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TOM WOLFE AND HIS EARLY CRITICS

A Thesis

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ABSTRACT

Tom Wolfe, one of the first so-called "new journalists," published his first book, The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby, in 1965. Consisting chiefly of material previously published in Esquire and The New York Herald-Tribune, Kandy saw Wolfe explore topics ranging from stock car driving to New York nannies in prose that defied all journalistic conventions with its whimsy and its excess. In the Introduction, Wolfe presented a theory which explained the reasons behind both his choice of topics and his explosive style. The author believed that the Post World War II economic boom had created unprecedented wealth in every level of society, thus eliminating traditional class barriers. For the first time in history, significant portions of a nation's culture were emanating from its lower income levels. In order to adequately report on these exotic new phenomena, Wolfe chose exotic new modes of expression.

Kandy polarized the critics. But as controversial as Wolfe's writing style seemed to be, the critics were far more concerned with his sociology. Reviews of Kandy were gathered and analyzed for content. It was discovered that critical acceptance of the book was strongly correlated to acceptance of its premise. Those reviewers who agreed with Wolfe's theory also tended to be more adept at untangling

the complexities of his style. Those who disagreed or expressed ambivalence seemed unable to understand the context of many of his statements.

The critical debate over Kandy proved to be a paradigm for a larger cultural and economic debate. Kandy was essentially a chronicle of the cultural effects of capitalism, as well as a declaration by the author of its triumph over socialism. Dwight Macdonald, who led Wolfe's detractors, was a liberal and expressed misgivings about this free market place of ideas. C.H. Simonds, the most perceptive of Kandy's supporters, wrote for the conservative National Review and was clearly in favor of cultural choice as manifested in American society.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In 1965, a controversial young New York journalist named Tom Wolfe published The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby (Farrar, Straus and Giroux; New York), thus issuing a loud, bold challenge to the intellectual literary establishment. Wolfe, in the years to come, would rudely question (and sometimes ridicule) the political, social and literary dogmas set forth by many post-World War Two intellectuals. But in a career marked by staunch opposition to hegemonies, Kandy remains particularly significant. It introduced what would later be called New Journalism, and it chronicled the rise of a "new prole order" that would eventually dominate culture in America and lead to the proliferation of American forms world-wide.

Kandy contained 22 articles and a handful of cartoons culled from Wolfe's work at Esquire and The New York Herald-Tribune from 1963 to 1965. The articles represented his first forays into an explosive, fanciful style of writing. Wolfe used bizarre punctuation and breathy, run-on sentences filled with colorful phrases and home-made words. His work displayed a keen, insolent wit and an insatiable eye for detail. Wolfe's subjects were as distinctive as his prose--the stars of Kandy were teenage car customizers, rock and

roll d.j.'s and stock car drivers. In the introduction to Kandy, Wolfe insisted that this was by design; he was observing a "whole new style of life" in America, and this new style demanded new journalistic treatments.

This "new style" was the product of economically empowered lower classes; Wolfe observed that throughout history, style has depended on "a lot of attention, to form, plus the money to make monuments to it." But the only classes with the power to erect these monuments were the aristocrats--the ruling elite. Suddenly, the "rancid proles and petty burghers" started gaining real material wealth in post-industrial, post-war America, and with this wealth came the power to build their own monuments. According to Wolfe, this new cultural freedom inevitably clashed with the ideals of the intelligentsia, who envisioned the enlightened masses spending their leisure time at the government-sponsored culture center, enjoying ballet or modern art. The Rolling Stones and Junior Johnson were not what they had in mind.

Wolfe had already stirred up the New York journalistic community when Kandy was published; his gaudy prose and his attack on The New Yorker (in a Herald-Tribune magazine series) earned him at least as many detractors as admirers. Kandy brought him notoriety and magnified by twofold the debate over his methods. Most discussion of the book centered on its sociological aspirations, i.e. Wolfe's theory of the new mass culture. Leading the attack against

Wolfe and Kandy was Dwight Macdonald, a prominent left-wing critic and New Yorker staff member noted for his own theories about the nature of popular culture. Macdonald labelled Wolfe a "parajournalist" and charged that neither his style nor his subject matter would be of any interest once the novelty of both had passed. Macdonald and like-minded critics took particular offense at the notion of a prole-dominated culture. Among Wolfe's defenders were the conservative National Review and esteemed English writer-critic Malcolm Muggeridge.

The critical debate engendered by Kandy portended events to come; Wolfe's entire career reflected his resistance to hegemony. The Pump House Gang and The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test elaborated on the theme of prole liberation from upper-crust cultural dominance. The Painted Word and From Bauhaus to Our House ridiculed the art and architecture communities for their conceptual subservience to a small group of theorists. Radical Chic and Mau-Mauing the Flak Catchers and Bonfire of the Vanities challenged liberal dogmas concerning racial politics and poverty programs. Although Kandy was much less ideologically outspoken than these other works, the responses it elicited proved to be accurate predictors of the critical polarization to come.

The following chapter will provide a biographical profile of Wolfe and much of his work, including a more

detailed discussion of Kandy. Wolfe's childhood and college experiences are particularly relevant to the Kandy debate; the image of the youth-conscious, status-seeking wildman created by many of his critics is belied by his southern-Protestant upbringing and the English dandy pretenses of his college days. Indeed, an examination of the author's personal life not only helps interpret his writing but also reveals the conservative roots which anchor much of his work.

Chapter three will examine several pieces of Kandy criticism and classify each according to its author's view of Wolfe's introductory sermon. Most reviewers focused their arguments on this little piece of pop sociology, and the results are telling. The overall substance and character of each review will be presented in order to establish possible correlations between resistance to or acceptance of Wolfe's thesis and critical attitudes towards other aspects of the book.

The final chapter will analyze these critiques and draw conclusions based on the observations made in section three. Critical acceptance of Wolfe's underlying ideology proved to be strongly correlated to acceptance of Kandy as a whole. Just as a careful reading of the book reveals a great deal about Wolfe, study of the resultant criticism paints an interesting ideological portrait of the critics and creates a forum for debate over the nature of popular culture.

In later years, Wolfe's social and political agendas would become increasingly evident--such charged works as Radical Chic left little doubt as to where Wolfe stood on various issues. But The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby was in many ways a subtle work. Few people recognized it for what it truly was--an exploration of the relationship between culture and economics. Wolfe took the time to record what few other journalists of the time seemed to notice; the obliteration of traditional class lines and the creation of new subcultures that rose from the lower income levels. In retrospect, it would seem that most of society took this transformation for granted or assumed that it was only a fleeting mania. Today, American cultural forms are enjoying unprecedented popularity, both at home and abroad. Tom Wolfe stands alone as the first significant historian of this new cultural era.

CHAPTER II

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

On March 2, 1931, in Richmond, Virginia, Thomas Kennerly Wolfe, Jr was born to Helen Perkins Wolfe and Thomas K. Wolfe, Sr.

Wolfe's parents were progressive southern gentry, ill-at-ease with Richmond society (Toby Thompson, Vanity Fair, October 1987 [Dorothy Scura, Conversations With Tom Wolfe, University of Mississippi, 1990]). His father was a professor of agronomy at Virginia Tech, editor of Southern Planter (a farm journal), director of distribution for the Southern States Cooperative and owner of two farms of his own. Wolfe's childhood was, by his own admission, very stable: "I was lucky, I guess, in my family in that they had a very firm idea of roles. Father, Mother, Child. Nothing was ever allowed to bog down into those morass-like personal hang-ups" (Elaine Dundy, Vogue, April 15, 1966).

Wolfe was a good student and became interested in literature at an early age; the precocious youngster wrote his own versions of Arthurian legends and even attempted to write a biography of Napoleon after reading Emil Ludwig's account of the French general's life (Current Biography, 1971). He discovered James M. Cain, John Steinbeck, Thomas Wolfe and William Faulkner while attending St. Christopher's, an Episcopal prep school in Richmond. At St.

Christopher's, Wolfe played baseball and edited the school newspaper, for which he also wrote a column entitled "The Bullpen" that showcased a style already possessed of flash and sophistication (Thompson, Vanity Fair, October 1987 [Scura, 1990]).

Upon graduating from high school in 1947, Wolfe enrolled at Washington and Lee, a prestigious, old-money private university in Lexington, Virginia. While completing his B.A. in English, he edited the campus paper's sports section, wrote short stories (he helped found the literary quarterly Shenandoah) and pitched for the college baseball squad. It was during his stay at the college that Wolfe developed his unique fashion sense, gadding about campus wearing outfits that would suit the primmest English gentleman and always sporting an umbrella, even in sunny weather. He has remained an unapologetic dandy. Wolfe had begun to obsess about the nature of status and class structure (Thompson, Vanity Fair, October 1987 [Scura, 1990]). His senior American Studies professor, Marshall Fishwick, says that the young writer was an eager student of pop culture, and that Wolfe "saw through the facade of the small, elite college and demonstrated that everyone was of the same pattern" (Thompson, Vanity Fair, October 1987 [Scura, 1990]).

In 1951, Wolfe graduated with honors from the university and tried out for the old New York Giants

baseball team. The audition was unsuccessful; Wolfe discovered that his fastball lacked the zip necessary for a big-league career. Placing his baseball aspirations aside, he entered Yale University and began working towards his doctorate in American Studies.

At Yale, Wolfe immersed himself in the works of several Russian postrevolutionary writers. In particular, he absorbed the work of the Serapion Brothers, a group of 1920's authors who wrote realistic fiction utilizing the techniques of the French symbolists. Wolfe marvelled at their use of stream-of-consciousness narratives, oddly punctuated inner thoughts and shifting viewpoints, devices that would later become hallmarks of his own unique style (Current Biography, 1971). His reading convinced him of the importance of doing research (i.e. reporting) in creating successful works of fiction and nonfiction.

