

Agents of Irony.

An Approach to the American liberal in Hunter S. Thompson's
Fear and Loathing: on the Campaign Trail '72.

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1. Introduction

The United States of America are suffering from an acute political disease. For decades the people's interest in politics has steadily decreased and the current political climate in America suggests that the faith in its representative system has completely eroded. The rise of anti-politicians in America's political landscape - the anger that fuels anti-governmental forces like the Tea Party movement - are symptoms of the disease, for which many diagnoses are at hand but no cure is offered. The origins of the disease stem from the hopeful aspirations of the hyper political 1960's, culminating in the passing of the *Civil Rights Act* and the prospects of a 'Great Society', which came to an abrupt end in 1968. The escalation of the Vietnam War, the murder of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy, and the riotous outcome of the Democratic National Convention, marked the decade's watershed that may have turned the hyper political youth into a disenchanting generation. While scholars tend to analyze the political disease empirically and from a socio-historic perspective, this thesis aims at providing a heuristic approach by investigating the paramount, most passionate literary testimony of concerned disenchantment with the American political establishment: Hunter S. Thompson's *Fear and Loathing: on the Campaign Trail '72*.¹

Campaign Trail '72 is the collected coverage of the 1972 presidential election that Thompson published in *Rolling Stone* between December 1971 and November 1972. The book first appeared as a collected volume in 1973. Some critics, notably Wayne Booth, reviewed the book as a failed approach to political news-writing, but people involved with political campaigning referred to it as the "least factual and most accurate book of the campaign" (Wenner 173). Thompson writes skeptically about the Democratic candidates' prospects to win against Richard Nixon, the incumbent president. The coverage critically portrays the candidates, chiefly Edward Muskie, Hubert Humphrey, and George McGovern whom Thompson initially praises. The book depicts the political establishment from the position of an outsider and portrays the actions of the protagonists from a highly subjective point of view. However, critics have pointed out that the book is essentially not about politics as the author fails to write anything substantial about George McGovern or any of the other candidates (cf. McKeen 102). Most critics regard *Campaign Trail '72* as a satirical account of the presidential campaign. Arguably, the corrosive tone which signifies Thompson's attacks on the political establishment intensifies the political disease that causes the American people to become alienated with their elected representatives.

Yet, I propose that satire is not the prevailing element in *Campaign Trail '72*, and Thompson uses a different literary *modus operandi* to refine the people's concept of representative politics. The book's aim is not to enhance the divergence of the American society but to establish an understanding for the political process without using the voice of neither the satirical moralist nor the pathetic ideologist. *Campaign Trail '72* identifies the problem of the representative system: it lacks authentic and upright men and women who seek a representative office. The attempt refrains from directly stating Hunter Thompson's strong ethical conviction, and resorts to an indirect mode of expression. I shall analyze how irony is used to circumvent an ideological bias and apologetic tone to refine the abstract concept of the American liberal.

¹ I will consequently abridge the full title of the book to *Campaign Trail '72*.

In Hunter S. Thompson's *Campaign Trail '72* it is especially the use of verbal irony that makes the abstract political concept of the American liberal palpable. To verify this hypothesis I shall, first, sketch the abstract concept of the American liberal from a historical and philosophical perspective. Second, I will establish the scope of irony and focus on irony as a language phenomenon by which normative discourses and commonsensical meaning can be reevaluated in a novel act of meaning-making. Hence, the theoretical frame is narrowed to analyze aspects of verbal irony as a perlocutionary speech act. After investigating the impact of verbal irony as a means to escape the hierarchical restrictions of society and resolve awkward social encounters in everyday situations, I shall describe how authors use verbal irony in their writing. Two distinct ironic characters are contrasted and identified as roles of self-disparaging irony. Afterwards the mode of impersonal irony, in which an author employs symbols, allegories, and metaphors to approach an abstract concept, ideal, or phenomenon, is analyzed. Consequently, I shall apply the theoretical frame to *Campaign Trail '72*. An investigation of common ironic dialogues with members of the establishment and the youth culture is followed by the identification of ironic characters and their function. The focus rests on the alazonic character of Dr. Thompson who is the author's notorious persona. First, the common ironic dialogues echo the problem of the politician's accessibility and authenticity and attempt to approach the divergence of the mainstream establishment and the youth culture. Then, the ironic characters hyperbolically intensify these issues in narrative situations that are most effectively presented as a tall tale. Finally, the use of impersonal verbal irony is analyzed. The digressive elements of *Campaign Trail '72* are identified as culturally charged symbols, allegories, and metaphors to establish an understanding of the political process and an approach to the abstract concept of the American liberal.

2. The Liberal Ideal

A key passage from the *Declaration of Independence* states that all men are free and equal; it is the origin of the American liberal ideal. Scholars have identified John Locke's *The Second Treatise of Government* as a central influence on the drafting of the American Constitution and the Founding Fathers' conception of the Civil Society (cf. Sigmund, ed. 386). Therefore, liberalism has been a crucial element of American political thought. The issue with Lockean liberalism, however, has been the meaning of 'property', which suggests the establishment of a hegemonic society where elites form a government that determines who has access to the majority of resources. Thus, Lockean liberalism has been seen as a defense of hedonistic capitalism (Sigmund, ed. 291). Yet, Locke's definition of property does not exclusively refer to material goods, but also yields creative acts of the self such as a right of personhood and self-development (Sigmund, ed. 358-359). This proposition - a central idea of the Enlightenment - upholds that, by thriving for self-perfection, one can perfect society as a whole.

As a perimeter to conventional Lockean liberalism, theorists have aspired to refine the implications of what it means to represent the liberal ideal. Thus, I want to offer a description of liberal thought in the United States that perceives the American liberal as more than a robust, i.e. egoistic, individualist. Judith Shklar offers an analysis of the political liberal tradition and opposes it to her concept of the 'liberalism of fear'. Shklar identifies the

aim of liberalism as “a political notion” that strives to secure the conditions under which the members of a society can exercise their personal freedom (Rosenblum, ed. 21). Her underlying concern is that “the fear and favor that have always inhibited freedom [are] overwhelmingly generated by governments ... [so that] agents of the modern state ... have unique resources of physical might and persuasion at their disposal” (Rosenblum, ed. 21). The representative government will enforce the personal liberties of those that are represented strongly, especially the wealthy. Shklar’s rejects the idea that the authorities of government² should have the potential to exercise cruelty against the poor and the disenfranchised.

Liberalism must restrict itself to politics and to proposals to restrain potential abusers of power in order to lift the burden of fear and favor from the shoulders of adult women and men, who can then conduct their lives in accordance with their own beliefs and preferences, as long as they do not prevent others from doing so as well. (Rosenblum, ed. 31)

Shklar appeals to universally accept that fear and suffering of fellow human beings must be prevented under all circumstances by means of policy. Therefore, I suggest that the liberal politician is not limited to an ideology, but determined by compassion and tolerance for *all* human beings. The liberal must feel liable to represent the disenfranchised of all causes, which means to actualize equal rights for *everybody*. Shklar maintains that the liberal is a person “who respects other people without condescension, arrogance, humility, or fear” (Rosenblum, ed. 34). The core concept of the American liberal must take into consideration the existence of tolerance and compassion with the disenfranchised other if the existence of freedom and equality for all is to be ascertained. Hence, the liberal politician attempts to shape a cultural climate in which all citizens can live without fear of repression.³

It is clear that the premises to fulfill the liberal ideal are high for a politician. The political system is not fostered by the integrity and authenticity of the liberal politician, but fortified by unemotional, pragmatic policies, that enable the majority to benefit even if a disenfranchised minority is ignored.⁴ Traditionally, the liberal ideology is associated with the Democratic Party but as research shows it cannot entirely be classified along party lines. The presidential election of 1972 reveals the American electorate’s inability to distinctly separate the liberal from the conservative politician. Hence, the electorate could not define attributes of the former (Luttbeg and Gant 80ff). Furthermore, the incumbent president, Richard Nixon, proposed an agenda that was liberal by a common definition.⁵ Nixon’s enactment of such policies proves that the American liberal must be more than a common denominator of an ideology to become the role model of the people. Nixon may have enacted some liberal policies while he denied enacting others such as decriminalizing abortion and

² The authorities of government refer to the legislative, the executive, and the judiciary branch of the state.

³ For instance, a man who rejects to fight in a nation’s war must have the right to desert the army, or deny the draft, without the fear of being jailed or losing his citizenship. I want to stress that during the elections of the Vietnam War in 1968 and 1972 the question of an amnesty for army deserters was a highly debated subject.

⁴ In addition, pragmatic policies increase the politician’s chances to be elected.

⁵ Nixon’s foreign policy was marked by the beginning of diplomatic relations with China and de-escalating the arms race with Russia. Nixon’s domestic policy aimed at expanding the welfare-state and national health-care, reducing gender-related discrimination in the educational sector, granting the citizens of America a living wage, and founding a national environmental agency (cf. Gassert 480).

amnesty laws. Therefore, the president allegedly lacked the integrity that would have enabled him to be compassionate with the truly disenfranchised and would have provided him with the authenticity of the decent representative.

To call somebody a liberal can mean many things and it is difficult to find a common ground from which to debate this concept. In fact, having a serious debate about what it means to be a liberal will result in opinions with which one may agree or disagree. Hence, the idea has to remain abstract. This becomes apparent in American politics: any candidate, who has been recognized as the liberal has been consequently accused of being arbitrary.⁶ To be a successful politician and remain truthful, or authentic, of the ideal appears to be a disparate endeavor. As the term has no commonsensical definition, especially none that everyone agrees with, I will attempt to make the abstract meaning of the American liberal palpable by reevaluating the idealistic and commonsensical understanding of the concept. Arguably, the deconstruction of this abstract idea can be approached through literature. However, if a text aims at defining the ideal American liberal it runs danger of becoming apologetic and blind for its own ideology and discourse. Therefore, an iconoclastic reassessment can be achieved by approaching the abstract idea indirectly. I shall explain why the use of irony is one literary *modus operandi* that is capable of refining meaning as it is a technique that follows the strategy of tacit implication. In order to provide groundwork for the use of irony, the next chapter will define the scope of irony, and determine which aspects provide the highest potential to refine an abstract idea.

3. The Scope of Irony

To read the vast literature about the phenomenon of irony and its ramified aspects means to acknowledge how all-encompassing it is. So much has been written on the subject of irony that, in fact, it seems to have become a hydra-term: like the mythological hydra irony is a many-headed phenomenon, and once the critic gets rid off one head two new ones will grow. Or, as Wayne Booth expressed it in the introduction to *A Rhetoric of Irony*: “the ironic critic [is] caught in the ironic trap of defining a term that will not stay defined” (2).

In the 20th century some critics, especially the American New Critics, claimed that irony is not a concept at all, and elevated it to the level of “the trope of tropes”, which is what Paul de Man observes about Northrop Frye’s notion of irony (de Man 165). By definition, ‘trope’ is a literary term referring to the use of figures of speech and stylistic devices to establish a deviation between literal and figural meaning (Cuddon, ed. 948). Furthermore, *The Dictionary of Literary Terms and Criticism* maintains that the term ‘trope’ literally means ‘to turn away’. Therefore, it concurs with what all irony pursues: it turns away from a direct statement or its obvious meaning as de Man also suggests (164-65). This observation is not prolific, although it is valid. All literature is composed of tropes, namely figures of speech or stylistic devices, and consequently any text can be ironic if it is read against particular circumstances or in a particular context. Many post-modern critics subscribe to this assertion. These critics, such as Eco, Hassan, and Hutcheon, argue that the erosion of shared values - the uncertainty of the modern human situation - enables readers to conceive all denotative language as inherently ironic (cf. Colebrook 18).

⁶ The critique of liberals regarding the presidency of Barack Obama may illustrate this point.

3.1. The Unstable Irony of Redescription

The approach to irony as an inherent all-encompassing language phenomenon, which can be employed to deliberately attribute meaning to a subject, is strictly modern. It is rooted in the thinking of modern skeptics, who concluded that the essential epistemological questions of human existence could no longer be satisfyingly answered by believing in a causal theory of reference. In the wake of the Enlightenment, when philosophers like Hume and Locke grounded truth in the analytical potential of empirical science, it was most notably Nietzsche who claimed that there is no ultimate ground provided by religion or science, which constitutes the fabric of our reality. What exists, however, are descriptions of the world uttered by human beings. Nietzsche, influenced by Schopenhauer, initiated a philosophical view-point, which claims that our reality is linguistically constructed and its meanings are contingent and without a necessary causal relation.

As Nietzsche famously states in "On Truth and Lying in a Non-moral Sense", truth is "a mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms, in short a sum of human relations" (Leitch, ed. 878).⁷ Nietzsche argues that language gains a truth-value by "rhetorical intensification, translation, and decoration, and which, after they have been in use for a long time, strike a people as firmly established, canonical, and binding" (878). An elementary, pure language that is able to signify the thing-in-itself does not exist. The people unconsciously believe, Nietzsche writes, in the illusion of truth because they have forgotten that it is an illusion (878). If they saw it is as such, they would have to admit that their seemingly canonical descriptions are arbitrary and accidental. In effect, the acknowledgement of the contingent nature of language coincides with the jargon of empirical science as merely being another metaphor.

Richard Rorty's approach to the contingency of language is less ironical than Nietzsche's. In his book *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* he writes that "[t]he world is out there, but descriptions of the world are not. Only descriptions of the world can be true or false. The world on its own - unaided by the describing activities of human beings - cannot" (5). The human enterprise to apprehend the world, which is deprived of a fixed meaning provided by a metaphysical order or the empirical order of exact science, involves the overcoming of "a legacy" (5). Yet, the creative acts of human beings, who show an effort to overcome and alternate old metaphors or adapt new ones, prove that the world is not entirely devoid of meaning and overall sense. In the 19th century individuals abandoned the 'idea' of understanding how things 'really' are and established the mode of thinking "that anything could be made to look good or bad by being redescribed" (73).⁸ The conclusion philosophers have drawn from the contingency of language is that of a contingency of the self. The recognition that all self-description is equally metaphoric is the foundation from which a creation of a new self is possible. This school of thought is exemplified in the philosophical writings of Existentialist philosophers. Sartre, for instance, describes the

⁷ However, if Nietzsche believes that this observation about the nature of truth is itself true, then it would paradoxically gain a truth-value. Also I think, the ambiguity of the statement, that the nature of truth as being metaphorical, is expressed through a metaphor nicely underlines the irony which is so common to Nietzsche's writing.

⁸ Consequently, I will borrow the term redescription from Rorty, and use it without quotation marks.

identity of the self as 'meta-stable' because individuals who realize that all their self-descriptions are alterable can never take themselves quite seriously (cf. Rorty 73-74).

The act of novel self-creation is the premise from which Rorty develops the concept of the liberal community. It is a "poeticized culture" (53) whose "hero is the strong poet and the revolutionary" (61). The language, conscience, and morality of the individuals in this liberal community are rooted in the acknowledgment of everything that constitutes this community as being contingent, hence, "as literalizations of what once were accidentally produced metaphors" (61). This acknowledgement enables individuals "to adopt a self-identity which suits one for citizenship in such an ideally liberal state" (61). It is an ironical existence in which the individual exhibits an attitude of permanent doubt. This 'meta-stable' identity is the critically reflective consciousness of a contingent self, and a world that is a mere product of time and chance. Critics have argued that this attitude is the foundation on which human solidarity can be fostered as it promotes tolerance and engagement with others rather than indifference. Potentially, the use of irony is an effective means to challenge the hegemony of the established, conformist discourses of power (cf. Jacobs and Smith 70).

Rorty's liberal ironists doubt the adequacy of a final vocabulary, which is defined by commonsensical 'nominalism'. They question whether the commonsensical, i.e. generic, final vocabulary that those around them employ habitually can "suffice to describe and judge the beliefs, actions, and lives of those who employ alternative final vocabularies" (74). The adaptation of other final vocabularies, which have been encountered through literature or sub- and intercultural experiences, enables the liberal ironists to deliberately redefine their own vocabulary and emphasize their autonomous position as individuals. This act of redescription creates an awareness of the contingency of their vocabulary (cf. 73f). The abandoning, or - less drastic - alternation, of the final vocabulary one has been subjected to, creates an autonomous perception of oneself (in the world). Individuals try to overcome the commonsense descriptions of reality and "renovate ... such vocabularies from within" (Colebrook 154). They do so by choosing alternative metaphorical constructions. Thus, their perception of reality becomes subject to permanent redescriptions, and the alternate vocabularies oneself and others employ become relational. On these grounds Rorty's idea of the ironist's redescriptions includes a sense of solidarity. This sense originates from the achievement of novel self-creation: the act which marks our essential humanity.

However, Rorty "insists on a peculiarly private irony" (Colebrook 155), which does not exactly concur with the type of irony that shall be analyzed in this thesis. Rorty has good reason to insist that irony is a private matter. In public, human beings need to subscribe to the commonsensical vocabulary, or else a situation is created where irony is an inherent part of public communication - the act of communication would inevitably fail. If an individual only uses irony privately, it will never be clear whether someone is being effectively ironical or not. In my opinion this form of purely private irony does not suffice to foster human solidarity because it is unstable: the use of irony remains opaque. Any utterance that consists of metaphorical redescriptions of a subject could, in fact, be meant

ironically. Since the ironist remains private there is no need to signal a use of irony. Thus, private irony is arbitrary and consequently unidentifiable.⁹

I will argue that the use of irony becomes stable if intentionally marked by the ironist. Stable irony is not private but essentially part of an open, quasi-public, speech act. The ironist has the option to deliberately choose to express irony publicly and become an ironic critic. Although the ironic critics run the risk of not being understood, their utterances or writings are addressed to an intended audience. This creates a two-sided, open, signification process because the audience can decipher the speaker's or the author's irony explicitly, and work out its meaning.

3.2. The Stability of Verbal Irony

It is important to narrow the frame of the analysis by using a more traditional and conceptualized approach. Hence, critics like Douglas Muecke have meticulously classified aspects of irony. In *The Compass to Irony* Muecke distinguishes three grades of irony, i.e. overt, covert, private, and four modes: impersonal, self-disparaging, ingénue, and dramatized irony. Then, Muecke categorizes ironic situations, such as irony of events, general irony, including cosmic irony, and finally romantic irony. The latter aspects are highly noteworthy for themselves, but in this paper the focus rests chiefly on verbal irony, which is the form of irony that is deliberately and effectively used by an ironist.¹⁰

The terminology of Wayne Booth's *A Rhetoric of Irony* elucidates this form of irony which he calls it "stable irony" (3) - defining it as "deliberately created by human beings to be heard or read and understood with some precision by other human beings" (5). According to Booth, stable irony is covert, which means it is "intended to be reconstructed with meanings different from those on the surface" (6).¹¹ The act of reconstruction is characterized by four steps, Booth suggests. The reader has to jettison the explicit or "literal" (10) meaning because the explicit meaning of the text (or of what is said) is apparently incongruous with the implicit one. Then, the reader can apply alternative interpretations and contrast them with the knowledge or beliefs he or she attributes to the speaker or author (cf. 10-11). The follow-up of these reconstructive steps yields "a new meaning or cluster of meanings" (12). However, this act of reconstruction is not an exclusive quality and, like Rorty's act of redescription, an often necessary component of

⁹ The problem is overly simplified for the purpose of the thesis. The essay "Taking Irony Seriously: Rorty's Postmetaphysical Liberalism" by Daniel Conway gives a more complete and more critical analysis that draws on the distinction of the private and the public sphere. According to Conway, Rorty's liberal conviction to human solidarity and the avoidance of cruelty are secondary concerns and the paramount concern is to maintain the sanctuary of the private sphere. Rorty's argument seems to be that only private self-creation must acknowledge the arbitrariness, contingency, and possible incoherence of one's final vocabulary. In the public sphere, however, the ironical attitude towards the autonomous self's essential hopes and values would jeopardize the serious commitment to the liberal ideals and possibly also undermine the autonomous self-creation of others by inflicting (verbal) cruelty by being ironical.

¹⁰ In *The Compass to Irony* most of the first part deals with verbal irony, which relies on intentionality, while irony of events is accidental, or even in the realm of metaphysical notions such as fate or destiny.

¹¹ Booth's use of 'covert' differs from Muecke's definition of covert irony. To me, Muecke's use of the term seems to be more practical. According to Muecke, covert irony is a form of verbal irony that cannot immediately be recognized as such. In a later chapter (see 4.2.) I will treat covert verbal irony as a form of impersonal irony. Arguably, verbal irony as a speech act (see 3.3) can be overt in some situations (when the hidden implication is immediately meant to be recognized). Such cases of overt verbal irony can have a stabilizing function in particular social situation, as I will show.

communication. Yet, what it shows is that the application and interpretation of verbal irony is an intentional communicative effort, and therefore a social act.

Linda Hutcheon suggests that irony “happens in something called ‘discourse’” (17), which means the use and interpretation of irony are essential parts of a social act (cf. 10). The agents of irony, or “the ... players in the ironic game” (11), are therefore the ironist and the interpreter, namely somebody who recognizes an utterance or text to be ironic. It is debatable whether all irony happens intentionally - especially for irony of events at most times this claim seems to lack validity. Within the scope of verbal irony, however, the argument is that irony is intentionally employed by an ironist, which means an author is being ironical in an “active process of attribution” (11). The interpreters are an audience or a potential readership recognizing the irony, which involves “an intentional act ... of inference” (11). Hence, the ironist and the interpreters show an “evaluative attitude” (11), or in other words, both reflect and contrast the explicit meaning and the implication of an utterance in order to establish a refined meaning.

