



Generation of Swine

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“It is a grim time to be growing up,” contends Thompson who, though age fifty, remains the kid who never traded his slingshot in for a credit card. He is a boozy Jeremiah railing against the shabbiness of the age in a style that crosses H.L. Mencken with Lenny Bruce, Charles Bukowski, and a spastic colon. Thompson writes about tattoo parlors, dog fights, and football gamblers, but his true subject is national politics, his principal inspiration Ronald Reagan. He can be outrageously offensive about such Democrats as Hubert Humphrey and Julian Bond, and his account of Oral Roberts as “a greed-crazed white-trash lunatic who should have been hung upside down from a telephone pole” is gloriously irresponsible. It is the Reagan cadre, however, that elicits Thompson’s most inventive invective.

GENERATION OF SWINE is not as perversely hilarious as HELL’S ANGELS and FEAR AND LOATHING IN LAS VEGAS, books in which Thompson, in the persona of a doped-up maniac, is an actor rather than simply a commentator. Reading all these columns at once is too much of a bad thing, like downing one hundred consecutive shots of methyl alcohol. Thompson does not always live up to his literary model: the Book of Revelation--“a thunderhead mix of Bolero, Sam Coleridge and the ravings of Cato the Elder.” Repetitious and manneristic, he does not always write deathless prose, though it is rarely as lifeless as that of newspaper pundits who pretend to pass wisdom but confuse it with water.

Thompson’s rant is informed by a powerful moral imagination, rage at the perversion of the American dream. The 1980’s, he raves, has produced a “Generation of Swine,” but he is railing less at a particular age cohort than the sins of an entire era. “Speak for yourself!” many might reply. Hunter S. Thompson does, in a style like nothing else in American journalism.

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