Wolfe was not entirely happy in graduate school - he felt claustrophobic, trapped within the confines of Yale's uptight liberalism, and found himself rebelling against prevailing political and intellectual notions. "I was a Stevenson man, but everyone was so liberal and patronizing to Eisenhower that I acted more conservative than I was. I'd kid them by saying 'You know, Eisenhower's really very bright. He reads seven foreign papers a day.'"(Thompson, Vanity Fair, October 1987 [Scura, 1990]). Friends remember that Wolfe had a penchant for confounding his professors by

turning in scholarly papers written in fanciful prose and for frequenting seedy bars, where he would engage beatniks in lively discussions (Thompson, Vanity Fair, October 1987 [Scura, 1990]).

In late 1956, Wolfe left Yale (he would receive his Ph.D. scant months later) and, after turning down a teaching job in the West, took a job as a furniture mover in an effort to pursue the lifestyle of a carefree bohemian. But Wolfe soon found that "the girls in the offices weren't impressed. They couldn't see that this was a bohemian moving all that stuff" (Dundy, Vogue, April 15, 1966). He concluded that "there is no insight to be gathered from the life of the working class milieu" (Dundy) and began applying to newspapers across the country.

One hundred and twenty letters of application later, Wolfe landed a position as a general assignment reporter at the Springfield (Massachusetts) Union. The 26-year-old cub reporter met the challenges of his new profession by staying on call and picking up extra hours at every opportunity. "The idea was to keep body and soul together, pay the rent, get to know 'the world,' accumulate 'experience,' perhaps work some of the fat off your style--then, at some point, quit cold, say goodbye to journalism, move into a shack somewhere . . . and light up the sky with The Novel" (Dundy, Vanity Fair, October 1987).

In June of 1959, Wolfe took a job with the Washington Post. His coverage of events in Cuba and his stories and editorial cartoons from the 1960 Senate civil rights bill filibuster earned him multiple Washington Newspaper Guild awards (for foreign reporting and humor).

Wolfe would later admit that despite his success, he was dissatisfied with the direction his journalistic career was taking. He disdained the conventions and oppressive unwritten rules in which traditional journalism was couched. Reflecting on his years with the Post, Wolfe recalled that "I didn't subscribe to the theory that every documented sparrow that falls within our circulation area you have to write about" (Newsweek, February 1, 1965).

In 1962, Wolfe opened new doors of opportunity when he left the Post for the "only experimental paper in New York" (Wolfe, The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby, 1965), the New York Herald-Tribune, concentrating his efforts chiefly on New York, the Tribune's feature-oriented Sunday magazine supplement. In his early days with the Tribune, Wolfe went on assignment to a custom car show at the New York Coliseum. At the exhibition, he was impressed by the elaborately decorated cars and, in particular,by their owners, who pursued their craft with much the same fervor and dedication as "serious" artists. Wolfe wrote an admittedly mundane story on the young customizers, adopting the tone of aloof condescension that was standard for

journalists writing about such phenomena for an upper-middle-class readership (he would later refer to this as "totem" journalism) (Wolfe, TKKTFSB, 1965). But Wolfe saw beyond the facade of rough boys with garish toys--he saw artisans of a brand new subculture building monuments to their way of life. With this experience, troubling thoughts about the nature of traditional journalism began to crystallize (Wolfe, TKKTFSB, 1965). When a 1963 newspaper strike granted him a hiatus from the Tribune, he went to Esquire magazine and outlined a story idea about custom cars. The magazine sent Wolfe to Southern California, mecca of the custom car world.

After a lengthy stay in California, Wolfe came back to New York with pages of notes. But with deadline approaching and editors screaming in his ear, Wolfe found himself struggling with writer's block. In despair, he made a last-minute phone call to Esquire managing editor Byron Dobell and told him that he would not be able to finish the story (Wolfe, TKKTFSB, 1965). Dobell told Wolfe to send his notes over so another writer could pull them together.

At 8:00 that same evening, Wolfe began typing his notes in the form of a memorandum to Dobell. He completed the memo at 6:15 and turned all 49 pages over to Esquire later that morning. At four in the afternoon, Wolfe received a phone call from Dobell, who told him that he was striking "Dear Byron" from the epistle and running the rest in its

entirety, "There Goes (Varoom! Varoom!) That Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby."

In the course of writing that article, Wolfe inadvertently stumbled upon something revolutionary. Writing free from constraint, he used vivid, impressionistic descriptions, colorful digressions and highly personalized diction. And rather than remaining detached and aloof, he immersed himself in the world of his subjects and moved seamlessly from voice to voice, thus lending his article an ambivalence that sometimes seemed to fade into empathy (Dundy, Vanity Fair, 1965). Wolfe combined the sophistication of Faulkner and Thomas Wolfe and the innovation of the Serapion Brothers with his own quirky eye for detail and, in the process, shredded nearly every single rule of conventional journalism.

Wolfe saw opportunity for a marriage of style and subject matter--opportunity to reinvent the decaying machinery of Old World journalism (Wolfe, TKKTFSB, 1965). Here was a world of brand new subcultures and technological marvels. This baroque new world, he reasoned, surely deserved a baroque new style of journalism. Tom Wolfe had discovered his voice.

Wolfe continued to write pieces for the Herald-Tribune, Esquire, and a handful of other New York-based publications. All the while, his writing became increasingly distinctive as he grew more at ease with his method. He spent most of

his energy examining the individual subcultures rapidly emerging from post-war society. Some of his pieces, however, lampooned New York society, with its jostling inelegance, vain and contrary elites and its hierarchy of leftist intellectuals (shades of Yale). To Wolfe, New York seemed to embody everything that was wrong with the Old World--the last, worst vestiges of pre-war America--and thus he attacked the outposts of Eastern elitism with the same enthusiasm with which he heralded the rising tide of populist subcultures.

As Wolfe's renown increased, so did his list of enemies. Wolfe did little to appease his detractors, as evidenced by an April 1965 two-parter he wrote for New York entitled "Tiny Mummies! The True Story of The Ruler of 43rd Street's Land of the Walking Dead!" The article painted an unflatteringly detailed portrait of The New Yorker and its reclusive editor, William Shawn, and declared the hallowed publication a literary dinosaur. The incident caused distress in the New York literary community, eliciting angry retorts from the likes of Dwight Macdonald and J.D. Salinger.

In June of 1965 Wolfe unveiled The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake (Farrar, Straus and Giroux), a collection of articles written in the 15-month period following his "discovery." In the introduction, Wolfe presented his journalistic raison d'etre, detailing his search for

something beyond ordinary "totemism." Totem stories, he explained, were those which took an event such as the custom car show and "make what is known as 'gentle fun' of this, which is a way of saying, don't worry, these people are nothing." Wolfe advanced the theory that World War II created an unprecedented economic boom which "made massive infusions of money into every level of society," and that this money had allowed previously invisible classes of people to create their own unique group identities. He concluded that, inevitably, journalism must change to accommodate this colorful explosion of new subculture, and that totem newspapers were no longer adequate or appropriate.

The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby reflected at once Wolfe's stylistic transformation, his pop-culture awareness and his prejudices. The book's first section, "The New Culture-Makers," looked at the rapid emergence of brand new lifestyles. Subjects included Las Vegas ("Las Vegas happened to be created after the war, with war money, by gangsters. Gangsters happened to be the first uneducated . . . Americans to have enough money to build a monument to their style of life."), the Fifth Beatle (about disc jockey Murray the K, who became the first rock and roll d.j. to employ over-the-top hysterics as part of his radio persona), and, of course, custom cars. Section two examined "Heroes and Celebrities," and featured "The Last American

Hero," a profile of race car driver Junior Johnson that originally appeared in Esquire. "The Last American Hero" explored not only race car drivers, but also the importance of the automobile in southern culture in general, reinforcing Wolfe's notion that the car had become America's single most significant cultural icon since World War II. Other notable items in the "Heroes" section included pieces on boxer Cassius Clay; Cary Grant; the editor of "Confidential"; and so-called "Girl of the Year" Jane Holzer, a New York socialite who achieved popularity in elite circles by virtue of her association with a variety of pop culture heroes. "A Metropolitan Sketchbook," section number three, presented 18 of Wolfe's caricatures, depicting everything from teenage male hairdos to New York sun-worshippers. The last two sections, "Status, Strife and the High Life" and "Love and Hate New York Style," focused primarily on New York City lifestyles. "The Luther of Columbus Circle," which profiled New York millionaire and art patron Huntington Hartford, was the highlight of these last two sections. Wolfe seemed to revel in the staunch individuality of Hartford, who stood against the cultural agenda-setting of the New York art community. Hartford championed tradition-minded art with an emphasis on aesthetics over the styles du jour favored by powerful critics and theorists. The remaining articles dealt with such topics as New York rudeness, love in the city, New York

nannies, and how city doormen play the musical cars parking game in order to earn spare cash. Every one of these essays was fraught with endless catalogues of details, thus revealing both Wolfe's passion for thorough reporting and his awareness of status and fashion.

Through 1966 and 1967, Wolfe continued to write for New York, which survived as a weekly publication after the Herald-Tribune collapsed, while farming his talents out to Esquire and other journals on a regular basis. In 1968, he simultaneously published his second and third books, The Pump House Gang and The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test, both with Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

The Pump House Gang continued in the mode of its predecessor, collecting more of Wolfe's essays and profiles. Whereas Kandy represented the first few sparks of the post-war cultural explosion, Pump House took place squarely at Ground Zero in mid-blast. Wolfe's introduction averred that people had become so successful at creating their own isolated "statuspheres" that traditional notions of class were becoming obsolete. He further argued that while the proles and burghers rolled on in their quest for extravagant self-actualization, the old-world culture-makers held steadfastly to visions of impending societal collapse: "Intellectuals and politicians currently exhibit a vast, gummy nostalgia for the old restraints, the old limits, of the ancient ego-crusher: Calamity. Historically, calamity

has been the one serious concern of serious people. War, Pestilence--Apocalypse!" Wolfe elaborated by recounting an experience he had acting as a panelist for a symposium on "The Style of the Sixties": the other panelists, all noted underground intellectuals, began to dwell on the supposed deterioration of America into a repressive police state, until Wolfe, no longer able to contain his incredulity, found himself blurting out "What are you talking about? We're in the middle of a . . . Happiness Explosion!" He concluded that "if we want to be serious let us discuss the real apocalyptic future and things truly scary: ego extension, the politics of pleasure, the self-realization racket, the pharmacology of Overjoy . . ." (Wolfe's ellipses).

