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The Dialectics of Class and Postcolonialism in
Cities of the Red Night

Authors by nature of their writing activities enter into a dialogue with the society that surrounds them, as well as their readers. For postcolonial writers this dialogue also includes the society of the coloniser. Yet, writing is a function of class as well; textual artefacts are inextricably tied to economic conditions past, present and future. All of these elements flicker in and out of focus in the myriad texts that facilitate the legacy of a culture. Texts are microcosms of their attendant culture(s). The academic John McLeod offers some perspective on colonialism's ongoing influence, saying that "colonialism's historical and cultural consequences remain very much a part of the present" (p4; TRCtPS). Withdrawal of the coloniser (or imperialist) does not remove, or even perhaps diminish, the socio-cultural effects of colonisation. One way this is reflected is in the colonised culture's texts. Socio-cultural behaviours as well as the coloniser's worldview remain in the colonised culture, influencing many streams of discourse flowing through the indigenous culture; domination and influence do not cease being issues when physical presence ends. Postcolonial discourse consists of attempts at "resisting, challenging and even transforming prejudicial forms of knowledge in the past and present" (p5; TRCtPS). The American author William S. Burroughs takes part in such discourse while simultaneously engaging with readers who are not generally perceived as being part of his ostensible audience.

  In the first two decades of his writing, William S. Burroughs primarily addressed an 'outsider' or marginalist audience. The author Barry Miles has described this audience as "a cognoscenti of the avant-garde and hipster" (p2; WB: EHI). This audience was a singular one; socio-culturally dispersed, often isolated from any broader context. With his novel *Cities of the Red Night* Burroughs perhaps sought to address another audience as well: that of the privileged, white America of his birth. In addressing such an audience Burroughs seeks to 'unmask' or reveal those discomfiting paradigms or truths that underpin contemporary Western society, especially in the United States of America. On the surface this may seem a contradictory agenda, of almost Sisyphean proportions. This is in no small part due to Burroughs' blatant foregrounding of such seemingly outré themes as drug addiction, homosexuality, ritual magic, the grotesque and others which render any sort of appeal to more traditional audiences a bit ludicrous. Yet, the deployment of such themes may be seen as an element in a process of (postcolonial) reader destabilisation, perhaps even liberation; an ironic undermining of bourgeois white, or traditionally American, paradigms so that they may be re-imagined and recast. This process could easily be interpreted as perhaps a partial parody of that most bourgeois of literary forms, the novel.

Parodist elements may be deployed by Burroughs to slyly radicalise the same privileged, white (bourgeois) audience. Although the use of parody implies that Burroughs desires to undermine certain basic socio-cultural assumptions, it may also be indicative of fear or ambivalence on some level. Parody and destabilisation are part of Burroughs' dialogue with his audience; a temporary de-masking and delimiting of the socio-cultural, within a textual space.

One possible rationale for Burroughs' attempt at such a re-engagement with his socio-cultural past may be that he came to a realisation that the perceived radical or revolutionary nature of his early novels and texts limited their wider impact. Burroughs had, in his own way, been 'preaching to the choir' and he desired at that time (late 1970's) to bring about change on a broader cultural basis. Connecting with a wider audience also entailed connecting with, on some level, the broader cultural currents at work in mainstream society. These broader social currents were in all probability quite similar to those Burroughs encountered as a youth in St. Louis and as a young man at Harvard (p 15-81; LO). However, it may just also be Burroughs merely desired a wider audience and greater success; needs possibly reflective of his bourgeois upbringing. Whatever Burroughs' intentions might have been, they do not invalidate the possible destabilising effects of his novel's text upon a wider, more conventional audience.

