



From Death and Dystopia to a New Space Age: An Analysis of  
Themes and Practices in the Later Works of William  
S. Burroughs.

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Abstract of Thesis

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Thesis: That the texts of the major trilogy by the contemporary American writer William S. Burroughs (*Cities of the Red Night* [1981], *The Place of Dead Roads* [1983], and *The Western Lands* [1987]) construct particular notions of themselves as text, as well as concepts of readerly roles and the position and function of an author, in order to achieve goals "beyond" the text, in the world "outside" it, while at the same time calling the objective existence of this world into question. These goals are both sociopolitical and ideological - Burroughs seeks to alter the consciousness or psyche of the reader, and hence to effect a basic alteration in the nature of contemporary society, thus revealing his essential humanism. These strategies, which are developed and radically transformed throughout the trilogy, are prefigured by one of Burroughs' first major works, *The Naked Lunch* (1959), which I treat as seminal in this regard.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any University. To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

I consent to this thesis being made available for photocopying and loan if accepted for the award of the degree.

Julia Oakley

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This thesis is dedicated to my father, Basil Oakley, with love and respect.

Julia Oakley

### Abbreviations

The following abbreviations have been used throughout this thesis to indicate the titles of Burroughs' works. Full bibliographical information can be found in the list of works cited.

<i>NL</i>	<i>The Naked Lunch</i>
<i>Job</i>	<i>The Job</i>
<i>AM</i>	<i>The Adding Machine</i>
<i>CRN</i>	<i>Cities of the Red Night</i>
<i>PDR</i>	<i>The Place of Dead Roads</i>
<i>TWL</i>	<i>The Western Lands</i>

## Introduction

"My purpose in writing has always been to express human potentials and purposes relevant to the Space Age." (Burroughs, "My Purpose Is To Write For The Space Age" 268)

The work of William Burroughs presents considerable problems for the literary critic. His works resist and defy categorization, and have even been the subject of legal debate, in the well-known obscenity trial of *The Naked Lunch*. Burroughs' relationship with the literary "establishment" has always been, and remains problematic.<sup>1</sup> He is a genuine eccentric, one whose life, legend and works all defy the constraints of definition, rendering him a "literary outlaw."<sup>2</sup>

Burroughs' early experimental style, use of obscenity, overt drug addiction, homosexuality, and misogyny have often repelled and even alarmed readers. The rage, despair, and cynical humour in his work seem to epitomize existential alienation and schizophrenic fragmentation, especially given his frequent evocation of a world structured by cancer, viruses, and parasites, and dominated by bureaucracy run mad. Reading *The Naked Lunch* in particular, Burroughs begins to seem the postmodern prophet of doom, an author for whom the medium is not the message but merely the anti-symbolic expression of repression and alienation.

Yet Burroughs' critique of liberal democratic society, especially in *The Naked Lunch*, is acute, though savage, and humorous, though grounded in despair. His vision is chaotic, but it is also structured -- by the crucial image of "junk." The more I read Burroughs' work, the more I become aware of its underlying structural and thematic unity, its incremental

repetition of his underlying compulsion to write -- in order to warn, prophesy, reveal, and dissect. And it is in this desire to write, to continue writing, that I locate the absolute ground of all Burroughs' work -- a radically redefined humanism.

The epigraph above, and the title of my dissertation both reflect my basic belief that the work of William Burroughs is grounded firmly in a fundamental compassion and concern for mankind. Analysis of his work reveals a consistent world view and perspective, a vision of contemporary dystopia countered by a longing for even the possibility of utopia. Burroughs' concern for mankind, his desire to write in order to warn and reveal, is particularly evident in the works I will consider in this dissertation.

*The Naked Lunch* represents the first complete expression of Burroughs' vision: his bleak diagnosis of the human condition through the operation of metonymy, "the surgical figure par excellence." (Lydenberg, *Word Cultures* 31) The *Soft Machine* trilogy extends and explores Burroughs' vision, but for my purposes this trilogy represents mainly a digression into the experimental style of the cut-up.<sup>3</sup> It is the *Cities of the Red Night* trilogy that I am concerned with, as it is in *Cities of the Red Night*, *The Place of Dead Roads*, and *The Western Lands* that Burroughs experiments with "cures" for his dire prognosis and diagnosis in *The Naked Lunch*. Each of these texts has its own unique strategies and approach, its own thematic emphasis, ranging from the insistent textuality and pirate utopias of *Cities of the Red Night* to the space cowboys of *The Place of Dead Roads* and the exploration of death



through Egyptian myth in *The Western Lands* -- yet they all express Burroughs' "radical humanism."

This concept deserves explanation. I see Burroughs' precise, dispassionate, and even clinical analysis of contemporary society throughout his work as grounded in a form of humanism. However, rather than constructing his vision around the notion of the freely self-determining individual, as traditional liberal humanism does, Burroughs instead sees the right to personal freedom and the integrity of the individual will as violated, by the control systems inherent in contemporary society and internalized by the ego. The freely self-determining individual becomes a goal, a remote and possibly even unattainable ideal in Burroughs' work, one which he uses to define his projected utopias and cast light upon contemporary dystopia.<sup>4</sup>

In fact, Burroughs leans toward "evolutionary humanism:" "A sort of secular religion... founded upon the deeply held conviction that evolution is the fundamental modality of all change in the universe." (*Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought*) Although I do not wish to pursue the analogy with the historical forms of "evolutionary humanism," it usefully illuminates Burroughs' literary practice as well as his thematic concerns -- he is constantly pressing against the bounds of genre, narrative, and literary convention, seeking to sustain life and energy through radical redefinition and experiment. The analogy with "evolutionary humanism" reveals the compassion underlying Burroughs' urgent imperatives to biological mutation and his obsession with evolutionary transformation, "We postulate that man is an artifact designed

for space travel. He is not designed to remain in his present biologic state any more than a tadpole is designed to remain a tadpole" (AM 82); as well as his contention that "The human organism is in a state of neoteny. This is a biological term used to describe an organism fixated at what would normally be a larval or transitional phase." (AM 125) Burroughs is concerned with evolution as a principal agent of change -- change which will ultimately improve and radically transform man's condition, or even save him from imminent apocalypse.<sup>5</sup>

Thus Burroughs is not an anti-humanist, as claimed by critics such as Robin Lydenberg, but rather a radical and postmodern humanist. The humanist ideal of the individual freely exerting his will becomes a goal in his schema; a paradigm (like the utopias he predicates in the *Cities of the Red Night* trilogy) which exposes corruption, addiction, and suffering, and expresses his prophetic sorrow for mankind. I take issue with arguments such as that of Lydenberg in *Word Cultures* that Burroughs is anti-humanist (3-18). While I agree that he is profoundly concerned with dissecting and dismantling absolutes and abstract concepts such as traditional liberal humanism, morality, and metaphor, he continually projects a desire for rehabilitation and reconstruction -- albeit one which remains implicit and can never be effected in dystopian contemporary society. Lydenberg's justification of her assertion is meagre: she attempts to explain away a few examples from *The Naked Lunch* and *The Job* which are couched in terms of absolutes, of Manichaeian good and evil, as "redefining" terms "in the most provocative way" (5), and as "acknowledging the necessity of

using those terms even as he calls them into question." (6) She overlooks the continual restatement of Burroughs' politics and themes in absolute terms ("This is a Manichaeian conflict. The outcome is in doubt." [AM 83]), as well as his desire to continue writing -- warning, prophesying, countering contemporary dystopia with projected utopias -- which I see as the most convincing evidence of his radical humanism. Thus although I agree that "The tradition of literary humanism is based on a moral vision of the universe, and on the place of art in that universe" (Lydenberg, *Word Cultures* 4), I diverge in seeing Burroughs as ultimately recuperating and reforming humanism, partially through a rigorous and profound analysis of morality and "the place of art."<sup>6</sup>

It is Burroughs' fundamental concern and compassion for the fragile and alienated figure of contemporary man which leads me to cast my discussion of the *Cities of the Red Night* trilogy in the traditional humanist terms of utopia and dystopia. I am far from being alone in this regard, as even the briefest survey of Burroughs criticism reveals this to be a constant theme.<sup>7</sup> However, I must insist that such terms are never used simplistically or without question in his work, but rather subjected to rigorous dissection and analysis, and often left permanently in question or even in quotation marks: "The face of 'evil' is always the face of total need." (NL 10) I concur in Lydenberg's attack on critics who attempt to recast and interpret Burroughs' texts in the terms of the systems he is attacking (*Word Cultures* 3-8). Thus although I believe that Burroughs is a humanist, I assert that he dissects, questions, and analyzes this term in order to arrive

at his individual and projective version of postmodern radical humanism, one which is defined simply and categorically by the epigraph.

This dissertation aims to demonstrate Burroughs' radical humanism throughout his work, and to analyze his diagnosis and attempted cure of dystopian contemporary society, which is approached uniquely in each of *The Naked Lunch*, *Cities of the Red Night*, *The Place of Dead Roads*, and *The Western Lands*. My approach is unashamedly text-oriented -- my goal is to draw out the texts' significances and multiplicities, to understand them on their own, idiosyncratic, and rigorously defined terms, not to confine them within a particular mode of theory, discourse, or interpretation.

Thus I make no apology for the intensity and often narrow focus of the later sections, unleavened by theoretical discourse or reference to secondary sources (few of which exist). In fact, I contend that Burroughs' texts, with their consistent characteristic of self-definition, vigorously resist the application of "critical tools," even those of radical contemporary theorists. Nicholas Zurbrugg writes of the need for a new, multi-media and extra-literary theory of intertextuality to encompass Burroughs' works, seeing them as "not simply anti-theoretical... rather, they are ante-theoretical, or outside the predictably limited present terminology of those who would define culture." ("Limits" 259) He recommends an "intercontextual" approach (265), one which is as radical as Burroughs' discourse.

Robin Lydenberg adopts another approach in her book *Word Cultures*. She constructs "a cut-up juxtaposition" of *The*

*Naked Lunch* and the *Soft Machine* trilogy with radical theorists such as Kristeva, Barthes, and Derrida (119). This is a valid and productive technique, one which refuses to confine Burroughs' discourse within the limits of others' thought. However, its application is far more appropriate to the works she chooses, with their experimental style and radical nature, than to the *Cities of the Red Night* trilogy, with its apparent return to conventional narrative forms. As Lydenberg herself suggests in the Afterword to *Word Cultures*: "Careful and detailed analyses of his recent novels will have to be made before we can hope to penetrate beneath their polished surface." (179) I agree with her, and with Zurbrugg, who considers that an appropriate point of intersection between the Burroughs text and literary theory is yet to be found, and argue further that Burroughs' novels and essays express a theoretical agenda of his own devising, one which must be examined in its own right before the work of other theorists is brought into play.

The resistance to literary theory and critical "tools" evinced by the Burroughs text complements its characteristic concreteness and specificity. That is, his texts are anchored in the world of everyday life, no matter how far they may seem to roam. As Mary McCarthy argues, "Burroughs is a prescriptive writer. He means what he says to be taken and used literally, like an Rx prescription." (38) This prescriptive -- but never proscriptive -- quality is a function of Burroughs' radical humanism, of his valorization of freedom and the integrity of the individual will.

The prescriptive qualities of Burroughs' work are

particularly evident in *The Naked Lunch*, which is the subject of section one. I interpret this text in terms of its dystopian vision, structured by the economics and exigencies of "junk." My argument stresses the basic unity of the text, despite its fragmented style and disdain for realist narrative convention. Burroughs seeks to remove himself as author from *The Naked Lunch*, to render it extra- or anti-literary, in an attempt to render it politically effective.

Burroughs' redefinition of the political, and his attempted recuperation of this concept, along with ideology and the dialectic, is covered in section two, on *Cities of the Red Night*. I see this text as initiating a productive play of meaning and possibility, through the projection of multiple utopias and dystopias, its positing of the integration of the non-rational (represented by magic and myth) with the rational, and above all through the strategy of insistent textuality. Burroughs counters his frustration at the perceived impotence of literature, of writing, by endeavouring to bring the world he wishes to change "inside" the bounds of his text. He does so by continually asserting the textuality of all thought and action, which he defines as irrevocably and inescapably structured by language. In response to *Cities of the Red Night's* assertive diversity and multiplicity, my approach considers its distinct, yet unified agendas, which incorporate practical strategies to ensure readerly complicity, as well as specifically political and textual or literary concerns.