Indeed, the world Wolfe wrote about in The Pump House Gang was threatened more by the excess of its own indulgences than by any specters of Armageddon. The title piece, which highlighted the phenomenon of California youth dropping out of both school and respectable society in order to form surfing cliques, continued Wolfe's quest for ever more bizarre alternative lifestyles among America's newly liberated lower and middle income classes. "King of the Status Dropouts," a portrait of Playboy magazine founder Hugh Hefner, illustrated the result of taking individualism to its logical extreme; Hefner, who lived like a hermit in his 18-room mansion which he left only a handful of times

each year, had gone beyond finding his own societal sub-niche--he had created his own world, completely devoid of the expectations and status codes of others. In "The Put-Together Girl," Wolfe followed the exploits of Carol Doda, a topless dancer who increased her appeal by increasing her bust via implants. Perhaps the book's best-known article was "What If He Is Right?," a profile of the enigmatic Marshall McLuhan, English professor turned communications theorist and prophet of the global village. Wolfe's other subjects included London teenagers, automated hotels and motorcycle enthusiasts. Once again, Wolfe flavored his writing and bolstered his pet sociological thesis with endless recitations of fashion-related minutiae, chronicling the breakdown of traditional class consciousness with a thoroughness bordering on the anal retentive.

The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test marked a departure for Wolfe. If, as Dwight Macdonald claimed, Wolfe exploited the "atmospheric license" of fiction, then Electric was dangerously close to being a novel. The book chronicled the escapades of Ken Kesey, author and LSD prophet, who led a group of young hippies (the so-called Merry Pranksters) across the country in a Day-Glo bus conducting acid experiments and generally wreaking havoc. The book, which eventually followed a fugitive Kesey into Mexico, was easily Wolfe's most exhaustive piece of reportage, as he drew upon his own extensive travels with the Pranksters along with

personal notes, cassette tapes, journals, letters and film clips provided by the principals involved. In the process, Wolfe further extended his theory of the liberation of American culture. Like Hugh Hefner or California's surf-obsessed teens, the Pranksters felt no need to conform to old-world structures and institutions, instead choosing to live in their own bizarre little vacuum.

Wolfe's dazzling, surreal prose proved to be the perfect instrument with which to capture the Prankster experience, and his own bold individuality seemed to mesh with that of Kesey's crew. In the end, Wolfe exhibited a certain ambivalence towards Kesey, who, though compelling, was also manipulative and erratic. And the Merry Pranksters, while refreshing in their youthful naivete, often seemed mesmerized by Kesey's charlatanry. However, Wolfe wrote in the concluding author's note that "For all the Pranksters, as I have tried to show, the events described in this book were both a group adventure and a personal exploration. Many achieved great insight on both levels."

Wolfe became a contributing editor for New York in 1968. In 1970, he published Radical Chic and Mau-Mauing the Flak-Catchers, a book comprised of two lengthy essays.

"Radical Chic" came about when Wolfe noticed a co-worker's invitation to a party at the home of conductor Leonard Bernstein for the purpose of raising money for the Black Panthers. His curiosity piqued, Wolfe called an

R.S.V.P. number (a Panther spokesman) and barged his way onto the guest list. The resultant essay took a humorous (some would say savagely satirical) look at the fat-cat liberal party guests, insinuating that their concern for the radical panther cause arose more from nostalgie de la boue ("nostalgia for the mud") than from humanitarian urges. Wolfe pointed out that the fashions and concerns of the lower income classes have long provided the elite with a means to distance themselves from the bourgeoisie, who historically strive to emulate the upper class: "New arrivals [to moneyed society] have always had two ways of certifying their superiority over the hated middle class. They can take on the trappings of aristocracy . . . and they can indulge in the gauche thrill of taking on certain styles of the lower orders." Wolfe seemed to revel in the ironies. His high-society fatuousi agonized over such questions as what to do with ethnic house-servants at a gathering for Black Panthers and whether to dress "funky" or high-class. Wolfe captured the irony of the situation with more vivid status details: "Mmmmmmmm. These are nice. Little Roquefort cheese morsels rolled in crushed nuts. Very tasty. Very subtle. It's the way the dry sackiness of the nuts tiptoes up against the dour savor of the cheese that is so nice, so subtle. Wonder what the Black Panthers eat here on the hors d'oeuvre trail?"

"Mau-mauing the Flak Catchers" looked at government poverty programs, which, according to Wolfe, primarily fed the loudest mouths. The juiciest awards consisted not of feckless make-work jobs, but of positions within the poverty bureaucracy, and these were doled out to those who made their presence known via threats, tantrums and demonstrations (mau-mauing) usually directed at bureaucratic second-bananas (flak-catchers).

Wolfe observed: "But from the first that was what the lion's share of the poverty budget went into. It went into 'community organizing,' . . . the term for finding the real leaders of the ghetto and helping them organize the poor. And how could they find out the identity of these leaders of the people? Simple. In their righteous wrath they would rise up and confront you. . . . So the poverty program not only encouraged mau-mauing, it practically demanded it."

In 1973, Wolfe published The New Journalism, which elaborated on the "baroque new style" of journalism he had helped foster and served as a fitting denouement for the first stage of his career. The book contained a lengthy introductory essay by Wolfe followed by examples of work from 23 writers who he felt approached journalism with the same sort of disregard for convention as the editor. In 1975, he published The Painted Word, his infamous send-up of the art world. Wolfe depicted an insular community dominated by tyrannical theorists and peopled by artists who blindly

embraced stylistic orthodoxy and fatuous elites who gleefully financed the whole charade. Mauve Gloves & Madmen, Clutter & Vine (1976), collected another bushel of Wolfe articles, most of them concerning lifestyles and subcultures of the seventies. These essays revealed a measure of stylistic restraint from the man who once began a piece by repeating the word "hernia" 57 times.

After marrying Harper's Magazine art director Sheila Berger in 1978, Wolfe saw the publication of The Right Stuff in 1979. His most ambitious work to date, The Right Stuff chronicled the birth of the space program, focusing on the seven original Mercury astronauts and their rise from the fraternity of test pilots. In 1980, Wolfe produced one minor work, a brief collection of cartoons and essays entitled In Our Time. He renewed some old grudges in 1981 with From Bauhaus to Your House, which gave the world of architecture much the same treatment that The Painted Word afforded art gurus six years earlier. Wolfe published his only novel, The Bonfire of the Vanities, in 1987. Bonfire told the story of Sherman McCoy, a Wall Street investment broker who accidentally hits a black youth with his car and becomes the victim in a tragicomic witch hunt led by opportunistic politicians and publicity-seeking minority leaders. The novel was a world-wide best-seller and, like The Right Stuff before it, eventually became a major motion picture.

CHAPTER III

KANDY-KOLORED CRITICISM

When The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby was published in 1965, critic Dwight Macdonald set the tone for ensuing critical debate with an essay/review entitled "Parajournalism, or Tom Wolfe and His Magic Writing Machine" in the August 26, 1965 issue of the New York Review of Books. Macdonald maintained that: (1) Wolfe's brand of journalism ("parajournalism") was duplicitous and thus inherently flawed; (2) Both Wolfe's style and his subject matter were faddish, and interest in his writing would rapidly wane; (3) Wolfe sought to glorify the values of the youthful (but unacceptably gauche) subcultures he explored at the expense of the middle-aged bourgeoisie that likely comprised much of his audience; (4) His sociological pronouncements were outrageous.

Macdonald began by defining parajournalism as "a bastard form, having it both ways, exploiting the factual authority of journalism and the atmospheric license of fiction." He went on to cite the first paragraph of "The Nanny Mafia" to illustrate. Wolfe's text read: "All right, Charlotte, you gorgeous White Anglo-Saxon Protestant socialite, all you are doing is giving a birthday party for your little boy. . . . So why are you sitting there by the telephone and your old malachite-top table gnashing on one

thumbnail?" Macdonald complained that the above passage contained a "built-in reaction." He claimed that the "hastiest, most obtuse reader is left in no doubt as to how he is supposed to react to Charlotte . . ." and that Wolfe's writing "hears for the listener." These particular elements, he said, were a byproduct of Wolfe's peculiar intimacy with his subjects, an intimacy where "the parajournalist cozies up, merges into the subject so completely that viewpoint is wholly from inside . . ." and thus an intimacy that allowed no objective judgement. But Macdonald asserted that "it is hard to say just what Wolfe thinks of Charlotte, or of the real people he writes about. He melts into them so topologically that he seems to be celebrating them, and yet there is a peculiar and rather unpleasant ambivalence . . . As for his readers . . . they are in the same ambiguous position."

With regard to Wolfe's unusual subjects and his singular prose, Macdonald predicted that he "will not be read with pleasure, or at all, years from now, and perhaps not even next year . . . because he has treated novel subjects . . . in a novel style." He averred that Wolfe's subjects would quickly become passe and that the author's style "will not wear well because its eccentricities, while novel, are monotonous . . . There is no one as dead as last year's mannerist."