Burroughs' novels are often viewed by critics as exemplars of 'postmodern', 'revolutionary' or 'transgressive' fiction, as well as being adjudged "pseudo-literary pornography" (p8; WUtM) by detractors. Burroughs has himself been described as "the man who saw the abyss and came back to report on it" (p1; WB:EHI). Such perceptions, though somewhat valid, would seem to minimise possibilities for examination of any broader cultural interpretation. For example, 'transgressive fiction' may be broadly defined as "a literary genre characterized by graphic exploration of taboo topics, to which the work of writers such as the Marquis de Sade and William Burroughs belongs. It is based on the belief that knowledge is to be found at the very edge of human experience," (http://encarta.msn.com/dictionary1861721468/ transgressive_fiction.html). This sort of categorisation (and linkage with De Sade) certainly creates a cultural hurdle when courting a more conventional audience. Similar critical stances overtly foreground a number of notorious thematic elements found in Burroughs' texts at the expense of those less obviously controversial, critically and otherwise. Even though transgression may indeed be a component of *Cities of the Red Night*, there are other aspects worthy of critical scrutiny as well. A less-obvious line of critical enquiry is that Burroughs may actually be attempting engagement with certain white, Euro-American middle-class values; a strategy going beyond mere literary *épater le bourgeois*. Although Burroughs' engagement with such values (and attendant audience) takes the form of parody and the grotesque most obviously, it does not preclude the existence of other strategies. The use of shocking imagery may destabilise while perhaps making the reader more amenable to less confrontational concepts; an authorial misdirection or thematic Trojan horse taking advantage of reader confusion or vulnerability. Alternatively,

readers choosing to interact with such a text may view themselves transgressive but are in actuality participating in a more conventional cultural and imaginative rite.

Burroughs was inducted into the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters in 1983 (p1; LO); an august and respected institution not exactly known for transgressive behaviour. This event associated Burroughs with a much more mainstream intellectual and institutional discourse than previously. Though popularised as an 'outsider' or even 'counterculture' author, Burroughs was actually speaking from the *inside*; a writer coming from a background of socio-economic privilege (p 18-65; LO). Burroughs was not merely fomenting potential radicalism amongst the disenfranchised; he was addressing the educated elite of which he was ostensibly a part. No matter how transgressive, he still on some level represents and sets forth a white male hegemonic program that is based upon values inculcated in him by his white and privileged upbringing (e.g., an advantaged youth in St. Louis, university education at Harvard, trust fund beneficiary, etc.). Such an ability to transgress or move amongst socio-cultural strata is a product of privilege and is conferred by the same. Because Burroughs' ability to 'transgress' or put forth seemingly radical ideas is a product of white male privilege this may, for some, limit the relative value of such ideas. Burroughs use of pulp or (bourgeois) historical forms along with parody is not only transgressive, but an attempt at conversation. In this way, he partakes of a tradition at least as old as the writings of Jonathan Swift. This creates a slippery sort of tension between Western cultural privilege and a more democratic or proletarian (libertarian) American post-colonialism.

The 'pirate' colonies found in *Cities of the Red Night* possess an almost 'Peter Pan'-like quality. These colonies appear to be an expression of boyhood fantasies stirred by pulp fiction from the early twentieth century (especially that from the U. S. A.). It is a land of boy scouts and pirates; these are boys seemingly without parents (with one male exception, the father of Noah Blake) or limits of any kind. They enjoy the privileges of adulthood without adult responsibilities or regrets, generally. These young males bear a close similarity to the ostensible followers of Captain Mission; they are "liberty lovers" (xi; CotRN). These boys are rugged *individuals* in keeping with the almost mythic American frontier and the revolutionary mentalities embedded in the *white* socio-cultural matrix of the United States of America. These boys are in their own way "stereotyped characters, surface motivations with a child's casual cruelty" (p167; CotRN).

Burroughs' experiences at the Los Alamos Ranch School for boys may have somewhat influenced his later thoughts relative to such an idealised society and its self-reliant participants, even though he personally found his stay depressing at best (p 42-55; LO). Burroughs' vision reads as *exclusively* libertarian; white male fantasies coloured by an almost adolescent narcissism. In this context, 'libertarianism' can be defined as the contention that "the scope and powers of government should be constrained so as to allow each individual as much freedom of action as is consistent with a like freedom for everyone else"