The use and recognition of (verbal) irony establishes a mutual relationship, or bond, between human beings, who are essentially deprived of an ultimate frame of reference and thus alien to each other. Here, Rorty’s definition meets with Hutcheon’s and Booth’s because irony, as an eligible speech act, gives the signifiers (the ironist and the interpreters) and the signified (the subject) relative stability. So, as stated before, the use of verbal (stable) irony is a means to establish communication: the explicit meaning of what is written or said is inferred with the implied meaning of what the ironist actually means to express. Then, an audience, or readership, establishes a refined meaning by understanding that the ironist is being ironical. The act of decoding, or interpreting, irony is open and not fixed, or determined, by the ironist.¹² Neither side in the decoding process yields a final meaning of what has been presented through irony. Or, as Hutcheon points out: “[It] undermines stated meaning by removing the semantic security of ‘one signifier : one signified’ and by revealing the complex inclusive, relational and differential nature of ironic meaning-making” (13). The use of irony, the act of meaning-making, is a synthetic process performed intentionally by the ironist and the interpreter alike; distinctive from each other but, paradoxically, in a common effort.

Hence, the ironist and the interpreter are agents who perform “an act - [attribute] both meaning and motives - and [do] so in a particular situation and context, for a particular purpose, and with particular means” (Hutcheon 12). The synthesis of what is implied with irony and how this use of irony is understood yields a meaning that is not fixed in any sense. As I have argued, the active process of attribution and meaning-making is contingent and not limited by the final vocabularies of closed communities, but expandable through all social classes, personal experiences, and also in the course of time. This is true at least within a particular culture, especially the western culture of Europe and North America whereas the Arabic culture seems to have no conceptual understanding of irony (cf. Hutcheon 91). The active process of attribution, which marks verbal irony, enables

¹² It is possible that the ironist did not even intend to make the irony identifiable, an instance of private irony, or that the ironist was not even aware of speaking or writing ironically. In this case the intentionality will be exclusively on the interpreter’s side.

communicators to recognize their different perceptions of a subject - ideal, idea, concept, or phenomenon - and, furthermore, reveals where they just appear to differ and in fact do not.

The recognition of verbal irony by an ironist and the interpreters makes it possible to see the differences within a certain argument, or discourse, and infinitively redescribe a subject for which there ultimately is no final definition. Being ironical about a subject means to communicate one's own perception but also includes the effort to understand the other's perception. This may lead to a mutual recognition and acknowledgement of different views. The process of attribution is two-sided as the distinction of 'one signifier [and] one signified' is jettisoned. In my opinion this is what happens in the process of attribution that marks the employment and understanding of irony, or what Hutcheon calls meaning-making and Rorty refers to as redescription.

Consequently, the act of redescription marks the scope of irony. In the following chapter I shall establish in detail how verbal irony is effectively used in generic speech acts as a strategy of communication and, further, how literature imitates such speech acts and develops more complex forms of verbal irony by use of metaphor and allegory. After showing with what effects verbal irony can be employed in daily life, I will distinguish two literary characters that an author can create to present an ironic speaker. Then, this basic mode in literature is brought further: the author does not speak or act via characteristic roles, but creates more elaborate and complex representations of verbal irony, which are defined by the use of tropological figures of speech.

3.3. Verbal Irony as Speech Act

Verbal irony as a speech act corresponds to the most overt and immediate form of instrumental (intentional) irony.¹³ Verbal irony has been known at least since the days of Greek tragedies or speeches on the Agora, Athens's paramount market place. In ancient Greece, irony began to play a bigger role at a time when traditional values were attacked and subject to debate (cf. Bergson 410). Then, verbal irony was practiced in political speeches and polemics in order to assert a speaker's means (cf. Colebrook 20). Colebrook points out that in this case the audience's or reader's understanding of verbal irony already relies "on the established speaking position and force of the orator" (20). Except for its use in speeches, verbal irony usually functions through dialogue. It appears that the ironic effect is derived from what is said by whom in which context. Booth suggests that verbal irony is the most stable form of irony because its application is direct and, more importantly, finite (cf. 6). Arguably, it is the most accessible form of irony. This can not only be attributed to its long tradition as a rhetorical strategy in western culture. It is the irony of the moment and in contrast to more complex forms of instrumental irony its scope is thus limited to a certain interlocution. "[D]ie verbale Ironie, die wir auch als Wortironie bezeichnen können ... ist die Ironie jedermanns" (Japp 38).

We often come across verbal irony in everyday conversations because it can be used as a resort from the banalities of daily small talk without breaking with the rules of conversation (cf. Japp 40). A speaker who uses verbal irony says something that is incongruous with the manifest meaning of the utterance (Muecke, 1980 54). In doing so, the

¹³ Here, this is especially the perlocutionary speech act by which we cause effects in other human beings, such as embarrassment or laughter.

speaker signals a distanced attitude (cf. Japp 40). On these grounds, verbal irony functions as the corrective of a speech act, which is normally predictable in matters of the intended utterance. The speaker in ironic dialogues, however, uses a principle of contrast and at the same time relatively little complexity in order to be understood. Uwe Japp describes this mode of speaking as follows: “[Ironie] funktioniert als ein sprachliches Manöver, als eine Variante des indirekten Sprechens, als ein Umweg” (39). Hence, speaker A says something to speaker B and they play with the general expectation of what is considered appropriate in the context. The ironic effect is derived from the context by saying one thing and meaning another, often the opposite (cf. Japp 38). The speakers in ironic dialogues deliberately convey what they really intend to say.¹⁴

In its most overt and simple form the special character of verbal irony stems from the use of figures of speech, notably hyperbole and litotes.¹⁵ These rhetoric devices of over- and understatement are employed in ironic dialogues to contrast the intended meaning of speaker A’s words to how they are understood by speaker B. Further, the use of such elements allows the ironic speakers to create an incongruous representation of themselves. One of the basic techniques of being ironical “is either that of ‘going along with’ the ironic butt and placing him in high relief or that of depreciating oneself” (Muecke 1982 56).¹⁶

Two short dialogues shall exemplify this technique. The ironic butt who has just committed an obvious mistake exclaims: “Well, once again, I have proven to be a genius.” An interlocutor recognizes this exaggeration and plays along by saying for instance: “Yeah, you really are the smartest person in the room.” In contrast, by understatement, one speaker feigns personal inferiority to the other speaker. This method of self-deprecation is, however, not easy to spot by the other speaker unless the speakers know each other well or their status is obvious. The latter case might be exemplified as follows: An executive manager who has just been teased for coming too late to a meeting says to an employee: “How can somebody in my position be expected to know that staff meetings are held on Mondays.”

In such cases the speakers usually know that the other one is being ironical, but sometimes just one speaker is being ironical and only an audience or the reader but not the interlocutor knows. Japp speaks of established ironic contact whenever the intended use of irony is recognized by both speakers (40). If this is not the case, the result is a situation where one of them becomes the oblivious victim to whom the ironic speaker does not want to reveal the irony. Otherwise the speaker uses covert irony, which is not immediately recognizable. It can be detected by an audience, respectively the reader, who then establishes ironic contact (cf. Muecke, 1980 56). Hutcheon suggests that the “miracle of ironic communication” (89) is due to the fact that both speakers are part of a “discursive

¹⁴ The ironic language game is substantially different from the language game of lying because the ironic speaker intends the incongruous meaning to be reconstructed by the interlocutor. However, in Greek theatre an ironic character was a deceiver, who had the liar’s proficiency (cf. Japp 82).

¹⁵ Sometimes it makes sense to distinguish between litotes and meiosis. According to the *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Criticism*, both are figures of speech that express understatement. The former is employed by referring to something exceptionally great through a negative statement, e.g. “Not so bad.” The latter is a form of positive understatement, where one says “rather good” when it is actually “spectacular”.

¹⁶ The ironic butt is an object or person one is being ironical about, namely the victim of irony.

community" (89),¹⁷ shaped by "a complex configuration of shared knowledge, beliefs, values, and communicative strategies" (91). In other words, a discursive community that is composed of heterogeneous parts and subject to great diversity constitutes a society. Similar to Rorty, Hutcheon and Booth argue that members of such a discursive community need to establish ironic contact and reject or alternate their generic vocabularies in order to create a feeling of solidarity in their efforts to communicate. (cf. Hutcheon 93; cf. Booth 28f).

In contrast to serious, straight-forward arguments, the speakers who establish ironic contact do not mean to openly refute, reject, or attack the values and beliefs of a community. Instead they make use of "an aggressively intellectual exercise that fuses fact and value, requiring [the interlocutors] to construct alternative hierarchies and choose among them" (Booth 44). The interlocutors, one or several ironic speakers, make use of what Hutcheon calls "irony's evaluative edge" (89). The ironic speakers use the dry humor of ironic understatement or ridiculous exaggeration to signal to each other that they are echoing the values of their community ironically. Thus, the use and mutual understanding of irony generates the potential of "building amiable communities" (Booth 28). An existing community with a given set of values and beliefs, as heterogeneous as these may be, defines "the scene for the very use and comprehension of irony" (Hutcheon 91). The ironic redescriptions of the values and beliefs are the shared frame of reference, which yields the possibility to establish an understanding for each other, despite the diversity in perception. Hence, the understanding of each other is established because the interlocutors ironically echo the values of a community and, thus, provide redescriptions of these. The use of irony is, therefore, an option to create understanding between interlocutors from the most oppositional spheres of their community, e.g. when the speakers have different social backgrounds.

Verbal irony as a speech act remains a communicative strategy rather than becoming an artistic mode. This speech act is not fully part of an ironic style with its invisible quality (cf. Japp 42). The example still illustrates that, at times, we use irony in our daily conversations to be witty or to signal that we are aware of a critical situation. Self-disparaging mocking, dry humor of understatement, or grotesque hyperbole can resolve an awkward moment in a dialogue. However, that does not necessarily make everybody an ironist in the philosopher's sense (Japp 47) because the ironic speaker can be ironic in some situations and straight-forward in others, while the ironist does not seem to make a distinction. The classic representation of the ironist is Socrates, who, even while defending himself in court in order to save his life, could not refrain from being ironical. Other examples of such full-fledged ironists are numerous, like Fielding and Swift as Muecke, Booth, and other critics have argued before. In the next chapter I will, therefore, look at some ways in which an author can express verbal irony. Two modes are distinguished: the expression of verbal irony through a speech act on the one hand and the more elaborate form of impersonal verbal irony on the other.

¹⁷ When an author presents ironic dialogues (or even more elaborate forms of verbal irony) in his or her fiction, the audience or readers, who understand these, are naturally also part of the discursive community.

4. The Use of Verbal Irony in Fiction

When verbal irony is used by an author to create passages of dialogue in their fiction, they make these ironic dialogues more accessible than elaborate forms of verbal irony of which the mode of impersonal irony is an example. Instead of presenting characters who imitate the speech acts of real people, the author uses more complex stylistic devices to initiate the process of meaning-making. The use of tropological figures, namely allusions, allegories, and metaphors, characterizes impersonal verbal irony. Rather than recognizing the imitation of a speech act, the reader must relate to the complex stylistic devices by establishing an analogy.

4.1. The Characters of Ironic Speech Acts

The author can create characters that imitate the daily use of verbal irony in dialogues. This imitation is achieved by employing characteristic rhetorical figures. Understatement and exaggeration, namely litotes and hyperbole, are those basic figures of speech that are easy to identify and widely used to contradict the normal conduct of a speech act, as I have argued in the preceding chapter. The addressee can follow the basic figures of speech more easily and grasp the intended double-meaning of what they read or hear. An ironic dialogue is the zero point from which a given value or belief is implicitly traced by the (self)-representation of the character(s), respectively the speakers in the ironic text. Muecke points out that especially the personality of the speaker is of relevance in ironic dialogues (cf. Muecke, 1980 87). In the interactions of fictive characters it is their exaggeration of the everyday use of verbal irony by which these characters represent themselves and mock a value or belief. This interaction creates a dynamic process, or act of attribution, which signifies the ironic meaning-making of an author and an audience.

Often, the author creates an ironic speaker who does not attack the values openly, but reveals how the specific character perceives these values by performing ironically in a given socio-cultural context. Depending on the context of the dialogue, a speaker takes on the eironic or the alazonic role, respectively the author presents the character as the eiron or alazon. The roles of the eiron and the alazon function as mutual counterparts and Max Eastman suggests that “the word irony arose out of this crude clash. It described the ‘taking down’ of the big talker [, the alazon,] by the man who says less than he means [the eiron] (Eastman 193). It appears that in the literary tradition these two characters have been presented as opponents (Eastman 192f).

4.1.1. The Eironic Role

The term ‘sly-foxy’ (cf. Muecke, 1980 47) is a good analogy for the character of the eiron. The foxy eiron is a dissembler who pretends to be modest when the character acts more harmless, grateful, or likeable than the interlocutors initially perceive him or her. The archetypical representation of the eiron is Socrates, as many critics have argued (cf. Muecke, 1980 87; Booth 269; Eastman 195). Walter Blair, whose essay “Americanized Comic Braggarts” picks up Max Eastman’s discussion of the eiron and the alazon,¹⁸ comments on the role of Socrates, the eiron: “[he] posed as an ignoramus but ... he often said wise things. He thus made himself out as worse than he was” (Blair 335). When Socrates displays the

¹⁸ Blair focuses on the role of the alazon: the braggart.

ironic character, he uses what Muecke describes as “the countersinking or intaglio method” (1982 56). Muecke seems to allude to a printmaking technique, where an image is incised into a surface. As the name suggests, here, ironic pretense is applied not by demoting the butt of irony but by demoting, or lowering, oneself (cf. Muecke, 1982 61).

The pretense of modesty is especially helpful when one is being ironical with superiors in a certain situation. An example that comes to mind is that of Socrates, the mason, having an argument with community members who are superior him, such as the great sophist Gorgias. The eiron pretends to be modest; he is a “Kleintuer” as Wilhelm Büchner states, translating a passage by Aristotle accordingly (341). The strategy is to display doubt, where nothing is doubtful, to express a lack of understanding, where the meaning is clear, or to praise in order to blame. Traditionally by self-demoting, or countersinking, the role of the eiron feigns ignorance. In this role, the eiron is prone to use certain elements of speech, such as euphemistic understatement, not only as a strategy of speaking but also to adapt a general mode of behavior, which “functions positively as a disguise or persona” (Muecke, 1978 56). The eiron’s interlocutors become the victims of irony because they tend to underestimate or misjudge the eiron’s false representation. This mode of switching into a role to use irony can be called self-disparaging irony (cf. Muecke, 1980 87).

4.1.2. The Alazonic Role

Alazoneia is another form of self-disparaging irony. Aristotle made the distinction that the eiron tends to be modest whereas the alazon is prone to ostentation (Bergson 413). The role of the alazon has been developed further in Renaissance comedy, the Italian *Commedia dell’Arte*, by introducing stock characters such as the “braggart soldier” or the “windy old doctor” (cf. Blair 337; 341). According to Blair, American fiction writers have presented this rogue, or *picaro*, as a comic show-off, for instance the boastful frontiersman. Further, Blair writes that “[these] writers personalized old tales about a stereotype, the Ferocious American Westerner. But many picturings had far older ancestors dating back to the ancient Greeks. The Greeks had a name for the type Davy Crockett represented, the alazon” (334). The role of the alazon, the boaster and yarn-spinner, is closely connected to the American tall tale tradition. The alazon’s role relies on the audience or the readers being outsiders, who have never been to the far-off exotic places that frequently provide the setting of the tall tale’s exaggeration. Carolyn Brown, in her book on the tall tale, maintains that it is dependent “upon some sort of tension between insider and outsider, old-timer and greenhorn” (33). The tall tale is effective because the outsider lacks a certain experience or knowledge that the yarn-spinner has. When a soldier, or a frontiersman, returns to the city, his audience is entirely unfamiliar with the experiences that constitute the yarn of the tale.

The author presents the alazon seemingly more important than he or she actually is, as it would be the case with the braggart soldier and the boastful frontiersman. The tales are naturally told in the past tense, which is an effective technique because this way “a braggart turns a boast into a *fait accompli* - an episode in his autobiography. He adds some vivid details and ties to it a related jest” (337), Blair writes. Hence, the alazon presents fabulous and extraordinary experiences as if they were a matter of fact. Also, the alazon ornaments the tale with colorful remarks which, at some point, leads the addressees to suspect that they were merely taken in by an extensive boast. This boast can be subsequently uncovered.

The alazonic role is usually characterized by overstatement, which often places the character in high relief. The high relief situation enables other characters to reevaluate the alazon's exaggeration. Here, alazoneia seems to bear elements of classical ingénue irony, too. In ingénue irony, the author puts forward a simpleton, who presents himself or herself in an over-enthusiastic, ignorant or earnest way. (cf. Muecke, 1978 58) This behavior, however, is often contrary to how a person should actually behave. For instance the alazon can present an unemotional event overtly emotional, and vice versa - an emotional event is told by being strictly unemotional. Hence, the alazon is, in contrast to the sober eiron, a boastful "decoy-duck" (Muecke, 1978 58). The decoy-duck, originally a hunting-device, is a somewhat over-decorated person who wants to accomplish a deceit by luring the victim into believing the exaggerated tale. This deceit may be uncovered which results in the alazon's boastful self-representation being ridiculed. The ironist conceives the character as a strategy to create a high relief, which is a set-up, to reveal the alazon's deceitfulness. Consequently, the reader will see the alazon in a different light and the victims of irony will not seem as ridiculous as they initially appeared.

4.2. The Impersonal Mode of Verbal Irony

The use of impersonal verbal irony is, unlike the use of self-disparaging irony, a mode in which the ironist does not speak through a role or persona. Impersonal irony is often covert and thus harder to detect than the rhetorical use of verbal irony presented in the preceding chapter. While the roles of the eiron or alazon actively participate in the narrative, the impersonal voice speaks from a withdrawn position, almost omniscient position, which functions to comment in more general terms on the actions of characters or the course of events.¹⁹ When the author uses irony by speaking through an impersonal voice, this is done to emphasize their detachment from the subject. According to Muecke, this mode of detachment is characterized "by a dryness or gravity of manner; the tone is that of a rational, casual, matter-of-fact, modest, unemotional speaker" (Muecke, 1978 52). Not always can the reader detect that the author is being ironical. Muecke notes that "the half-concealment is part of the ironist's artistic purpose and the detection and appreciation of the camouflage is a large part of the reader's pleasure" (1978 52-3). With impersonal irony the employs artistic devices that go beyond presenting a strategy of speaking that echoes the values or beliefs of a society ironically. The values are not explicitly presented in a piece of dialogue but are part of a more profound cultural context, which becomes manifest through the use of tropes.

The impersonal mode of irony is elaborated through the use of tropes of analogy: allegory metaphor and allusion. Verbal irony as a speech act echoes aspects of a community through common dialogues or the interaction of ironic characters. The impersonal mode of irony, however, enables the author to write ironically about a community, or even mankind as a whole. Impersonal irony has a wider scope than the form of verbal irony that functions through dialogue. In order to reach this higher degree of irony, or "true irony" as Sören Kierkegaard called it, according to Muecke (1978 54), the ironical author employs culturally

¹⁹ But it is not a *necessary* feature of impersonal irony that the author has to speak with the impersonal voice or the matter-of-fact tone used for naturalistic writing. Rather, the author speaks outside of the role that is the key-element of self-disparaging irony.

charged allegories, which the reader can understand by analogy. In the mode of impersonal irony these analogies can be deciphered because the readers share the cultural experience with the author. However, it may not be apparent whether the text contains these tropes because the author has the intention of writing ironically about a given subject, or whether the tropes are used for another purpose, such as establishing the general tone of a text or dramatizing. It is a question of the author's delivery of a passage which can be taken as suggestive hint to the readers that a process of attribution and ironic meaning-making is possible. The author nudges the readers towards the underlying irony in several ways.

First, Booth identifies "straightforward warnings in the author's own voice" (54). This is mostly done by directly addressing the readers and warning them about the quality of a passage, like in Thompson's texts by asking a rhetorical question such as 'why do I write such gibberish?' or suggesting that 'this is just another tangent'. The author may inform the readers about the circumstances under which a text was written, like a pressing deadline, and furthermore the apparent mode of the text may be entirely negated: 'this is not interesting'. Another way of signaling the impersonal mode of verbal irony is that the author chooses a specific title, or epigraph to precede the questionable passage (cf. Booth 54). Although the reader cannot ignore the intentionality of a title or an epigraph, its meaning is more private than, for instance, the author's comments or warnings about a certain passage. The author can also allude to the ironical meaning of a text by writing in a style that is incongruous with what the reader considers the author's usual tone (Booth 67). Some or all of these techniques are possible ways in which the author may establish an intellectual and emotional bond with the readers. Preceding a trope, these techniques signal that the trope has ironical connotations and possibly reveals the situation's or subject's inevitable defectiveness.

