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# Актуальные проблемы журналистики

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## **HUNTER S. THOMPSON, THE WRITER OF FEATURES IN GONZO STYLE.**

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The objective of the research is to examine the origin of gonzo journalism that appeared in the writings of the American journalist Hunter S Thompson and define main characteristics of the features, written in the gonzo style.

Before Thompson, before his creative works the traditional role of a journalist was a role of an objective outsider who simply observes and reports a newsworthy event, but not being an active participant of the event. With Thompson's works appears a radical form of news reporting known as "gonzo style" and a journalist becomes an insider and one can see a clear separation between the feature-writing journalist and the event itself.

Hunter Stockton Thompson was born on July 18, 1937 in Louisville, Kentucky and is best known for authoring "Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas" and more than that, it was he who created "gonzo journalism", a highly personal style of reporting where a writer becomes so involved in the story that he becomes a central figure in his works. His hard-diving lifestyle made Thompson an icon among college students. After several periods of poor health, Thompson died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound in 2005.

Thompson began his career in journalism as a sport reporter for the "Air Force" newspaper. Some time later Thompson started working for small-town newspapers, and later a copyboy in "Time" magazine. Hunter himself said that the "gonzo" was born while he was trying to piece together a story about the Kentucky derby on a deadline. The result was that in his story "The Kentucky Derby is Decadent and Depraved" he wrote about the feelings and behavior of the watching people and the atmosphere of the derby more than the race itself. This story was published in "Scanlan's Monthly" in June 1970 and was perceived as a breakthrough in journalism.

A gonzo journalist can actively participate in a political candidate's campaign without making any effort to appear politically neutral or unbiased. Indeed, one of the characteristics of gonzo journalism is an almost complete personal immer-

sion into the world he describes. For example, while a traditional journalist might interview drug dealers or drug addicts to expose the local drug trade, a gonzo journalist may actually participate in the shady deals of a local gang. The purpose of gonzo journalism is to produce a brutally honest or highly subjective journalistic piece based on the real experience.

There are a lot of definitions of a feature story. The following definitions belong to Dr. Anthony Curtis: “Feature stories are human-interest articles that focus on particular people, places and events. They are journalistic, researched, descriptive, colorful, thoughtful, reflective, thorough writing about original ideas. Feature stories are popular content elements of newspapers, magazines, blogs, websites, newsletters, television broadcasts and other mass media” [1].

Hunter Thompson creating his features wrote about many things: politics, crime, people’s relations but there is one topic he knew best of all – it is sport. For the research analysis of gonzo-style feature I have chosen the text “The Good, the Bad and the Vicious”, written by Thompson in 2003.

The subject of the feature is the NBA playoff games and it is submitted through the Thompson’s perception of the games and his expectations: “Wow! This is incredible. We have just witnessed two consecutive good basketball plays in a single NBA Eastern Conference playoff game <...> The top-seed Detroit Pistons are more or less leading the quasi-dangerous New Jersey Nets, champions of the NBA East”. [2].

Examining the structure of the feature, I have defined the first element that is the headline “The Good, the Bad and the Vicious”. Using the abstract adjectives the headline doesn’t say anything clear about the content, but I can affirm that this particular headline is the first hook to grab the prospective readers attention.

The second structure element is the lead. It consists of two paragraphs that begin the feature story. Hunter Thompson uses these paragraphs to set a mood, to arouse readers’ curiosity and to invite them inside of the NBA playoff games story.

The development of the NBA playoff games story covers the next eight paragraphs, so-called “the nut graphs”. The nut graphs technique explains the reason why this feature was written and is a vital element of the structure that is common to many Thompson’s features and the technique provides information that educates, entertains, and emotionally attracts the audience to the subject of the feature.

It is worth noticing that there is a special expressive means of the language, specific voice and dialogues in “The Good, the Bad and the Vicious”. The main characteristic of his dialogues is a technique of using rhetorical questions. They help to keep a story moving and give readers strong mental images. Rhetorical questions make an illusion of Thompson’s dialogue with readers. They become involved into the story and Thompson addresses to his readers like to his old buddy. “Right. And so much for that, eh?”, “I weep for Sacramento, but so what?”, “How could I have been so silly? So naive?”, “Indeed. How could any self-respecting gambler give Dallas, plus nine, in a playoff game?” [2].

Another key element that “cements” the Thompson’s feature is his voice. It helps to inject color, tone, and subtle emotional commentary into the story. His spoken voice is very specific. It is rather blatant and categorical. For some people it can be impolite, even rude but such way of using “the voice device” is his peculiarity and the essence of “gonzo style”. His spoken voice emerges naturally, it comes from his own manners to describe and portray everything that he knows from inside and he feels comfortable when he writes about topics he knows very well. In our case it is the sport.

In the feature “The Good, the Bad and the Vicious” Thompson sharpens the angle of his description. He evaluates problems he writes about from the very subjective point of view, informs readers about his own position but the important thing is that he doesn’t impose his thoughts on the readers. Describing people and the games he chooses caustic words: “These teams suck. But do we really deserve five more minutes of overtime <...> This is bad-bad, ugly-ugly basketball. We don’t need any more of this brazen chickens. Get it over with. <...> The Nets win, by two. 88-86. And good riddance” [2]. The text sounds ironical. More – Thompson is a great master of irony.

Analyzing “The Good, the Bad and the Vicious” I can say that Thompson describes the time and place in details as a real reporter. “We have just witnessed two consecutive good basketball plays in a single NBA Eastern Conference play-off game. It is 10:19 pm on a wet Tuesday night in America”, “And if San Antonio hadn’t blown that game against Dallas on Monday, they would almost certainly have been the Champions of the NBA this year” [2].

The analyzed feature shows some points of Thompson’s manner of writing, specific characteristics of his feature composition and his expressive means of language.

While doing the research, I have examined the origin of gonzo journalism through Thompson’s writings and defined main characteristics of his specific feature composition, besides it I have understood some specific language means that are not accepted by many people but are suitable for his style. I believe that his highly personal style deserves great attention both in the American and world journalism.

References:

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