Macdonald made note of Wolfe's frequent references to "arteriosclerotic, larded adults" and interpreted such remarks with little humor or consideration of context: "But there is one value Tom Wolfe asserts clearly, constantly, obsessively: old he bad, new he good. Although he is pushing thirty-five, or perhaps because of it, he carries the American teenager's contempt for adults to burlesque extremes. . . . Those ten-thousand-plus purchasers of Wolfe's book are probably almost all adults, arteriosclerotic or not . . ." However, it would seem that the actual source of his distaste was Wolfe's introductory thesis: "The educated classes in this country . . . are all plugged into what is, when one gets down to it, an ancient, aristocratic aesthetic. Stock car racing, custom cars . . . still seem beneath serious consideration . . ." Macdonald expressed a clear contempt for this alleged prole new order, and counter-theorized that cultured adults, acting out of a "masochistic deference to the young . . . and a guilt-feeling about class," had bought Wolfe's book and taken an interest in things that they might otherwise have considered vulgar or insignificant.

Macdonald, who was a New Yorker staff writer, concluded his review by attacking (at length) Wolfe's "Tiny Mummies" pieces, although neither of these were included in Kandy.

Wolfe did receive crumbs of praise from Macdonald, who said that Kandy was "amusing" (taken in small doses) and

admitted that Wolfe was "a good observer, with an eye for [New York City's] style," noting that his pieces on New York life were particularly good. But "Tom Wolfe and His Magic Writing Machine" was first and foremost an indictment of Wolfe and his book, charging that the young writer used methods inappropriate to serious journalism and employed flawed sociological reasoning that mired his work in subjectivity and exposed the author's various bigotries. Macdonald weakened his case first by revealing his own prejudices--as both a head-hunting New Yorker staff writer and (arguably) as one of the class-conscious culture-makers that Wolfe's sociological premise seemed to attack--and next by attempting to second-guess Wolfe. Much of Macdonald's essay, particularly his attacks on Wolfe's "parajournalism" and on the author's alleged preference for certain cultural values, depended on critical inferences made with regard to Wolfe's viewpoint. However, Macdonald admitted that he had difficulty interpreting passages that had the potential to be taken either literally or ironically (hence the aforementioned "unpleasant ambivalence"). But having made this confession, he seemed to take such ambiguities at face value, and attacked Wolfe based on the resultant assumptions. (Besides the references to the older generation, Macdonald swallowed Wolfe's sly pronouncements on both Baby Jane and sensationalist tabloids whole without a thought given to viewpoint or context.)

Macdonald's essay proved to be archetypal. Many ensuing critiques took Wolfe at face value and proclaimed him champion of the teenage proles and race car drivers, noting the sociological theory at the heart of his book. In the New York Times Book Review (June 27, 1965), Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. interpreted Wolfe in much the same way Macdonald did, but came to a wholly opposite conclusion. Vonnegut said of Wolfe "[he] hates the East and the looks of old people. He is a dandy and a reverse snob." He pointed out Wolfe's disdain for the New York intellectual set and attributed it to "regional animosity." Vonnegut recognized, more so than Macdonald, the irony lingering in much of Wolfe's writing, but decided that the author had ultimately fooled himself: "Wolfe has proved to himself and to some others that teen-age culture is becoming dominant, so he casts himself as a teen-ager, a razzer of old folks and old establishments, the better to describe that culture. But he sounds hooked to me. . . . He is, like all teenagers, terribly annoyed by almost anything an American grownup not associated with automobiles may wear or say or do." But whereas Macdonald had stewed at length about Wolfe's New Yorker pieces, Vonnegut took appreciative notice of the "frightful, public gastrectomies . . . performed without anesthetics or rubber gloves . . ." and appeared equally unperturbed by Wolfe's palpable contempt for intellectuals and culture-bugs. And while Macdonald gave Wolfe only brief, grudging credit for his

verbal innovation, Vonnegut enjoyed the writer's flashy prose and seemingly endless storehouse of knowledge. Vonnegut concluded that Kandy was an "excellent book by a genius who will do anything to get attention."

But most of the critics who, like Macdonald, focused on the ramifications Wolfe's theories held for high culture and the implications for intellectuals and who (again, like Macdonald) took Wolfe's razzing of age and tradition at face value were far less congenial than Vonnegut.

If some of Macdonald's opinions were informed by a relatively overt class-consciousness, other like-minded critics were little short of snobbish. In his review of Kandy in the July 31, 1965 issue of the Saturday Review, Emile Capouya stated that "Mr. Wolfe's facts are addressed to the country cousins, rural and urban, among us, persons in whom the praise-worthy faculty of wonder is swelled beyond all praise to a promiscuous curiosity about the cultural junk of the modern world." Like Macdonald, he was quite unimpressed with Wolfe's espousal of a new prole order and concluded by asking "why should a talented writer compose dithyrambs on the manners and morals of the underbred, undereducated, and underevolved? One wants to say to Mr. Wolfe, you're so clever, you can talk so well, tell us something interesting."

Writing for The Reporter (August 12, 1965), Marvin Barrett criticized Wolfe's style for its excess, noting that

the writer "often became emotionally involved, not to say confused, with his subjects." But Barrett's distaste for the implications of Wolfe's introduction overshadowed these considerations: "Now, suddenly, we are told that what he purports to attempt is not nearly so modest as what he has accomplished. Not only is he 'the most contemporary writer in America today,' according to the copy on his book jacket; in his introduction he announces himself in clanging phrases as a kind of Saint-Simon of America's first unconscious avant-garde!" Barrett illustrated his objection to Wolfe's theories by quoting one of the same passages cited by Macdonald: "Baby Jane is the hyper-version of a whole new style of life in America. I think she is a very profound symbol." Both critics seemed to feel that this implied some level of endorsement on Wolfe's part and irately questioned the validity of imparting so much significance to a low-brow cultural icon. Barrett ended on a haughty note: "In fact [Wolfe's self-destruction] happens right before our horrified eyes. . . . But then, like the spectators at the demolition derbies and stock-car races Wolfe loves to write about, Americans apparently enjoy witnessing such disasters."

In the July 31, 1965 edition of the New York Times, Eliot Fremont-Smith looked at Kandy with sarcastic disapproval: "You don't get it? Too 'inside,' these jokes, too hip and kookie? . . . you are Out Of It, strictly from

Steubenville, just not one of the Beautiful People. You don't care? You don't want to be a B.P., a friend of Baby Jane and invited to Andy's parties and all? Of course you do! Better fey and even gay (the old adage goes) than a crude rube." Fremont-Smith proclaimed Wolfe the "voice of the throbbing teen-pop-campy underground" and sneered that his goal was to be taken seriously as a social critic. Wallace Markfield, reviewing for Book Week (June 27, 1965), also insisted that "Tom Wolfe demands, indeed cries bloody murder that he be taken 'seriously,' that he be given all the honors which fall to social critics of the highest order." Markfield needled Wolfe for his lack of respect for convention (with a disapproving reference to the "Tiny Mummies" series) and then devoted the majority of his essay to a parody of Wolfe's style. The Times Literary Supplement (March 17, 1966) said that Wolfe's style was "concocted out of the kandy-kultur of our paperback era . . . representative of the chocolate box culture . . ." and wondered ". . . is there not, after all, something condescending in this insistence on youthful 'prole vitality,' this scorn for the arteriosclerotic 'old boys' with their 'old babes,' the 'aging dolls'? The new aesthetic, it turns out, is as exclusive as the old." The publication did credit Wolfe, for better or worse, with creating the non-fiction short story and declared his New York-based articles to be his best.

Writing for The New Republic (July 24, 1965), critic Joseph Epstein claimed that Wolfe was "most fatiguing when writing about the lower classes . . . At bottom, what is involved here is worship of the Noble Savage." Epstein quoted George Orwell ("One thing they ought to keep in mind about the lower classes is that they smell.") in response to Wolfe's literary slumming and detected a note of "supreme reverse condescension" in Kandy. But Epstein's patronizing tone was shelved when he spoke of Wolfe's New York-oriented pieces: "Wolfe is much better when he leaves the Noble Savages lie and best of all when he writes about New York City. Here he drops his studied spontaneity, eases up on the rococo, slips his doctorate, and takes on the tones of the reasonably feeling New Yorker who has not yet been knocked insensate by the clatter of that city . . ."

But some critics eschewed the literal-mindedness of the Macdonaldesque reviewers and viewed Wolfe's sociological pronouncements and choice of subject matter as secondary considerations, overshadowed by the author's own idiosyncratic persona. In a review entitled "The Outsider is Very Much In" (Christian Science Monitor, July 8, 1965), Melvin Maddocks observed that "[Wolfe] can score solidly as an observer-critic of 'pop' society. He can also be a glib, fast-talking door-to-door salesman of what is in . . ." But he also noted Wolfe's ambivalence toward his subjects and even toward himself, noting that "at least half of what he

writes is a sort of elaborate self-parody." And whereas Macdonald insisted that Wolfe's popularity was the result of cultural slumming practiced by high-brows with guilty consciences, Maddocks believed that "He is, in his fascination with and horror of [his subjects] supremely American, supremely of the mid-1960's. Indeed, his fascination and horror take on the very gaudiness, the very vulgarity of what he is writing about. . . . he is himself part of the scene: he is, in the hip phrase, part of what is happening."

William Barrett, writing for The Atlantic (July 1965) made a nearly identical observation, stating that "the very vulgarity of his urge to be sophisticated, to be 'in,' is itself a revelation of what now preoccupies a whole generation of Americans," and labelling Wolfe "a remarkable reporter . . . who, by his talents and even more by his failings, manages to hold a slightly warped but fascinating mirror up to the contemporary American scene." Unlike many of the previous critics, Barrett felt that Wolfe was "at his best when he writes about what really interests him, such as the stock-car races in the South." Both Maddocks and the Barrett tended to overlook Wolfe's theories; yet their conclusion--that Wolfe was one element in a burgeoning cultural phenomenon-- was a central tenet of Kandy's introduction, which discussed both rising subcultures and Wolfe's union of style and subject.