(http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/339321/ libertarianism). Or, more simply put "you should be free to do as you choose with your own life and property, as long as you don't harm the person and property of others" (http://www.libertarianism.com/what-it-is.htm). Such a view would not only appeal to 'middle-of-the-road' or status quo-minded individuals (and privileged classes), but a broader population desiring equality and opportunity (or illusion thereof) as well. Such a socio-political setting provides Burroughs the platform for addressing the privileged class of his upbringing, with its multi-generational hegemony up to and including the contemporary United States of America. Burroughs does this while using a popular form (i.e., the novel) to appeal to a broader audience. The novel is itself a product of privilege in part because it is time and resource-intensive. Burroughs even offers in his novel a palliative for white guilt by saying that the "white man is retroactively relieved of his burden" (xiv; CotRN). Seen in this way, Burroughs may be imagining an alternate version of Enlightenment revolution; the result of this exercise being an (initially) idealised libertarian society. Through this construction, a "retroactive Utopia" (xiv; CotRN), he can address the ghosts of colonial Europe and colonised Americas via the primacy of the individual. Burroughs implicitly sets up his construction against 'other' dreams; an alternative to a bourgeois milieu of consumerism, privilege and colonial/imperialist power.

Burroughs' form of post-colonialism is almost colonial in its approach to other races and peoples. Although Burroughs' treatment of non-white, non-Europeans is ostensibly 'better' than what those same peoples suffered under most white colonialism this does not mitigate Burroughs' elitist worldview as propagated in *Cities of the Red Night*. Burroughs often identifies characters by their role, race or gender; objectifying the 'other' in a manner reminiscent of a coloniser. Examples of this sort of labelling are descriptors such as "the boy", "my boy" (p7; CotRN), "Chinese boy", "a mixture of Arab and Negro stock" (p8; CotRN), "gypsy" (p188; CotRN), "mulatto" (p196; CotRN), "krauts" (p234; CotRN) and "sow" (p200; CotRN). Narrative voices are often white and exclusively male, from Farnsworth to Audrey, from Clem Snide to Noah Blake. In the novel Burroughs speaks *for* colonised and subject peoples; a sort of 'ventriloquism' purveyed by the affected and afflicted coloniser.

The colonised in *Cities of the Red Night* do not speak with a voice that is their own. And this narrative behaviour offers clues as to the intended audience; a white, male, educated and libertarian/conservative which glorifies individual achievement. In Book One, Burroughs does briefly allow a colonised (South American) female voice to speak (p111-112; CotRN). The character, Hirondelle de Mer, is forced by 'circumstances' (i.e., the guerrilla war against Spanish colonisers) to become a rather conventional female essence, a sorceress. The choice of sorceress as revolutionary act constrains and limits; appealing to a transcendental realm for assistance or power. By asserting power in this way the colonised foregoes a more directly confrontational and temporal approach. In content, the voice of Hirondelle de Mer as sorceress/ warrior is above all an

example of Burroughs' 'ventriloquism'; it is the (supposed) voice of the colonised manipulated to reinforce the viewpoint of a white and educated libertarian program. The portrayal of other races, even when the individuals are male, is that of servants, soldiers, workers or exotic sexual objects….seldom as full participatory and thinking equals. This applies even more so to women, who are at worst vessels of reproduction or at best castrating and power-hungry queens…along with the occasional 'siren'.

In the "Fore!" section of the novel, Burroughs fires his first shot across the bow of the unsuspecting reader when in the first sentence (xi; CotRN) he openly interrogates the socio-political primacy of the American and French revolutions, along with their basis. Burroughs baldly states "The liberal principles embodied in the French and American revolutions and later in the liberal revolutions of 1848 had already been codified and put into practice by pirate communes a hundred years earlier" (xi; CotRN). The historical/cultural primacy and weight of these revolutionary events are minimised in comparison with *pirates*; a group historically and culturally mediated as essentially de facto criminals. Burroughs destabilises the reader by interrogating conceptions of the 'criminal' (shades of Jean Genet), along with the bulk of bourgeois/colonial/imperialist received history. In a section of text quoted by Burroughs, the 'pirates' are described as "not pirates but liberty lovers, fighting for equal rights against all nations subject to the tyranny of government" (xi; CotRN). This would most certainly appeal, on some level, to those rugged conservatives and libertarians who tend to emphasise the human individual and desire limited government. It also appeals to a certain inherent romanticism associated, at least in some fiction, with that of the pirate. Additionally, there seem to be indications of an underlying fear of the particular being overwhelmed by the general; a discomfort with a true democracy's permeability or extent to which individual desire is superseded by collective need. By the end of the "Fore!" section Burroughs claims that his re-imagining of history is an example of a "retroactive Utopia" (xiv; CotRN) and that "The chance was there", "The chance was missed" (xiv; CotRN). Burroughs then seems to pass judgement on contemporary American and European societies when he states "The principles of the French and American revolutions became windy lies in the mouths of politicians" (xiv; CotRN). Burroughs also laments the circumstances that made communities based upon "the lines set forth by Captain Mission" (xv; CotRN) of little real possibility.