Textuality takes a back seat in *The Place of Dead Roads*, as Burroughs' emphasis shifts from the definition and location of

specific entities to a theoretical concern with forms of textual "space." Space is the primary focus of this text -- it is a goal, an image, a structure, a dimension, and an ideal. *The Place of Dead Roads* pursues both textual and extraterrestrial space, continuing to redefine Burroughs' goals and his strategies for achieving them. This text performs a synthetic role in relation to the trilogy as a whole, focusing and clarifying its theories, images and ideology. It is also in *The Place of Dead Roads* that unity in multiplicity emerges from the subtext to become Burroughs' explicit and dominant goal. My discussion of this text, in section three, analyzes this variety of functions, but also demonstrates their integration and paradigmatic unity.

The final text of the trilogy, and Burroughs' last published work to date, is *The Western Lands*, the subject of section four. This text continues the change of direction in the trilogy initiated by Book Three of *The Place of Dead Roads* -- from the expansive forces of *Cities of the Red Night* and Books One and Two of *The Place of Dead Roads* to the gradual intensification and narrowing of focus imaged in the concept of "the garden."<sup>9</sup> The orientation of *The Western Lands* is almost entirely inward, as the exploration of utopia and dystopia, Time and Space, becomes only the narrative embodiment of Burroughs' cathartic self-analysis. Death and immortality achieve a new prominence, as part of Burroughs' quest to make sense of his life and career and come to terms with the inevitability and perceived imminence of death. My approach to *The Western Lands* stresses the integration of Burroughs' political ends and mythopoeic processes with the

projection and analysis of his most intimate thoughts, and works to reveal his increasing emphasis on closure as not only acceptable but even desirable.

Commencing with the explosive and epiphanic violence of *The Naked Lunch*, Burroughs works through the exploration of multiplicity and possibility, utopia and dystopia, to a final acceptance of closure, and ultimately, death. This dissertation attempts to work through these processes as well, analyzing the self-defining elements of each text along with the constantly redefined constructs of author. I assert my concern with the integrity and fierce independence of each of Burroughs' texts, and my belief in the constant presence of his radical humanism.



I. Origins: *The Naked Lunch*.



In the context of William Burroughs' entire published work, *The Naked Lunch* stands out as seminal. It provides a crucial focal point in relation to the later trilogy, as it not only marks the emergence of Burroughs' distinctive fragmented style, but also introduces a number of significant images which are central to his work as a whole. *The Naked Lunch* diagnoses the situation -- the fundamental nature and conditions of contemporary human existence -- which the later trilogy reassesses and seeks to remedy. As Jennie Skerl argues in *William S. Burroughs*, each Burroughs text is a fragment, given wholeness and unity only in the context of Burroughs' oeuvre and the originary creative source -- Burroughs' imagination (19). The unity in multiplicity which Burroughs' life, works, and career represent is a paradigm for the holism, and integration sustaining individual identities, which is a primary goal of his later work.

*The Naked Lunch* deserves critical attention in its own right. My discussion asserts the importance of this text, in relation to Burroughs' work and contemporary fiction as such, rather than treating it solely as the origin of the *Cities of the Red Night* trilogy. *The Naked Lunch* provides a paradigmatic source of many of Burroughs' themes, images, and ideas, as well as an exemplar of his radical and idiosyncratic literary practice. In this context, the texts of the *Soft Machine* trilogy merely expand and intensify the "New Vision" of *The Naked Lunch*, through the intensive exploration of the cut-up form (Skerl, *Burroughs* 36). It is not until the publication of *Cities of the Red Night* that a major and significant shift in Burroughs' theories and practice of

literary production is fully realized,<sup>1</sup> and it is this shift, and those later texts, which the later sections of this dissertation explore.

My examination of *The Naked Lunch*, and the evidence it provides of Burroughs' theory and practice of literary production, is structured around three distinct, but closely related, aspects. Chapter one analyzes how the text constructs and defines itself -- a particularly rigorous process in this instance -- including what kind of text it defines itself as, and why it does so. Burroughs' goal is to avoid the perceived impotence of literature, and he denies the literary status of his text in favour of political effectiveness. I intend to show how *The Naked Lunch's* "meta-textual" sections -- the Introduction and the "Atrophied Preface" -- redefine the text and the role of the author, and to discuss the implications of this redefinition for literary production as such. In chapter two, I look at the concept of an "author" which the text constructs, one which becomes complex and problematic in the face of conflicting textual imperatives and agendas. Burroughs strives to overturn realist narrative convention by attacking the author's position as central and dominant in the text. I contend that he shifts the author to the margins of the text, in an attempt to render it independent, and hence politically effective in his terms.

Chapter three is concerned with "junk," its diverse images and functions. The economics and exigencies of junk become the structuring principle of *The Naked Lunch*, the source of its unique vision. Burroughs' heroin addiction, and

withdrawal from addiction, provide the perspective which makes the radical vision of his text possible and comprehensible. Chapters four and five undertake a close examination of the text as such. I have noted that many critics of *The Naked Lunch* tend to stress its disparate themes and fragmented style, at the cost of its thematic coherence and overall sense of unity. I seek to remedy this through a methodical and empirical approach to the text, analyzing its narrative structures and theoretical developments, and confronting its central theoretical locus. This general structure -- analyzing textual self-definition and the role of the author, followed by a close reading of the text -- will be replicated in my discussion of the later texts, as it reveals the evolution, and sometimes radical transformation, of Burroughs' theory and practice, as well as the underlying continuity provided by his radical humanism.

Chapter One: The Self-Defining Text.

"*The Naked Lunch* is a blueprint, a How-To Book...." (NL 176)

*The Naked Lunch* defines itself and its field of play rigorously. This chapter is concerned with the process of self-definition the text undertakes, both as a significant literary practice, and as a means of revealing the central aspects of Burroughs' theory and practice in this text. His perceptions of the sociopolitical impotence of literature, and the consequent definition of *The Naked Lunch* as non-literary, as a "blueprint" or "How-To Book," expose a fundamental abhorrence of imprisoning structures, specifically dualism. Burroughs' theoretical concern with dualism, which he sees as dominating thought and even existence through the primary structure of binary opposition, leads him to define his own literary practice as one of revelation and analysis. That is, Burroughs' texts in general, and *The Naked Lunch* in this instance, are dedicated to unearthing the dualist structures of being, of society and the ego, and to the dissection of these structures. This practice indicates Burroughs' radical humanism; he wants man to recognize his imprisonment in the structures of dualism, and thus become capable of freeing himself.

The nature of Burroughs' obsession with dualism, and his central practice of revelation and analysis, means that all of the texts I plan to discuss share a characteristic of rigorous self-definition. That is, each of these texts possesses sections, characters, or episodes which fulfil what I call a "perimeter/parameter" function. These textual elements define the scope of each text, establishing limits to the play of

meaning and to the reader's participation and interpretive engagement, thus fulfilling the function of a perimeter, or boundary. These elements also function as parameters, that is, they provide relatively constant moments of stability within the fragmented and constantly disrupted narrative. Both functions -- the establishment of boundaries and the evocation of stability -- are essential to the success of Burroughs' radical textual theory and practice.

\* I see such textual elements as synthesizing these two functions -- perimeter and parameter -- and as exceeding them, indicating a surfeit of meaning and signification in Burroughs' work. As such, they are a crucial and definitive feature of his texts, one which evolves over time and is subject to typical (and playful) experimentation. The siting of the perimeter/parameter elements within each text provides an important structural indication of the shifts in Burroughs' attitudes towards readerly, authorial, and textual definition. The perimeter/parameter function is of crucial importance to my interpretation of Burroughs' texts, and is thus the primary concern of the first chapter of each section.

The perimeter/parameter function in *The Naked Lunch* is enacted by two sections of text: the first, entitled "Introduction. deposition: testimony concerning a sickness," and the last, titled "Atrophied Preface," and subtitled "Wouldn't You?"<sup>2</sup> Despite their separation -- at opposite ends of the text in linear terms -- these two sections are connected intimately, and the necessity of moving back and forth between them emphasizes the cyclical nature of Burroughs' prose. Their relationship is evident in their

titles: "Introduction" and "Preface," sections which usually are placed together at the beginning of a text. Their separation in *The Naked Lunch* indicates Burroughs' disdain for literary convention, as well as his distaste for linear readings as such. These same conventions, internalized by the reader, force him/her to connect the beginning and end of the text, thus producing a circular, rather than linear, reading.

The separation of Introduction and Preface also prefigures Burroughs' diagnosis of human existence and consciousness as basically dualist. That is, the separation of Introduction and Preface represents the separation of mind and body, logic and magic, male and female, form and content, emotion and reason, and so on -- separations which become entrenched and rigidified as binary opposition. Burroughs undertakes a "critical analysis of the basic dualism underlying our civilization, and the development of a methodology which attempts to break through the strictures and structures of binary opposition into a more free and open space."

(Lydenberg, *Word Cultures* 121) Burroughs' critical analysis of dualism is a crucial feature of all his work:

I've spoken of unworkable formulas and possibly the most unworkable formula is the whole concept of a dualistic universe. I don't think that there is really room for more than one person, that is, one will, on any planet. As soon as you get two you get trouble. Dualism is the whole basis of this planet -- good and evil, communism and fascism, man and woman, etc. As soon as you have a formula like that, of course you're going to have trouble.  
(*Job* 91)

His horror of dualism is expressed specifically as a horror of separation, division, and opposition, suggesting an inverse longing for wholeness and unity: "The whole inward/outward, introverted/extroverted dichotomy is an either/or imposition

on data which isn't either/or and cannot be accurately confined in either/or terms.... All experience is both objective and subjective." (AM 182-3) Burroughs relates his horror of dualism, of separation and opposition, to the problem of subjectivity. In *The Naked Lunch* he attacks what he sees as false and arbitrary divisions and dichotomies, although he refuses to put anything in their place. Instead, Burroughs' approach is to invert binary oppositions, to introduce a "third term" which the binary structure cannot incorporate. This third element, reminiscent of Derrida's "supplement," works "to evade structural assimilation, to dwell within and explode the dual structure." (Lydenberg, *Word Cultures* 124)

The inversion and dispersion of binary oppositions is central to the "Atrophied Preface." Burroughs exposes and confounds the oppositions of inside/outside, body/mind:

"Possession" they call it.... Sometimes an entity jumps in the body -- outlines waver in yellow orange jelly -- and hands move to disembowel the passing whore or strangle the nabor child in hope of alleviating a chronic housing shortage. As if I was usually there but subject to goof now and again.... *Wrong! I am never here....* Never that is *fully* in possession, but somehow in a position to forestall ill-advised moves.... Patrolling is, in fact, my principal occupation.... No matter how tight Security, I am always somewhere *Outside* giving orders and *Inside* this straight jacket of jelly that gives and stretches but always reforms ahead of every movement, thought, impulse, stamped with the seal of alien inspection.... (Burroughs' italics, *NL* 174)

The author becomes the "third term" -- possessed and in possession, inside and outside both text and body. He rejects the principle of exerting control over the text, preferring to "forestall" and "patrol." Yet the author also embodies, literally, the human condition -- constrained and contained by



the "straight jacket" of the body.<sup>3</sup> The restrictions of the body, of fleshly existence, as well as the opposition "embodied/disembodied" are challenged further in the "Atrophied Preface" by the merging of characters:

Sooner or later The Vigilante, The Rube, Lee The Agent, A.J., Clem and Jody The Ergot Twins, Hassan O'Leary the After Birth Tycoon, The Sailor, The Exterminator, Andrew Keif, "Fats" Terminal, Doc Benway, "Fingers" Schafer are subject to say the same thing in the same words to occupy, at that intersection point, the same position in space-time. Using a common vocal apparatus complete with all metabolic appliances that is to be the same person -- a most inaccurate way of expressing *Recognition: The junky naked in sunlight...* (Burroughs' italics, NL 175)

The "interchangeable" nature of the characters subverts and rejects realist convention, and displays the unifying, though intensely reductive power of junk; all characters are reduced to "The junky naked in sunlight." They all pass through a single, generic human body, one which is defined in mechanistic and anti-organic terms to emphasize its artificiality and that of processes of character construction; indicating the alienation from the body that dualism inflicts. Oppositions such as ego/body, organism/mechanism are revealed by Burroughs' "sunlight," as is the restrictive insistence of all dualist structures.