In Commonweal (September 17, 1965), William James Smith observed, in much the same spirit as Maddocks and Barrett, that Wolfe was part of the world he purported to explain: "Wolfe is appalled and at the same time fascinated by the sight of Super Scuba-man advancing on us. . . . There is something of Super Scuba-man about Wolfe himself. His voice is one that has never been heard before and the intonations are the kind that raise the hair on the back of your neck." However, whereas the former two critics characterized Wolfe as a somewhat unwitting participant in the carnival he described, Smith seemed to recognize a certain cognizance on the author's part (a la Wolfe's style-to-subject-matter diatribe in the Kandy introduction): "Wolfe, at the age of thirty-two, realized that he had something special to say and his praised and excoriated style, I suspect, was merely an outgrowth of that realization." Smith defended Wolfe against critics who either parodied him or belittled his style for its novelty and ephemerality: "None of his parodists . . . has successfully captured much of the flavor of Wolfe. On the surface he seems a natural for the imitator . . . [but his parodists] miss the spark of personality that is more arresting than the funny punctuation. Wolfe has it, that magical quality that marks prose as distinctively one's own. It is not just a matter of tricks."

Smith also attempted to explain Wolfe's unpopularity in some literary quarters: "All new voices in writing are apt

to be reprobated. The reasons for this are implicit in human nature. Tom Wolfe's New Yorker articles are an interesting case in point. . . . The reaction was not so much to what Wolfe said as to the way he said it. Wolfe could be 'heard,' he had a voice that made you listen, he had a style. And it was a style that was no more a mere collection of gimmicks than, say, Whitman's was a hundred years ago when he raised a similarly self-confident voice." The question of Wolfe's subjectivity was only hinted at, as Smith noted that Wolfe used his "horrified yet affectionate" observations to document "all these weird forces taking over, closing in, not with any particular vicious impulse but moving with relentless, half-conscious force . . ." Smith, who found Wolfe's stock car piece "The Last American Hero" particularly scintillating, ended by quoting Emerson's assessment of Whitman's first book: "I greet you at the beginning of a great career. Yes!"

Stanley Reynolds (Manchester Guardian Weekly, March 10 1966) not only recognized Wolfe's style-to-subject merger, he suggested that it be the foundation for new journalistic institutions. "But if I were to start a new school of American writing as somebody starts a restaurant, I would base it on these pieces of Wolfe's reportage. For the break with the 'now' college professor and university-grant dominated American literary scene is as clear and final as . . . well, as Mark Twain's. . . . The style tends to obscure

the big time stuff inside, until you begin to see that with all its idiosyncrasies, it fits the subject just as Joyce's or Beckett's fit . . ." Reynolds accepted Wolfe's cultural Big Bang theory and noted that "he seems to think it is a pretty good idea." He proffered this explanation for critical rejection of Wolfe in certain intellectual circles: "[Wolfe's work] has that particular revolutionary touch--in style and content--that gets the established order hopping mad." And, as if in response to Macdonald (who charged that Wolfe would be forgotten soon because his style was faddish), Reynolds warned that "the danger for this book . . . is that it will be picked up as a piece of current chic by the smarties who can understand the pieces on Cassius Clay and Cary Grant and Nannies (the weaker pieces), and then dropped when the next chic comes along the pike. But who are the smarties anyway? Well, unfortunately they're the guys pushing the culture buttons."

But critic Richard Hoggart (Encounter, August 1966) was troubled by the fact that Wolfe seemed to be some integral part of the world he claimed to introduce. Hoggart began by noting "Almost all these essays are in fact about . . . the search for poise today, chiefly among young people. Mr. Wolfe calls it 'style' or more often, 'form.' The kinds of teen-ager he writes about are 'absolutely maniacal about form,' 'serious as always about form.' To have realised this is Wolfe's main insight. . . . It is not, of course, a new

insight and others have probed it more penetratingly." (Dwight Macdonald, whose essay Hoggart would later cite, made a similar observation.) Wolfe, he explained, was taking the McLuhanism "the medium is the message" to unwarranted extremes. Hoggart saw Wolfe as a malevolent Pied Piper, leading the culturally dispossessed down the road to oblivion: "Tom Wolfe's success, then, is ensured because in describing the search for poise, he also exhibits one kind of available poise. He says, by all the breathy implications of his confident prose, 'Look,it can be done.' And in doing so, he appeals not just to teen-agers, probably few of whom ever read him, but to a much wider range of people who may not be young but who nevertheless feel a similar difficulty in making sense of mass society." Hoggart decided that Wolfe was symptomatic rather than representative of the cultural evolution portrayed in Kandy, more a distasteful byproduct of the era than a legitimate reporter and observer: "[Wolfe's] style is the symptom of an important characteristic of modern mass communications. When this period's cultural history comes to be written one chapter ought to have the heading: It ain't what you do; it's the way you do it. Mr. Wolfe's medium, his stylistic poise, is more important than his message, his manner more than his matter. His spiritual sister is Baby Jane Holzer, the subject of one of his essays."

Hoggart's displeasure seemed to stem from an inability to organize Wolfe's myriad ambivalent references and viewpoint shifts into an orderly schemata and reconcile these with his own feelings towards Kandy's subjects. He stated that "the most important ingredient in the whole cocktail--if it is to serve its readers in the way they need--is not the fact that Tom Wolfe loves the material. It's that he also hates it. And that he usually manages to hold these two moods in suspension." Hoggart went on to say that "even though his criticisms may sometimes be sharp and brilliant, they are, in total effect, local. He never drives them home. . . . You have to keep all doors open, yet never fully go through any one . . . Acceptance must always keep at the back of the mind the idea of--not the acted fact of--rejection. Rejection must not close any doors . . . on the pleasures of acceptance. The delicate, iridescent film must never be quite broken, though it can be made to bend. . . . We are left feeling that we have never realised how glittering, how interesting in itself, the surface is until that long-legged fly [Wolfe] danced on it." However, Hoggart did attempt to second-guess Wolfe, and he determined that "Mr. Wolfe has no real critical distance. His dislike, when it comes out, comes out hard and the boat is only just saved from capsizing." Like Macdonald, he thought that Wolfe "hates and fears the thought of aging" and that this fear was attributable to "the old, old elemental retching at the

ephemerality of sexual allure, and nausea at its last gasps." Hoggart believed that the combination of frequent ambivalences and occasional concessions to personal bias allowed Wolfe to maintain an "elaborate balance" which, in turn, maintained his "poise." Although Hoggart felt that Wolfe perpetuated devotion to form over substance, he often recognized Wolfe's writing ability, granting that he had "considerable verbal talent" and "great "readability" and enumerating in detail the skills Wolfe employed in writing his best essays (particularly "The Last American Hero"), albeit in the service of "maintaining the poise."

C.H. Simonds, writing for the National Review (November 2, 1965) presented a decidedly anti-Macdonald viewpoint, going so far as to compare the critic's well-known cultural theories unfavorably with Wolfe's approach: "American culture, whatever that is, bears watching. The brahmin rumblings of an Edmund Wilson or the meat-cleaver Macdonald approach (He ought to know about Midcult!) won't do--or so one suspects after a heavy dose of Tom Wolfe." Simonds saw Wolfe not as a champion or a promoter of all things new, but as a fascinated observer and clever interpreter: "Wolfe is able to preserve a hard core of perceptiveness amid the riot and the wreck; always he poses and bravely tries to answer the frustrating question 'What (if anything) does it all mean?'" Though Simonds saw Wolfe mainly as an objective translator, he did detect varying degrees of approval (and

disapproval) from chapter to chapter. The infamous Baby Jane piece, which caused many critics to agonize over Wolfe's viewpoint, bothered Simonds little--Wolfe's portrait merely suggested that this vacuous young socialite was indicative of a society grown so affluent and culturally liberated that such frivolousness was tolerated and even patronized. Simonds believed that Wolfe's Junior Johnson/stock car racing epistle was among his best work, and he observed that "Wolfe's sympathies clearly lie with the country men whom Johnson represents--the unassimilated hill types who still live by a Code and who make good war heroes." He saw a dichotomy running through Kandy, a tension that pitted grass roots subcultures against mainstream institutions that would eventually assimilate and dilute them. Wolfe, in Simond's eyes, was a literary populist, a people's journalist championing old-fashioned American initiative and individualism over homogenizing cultural monoliths: "Wolfe, the darling of the campy set, the discoverer of outrageous new enthusiasms, the watcher of the gallery-walkers - Wolfe is on the side of the unengulfed: the racers, the customizers, the proles. But . . . it's an absolutely sure bet that any day Baby Jane, or whoever this year's Baby Jane is, will show up at the stock-car races in spray-on pants and eye makeup by Andy Warhol. Alas."

In the October-November, 1965, issue of The Critic, Thomas McDonnell endorsed Wolfe at the expense of his

detractors. ". . . the l.c. reviewers and U.C. Critics are still so set on what they themselves choose to talk about that they pathetically don't get the point about Tom Wolfe at all. The ironic part of it is that he has stated the case very clearly himself, and still the Dwight Macdonalds can't see what he is talking about . . . the steady obliteration of class cultural lines in the 20th [century] is quite something else again--and this is the chronicle that Tom Wolfe, almost alone, is helping to record for our time." McDonnell noticed that Wolfe had taken "something of the wonderful WHAP at The New Yorker" and added that "people started fainting all over the place and looking around for some kind of Defender of the Faithful, for suffering out loud, to arise and save them all, and this is where Dwight Macdonald was coming in, last time I looked, and for all I know he will have already pluperfectly slain the sheep in Wolfe's clothing that's been ravaging faint hearts up and down the eastern seaboard." Macdonald's initial attack, McDonnell said, had "all the energy of a wet firecracker." McDonnell, showing little sympathy for the intellectual set, believed that critics like Macdonald were after Wolfe rather than Kandy, to the extent that they offered little relevant analysis of the book itself. McDonnell thought that Wolfe had "original gifts and a fine sensitivity to the tensions and tempo of our great Megalopolis A-Go-Go," but he also insinuated that his flamboyance could become tedious and

that Kandy's articles would not be as relevant down the road. However, McDonnell felt that this was simply the nature of Wolfe's task (and of journalism in general), and that perhaps a certain ephemerality came with the territory. Comparing Wolfe to writers who concentrated on more timeless subjects, he noted that "Tom Wolfe is taking the risk to record the culture mutations of our time--in an idiom, too, which has to catch electric rather than linear rhythms only . . ."