The "Fore!" and "Invocation" sections introduce and frame the narrative of *Cities of the Red Night*. Both signal Burroughs' intention to re-imagine and rewrite Western cultural narrative by generally interrogating some of its basic paradigms, while at the same time addressing those elites which benefit most from these same paradigms. "Fore!" interrogates the politico-historical and "Invocation" the religious or moral basis of Western culture. These sections posit, in the form of a 'retroactive utopia', a universe where Western colonialism *failed* and the gods of the colonised are ascendant. Yet, such a reading has caveats. Burroughs' 'retroactive utopia' is still dependant upon Western paradigms in the

guise of "The Articles" of Captain Mission. Burroughs' new world is still beholden to the ideals generated by and propagated through the colonising (and slave-owning) white, male elite. Furthermore, this utopia is imagined into being by an author educated in and supported by the twentieth century American version of those elites. This partially riddles Burroughs' discourse with a sort of tension; it is a tension which expands exponentially in the main body of the novel.

   In Book One of *Cities of the Red Night* Burroughs' multiple narrative threads are at their most seemingly conventional, based as they are upon some familiar genres. This narrative familiarity may be comforting to an 'educated' white male (especially those born in the first half of the Twentieth century) readership after the opening shocks found in the previous "Fore!" and "Invocation" sections. For example, the first character a reader encounters is that of the colonial bureaucrat; an ennui-ridden 'District Health Officer'. Burroughs describes Farnsworth as a "man so grudging in what he asked of life that every win was a loss" yet he possesses "a certain plodding persistence and effectiveness" (p3; CotRN). Furthermore, Farnsworth's ability to endure his life in a jungle colony depends (initially) upon his addiction to 'opium pills'. Farnsworth seems to be the quintessential colonial bureaucrat; a bourgeois character found in novels from Joseph Conrad to E. M. Forster, from Rudyard Kipling to Paul Bowles. As in other novels, Farnsworth is eventually transformed by his experience in the land of the 'other'. Another character that may seem somewhat familiar is the private detective, Clem Snide. Snide calls himself a "private asshole" (p35; CotRN) and is hired to find a missing young man named Jerry. Snide is eventually transformed as well, although his personality remains still a 'hardboiled' one. Then there is the 'boy's story' of a young man, Noah Blake, shipping off to sea with his friends upon a (pirate) trading ship; Blake is the son of a weapons maker and becomes involved with the pirate colonies mentioned in the "Fore!" section. Added to all this is the science fiction storyline concerning the "Virus B-23" (p20-26; CotRN). This narrative has elements of Cold War-like conspiracy and biological weapons paranoia, as well as a Dr. Strangelove sort of black humour. Furthermore, the 'major' characters are possible analogues of Burroughs himself; just as the narratives mirror authorial interests and upbringing, so do some characters. The familiarity of the character and colonial narrative draws the bourgeois or conventional reader in to the novel more easily, perhaps allowing them to relax and eventually be destabilised. These narratives and (major) characters are distorted reflections and cultural artefacts of the privileged, white male audience, hence their possible appeal and familiarity. Yet, although these characters and settings partake of the familiar, Burroughs adds his own flavour to them; at first subtly warping clichés, then bending them almost beyond recognition.