A necessary consequence of Burroughs' principal practice of revealing and dissecting dualist structures is that he must also reveal and disturb the structures and concepts of his own argument. There is an undeniable tension between his use of existent structures for precise and practical ends and his theoretical distaste for, and desire to dismantle, such structures, and Burroughs uses this tension productively to define his text. Thus the Preface is "Atrophied," and located as a "postface." Prefaces in his work "atrophy and amputate

spontaneous like the little toe amputates in a West African disease" (NL 176). The traditional meta-textual or pre-textual status of a preface is employed yet placed in question, as are conventions of narrative transition and mimetic "flow:" "Why all this waste paper getting the People from one place to another? Perhaps to spare The Reader stress of sudden space shifts and keep him Gentle?" (NL 172) Literary convention is yet another manifestation of dualism, one which *The Naked Lunch*, and its parameters in particular, violently disrupt.

Disruptive forces become principles of textual construction, as the juxtaposition -- even enforced collision -- of opposing terms becomes the primary strategy of *The Naked Lunch*. The text operates through montage and contrast, revelation and dissection, rather than building a textual edifice of conventional, and thus in Burroughs' terms unquestioned and ambiguous, structures. The process of textual construction and self-definition begins in the parameters, where Burroughs diagnoses the sociopolitical impotence of literature and reacts by prescribing non-literary definitions for his text.

Burroughs' perceptions of the impotence of literature, of texts, are suggested by the opposition of art and action in the "Atrophied Preface:" "You can write or yell or croon about it...paint about it...act about it...shit it out in mobiles....*So long as you don't go and do it....*" (Burroughs' italics, NL 176) Art has lost its danger, its risk, through becoming divorced from political activity. Burroughs' desire to render art, specifically his own texts, effective and

active is evoked powerfully in the *Paris Review* interview with Conrad Knickerbocker:

I do definitely mean what I say to be taken literally, yes, to make people aware of the true criminality of our times, to wise up the marks. All of my work is directed against those who are bent, through stupidity or design, on blowing up the planet or rendering it uninhabitable. ...I'm concerned with the precise manipulation of word and image *to create an action*, ...to create an alteration in the reader's consciousness. (my italics 174)

Burroughs blends his compulsion to write, to create literature, with his desire for action and effectiveness, defined as altering the reader's consciousness. His approach to the problem of literary impotence in *The Naked Lunch* is to use the parameters to define this text as non-literary, as a blueprint, "How-To Book," and as legalistic "deposition" and "testimony."

Burroughs initiates the process of defining *The Naked Lunch* as non-literary by denying its creative and imaginative -- its definitive literary -- aspects:

There is only one thing a writer can write about: *what is in front of his senses at the moment of writing*.... I am a recording instrument.... I do not presume to impose "story" "plot" "continuity."...Insofar as I succeed in *Direct* recording of certain areas of psychic process I may have limited function.... I am not an entertainer.... (Burroughs' italics, *NL* 174)

Reportage and experience are asserted, though not privileged. Burroughs defines narrative devices, "story" "plot" "continuity," as arbitrary structures "imposed" upon experience, which they modify and standardize. The definition of writing in the passage above is problematic, implying that some kind of "unmediated" experience of reality is possible. Burroughs is quick to step back from this assertion, preferring instead to project specific textual forms as

appropriate to *The Naked Lunch's* anti-dualism and desire for action:

*The Naked Lunch* is a blueprint, a How-To Book.... Black insect lusts open into vast, other planet landscapes.... Abstract concepts, bare as algebra, narrow down to a black turd or a pair of ageing cajones.... (NL 176-7)

This passage combines the definition of *The Naked Lunch* as primarily reportage with the attempt to solve the problem of the ineffectiveness of writing. Any literary claim to abstract truths or serious moral purpose is rejected, with the depiction of *The Naked Lunch* as a "How-To Book" or "blueprint."

Usually, a blueprint is associated with architectural or engineering planning, but it can also be "a program of action."<sup>4</sup> The projective aspect of a blueprint is crucial -- it is a graphic textual representation of something that does not yet exist (and may never exist, "Like Da Vinci's flying machine plans" [NL 172]), and whose eventual existential realization is dependent wholly upon its textual form. Burroughs uses the "blueprint" to map the characteristics of modern society, and to project its future as dystopia and chaos. The reader is given the blueprint of the future as Burroughs sees it, in the form of *The Naked Lunch*, and given the choice of changing it. *A blueprint does not have to be realized.*

A "How-To Book" also possesses an essentially projective function, but one which is concerned more with assessing the status quo and altering it through practical action. That is, a "How-To Book" generally provides expert advice and instructions on how to construct something of practical use, from an improved physique or personality to a set of

bookshelves. This kind of text predicates language as a transparent medium, *through* which meaning is perceived. This is opposed to the literary use of language, as construed by Burroughs. The opposition is between language as foregrounded or as ignored, between language as dense, opaque and figurative, or as transparent and literal; yet the employment of this assumption as part of the process of defining *The Naked Lunch* foregrounds it as problematic. Burroughs continues to reveal and disturb the binary oppositions structuring his argument, even as he strives to enable his text to function effectively in social and political terms. Through the "Atrophied Preface," *The Naked Lunch* denies its own imaginative achievement and the privileging of language in literature, in order to emphasize the value of action.

*The Naked Lunch* is redefined further in the Introduction, subtitled "deposition: testimony concerning a sickness." The key words here are "deposition" and "testimony," probably best known as legal terms; "deposition" refers to "the giving of testimony on oath in a court of law, or the testimony so given; specifically a statement in answer to interrogatories, constituting evidence, taken down in writing," while "testimony" is "personal or documentary evidence or attestation in support of a fact or statement; hence, any form of evidence or proof."<sup>5</sup> These are two more textual forms which purport to use language as a transparent medium, and which emphasize reportage of actual experience or observation over speculation and abstraction -- indeed they overtly reject any generalization or deduction. Like the idea of a How-To Book or a blueprint, "deposition" and "testimony" stress the

existence of a "real" referent, the reality of its existence determined by its exteriority in relation to the text. With the two latter terms, there is also an insistence on fact, truth, and accuracy, and therefore an underlying assumption that such concepts not only exist, but can be expressed in language.

The assertion of concepts of truth and accuracy reveals that value judgements are a crucial part of deposition and testimony, underlining the problematic opposition of subjective/objective. That is, concepts of testimony and deposition assume that what was seen or experienced by a witness has universality -- any other witness would have had the same experiences or seen the same events -- and communicability -- the witness can tell his/her story, give it adequate linguistic representation. However, this repression of subjectivity is manifestly invalid, given that an individual's experiences and observations of events, and further, their interpretations and representations of those events in the forms of deposition and testimony, are determined by social, cultural, and psychological conditioning. The specificity of the "psychic processes" narrated in *The Naked Lunch* demonstrates vividly that there is no core of universal experience in a world which is defined by fragmentation and alienation. Thus the binary oppositions structuring "deposition" and "testimony" are exposed and confounded.

The use of the inherently problematic terms "deposition" and "testimony" in the title of the introduction combines with the depiction of *The Naked Lunch* as a "blueprint" or "How-To

Book," and with the emphasis on reportage of experience rather than imaginative creation, to "objectify" the text. While a blueprint and a How-To Book are essentially projective, textually inscribing a potential future, deposition and testimony refer exclusively to the past, attempting to give an accurate representation of what has been and what therefore *is*. Thus *The Naked Lunch* reaches back into the past, a past objectified textually as artifact, and forward into the future, which is inscribed as determined potential. It defines itself as a useful text, one which is of practical value, and which people can believe in and act upon. Yet *The Naked Lunch* mocks its own didacticism, its attempts at extra-literary effectiveness:

This is Revelation and Prophecy of what I can pick up without FM on my 1920 crystal set with antennae of jissom.... Gentle reader, we see God through our assholes in the flash bulb of orgasm.... (NL 180)

Burroughs invokes the Bible, the text which ultimately synthesizes the functions of blueprint and How-To Book, and incorporates notions of deposition and testimony,<sup>6</sup> to parody his own seriousness and to undercut his own processes. In the end, all he is prepared to assert is the necessity for revelation, and the goal of disrupting, and implicitly destroying, dualism.

Through the processes entailed in their function of textual definition, the perimeter/parameter sections of *The Naked Lunch* introduce and structure its thematic concerns: Burroughs' pervasive horror of dualism and his vision of society as decadent and corrupt, perhaps even beyond redemption. The parameters also work to intensify the

reader's self-consciousness -- his awareness of his situation in the world and in his body, both of which he experiences as alien due to the dualism inherent in consciousness. Burroughs is engaged in "consciousness-raising" despite his restriction of the reader's interpretive engagement through the denial of "literary" practice. For example, the problematic redefinition of *The Naked Lunch* encourages the reader to recognize the opposition of subjective and objective; a recognition which has a profound impact upon the reader's position in relation to the text, according to R.G. Peterson:

The chaotic nature of the book, the absolute suspension of overall order, of time and space, means that those tags by which men hang on to external reality have been recognized as fundamentally subjective. And in the new relation that is established between reader and book (the reader engulfs, as it were, the book, the speaker-narrator's mind, and the world), this solipsistic recognition is forced upon the reader. Completely isolated within his own consciousness, he is forced to doubt not only his own sanity but the meaning of the term itself. (82-3)

Isolation and alienation (from the world as well as the body) become fundamental to the condition of the reader, who becomes the site of this problematic. *The Naked Lunch's* aims are evident -- it seeks to effect a profound alteration in the reader's consciousness, and to enable the reader in turn to affect and act upon the world he recognizes but from which he is irrevocably separate. Effectiveness and appropriate action are Burroughs' primary goals, mediated by the reader's consciousness, and expressed in the practice of revelation and analysis. Burroughs is compelled to scrutinize and deconstruct every major social, political, and textual (literary and linguistic) structure, including those he uses to support his own contentions. Through this central practice he strives to maintain an idiosyncratic ideological purity, to



remain separate, other, from the world he evokes and attacks in his text. As positioned by its parameters, *The Naked Lunch* is poised to reunite art and action through its own effectiveness.

Chapter Two: The Author of *The Naked Lunch*.

"There is only one thing a writer can write about: *what is in front of his senses at the moment of writing....* I am a recording instrument.... I may have limited function...." (Burroughs' italics, NL 174)

The goal of positioning *The Naked Lunch* as an active and effective text is a crucial determinant of its authorial concepts. The parameters of the text seek to deny its "literariness," through revealing and analyzing the underlying binary structures of what Burroughs sees as typical literary practice, and by projecting non-literary textual forms as appropriate and useful. These processes of exposure, analysis, and radical redefinition are equally important in relation to the "author" of *The Naked Lunch*, as Burroughs strives to emphasize the author's prosaic, and hence non-literary qualities, and to define the text and his position within it. This chapter will examine the diverse processes of authorial definition and redefinition in *The Naked Lunch*, and demonstrate how the gradual marginalization or erasure of the author reveals a new and paradoxical goal -- using language and text to destroy the monopolistic hold of language on human consciousness.

The construction of the author in *The Naked Lunch* is complicated by Burroughs' dissociation from the text. That is, in the Introduction, Burroughs denies authorial responsibility for the text, reconstituting his relationship with it as marginal, rather than central:

I awoke from The Sickness at the age of forty-five, calm and sane, and in reasonably good health except for a weakened liver and the look of borrowed flesh common to all who survive The Sickness... Most survivors do not

remember the delirium in detail. I apparently took detailed notes on sickness and delirium. I have no precise memory of writing the notes which have now been published under the title *Naked Lunch*. The title was suggested by Jack Kerouac. I did not understand what the title meant until my recent recovery. The title means exactly what the words say: NAKED Lunch -- a frozen moment when everyone sees what is on the end of every fork. (NL 9)

The first sentence places the experience from which the novel is drawn in the past, implying both termination and objectification. We discover that *The Naked Lunch* purports to deal with reportage of a state of being which has already ceased to exist. The use of the phrase "the look of borrowed flesh" underlines the difference between the past author of the text and the present author of the Introduction, suggesting a disparity between even the bodily constructs of these two authors. Burroughs also uses this phrase to stress his membership in the community of survivors of "The Sickness," as opposed to his role as a writer.