However, when impersonal irony is overt it borders on satire and is meant to be seen through immediately (Muecke, 1978 52). The distinction between the 'bitter irony', or sarcasm, and satire is not one to be easily drawn. In satire, I would argue the overt victim, or subject of satire, is excluded from the community through the use of a pejorative tone.²⁰ As regards irony, on the other hand, a certain degree of understanding for the victim, or subject, of irony is established with "the building of amiable communities [being] ... far more important than the exclusion of naïve victims" (Booth 28). A withdrawn or aloof author is not necessarily excluded from the subject of irony. In fact, if the use of irony is allegorical, frequently a naive victim of irony will be absent because the function of an allegory is to mirror the most universal aspects of life, according to *The Dictionary of Literary Terms* (21).

While critics like Muecke or Booth have largely identified passages of irony in fiction writing, the following chapter will show how a non-fiction writer employs the characters of verbal irony and the mode of impersonal verbal irony to approach a subject, namely the core concept of American political thought: the liberal.

²⁰ *The Dictionary of Literary Terms* provides Swift's definition which assumes that satire is mirroring everyone's folly except one's own (cf. 780). Thus the satirist is someone who vehemently excludes himself from the subject of his texts. Frye, in *Anatomy of Criticism*, describes satire as "militant irony" (223) with "a token fantasy, a content which the reader recognizes as grotesque, and at least an implicit moral standard" (224).

5. Verbal Irony in Fear and Loathing: on the Campaign Trail '72

The author of *Campaign Trail '72*, Hunter S. Thompson, is associated with a group of non-fiction writers; the self-proclaimed New Journalists (cf. Klinkowitz 33).²¹ Critics have consensually agreed that this form of non-fiction writing is tightly connected to the erosion of believing in objective, factual, truth (Meyers 10-22). While the naturalistic writers of the 19th century claimed to achieve objectivity through their meticulous matter of fact descriptions (37), the non-fiction writers of the 1960's, but also the contemporary post-modern writers of meta fiction like Pynchon and Vonnegut, are "explorers who literally immerse themselves in the area to be explored and attempt to get to the bottom of things" (3). By making use of the subjective qualities of observers and explorers alike, the New Journalist is capable "to probe beneath the facade of society and puncture public images, myths, stereotypes, and pretense" (ibid.) and may thereby establish an understanding between the mainstream culture and its strains of subculture (4). The act of writing in the New Journalist's style can be, in my opinion, juxtaposed to the novel self-creation that is the result of realizing the contingency of language, self, and society. The New Journalist can therefore be considered the strong poet - the culture's hero (43ff) - who makes use of the redescriptive power of language and the possibility to reject, adapt, and alternate final vocabularies.

Arguably, Hunter Thompson is the most extreme of these literary explorers because he is the most vehement representative of personal objectivity in the non-fiction form of journalism (Meyers 58).²² Thompson called this form of reporting 'gonzo'. The term is derived from Cajun slang and was used in New Orleans' jazz scene for decades. 'Gonzo' roughly means 'to play unhinged' as Douglas Brinkley maintains (Wenner 128). The ability to be a literal explorer becomes the essential quality of Thompson's writing: it helps the readers make sense of the incongruities and contingencies within the vast network of factual references, which they encounter in a society that is fueled by an amalgam of information.²³ Critics argue that the writings of Hunter Thompson (and other New Journalists) were not only appealing to an unsophisticated public that saw these texts as another accessible form of entertainment, alongside cheap publications and endless TV-series (Meyers 46). Quoting Newfield, Meyers suggests that "[fashion] followers, undercover narcs, and sexual deviants cannot constitute all of ... *Rolling Stone's* 200,000 [readers]" (ibid). In the early 1970's *Rolling Stone* was, therefore, not only the voice of an underground subculture, but already appealed to the mainstream culture as well.

In accordance with Meyers, Thompson is the creative agent of American society that lacked an objective consensus after traditional values were subject of debate in the post-

²¹ Klinkowitz suggests that Thompson is not exactly a New Journalist (in the fashion Tom Wolfe's terminology) but rather a 'Superfictionist', which may concur with Thompson's self-description as a 'gonzo' journalist.

²² Personal objectivity appears to be an oxymoron. It means to write with a sense of immediacy and authenticity. Objectivity is only maintained when the text remains in its most original form. This special feature becomes obvious in *Campaign Trail '72* where the author refrains from editing his writing at all or pretends to refrain from it. He includes passages of verbatim transcript and parts of text which look like they are a first draft directly from the typewriter with passages crossed out and scribbled over notes.

²³ The 1960's saw the rise of extensive live coverage of cultural and political events, such as the live coverage of the Moon landing or the annual conventions of Republicans and Democrats, where political leadership was in the making.

WWII decades. Other critics, like Hutcheon, Booth, and Colebrook, have argued that it is especially a culture without fixed values that creates a discursive climate where the use of irony is frequent as a means of reevaluation in a period of confusing transition. Curiously, so far, the use of irony has been entirely disregarded in the critical analysis of Thompson's writing that is a testimonial to the deconstruction of fixed values at the end of the 1960's.

Although Thompson's preferred mode of reporting - the 'gonzo' style - is generally associated with satire and compared to the writings of Mark Twain (cf. Steinbrink; Caron), it contains many elements that constitute the ironists' writings. Still, the available, critical publications on Hunter Thompson, namely by James Caron, John Hellmann, and Jerome Klinkowitz, investigate the use of formal literary elements and attempt to define the trans-genre of New Journalism and its potential as a form of fiction by contrasting the peculiar style of 'gonzo' with other New Journalists' writings. Other publications, by Juan Bruce-Novoa, Scott Dunn, Shimmerlee Jirón-King, Paul Thomas Meyers, Jeffrey Steinbrink, and John Stull, further illuminate Thompson's function as an 'outlaw' journalist, a spotter and dissenter of cultural phenomena, in the historical-cultural context of American society in the 1960's. Thus, Thompson's image as an eccentric, if not defiantly individual, fierce culture critic, and radical satirist is reinforced. I will discuss aspects of these critical publications in my thesis but, furthermore, I want to add the argument that the use of irony is a significant factor in Hunter S. Thompson's writing because it makes the abstract, arbitrary concepts and ideals of the American society in the 1960's palpable for the readers.

To start with, it is significant that all the critical texts maintain that the author is an inextricable part of the story. Clearly, Thompson does not separate himself from his journalistic subject, and neither does he exclude himself from the fierce satirical attacks that remain a distinguishing mark of his texts. As a means of his style, Thompson often uses a characteristic role, or persona, which not only reveals the narrator's attitude about the subject but is also self-disparaging. In *Campaign Trail '72*, Hellmann maintains that Thompson calls his character 'Dr. Hunter S. Thompson' (cf. 17). Supporting Hellmann's hypothesis, Meyers writes that there is no evidence in Thompson's biography for receiving a degree in higher education (155). Consequently, I will adapt Hellmann's distinction of author and character.

Thus, *Campaign Trail '72* has a narrator who may speak with the authorial voice and also act as a hyperbolic persona: the former will be referred to as 'Thompson' and the latter as 'Dr. Thompson'.²⁴ This narrator-protagonist can be linked to what has been said about the use of ironic characters. Further, the use of metaphors, symbols and allegory shows the author's evaluation of the actions and alleged motivations of the protagonists. I want to suggest that these digressive 'tangents' on universal phenomena like the behavior of wild animals, or a football match are disjunctive elements that can be associated with the use of impersonal verbal irony. The frequent changes of style in the author's writing further support the evidence that he employs impersonal verbal irony.

I will try to show that Hunter Thompson is not only a satirist who disparages what he writes about, but to an equal extent an ironist who uses digressive or disjunctive passages in

²⁴ It is not clear, whether Hunter Thompson always could (or cared to) separate his personality from his metaphorical self. I have, however, tried to separate them pragmatically, depending on the effect that the character's actions and stories have on the narrative.

his writing as a means to establish ironic contact with his readership. It is true, however, that Thompson's coverage of the 1972 presidential campaign also contains many elements, which meet part of Frye's definition of satire in *Anatomy of Criticism* because they are "founded on fantasy or a sense of the grotesque or absurd" (224). Examples of satire are the rumor about the 'Ibogaine Effect' in Edward Muskie's campaign (Thompson 150ff), or Thompson's story of a Democratic delegate's 'promise' to vote for a candidate at the convention (264-66); not to mention the invective name-calling, which is known as 'flyting' and an essential component of satire as Frye suggests (223). Yet, I think that the often unconcealed use of verbal irony in *Campaign Trail '72* and its subsequent effects have been ignored so far.

Initially, an example may illustrate how Hunter Thompson uses verbal irony to distinguish his reporting style from conventional journalism. The following excerpt sums up the New Journalist's endeavor to write a different kind of news, and it also shows how Thompson's use of verbal irony juxtaposes this new style with news making conventions. Here, the narrator describes his feelings about returning to Washington after a week on the campaign trail and finding a dozen national newspapers, which he consequently scans for interesting information, on his desk. The "seven *Washington Posts*, seven *Washington Stars*, seven *New York Times*, six *Wall Street Journals*" contain barely any "interest items" (92).²⁵ Most of the newspapers are redundant and mention a speech by the current Democratic front-runner, Edward Muskie. According to Thompson just one small comment in the *New York Times* describes a breakdown the Democrat had after the speech. It also reports that afterwards the candidate started a fight with his campaign manager, which was subsequently resolved by a woman who appeared to be in control (ibid.). Thompson reacts positively to this news item.

Now that's good journalism. Totally objective; very active and straight to the point. But we need to know more. Who was that woman? Why did they fight? Where was Muskie taken? What was he saying when the microphone broke?

Jesus, what's the other one? Every journalist in American knows the 'Five W's'. But I can only remember four. 'Who, What, Why, Where,' ... and yes, of course ... 'When!'" (92)

Although Thompson initially shows how serious he is taking his profession by reading up on the past week's news in various papers, he pretends to have forgotten the formula of all objective news writing. Thompson can only come up with four of the W's, yet the fifth W seems hard to remember. The pretense is effectively marked by Thompson speaking with the voice of the naïve, which is characteristic for the eiron's role. As the naive journalist, who has trouble achieving the simplest professional task, he separates himself from "[e]very journalist in America". When Thompson praises the small *Times* comment he employs the technique of praising in order to blame, which is characteristic for the eiron's role. His praise for the *Times* article, in my opinion, shows that he rejects most of their conventional pieces, which are not "very active and straight to the point". In this excerpt Thompson, instead of directly attacking the reporting style of conventional journalism, uses irony to reveal his critical attitude.

²⁵ I will cite all references to *Campaign Trail '72* by giving the page number and author's name where it is necessary. I will not include a year of publication. Whenever a year of publication is included with a quote it will either refer to *Generation of Swine* or *Fear and Loathing in America*.

Additionally, Thompson reveals, by supposedly admitting to forget the formula of news making, that he is not participating in the “pack journalism”, which Timothy Crouse described in *The Boys on the Bus*, a defining account of political journalism (Crouse 7f).²⁶ Thompson suggests that the “public expects ... a man who can zap around the nation like a goddamn methedrine bat ... sucking up the news and then spewing them out by the ‘Five W’s’ in a package that makes perfect sense. Why not?” (93) Thompson insinuates that it may be a legitimate option when “the truth [is] so dull and depressing” (ibid.). However, the alternative “is wild bursts of madness and filigree” (ibid.) written somewhere in seclusion from the other journalists. In fact, this comes closer to what the author decided to do.

While there are numerous other instances when Thompson writes ironically, often with a bitter undertone, about the journalist’s situation on the campaign trail, I want to draw attention to a more complex phenomenon.²⁷ In the next chapter it is the task to answer the question how Thompson’s reportage of the 1972 presidential campaign has made the abstract concept of the American liberal, which I have sketched in the second chapter, palpable for the readers, and, furthermore, how the author’s use of verbal irony provides the readers with a liberal identity. In concordance with the concept of verbal irony, established in the preceding chapters, I want to first analyze passages where the narrator imitates the common use of verbal irony, then, where he adapts the characteristic roles of irony, the eiron and the alazon, and finally passages in which allegorical and metaphorical elements illustrate the use of impersonal verbal irony.

5.1. Common Ironic Dialogues

In this chapter the argument is that Thompson gives accounts of common ironic dialogues in *Campaign Trail ’72* to determine the protagonists’ role within a certain social hierarchy, without attacking its values, and to build up to a more complex and covert irony. The ironic dialogues are common, meaning that they imitate the use of verbal irony in everyday speech acts that the readers are familiar with. This allows readers with little background knowledge to access more complex aspects of the subject Thompson writes about. The ironic speech act functions, as I will try to show, as a corrective of communicative situations that would otherwise be awkward, alienating, or even aggressive. Although in these dialogues the interlocutors use rhetorical devices, like exaggeration and understatement, they refrain from adapting a persona to make the irony effective. Foremost, the common ironic dialogue has the function to imitate everyday speech acts and thus aims at establishing ironic contact. Such dialogues are prosaic rather than extravagant, so that the interlocutors communicate within the appropriate limits of everyday situations. This enables the readers to associate their own experiences with the situation Thompson describes.²⁸ The common dialogues are

²⁶ The depiction of the media in *The Boys on the Bus* has influenced the forthcoming of Agenda-Setting theories, especially by Combs and McShaw, which analyze the impact of streamlined journalism on the media system in the United States (cf. Dunn 33f).

²⁷ For instances of accounts of the journalists’ situation, passages on pages 40ff, 237-242, 351f, 400ff, 424ff in *Campaign Trail ’72* can be helpful.

²⁸ In passages that contain extravagant elements Thompson, or another protagonist, adapts an ironic character, either the eironic or the alazonic role, and excessively uses hyperbolic or self-demoting elements that, in my opinion, exceed the limitations of everyday speech acts.

characterized by Thompson's attempt to blend in where he would otherwise stick out, and the opposite is the case where Thompson adapts ironic characters.

As stated above, the common ironic dialogue is a means to determine the protagonists' social role. Partly, these dialogues echo the values that the protagonists associate with their understanding of the American liberal, especially the liberal politician and journalist. Thompson's dialogues with members of the establishment echo for instance the factor of accessibility and transparency, which form an essential part of the American liberal ideal. Although the excerpts do not explicitly give a refined understanding of the American liberal by attacking the values attributed to it, the potentially liberal-minded readers can establish a refined understanding by contradicting their concept of themselves and their perception of the liberal politician. When Thompson published his articles in 1972 the readers were, initially, members of the liberal establishment and the youth culture. Viewing instances of ironic dialogues in *Campaign Trail '72* shows that those dialogues bear evidence for ironic contact and, additionally, are accounts when Thompson is actually confronted with those members of the establishment or of the youth culture.

5.1.1. Ironic Dialogues with Members of the Establishment

In the third chapter of *Campaign Trail '72*, which covers the New Hampshire primary in February of 1972, Thompson recollects an event from the '68 campaign in this state. It is the memory of a car ride from Nashua to Manchester airport with the Republican candidate for the presidency: Richard Nixon. Instead of conducting a regular interview with the candidate, Thompson and Nixon have a conversation about professional football. At the airport, waiting for the plane to get ready for take off, Thompson is standing around "with Dick and the others, chatting in a very relaxed way about how successful his swing through New Hampshire had been ... and as he climbed into the plane it seemed only natural to thank him for the ride and shake hands" (Thompson 59). But suddenly Thompson is pulled away and expects trouble when everybody gets alerted. Then Nick Ruwe, "Nixon's chief advance man for New Hampshire" (ibid.), yells at somebody to "get that Cigarette" (ibid.), which Thompson has been smoking while "leaning over the fuel tank" (ibid.). After the plane has left Ruwe is still worried about the incident because none of the security men noticed Thompson smoking three king-size cigarettes next to the plane. Thompson tries to appease Ruwe by assuring him of his integrity.

"...you people are lucky I'm a sane, responsible journalist; otherwise I might have hurled my flaming Zippo into the fuel tank."

"Not you," he said. "Egomaniacs don't do that kind of thing." He smiled. "You wouldn't do anything you couldn't live to write about, would you?"

"You are probably right," I said. "Kamikaze is not my style. I much prefer subtleties, the low-key approach - because I am, after all, a professional."

"We know. That's why you're along." (59-60)

In this piece of dialogue both speakers are aware of a contrast between what has been said and what is actually meant. Ironic contact is, thus, established between the interlocutors. A dialogue without ironic contact would have created an everyday situation, where both speakers accuse each other of wrongdoing. In fact, Thompson can be accused that he has been ignorant of the dangers which the smoking of the cigarette and the

handling of fuel involves. On the other hand, Ruwe is accountable for the security on the airfield and should have prevented smoking around the airplane in the first place. So, both speakers could choose to use their erratic behavior against each other to support their position. Instead, both Thompson and Ruwe play down the situation by being ironical.

The use of irony in this specific situation is effective because both speakers deliberately make Hunter Thompson the butt of irony. Thompson associates himself with the stereotypical journalist's attitude and plays with Ruwe's perception of his role as such. Then, Thompson goes along with Ruwe's overstatement of his professionalism. Thompson emphasizes that he is a professional journalist, which also has the effect of creating a contrast between what is said and what the readers' general perception of Thompson is. The other speaker, Ruwe, pretends that this professionalism has been the reason for riding to the airport with Nixon, although both speakers know that this is not the case. Ruwe makes Thompson the butt of irony in a double sense. First, by exaggerating the journalists' professional attitude and, then, by pretending it is the reason why Thompson is along.

Both speakers echo the professionalism of the journalist ironically by using rhetorical figures of under- and overstatement. Thompson exaggerates the consequence of not being a professional journalist by suggesting that an irresponsible journalist would have blown up the plane. Ruwe's use of understatement signals that he understands what Thompson alludes to. The reply that "egomaniacs don't do that kind of thing" and "you wouldn't do anything you couldn't live to write about, would you?" are understatements because both statements imply the opposite through a negative, which is marked by the rhetorical question tag at the end of the statement. Ruwe implies that professional journalists are individuals who are extremely self-centered and so interested in delivering a story that all other motivations are subordinate to writing the article. Even if Thompson had been a security-threat, Ruwe suggests, he would not have blown up the plane because another journalist would have had the chance to write about this spectacular news item. Ruwe's reply indicates that the worst that can happen to a professional journalist is losing the story to another competitor. This insinuation is fortified by asking Thompson the rhetorical question at the end of the statement. Ruwe's observation shows how dependent the journalist is on delivering a story in order to build up a reputation, and this also shows how strong feelings of envy are among journalists.

Thompson affirms Ruwe's description of the journalist's motivation and defends himself by replying that instead of "kamikaze" he prefers "the low-key approach". In this context it is an understatement that, again, implies the opposite meaning through the negative connotation. "Kamikaze" is a widely known term for the suicide attacks of Japanese jet-pilots in World War II (cf. *Merriam-Webster* "kamikaze"). Here, Thompson feigns to disparage his own style and points out that he is a journalist who prefers the subtleties of a story over the 'explosive' news items. Still, his erratic behavior, not only on the airfield, suggests that he really prefers the "kamikaze" style. In 1972, as this passage is a memory from 1968, a time when the 'gonzo' style had not yet been fully developed, the readers of *Rolling Stone* have been exposed to a different style, and therefore the statement about preferring the subtle approach yields an ambiguity and contains hyperbolic elements. In fact, in the introduction to *Campaign Trail '72*, the narrator already informs his readers that he will write about the presidential election "as close to the bone as [he] could get, and to hell with the

consequences" (18). So, the reader can expect Thompson to write about a subject by choosing an approach that is not subtle at all.

However, in 1968, Thompson is not known for his "kamikaze" style and to Nixon's security, on that day in February of 1968, he is just another journalist from the press corps. On the other hand, Thompson had written a book on the *Hell's Angels*, and, as critics point out, had been to South America and the Caribbean between 1959 and 1963, writing for *National Observer* (cf. Meyers 155; Stull 87). Stull maintains that "while this writing is generally more conventional than his later work, Thompson nonetheless reveals his liberal, if not radical, political beliefs" (87). Nixon's staff does not seem to be aware of these publications and so they understand Thompson's remark regarding "kamikaze" as an understatement by seeing it in a different context than Thompson's readers. The aim may be to emphasize what a reliable, professional journalist he is, despite his thoughtless behavior on the airfield. Thompson is adamant that he is "a professional" and, thus, shows his solidarity and identification with other journalists instead of pointing out that none of them was chosen to have a rare, private conversation with the Republican candidate.

Prior to the scene at the airport and the dialogue with Ruwe, Thompson already writes that he only talked about football with the Republican candidate. Therefore, the readers can suppose that his professional attitude has not been the reason why he was asked to ride with Nixon, thus understanding the pretense when Ruwe makes Thompson the butt of irony. Ruwe suggests that Thompson's defense corresponds with the attitude of a man who wants to appear like one of the most professional journalists on the press corps. Ruwe makes it sound as if the professional attitude really is the reason why Thompson was allowed to accompany the candidate. In retrospect, however, Thompson is not hesitant to admit that he "was the only one on the press corps that evening who claimed to be as seriously addicted to pro football as Nixon himself" and, although he was the "only out-front openly hostile Peace-Freak", agreed "to talk about nothing except football" (60).