   Everything changes with Book Two; the preceding comforting forms and linearity begin breaking down. The reader is informed that humanity was once one race, brown not white, and spoke one language (p155/167-168; CotRN). Furthermore, red and blond hair along with blue eyes, are a *mutation* (p167; CotRN). These mutations are all possibly due to the 'radioactive' "Virus B-23"

mentioned in Book One or meteor strike. Much like Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, the virus theme sub-textually plays into colonial and racial fears of contagion or 'pollution'. This is in addition to a more generalised apocalyptic or *fin-de-siècle* anxiety, which informs both works. Such a conception could be discomfiting or possibly even destabilising to a white, bourgeois audience because it directly attacks their sense of entitlement via received notions of racial superiority and purity. As such, these sentiments may reflect Burroughs' own discomfort with or guilt on his part relating to the privileged Caucasian elements in his background. If only as a textual effect, Burroughs' pulp-ish 'theory' definitely participates in a wider cultural interrogation of the American/European ideological basis for colonialism and racism.

Though Burroughs certainly maintains a fondness for 'pulp' forms and imagery, such as the detective thriller, he also parodies them. Burroughs' parody thereby interrogates the forms' basically conservative genre rules and underlying philosophies. For instance, Burroughs' parody of detective or adventure/pirate fiction interrogates certain genre assumptions concerning the individual, class, nature and race. These types of fiction and storytelling are a sort of modern folktale or fairy tale. Pulp forms (or books meant for young adults; p167; CotRN) are by definition rigidly defined, if only for economic efficacy. Genre forms, in part, are stylistically rigid so that they may be produced in quantity (usually on a weekly or monthly deadline, originally) by writers of varying skill levels who were usually paid by the word. These stories followed a common structure that was often episodic in nature and based upon action, with little time for extraneous exposition that did not move the plot ever forward. The minimisation of the extraneous parallels capitalism's need to control and define time; that which is not geared towards efficiency and production interferes with profit. Burroughs uses the rigid pulp formulations to ground his texts, providing a modicum of structure amongst the madness; allowing various radical ideations to be experienced and internalised within the realm of what is familiar. It bears noting that American pulp forms are an extension of, or are related to, Anglo-European forms (e.g., 'boy's magazines, comic books, 'dime novels', 'penny dreadfuls', 'potboilers', pamphlets, 'shilling shockers', etc.). By also appealing to the adolescent (male) mentality activated by the pulp formulations, Burroughs associates radical ideations with a time and developmental level in which most humans are more psychologically vulnerable and less rigid in thought: the adolescent awash in the hormonal charge of puberty. These pulp forms are radical in their ubiquity (i.e., comic books). Adolescence and its cultural artefacts are seldom viewed as intellectually threatening by adults. In addition, pulp forms traditionally have little 'high' culture value; they can be more flexible in what they choose to mediate (although this has changed somewhat in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries).

In Book Two and Three Burroughs parodies the author/authorship, along with Hollywood movie-making and image manufacture. Clem Snide and his assistants re-write and re-imagine history, first in book form then via film, hoping to disable

or diminish the control of dominant discourses. The 'Iguana sister' informs Snide and the reader that "Changes, Mr. Snide, can only be effected by alterations in the original" (p 166; CotRN). Re-imagining and re-writing are part of a human evolution whose first stage is, as the critic Ron Roberts says, "the dissolution of boundaries: geographical, psychic and physical" (p 229; RtU). Snide speaks obliquely to this sort of narrative interrogation when he states "They have removed the temporal limits" (p169; CotRN). By problematising the author/authorship via interrogation of boundaries, Burroughs attempts to dissolve the barrier between himself and the reader. All of which is an extension of Burroughs' image warfare; a retaking of image mediation and production so that they may be used to re-imagine on less-rigidly defined, more individual levels. Additionally, all this creates linkages with not only Marxist thought, but also with some critical conceptions of laughter.

For the critic Katharine Streip laughter inscribes "a place where boundaries can be both acknowledged and crossed, where conventional feelings are questioned and challenged" (p 270; RtU). Laughter and the grotesque, which proceed from low to high socio-culturally, are strategies employed by Burroughs. The inversions and perversions of *Cities of the Red Night* are the 'laughter' with which Burroughs creates 'sleeper agents' within the white male power elite; cultural 'Manchurian candidates' who when activated at a later date by similar pulp forms. An audience so transformed could possibly energise currents of cultural change, struggling in various imagined futures overrun by the forces of control. By multiplying the nodes of conflict or discourse, the ability to control or dominate such discourses becomes more diffuse or lessened. Laughter allows more individual voices to manifest and possibly deflect those 'control' narratives based upon fear.