*The Naked Lunch* becomes the product of an other, who has ceased to exist, and become objectified as an artifact in the past (the fate Lee specifically seeks to avoid but still encounters in "Hauser and O'Brien"). The assertion that the author of the Introduction neither invented, nor understood, initially, the title of the text inverts traditional notions of the necessary significance, either literal or figurative, of the title of a work. Instead, a title becomes one more external imposition upon the organic text, like "'story' 'plot' 'continuity'" (NL 174). The passage ends by echoing the "Atrophied Preface," with its stress on literal, and restricted, interpretations of the text: "The title means exactly what the words say...."

Thus Burroughs introduces *The Naked Lunch* by disclaiming all responsibility for its existence, and by stressing his role as "survivor" rather than "author." The author of the Introduction is marginalized further through alignment with Burroughs' most peripheral figure -- the junky (or in this case former junky). As a result of Burroughs' projected withdrawal from *The Naked Lunch*, its constructed "author" exists wholly within the text, which defines and locates his function and position. Although the author is encompassed totally by the text, he *appears* to exist separately, in the use of meta-textual structures (such as an introduction) as a locus of responsibility and power. Burroughs plays with this (usually concealed) duality in order to promote the "independence" of *The Naked Lunch*.

The independence of the text is Burroughs' goal throughout the processes of authorial redefinition. He seeks to avoid "the writer's self-knowledge and self-disgust, and the God-guilt all writers feel in creation" (*Port of Saints* 59), by shifting the author's position from the centre of the text to its margins. Burroughs' tactics, and the quotation above, manifest a desire to avoid responsibility for the text. That is, the burden of making sense of the text, realizing its imperatives and rendering it effective, is shifted on to the reader.

Thus the definitions of the author in *The Naked Lunch* work to establish his marginality and even impotence, and to convince the reader to take responsibility for the text. If this process succeeds, then the author of *The Naked Lunch* becomes a paradigm of literary practice for Burroughs --

undercutting almost completely his own position, yet rendering the text effective through the medium of the reader. As Burroughs argues, "A novelist.... needs the reader in that he hopes that some of his readers will turn into his characters. He needs them as vessels, on which he writes." (*Job* 48)

Hence Burroughs sets out to demonstrate the marginality and insignificance of the literary author in contemporary society. He begins with asserting the general impotence of modern literature (see chapter one), and continues by defining *The Naked Lunch* as the work of a former junky, a "survivor," rather than a professional writer. The devalued and minor position of the writer in society is illuminated further, with explosive violence, in an exchange between Dr Berger (a psychiatrist) and a technician:

BERGER: "Oh yes. Very well put, of course," he snarls viciously. "I don't pretend to be a *writer*." He spits the word out with such ugly hate that the Technician reels back appalled.... (Burroughs' italics, *NL* 115)

One of Dr Berger's "successful" patients is a writer, who has been so liberated from his psyche by his treatment that he can no longer speak (*NL* 114). Berger suggests that writing is an illness or disease, like homosexuality (which is compared to terminal cirrhosis of the liver [*NL* 115]): one which is both repugnant and socially unacceptable. However, Burroughs specifically resists, through caricature, the limitations of definition both as writer and as homosexual. He refuses the double marginalization which these definitions, entailing value judgements of abnormality, and even sickness, strive to effect. In so doing, he not only reveals the motives behind such processes of definition, and binary oppositions such as homosexual/heterosexual, sick/healthy, and insane/sane, but

also the guilt and self-hatred he attributes to the condition of being a writer in a world where writing has become insignificant and devalued.

The writer is defined poignantly as torn by the effort to reconcile irreconcilable oppositions within himself and within the body of his work. He is a pariah, an outcast, rated low on the social or political scale, but (or perhaps because) he performs a function of great importance to society as a whole. The writer becomes a furtive outlaw figure, typified by William Lee in "Hauser and O'Brien" -- living by his wits, only one step ahead of the police, who represent those forces which seek to control and oppress his knowledge, his creativity: "'Room 606. Just pick him up. Don't take time to shake the place down. Except bring in all books, letters, manuscripts. *Anything* printed, typed or written.'"

(Burroughs' italics, NL 166) The potential threat of texts which are politically effective in Burroughs' terms is reinforced by the fact that Lee is forced to kill the two policemen in order to save himself and protect his work. *The Naked Lunch* prefigures *Cities of the Red Night* and *The Place of Dead Roads*, in which the political power and hence danger of the writer's position -- defined as one of knowledge -- is foregrounded. The writer becomes a dangerous outlaw, precisely because of his knowledge, embodied in his texts. However, in this section of *The Naked Lunch* the writer remains a fugitive and shabby figure, like the "old writer" of *The Western Lands*.

The author of *The Naked Lunch* is defined as textually, as well as socially, marginal. As we saw in chapter one, the

"Atrophied Preface" restricts writing to the direct recording of psychic processes. The writer can initiate, "forestall," and "patrol" -- but not "create." As a result of this immensely reductive proposition, Burroughs comes to define literary production in terms of *selection* -- the power to choose, to include and omit -- as he makes clear in the Knickerbocker interview:

INTERVIEWER: Therefore, you're not upset by the fact that a chimpanzee can do an abstract painting?  
 BURROUGHS: If he does a good one, no. People say to me, "Oh, this is all very good, but you got it by cutting up." I say that has nothing to do with it, how I got it. What is any writing but a cutup? Somebody has to program the machine; somebody has to *do* the cutting up. Remember that *I first made selections. Out of hundreds of possible sentences that I might have used, I chose one.* (First italics, Burroughs; second italics, mine; 159)

The writer becomes a "programmer," selecting and permuting existing material. His "imagination" and "creativity" are deprivileged and placed in question, as Burroughs continues to defy all hierarchical oppositions and definitions concerning the practice of writing as such.

The double marginalization of the author undertaken in *The Naked Lunch* leaves only a residue -- a *vestigial* author. All that remains is a name on the cover of a book, as the contextualizing potential of the traditional concept of a literary author has been pared down to an absolute minimum, the vestiges of an author. The self-eradication of the author attempted in *The Naked Lunch* works to establish the text's veracity. Peterson argues that

For Wittgenstein... the truth of solipsism lay in the fact that the self cannot be inferred from the world of which that self is aware. The self is the limit of the world... but not part of it. If *The Naked Lunch* is to be a true representation of the world it cannot, thus, include a self. What self there is is outside the book: it is the

self of the speaker-narrator or the reader. (82)

The displacement of the author to the vestiges (the "limits") of the text not only creates space for the magnification of the reader's role, but enhances the text's status as an accurate representation of contemporary society. However, within the text, and as exemplified within its parameters, the author remains and persists, although as a structuring and defining force, rather than as an anthropomorphic figure. The redefinition, refining, and even virtual erasure of the author in *The Naked Lunch*, which must also be considered in the context of an often parallel redefinition of the role of literature undertaken by the text's parameters, works to change the way we think and proceed in regard to literary production, as well as structuring and defining this particular text.

One important result of the denial or erasure of authorial culpability is that the reader must act solely on the basis of the independent text, rather than shifting the weight of political responsibility back upon the author. The reader must engage directly with the text, as the author has retreated, or been displaced. The complicit position of the "Gentle Reader" of the "Atrophied Preface" becomes dangerous: "No longer can the reader rely on some safe 'point of view' behind the scalpel." (Lee 77) The reader must confront the dangers the text confronts, and observe and internalize its (supposedly unmediated) version of reality.

Once Burroughs has ensured the effectiveness of *The Naked Lunch* by eradicating and displacing the author -- rendering the text independent and the reader responsible for its



realization -- he posits a new and radical goal, that of using language to break the monopolistic hold of language, as expression of dualism, on human consciousness. Tony Tanner argues that this central paradox is common to a number of contemporary American writers, and is a response to perceptions of reality and language as essentially confining:

Here then is the paradox for a writer. If he wants to write in any communicable form he must traffic in a language which may at every turn be limiting, directing and perhaps controlling his responses and formulations. If he feels that the given structuring of reality of the available language is imprisoning or iniquitous, he may abandon language altogether; or he may seek to use the existing language in such a way that he demonstrates to himself and other people that he does not accept nor wholly conform to the structures built into the common tongue, that he has the power to resist and perhaps disturb the particular "rubricizing" tendency of the language he has inherited. Such an author... will go out of his way to show that he is using language as it has never been used before, leaving the visible marks of his idiosyncracies on every formulation. (16)

Burroughs pursues both these paths, undertaking radical redefinition and gesturing towards outright rejection. The paradox of using language to destroy the power of language takes on new and complex dimensions with Burroughs' refusal to systematize his vision:

It is possible to become imprisoned in a system of your own choosing as well as in a system of another's imposing. At the same time there has to be some sort of system because you cannot have pure unstructured consciousness nor, so long as you are involved in language, can you have pure unmediated reality. ...Any writer has to struggle with existing language which is perpetually tending to rigidify in old formulations, and he must constantly assert his own patterning powers without at the same time becoming imprisoned in *them*. (Tanner's italics, 17)

An author such as Burroughs seeks to destroy the rigid and imprisoning systems which mediate and control reality as such, but, importantly, without replacing such systems with new ones, even of his own devising. In such texts as Tanner

describes, the author searches for "stylistic freedom which is not simply a meaningless incoherence," and "stylistic form which will not trap him inside the existing forms of previous literature." (19) The author uses verbal or textual space -- a medium between social space and private, inner space -- to search for his freedom and his form. In *The Naked Lunch*, the author's space is located in the margins of society and of the text, enacting yet again the central practice of revelation and displacement. Burroughs' practices in *The Naked Lunch* exemplify Tanner's description of the contemporary American author's search for freedom from conditioning in tandem with valid artistic (textual) representation, a search which is intensely self-conscious and which entails the conscious embrace of paradox and ambiguity.

In his chapter on Burroughs, Tanner distinguishes three ways in which he attempts to respond to the predominance of mysterious and alien, because coded, systems of control:

a writer may try to jam or foil the codes; he may try to crack them; and he may try to put himself in a position where no codes can reach him -- beyond language and into the silence on the far side of the world's mirror. (121)

*The Naked Lunch* enacts all three methods: shifting to non-literary forms to "jam or foil" the coded significations of literary forms; attempting to "crack them" through exposing and analyzing their binary and hierarchical structures; and finally reaching a position somehow "beyond" codes, as Lee does in "Hauser and O'Brien," "occluded from space-time like an eel's ass occludes when he stops eating on the way to Sargasso...." (NL 171) However, despite the diversity and self-awareness of his strategies, Burroughs never resolves -- and cannot resolve -- the basic paradox of using language and

literature to destroy the power of language and literature.

He is well aware of this problem:

INTERVIEWER: You deplore the accumulation of images and at the same time you seem to be looking for new ones.

BURROUGHS: Yes, it's part of the paradox of anyone who is working with word and image, and after all, that is what a writer is still doing. (Knickerbocker 154)

Tanner argues that Burroughs' (admittedly partial) solution to this paradox is to discriminate between the intentions behind the propagation of texts and images: "He is manipulating words and images, not to make people accept and purchase existing products and artefacts, but to 'create an alteration in the reader's consciousness.'" (122) Thus, ironically, it is the reader, as textual agent and locus of responsibility whose role is determined by the configurations of "author" in Burroughs' text. Meanwhile, the author's "limited function" manages to encompass all aspects of *The Naked Lunch*, and to project its potential beyond the traditionally conceived bounds of the literary text.

Chapter Three: Junk.

"Junk is, in one of its aspects, the inspirer, the hero of the tale, because it is the universal metaphysical solvent to dissolve the world into its basic units."  
(Peterson 82)

Thus far, my stress has been upon the way in which Burroughs' work is directed and energized, often explosively, through the conflict and tension between dualist imperatives. I have established a framework -- an analysis of the defining structures of literary production, both of and within *The Naked Lunch* -- within which coherent interpretation of its narrative and creative processes can be achieved. Thus the aim of the succeeding chapters is to work through the text, pursuing a simultaneous and threefold movement: firstly, in this chapter analyzing the central structural and symbolic role of junk in the text; next, examining the processes of literary production both as they occur, and as Burroughs comments upon them, and looking at the narrative structures and use of narrative conventions; and finally, locating and confronting the central theoretical locus of the text. I will conclude with a chapter relating *The Naked Lunch* to the *Cities of the Red Night* trilogy.