With this confession the narrator makes a point not only about the relationship of journalists and politicians, but also about the people's perception of politicians and journalists, which is determined by the news items that journalists write about politicians. On one level the context of the dialogue is a revision of the idea of what a professional journalist is supposed to do when the chance arises to talk in private with a candidate. If any of the "straight/heavy press types" (60) had known more about pro football that evening, they, rather than Thompson, would have been permitted to ride in the car with Nixon and deliberately disassociated themselves from their professional attitude as well. This incident shows how compliant the journalists, including Thompson, are to play by the rules, which the candidate, the candidate's press secretary, and chief advisers determine. On another level Thompson also revises the idea about political realities as the instance reveals that the topic and expertise in a conversation with a politician may be very profane. This stands in contrast to the expectation that such conversations are usually highly intellectual, or exclusively refer to political topics. Thompson even admits that he enjoyed the ride with Nixon and both of them "had a fine time" (60). It changes the public image of the candidate, who, in this instance, is not an elusive politician because the fact that he is "seriously addicted to pro football" makes him more accessible to the general American public.

Ultimately, Thompson's encounter with Nixon shows that being on the campaign trail in New Hampshire is different from later stages of campaigning. Thompson makes clear that the candidates are far more accessible for the press and the electorate in New Hampshire than in any other primary. In another passage that explains the "odd magic of the New Hampshire primary" (Thompson 366) Thompson recollects how he met George McGovern in the bathroom. McGovern was, at that point, an underdog in the field of Democratic candidates. In this instance the journalist is standing side-to-side with McGovern at the urinal, and has a conversation with him. Thompson observes that "anybody could have walked up to that urinal next to McGovern at that moment, and asked him anything they wanted - and he would have answered" (366). Yet, Thompson realizes that this is a one time opportunity because in other states it is impossible to get so close to the candidate as the secret service takes heavier security measures (cf. *ibid.*). When this happens the candidate is endangered of becoming an elusive politician, and that can only be countered by charisma. Thompson comments on charisma in the McGovern campaign in the February article.²⁹ According to the "Madison Avenue school of campaigning", a charismatic politician needs "a nice set of teeth, a big wad of money, and a half-dozen Media Specialists" (72). Here, Thompson's use of hyperbole mocks the value of modern political campaigning, and also reveals his own attitude: he thinks modern political campaigning is not worth as much as the political science graduates claim.

In September 1972 Thompson writes about Nixon's reelection campaign, which gives the reader an idea of what happens when the candidate becomes inaccessible for the journalists and the electorate. Thompson provides this example to establish a contrast between McGovern's and Nixon's style of campaigning. Using a hyperbolic simile to enforce the contrast, he observes that "the difference between traveling with McGovern and traveling with Nixon is just about like the difference between going on tour with the Grateful Dead & going on tour with the Pope" (400). While McGovern's campaign resembles being on tour with a subculture folk-rock band, the president's campaign functions through an aloofness that suggests he is a holy dignitary. Subsequently, Thompson describes how alien the incumbent president is on his reelection campaign. The depiction of Nixon emerging "from a nearby subway tunnel", briefly waving at the crowd, and then vanishing into "the control room", reads like the landing of an astronaut. From the control room Nixon's "pithy remarks" are broadcast via loudspeakers to the "press mob" in the hallway (401).

Thompson is one of those who listen to the president's remarks in the hallway. A short conversation with "a young Chicago *Sun-Times* reporter", who has also switched from the McGovern campaign to Nixon's, shows how the journalists use verbal irony as a means to come to terms with the way the president conducts the campaign. Instead of openly criticizing the way they are treated, they retreat into verbal irony to wryly reevaluate the situation.

"Jesus", I said. "Is it *always* like this?"

He laughed. "Hell, this is *accessible!* We can actually *see* him. I spent about twelve hours covering him in New York yesterday, and I never saw him once - except on

²⁹ Thompson criticizes McGovern's failure to realize that it is not enough to be an honest and intelligent man to get elected into the White House, and also his inability to mobilize the great number of people who believe there is no candidate they can vote for in 1972 (cf. Thompson 72-74).

closed-circuit TV when he made his speech last night. They had us in a separate room, with speakers and TV monitors.” (401)

Thompson’s question that marks the beginning of the dialogue is highly rhetorical because he can tacitly assume that the president’s campaign is *always* like that. So, Thompson establishes a contrast between what is said and what he meant to say. This is also suggested by the emphasis of the adverb ‘always’ in italics. The young reporter understands that Thompson’s suggestive questioning marks the use of verbal irony. Therefore, instead of just affirming Thompson inquiry, the young reporter responds ironically to the rhetorical question. His answer that “this is *accessible*” is an overstatement of the apparent facts and indicates a different meaning: the president is *not* accessible at all. With this statement the reporter implies that, in comparison to McGovern’s campaign, Nixon is very inaccessible. By reacting appropriately to Thompson’s rhetorical question, the young reporter signals that he shares Thompson’s attitude towards Nixon’s campaigning style. Thus, he can legitimately resort into bitter irony - sarcasm - by commenting that they “can actually *see him*” in person. Again, this is a dry overstatement because Nixon, though briefly visible, almost immediately withdraws from the public. How unusual it must be for the reporter to see the president in person is, again, emphasized in italics.

Although in a different context than on the airfield in 1968, in this instance it becomes obvious that the journalists can only play by the rules which the political establishment dictates. Either the journalists accept how the president mocks the idea of an accessible campaign by becoming a face on a “closed-circuit TV”, or they are deprived of an independent news item and become entirely reliant on the pool reports provided by the White House. The passage reveals a phenomenon in politics for which Nixon is an extreme example: the president can effectively refrain from campaigning because he can abide to not be an accessible candidate. In contrast to the incumbent president, a candidate has to spend a lot of time on the campaign trail amongst the people and with the press because it is the best chance to receive publicity and an authentic profile. An accessible and authentic liberal candidate who gets elected to the White House runs danger of becoming an elusive president as well. The example of Nixon is extreme but it shows that, once in power, a politician becomes more elitist and reliant on an inner circle of advisers than a candidate who ideally has best intentions of remaining accessible and transparent once elected.

5.1.2. Ironic Dialogues with Members of the Youth Culture

Thompson’s conversations with members of the establishment illustrate aspects of the politicians’ accessibility in relation to their style of campaigning, and the relationship of the press and politicians. The conversations with members of the youth culture, generically the generation of young Americans from 18 to 25, refine their disillusioned image of politicians, and echo their attitude towards politicians and elections in general. The situation of young Americans who associate themselves with a counter cultural lifestyle and reject the norms of mainstream society is that of “disenfranchised others” (Stull 87), or what Ron Dellums called the “nigger vote” (cf. Thompson 73). Rather than stressing the difference between “a brutal and at times punitive mainstream culture” (Stull 89) and a disenchanting youth culture, I want to emphasize that Thompson uses verbal irony to endow solidarity between the divergent groups. The use of verbal irony in the dialogues with members of the youth

culture enables Thompson's readers to refine their understanding of the young Americans' disinterest in society. These dialogues relate to the problem why the majority of young Americans refrain from participating in the representative political system. Rather than further separating two disparate parts of a society, Thompson aims at establishing a refined, compassionate understanding for what is awry in America at the beginning of the 1970's.

The first dialogue is from December, it is the first chapter of *Campaign Trail '72*. Thompson is on his way to Washington D.C. and helps out two young men, Jerry and Lester, whose car has broken down. The young men inquire what Thompson is going to do in Washington and both are surprised when Thompson reveals that he is a reporter for *Rolling Stone*, covering the 1972 presidential election. However, especially Lester is not impressed by this information and tries to convince Thompson to quit the assignment and work with them on selling used cars. This suggestion is already an instance of verbal irony as it reveals that Lester reevaluates the political journalist as a used-car dealer. While Jerry is at least sympathetic, Lester cannot understand why Thompson would get involved with politics. The excerpt from the conversation shows what attitude members of the youth culture have towards politics, and how Thompson reflects their attitudes and defends his own motivation.

"Well..." I said, wondering if there was any sane answer to a question like that: "It's mainly a personal trip, a very hard thing to explain."

Jerry smiled. "You talk like you've *tried it*," he said. "Like maybe you *got off on it*."

"Not as far as I meant to," I said, "but definitely high."

Lester was watching me now with new interest. "I always *thought* that about politicians," he said. "Just a gang of goddamn power junkies, gone off on their own strange trips."

"Come on now," said Jerry. "Some of those guys are OK."

"Who?" Lester asked.

"That's why I'm going to Washington," I said. "To check out the people and find out if they're *all swine*."

"Don't worry," said Lester. "They are. You might as well go looking for cherries in a Baltimore whorehouse."

"OK," I said. "I'll see you when I make it over to Baltimore." (31-32)

Thompson's response to Lester's suggestion, that nobody would want to get involved with politics, is an acknowledgment of the young man's opinion. Thompson muses, or pretends to muse that he cannot reasonably explain his motivation and describes the assignment as a "personal trip". The use of the word 'trip' is ironical because Thompson intends a double meaning, which is grasped by the youths. The word trip can describe a journey but it also describes the intense effect which the intake of a psychedelic drug has on a person (cf. *Merriam-Webster* "trip"). By choosing this rhetorical strategy Thompson establishes ironic contact with the youths. Alternatively, if Thompson had tried to describe his motivations reasonably, the youths could have decided to mock an, in their opinion, meaningless endeavor. Instead, Thompson's strategy to use a metaphor that suggests politics is a drug-like experience echoes the youth's fascination with and, moreover, assimilation of the drug culture during the 1960's.

Jerry reacts sympathetically to Thompson's confession and suggests that Thompson, after trying the trip once, "got off on it"; he had some intense experiences on the trip, which was so enjoyable that he wants to try again. Thompson affirms, and ponders that he has not gotten as far as he meant to get. This can be read as an allusion to Thompson's own political endeavor in 1970, when he attempted to become sheriff in his home community of Aspen, Colorado. Lester, who initially lost interest when Thompson revealed that he was a political journalist, is nudged by Thompson's suggestive metaphor to reveal his own opinions about politicians. Cynically, he describes them as a "gang of ... power junkies", which brings the metaphor to another level because a junkie is a person who is severely addicted to a drug and dependent on it. Lester concludes that the junkie's trip is "strange" and, hence, not desirable. Here, the interlocutors use bitter irony in a speech act that juxtaposes politics with aspects of the drug-culture and, thus, they reveal motivations and dependencies of politicians who run for office.

Jerry, however, is hesitant to agree with Lester's harsh conclusion, drawn from the premise that politics is "a trip". Rather, he is adamant that some politicians are "OK". Although Lester doubts that, Thompson supports the idea that some politicians are decent. Thompson confesses that his motivation is to investigate whether "they are *all* swine". The phrasing of this response suggests that Thompson actually doubts that every politician is corrupt and deviant. In this situation Thompson's response is rhetorically strong because he assumes a position that does not make him seem naïve and, further, tacitly attacks the assumption that the decent politician is non-existent. This is done by ironically expressing a belief through the opposite and, thus, signaling a distanced attitude. Thompson makes a universal proposition about *all* politicians and by emphasizing this universality the proposition becomes absurd. While Thompson does not openly admit that he also believes that some politicians are "OK", by ironically exaggerating Lester's belief he makes it sound implausible why some politicians might not be alright after all. Primarily, this piece of dialogue shows how deep the resentment against politics is among the young Americans, and it appears that Thompson can sympathize with their resentment without fully agreeing with it.

In fact, Lester's final remark concerning the sincerity of politicians shows that members of his generation have lost respect for politicians. Lester advises Thompson that he might as well start looking for "cherries in a Baltimore whorehouse" instead of looking for a sincere and decent politician. Lester uses a simile to emphasize that Thompson will not find a politician of integrity in Washington D.C. Instead of directly voicing his disappointment with the political establishment, Lester expresses the disappointment wryly. Again, part of the irony derives from the use of slang: the word 'cherry' in this context refers to a woman who has not lost her virginity (cf. *Merriam-Webster* "cherry"). The simile is similar to the English proverb 'carrying coals to Newcastle', though used in reversed logic, and underlines that it is pointless to try looking for a decent politician. The simile creates the effect of irony because it emphasizes the fact that nobody who had knowledge of what a brothel is, would expect to find a virgin there. Hence, it is certainly ironic if somebody visits Washington D.C. with the intention to find a decent politician. The analogy of looking for virgins in a brothel contributes to the quixotic, 'picaresque', irony of Thompson's trip as it reveals the absurdity of going to Washington in order to find a politician of integrity.

Overall, Thompson's conversation with the young men shows how communication that relies on slang expressions has a tendency to become ironic. A group that is prone to use words which often imply more than one meaning has a chance to have conversations that are open-ended. This means it leaves the interlocutors a better chance to defend their own convictions and motivations without attacking the other's and, therefore, soothe alienating situations. The erosion of fixed meaning opens the discourse for metaphors that enable the interlocutors to refine the intended meaning of conversations. So, without directly implying it, the composition of this dialogue, which appeared as early as December 1971 in *Rolling Stone*, sets the theme for Thompson's picaresque journey for the decent politician: the American liberal. Furthermore this dialogue shows, in my opinion, that Thompson does not attack politicians in general but rather the way the political system works, as the allusion to the brothel suggests.

Another short conversation with a young man underlines that Thompson is attacking the political machinery in the United States. In the early chapters of *Campaign Trail '72* Thompson is concerned with the potential impact which the "Youth Vote" will have on the 1972 election (cf. 40). According to the political commentators in Washington "these kids are turned off from politics ... Most of 'em don't even want to hear about it" (40). Thompson challenges this opinion, and concludes that "if you give 25 million people a new toy, the odds are pretty good that a lot of them will try it at least once" (79). Yet, a piece of dialogue with a hitchhiker shows how disenchanted and apolitical the majority of the adolescent electorate actually is. Thompson's use of irony in this situation can be described as prosaic.

[When] I asked him who he planned to vote for in the election he looked at me like I'd said something crazy.

"What election?" he asked.

"Never mind," I said. "I was only kidding." (81)

In this small piece of dialogue the dynamics of the speech act reveals the acuteness of disinterest in politics. Thompson uses understatement, namely litotes, as he implies the opposite to show the incongruity between his previous writing about the potential 'Youth Vote' (79) and the reality among young Americans. Verbal irony is, again, a speaking strategy to avoid an alienating, or awkward, situation. Realistically, in a straight-forward, non-ironic, conversation between a political commentator and a young hitchhiker, the latter would probably be scolded for his lack of awareness. In this particular context both speakers' contained use of irony helps to avoid a painful topic; a conversation about politics would have started, if they had been non-ironical about their political commitment. The short dialogue shows that Thompson can understand why the youth "will not give a hoot in hell about any election" (79); the young hitchhiker signifies the youth's general lack of interest in politics in its full-blown acuteness. In its shortness the hitchhiker's presumably rhetorical question and Thompson's prosaic response show two things: the young hitchhiker represents a member of the increasingly frustrated, indifferent, and apolitical youth culture. Yet, Thompson, despite his position as a political commentator, can understand their frustration.

If one reads the passage with the impression that the hitchhiker is totally unaware of any upcoming election, it would suffice to prove the youth's disorientation and their disenchantment with the American society. However, I want to suggest the alternative

reading that the hitchhiker is bored by the fact that there is always an election in which one is required to vote, which creates a feeling that it won't make a difference if one doesn't vote at all. In the first reading, ironic contact is not established because the young hitchhiker is overwhelmed by Thompson's question. Although, in this case Thompson makes the hitchhiker the butt of irony, he takes a self-ironic stance as well. Arguably, a political commentator who says "never mind I was only kidding" instead of pointing out his interlocutor's lack of awareness undermines the own standpoint. Yet, in the alternative reading ironic contact is established because the hitchhiker only pretends to not know about the election. Accordingly, Thompson deliberately contradicts his own enthusiastic writing about the potential 'Youth Vote'. Instead of boastfully expressing his political enthusiasm, Thompson gives a diffident response with no sign of inordinateness. He refrains from emphasizing the importance of electing George McGovern instead of Richard Nixon for president, and he does not go on a rant about the elections, these "big bogus showdowns" (56), either. Thompson pretends to be disinterested as well, and understates his involvement on the campaign trail.

The response "never mind ... I was only kidding" is an understatement because Thompson has frequently emphasized how important the upcoming election is in his opinion. In the February article Thompson writes about the potential of the young electorate extensively, and even quotes Ginsberg writing that "the ones who go to the polls in '72 will be the most committed, the most idealistic, the 'best minds of my generation'" (79). Hereby, Thompson implies more than simply referring to the "most committed and idealistic" but rather insinuates that the "best minds" of his generation are those who are "destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked ... [and] looking for an angry fix" (Ginsberg 9). At a later point in *Campaign Trail '72* Thompson quotes from the book *Changing Sources of Power* by Fred Dutton to support the conviction that the angry generation of young Americans will change the hegemony of the system (cf. 371-72). Yet, Thompson strongly feels that the 1972 election may also indicate a watershed after the hyper-political 1960's. He emphasizes the importance to vote but, more importantly, his jeremiad attacks the political system that cannot provide a candidate or cause *worth voting for*. Fatalistically, Thompson asks "what about next time? Who is going to explain in 1976 that all the people who felt they got burned in '72 should 'try again' for another bogus challenger?" (79), and thus intensifies the feeling of urgency. Thompson speculates that this election is the last chance to prevent "two entire generations" from genuinely losing all interest in politics because "their apathy will be rooted in personal experience" (79). Bearing Thompson's conviction in mind, the prosaic response to the hitchhiker's disinterest can be interpreted as ironic self-reflection.

Thompson has written critically about the youth culture as "a generation of stone desperate cripples ... a whole subculture of frightened illiterates with no faith in anything" (63). He maintains that the normative mainstream culture is responsible for "these kind of people who [don't] need to get hung up in depressing political trips. They are not ready for it ... all they want to do is get level long enough to think straight and avoid the next nightmare" (64). From the perspective of the author's writing, the narrator sees himself not as a representative of the counter culture. Rather, it makes him uncomfortable that they are "terrified of almost everything, including [himself]" (64). The reason for the reaction of ironic pretense - the hitchhiker's exaggerated disinterest and Thompson's understatement

of the importance of voting - is the understanding for the confusing situation of young people at the beginning of the 1970's. Thompson's response creates a sympathetic situation between the two men, who formally represent different spectrums of society. In this context the hitchhiker and the journalist exhibit two distinct roles: Thompson is the politically active, liberal citizen and the young hitchhiker a non-participant dropout. Describing the interaction between these two sides of the spectrum nudges Thompson's readers to reflect their own liberal attitude. Thompson implies that it is questionable whether there is any point in convincing an adolescent of the necessity to vote, or even register to vote.

Thompson disparages himself, taking into account what has been written about the 'Youth Vote', and he also contradicts the liberal ideal that upholds the belief in the perfectibility of man by means of participation in the civil society. Affirming the hitchhiker's disinterest is more important than taking an elitist position and giving him an intellectual scolding about the duty to vote and to participate in the building of a better society. Rather, both speakers voice their disappointment with the political system without explicitly saying anything about it. Again, verbal irony is used to circumvent direct critique and silently express discomfort with social norms and hierarchies. The dialogue reveals that the protagonists are highly critical of the political machinery, which is run by influential party bosses such as Mayor Daley of Chicago. However great Thompson's concern with the apolitical young Americans is, he can maintain an understanding for them. The way of conducting the conversation with the young hitchhiker underlines this understanding compassion.

In the essay "A Ritual Reenactment of Deviant Behavior" Stull observes that Thompson identifies with "the disenfranchised other", as I have also pointed out. Accordingly, Thompson presents his deviant character always in opposition to a "punitive mainstream culture". However, after the analysis of exemplary dialogues with members of the establishment and with the youth culture, I want to conclude that the permanent enactment of deviant behavior and an association with society's outlaws does not augment the divergence of mainstream and counter culture in American society. It is rather the narrator's communicative strategy - the use of verbal irony in the common dialogues - that makes his articles accessible for a wide range of readers, who cannot be exclusively grouped in the counter culture or the established mainstream as Meyers suggests with reference to Newfield.

The dialogues illustrate the spectrum of American society and bear evidence that the seemingly divergent parts can relate to the same problems: the inaccessibility of politicians and the opaqueness of the political process. Thompson's depictions attempt to unify mainstream and counter culture. Rather than insisting that these parts of society are disparate, the use and recognition of verbal irony in common dialogues can create sympathy for each other, under circumstances determined by two entirely different perspectives. Thompson establishes an understanding for the divergence of the American society as a whole that is rooted in the complicity and helplessness of the people who are entangled in the political system.

5.2. The Use of Ironic Characters

The common ironic dialogues already echo the disillusionment of the American society at the beginning of the 1970's, but the use of ironic characters in *Campaign Trail '72* reinforces it. In contrast to the common dialogues the narrator adapts the role of the alazon that refrains from maintaining a distanced, diffident attitude. The alazonic character is called Dr. Thompson, who prefers to stick out instead of blending in with the actions of other characters. In *Irony and the Ironic* Muecke suggests that the effectiveness of the ironic characters "comes from the economy of means" (64), namely the use of simple rhetorical devices. What the character says and how she or he is represented, Muecke maintains, "may suffice to see through the complexities of hypocrisy or expose the irrationality of prejudice" (64). Dr. Thompson is the self-reflexive and excessive representation of the narrator and in contrast to the narrator's prosaic use of verbal irony in common ironic dialogues, this ironic character is a means to hyperbolically and directly voice his disenchantment about observations made on the campaign trail.