Eric Lloyd (Wall Street Journal, September 8, 1965) shared a similar opinion of Wolfe's journalistic role. Like Simonds, he believed that Wolfe was a cultural translator for (and not an enemy of) middle America: "Mr. Wolfe proves himself a true observer of our mass-communication, celebrity-conscious times. . . . His forte is making the square felt at home in a round niche. In our depersonalized and frightening world he makes 'belonging' seem easy; it's just a question of doing the 'right' things that the 'right' people do; and if Mrs. Holzer is not the girl of this year, at least you'll know who is." Inherent in this statement was a recognition of Wolfe's ambivalence towards his subjects; Lloyd seemed to discern a healthy skepticism (rather than an urge to promote) on Wolfe's part. Like William James Smith, Lloyd insinuated that Wolfe's style was beyond imitation, going deeper than the superficial gestures which seemed to define it. Lloyd did not directly address Wolfe's role as

social commentator, nor did he comment on the style-to-subject matter linkage. He ended his review by remarking that "though Tom Wolfe is sometimes irritating, he is seldom boring and he wears the plastic mantle of the prophet of Pop with a Saville Row flair."

Malcolm Muggeridge (Esquire, August 1965) felt Wolfe was a valid and reasonably objective cultural translator. Paraphrasing Blake, Muggeridge said: "They ever must believe a lie Who see with, not through, the eye. When they fall into the habit, as so easily happens, of seeing with the eye (that is, reflecting rather than looking at the social and political scene; being the lens and not the eye behind the lens), someone like Wolfe has to come along who sees through the eye." Muggeridge, whose critique went into several lengthy digressions, never fully explained how this statement could be reconciled with the reality of Wolfe's charged prose and social pronouncing, but he did suggest that Wolfe, following his journalistic transformation, "never looked back. His excellent method is to go, to see, and then to write down what he has seen and thought. Note, what he has really thought; not what he was expected to think, or thought he ought to have thought, or thought he ought to have thought he ought to have thought. In other words, he brings a fresh, robust, entertainingly sardonic point of view to bear on such phenomena of our time as Las Vegas, The Voices of Village Square . . ." Muggeridge noted

Wolfe's attack on The New Yorker with gleeful approbation. "Even on this side of the Atlantic, we have heard about Wolfe's row with The New Yorker with a good deal of quiet chuckling and satisfaction. That dear old fat magazine arrives on my doormat week by week, and I flip over the pages in a desultory way, mostly marveling that such brilliant ads can enshrine such dull writing."

Choice magazine (September 1965) placed its faith in Wolfe's cultural analysis, noting Kandy's "structured studies of American 'culture levels' from lower to higher" and calling Wolfe "a sort of American Mod . . . a severely conscientious, comparatively objective guide . . . " The critique stated that "the book will undoubtedly be read by undergraduates who are social or sociologically-minded" and that "there is a lot of incidental and peripheral information for professors and parents too." Choice did find mild fault in that some of the material appeared a trifle dated: "the automobile sports which are certainly being covered by TV and other media, and are no longer esoteric." (However, this was addressed by Wolfe when, in his Kandy intro, he alluded to the gradual assimilation and dilution of subcultures by society, and by critic C. H. Simonds when he predicted the de-flowering of the unengulfed when Baby Jane and Andy showed up at the race track.) The review mused that "Wolfe's is a vivid, audacious, alert and individual

view of our times, take it or leave it. How does one leave it?"

A handful of reviews were too brief too provide significant fodder for discussion. The Kirkus Review (May 1, 1965) spent most of its brief critique parodying Wolfe's style (in more-or-less friendly fashion) and generally praising his stylistic hijinks. ("W-o-o-o-o-n-n-n-n-derful-l-l. FUN-N-N-NESS!") The review did note that Wolfe's New York-based pieces paled in comparison to the rest of the book.

In Publisher's Weekly (January 31, 1965), Barbara Bannon called Wolfe "the double-breasted, white-spatted, pop-op wunderkind of the New York Herald-Tribune" and commented that "Wolfe makes the scene, but his expositions on kultur nouveau are like steak with chocolate sauce--you gotta dig through the goo to get to the meat underneath." Frank N. Jones, whose review appeared in the Library Journal (June 1, 1965), said that Wolfe approached his subjects with "an entertaining mixture of satiric humor and sympathetic insight." He took cursory note of Wolfe's viewpoint shifts ("Style reflects the jargon of the moment among disc-jockeys, art patrons, . . .") and concluded that Kandy was "a jaunty report on odd-balls and others [that] will amuse many readers."

The Virginia Quarterly Review (uncredited, Autumn 1965) gave Wolfe good marks and lauded his verbal virtuosity, but

thought that he often plunged from topic to topic "with a fervor not always matched by a sense of direction . . ." This left the reader "overwhelmed by this display of his prowess, but at some small loss nonetheless in justifying the expenditure of so much raw energy upon such vulnerable objectives." This potentially loaded criticism went unexplored, however, and the reviewer finished this short-take by complimenting Wolfe on the basis of his "not inconsiderable humorous resources" and observing that his short pieces were best because they "manage to register a perceptible impact before his uninhibited hyperbole defeats itself by inducing plain somnolence."

Maurice Dolbier (New York Herald-Tribune, June 28, 1965) wrote a relatively brief review notable mainly for the gushing reverence it exhibited towards the critic's friend and fellow Herald-Tribune employee. Dolbier's premise was that Wolfe possessed a talent too large to be contained within the stuffy confines of New York, and that the writer needed to move away in order to "see with his artist's and reporter's eye the things that are happening in and to this wide, wild country and to write about them with the forceful precision and the fiery candor and the comic stabs that are wasted on the ridiculous preciousnesses of this week's New York Ins and next week's New York Outs." Although Dolbier believed that Wolfe's New York pieces were merely good while his others were "masterly," he remarked that "Tom Wolfe's

New York . . .is as much an imaginative creation (and a reporting of reality) as O. Henry's Baghdad-on-the-Subway and Runyon's guys-and-dolls and Henry Miller's stinking cesspool."

Newsweek (June 28, 1965) took some pleasure in Wolfe's skewering of The New Yorker and declared that Wolfe would survive when New Yorker champions came "galumphing out of the reviewers' bull pens with horns lowered." But this observation notwithstanding, Newsweek's critique stood out in that it avoided discussion grounded in either New York literary politics or social science. Instead, the review noted that Wolfe had "created . . . anger and delight . . . with the most primitive of writer's weapons--language. . . . Wolfe instinctively knows that a word is a supercharged mixture of sense and mind stimuli, and he is not afraid to act on that instinct. He hits as many senses as he can with his linguistic bazooka, knowing that the mind will be waiting for the final impact." The Newsweek reviewer said Wolfe was part poet-journalist and part new breed journalist with "supereducated hip sensibilities," noting that his best pieces had the "fictive music" of a poet or novelist. The magazine held out its highest praise for "The Last American Hero" ("the mythic lilt and velocity of a story by Faulkner") and "Putting Daddy On" (a New York-themed piece). The review concluded, in a paragraph cited contemptuously by Dwight Macdonald, that Wolfe would be reread over the years

with "sharp pleasure" and that he would eventually achieve literary success of the highest order.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS

With some noted exceptions, critics of The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby could be filed into three distinct categories: the "Macdonaldesque" critics, who rejected or resisted Wolfe's pop sociology; the critics who recognized but sidestepped the sociological ramifications of Kandy; and the critics who based their arguments on acceptance of Wolfe as a social commentator and cultural interpreter.

Those reviews which fell into a mode similar to that of Macdonald's "parajournalism" essay were generally characterized by a focused aversion to Wolfe's claim that he was reporting a new cultural universe rising up in defiance of old-world high culture. This reaction often manifested itself in distasteful references to Wolfe's new-world subjects. Macdonald implied that stock car racers, car customizers, and the like were vulgar, things not worthy of the concern of cultured people (New York Review of Books, August 26, 1965.) Emile Capouya (Saturday Review, July 31, 1965) declared haughtily that Wolfe's essays were intended for the "country cousins" with a "promiscuous curiosity" about "cultural junk" and concluded that Wolfe's talent was wasted on the "underbred, undereducated, and underevolved."

Joseph Epstein (The New Republic, July 24, 1965) believed that much of Kandy was tantamount to "worship of the Noble Savage" and quoted Orwell: "One thing they ought to keep in mind about the lower classes is that they smell."

Since Wolfe was purporting to introduce a world with which the Dwight Macdonalds and Richard Hoggarts were obviously ill-at-ease, these particular critics tended to attribute to the author attitudes wholly in support of the attendant phenomena. Throughout Kandy, Wolfe engaged in shifting of viewpoint, changing voice (often from paragraph to paragraph) in order to give multiple perspectives on his subject matter. These reviewers ignored such subtleties and ascribed to Wolfe all voices which spoke contemptuously of age and tradition. Macdonald, for example, noted that Wolfe made frequent reference to "arteriosclerotic, larded adults" (a favorite phrase). A moderately careful reader might easily make the case that Wolfe used such references to reveal the nature of his younger subjects' prejudices--that he was speaking from their point-of-view. Macdonald, however, discerned none of the irony in these passages. Instead, he asserted that Wolfe's overriding theme was "old [it] bad, new [it] good" and that Wolfe was motivated by his own waning youth to cling to the warped fashions and values of the young.