Junk is defined in a number of ways in *The Naked Lunch*. It refers specifically to addictive drugs, especially heroin and morphine: "(generic term for opium and/or derivatives including all synthetics from demerol to palfium)." (NL 9) Yet the term is also used to refer to the economic system created by drug addiction and its supply:

The pyramid of junk, one level eating the level below...  
right up to the top or tops since there are many junk

pyramids feeding on peoples of the world and all built on basic principles of monopoly:

- 1 Never give anything away for nothing.
- 2 Never give more than you have to give (always catch the buyer hungry and always make him wait).
- 3 Always take everything back if you possibly can. (NL 9-10)

Junk becomes the image of a system of exploitative capitalism reduced to an absolute minimum: total need and minimal supply of the most basic product. Junk is the ultimate consumer item:

Junk is the ideal product...the ultimate merchandise. No sales talk necessary. The client will crawl through a sewer and beg to buy.... The junk merchant does not sell his product to the consumer, he sells the consumer to his product. He does not improve and simplify his merchandise. He degrades and simplifies the client. He pays his staff in junk. (NL 10)

Junk becomes a form of currency -- the junk merchant pays his staff in kind -- precisely because of its constant value based on universal demand. Thus junk is the guiding principle of an economic system based on reductive concepts of need and supply, concepts which Burroughs portrays as at the heart of modern capitalism.

In his definitions of junk, Burroughs never loses sight of its fundamentally abhorrent nature and the sheer horror of addiction as such. As a result, he also defines junk, or rather the need for it, as a "virus:" *"The junk virus is public health problem number one of the world today."*

(Burroughs' italics, NL 13) Addiction and its imperatives become the motivating principle of a world structured by the economics of junk, and Burroughs refuses to represent this world in moral terms:

Junk yields a basic formula of "evil" virus: *The Algebra of Need*. The face of "evil" is always the face of total need. ...Beyond a certain frequency need knows absolutely no limit or control. In the words of total need:

"*Wouldn't you?*" Yes you would. You would lie, cheat, inform on your friends, steal, do *anything* to satisfy total need. Because you would be in a state of total sickness, total possession, and not in a position to act in any other way. Dope fiends are sick people who cannot act other than they do. A rabid dog cannot choose but bite. Assuming a self-righteous position is nothing to the purpose unless your purpose be to keep the junk virus in operation. (Burroughs' italics, *NL* 10-11)

As Burroughs points out, morality simply clouds an issue he treats as strictly clinical. Although junk addiction may lead to immoral acts, it is in itself a completely amoral condition. That is, in the exigencies of limited supply and total need, there is no room for questions of right and wrong; they become inappropriate and simply irrelevant.

Burroughs uses junk to reflect the condition of modern man under capitalism -- victimized by addiction to products and to the very idea of consumerism, an addiction which is beyond his control, imaged as illness: "A mathematical extension of the Algebra of Need beyond the junk virus. Because there are many forms of addiction I think that they all obey basic laws." (*NL* 14) Junk is redefined as "waste" of all kinds; specifically as anything to which man becomes addicted which is inimical to his health and well-being. Junk reaches beyond addictive drugs to encompass structures of modern living.<sup>1</sup>

In the Introduction Burroughs stresses his intimate understanding -- that of a participant -- of the junk world, as well as expressing his post-addictive contempt for it:

It is clear that junk is a Round-the-World-Push-an-Opium-Pellet-with-Your-Nose-Route. Strictly for Scarabs -- stumble bum junk heap. And as such report to disposal. Tired of seeing it around. (*NL* 14)

*The Naked Lunch* becomes a revelation of the iniquities of junk and the world it structures, one which Burroughs perceives as necessary and urgent:

Paregoric Babies of the World Unite. We have nothing to lose but Our Pushers. And THEY are NOT NECESSARY.

Look down LOOK DOWN along that junk road before you travel there and get in with the Wrong Mob....

A word to the wise guy. (NL 16)

Burroughs is a survivor, one who has negotiated the toils of junk and addiction and emerged with a unique perspective he is impelled to communicate. Indeed, as Skerl argues: "Literature has taken over the role that drugs once played in his life, and Burroughs has often called himself a 'writing addict' in his work and in interviews." (*Burroughs* 13) *The Naked Lunch* expresses Burroughs' transformation from addict to writer, from victim to survivor.

Having considered the various definitions of junk in *The Naked Lunch*, we move on to the functions which junk enacts within the text, as both structuring force and enigmatic image. An examination of these functions reveals not only the overall structure of the text but also a number of its crucial imperatives, especially the one embodied in the title *The Naked Lunch* -- the urge to see, to perceive and truly comprehend contemporary reality as a structured and coherent whole. Burroughs himself has seen, and now he is warning others -- for him writing combines vital functions of prophecy, warning, and paradigmatic demonstration of the horrors concealed by a deceptive exterior. To see is to know, and knowledge is an icon of resistance to control and exploitation through addiction and the reductive consumerism of junk.

Junk produces the perspective on reality which *The Naked Lunch* elaborates. That is, junk creates the position of

detached and informed observer through its characteristic embodiment -- or even infliction -- of dualism, of separation, upon the addict. The addict is detached from his own body: "The addict regards his body impersonally as an instrument to absorb the medium in which he lives, evaluates his tissue with the cold hands of a horse trader." (NL 63) Junk makes the addict acutely aware of the dualist division between mind and body, subject and the exterior world, by immersing him so totally in his subjectivity that his own body, and even his past life, become objectified and can be observed with dispassionate clarity. Burroughs expresses this apparent contradiction in terms of his personal experience:

I lived in one room in the Native Quarter of Tangier. I had not taken a bath in a year nor changed my clothes or removed them except to stick a needle every hour in the fibrous grey wooden flesh of terminal addiction. ...I did absolutely nothing. ...If a friend came to visit -- and they rarely did since who or what was left to visit -- I sat there not caring that he had entered my field of vision -- a grey screen always blanker and fainter -- and not caring when he walked out of it. (NL 11-12)

Instinct and emotion atrophy, replaced by simple need and the drive to fulfil that need. The addict lives wholly in the present -- a present defined solely by the degree of need or satiety at that particular moment.

Thus junk produces the ultimate observer: completely detached from his body and his past, and hence from physical restraints as well as social and cultural conditioning; distanced from reality and able to observe it without mediation. However, in order for this ideal observer position to be useful, the addict must defeat his addiction, and become a "survivor" like Burroughs himself. Otherwise the addict's lack of interest in the external world, and his inability to



express his vision, render his ideal position useless. As Skerl puts it:

none of these works could have been written by Burroughs the addict, for, as he has pointed out, opiates decrease awareness and thus the ability to write creatively. In fact, Burroughs has denied that anything of worth can be written under the influence of any drug... although drugs may be useful for opening up psychic areas to be written about afterwards. (*Burroughs* 13)

This is the exact position Burroughs maps for himself in the Introduction, which details not only his experiences of addiction but also his cure, through a program of apomorphine treatment (described further in the Appendix). He not only possesses the perspective provided by junk (or the memory of it) but also the will to analyze and interpret the visions of junk, and to communicate them to a wider audience.

The factors constructing the detached observer position of junk addiction are also the source of Burroughs' acute experience of mind-body dualism, as Skerl argues:

As an addict Burroughs found mental freedom in a drug that also produced physical bondage and social victimization. His life had been reduced to a basic contradiction -- the duality of mind and body -- which is the human condition. The extremity of Burroughs' experience had finally revealed that his fate was Everyman's, and the intensity of his vision gave the impetus for a series of novels in which Burroughs' experience is used as the basis for a mythology of modern man. (*Burroughs* 12-13)

Burroughs' experience of the dualistic division of mind and body is the basic impasse which is the source of his vision of contemporary society and hence of his literary work. The specific experience of addiction becomes the universal experience of modern humanity, inscribed in terms of duality and absolute separation. The survivor of addiction is ideally placed to utilize his experience toward a greater goal -- in this case the creation of "a mythology of modern man."

Skerl also makes the important point that Burroughs' own drug addiction was ultimately a free choice:

Although Burroughs argues persuasively about the lack of choice involved in addiction to opiates, it is clear that he chose this fate. Addiction became his spiritual discipline as an artist. Burroughs used addiction for two purposes: deconditioning and expansion of consciousness. ...exploration of consciousness through drug-induced states could give new insights into mind and reality and produce new literary forms. Burroughs has been particularly interested in the realm of the irrational and the repressed -- what he calls the world of dream. (*Burroughs* 12)

Just as Burroughs sought to expand his own consciousness through drugs, so he seeks to expand the reader's consciousness through the text. Text and junk are aligned, both functioning to alter consciousness, with the important difference that the text is non-addictive (although Burroughs portrays himself as addicted to writing). Thus *The Naked Lunch* becomes a substitute for addiction, for junk, a means of experiencing a harsh and brutal reality from a position of (relative) safety.

As Skerl indicates, the text is not only the vehicle of expanded consciousness, but also the means of exploring unconscious and hidden aspects of the psyche -- "the irrational and the repressed." Junk is a means of achieving detachment from the past and the physical fact of existence, as well as the exploration of hidden and unfamiliar aspects of the psyche. This process eventually leads back to the self in a positive way, either through the surmounting of addiction or the enrichment of self-knowledge and awareness. Junk is a means to an end, an end which it also construes, as oblivion and release (through drugs), or survival and liberation (from drugs), and health.

Junk is an image of reality, one which gives structure and coherence to the detached visions of the addict. Yet junk is an exclusive and unique image, one which resists translation and allegory. As Frank McConnell puts it:

Junk *is* image, and therefore image *is* junk: the terrible purity of Burroughs' style will not allow us to extrapolate symbolic matrices because it will not allow terms for the problem other than its own. Any second series of correspondences would be, in the book's own terms, a retreat into image-junk and a final betrayal into addiction. (McConnell's italics, 671)

The relationship between image and object is specific and unique, innately meaningful and significant, as construed by the text. Its resistance to representation in any terms other than its own recalls the insistence on closure and restricting readerly engagement found in the text's parameters. Lydenberg extends the text's anti-metaphoric nature, arguing that Burroughs "refuses to feed our need for allegorical explanation, our need to reaffirm the transcendent nature of language, literature, and the human condition." (*Word Cultures* 10) Thus *The Naked Lunch* is centred by junk, but it is an image which resists community with other images, refusing all symbolization other than its own.<sup>2</sup>

Junk can also, ironically, inspire addiction to images:

INTERVIEWER: Can you amplify your idea of junk as image?  
BURROUGHS: It's only a theory and, I feel, an inadequate one. I don't think anyone really understands what a narcotic is or how it works, how it kills pain. ...As I see it, what has been damaged in pain is, of course, the image, and morphine must in some sense replace this....

INTERVIEWER: Narcotics, then, disturb normal perception---  
BURROUGHS: --and set up instead a random craving for images. (Knickerbocker 148-9)

Burroughs' theory here is that pain damages the image (of the self, primarily), and that junk replaces the damaged image,

therefore becoming an image itself. This theory explains the imagistic, non-narrative quality of much of the text, which implies in turn an idealistic definition of reading as an emotive, nonrational, and associative process of perception: "The word cannot be expressed direct.... It can perhaps be indicated by mosaic of juxtaposition like articles abandoned in a hotel drawer, defined by negatives and absence...." (NL 98) As in the parameters of the text (including in this instance the Appendix) -- where he attempts to render language self-referential, containing or structured by its own metaphor, and untranslatable into any other terms -- Burroughs strives to reach a point at which language becomes entirely denotative, or anti-metaphorical (see McConnell 676).

Burroughs resists symbolic language, in which significations and interpretations multiply freely and therefore pass beyond his control, in order to effect closure and restrict readerly engagement, as we have seen, but also in order to depict the banal sterility of uses of language perpetrated by those in control of the media. This aim connects with the unique and individual perspective junk establishes in *The Naked Lunch* -- the absolute division between subject and world entails that one can only speak for one's self, and Burroughs criticizes those structures which enable (even encourage) individuals to speak for others, to translate unique experience into other, alien terms, to deny their subjective integrity and identity, and to erect structures of control: "And speaking *Personally* and if a man speaks any other way we might as well start looking for his Protoplasm Daddy or Mother Cell...." (Burroughs' italics, NL

14) To speak for one's self is all that is possible in the fragmented and atomistic world of junk, and Burroughs argues that to speak for one's self (and one's self alone) is to take responsibility for the nature of one's own existence, and thus to take a first step in reintegrating the damaged self-image which junk has corrupted and replaced.