Stull identifies Thompson's deviant personality with the ironic character of Dr. Thompson, and I agree that it is hard to separate both at times. Stull may be right that "we become increasingly aware that [Thompson's] writing is a verbal performance, a self-reflexive process rather than a codification of significance about a subject beyond the text" (97). However, I disagree that the subject beyond the text is without significance. Rather, I will make the case that this self-reflexive performance is a means of identifying himself as a liberal ironist, who is more than "a countercultural model, an emblematic figure who endorses and gives life to a repertoire of unorthodox practices and beliefs" (94). Dr. Thompson's hyperbolic behavior mocks the stereotypes and prejudices of daily life and provides a kaleidoscopic mirror in which the hegemony of the establishment reflects itself. Thus, Dr. Thompson is the iconoclast, who openly attacks what Hunter Thompson merely echoes in the common ironic dialogues.

The following chapter will examine the interaction between characters on the campaign trail and the narrator's persona, Dr. Thompson. A characterization of the persona will illustrate how he communicates with other characters on the campaign trail. Then, I will investigate Dr. Thompson's tendency for telling tall tales, and the function and effects of those. Finally, I want to stress that Hunter Thompson is the rare example of an author who blends person and persona to create a metaphorical self that teeters between mainstream and counter culture and illuminates the juxtaposition of irony and liberal identity.

5.2.1. A Characterization of Dr. Thompson

Dr. Thompson is a character permanently on the verge of psychological and physical breakdown; frantic about missing the deadlines for his articles, paranoid, and in constant worry about his health. Hellmann describes Dr. Thompson as "a comic, mock-psychotic persona", used to "to shape [Thompson's] journalistic works into inventive allegories - parodistic dramatizations" instead of just creating a "selective emphasis of the complex traits of his actual personality" (17). An example of such a parodistic dramatization is, as Hellmann hints at, Dr. Thompson's feud with Democratic chairman Larry O'Brien, which originates in O'Brien's broken promise to make Dr. Thompson governor of American Samoa (Hellmann 21; e.g. Thompson 82-83). Arguably, this frequent use of absurd hyperbole is a

characteristic of Dr. Thompson, the alazonic character in *Campaign Trail '72*. This character, unlike the narrator who uses verbal irony to display modest or diffident behavior, acts hyperbolically. The oscillation between the narrator, Hunter Thompson, and the character, Dr. Thompson, creates an effect which Klinkowitz identifies as a “Fitzgerald technique, that of simultaneously leading the parade and heckling oneself from the curb, to capture the spirit of the age in himself” (34). The alazonic character is prone to boast about information that he cannot confirm, or sources that do not exist, like the fabrications of the effects of the drug Ibogaine on Edward Muskie. Dr. Thompson’s frequent drug and alcohol binges, his fast motorcycles and his fierce Doberman pinschers have become part of the legendary character that is often confused with the author of the work. The narrator’s rather diffident attitude that is, at times, morphed into the character’s swagger provides the mirror in which the spirit of the age is reflected.

A conversation between Dr. Thompson and “Bobo, the master pimp and carmeister” (337) at the Fontainebleau Hotel, a few days after the Republican National Convention ended, depicts the character’s conduct. Dr. Thompson, who is prone to ostentation, exhibits the simulative self-perception of the alazon because he is the only journalist left at the hotel after the convention but adamant to admit it. In contrast to Hunter Thompson’s self-perception as a professional journalist, Dr. Thompson is pretending to be more than a journalist.

“Not me. Everybody else says I look like a cop.”

[Bobo] looked at me for a moment, tapping his foot on the accelerator to keep the engine up. “Yeah,” he said. “I guess so. You could pass for a cop as long as you kept your mouth shut.”

“I am usually pretty discreet,” I said.

He smiled. “Sure you are. We’ve all noticed it. That other press guy that’s still here asked me who you were the other day, when you were bad-mouthing Nixon...” (340)

Bobo takes down the big talker, the alazon, by pretending to agree with what Dr. Thompson tells him. In this context Bobo exhibits the role of the eiron, supported by translating the word ‘bobo’ from Portuguese: it means foolish (cf. *PONS* “bobo”). However, in the course of the dialogue with Dr. Thompson, the reader understands that the pimp is not a fool at all, and in the end he reveals a profound understanding of politics (cf. 341). When Dr. Thompson brags that nobody can identify him as a journalist and everybody thinks “he looks like a cop”, Bobo pretends to agree at first. But he points out that Dr. Thompson could only be mistaken for police if he “kept his mouth shut”. This puts Dr. Thompson in high relief and, here, the character makes a countersinking statement that he is “usually pretty discreet”. In another context, like on the airfield in New Hampshire in 1968, this statement could have been meant ironically, but here it expresses the characters firm belief that he has the ability to blend in, whereas he clearly sticks out. So, the communicative effect is similar to sawing off the branch one sits on. Bobo affirms Dr. Thompson’s self-assessment ironically. The reply “sure you are ... we all noticed it” is a form of meiosis because it implies the opposite through a positive understatement.

The dialogue shows that, in contrast to Hunter Thompson, who tries to sympathize with the other journalists on the campaign trail, Dr. Thompson tries to conceal his journalistic profession. Further, the boast about being a cop is supposed to have an intimidating effect

on his interlocutor, who is a hustler. The claim is an ironic hyperbole because the reader knows that the author resents state authority, especially police force after the experiences in the late 1960's.³⁰ When Dr. Thompson says that everybody thinks "he looks like a cop", he means a cop who investigates undercover; Dr. Thompson clearly does not wear an official uniform in this scene. The idea of looking like an undercover cop establishes the exotic nature of the character. It is fostered by the fact that Hunter S. Thompson has been a very unusual appearance among other journalists. Timothy Crouse points out that

[Thompson] wore sneakers, Miami sport-shirts, a motley hunting jacket, and bat-wing blue-tinted sunglasses. He looked more like a Sierra Club back-packing nut than a hippie, but there was no confusing him with the rest of the reporters, all of whom wore suits and ties. (330)

Here, it is again hard to separate person and persona but, as I have argued, it is not necessary either. For certain effects Thompson switches to his imaginary self, mostly to create comic relief. Whenever possible the narrator has his character, Dr. Thompson, exploit the exotic appearance to create hyperbolic situations where, as Stull also observes (95), the social order is disrupted. Dr. Thompson "plays the trickster figure who mischievously disrupts the social order or shows his disdain for certain persons" (Stull 95). Boasting that he looks like an undercover cop reveals how much the character tries to contradict the cultural norm and evoke deviance.

I want to suggest that the character's resemblance of a police officer is an ironic allusion to an experience from the early stages of the McGovern campaign. Dr. Thompson attends a dinner at the McGovern headquarters in Milwaukee where, unexpectedly, "[his] night [is] turning into something out of Kafka" (149). Arriving dazed and confused, Dr. Thompson is, at first, warned by Frank Mankiewicz, the campaign manager, "to stay away from [his] house" (148). Then an unidentifiable voice calls a "Sheriff" several times (149). Dr. Thompson's paranoid reaction to the situation makes him the decoy-duck for an elaborated hoax. The confusion is complete when the character realizes how he is framed in high relief by the campaign manager and the candidate. The person, who kept shouting "Sheriff", is actually George McGovern. McGovern's reason is not Dr. Thompson's supposed misconduct, but knowledge about Hunter Thompson, whose biography the character naturally shares, and his attempt to become sheriff in Aspen. McGovern, thus, means to ironically frame Dr. Thompson in high relief because it can be expected that the character would react to the shouting with alertness. It is an instance when the narrator presents the situation from the paranoid perspective of his character, although the reality about Thompson's presence on the campaign trail may have been slightly different as many contemporaries point out (cf. Wenner 159-163).

For the reader this creates a double effect. First, it is observable how vulnerable and paranoid the character is, then it becomes apparent that a sense humor, which "is the main measure of sanity" (Thompson 128), makes the formerly humorless politician more sympathetic and accessible to the readership. The character's mental frailty is used to make him the decoy-duck for a public joke, and the politician's ironic statement expresses his

³⁰ Here, especially the experience at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, where the Chicago police acted with such brutal force against the protestors that the author's plan to write a book, entitled *The Death of the American Dream* [unpublished], "was a rotten success", as he confessed to senator Abraham Ribicoff (cf. Thompson, 2001 127).

sympathy with the journalist, who is suspiciously eyed by the secret service. The exclamation “Sheriff” is ironic because it implies more than the obvious meaning. The context suggests that the politician calls out for the secret service because an exotic person, who is acting up, approaches. However, with knowledge of the politician’s and the narrator’s relationship, it becomes clear that the McGovern expresses respect for Dr. Thompson by calling him sheriff. In fact, Hunter Thompson, against all odds, only lost the election in Aspen by a margin (cf. Wenner 113-114).

Here, the narrator describes a situation that makes use of verbal irony to provide a sudden insight into the impact of humor in uptight social situations. Thus, Thompson not only assesses himself ironically, but also reevaluates the image of George McGovern; a stiff underdog candidate becomes the sovereign contender. So, this scene further develops the picture of the decent, liberal politician and separates this image from the mass of power-seeking politicians. I want to suggest that the narrator’s idea of the decent, accessible and upright politician is mentioned in one key passage about George McGovern just before the Democratic convention. The character, namely Dr. Thompson, describes his experience with a prototype motorcycle, the Vincent Black Shadow. After the ride it rests in the hotel parking lot with a ‘McGovern for President’ tag on its handlebars. Dr. Thompson suggests that McGovern should ride the bike and get some pictures taken for public release. Yet, McGovern’s campaign managers are not interested in this sort of publicity and Dr. Thompson indicates that McGovern could get the votes of about one million people, if he got pictures taken at the beach, drinking beer and wearing a Grateful Dead t-shirt (cf. 224). This idea is another absurd hyperbole. It may express the hopes for a liberal candidate who is appealing to the people and compassionate with the disenfranchised, a person of integrity, and not another typical career politician who got his charisma from media advisers.

5.2.2. Dr. Thompson’s Tall Tale

Stull has observed that Dr. Thompson is not hesitant to express his disdain about certain persons, which he achieves by becoming “a trickster figure” (95). I want to connect this claim with Caron’s observation that describes the narrator-protagonist as “a double boiler yarnspinner [sic], capable of steaming against the strongest current of truth imaginable” (1). Consequently some critics, namely Caron and Steinbrink, associate Hunter Thompson’s texts with the writings of Mark Twain. It is especially the use of imaginative, hyperbolic storytelling that associates Thompson’s work with the American tall tale tradition.

Often, the narrator recollects events in which the character, Dr. Thompson, presents the most absurd stories to an audience of outsiders. Hellmann suggests that an example for a tall tale is the account of how Dr. Thompson’s harmless blue indigo snake escapes its box and is beaten to death with a metal vacuum cleaner by a watchman from Random House. According to Hellmann, the story can be related to the efforts of the ‘Old Guard’ Democrats, who want to prevent George McGovern from seizing the nomination.³¹ Thompson employs a technique that is an example of how storytelling becomes a form of reporting (cf. Hellmann 21). The advantage of this technique is that the author is able to mix fact and fiction through

³¹ Today’s reader may be tempted to understand the fact that the snake is blue as a proof that it represents the Democratic candidate. However, in 1972 the Democrats were not associated with this color. The distinction of blue Democrats and red Republicans was introduced years later (Bensen 1-2).

accounts of the narrator and the actions of his character in order to reveal aspects of the story that remain hidden in normal reporting. In this chapter I will point out how the narrator is prone to present tall tales to a group of outsiders with the effect that the potential victims of the hoax will appear more accessible to the reader. Rather than making the group of outsiders look bad, the character is placed in high relief, and the hoax is detected.

One of Dr. Thompson's notorious tall tales is presented when he participates in the Republican National Convention (RNC). What makes this tall tale stand out is that it can be analyzed on two levels because it has two addressees: the 'Nixon Youth' and the readers of *Campaign Trail '72*. By using verbal irony, the character gains access to the group of enthusiastic Nixon supporters. First, Dr. Thompson claims to be a political insider and, then, brags about taking LSD with NBC anchor John Chancellor, a representative of the liberal media. Initially, the use of verbal irony reveals how strongly the conservative youth group rejects liberal thinking. Yet, the scene does not only reveal how the character tricks a group of outsiders with his tale, but also how the narrator exposes the readers to the tall tale of the character's experiences in the alien surroundings of the RNC. It warps the reality of Hunter Thompson's Aspen campaign and John Chancellor's attitude towards illegal substances.

The character's acts at the RNC in August 1972 provide a view of the conservative youth's enthusiasm. It shows that the prevailing idea of young people being either apolitical or voting for the Democratic Party does not constitute the full picture of the generation of young Americans. Thus, the character's encounter with the political 'Nixon Youth' stands in sharp contrast to the experiences with the apolitical part of that generation, which have also been described in *Campaign Trail '72*. The 'Nixon Youth' is presented as desperate opposition to the youth subculture and Dr. Thompson uses the supposed knowledge about influential people to impress the conservative youngsters. Arguably, this strategy would not have worked with the disinterested, apolitical young dropouts. Then, the association of influential people, namely John Chancellor, with aspects of the subculture creates a situation where events that are hard to believe, and that occurred in an exotic place, are presented to a group of outsiders. The effect is a tension between insider and outsider, or 'old-timer' and 'green-horn', which reveals the role of the 'Nixon Youth' in a cultural context and their opinion of the liberal media.

The encounter takes place when Dr. Thompson is at the RNC in Miami and gets lost in the hallways of the convention center, while trying to find the press lounge. He ends up "in a big room jammed with 'Nixon Youth' workers, who are preparing "for a 'spontaneous demonstration' at the moment of climax" (Thompson 352). They are getting ready for the roll-cast vote, in which Nixon will seize the GOP nomination for president. Before the young Nixon supporters are heading onto the convention floor, Dr. Thompson mingles with them. The young Republicans want to keep the press out, and Dr. Thompson is the only reporter who manages to stay by asking a young staffer, who bluntly wants to throw him out, whether he has run for a political office. Dr. Thompson seems to have calculated the young man's response, which is marked by the logical counter question: "What about *you*? What office did *you* run for?" (355) Dr. Thompson jovially exclaims that he ran for Sheriff and, thus, brings his alter ego's own recent political activities into the picture. Gently smiling, the character informs the staffer that he lost "only by a hair [because] the *liberals* put the screws

to [him]" (355). This statement has the effect of surprising the Nixon staffer with Dr. Thompson's supposed political experience.

The emphasis of the opposition to liberals identifies the reporter with the young Republicans by giving the term 'liberal' a different meaning than it has for the , the readers, and in the presidential campaign of 1972. When Dr. Thompson says 'liberal', he actually refers to profit-oriented and economically powerful elites that promote a hedonistic capitalism, believing in the materialistic supremacy of property value. An examination of the group of people who ran against Thompson proves that. Thompson campaigned against the economical establishment that wanted to expand Aspen's infrastructure and tourist industry (McKeen 10). The way the character denotes the term 'liberal' in this context associates it with a Republican ideology of deregulated markets, and minimal interference with private interests. The 'Nixon Youth' supporters become the victim of irony as they do not understand this. In their understanding the term 'liberal' refers to such politicians as George McGovern and Hubert Humphrey.³² They believe Dr. Thompson is attacking such candidates because they do not recognize that the character is actually referring to a coalition of established money elites in and around Aspen. Here, Dr. Thompson poses as a reactionary in order to dismantle this position. The use of covert irony and intended dissimulation tricks the 'Nixon Youth' into sympathizing with the character and taking him along. This is emphasized when the character exaggerates his identification by admitting that he "[wants] to see what it [is] like on the inside of a winning campaign" (355). This may ironically voice the conviction that the liberal Democratic candidate, George McGovern, will beat Nixon in November of 1972.

The way of retelling the events suggests that Thompson presents these events in the fashion of a tall tale to the readers, namely in retrospect, as an accomplished coup - a 'fait accompli'. The scene of the RNC is an exotic setting to the readers of *Campaign Trail '72*, and the character exaggerates the unlikely event of gaining access to the convention floor by being part of an empathic Nixon rally as if this experience were a matter of fact. Dr. Thompson brags how he is wearing "the only visible MCGOVERN button in Miami Beach that week" (356) and stirring discomfort among the 'Nixon Youth'. Instead of being thrown out, the character proudly claims to argue successfully with the Republicans, and yet the argument "became so complex and disjointed that [he] can't possibly run it all down" (356). Here, the narrator uses a strategy to leave the reader uncertain about the details of the coup's emergence and overtly ornaments its outcome, which is a cunning storytelling technique. Dr. Thompson gives a depiction of his demeanor at the rally; he describes how he is already seeing himself "wearing a plastic red, white, and blue Nixon hat" and how the TV cameras zoom in on him:

a weird-looking 35-year-old speed freak with half his hair burned off from overindulgence, wearing a big blue MCGOVERN button on his chest, carrying a tall cup of 'Old Milwaukee' and shaking his fist at John Chancellor up in the NBC booth - screaming: "You dirty bastard! You'll *pay* for this, by God! We'll rip your goddamn

³² The former has been labeled the triple-A candidate, who is supposedly soft on issues such as abortion, the amnesty for army deserters, and the legalization of LSD. Hubert Humphrey, in his leading role as an advocate of the Civil Rights Movement and his ties to labor unions, is also strongly representing the liberal politician as seen by the young Republicans.

teeth out! KILL! KILL! Your number just came up, you communist son of a bitch!" (356)

Dr. Thompson surprisingly evokes a new image of an enemy, and presents his readers a story where he and the 'Nixon Youth' threaten the NBC anchor John Chancellor.

The following dialogue with a young woman from the 'Nixon Youth' stands out in several ways. Here, we see how Dr. Thompson uses the exaggeration of the tall tale, combined with verbal irony, to reveal two contradictory elements in the concept of the American liberal. First, the image of the liberal media is opposed to its perception by representatives of the youth culture's generation, and then this generation's own arbitrariness is brought to light. The conversation with the 'Nixon Youth' has, again, two dimensions: the inner quality of the dialogue that uses verbal irony to trick the young conservatives, and the outer quality that uses the hyperbolic boast of the tall tale to present a hoax - as if it were a matter of fact - to the readers.

Dr. Thompson tells the readers how he soothed the young conservatives' discomfort after supposedly threatening the NBC journalist.

I politely dismissed all suggestions that I remove my MCGOVERN button, but I agreed to carry a sign and wear a plastic hat like everybody else. "Don't worry," I assured them. "You'll be proud of me. There's a lot of bad blood between me and John Chancellor. He put acid in my drink last month at the Democratic National Convention, then he tried to humiliate me in public.

"Acid? Golly, that's terrible! What kind of acid?"

"It felt like Sunshine," I said.

"Sunshine?"

"Yeah. He denied it, of course - But hell, he always denies it."

"Why?" a girl asked.

"Would you admit a thing like that?"

She shook her head empathically. "But I wouldn't do it either," she said. "You could kill somebody by making them drink acid - why would he want to kill you?"

I shrugged, "Who knows? He eats a lot of it himself." I paused sensing confusion...

"Actually I doubt if he really wanted to kill me. It was a hell of a dose, but not that strong." I smiled. (356-57)

The examination of the dialogue with the young woman makes it obvious how Dr. Thompson uses ironic pretense when he "politely dismissed all suggestions", to repeal his support for McGovern. He even conforms "to carry a sign and wear a plastic hat" so that they would be "proud" of him. Here, the character suggests that the last thing he wants is to make the young conservatives look bad. However, the reader can assume that the character's motivation is rather the opposite. It is a canny communicative strategy to refrain from openly displaying rejection when the motivation is to stay with the group. So, in order to assert his means he pretends to modestly go along by taking the role of the compliant follower.

This strategy is effectively pursued by displaying antipathy for John Chancellor. Dr. Thompson boastfully points out that "there's a lot of bad blood" between him and John Chancellor. This is an exaggerated presentation of their relationship, and part of the ironic pretense as a means to stay with the 'Nixon Youth' to cover the convention. Moreover, the

hyperbole, John Chancellor's depiction as a LSD-user, functions as an elaborated hoax to the readers. For this purpose the author includes a correspondence between him, respectively Dr. Thompson, and John Chancellor in the book. After the Democratic convention in July, Chancellor writes to Hunter Thompson that he disagrees with the description of NBC's coverage of the 'South Carolina challenge' at the convention, but he also says that he enjoyed the convention piece overall, and he even encourages him to "have a double Margarita when [they] next meet" (Thompson 323). The response letter, which is also printed in *Campaign Trail '72*, in a chapter previous to the account of the RNC, includes an accusation that Chancellor was "so fucked up on drugs that [he] kept calling it the 'South Dakota challenge'" (324). These letters further contribute to the credibility of Dr. Thompson's tale.³³ The reason why Thompson dared to write such a libelous response to Chancellor is, I argue, to substantiate his character's tall tale.