It can be argued that the entirety of Burroughs' fiction is an expression of bourgeois social crisis and fear, with its intimations of *fin-de-siècle* millennialism, especially in the almost never-ending conflict across time and space in Book Three. Alternatively, it is the giggle or laughter on passing through the cemetery of the modern; a diffusion and expression of fear. On a facile level, these violent (pulp) tableaux of Burroughs may be interpreted as a critique of Western rationalism; a mode of thought which many people in the world still view with suspicion. Rationalism becomes that which divides and fractures; any sense of universality is diminished. Rationalism and reason, in this way, are perhaps seen as good for taking things apart so that they can be examined; perhaps not so good at putting them back together again. This state of affairs is described by the critic Philip Walsh as "the ambivalence of enlightenment" (p 64; RtU). Rationalism and reason, for some individuals, almost become something to fear. This is perhaps due to their perceived corrosiveness towards the very societal paradigms they claim to support. In the U.S.A, received ideas of rationalism/Enlightenment reason may not only be seen as foundational and hegemonic (via the American Revolution), but also that which divides. Such socio-cultural division can even reinforce class boundaries and conflicts.

Such fears may also have roots in colonialism (i.e., racial fears of the 'primitive') and Western Christianity's apocalypticism (ideas with which Burroughs was certainly familiar via his mother and maternal grandfather). These apprehensions also reflect class anxieties. What was formerly seen as rational and 'right' modulates into fears of bodily dissolution and loss of control or power; the stasis or linearity of law and privilege lost in upwelling chaos. Burroughs irruptions of grotesquerie are a carnival-esque expression of his need to expose and interrogate uncomfortable ideations relative to American and Western societies, as well as embodying the fears of the coloniser and colonised. In her foreword for the English translation of Mikhail Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World*, Krystyna Pomorska describes the 'carnival' as being "opposed to official culture" (x; RaHW). This, on the surface, seems to relate to Burroughs' writings as well. It is not difficult to see the laughter and burlesque in the carnival atmosphere of *Cities of the Red Night*. Burroughs expresses his feelings of constriction by the dominant or official worldview through parodist extremity and inversion. Yet, he is perhaps uncomfortable with his dependence upon such dominating discourses in delineating his own; his laughter is nervous. This results in the (intentional) ambiguities within *Cities of the Red Night*. 'Official culture' generally maintains its power and presence through control of discourse; Burroughs' novel sits anxiously upon its white, male privilege.

In the third book of *Cities of the Red Night* the reader is introduced to a future where the 'old paradigms' never really disappeared and nothing is really lost; war as stasis. The future is portrayed as an embodiment of entropic Hollywood kitsch; the game is what it has always been, commerce. Book Three almost seems a collection of movie moments; splices from myriad films joined together in one chaotic meta-narrative. All of humanity's various routes of escaping from self are *dead* ends in this vision, so the alternative is to construct a sense of self, to find an identity, amongst the fractured remnants scattered across time and mind. Burroughs states in the novel such a journey "may take many lifetimes" (p 325; CotRN). It is a search for a *stable* (transcendent) self-image in a universe of chaos and carnage where only the madly carnivalesque seems to exist.

Alan Hibbard has stated "one of the last really free spaces seems to be the space of the imagination, the space of creative activity, the space of writing" (p 27; RtU). *Cities of the Red Night* represents an ongoing form of imaginative discourse which interrogates or parodies hegemonic Western culture and power; a discourse between the people and the elites which govern them. For William S. Burroughs this is a form of talking back to his white, bourgeois roots. It is a discourse which engages with the foundations of the United States of America; itself a consequence of English and European colonialism. Burroughs is able to move between general (i.e., the people or working classes) and particular (i.e., bourgeois white males or the elite) spaces because he benefits from privilege (e.g., his bourgeois upbringing and education, his later acceptance as an artist, etc.). This is at least partially a conversation with white, male power elites. While being critical, Burroughs also appears to recognize the difficulty in escaping the