Thus Burroughs resists interpretation of his text in terms other than his own. He refuses allegory, content with a single, all-encompassing image of control through desperate need. The specificity of *The Naked Lunch's* perspective is explained: although Burroughs uses junk as structuring image to contextualize his worldview, a worldview made possible by the subject position inherent in addiction, the narrative point of view is always that of a junky -- addicted, withdrawing, or recovering. Although Burroughs describes the condition of contemporary man in terms of junk/addiction, he does not apply his central image to the facts of existence, but rather tries to demonstrate that it is always already present as a defining structure of contemporary existence, entrenched in dichotomies and the oppositions engendered by dualism. Hence junk (and addiction) is the dominant structuring principle of reality as Burroughs defines it.

I now want to move on to a brief examination of the version of reality that Burroughs constructs through his use of the addict's perspective. As noted above, his version of reality is based on an acute perception of the power of dualism, which, as addict, he has experienced firsthand in the separation of mind and body. Burroughs' vehement opposition

to dualism springs from his analysis of binary opposition as the source of external control of mankind -- dualism entrenches the separation of mind and body, subject and world, reason and emotion, and so on, thus externalizing crucial elements of man's identity and self-image, and rendering the world fragmented and alien to his perception. Burroughs locates the gap between two terms of a binary opposition as the source of corruption and exteriorized control:

"That's the sex that passes the censor, squeezes through between bureaus, because there's always a space *between*, in popular songs and Grade B movies, giving away the basic American rottenness, spurting out like breaking boils, throwing out globs of that un-D.T. to fall anywhere and grow into some degenerate cancerous life-form, reproducing a hideous random image." (Burroughs' italics, *NL* 111)

Separation, opposition, and division are anathema to Burroughs, representing the fragmentation of that which should be whole. John Vernon, in his book *The Garden and the Map*, argues that this fragmentation is

the defining characteristic of Western culture: it is schizophrenic, in that it chooses to fragment its experience and seal certain areas off from each other. It drains the fantastic, the mad, and the subjective out of their unity with the self and the world, out of the condition by which they are not even differentiated yet, and locks them in a common inaccessible space. (xi)

Reality, as perceived by Western culture, becomes "an incomplete chunk of the real feigning completeness." (xi) The society structured by this culture is schizophrenic, Vernon argues, and in fact "mad" in the sense of "a basic alteration of one's being-in-the-world. It is that alteration which tears one's being out of the world, which alienates the self by fragmenting it." (xi) Western culture represses actual unity in favour of an appearance of unity in incompleteness. Vernon sees this kind of culture as exemplified by the "map"

structure, "whereby areas of experience are extricated from each other and arranged in discrete spaces beside each other, often as opposites." (xii) He argues that much of modern literature seeks to replace the "map" with the "garden" -- a structure which "unites opposites and enables all areas of experience to be accessible to each other" -- but that this shift has barely begun (xii).

The schizophrenia Vernon ascribes to contemporary culture is one of the primary concerns of *The Naked Lunch*. Throughout his text, Burroughs uses the perspective and the structuring image of junk to reveal and comment upon the fundamental dualism at the core of all social and political structures. The fragmentation and isolation which junk entails and represents becomes the ultimate paradigm for modern existence -- a paradigm of evil, stagnation, and alienation. The self, as expressed in the body, becomes, according to Vernon, a passive victim of the objects surrounding it -- eternally separated from them by the subject/object dichotomy:

In Burroughs, movable objects control the body literally because they are junk. "Junk" means both waste objects and heroin, and the two are collapsed into one symbol in Burroughs' world. Civilized society is the consumer culture; it produces objects for instant consumption, objects with their waste function built in, objects to be emptied of their use and thrown away. The object most repeatedly emptied of its use in Burroughs is the needle, and it is emptied into the body. ...Thus the junkie is the perfect consumer; his body awaits the distribution of goods and is totally controlled by the map of that distribution. (95-96)

Thus the junky is not only the victim of his need, of an economy based on principles of total need and restricted supply, but of the very objects which fulfil his need -- from which he is separated eternally by the subject/object

dichotomy. As McConnell puts it, the visions of *The Naked Lunch* are "clarified visions of present reality made more terrible by...the addict's absolute dependence on real *things* in their aspect of maximum power." (his italics, 674) The addict experiences dualism, binary opposition, in every fibre of his being. In so doing, he typifies the schizophrenic culture which embodies such divisions and takes them as its basis.

Vernon goes on to describe the helpless passivity of the addict in the face of a world of actively material and hence threatening objects in sexual terms:

The heroin experience is an offering oneself up to be penetrated, either by another or by one's own self as other. Junk satisfies the need to be passive, to be controlled, to be relieved of the burden of initiating any actions, to be fed, to incorporate, to consume. (96)

It is profoundly ironic that the addict commits this "penetration" or even violation upon himself most of the time.<sup>3</sup> The addict masochistically unleashes upon himself the substance, representative of object-ness as such, which threatens and assaults his subjectivity:

The subject-object split that produces the external-internal structure of the body also produces a split between the hard-edged objects of the world and the vulnerable, soft body, a split that gives the world the continual character of attack, of bombardment. (Vernon 97)

The fragmentation of the world of objects which is symptomatic of Burroughs' vision in *The Naked Lunch* is important to the structure of the text. As Peterson puts it in the passage from which the epigraph to this chapter is taken:

Junk is...the inspirer, the hero of the tale, because it is the universal metaphysical solvent to dissolve the world into its basic units. The "characters" are,



therefore, fragmented and incomplete, as the world of the speaker-narrator (which becomes also the world of the reader) really is. (82)

The text which mirrors the world structured by junk, structured by schizophrenia, is necessarily schizophrenic and fragmented in its own structure. Passivity and inaction become appropriate responses in a fragmented and alien world, and it is precisely this passivity and inaction which Burroughs is trying to break through in his attempts to compel the reader to act on the basis of *The Naked Lunch's* representation of (what he sees as) essential truth.

The quotation from Peterson also points to a further extension of the junk perspective in its description of junk as "metaphysical solvent." That is, there is a discernable metaphysic of junk in *The Naked Lunch*, one which complements and completes its predominance as object/image and as structure/context. Peterson suggests this when he describes the text as "designed to reflect a system of metaphysics" (81), and argues that:

In the twentieth century...it is not only impossible to transcend the material world but it is also impossible to take refuge in it. Both idealistic and materialistic escapes from the ego-centric predicament...have been finally closed. (79)

Peterson evokes the basic predicament of the junky, and hence Everyman, in *The Naked Lunch* -- eternally separate from the world of objects, which comes to include the body, yet equally unable to connect with other subjects -- alienated and profoundly isolated. He argues that the refuge the text posits is solipsism: the individual comes to recognize, if not accept, the inability of the world he perceives to contain his subjectivity as such. I contend that Burroughs' vision is

less compromised -- his version of the map of contemporary society and culture (and their constructions of reality), to which the key is provided by junk, offers no final route to safety, security, or happiness. It provides no answers, only the imperatives to act, to change the status quo by altering one's own consciousness, and, importantly, by moving away from junk and all its ramifications. As McConnell puts it:

"Burroughs will tell us that it is our duty to will health, but he will also insist that we will it meaningfully, without regression to easy but exhausted versions of the spirit."

(680)

The significance of junk in *The Naked Lunch* is more than apparent. It is the core of what is revealed to the reader in "*Bill's Naked Lunch Room*," at "the end of that long newspaper spoon" (Burroughs' italics, *NL* 15, 14), yet it also contextualizes, structures, and enables this vision. His personal experience of drug addiction, and his use of the perspective provided by junk to analyze and represent the human condition, are at the centre of Burroughs' text. The new addiction, writing, becomes the vehicle for analysis of the old addiction, culminating in the clinical detachment of the Appendix. It is from this point -- the realization of the multi-dimensional role of junk in *The Naked Lunch* -- that I will proceed to a close examination of the text as such, an examination which is, unavoidably, concerned with junk "the inspirer, the hero of the tale...."

Chapter Four: The Word.

"WHAT SCARED YOU INTO TIME? INTO BODY?  
INTO SHIT? I WILL TELL YOU. THE WORD."  
(Letter from Burroughs to Ginsberg, qtd in  
Tanner 109)

"Burroughs' fictions are indeed acts of  
exorcism, a confronting of what he views  
as a new diabolism of control and power."  
(Lee 78)

One of *The Naked Lunch's* primary concerns is language, and the use and nature of linguistic forms such as literary narrative. To use Burroughs' own terms, he is obsessed with the power of "the word" -- "The word of course is one of the most powerful instruments of control..." (*Job* 18) -- which he perceives as dualist in its every aspect. This dualism is encapsulated in the crucial paradox which directs the text's efforts to achieve effectiveness: Burroughs' desire to break the power of language through the very use of language.

Thus Burroughs' desire to defeat dualism, and to challenge the primacy of language and the dominant control systems it empowers, as depicted in the epigraphs to this chapter, represents the unifying goal of *The Naked Lunch*. His responses and strategies are also fundamentally dualist -- he employs the narrative conventions and devices disparaged in the "Atrophied Preface" to inform and construct the text, while at the same time he reveals and dissects the underlying ambiguities and hidden value judgements embedded in such conventions and devices. This process of usage followed by revelation and dissection insists upon the reader's constant awareness of the text as literary construct, as well as his awareness of his own narrowly constructed function as reader. All this is part of the ongoing process of (re)training the

reader -- breaking down his learned assumptions and interpretive practices, and instituting new ones. It is these processes of diverse and complex interaction between text and reader, as well as the specific "political" agenda outlined above, which I now examine. My approach is mimetic and empirical, in order to emphasize the text's thematic unity, and to reveal the crucial cumulative effect of Burroughs' incremental repetition.

The first section of *The Naked Lunch*, which is untitled, is narrated by William Lee, the narrator of *Junky* as well as the pseudonym under which it was published. Lee's persona as small-time crook and drug addict is established in a seemingly realist narrative, but this apparent realism is undercut by the narrator's obtrusive awareness of his audience. This awareness is expressed in numerous asides to the reader, which fall into three categories.

The first kind explain idiomatic slang: "(Note: Grass is English thief slang for inform)" or "(Note: People is New Orleans slang for narcotic fuzz)" (NL 17, 21). The second category explain the characteristics of certain drugs and the practices associated with taking them, "(Note: Catnip smells like marijuana when it burns. Frequently passed on the incautious or uninstructed)" and "(Note: Yen pox is the ash of smoked opium)" (NL 19, 21). The third kind of aside explains slang terms for obscure or apocryphal customs and rituals:

(This is a rural English custom designed to eliminate aged and bedfast dependants. A family so afflicted throws a 'smother party' where the guests pile mattresses on the old liability, climb up on top of the mattresses and lush themselves out) (NL 23)

The asides emphasize the literary and fictive nature of the narrative, through their insistence on the semiotic possibilities of language, and the contrast they evoke between Lee's narrative and "scientific" fact. They initiate the reader into a new language -- slang or pseudoscientific jargon -- which is exclusionary in nature, stressing the potential for complicity with the text. Above all, the asides "interrupt" the text, reminding the reader of the disruptive potential, and intratextual authority, of the author. As Lydenberg argues, the asides represent "the splicing in of a different voice in the text." (*Word Cultures* 13) This voice is "scientific or technical" in tone, insisting upon the factual veracity of the narrative's terminology: "The literalness... which pervades Burroughs' prose style is part of his campaign to free literature from morality and symbolic rhetoric, to seize for it the independence of the sciences...." (Lydenberg, *Word Cultures* 13) Hence the asides work to maintain a balance between the precise and detached voice of science and that of the narrator of a literary text. As Lydenberg stresses, "these intrusions do not represent the hierarchical domination of one voice over another, but a surgical attack on all structures of hierarchy, continuity, and control." (*Word Cultures* 13-14) Integration, rather than hierarchical privileging, is Burroughs' goal.