However, in the context of Dr. Thompson's interaction with the 'Nixon Youth' his exaggerated display of antipathy for Chancellor effectively creates identification with the conservatives. The conservative youngsters reject the overtly liberal media networks, of which Chancellor functions as the representative per se. They reject him because in their opinion the media is biased in favor of the Democrats. "The Nixon Youth people were not happy with Chancellor [...] saying it was just another example of the 'knee-jerk liberal' thinking that dominates the media" (Thompson 352). The prevailing perception is later exaggerated to absurdity, when the dialogue circles around the use of acid. From the start it appears that the young woman seems to be aware that John Chancellor is an NBC anchor man. This can be read as a hint at the increasing impact the television media had on the coverage of campaigns and conventions at that time. As various online sources confirm, John Chancellor is attributed to be one of the 'Four Horsemen'³⁴; originally riders of the apocalypse, who bring the final judgment to earth at the end of days.³⁵ It is very strong imagery, which substantiates the influence of TV journalism on the perception of the audience. Especially, when it comes to the coverage of the parties' convention, which were the final 'making' of the candidate.

It appears that the ironic effect primarily derives from the double meaning of acid. Acid can be toxic like hydrochloric or nitric acid, on the other hand it refers to the hallucinogenic LSD-25 (*Merriam-Webster* "acid"). But this difference is not grasped by the young woman in this particular situation. By not revealing what he really means, Dr. Thompson uses covert irony and makes her the oblivious victim. Obviously, the young woman has such a negatively biased perception of the liberal media that she believes John Chancellor intended to kill someone with lethal acid. Additionally, Dr. Thompson is aware of her unawareness and remains in the role of the dissembler because he pretends to refer to such a toxic variant of acid. Thus, he plays along and, with the voice of the innocent, encourages the criminal act:

³³ This is supported by the fact that the letters are printed before the piece about the RNC, yet Thompson's letter to Chancellor has been written a month later. It is dated September 11th, 1972 (cf. Thompson 324-325).

³⁴ Media observers gave this name to Chancellor, and fellow NBC journalists Frank McGee, Edwin Newman, and Sandor Vancour (e.g. Reeves 28).

³⁵ This imagery should have appealed to the author, who never withheld that he was frequently inspired by passages from the *Book of Revelation* (Thompson, 2003 9). However, Thompson never uses this metaphor in *Campaign Trail '72*.

“Would you admit a thing like that?” So, Dr. Thompson does not explicitly tell her that Chancellor gave him something like hydrochloric acid, but soberly informs her that “it felt like sunshine”, which is a slang term for LSD-25.

Her confusion about ‘sunshine’ then is turned into an innuendo by Dr. Thompson, who replies “Yeah. He denied it. But then he always denies it.” The semantics of ‘it’ is unclear in this case. As the conversation leaves the meaning open, ‘it’ may also be interpreted as the Republican perception of the liberal media. According to their prevailing perception, the media is in permanent denial about ‘it’, namely the political realities and problems in the United States. When ‘it’ is juxtaposed to ‘sunshine’, this is done in order to create even more confusion because the young woman must ponder how sunshine feels. Then, Dr. Thompson begins to mark his dissimulation: the alazon extends the boast and puts himself into a high relief situation by stating that Chancellor “eats lots of it himself”, and doubting that “he wanted to kill” him. This conjecture reveals the presumptuous undertone of the tall tale and may be seen as a hyperbolic assessment of the character's paranoia. Eventually, Dr. Thompson reveals the ironic meaning of ‘acid’ by giving one of his famous descriptions about the on-coming effects of LSD-25. “It came up [the] spine like nine tarantulas...” (357); and only then a bystander in the scene grasps what the character is really talking about.

Hence, one can maintain that making John Chancellor a victim of irony primarily shows how deep-rooted the rejection of the liberal media, especially among young Republican voters, has become by 1972. In the dialogue John Chancellor functions as a means to stir the young Republicans’ resent. The dialogue shows how far the conservatives’ perception of Chancellor has changed from being titled one of the ‘Four Horsemen’ to such a negative image. The respect for the liberal media has diminished drastically, so that conservative adolescents, if they don’t suspect the media representatives of being murderers, at least see them as drug-addicts. The young Republican woman clearly expresses this belief by stating “golly ... this explains a lot, doesn’t it?” (357) She, thus, becomes a sort of innocent, conservative stock character who only needs the most unreliable proof to convince her of something she has always firmly believed: the corruptibility of the liberal media representatives.

Yet, Dr. Thompson also makes the ‘Nixon Youth’ the victim of irony. He reevaluates the reality of being part of the youth generation of which the largest part is associated with the youth culture. On the surface the character tries to depict the ‘Nixon Youth’ disadvantageously by making them the oblivious victims of irony. This could be plainly seen as antithetically presenting and mocking the underside of the adolescent generation. But on another level the interaction, initiated by the character’s hyperbolic accusations, gives the impression that the young conservatives are trying hard to oppose the counter culture, which nevertheless fascinates the conservative adolescents. The cultural influence that the ‘Nixon Youth’ try to ignore becomes paradoxically more unavoidable in this episode than most of the young Republicans can grasp. In fact, they believe Thompson’s ironic dissimulation by acknowledging Chancellor’s alleged criminal tendencies, and reveal the increasing popularity of the drug culture as well as mainstream society’s fascination with it.

Then, in a way the irony reveals a double layer, namely that the young Nixon supporters are just another aspect of an arbitrary generation. Their absurd opposition to liberals shows a grotesque inability to find their place in a time of transition when conservative values are

subject of debate, and so they can be seen as disoriented as the young hitchhikers and dropouts. It is a generalization but fair to say that some of those young hitchhikers, who represent the anti-establishment youth culture, are *Rolling Stone* readers. The recognition of the irony in this dialogue can create a sense of understanding for some of their conservative counterparts, who they have strongly rejected before. Here, two seemingly divergent groups, the disenchanting youth and the oppositional reactionary conservatives, can establish a connection on the grounds of Dr. Thompson's ironic dissimulation because it makes the American youth as a whole reflect their own role within the community.

However, the drug affiliated youth culture is also subjected to Dr. Thompson's hyperbolic tall tale about John Chancellor's affiliation for hallucinogenic drugs. The character has reached a level in his ironic spiel, where he fully displays the hyperbolic role of the bragging alazon by entertaining the thought of the "poor, young waterheads" (357) who tell their parents about John Chancellor's addiction to LSD-25. Here, it is not exactly clear whether the character's reference to the "poor, young waterheads" signifies the young Republicans or his readers, although the hint that they will tell their parents suggests he refers to the former. Consequently, Dr. Thompson imagines "to start babbling crazily" (357) that Walter Cronkite, the equally respected CNN anchor, is "heavy into the white slavery trade" (357). The alazonic role gives Thompson the chance to draw a ridiculous picture by presenting the 'Nixon Youth' as more naive and slow to understand than they are. It is debatable whether this exaggeration can be taken seriously by the readers. Hence, it has the effect that the 'Nixon Youth' is redeemed in a way, while Dr. Thompson deliberately places himself in high relief. Evidence for the ironical self-assessment is the fact that he does not miss to point out that the 'Nixon Youth' got the information "from reliable sources" (357). Here, the character's overstatement of his journalistic sources is a means to provide high relief for the ones who established ironic contact.

The high relief of Thompson's alazonic character is a situation where he gives a stereotypical or shallow self-description. The narrator has previously presented the character as quite an unreliable source, which the readers know and, therefore, may accept the high relief Thompson has created for his character. Naturally, the claim that he is a reliable source generates a contrary perception. Psychologically speaking, Thompson uses the technique of creating a shallower picture of himself through his character to position his former victim of irony in a different light. When he presents himself as a reliable source this is a hyperbole, which is recognized by some of the readers, Dr. Thompson the decoy-duck for the elaborated hoax. Hence, what has been written before is reevaluated because the readers realize that the convention piece and, consequentially, other articles are contradictory exaggerations. Thus Thompson's ironic strategy makes the reader eventually reflect on how accurate the depiction of the young Republican's dupability really is, resulting in the re-assessment of their initial perception.

Yet, on the other hand Thompson keeps suggesting that John Chancellor likes to take LSD. For instance in a passage at the end of the book: the character tells about the experience at the Super Bowl, where he "went up to the crow's nest to split a cap of black acid with John Chancellor" (504). Some of the readers may be tempted to believe that one of the most respected journalists of the time is a frequent drug user. This brings up another aspect about the function of the tall tale in this context. Initially, it is a humorous reflection

on the impact of drugs on the American culture after the 1960's. The contemporary readers' fascination with drugs of all kinds is implied, and Thompson may encourage them to reflect on their attitude towards drugs. Thompson's character is often seen as advocating the use of drugs, but on the other hand a culture is depicted where drugs are frequently taken by many people in society. The hyperbolic account of John Chancellor's acid experience, although it is seemingly glorified, ironically reveals the careless attitude towards the problems and dangers of a liberal culture exposed to these substances. Thompson makes this point through the character of Dr. Thompson, whose health and psyche is deteriorating due to the frequent abuse of all kinds of substances. Initially, I pointed out that the character is an exaggerated, inflated, self-representation of Hunter Thompson, and the creation of this image reveals Thompson's ironic self-assessment that borders on self-parody.

The tall tale that Dr. Thompson has presented to the readers has three effects: first, it reveals the existence of an arbitrary generation with a torn ideology; secondly, it proves the facility of creating a negative image of the media in the United States; finally, it shows the mainstream culture's fascination with, which are widely accessible. Dr. Thompson hyperbolic tale of Chancellor's affiliation for LSD, to which the 'Nixon Youth' does not react out-raged, may reflect the cultural attitude towards drugs. Thus, the tale addresses the liberal policy whether it should be constitutional to have free access to the whole range of mind and body altering and stimulating substances. The notion of two journalists of reputation, who split "a cap of black acid", furthermore, ridicules the acceptance of alcohol, a legal drug, among the press. Journalists tended to gather after work in order to consume "two hundred dollars a night worth of free cheap booze up there in the Press Suite, and some were consuming the lion's share" (4), as Crouse observes in *Boys on the Bus*. The hyperbolic, swaggering tall tale of Dr. Thompson, thus, gives a kaleidoscopic look at the "spirit of the age", as Klinkowitz calls it.

5.2.3. The Transmogrification of the Ironic Characters

Hunter Thompson's transmogrification of the ironic characters is a peculiar aspect of his writing. The writing provides instances where Thompson permanently switches between the alazonic swagger of Dr. Thompson and the more socially compatible assessment of the eironic role of the narrator that may be closer to the authentic voice of the author. This contributes to the legendary image that Thompson has created of himself and the readers' confusion about what is fact and what is fabrication in *Campaign Trail '72*. This chapter investigates how the narrator contrasts the alazonic stock character with his supposedly more innocent self in order to form a synthesis of a character/persona. Nonetheless, Thompson also uses this contrast as a reflective strategy to mirror the dullness and uneasiness encountered on the campaign trail with one of the Democratic candidates.

One of Thompson's most hilarious tall tales in *Campaign Trail '72* is the 'Sunshine Special' incident. Here, a dubious character - Thompson calls him the Boohoo - causes chaos after boarding Ed Muskie's chartered train on the candidate's whistle-stop tour through Florida. The style of writing in this episode is, again, close to the tradition of the tall tale. The narrator presents a hardly believable event to a group of outsiders, namely his readers, and whereas the details of the coup's emergence are left out, the outcome is ornamented and turned into an accomplishment, a 'fait accompli'. This 'fait accompli' is the disparagement of

'Big Ed' Muskie. Furthermore, the narrator introduces a character that resembles the actions of Dr. Thompson, but surpasses him in exaggerated borderline behavior. At first, Thompson appears reluctant to inform the reader about what exactly happened on the 'Sunshine Special', which upholds the readers' suspicion that the Boohoo is in fact Dr. Thompson. Yet, the narrator convincingly accounts that this is not the case and, therefore, creates the effect of separating the narrator, namely the eironic character, from Dr. Thompson, the alazonic persona. The narrator plays with the readers' expectation of his character and establishes a narrative strategy that effectively mixes the facts of the 'Sunshine Special' incident with fabrications, which are partly composed of the eiron's feigned innocence and the re-telling of encountering the Boohoo.

How the Boohoo got access to Thompson's press badge is a story that is laced with ironic pretense. Here, the narrator provides assistance to uncover the hoax, of which various newspapers supposedly took notice of. Therefore, the episode begins with an excerpt from an article that the *Miami Herald* published. The article maintains that a man called Peter Sheridan boarded Muskie's train, which was heading to West Palm Beach, with Dr. Hunter S. Thompson's press credentials (cf. Thompson 104). This incident has made Thompson's character instantly popular across the media and can be seen as a cornerstone for episodes of deviant behavior.³⁶ The initial reaction to the media coverage is marked by obliviousness, which is characteristic of the eiron's pretense. Thompson is alarmed when he is noticed about the events on the 'Sunshine Special', and admits that "this incident has haunted [him] ever since it smacked [him] in the eyes on a peaceful Sunday morning ... as [he] sat on the balmy screened porch of the National Affairs Suite here in the Royal Biscayne Hotel" (104). The feigned unawareness and alarmed attitude suggest that the character refrains from being boastful and, in this instance, rather associates with the eironic mode of pretended innocence and understatement of his involvement. Hence, the voice of the narrator, Thompson's eironic self, dominates the account of the 'Sunshine Special'.

Although Thompson clearly knows what has happened, he does not boast about the coup, and at first even feigns obliviousness. Therefore, "several quick phone calls confirmed that something ugly had happened on that train, and that [he] was being blamed for it" (104). The story is set up in a way that only releases small bits of information of what has really happened and effectively keeps the readers doubtful, whether Thompson, respectively the alazonic character, or someone else, caused chaos on the train. So at first, Thompson's informant, a reporter from New York, confirms a rumor that Thompson overdosed on LSD and caused havoc (cf. 105). However, Thompson supposedly doesn't understand the accusations against him and sheepishly asks why the Muskie people did not throw the trouble-maker off the train. (cf. 106). The conversation with the New York reporter, which Thompson directly forwards to his readers, is suggestive that Thompson hears about the events on the train, namely the 'Sunshine Special', for the first time. This point is underlined by referring to the events as Thompson supposedly reads about them in two other newspapers, the *Washington Star* and *Women's Wear Daily* (cf. 106). On the next

³⁶ The fact that the *Miami Herald* identified 'Dr. Hunter S. Thompson' as the cause of the chaotic episode of Ed Muskie's whistle-stop tour to Miami contributed to the public confusion about the author and his character. It is one thing, when the author blends self and persona in his articles into one but when other media sources do so as well in their news items it solidifies the creative act.

two pages, Thompson pretends to give actual details of what happened that day on Ed Muskie's train by summarizing these news items (cf. 107-108) and calling a befriended young journalist to receive further information. This creates the impression that Thompson has barely anything to do with the events and fortifies the story's substance.

However, Thompson's feigned unawareness becomes absurd, when he casually states that he met the Boohoo "the night before" (108). Thompson describes how the Boohoo loudly complained that he could not "have a good time" around "all these pansies ... trying to suck up to Muskie" (ibid.). Under the pretense that this is usually not his style, Thompson informs the readers that "a scene like that wouldn't normally interest [him]" (ibid.). In this context, bearing in mind what the readers have come to expect from Thompson, the statement makes use of the countersinking strategy - characterized by understatement - which is generally associated with the eiron's attitude. Unsurprisingly, Thompson justifies that the Boohoo's rant had a special appeal because it resembled "the Neal Cassady speed-boozee-acid rap - a wild combination of menace, madness, genius, and fragmented coherence that wreaks havoc on the mind of any listener" (ibid.). Neal Cassady is the larger-than-life icon of the counter culture and the inspiring figure to Jack Kerouac in his novel *On the Road*. So, the unusual chance to meet "an obvious aristocrat of the Freak Kingdom", as Thompson eventually realizes (110), is construed as the logical reason to take the Boohoo along. Additionally, the Boohoo boasts about having an influential friend on Muskie's train, despite the fact the he has just been released from jail. Here, the character of the Boohoo resembles the big-talker, the alazon.

Before the narrator fills the readers in on the details of the night with the Boohoo, he conspiratorially insists that "the nuts & bolts people are starting to moan ... demanding a fast finish and heavy on the *political stuff*" 109). The "nuts & bolts people" are supposedly Thompson's *Rolling Stone* editors. This can be seen as an ironic innuendo, further supported by the claim that he does not want to "cheat the readers" (ibid.). Thompson pretends to be in a position, where he worries about the demands of his editors and the satisfaction of his readers. In fact, here, he indirectly suggests that it is reasonable to believe that the readers are far more interested in the story of how and, moreover, why the Boohoo gained access of Thompson's press badge than in a political analysis of Muskie's campaign in Florida. The ironic pretense is fortified by putting an italicized emphasis on "the *political stuff*". It is ironic because, although Thompson suggests that the whole article is apolitical, the depiction of the scene, nonetheless, sheds light on the political realities on the campaign trail. Then the full story is finally told, and Thompson gives the warning that it "is a long and tangled story" (109). Here, the narrator further implements the traditional storytelling technique of captivating the reader, or listener, by suggesting that the story is very complex.

As it turns out Thompson hands the press credentials to the Boohoo because he supposedly does not want to cover the event himself. It is too dull for his taste. The Boohoo accepts the pass and hopes that he can possibly "put it to better use" (cf. 111). This is a form of meiotic understatement: his motivation of heckling the people on the train is expressed through a positive statement that implies the opposite. How the Boohoo actually put the credentials 'to better use' has been previously summarized by Thompson. The pinnacle of the Boohoo's ride with Muskie is the scene that develops in the Miami train station, where

the Senator is supposed to deliver the climactic speech of the whistle-stop tour which is effectively ruined by the Boohoo's abusive remarks and behavior.

The reaction to this strange episode is described by Thompson with the conclusion "that something like the fiasco in the Miami train station is just about impossible ... to understand except in terms of conspiracy" (111). Consequently, Thompson gives his private account of what happened on the train, implying that he has actually participated in the events (112-113). What Thompson ironically calls Muskie's "finely-honed speeches" (112) are, in fact, just phony remarks on "the good people of America [getting] together behind somebody they can trust" (112). Again, the understatement is marked by the meiotic figure of speech. The positive remark is meant to signify the negative opposite. The narrator exaggerates the effect of Muskie's chummy and dull rhetorical efforts by eventually abbreviating "etc., etc..." (112). Here, the account reveals the reality of a campaign that is supposedly appealing to the people.

Hence, the effect of getting the Boohoo on the train becomes obvious: instead of displaying his own swaggering persona, Thompson can act as a passive observer, suggesting that he was left behind (cf. 114). This gives the narrator the chance to refrain from exhibiting the notorious Dr. Thompson character and, thus, give a less frantic, yet as personally involved and accurate account of the inside of Muskie's campaign. The narrator takes pleasure in presenting the Boohoo's chaotic behavior without being directly blamed for these acts. If the narrator had presented these acts being committed by Dr. Thompson, the depiction would have involved various half-paranoid exclamations and self-conscious doubts about Dr. Thompson's state of mental and physical health. By introducing the character of the Boohoo, Thompson can avoid exhibiting the characteristics of the alter ego, Dr. Thompson, therefore making his writing about the experience on the train less disruptive.

The accounts of the national press corps' disillusion with the quality of this political event, and the pathetic efforts of entertainment, attempting to stir the crowds' enthusiasm, let Thompson conclude that "the scene [is] pure Nixon" (113). The narrator and character are transmogrified because the Boohoo takes the function of the individual who swaggers and causes a blunder due to severe over-indulgence of alcohol. Without the character of the Boohoo Dr. Thompson might have had to enter the stage and represent the alazonic heckler. The character of Dr. Thompson evokes a self-parodistic assessment that focuses on the troubles of the individual in strange times and alien surroundings, whereas the narrator's ironic mode provides observations that are distanced and more sophisticated. This approach enables the narrator to lead the parade and provide an account of the Muskie campaign that reveals the weakness of the candidate rather than the flaws of Thompson's character. The telling of the 'Sunshine Special' story takes down two big talkers: the Boohoo is not the resemblance of a counter culture idol but unmasked as a vulgar individual, and Ed Muskie is not the people's candidate.

To fortify the eiron's attitude, Thompson pretends to develop an understanding for the victims of the coup, conferring with the opinion of other established journalists that the Boohoo's attacks on Muskie's campaign were illegitimate. Naturally, Thompson's supposed attitude is altered by ironic remarks.

[Thompson] might even agree to [the journalists'] thinking ... if the question of 'drastic retaliation against the candidate' ever actually confronted [him]... for the same reason that [he] couldn't crank up enough adrenalin to get [himself] involved in some low-level conspiracy to heckle a harmless dingbat like Ed Muskie in a Florida railroad station. (Thompson 114)

In retrospect "that tragedy" (115) is nothing Thompson was directly involved with, although from his accounts it is quite clear that he is responsible for placing the Boohoo on the train. Furthermore, it is more logical for the reader to assume that the very reason to bring that man on the train was to sabotage the trip and give the senator a hard time. Thompson even makes himself the victim of the ironic act and complains that "the Boohoo incident haunted [him] throughout the campaign" (114). Here, Thompson takes the role of a simpleton, who innocently presents the events in a more earnest manner than would seem plausible to the reader. As suggested earlier, this technique is used to make the victim of irony more sympathetic. So, Thompson stages the Boohoo to make himself, and consequentially his persona as well, appear more innocent and sympathetic than it has appeared to the reader before. By having the Boohoo cause all the trouble, Thompson effectively separates the eironic character that is predominant in common ironic dialogues from his alazonic persona in order to create more distanced, 'meta-stable' self. Therefore, this tall tale establishes the effect of indeterminacy regarding the author and the narrator-protagonist.