mediated formulations consequent to privilege. It is these formulations which still affect discourse in the contemporary U.S.A. discourse, attached as they are to colonial imposition of not only language but a worldview. This worldview was based upon Rousseau's rationalism and Renaissance thought, via European-educated revolutionaries like Thomas Paine and Thomas Jefferson. The 'European Enlightenment' would eventually birth a worldview resulting in the American and French revolutions. These revolutions in turn were part of the discourse that saw at least partial disassembly and ongoing interrogation of colonialism. Burroughs' flipping between various characters, discourses and storylines acts as a (Brechtian) distancing effect, encouraging the reader to *examine* events as opposed to getting lost within them (as in an escapist pulp narrative). This applies as well to the use of parody and grotesque within the text; the point is not to engage the senses or emotions, but to understand their context, thereby connecting with the ideas lurking behind.

Cities of the Red Night sports a carnival mask to intrigue, then removes it to show what is beneath, encouraging the reader to engage *and* think. The ambivalence of Burroughs towards his subject matter and audience is regenerative because it is not absolute; it is hope hidden inside a construction of libidinal chaos and death. Burroughs may indeed be part of that American post-colonial discourse which talks back to its Anglo-European roots, but he is also talking back to his class and upbringing. Allen Hibbard has stated that "it was not always clear whether his [Burroughs] own struggle for liberation extended to embrace the collective" (p 25; RtU). Perhaps then it may be said that Burroughs embraces some collective issues refracted through a highly individual vision. Burroughs' attempt to deconstruct his bourgeois upbringing, and thereby delimit himself, is only a partial success. The process parallels the U.S.A.'s attempt to deconstruct its colonial and European roots in hopes of a delimited postcolonial future.

The concluding narration states, "I have blown a hole in time with a firecracker" and "Like Spain, I am bound to the past" (p 332; CotRN). This is the condition that Burroughs leaves the reader in as well, with no easy answers or hopeful dreams just ephemeral possibilities. However, the apocalyptic and hysterical tone of the writing may also reflect the pain felt by the colonised, separated from their native culture and barred from inclusive participation in the culture of the coloniser. Most human beings eventually rebel after a fashion, hopefully achieving some sort of peace with their upbringing and background within the wider context of the world at large. Bakhtin states in his introduction to *Rabelais and His World* that "To degrade an object does not imply merely hurtling it into the void of nonexistence, into absolute destruction, but to hurl it down to the reproductive lower stratum" (p 21; RaHW). In his parodying discourse, in his foregrounding of polymorphous sexuality, Burroughs flings text, self (via personae like Clem Snide) and readers into a grotesque of flesh. The purpose of such an act is not transcendence but *rebirth*; a rebirth for the colonised and coloniser alike. Perhaps with *Cities of the Red Night* William Seward Burroughs

the writer was attempting to do just this, while dragging the reader along with him in a search for less colonially encumbered forms of discourse and identity.

Though Burroughs may be seen as elitist, or even racist and sexist, it merely offers further evidence as to the identity of Burroughs' intended audience. Burroughs is no longer speaking to a liberal or avant-garde audience; he seeks to address the audience of his upbringing, that of white male, moneyed privilege. It would seem somewhat obvious at this point that Burroughs as an author is not primarily addressing a multi-racial, multi-gendered audience either...or at least not one of a more conventional or 'mainstream' sensibility. Burroughs' personal (supposed) peccadilloes notwithstanding, the worth of a text does not completely reside in its author's politics or personal views, but also within its ability to engage and hopefully transform its audience. In addition, these same 'negative' issues can possibly be construed as distractions or misdirection once the reader encounters certain underlying ideas made more completely manifest in the novel. Burroughs' destabilisation of the reader is one that will hopefully result in conversation, perhaps even change in wider literary and social discourses.

The horror Burroughs obviously has for the tableaux he presents is what makes him a moralist and therefore on at least some level a conventional writer. Black humour and perversity are merely the curtains behind which Burroughs as the modern Oz tells his tale of morality, before the world's silence makes cynics of us all.

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