The asides augment the persona of Lee. His narration also includes a number of other characters from *Junky*, such as Old Bart, Bill Gains, Old Ike, Pantapon Rose, and Lupita. The evocation of these characters in this section marks the beginning of their transformation from realistic characters in

a conventional narrative to mythical beings, possessing figurative resonance in an anarchic and unconventional text. These characters are transmuted into touchstones in the rest of Burroughs' work, losing their individuality but gaining an extended significance in the process. This is one of the key functions of the mythopoeia central to his subsequent work. It is exemplified in this section by the metamorphosis of Bradley the Buyer into a terrifying figure like a vampire bat (NL 29).

The juxtaposition of the realistic characters and narrator of *Junky* and a conventionally presented realist narrative, against a fantastic sequence (Bradley the Buyer) and explanatory asides, both of which challenge the realist status of the text, emphasizes the diverse and disparate functions of language. The reader is forced to recognize the nature of the choice that is made every time one word, and not another, is selected and deployed (recalling the authorial function of selection and permutation). The division between reader and text, symptomatic of the fragmented and schizophrenic world inhabited by the reader and depicted by the text, is rigorously drawn.

The second section of the novel is titled "Benway," after the character who is one of Burroughs' earliest literary creations.<sup>1</sup> One of the first things the reader learns about Dr Benway is that he is "a manipulator and co-ordinator of symbol systems, an expert on all phases of interrogation, brainwashing and control." (NL 31) After this brief introduction, Benway speaks for himself. His statements are always spoken from a position of authority and assumed superiority. They are declamatory, rhetorical, and resist

interpretive engagement, yet they are often satirical and even comic: "'God damned matriarchy. All matriarchies anti-homosexual, conformist and prosaic. Find yourself in a matriarchy walk don't run to the nearest frontier.'" (NL 36) Burroughs emphasizes the linguistic forms of authority -- in this case medical -- which lead to the tacit acceptance of control, of prescribed forms of response.

The portrayal of Benway (NL 31-36) stresses the redundancy of traditional concepts of character in the novel, according to Burroughs, as well as the arbitrary nature of the processes in which such a character is constructed by the reader:

Benway's face retains its form in the flash bulb of urgency, subject at any moment to unspeakable cleavage or metamorphoses. It flickers like a picture moving in and out of focus.

Benway's voice drifts into my consciousness from no particular place...a disembodied voice that is sometimes loud and clear, sometimes barely audible like music down a windy street. (NL 36)

Taken in conjunction with Benway's own statements, these two passages establish and emphasize his nature as an amalgam of character (and caricatured) stereotypes, rather than as an individual, fully realized, and realistic character -- he has neither a face nor a voice of his own. This is evident in the language Benway uses, which consists largely of pseudo-scientific jargon, hackneyed clichés, and medical platitudes.

The intrusive and insistent presence of the author in this section is marked by the following passage: "I quote from the author's article on narcotic drugs in the *British Journal of Addiction* (see Appendix)" (NL 37). Here, the narrator of a seemingly realist narrative speaks of "the author," revealing

a complete awareness of himself as authorial construct. "The author" is invoked dispassionately, and is given no specific identity other than as the author of this text. This is an extension of the distancing processes commenced by the text's parameters, typified here by the positioning of the author as simply a point of reference, of vestigial authority, in relation to the narrative.

The undercutting of traditional narrative structures, which we recognize as a goal of the text's parameters, is emphasized throughout this section in the playful approach taken toward generic definition, the narrative conventions of the novel, and the (literary) uses of language. This playfulness takes on a dangerous and violent note with the description of the scenes which occur when Dr Benway's patients and experimental subjects escape en masse:

Gentle reader, the ugliness of that spectacle buggers description. Who can be a cringing pissing coward, yet vicious as a purple-assed mandrill, alternating these deplorable conditions like vaudeville skits? Who can shit on a fallen adversary who, dying, eats the shit and screams with joy? Who can hang a weak passive and catch his sperm in mouth like a vicious dog? Gentle reader, I fain would spare you this, but my pen hath its will like the Ancient Mariner. Oh Christ what a scene is this! Can tongue or pen accommodate these scandals? A beastly young hooligan has gouged out the eye of his confrere and fuck him in the brain. (NL 44)

Ironic modes of address are employed to ensure the reader's emotional detachment from horrific scenes, through the parody of literary forms and styles, and the insistence upon the reader's awareness of these passages as essentially literary and fictive. Uses of language characteristic of particular authors (eg, Swift, Shakespeare), as well as particular periods, are invoked and as swiftly dismissed or undercut. Narrative styles and conventional literary uses of language



come to have equal, and negligible, significance and value, although the text continues to be dominated by Burroughs' obsession with forms, uses, and effects of language, specifically those of literature.

In "Joselito," the third section, the unidentified narrator continues to insist upon the reader's awareness of the ambiguity and nature of literary language, as well as differentiating between this kind of language, which the text works to undermine, and *The Naked Lunch* itself. This process begins with the definition of Joselito according to his literary pretensions and achievements: "And Joselito who wrote bad, class-conscious poetry..." (NL 48). It continues with the narrator's refusal to use figurative, almost necessarily literary, language in a particularly evocative descriptive passage: "(Note: This is not a figure. Anopheles mosquitos are silent.)" (Burroughs' italics, NL 48) Once again Burroughs asserts the anti-metaphorical literalness of his imagery.

The fourth section, "The Black Meat," introduces a number of important characters (the Sailor, "Fats" Terminal) in a realist narrative describing fantastic and grotesque creatures and events. The central location of "The City" is also introduced, depicted as structured by the addictions of its inhabitants, one of which is the black meat of the giant aquatic centipedes.<sup>2</sup> This short and narratively straightforward section applies the structuring image of *The Naked Lunch*, junk addiction, to a fantastic and alien environment. All relationships are shown as structured by need and supply, forcefully illustrating the nature of power for Burroughs. The third and fourth sections of *The Naked*

*Lunch* function in terms of the text's own imperatives, whereas the previous sections are mainly concerned with the discrediting or dismissal of the techniques and imperatives of other, specifically literary, texts.

The fifth section, "Hospital," is centred around the experiences of an unidentified narrator who is withdrawing from junk in a hospital. His paranoid, withdrawal-induced suspicions feed directly into full-blown fantasy sequences, interspersed with precise factual perceptions about his own mental and physical condition. The narrator represents the archetypal addict -- able to detach himself from his own body and experience, like the narrator of the Introduction, and to observe himself dispassionately.

This section is primarily a straightforward narrative, ending with a short paragraph of juxtaposed images, connected by ellipses. At first, emphasis is placed on the extraordinary semiotic clues the narrator is able to perceive in his environment. That is, the withdrawing addict becomes obsessed with codes, and with language as a code. He even speculates on the possible semiotic significance of disease: "Fall asleep reading and the words take on code significance.... Obsessed with codes.... Man contracts a series of diseases which spell out a code message...." (NL 63) Images of addiction and disease become the fundamental means of communication between humans. The addict, in the depths of degradation ("Running out of veins and out of money" [NL 63]), begins to be aware of his own place in the power structures of junk and addiction. It is significant that this realization occurs and is expressed in terms of codes and semiotics: junk

is rendered universal and archetypal by its inscription in these terms. This realization by the addict connects with the text's insistence on the reader's realization of the structures which control and inform his reading. The distancing effect which both realizations imply is expressed in terms of the addict's complete dissociation from, firstly, his body, and secondly, his self-image or sense of identity -- a condition which, he comes to realize as he withdraws from junk, is characteristic of contemporary existence as a whole, not just drug addiction.

At the end of this section there is a shift from the perception of excessive semiotic significances to the loss of the ability to perceive any such significances: "I try to focus the words... they separate in meaningless mosaic...." (NL 64) The junky's connections with the world, already tenuous, are severed.

In the sixth section, "Lazarus Go Home," Lee reappears, in the throes of addiction, but as a character rather than as the narrator. His body is the centrepiece of a fantastic sequence, underlining the sense of detachment from self discussed above (NL 66). This section mainly consists of bizarre, frequently obscene, and often disparate events, related in a conventional narrative form. The practice of providing informative asides to the reader continues. One particular example of this is significant -- a long aside about the condition known as Bang-utot ends thus: "[See article by Nils Larsen M.D., *The Men with the Deadly Dream* in the *Saturday Evening Post*, December 3, 1955. Also article by Erle Stanley Gardner for *True Magazine*.]" (NL 67) The

intertextual sources invoked underline the insistence of the text's parameters on the (supposedly) non-literary, and non-fictive, nature of *The Naked Lunch*. The author casts doubt upon the text's status as fiction, as a novel, by continuing to disable the practices and techniques through which the reader interprets, assesses, and judges a literary text. This particular use of intertextuality has another important aspect, one described by Skerl:

In *The Naked Lunch* Burroughs makes use of the full range of popular literary resources: news media, advertising, and popular fiction in all of its forms.... What all these popular forms have in common is a paranoid view of the world that Burroughs accepts as valid. Popular art, like pseudoscience, reveals what society would like to repress. (*Burroughs* 42)

Burroughs uses these "literary resources" not only as part of his systematic attack on the privileging of forms of discourse defined as literary, but also in order to penetrate the ambiguity and secrecy permeating the inner structures of reality as conceived by schizophrenic Western culture. The substance and nature of Burroughs' intertextual sources are as important as the act of intertextual invocation itself.

Junk is invoked and surpassed in this sixth section: "A long slug undulated out of Lee's right eye and wrote on the wall in iridescent ooze: 'The Sailor is in the City buying up TIME.'" (*NL* 68) The fact that the Sailor is attempting to monopolize Time suggests that it is the next commodity to be incorporated into the structures of need and addiction -- a theme which is developed substantially by the later trilogy. Burroughs continues to permute the structures junk provides.

The seventh section of *The Naked Lunch*, "Hassan's Rumpus Room," continues to stress the undermining of readerly

conventions of constructing and interpreting characters through analysis of what they say and how they say it. Two central characters are introduced in this section. Firstly, Hassan appears, at the end of an elaborate performance of multiple homosexual acts and ritual hanging, and proclaims sexual freedom, disguised as a parody of a Texas oil baron (*NL* 72). He is subsequently confronted by A.J., who represents the opposition to the Liquefactionist doctrine which Hassan supports. The fact that this is a conflict of ideological oppositions rather than of realistic characters is apparent in the constant assuming and discarding of different disguises and modes of speech by both Hassan and A.J., as when Hassan exchanges his "phoney Texas accent" (*NL* 72) for a parodic Mafia one:

Hassan shrieks out: "This is your doing, A.J.! You poopa my party!"

A.J. looks at him, face remote as limestone: "Uppa your ass, you liquefying gook." (*NL* 74)

Lydenberg argues convincingly that it is in the space between two such conflicting and parodied voices that Burroughs' "poetic voice" is sited: "We cannot locate the author or the 'truth' in either of these voices 'put down' in the text. We must look to the negative space between them, to the space cleared by the antithetical clash of these two ways of seeing." (*Word Cultures* 12-13) Burroughs continues to use -- and deconstruct -- binary oppositions and the "negative space" they provide, the "space *between*" (*NL* 111).

The eighth section of *The Naked Lunch*, "Campus of Interzone University," is a comical parody of the typical university lecture, shifted to the location of a busy marketplace, which

serves to disrupt readerly expectations yet again, as do the continual alterations in the Professor's appearance and mode of presentation. The Professor presents a number of ideas which are theoretically central to *The Naked Lunch*, but they are constantly controverted or undercut by student opposition, humorous and/or fantastic asides, or the intrusion of the Professor's multiple personalities. Even the conclusion of this section is parodically disputed: "'I am not worthy to eat his feet,' says the fattest hog of them all. 'Clay anyhoo.'" (NL 78) This undercutting of crucial assertions is necessary and unavoidable in terms of Burroughs' political agenda, which promotes the goal of destroying the power of language and the media over the individual, and paradoxically seeks to do so through a series of literary works. Burroughs' technique is to make a positive and theoretically significant assertion through the locus of a character, but to hedge it with parody and irony, to juxtapose it against opposite positions, and even to contradict it directly. What remains after this process is the vestiges of an idea, which requires the voluntary engagement of the reader to be activated.