Several other reviewers followed suit. Eliot Fremont-Smith (New York Times, July 31, 1965) sarcastically chided

readers for not being as hip to the "beautiful people" as Wolfe. The Times Literary Supplement regretted Wolfe's "scorn for the arteriosclerotic 'old boys' with their 'old babes'" and said that his "new aesthetic" was "as exclusive as the old."

Although many reviews mentioned Wolfe's "Tiny Mummies" escapade, the incident was most likely to be viewed disapprovingly by the Macdonald-mold critics. Macdonald himself fired the loudest shot at Wolfe in that regard, spending several paragraphs at the end of his lengthy essay complaining about the attack on The New Yorker. And although many critics could not resist the temptation to throw in a few passages written in Wolfish prose, these critiques often contained jeering imitations. Wallace Markfield (Book Week, June 27, 1965) devoted three-quarters of a 1,000-plus word essay to a disjointed and largely pointless Wolfe parody.

With the lone exception of Kurt Vonnegut (New York Times Book Review, June 27, 1965), who approached Kandy possessing somewhat similar biases but ultimately found it much to his liking, the critics who fell within the Macdonald classification treated Wolfe's first book with guarded ambivalence at best (a la The Times Literary Supplement or Epstein in The New Republic) and utter contempt at worst (Macdonald). Although the reviewers in question made occasional references to problems inherent in Wolfe's style (like Macdonald, who felt that his writing was

too modish and idiosyncratic and therefore of little significance in the long run), arguments to this effect invariably took a back seat to ideological considerations. Indeed, resistance to Wolfe's new style of journalism seemed to be directly correlated to resistance to his new world of subcultures.

If Macdonald and others rejected Wolfe's theories outright and tended to prejudice all critical evaluation accordingly, then the critics in the second category were inclined to give limited recognition to Kandy's social themes. These critics universally recognized that Wolfe, with his outlandish method, was part of the colorful scene he was trying to report, but ultimately failed (or hesitated) to understand fully the significance of that world within the context of the Kandy introduction. Melvin Maddocks (Christian Science Monitor, July 8, 1965) and William Barrett (The Atlantic, July 1965) connected Wolfe to a cultural explosion but failed to place this explosion in the context of his introductory remarks. Both publications characterized Wolfe as taking on the "vulgarity" of his subjects in his attempt to be "in," insinuating that perhaps Wolfe had taken a somewhat unwitting role in the lunatic's passion play around him.

However, Wolfe's Kandy introduction outlines a very conscious decision to break away from "totem" (traditional) journalism in order to report adequately the new styles of

the 1960's. William James Smith (Commonweal, September 17, 1965) and Stanley Reynolds (Manchester Guardian Weekly, March 10, 1966) more correctly observed that what Wolfe had actually done was match style to subject matter.

Richard Hoggart (Encounter, August 1966) was likewise concerned with Wolfe's role as both a cultural reporter and a cultural phenomenon, but his analysis was tempered with Macdonald-like prejudices. Hoggart pointed out that Wolfe's favorite subject was style (referred to as "poise"), and that in the process of reporting it, he had become a purveyor of style by way of his new journalism. Hoggart (like Macdonald) believed that Wolfe was basically enamored with youth and all things frivolous, and he expressed sharp disapproval at the thought of Wolfe leading others down a path that ended at junk culturedom. He concluded that Wolfe was "symptomatic (of the times) rather than representative," and that his work was a hollow triumph of style over substance. Ironically, this essay contained several ringing testaments to Wolfe's verbal talent. But Hoggart, perhaps blind to his own appreciation of the book, was unable to accept the "poise" offered therein, whether it was that of the author himself or that of his "vulgar" young subjects.

If the first group of critics was "Macdonaldesque," then the third group might well be labelled the "anti-Macdonalds"; both C. H. Simonds (National Review, November 2, 1965) and Thomas McDonnell (The Critic, October-November

1965) skewered the venerable intellectual in the course of their Kandy evaluations. Simonds sensed that Macdonald was missing the point when it came to American culture--"the meat-cleaver Macdonald approach (he ought to know about Midcult!) won't do"--while McDonnell noted that the "parajournalism" essay had "all the energy of a wet firecracker." Unlike Macdonald, these critics accepted Wolfe not only as a writer, but as a social commentator as well. Wolfe, they believed, possessed both unique insight (contrast with Macdonald, who thought he had none at all, or Maddocks, who implied that Wolfe was unaware of his role) and reasonable objectivity (Macdonald and Hoggart both claimed that Wolfe was too close to his subjects.)

Simonds in particular exhibited a heightened understanding of Wolfe. Where others had assumed that Wolfe was somehow promoting all of the phenomena represented in Kandy, Simonds cleverly weaved his way through the book's complex infrastructure of irony, tongue-in-cheekism and shifting viewpoint and found not a "razzer of old folks" (Vonnegut, New York Times Book Review, June 27, 1965), but a staunch individualist who admired those aspects of new culture that were characterized by integrity and boldness of heart and who was somewhat at odds with those who defiled that pioneering spirit. Simonds skillfully drove this point home when he observed that "it's an absolutely sure bet that

any day Baby Jane . . . will show up at the stock-car races in spray-on pants and eye makeup by Andy Warhol. Alas."

Not all of these critics fit perfectly into the taxonomy assigned them--any such attempt at rigid classification necessarily retains a sense of artificiality. One might contend, for instance, that Richard Hoggart would fall in either the first or second categories, while William James Smith and Stanley Reynolds might be placed in the third rather than the second. One might choose instead to remove these labels, thus revealing a spectrum of criticism with clearly marked gradations of opinion ranging from Dwight Macdonald at one end to C.H. Simonds at the other. These gradations represent the degree to which each critic understood and accepted Wolfe's central sociological premise. Not surprisingly, the spectrum also charts the range of opinion concerning Kandy and finds that it moves, with only slight oscillation, in direct accordance with critical appraisal of that premise. Macdonald detested Wolfe's pronouncements and likewise detested Kandy. Simonds thought Wolfe was on target with his theories and gave his book unreserved endorsement.

Thomas McDonnell (The Critic, October-November 1965) astutely observed that among the Kandy critics, "hardly anyone has reviewed the book in hand" and that "it is Tom Wolfe they are after, not TKKTFSB itself." McDonnell pointed out that "they don't get the point about Tom Wolfe

at all. The ironic part of it is that he has stated the case very clearly himself, and still the Dwight Macdonalds can't see what he is talking about--largely, one guesses, because it would involve the wholesale re-examination of their own particular values and their by now totally solidified modes of expression . . ." What Macdonald failed to grasp, said McDonnell, was "the obliteration of class cultural lines" in 20th century America. Indeed, Macdonald interpreted the cultural revolution that Wolfe portended in cursory, dismissive fashion, claiming that Wolfe's subjects were not that novel because "others have discovered our teen-age culture, including myself, seven years ago, in a New Yorker series . . ." Richard Hoggart similarly ignored the greater significance of Wolfe's work, stating that "almost all these essays are in fact about . . . the search for poise today, chiefly among young people. . . . It is not, of course, a new insight and others have probed it more penetratingly."

What Macdonald and Hoggart failed to see was that Wolfe went beyond merely reporting unique lifestyles. The real story behind Kandy was not oddball hobbies, but the rise of the modern world's first major free-market, post-industrial culture; a culture that often saw the flow of ideas travel from the bottom to the top. In the Kandy introduction, Wolfe said that "throughout history . . . [style] has been something the aristocracy has been responsible for. What has happened in the United States since World War II, however,

has broken that pattern. The war created money. It made massive infusions of money into every level of society. Suddenly classes of people whose styles of life had been practically invisible had the money to build monuments to their own styles."

In short, Kandy was about the cultural manifestations of capitalism. Wallace Markfield ably summarized Wolfe's position (albeit in disapproving fashion) in his review (Book Week, June 27, 1965): "I mean it's a changing ethos, eeey-thoss, the way Ringo Starr would say it, and CAPITALISMUS is inching into the shire like Junior Johnson on a dirt track, and the burghers are taking over--alackaday!" Wolfe believed that only a society devoted to free markets and other such principles of individualism, one where the "lower classes" made enough money to purchase cars and televisions, could produce something as colorful and diverse as American culture. Ultimately, Wolfe's own style of journalism, which flew in the face of staid conventions in much the same way that car customizers defied old-world culture-makers, reflected this capitalistic spirit.

For further proof of Wolfe's agenda, one need only look at his career in the ensuing years. That he was a conservative became increasingly evident, despite the doggedly nonpartisan stance he maintained in early interviews. Eventually, Wolfe would come to accept the "conservative" label, admitting that "it doesn't bother me,

particularly when I consider the alternative" (Alvin P. Sanoff, U.S. News and World Report, November 23, 1987). Throughout his career, Wolfe has been a staunch critic of both socialism and of the intellectual set that embraced it. His most forceful indictment came in the form of "The Intelligent Coed's Guide to America" (Mauve Gloves & Madmen, Clutter & Vine, November 1976), an essay devoted to mocking leftist intellectuals who proclaimed the death of American capitalism and the rise of fascism while surrounded by prosperity and contentment. American thinkers, Wolfe said, held the prominent European socialist intellectuals up as role models: "the Stainless Steel Socialist glistening against the bone heap of capitalism in its final, brutal, fascist phase." Pointing to the results of Soviet Communism, Wolfe concluded that "there was a bone heap, all right, and it was grisly beyond belief, but socialism had created it."

In both the Introduction to Kandy and the Preface to The Pump House Gang, Wolfe explained how the intellectuals sought to control culture in much the same way that statist governments controlled economies: "Now, this [American culture] is not exactly what the great Utopian thinkers of the nineteenth century . . . had in mind when they envisioned a world of the future in which the ordinary working man would have the time and the money to extend his God-given potential to the fullest. . . . the worker-paradise industrialism would make possible was to take a

somewhat more pastoral form. . . . In short, a community, with everyone, great and small, knit together forever after, grateful as spaniels. . . . the whole family would hold hands and walk up to the Culture Center to watch the Shock Workers of the Dance do a ballet called 'Factory'" (The Pump House Gang, August, 1968). Wolfe noted that the Culture Centers did indeed sprout up in the 1960's, but that the people left them to the "cultivated, educated classes, the 'diploma elite,' who created them."