Ultimately, the description of the 'Sunshine Special' incident mirrors the atmosphere of Ed Muskie's campaign through the fabrications about the Boohoo. Thompson being the observer rather than making Dr. Thompson the protagonist of the tall tale has the effect of providing an unusual portrayal of Edward Muskie, which reveals the dullness and superficiality of political campaigning. Overall, this gives Thompson the chance to provide a clearer, unobstructed view of the atmosphere on the Muskie trip, and contrast it with McGovern's "relaxed and informal" (Thompson 115) campaign that reminds Thompson of McCarthy's in '68. Senator McCarthy was the natural choice of the liberal-minded political majority in that year, but did not have a chance to get the Democrats' nomination because the party's power base was essentially conservative.³⁷ In addition to the rumors Thompson spread about Edward Muskie's addiction to 'Ibogaine', and his fabrications about attaining this information from a Brazilian doctor (cf. 151-152) - another instance of a tall tale -, the 'Sunshine Special' incident indeed appears to be the very act of sabotage that Thompson vehemently denies. However, it is not Thompson's fabrications that throw a bad light on Edward Muskie but rather the uneasy, self-conscious manner in which the senator handles the accusations. Muskie, thus, deprives himself of the liberal image of an upright and accessible politician, namely, a man of integrity whom the cultural mainstream as well as the diverging subcultures can relate to.

5.3. The Use of Impersonal Irony

The use of verbal irony that is presented through the acts of the characters, namely the eironic narrator and the alazonic Dr. Thompson, is overt. The allegorical juxtaposition of the

³⁷ In the first chapter of Campaign Trail '72 Thompson describes his affection for McCarthy by giving a retrospective of the '68 campaign (cf. 43-47).

protagonists' motivations with effects that popular drugs have on their users and the dependency these drugs cause makes this form of verbal irony relatively easy to detect for the readers. The spirit of the age, the atmospheric tension between counter culture and the established mainstream, which the author captures in the ironic dialogues through the acts of the ironic characters, is further deconstructed on another level. The mode of impersonal irony that the narrator, as I will argue, frequently chooses as a mode of expression reveals an almost natural inevitability that reflects the acts of the protagonists in *Campaign Trail '72* and suffices to distinctly separate the idealistic figure of the liberal from the rest of the political establishment. Here, the author uses the voice of a more distanced narrator, characterized by using digressive elements, such as symbols, allegories, and metaphors, to create an ironic effect.

The epigraph to *Campaign Trail '72*, a quote from T.S. Eliot's poem "The Hollow Men", reveals a level of indeterminacy that can be detected by contrasting Hunter Thompson's writing and its implied meaning. The epigraph - "Between the Idea and the Reality ... Falls the Shadow" - may already indicate that the author disguises the use of impersonal irony with off-topic descriptions and along the way observations that 'overshadow' the alleged topic of the articles. Furthermore, the epigraph can be interpreted as setting the theme of Thompson's quest for the liberal. The liberal ideal Thompson pursues is overcast by the shadow - the experiences on the campaign trail - and the reality is an ironically revised ideal. The use of impersonal irony is distinguished from common verbal irony because its effects are not overt, as it is the case in ironic dialogues. Additionally, the digressions often lack the boastful self-representation of Dr. Thompson. Thus, one can say that these disjunctive elements are characterized by rather grave manner that establishes a contrast between the character's tone and the style of these digressive passages.

The digressions and disjunctions in Thompson's articles, which have been identified as characteristics of the author's 'gonzo' style as many critics have pointed out, mark the use of impersonal irony. I will attempt to show that the author's use of symbols, the lengthy comments on football, and especially Thompson's frequent association of human behavior with animal instinct are examples of impersonal irony in *Campaign Trail '72*. These digressions, or in Thompson's words "tangents" are usually pointed out; Thompson gives straightforward warnings by calling his articles gibberish (125), and provides exclamations like "[we] seem to have wandered out on another tangent" (91-92) or "Jesus! Another tangent, and right up front, this time - the whole lead, in fact completely fucked" (221). Here, the narrator comments on football, or a bull-moose simply to fill the pages because the editors, "those thugs out in San Francisco will be screaming for Copy. Words! Wisdom! Gibberish!" (184) Thompson suggests that he betrays the reader about a serious news item, and implies that everything that has been labeled as 'a tangent' can be dismissed as uninformative.

In fact, the deliberate indication that such passages are not to be taken seriously reveals the strategy to signify the actual importance of so-called tangents and a deeper meaning that the readers can detect behind the supposed gibberish. With regard to these 'spontaneous' digressions, Jirón-King maintains that

[Thompson] 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 ...* 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. (Jirón-King 8)

Consequently, in this chapter I will analyze the meaning that can be deduced from passages which contain unexpected use of culturally charged symbols, the allegory of the football game, and the frequent appearance of bestial images that function as metaphors about an animal-like tendency in human nature. Arguably, Thompson uses especially this metaphor to disagree with the idealistic liberal notion about the perfectibility of mankind.

5.3.1. The Use of Symbols

This chapter investigates two recurring symbols in *Campaign Trail '72*: the sun rising and the raven. These two symbols appear in Thompson's articles as observations along the way and are not further commented. Thus, the symbols are not full-fledged 'tangents', and superficially function to provide atmospheric intensifications. On a deeper level, however, the sun and the raven symbolize the permanent opposition of two prevailing emotions in American society, i.e. an optimistic hope and pessimistic acceptance.

5.3.1.1. The Sunrise

In his essay "Corporate Fiction, Private Fable" Hellmann observes that there are numerous instances in *Campaign Trail '72* where the narrator describes a sunrise. According to Hellmann, Thompson's descriptions reveal the eminent pessimism in the United States at the beginning of the 1970's. The pessimism is caused by the cultural tensions between the disenfranchised and the establishment, and the uncertainties about the war in Vietnam with its impact on the American culture. These events and conditions make the people already doubt something as natural as the rising of the sun. The feeling of pointlessness prevails, but Thompson tries to see brighter, more hopeful prospects when he describes the sun that fights through the mist or breaks through the clouds at dawn (cf. Hellmann 25). The twilight of dawn - the atmosphere of obscurity - is more than the matter of fact description of meteorological phenomena. Rather it marks the use of a symbol, which can be read as echoing the hopes of many. For instance on the morning in Wisconsin, at the beginning of the article about the state's primary, Thompson writes that he "can sense the sunrise, but [he] can't feel it" (136). Coincidentally, Wisconsin is the state where the McGovern campaign gained momentum and the candidate became a serious contender in the Democratic field. Seemingly Thompson writes about a sunrise "through the polluted mist on Lake Michigan" (136) but this matter of fact description ironically echoes the feeling of a not-yet manifestation of brighter prospects, which he can sense but not feel yet.

As McGovern is the liberal candidate that Thompson admires, it is logical that the sun finally rises without being obscured on the day of McGovern's nomination (cf. Hellmann 25). This suggests that Thompson believed McGovern actually was the dignified liberal who can unify the larger part of the American society behind him, end the war, and integrate all those who have been disenfranchised by social injustice. To Hellmann these descriptions of a dawn that eventually comes, culminating in the morning after McGovern's nomination, are another hint that "the concern with the history and future of America is the larger theme of

On the Campaign Trail, much more its true concern than the immediate subject of the Presidential campaign" (25-26). Therefore, the beginning to the article about the Wisconsin primary relates to a larger subject. This is underlined by the association of an anticipated sunrise with the celebration of Easter. Certainly, this could be just a coincidence, but I want to suggest that the sunrise and Easter - the resurrection of Christ - are deliberately juxtaposed in order to create an ironic effect. One can detect that the rising of the sun and Easter are at first seemingly related to Hubert Humphrey entering the race for the presidential nomination. Then, Thompson brings up the candidates' use of Robert Kennedy voice-tapes, which are recordings for the '68 campaign (cf. 138-139).

Hubert Humphrey and Robert F. Kennedy are the two disparate representatives of the liberal of the past for Hunter Thompson. Hubert Humphrey, albeit considered to be an 'arch-liberal', is in fact all that the liberal politician, according to Thompson, is not. Although Humphrey claims to have broken the filibuster of the *Civil Rights Act* (Thompson 138), he is an example of a faltering politician, who says what the audience wants to hear, and who becomes inauthentic by making advances to people in power when he gets the chance. Thompson calls Humphrey "a ward-heeler ... who should be put in a goddamn bottle and sent out with the Japanese Current" (135). Robert Kennedy, however, represents the apotheosis of the liberal ideal that the narrator frequently champions, e.g. upon arriving in Washington Thompson already brings Kennedy into the picture (cf. 34-36). One can say that the ghost of Robert Kennedy loomed over the campaign of 1972. The reminiscent passages make clear what a shock the murder of Robert Kennedy has been to the author. Beginning with the image of a sunrise on Easter morning, Thompson ends up writing about Robert Kennedy who, as he claims, "would find McGovern preferable to any other candidate" (139).

Yet, the anticipation of another sunrise also bears memories of a dark night, and therefore Thompson, having echoed his hopes impersonally, ends the passage with a very personal retrospective of the Kennedy murder. Even in 1972, Thompson concedes,

there will be a few bad losers here and there ... who feel a very powerful sense of loss and depression every time [they] hear that voice - that speedy, nasal Irish twang that nailed the ear like a shot of *Let It Bleed* suddenly cutting through the doldrums of a dull Sunday morning on a plastic FM station. (140)

Thompson suggests that Kennedy was the candidate of the "bad losers", the candidate who sincerely attempted to be the voice for the disenfranchised of the American society. The use of impersonal irony that marks the introduction to the chapter turns bitter and personal. There is an underlying irony in the fact that Thompson writes about an Easter morning that fights through the mist, echoing the awaited resurrection of Christ, and ends the passage with comparing Kennedy to a Rolling Stones song, namely *Let It Bleed*. In the context of the article the song title may allude to the Christ's wounds, which would not stop bleeding, and to the sorrow of a 'bleeding heart' about the death of Kennedy. Here, the suffering of a whole generation is magnified in a few paragraphs about a sunrise, Easter, and the murder of the liberal.

The only account of an unclouded sunrise is, and I agree with Hellmann, the day after George McGovern seized the Democratic nomination for president. "[W]hen the sun loomed out on the ocean to light Miami Beach on the morning of Thursday, July 14, George McGovern was the man in the catbird seat" (378). Yet, here Thompson's choice of

vocabulary already echoes pessimism. ‘To loom’ implies a menace, such as a sun on a day that is too hot to endure. Without voicing his concerns openly, Thompson hints at the fiasco that Thomas Eagleton, McGovern’s candidate as vice-president, will cause. The ‘Eagleton Disaster’ will not be discussed in detail here, and it is debatable whether it caused McGovern to lose against Nixon in the election.

More interesting is the fact that Thompson, after it is clear that McGovern will hopelessly lose against Nixon, starts the chapter before the epitaph with a poem by Robinson Jeffers, titled ‘Be Angry at the Sun’ (459). The content laments the hegemonic power-structures in the United States and encourages approving that “public men publish falsehoods” (ibid.). The acceptance of this historic truth is voiced in line five to seven: “Be angry at the sun for setting/if these things anger you/watch the wheel slope/and turn” (ibid.). Placing the poem before the final chapter, it appears that the author impersonally voices a disillusion about the presidential election in which his candidate is without a chance. The poem ends with the conclusion that “theirs is not yours” (ibid.) and I think this suggests that anybody can ethically perfect him- or herself and achieve happiness in a private manner without seeking the publicity of a representative office. Thompson appears to give up his liberal ideal, which traditionally upholds that by participation the people of America can become better individuals and make theirs a better nation.

5.3.1.2. The Raven

The image of the raven is a symbol that the author does not use often in *Campaign Trail '72*. In fact, there are three passages where it is referred to. Still, the raven marks a powerful symbol that is very effective and well established in American culture, and, therefore, can be expected to evoke similar reactions in most people. Again, the universal symbol functions as an atmospheric intensification of the narrative. Hence, like the sunrise, this symbol is also accessible from common experience. When one hears the birds’ hoarse croak this may have an effect on how one’s surroundings are perceived. Arguably, ravens can have a negative psychological effect on the observer. As I have pointed out the author is also frequently inspired by biblical rhetoric and images and the *Bible* depicts the raven as a sign of bad omen, unease, and suffering. Furthermore, it is a key symbol in a poem that every American high school student has heard of at some point, namely “The Raven” by Edgar Allen Poe. I want to suggest that Thompson’s use of the symbolism in *Campaign Trail '72* is effective because the reader can relate to the raven from common experience, through imagery charged with biblical reference, and by rudimentary knowledge of Poe’s poem.

At the end of the article from June '72, following his analysis of the Democratic Party’s condition in 1972 and a reflection of McGovern’s struggle to become the party’s nominee, Thompson concludes with a “depressive news item” (251). He states that “an unnatural number of ravens have been seen in the city [of Miami] recently” (ibid.). On the one hand, Thompson maintains a matter of fact tone by writing about the tourists’ complaints and the residents’ troubles with the birds, on the other hand the passage produces a somewhat nightmarish feeling and associations with biblical scenes of apocalypse are imposed. The *Bible* states that the raven is an unclean creature (Lev 11:15), which means that man is not supposed to eat it. The raven is singled out because it feeds on carrion and can be a carrier of disease. The news item, which Thompson quotes, states that the ravens “are killing the

trees and their droppings smell like dead flesh” (251). This statement enforces the image of the raven as a harbinger of death.

The image of countless ravens covering the houses and the trees of Miami evokes a feeling of unease because the ravens do nothing except feed on what is available to them, watch, and wait. In the *Bible* the raven is a symbol for unease. When Noah’s arch reaches its destination, Mount Ararat, a raven is sent out, but except flying back and forth it is not of much use; unlike the dove that has a purpose, namely to find dry land (Gen 8:7). As early as this source from the *Old Testament*, the raven is depicted as a creature that waits until its own purposes are fulfilled so that carrion is available. As their numbers are increasing, it is reasonable that the ravens are gathering in the city to await the coming of a greater doom. The ravens’ invasion, which threatens other life-forms such as the trees, reads like a passage from the *Book of Isaiah*. The prophet writes that after the destruction of the city “none shall pass through it forever and ever” but “the owl ... and the raven shall dwell in it: and he shall stretch out upon it the line of confusion and the stones of emptiness” (Isa 34:11). Although Thompson’s readers are not necessarily acquainted with this passage, the image that Isaiah evokes is strong and part of a larger cultural imagination. Thompson deliberately includes the news item and it becomes the symbolic act of the prophet who is seeing ravens gathering in the city. Thompson associates himself with the prophecies of doom and the reader can decipher the passage as such.

The passage is ironic because on the surface Thompson seems to describe an unusual avian phenomenon and, furthermore, imitates the tone of a standard news item by providing interviews with tourists and local businessman. But on a deeper level the scene appears to aim at a larger context, and is substantiated by the hardly disguised biblical reference. The effect of using this kind of symbolism is emphasized by placing it at the end of the chapter. Instead of just creating atmospheric intensification, the description of the ravens in Miami is suggesting that Thompson is actually being ironical. He seems to express his pessimistic outlook with regard to the state of the Democrats, respectively the hegemonic system of partisan politics as a whole. The hypothesis can be supported by the fact that the “depressing news item” concludes an article that is composed of a lengthy elaboration about McGovern’s prospects regarding the mechanisms and hierarchies of the Democratic Party (247-250).

Thompson uses a symbol that suggests a time where things as they were known come to an end. In fact, the passage can be read in such a way that the ravens gather in the city to await the end of the Democratic Party, which will hold its convention in Miami the following month. So, the ravens can be said to serve as a pathetic fallacy for Thompson’s feelings about partisan politics and his endeavor on the campaign trail. Although at that point of his writing McGovern has a reasonable chance to win the nomination, Thompson senses that the system of partisan politics will suffer an inevitable defeat. He chooses the symbol of the ravens to anticipate that the political system is incurably ill and will eventually become carrion. Therefore, the ravens gather in Miami where the Democrats and the Republicans will hold their conventions.

However, Thompson also uses the symbol of the raven in a different context. In contrast to the gathering ravens that symbolize the coming of calamity, the single raven symbolizes the prophetic voice that judges hubris and corruption. Thus, it speaks for all the

disenfranchised. Arguably, Thompson provokes the ironic effect by associating the single raven with symbolism borrowed from Poe's poem *The Raven*.³⁸ In Thompson's *Campaign Trail '72* there are two instances where the raven speaks. It appears as a symbol of wisdom and insight, however inconvenient the truth of this insight may be. Thompson uses symbolism that is associated with the raven when McGovern's campaign receives a first set-back in New Hampshire, and in an elaborate reckoning of Hubert Humphrey.

In February, "McGovern's old friend and staunch liberal ally ... Senator Harold Hughes" (Thompson 71) decides to support then-frontrunner Edward Muskie. For the campaign morale this is a disaster because McGovern, who is an underdog at that point without many outspoken supporters, has counted on Hughes endorsement. According to Thompson's characterization of Hughes, the senator has committed himself to an alternative lifestyle, "admitting that he talked to trees now and then", and has recently resented compliant partisanship when he attacked the Democrats' hierarchies (71). So, the reader can perceive Hughes as the liberal representative that Thompson would favor. When Hughes surprisingly denies McGovern support, it is a set-back for the campaign. Thompson recognizes the devastating effect, and when they arrive at the hotel he almost expects "to see a filthy bearded raven perched over the entrance, croaking 'Nevermore'..." (71).

The juxtaposition of the campaign morale with the poem *The Raven* is a form of impersonal irony because Thompson highlights Hughes' decision without complaining about the senator directly. Rather, the narrator expresses his initial disillusion in a grave manner by creating the fancy about the raven. Hence, for the reader it is clear that Thompson does not expect a speaking raven above the entrance but applies this symbol to describe the impact of the set-back ironically. According to the interpretation of the symbol from Poe's poem, I suggest that Thompson implies an inconvenient truth. McGovern's alliance is weak so that even a seemingly committed politician like Hughes will support the candidate who has the best chances to actually win and advance those that have been supportive. Thompson is pessimistic that such proceedings will ever change, and so the raven's somber prophecy is like a confirmation of this pessimistic outlook.

Another passage where Thompson applies the symbolism is on "a rainy grey dawn in Omaha" (188). The passage is preceded by a quote, a statement that Robert Kennedy made after his brother won a primary in 1960. In this statement Robert Kennedy frankly describes his further plans after getting his brother elected president, namely, nothing less than the political destruction of Hubert Humphrey (188). The quote functions as an epigraph to the following episode, where Thompson - initially involved on a very personal level - ponders finishing the job Kennedy proposed twelve years earlier. In May of 1972 Humphrey appears as strong as ever, and so Thompson, here allegedly speaking with his character's hyperbolic swagger, imagines "going out to do a road test on the new Vincent Black Shadow ... and

³⁸ Consequently, I want to outline a short interpretation of aspects connected with the raven-symbolism in the poem. In *The Raven* a speaking raven visits the narrator, who rests lonely in his room in 'sorrow for the lost Lenore'. To all the narrator's questions the raven answers 'nevermore', and it appears that this is the only word it knows. Yet, I want to suggest that the raven symbolizes the bearer of an inconvenient truth - such as the death of Lenore - that the narrator has not yet accepted. Although the raven speaks but one word, namely 'nevermore', it acts like an intelligent creature and deliberately torments the narrator with its presence. Determinedly, it sits on 'the bust of Pallas' and it is likely that 'Pallas' refers to *Pallas Athena*. It is commonly known that the Greek goddess is the symbol of wisdom and insight, and therefore, it is suggestive to think that the raven, in this context, may symbolize these attributes as well.

maybe follow Hubert for a while, track him around the state like a golem and record his last act for posterity" (188). What follows is a reckoning of Humphrey's role at the Democratic convention in 1968. Here, Thompson no longer exhibits his character's attitude, and I want to suggest that the narrator speaks with the voice of the formerly hopeful who was disillusioned on that day in Chicago.

Thompson does not settle the act with Humphrey himself because he is powerless, a fact that he ironically understates by saying that he is nobody "to hold a grudge longer than necessary", and that it is "nothing personal". However, "it is time to balance the books". It is not Dr. Thompson who eventually judges over Hubert Humphrey's fateful wrong-doing, which consisted of accepting the Democratic nomination in 1968, but "the Raven" that is calling his name. Here, Thompson resorts to an impersonal voice of a raven instead of his usual satirical invective name-calling, 'flyting'. He prosaically explains that "the Raven" is calling Humphrey because the politician still owes some dues, which are "payable, in full, on June 6th. In the coin of the realm; no credit this time, no extensions" (188). Thompson does not act as the avenger of the disenfranchised but pretends to warn Humphrey about "the Raven", whose judgment is finally coming. It symbolizes those who scorned the conservative forces, and represents the fair but merciless judge who will announce that Humphrey is guilty of abiding to these forces.

