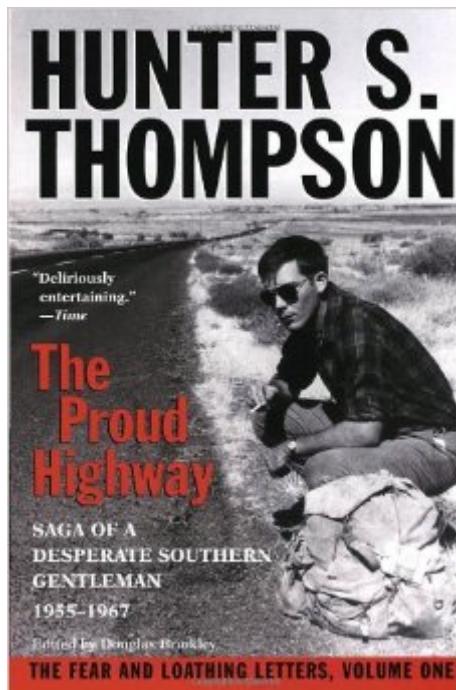


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The Proud Highway: Saga Of A Desperate Southern Gentleman, 1955-1967 (The Fear And Loathing Letters, Vol. 1)



Synopsis

Here, for the first time, is the private and most intimate correspondence of one of America's most influential and incisive journalists--Hunter S. Thompson. In letters to a Who's Who of luminaries from Norman Mailer to Charles Kuralt, Tom Wolfe to Lyndon Johnson, William Styron to Joan Baez--not to mention his mother, the NRA, and a chain of newspaper editors--Thompson vividly catches the tenor of the times in 1960s America and channels it all through his own razor-sharp perspective. Passionate in their admiration, merciless in their scorn, and never anything less than fascinating, the dispatches of *The Proud Highway* offer an unprecedented and penetrating gaze into the evolution of the most outrageous raconteur/provocateur ever to assault a typewriter.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I first picked up this volume when it was brand new and I was a freshman at USC, just entertaining the notion of becoming a writer. Now, some seven years later, I finally got around to getting my own copy and finishing it recently, I can say it was worth the wait. Hunter S. Thompson may have only been thirty when the book comes to a close, but he does so much living in the 12 years detailed that one can't help but feel envious. From his stint in the Air Force to his various travels cross-country and to South America, Thompson remains a fiercely independent creature throughout his letters, heaping scorn and praise upon those he corresponds with as he sees fit. The bulk of the first part concerns Thompson's unfruitful look for a steady writing assignment early on, and one feels the sense of desperation and (dare I say) fear and loathing he builds up for the workaday world.

Thompson's muse carries him far and wide, to outposts both remote (the heart of deepest South America) and wellknown (New York, San Francisco). Through it all, Thompson never loses sight of his original passion for the written word. Some of the letters are to family or friends, with some fiery dispatches to entities Thompson felt had hurt him or America in some way (imagine writing a letter to Dubya like the ones Thompson wrote to LBJ without getting the Secret Service breathing down your neck). The friends that Thompson collects range from obvious (Hells Angels, other struggling literati), to the baffling (I had no idea Charles Kuralt and Thompson knew one another). Throughout, Thompson's savage wit and fiery temper burn through even the most customary notes to landlords or editors. In some ways, Thompson's constant refrain of the "n-word" is disturbing to more modern readers, but like the great writers of the past he is a product of his times. To omit the phrase or other derogatory terms Thompson used in the original letters would be to deny the authenticity of his feelings, and once any initial shock wears off it becomes apparent that Thompson may not even be using the term to refer specifically to African-Americans. That was my only qualm with the content, and it's a credit to his maturity over the course of the years contained that Thompson seems to be far more liberal than his peers from Kentucky. The first volume made me want to go out and buy the second right away, if only to see what predicaments the Great Gonzo finds himself in. No one wrote letters quite like HST, letters that could stand in their own right as bizarre snapshots of an America in transition. I've even found my own e-mail length increasing mightily since I began the book (for which I apologize to anyone from here on out who I send an unusually long e-mail to). You'll come away from this book with a deeper appreciation for the work Thompson has done to document the death of the American Dream. Captured within these pages are his first inklings that such a thing has come to pass. From fellow journalists like William Kennedy and Tom Wolfe to LBJ and the NRA, Thompson's letters reflect the wide spectrum of Sixties personalities. Perhaps the most engaging character throughout is Thompson himself. For all his egotism, he is a great writer. The proof is in this book.

I read this book a few years ago, but never felt motivated to write a review until this sad day. HST killed himself last night--a tragic end to a savage, but noble, life. Over the years, I have read several of HSTs books and articles. They are all wildly original, fearless, brilliant, and (above all) LOL funny. *Proud Highway* is a fascinating read because it shows the evolution of HST's genius, from teenager through his maturation as a writer. You can see from the razor sharp, revealing letters the trials, tribulations, sacrifice, and hard work that transformed Thompson into the legendary, "gonzo" journalist he was. Despite his talent and humor, years of fear and loathing must have finally gotten

to him. Rest in peace, Raoul Duke. You were a true American original and the world will be a poorer place without you.

William J. Kennedy writes that odd things happen when you intersect with Hunter Thompson. Kennedy's introduction describes him as a masterful prose stylist. Douglas Brinkley, the editor, notes that Hunter Thompson took over Kierkegaard's phrase 'fear and loathing'. Thompson, Brinkley reports, had a ritual of typing letters at night. Brinkley believes that Orwell was a supreme influence of Thompson's style. The letters written during Thompson's service in the Air Force evidence a young person literary to his finger tips. The editor uses notes to orient the reader by saying, for instance, now he is reading F. Scott Fitzgerald, or John Dos Passos. Like many young people suffering from maladjustment, he was also reading with great interest THE OUTSIDER and THE FOUNTAINHEAD. Thompson worked as a copy boy at TIME. Henry Luce set up a free bar for the employees on Sunday evenings. Hunter details in one of the letters how he took some of Henry Luce's things. After being fired by TIME for insubordination, Thompson went to work at the MIDDLETOWN DAILY RECORD. He lost that job when he abused the candy machine. He thought LIE DOWN IN DARKNESS was great and wrote a letter to William Styron. (Actually, by reading this collection I learned to take a more charitable view of the journalistic posturing and strutting engaged in by Ernest Hemingway as his way of overcoming the terrible resistance of the blank white page to literary production.) Thompson moved to San Juan to write for a bowing newspaper. Photographs show Thompson the Outlaw of Big Sur and Joan Baez, his neighbor. It was 1961 and he was 33. Thompson had a piece on Big Sur accepted by ROGUE. When his piece was published he was evicted for spreading gossip in a smutty magazine. Thompson sold a short story to ROGUE. In 1962 he was in Bogata, Colombia. He went on to Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Brazil doing pieces for THE NATIONAL OBSERVER. Carey McWilliams of THE NATION had Hunter Thompson cover the Free Speech Movement. By 1966 Thompson had his book on the Hell's Angels ready for publication by Random House. In a letter to Tom Wolfe Thompson described Colorado as one of those squalid-shaped states. The writing is very lively and energetic. The editor's presentation of Hunter Thompson is fair and sharp.

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