The writers on the far left of the imaginary spectrum of Kandy critics (the Macdonald end) seemed to be of the same stripe and color as the socialist, cultural dogmatists whom Wolfe described in Kandy and Pump House, to the extent that his introductory essays often anticipated their critical responses. Wolfe stated in Kandy that despite the meteoric rise of hundreds of significant new cultural forms, most of the thinkers considered such matters "beneath serious consideration." He insisted that "people are creating new styles all the time and changing the life of the whole country in ways that nobody even seems to bother to record, much less analyze." True to form, Macdonald and company worked themselves into a snobbish, high-brow dither with every mention of the "new prole aesthetic," dismissing the principles involved and peppering their reviews with references to "noble savages" and the "underevolved." Not a few of these critics tried to characterize Wolfe as an aging

status-seeker, trying to hold on to youth by glorifying the old at the expense of the new (thus Macdonald's "old he bad, new he good"). However, Wolfe's personal and professional habits would seem to refute this contention. Wolfe was and is an elegant, well-mannered Southerner who once confessed that he wore blue jeans when writing as a means of discipline because he knew he would be too embarrassed to leave his house while wearing them. His old-style dandyism was so much a part of his nature that, by all accounts, he wore an expensive white suit for the duration of his travels with Ken Kesey's acid freaks on their dilapidated bus.

Wolfe dispelled the notion that he hated old people in Kandy's "A Sunday Kind of Love," an ode to the relative tranquility of New York Sundays. Wolfe stripped away irony and revealed the inner machinery of his shifting viewpoints when he described "one of those old dolls with little flabby arms . . . [who] holds everybody up because she is so flabby and decrepit . . . and today, Sunday, on good, clean, empty 14th Street, she just looked like a nice old lady. There was no one around to make her look slow, stupid, unfit, unhip, expendable. . . . The weasel millions were absent." It is not likely that Wolfe, who often seemed like some real-life Dickensian portrait of aristocracy, hated old people and old ways. It is far more likely that Macdonald hated that which was young and new, and, more importantly, that which was

prole. What Wolfe hated was hegemony--Socialism, whether it manifested itself in politics or culture.

Nowhere did Wolfe more accurately foretell the reactions of his critics than in that portion of the Kandy introduction where he discussed Baby Jane Holzer. He described reader reactions to the piece after its initial appearance in New York magazine: "A lot of readers were enraged. They wrote letters . . . they would confront me in restaurants . . . and in all of it I kept noticing the same thing. Nobody ever seemed to be able to put his finger on what he was enraged about. Most of them took the line that the Herald Tribune had no business paying that much attention to such a person and such a life as she was leading. Refreshing! Moral Outrage!" Almost as if he were baiting a trap, Wolfe concluded that "there's nothing freakish about it. Baby Jane is the hyper-version of a whole new style of life in America." Like the angry Herald-Tribune readers, Macdonald bristled over Baby Jane and demanded to know "why Baby Jane is not freakish [and] why she is a profound symbol of new American style. . . . [Wolfe's] articles on her . . . lead me to opposite conclusions . . ." Marvin Barrett quoted the "profound symbol" passage with similar irritation. Both Barrett and Macdonald looked at Wolfe's treatment of Holzer expecting particular value judgements concerning her lifestyle. Neither critic was able to understand that Holzer represented a triumph of prole

aesthetics--the triumph of a society grown wealthy enough to elevate low-brow status seekers and junk culture byproducts to glamorous heights.

If Macdonald represented the left endpoint of the imaginary progression of Wolfe's critics, then Melvin Maddocks (Christian Science Monitor) and William Barrett (The Atlantic) occupied dead center. These critics were more open to Kandy's subject matter, yet couldn't grasp its significance. Maddocks called Wolfe "an observer-critic of 'pop' society" and "a glib, fast-talking door-to-door salesman of what is 'in,' peddling with a hard sell what his despised New Yorker has done for so long with a soft sell." But Wolfe didn't want to sell hipness; he wanted to explain a phenomenon. Maddocks didn't get past the forms and roles Wolfe reported to see the process he was outlining. Barrett made a similar error, touching on the superficial elements of Wolfe's work without comprehending its essence. He saw that "the very vulgarity of his urge to be sophisticated, to be 'in,' is itself a revelation of what now preoccupies a whole generation of Americans." Once again, the process was ignored. That thing which "preoccupie[d] a whole generation of Americans" was not a phase but a major cultural transition, and Wolfe wished to report it.

At the right end of the hypothetical critical spectrum sat C.H. Simonds of the National Review, with critics such as Thomas McDonnell and Malcolm Muggeridge falling in close

proximity. Simonds realized that Wolfe was attempting to go beyond simple recognition of new lifestyles in order to "speculate upon the larger implications of such phenomena." He recognized Wolfe as a seeker of knowledge rather than a seeker of status: "Wolfe is able to preserve a hard core of perceptiveness . . . always he poses and bravely tries to answer the frustrating question 'What (if anything) does it all mean?'" Simonds faced down the Baby Jane dilemma with none of Macdonald's impotent rage. ". . . but what does she mean? She represents the triumph of what Wolfe calls 'Pop Society'--a society, and indeed, a whole culture, drawn from the lower strata, the bohemians, the proles." More than any other critic, Simonds was able to navigate Wolfe's hairpin turns of viewpoint, thus avoiding the trap of labelling Wolfe a would-be hipster and cultural snake-oil salesman: "Wolfe, the darling of the campy set, the discoverer of outrageous new enthusiasms, the watcher of the gallery-walkers--Wolfe is on the side of the unengulfed: the racers, the customizers, the proles." As a conservative, Simonds understood that individualism lay at the heart of capitalism and classical liberalism, and that recognition of diversity did not necessarily imply approval of every aspect of it. He sensed that Wolfe admired the courage of Junior Johnson and the innovation of the car customizers, and that perhaps he was less enthusiastic when confronted with the likes of Baby Jane.

It was quite significant that very few critics (Newsweek was the chief exception) reviewed The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby without discussing the larger social and cultural issues raised by Tom Wolfe in the book's introduction. The resultant round of critical appraisals provided what was in essence a panel discussion on the merits of capitalism, specifically as it related to cultural development. Reviewers such as Dwight Macdonald, Emile Capouya and Richard Hoggart balked at the prospect of a "new prole vitality" and exhibited various critical biases stemming from their preference for old-style, trickle-down "statist" cultural norms. At the center of the debate stood critics like Melvin Maddocks, who demonstrated less prejudice but who begged the question when faced with the larger significance of Kandy. The right wing of this hypothetical panel was manned by C.H. Simonds, Thomas McDonnell and Malcolm Muggeridge, who understood (and perhaps endorsed) the notion of cultural capitalism. And while it is quite possible that not all of the critics on the "left" of this debate would choose to espouse socialism as a viable economic policy, it is significant that the endpoints of this spectrum are marked by Dwight Macdonald, a liberal, and Simonds, a conservative.

Kandy represented the first skirmish in an ongoing conflict between Wolfe and the legions of left-leaning intellectuals. Resistance to socialistic hegemonies would

become a central theme in his career. His next book, The Pump House Gang, continued in the same vein as Kandy, exploring the subcultures of a financially empowered proletariat, and elaborated further on the nature of the new prole vitality and the elites who abhorred it. In The Painted Word and From Our House to Bauhaus, Wolfe criticized the art and architecture communities, both of which, he contended, were dominated by a small number of theorists who were oblivious to public preference or traditional notions of artistic excellence. Wolfe best summarized his struggle against cultural monoliths in a November 1987 by Alvin P. Sanoff interview in U.S. News & World Report. Wolfe recalled a reporter who approached him at the 25th anniversary party of the National Review and asked whether the event was a gathering of prominent neoconservatives. Wolfe told the man that "as far as I could tell, most of those in attendance had never seen each other before but all in one way or another have thumbed their noses at the prevailing intellectual orthodoxy over the past quarter-century. That's sort of the position I see myself in--and I'm comfortable with that."

In the 28 years since The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby was published, events would seem to have added strength to Tom Wolfe's arguments. Wolfe sought to draw attention to the revolutionary forces that were redefining the relationship between economics and culture;

he wished to put America's cultural expansion into perspective by demonstrating that no society had ever permitted individualism to thrive on such a scale, to the point that ego extension became more a right than a luxury at every class level. Today, American cultural forms and icons are dominant in countries throughout the world. Ways of life have continued to rise up from the prole and burgher classes rather than seeping down from on high. MTV, Michael Jackson, video games--the American Experience has produced freakish wonders that not even the most astute prognosticator would have foretold scant decades ago. Wolfe's hated intellectuals either denied this evolution or fought it tooth and nail when he first presented the evidence in the pages of Kandy. Richard Hoggart epitomized this particular group of elites and extended the capitalist vs. socialist analogy when he observed that "In Russia the authorities fear that to expose their people to the open, multitudinous play of messages in a 'free' consumers' society would be to risk making them dissident. . . . the Russian authorities are mistaken. The best way to keep their people from seeking alternative goals would be to flood them with 'data,' to offer them the chance to become anxious only about 'form,' so that they came to believe that goals are out and poise in" (Encounter, August 1966). But if Wolfe saw drawbacks to America's new liberation, he shared none of Hoggart's haughty concern: "I, for one, will be content

merely to watch the faces of our leaders, political and intellectual, the day they wake up and look over their shoulders and catch the first glimpse of their erstwhile followers--streaking--happy workers!--in precisely the opposite direction, through God's own American ozone--apocalyptic riders!--astride their own custom versions --enjoy!--of the 300-horsepower Chevrolet V-8 engines of this world . . . riding bareback . . ." (The Pump House Gang, August 1968).

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