The reader can detect that Thompson describes the disenchantment with the events of the past because the passage of Humphrey's condemnation begins by evoking the memory of Robert Kennedy, who was murdered before the Democratic convention, and who could not finish in 1968 what had already been announced eight years earlier. The irony derives from the impression that no living creature can make Humphrey accountable for his acts, and, symbolically, it has to be "the Raven" that demands the dues "in the coin of the realm", which is arguably referring to an otherworldly kingdom come. By mentioning "the Raven", Thompson suggests that the situation is quite serious for Humphrey, but he furthermore implies that the person who would have been able to stop Humphrey is dead. If "the Raven" is speaking from the realm of the dead, then, even if it is a fair and merciless judge, it may be powerless outside its realm. Being personally vengeful initially, the narrator eventually applies a form of impersonal irony that is bitter in this particular context.³⁹ Again, "the Raven", although superficially appearing to be a legitimate voice of vengeance, also may represent Thompson's pessimism about the realities of the political process in the United States.

5.3.2. Football: An Analogy of the Political Game

Thompson's concerns with the functionality of the political system are elaborated when the happenings on the campaign trail are repeatedly juxtaposed to one of America's favourite sports, football. While the deciphering of Thompson's application of symbols - the sunrise and the raven - is a rather complex and ambivalent endeavour for the reader, the understanding of the allegory that Thompson projects by relating the dynamics of the political process to the game of football is more palpable. *Campaign Trail '72* provides various passages that directly compare the actions of players and teams to the actions of

³⁹ Humphrey has just won the West Virginia primary; ironically the one after Kennedy made the statement about finishing Humphrey, who moves into California with political clout.

politicians. Therefore, the reader can grasp that Thompson implies the juxtaposition of both spheres to further revise the image of American politics. However, at times it is not clear whether the report of a match expresses the author's private fascination with football, or whether the digression has a deeper meaning by which the image of the politician may be reevaluated.

Arguably, in *Campaign Trail '72* Thompson establishes the game of football as an allegory of politics: he is "fascinated by the drifts and strange quirks of the game" and starts "handicapping politics and primaries like it was all just another fat Sunday of pro football" (53). Thompson's analogies between politics and football are overtly detectable because the reader knows about the character's enthusiasm for the game. Therefore, it just seems reasonable that football, which the narrator respectively Dr. Thompson are experts of, is associated with politics for which he supposedly lacks equal expertise. Furthermore, the author establishes his narrator-protagonist's expertise because it can be assumed that the readers know equally less about politics and have a comparably high affinity for football. The instances when football is compared to politics are palpable because the sphere of politics is juxtaposed with a sphere the reader is more familiar with. They can grasp that the attitude of a star quarterback is similar to the motivation of a star politician who declines the vice-presidency (cf. 379). Overall, Thompson suggests that the fact who wins an election is equally important to a team winning or loosing in football, but he also maintains (cf. 53) that "once in a while you stumble into a situation where you find yourself really wanting some team to get stomped all over the field" (ibid.). Here, Thompson indicates that his writing is biased, although he does not have to state it openly and resorts to the analogy of the football-fan.

When Thompson tries to describe the repressive atmosphere in Washington, these comments are followed by a passage about NFL running back Duane Thomas, who was the most valuable player in the 1972 football season. Jirón-King discusses the same passage and relates Thompson's comments on Thomas, who is discovered to be a drug-user, to the social issue of the governmental policies on drug prohibition (cf. Jirón-King 5). I agree with her that this passage is an instance where Thompson "interweaves tender and complicated social commentary into his coverage" (5). But with regard to what Thompson has previously written about the repressive climate in Washington I want to suggest that the commentary on Duane Thomas is an instance of impersonal irony, which mirrors the politician's difficulty to dissent from the political norm, by means of the football analogy. An example for the difficulty to dissent is the fact that the only two senators who voted against the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution⁴⁰ in 1964 lost their seat in 1966 (cf. Thompson 88-89). Thompson concludes 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" (90).

The next paragraphs deal with the role that Duane Thomas has played in the '72 Super Bowl, and it reads like an allegory that mirrors Thompson's aspirations. From the pack of power-seeking politicians a protagonist might emerge who does not represent the

⁴⁰ The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution was the one "that gave [Lyndon B. Johnson] carte blanche to do Everything Necessary to win the war in Vietnam" (Thompson 89), and actually marks the beginning of the Vietnam War.

mainstream establishment, and nevertheless has to be accepted by this establishment due to his persuasiveness. In this reading Duane Thomas is the ironic representation of the liberal dissenter who has the potential to change the system from within but eventually fails. In Duane Thomas' case it is the conviction of being a drug-user, which is ironic as Thompson observes the fact that most of the players in pro football are addicted to some kind of amphetamine is an open secret (cf. 91). In the case of the liberal political dissenter, such as Robert Kennedy in 1968, it was the fateful act of an assassin that stopped the emergence.

Thompson contrasts Duane Thomas' role with the conservative establishment, when he ponders "what [it was] like for those humourless, god-fearing Alger-bent Jesus Freaks ... [to] get beaten like gongs" (90). The conservative establishment firmly believes that America's values are still intact. These established protagonists are helpless when they face a contender who is more gifted - allegorically represented by being a better football player - than regular politicians. However, the fate of Duane Thomas serves Thompson well to allude to the danger that a dissident protagonist encounters by not abiding the establishment's conservative influence, whose rules eventually stop him. Duane Thomas' deviant attitude, represented by his addiction to drugs, is not welcome in the sphere of professional football, although Thomas is the most valuable player. Here, Thompson refines the picture of a conservative mainstream that is driven by hubris and hypocrisy. Thomas has no future in the NFL and withdraws as a player because there "is not much room for freaks in the National Football League" (91) as Thompson concludes. This mirrors his attitude towards the political establishment in Washington. Thompson has the conviction that the liberal, who has the ability to make a difference in the system, is not appreciated and thus must withdraw from the public, seek privacy, and attempt to improve their initial surroundings instead of society as a whole.

The aim to refine the perception of the political establishment by means of the football analogy is an application of impersonal irony. So, unsurprisingly, the Epitaph to *Campaign Trail '72* is partly an account of the Super Bowl. Thompson provides a quote by Grantland Rice, the 'Dean of American Sportswriters', to summarize his perception of the experiences on the campaign trail. "When the Great Scorer comes to write/against your name - he marks -/ Not that you won or lost -/But how you played the game" (499). What follows is Thompson's hyperbolic enlargement of the players, who "were giants, idols, titans ... Behemoths. They stood for everything Good and True and Right in the American Spirit. Because they had guts" (500). Here, the impression is established that the American public perceives the players as authentic protagonists of a game that is accessible. Thompson gives the impressions of fans who by "noon, ... were weeping openly, for no apparent reason" (500) and the readers grasp that it is ironic how the average American is moved to tears by a football game but is indifferent towards politics. The reason is, as Thompson has alluded to in the opening-verse, the fact that politicians are too fixed on the Pinnacle - the presidency - although they have played a 'terrible game', which has not addressed the hopes of the people in a proper manner and failed to fascinate, causing more frustration with the political representatives among the people. So, in the end Thompson, who as a 'sports writer' knows how to 'play the game', ponders his own ambitions to do better and get further involved in

politics to represent the voice of the disenfranchised, although he anticipates that he is likely to lose (cf. 503).⁴¹

5.3.3. Bestial Images: A Zoo of Metaphors

Hunter Thompson's makes frequent use of bestial images to portray the political protagonists and the times they live in. Often, these are instances of 'flyting', such as the descriptions of leaders of the Democratic Party, who are "a gang of senile leeches" and a "herd of venal pigs" (125). 'Flyting' serves the purpose to openly disparage the addressees, and shows what opinion the narrator has of them. In this case it is a satirical strategy to form a disparaging simile by making use of bestial attributes, as the leech is a blood-sucker, and the pig is perceived as an unclean animal. At times Thompson compares the acts of the protagonists with the behavior of animals, for instance by describing that an election between Ed Muskie and Nixon is "like sending a three-toed sloth out to seize turf from a wolverine" (159). In these passages Thompson, ironically, makes use of the media label of the political animal, which generally describes a gifted politician. Of all the politicians Thompson encounters on the campaign trail "Hubert Humphrey is the purest and most disgusting example of a Political Animal in American politics today" (205). Here, Thompson's recurring application of bestial images reverses the term of the political animal, and thus gives it a negative connotation.

However, the bestial images are not only the narrator's, respectively the alazonic character's disparaging assessments of politicians, but hint at a larger theme as I would suggest. One has to keep in mind the epigraph to *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, a quote by Samuel Johnson: "He who makes a beast of himself gets rid of the pain of being a man". In the *Fear and Loathing* books, Thompson reveals his perception of a supposedly civilized world that is really determined by irrationality and ferocity. A pinnacle of representative politics, the nomination of a presidential candidate at the Democratic convention, is consequently described as "one of the most brutal and degrading animal acts of our time" (Thompson 220). Those are instances where Thompson resorts to bitter irony to express his disenchantment with the American culture. However, Thompson also presents a natural inevitability when he portrays man as a beast, and it suggests the mockery of the ideal that upholds the perfectibility of mankind.

Hence, bestial images are omnipresent in *Campaign Trail '72*, as in Thompson's other works. But, furthermore, the use of impersonal irony is only detectable in digressive passages where Thompson juxtaposes the behavior of the presidential candidate with a bull elk. The behavior of the bull elk functions as a metaphor, which provides an explanation for the reader, why George McGovern could not convince Ted Kennedy to be his running mate. First, Thompson makes use of the football analogy, comparing Kennedy to a star quarterback, and then elaborates further by means of the beast metaphor to refine the image of the career politician. Thereby, Thompson makes use of the analogies that are most palpable for his readers to provide an explanation why McGovern and Kennedy did not run on the same ticket, which a lot of *Rolling Stone's* readers possibly hoped for.

⁴¹ Ironically, Thompson echoes this hopeless endeavour by concluding *Campaign Trail '72* with the suggestive statement "I... walked several blocks down La Cienaga Boulevard to the Losers' Club" (505).

The bull elk is a very crafty animal for about fifty weeks of the year; his senses are so sharp that only an artful stalker can get within a thousand yards of him ... but when the rut comes on, in the autumn, ... [the] dumb bastards lose all control of themselves ... Their eyes glaze over, their ears pack up with hot wax, and their loins get heavy with blood. Anything that sounds like a cow elk in heat will fuse the central nervous system of every bull on the mountain. (380)

In this passage, Thompson partly imitates the style of a hunting report, especially in the first two lines. The passage differs slightly from the narrator's general tone. The passage contains some information that bears a double meaning further contributing to the effect of covert irony. Coincidentally, the presidential election and the rut are both in autumn. It affects every bull on the mountain - whereas the politicians in Washington gather on Capitol Hill. The description of the bull elk is an effective metaphor that Thompson provides to understand the motivations of career politicians. Instead of referring to exotic animals, such as the three-toed sloth, the wolverine, or the hammerhead shark, Thompson chooses a beast that readers can relate to - the bull elk can be hunted in most of America's northern states. In contrast to the invective name-calling, Thompson does not draw an entirely disparaging image of the career politician, maintaining that he is "a very crafty animal about fifty weeks of the year". By comparing the protagonists' motivations to the instincts of animals Thompson describes the natural inevitability of the appetite that can be seen in the acts of politicians.

While the descriptions of protagonists associated with beasts and events morphing into grotesque impressions of brute gatherings prevail, three characters are set apart from the rest of bestial images as Hellmann maintains (cf. 23). Dr. Thompson, who in the course of covering the campaign reports how his hands are turning into claws (cf. 219), and Richard Nixon who is depicted as neither man nor animal but rather something worse - a kind of werewolf. George McGovern is not compared to a beast at all, granting that the passage about the bull elk refers to the generality of career politicians.

McGovern is not seen as a man who is really a beast but as a mysterious beast who may really be a kind of man - which for Dr. Thompson places him well above the typical Presidential aspirant. However much he may doubt the reality of McGovern's difference from other politicians as the campaign progresses, by the eve of the election he is sure that McGovern and Nixon afford a crucial symbolic and psychological choice[.] (Hellmann 23)

This choice is between a man "who really understands what a fantastic monument to all the best instincts of the human race this country might have been" (414) and "America's answer to the monstrous Mr. Hyde ... who turns into something unspeakable, full of claws and bleeding string-warts, on nights when the moon comes too close..." (417). The fabrication of this duality between the bestial Nixon and the upright McGovern creates a sharp contrast between two extremes that characterize the political establishment.

The bestial metaphor distinguishes the political establishment from the upright liberal, and, moreover, the latter from shyster politicians like Richard Nixon. The metaphor of the bull elk refines the image of the establishment because, apparently, it is driven by instinctive appetite. Hence, the 'political animal' cannot be blamed for the dysfunctional representative system in the United States. Richard Nixon, however, is deliberately committing criminal

acts and represents the venal side of America. Therefore, Nixon is not a beast that is simply driven by appetite but, worse, acting intentionally “every day of his life, on purpose, as a matter of policy and a perfect expression of everything he stands for” (Thompson 414). The president, according to Thompson, is a dangerous chimera that acts not determined by an inevitable, instinctive drive but by ruthless calculation and reason. Thompson concludes that “Nixon himself ... represents that dark, venal, and incurably violent side of the American character that almost every other country in the world has learned to fear and despise” (416). The climaxing contrast of McGovern and Nixon - man and monster - is emblematic as it provides the readers with the sharpest distinction between the upright and accessible liberal and the absolute opposite of it. The writings of Hunter Thompson make powerful use of the bestial metaphor, and neither the candidate’s distinguished political program, nor a captivating public speech, nor a sympathetic TV appearance, could refine the meaning of the liberal more clearly. Ironically, the decent man George McGovern lost by the highest margin in any presidential election to date.⁴²

6. Conclusion

The investigation of *Campaign Trail '72* shows that irony is important as a strategy to create understanding within a discursive community, namely the American society. In a time when the discursive climate is determined by an atmosphere of disparity of values and beliefs, the establishing of ironic contact can proliferate a feeling of solidarity among the members of the community. Hence, the investigation and interpretation of Hunter Thompson’s use of verbal irony is a sufficient means to evoke a literary understanding of the American liberal ideal. Like Whitman who composed *Leaves of Grass* in attempt to create a natural trope that expresses the peculiarly American feeling of camaraderie (cf. Folsom 48), Thompson, in my opinion, succeeds with establishing an equally heuristic understanding for the meaning of the American liberal. The ideal originates from the feeling of camaraderie, solidarity, and compassion with fellow human beings. Such a cultural atmosphere is, then, the single foundation from which democracy can be fostered.

Therefore, the initial proposition that Hunter S. Thompson’s use of verbal irony in *Campaign Trail '72* is a possible approach to the abstract ideal of the American liberal has proven to be comprehensible. Hunter Thompson’s ironic dialogues and the use of impersonal verbal irony have made the American liberal palpable for the readers as the representation of the decent politician. By refraining from being opportunistic and attempting to remain authentic and upright, even if confronted with the siren call of power, the liberal politician may not become inaccessible, unsympathetic, and elitist. Foremost, the American liberal, as conceived by Thompson, has to remain a nonconformist who is willing to voice the hopes and concerns of those who feel disenfranchised by society.

In the ironic dialogues with the youth culture Thompson shows how strongly the seemingly disparate spheres of society are influenced by the liberal-minded thinking of the 1960’s, which becomes apparent in the omnipresence of the drug culture’s appeal. However, Thompson’s ironic speech acts echo a feeling of decadence and carelessness among the

⁴² Thompson suggests that it was McGovern’s talking about ‘Honesty in Government’ and ‘New Politics’ that were imprecise - too abstract for people to grasp -, and which the candidate abandoned soon enough when he got entangled into a power-limbo with the other career politicians (cf. 414).

young Americans as well. These feelings are catalyzed by the dysfunctional representative system that does not provide a candidate whom the non-conformist, liberal youth perceives as an authentic politician they can vote for. Thompson magnifies the atmosphere of existential disorientation by using the symbols of the sunrise and the raven in his writings. These symbols signify the disorientation in American society, drifting between an optimistic hope and a pessimistic acceptance of the status quo. Thompson attempts to show that the American liberal cannot be perceived as an ideological construct, but must appeal to inspire the young and hopeful who, otherwise, will feel deviant and disenfranchised.

Thompson reveals that liberal politicians, notably Edward Muskie and Hubert Humphrey, cannot live up to the ideal when they are reevaluated ironically. Rather, these politicians are framed by ironic characters like Muskie on the 'Sunshine Special', or embedded into a larger context of impersonal irony. The ironic assessment of the average career politician shows that these politicians are unfit to properly defend the American society from negative influx. Hence, in contrast to the political establishment Thompson places Richard Nixon, who embodies the Machiavellian despot, represented as a dangerous chimera and equipped with unethical reason and a cunning sense for self-preservation. The use of verbal irony is one of Thompson's means to uncover the realities of the political sphere. Foremost, he reveals the determined compliancy of the career politician and the dangers that the representative system holds by bringing men like Richard Nixon into power. Contrasting the ideal with the shyster politician, Thompson approaches the American liberal antithetically because the use of verbal irony essentially reveals what the liberal is not, despite Nixon's enactment of allegedly liberal policies.

The agents of irony may uncover the complexity of the political disease in America, which Kurt Vonnegut Jr. described as "Hunter Thompson's disease" in his review of *Campaign Trail '72* (235). At a time when "[practically] everybody ... feels fine, just fine" (235) Hunter Thompson's book of the 1972 presidential campaign is a supersensitive cultural seismograph and anticipates the erosion of the politico-cultural national identity that progresses until today. Unfortunately, Vonnegut does not provide an answer why the author of *Campaign Trail '72* contracted this nowadays common political disease. Vonnegut merely suggests that the author exhibits a psychological and physical frailty that made him more vulnerable than his contemporaries. Arguably, Thompson's strong moral conviction and belief "that it is easy and natural for Americans to be brotherly and just" (Vonnegut 234) made him many things "but one thing he is not is a cynic" (Halberstam xi). Hunter Thompson connects the art of being ironical with the determinedly ethical acts of the liberal, fusing both to a precept of action that surpasses the moralizing of satire and becomes itself the manifestation of the authentically ethic individual.

Primarily, Thompson's ironical reevaluation of contemporary politicians and the conditions that determine their scheme of action illustrates the dilemma of American politics. Furthermore, Thompson's complex role as author, narrator, and persona in his work establishes a peculiarly 'meta-stable' self that can never take itself quite seriously. I think that the duplication of author, narrator and persona establishes a reflexive structure of identity, which de Man in a different context describes as "dialectic of the self" (169). Halberstam observes that the "further you are from the event, the more important the chronicler becomes ... The events shrink, but Hunter's performing and reinterpreting them

is enhanced" (Wenner 434). Hunter Thompson's performance is a self-disparaging redescription of his private self that makes him the 'poetic hero' of the American society, and thus Rorty's liberal ironist may be the embodiment of the American liberal ideal.

The creation of a 'meta-stable' self that can never take itself quite seriously may establish the author as an authentic embodiment of the American liberal. Thompson becomes the agent of irony who redescribes society with an ironical understanding that enables his acts of solidarity to be directed at the diverging spheres of mainstream establishment and counter culture. The transmogrification of the narrator-protagonist, the duplication of the author's self, establishes a countersinking techniques that resemble Socrates', who preferred to make himself out worse than he was and thus establish an understanding for the convictions of his interlocutors. Hence, Thompson attempts to evoke sympathy for all members of a diverging society by being ironical. While Thompson's acts are implicitly ethical when engaging with members of society, he refrains from reevaluating Richard Nixon equally. However, the redescription of Richard Nixon also evokes an understanding for his acts and motives, which are identified as the antithesis of the American liberal and characterized by greed and pathological egotism.

In conclusion, Thompson suggests that the authentic and upright American liberal has to try to improve the condition of fellow men and women in his or her immediate surroundings. Throughout the book Thompson alludes to his sheriff campaign which seems to suggest that the American liberal is an effective ideal in the community rather than in national politics. The American liberal can also remain a liberal ironist in communal surroundings that constitute the private sphere. In the community one may attempt to establish conditions under which fellow women and men can live without fear or favor, namely a life of integrity. However, I want to comment that Thompson possibly underestimated the impact that his persona's publicity evoked. Thus, the author was unable to pursue the private liberal ideal in his home community because he failed to properly separate his persona from his authentic self. Thus, Hunter Thompson became one of the first popular idols of an overtly media-influenced society. The impact of becoming a caricature of himself - culminating in Trudeau's 'Uncle Duke' (cf. McKeen 101) - might have paralyzed Thompson's abilities as the culture's 'poetic hero' because he had to live up to the expectations that his inflated persona evoked. Whenever Hunter Thompson made a public appearance and may have wanted to be perceived as a serious man, the audience rather anticipated his notorious persona.

Ironically, the thesis concludes with placing a focus on Hunter S. Thompson's life and personality, which I initially wished to avoid. Therefore, I want to offer a prognosis what the scope of irony in Hunter Thompson's writings furthermore yields. If the systematic approach that I have suggested in this thesis is accepted to be prolific, it might suffice to analyze other abstract concepts or theories, such the Agenda-Setting and the interdependencies of journalists and politicians. Both, the system of analyzing the use of verbal irony in an author's texts and the investigation of other subjects that Thompson hints at ironically can be the ground for further literary research.

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