Intertextuality is a crucial element of the Professor's argument, which is structured by Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. Throughout the Professor's long monologue (NL 77-78), the games with language continue -- reactivating clichés and parodying various styles of speech. Coleridge's poem can be taken as parallel to the text itself, with the reader as one of "those who cannot choose but hear owing to already existing relation between The Mariner (however ancient) and the uh Wedding Guest...." (NL 78) The Professor

claims that "What the Mariner actually says is not important...." (NL 78), suggesting that it is the act of reading and writing -- communicating -- which is important. That is, the Professor argues that no matter what the Mariner says, the Wedding Guest undergoes a significant transformation of some kind, through the simple act of listening.

McConnell indicates another side to Burroughs' use of Coleridge's poem in this section:

For just as the Ancient Mariner's compulsion arises from his never really finding the appropriate language for his experience, so that he must tell his tale again and again *ad infinitum, in exilio*, so the deliberate reduction of linguistic power we have noted in *The Naked Lunch* is a desperate attempt to tell the tale truly once and for all, and so be rid of it. (676)

Burroughs' attack on literary forms becomes the product of not only his despair at the impotence of literature as he perceives it, but of a desire to create the ultimate -- final, total, and complete -- literary text. *The Naked Lunch* can be seen as a kind of ritual exorcism of junk and of all unnecessary, arbitrary, and ambiguous structures, especially those of dualism.

The Professor takes the position established above one step further still by surmising that little or nothing can be achieved through exchanges structured by language: "nothing can ever be accomplished on the verbal level" (NL 78). His ultimate conclusion is that: "'You can find out more about someone by talking than by listening.'" (Burroughs' italics, NL 78) Talking occupies the conscious mind, leaving the unconscious free to communicate on a non-verbal, deeply profound level. Burroughs arrives at this conclusion through the inversion of a binary opposition (talking as imparting

knowledge, listening as receiving it) so well established that it has become a cliché. His inversion gives new meaning and depth to a stale assertion, whilst refusing to reinstate the privileging of either term.

In this section we see the first explicit statement of Burroughs' persistent goal: to destroy the "evil" powers of language either through demolishing and somehow "replacing" it, or through radical restructuring and overhaul. All this is presented through the parodic character of the Professor, whose lapses into "Southern redneck" and attempts to dress up as an old woman seriously undermine the weight, if not the meaning, of his discourse. What remains after all this demolition is meagre, but ideologically sound to Burroughs -- the act of engagement between reader and text.

The ninth section of *The Naked Lunch*, "A.J.'s Annual Party," is structured as a pornographic film that the partygoers are watching, and the narrative progresses through the traditional film techniques of juxtaposition and association, rather than through contiguity. The pornographic genre is treated as an art form, with the Great Slashtubitch's insistence on "sincerity and art, and devotion" (NL 79) from his actors. Within the film itself, there is a philosophical emphasis on the theme of organic decay, especially of youthful bodies and their desires. There is also stress on the differences between appearance and reality, differences which film has always been able to explore in a productive and insightful way. This stress is most evident when the leading actors appear after the film, looking tired, older, and petulant (NL 89). The continual performance of sexual acts is



made to signify beyond its mere permutative or algebraic aspects, to record important manifestations of human nature and sexuality. The text proves that the depiction of incessant sex need not require the disengagement of the thinking mind, once again challenging conventions of generic definition.

In this section, the reader is invited to join a community, the community of those watching the film. However, he always remains aware that he can be only a peripheral member of this group, as he is not only in the position of watching the audience watching the film, but he is "reading." That is, his perception of the film is through language, and he must recreate the visual images for himself. Again, we see a distancing movement -- the reader moves further and further away from the primary emotional core of the text, although he is expected to engage fully with its political aspects. The use of the film as the source of narrative form in this section stresses the distance between reader and text, a distance which is always conditioned and modified by the very nature of language in a world structured by junk.

The nature of language, and the way it conditions our construction and interpretation of the text and of reality, is the site of intense analysis in the tenth section, titled "Meeting of International Conference of Technological Psychiatry." The scene is that of a medical conference, which breaks into total and fantastically presented chaos, incorporating a parodic courtroom episode. This is a specific attack upon the medical and legal professions, and more generally the institutions central to them, which are regarded

with reverence, and involve supposedly humanist ethics. A highly conventional and ritualized situation (the medical conference and the court of law) is reduced to anarchy and destruction, as is the hospital in the second section. Supposedly civilized men of intellect are reduced to primitive survival instincts: "They storm the exits screaming and clawing." (NL 91) Burroughs reveals that the veneer of civilization is thin, and that the seemingly impermeable societal structures established by science, law and medicine are in fact frail and vulnerable. In revealing their betrayal of humanism he reaffirms his own radical version.

A pattern is emerging, in which the text unearths the underlying structures of society and reality, as well as the structures of narrative, of reading and comprehension, and then disrupts them, usually with a considerable element of humour and playfulness. The entropy generated in this tenth section represents a kind of second order demolition for Burroughs: the way in which the societal structures of supposedly benevolent and humane institutions such as medicine and the law are disrupted, and their fundamentally anti-humanist basis revealed, can be seen as a secondary operation of the major drive to destroy the power of language in general and narrative in particular. All of these structures are integral to the way we interpret, comprehend, and order the world we perceive, a world which Burroughs portrays as structured by junk. The world and practices of the reader are continually subjected to attack and disruption in and by this text, with a frightening and progressive intensification. The question arises: how far can this

process continue before the text itself must necessarily become meaningless and incomprehensible, through defying every method or practice of interpretation and analysis, every technique of "making sense?"

Instead of providing an answer to this question or relieving the tension it generates, the eleventh section of *The Naked Lunch*, "The Market," extends and diversifies the attack on societal and cultural structures. It is sited in the city of Interzone (based on Tangier), Burroughs' archetypal city, "where all human potentials are spread out in a vast silent market." (NL 91)<sup>3</sup> There is a return to the use of informative asides, primarily about drugs and their use. In this case the drug is Yage, and it is used to highlight the self-consciousness and self-referentiality of the text:

(Section describing The City and the Meet Café written in state of Yage intoxication... Yage, Ayuahuasca, Pilde, Nateema are Indian names for Bannisteria Caapi, a fast growing vine indigenous to the Amazon region. See discussion of Yage in Appendix.) (NL 93)

This aside undercuts the descriptive and evocative elements of the section, reducing them to drug-induced hallucinations and providing a technical and scientific explanation for their origins. The balance of the narrative is again weighted in favour of the technical and literal as opposed to the imaginative and literary. Also, we see the repetition of the technique of containing associative passages of fantastic imagery within a realistic scientific/medical framework (to give veracity) -- the recounting of "symptoms."

It is within this context, in which doubt has been cast on what is "real" and what is merely hallucination, that Clem and Jody appear and carry out blasphemous acts at religious

events. Their actions underline the fundamental lack of logic and rationality which Burroughs perceives in most religious and cultural practices. Clem and Jody are succeeded by the "vicious, fruity old Saint" (NL 96), who spitefully proceeds to denigrate the world's major religious figures: "'Christ? .... That cheap ham!'" (NL 96), "'Buddha? A notorious metabolic junky,'" "'Mohammed? Are you kidding? He was dreamed up by the Mecca Chamber of Commerce.'" (both NL 97) Confucius and Lao-Tze are also disposed of in this fashion, as are the Christian saints (NL 98). All of these major religious figures are thus comically inscribed in the structures of power and control, need and supply, commodity and demand. They are portrayed, significantly, as theatrical constructs, fundamentally self-interested, and with not even a hint of divinity. However, despite the comic disparagement of such figures, Burroughs does not underestimate their cultural power and status.

The "saint" goes on to present himself, ironically (or perhaps not?) as a potential Messiah:

"So I got an exclusive why don't I make with the live word? The word cannot be expressed direct.... It can perhaps be indicated by mosaic of juxtaposition like articles abandoned in a hotel drawer, defined by negatives and absence...." (NL 98)

This passage concerns what Burroughs sees as the crucial centre of all religious practice and discourse -- the word, or rather, a particular use of language. Religion becomes just another form of discourse, like the literary, with narrative and rhetorical conventions of its own. However, "the word" continues to signify in some important way, even if it is not adequately represented by the major religions of the world.

Like everything else of significance in the text, the word becomes vestigial, minimal, and consequently more powerful. Its power is expressed in the fact that access to the word must be oblique, through juxtaposition and association rather than through contiguity. The connection between the redefined "word" and the text of *The Naked Lunch* enhances the "Biblical" overtones powerfully suggested by the "Atrophied Preface." Even divine revelation is structured and determined by the nature of language.

The twelfth section of *The Naked Lunch* is titled, appropriately, "Ordinary Men and Women," as within it men and women are revealed as basically corrupt and grotesque creatures. The section is presented largely in a dramatic mode, given as direct speech with actions denoted parenthetically. Styles of speech are parodied acutely. The section contains many apparently random elements, but is structured loosely around various attacks on political and sexual forms, prejudices, and conflicts, in a vaguely Arab setting. Both homo- and heterosexuals are parodied in their lifestyles and habits, amidst interspersed scenes of winter, sterility, death, decay, and violence. Ultimately, the section moves through the continued satiric dissection of fundamental societal structures toward despair, futility, and entropy.

This movement is structured, as always, by the insistence on the reader's awareness of the constant manipulation and omnipresent nature of language. The anecdote concerning the "talking asshole," narrated as an amusing curiosity by Dr Benway (NL 110-111), underlines the fundamental corruption and

corrupting powers of language. Once the asshole learns to talk and eat it gradually destroys the brain, and the very conscious and emotional being, of the person:

For a while you could see the silent, helpless suffering of the brain behind the eyes, then finally the brain must have died, because the eyes *went out*, and there was no more feeling in them than a crab's eye on the end of a stalk. (Burroughs' italics, NL 111)

The possession of the means of linguistic communication becomes the source of power and dominance. This power corrupts the asshole, leading it to usurp and destroy the brain, rather than seeking harmonious co-existence, once again revealing that a society structured by binary opposition is subject to violence and conflict because of its very nature.<sup>4</sup>

The corruptive power of language, as well as its central role in the competitive ethos of modern society, is evident in the description of the corruption of American society in terms of word and image:

"That's the sex that passes the censor, squeezes through between bureaus, because there's always a space *between*, in popular songs and Grade B movies, giving away the basic American rottenness, spurting out like breaking boils, throwing out globs of that un-D.T. to fall anywhere and grow into some degenerate cancerous life-form, reproducing a hideous random image." (Burroughs' italics, NL 111)

Benway depicts the fundamental corruption of American society as existing in the gaps between structures -- between terms of a binary opposition -- and between the levels of these structures. Benway goes on to describe American political structures in terms of cancers and viruses:

"Democracy is cancerous, and bureaus are its cancer. ...Bureaus cannot live without a host, being true parasitic organisms. ...Bureaucracy is wrong as a cancer, a turning away from the human evolutionary direction of infinite potentials and differentiation and independent spontaneous action, to the complete parasitism of a virus." (NL 111)

These images -- cancer, virus, parasite -- are as central to Burroughs' work as the all-encompassing image of junk. They represent a virulent corruption and decay which exists, largely unnoticed, in the very heart of society's dominant structures. They function within the text in terms of a diagnosis of the nature of existing society and as a paradigm of what is to come; in opposition to Burroughs' radical humanism and belief in evolution as the source of "infinite potentials" and "independent spontaneous action." This section represents a comprehensive assault upon political, social, sexual, scientific, and ethical prejudices, conventions, and beliefs, to be taken in tandem with the eleventh section's attack on cultural and religious practices. The deliberate destruction of societal forms and structures enacted here becomes a movement toward anarchy and despair, with little or no hope for redemption being offered by or through the text.

I want to diverge temporarily from this orderly progression through the text in order to consider the political agenda which is manifesting itself intrusively and insistently. Burroughs' political agenda -- his plan of action concerning all kinds of structures of government, power, and control primarily embodied in language -- is evidence of his basic humanism. His concern with the systems through which mankind is controlled and manipulated complements his obsession with literature and language as vehicles of repressive control, and as possible means of liberation from it.

Burroughs' attack upon the control systems he perceives as

pernicious is rarely direct. He proceeds through revelation and dissection, analysis and parody, with the primary goal of enabling the reader to see, truthfully and clearly, the "naked lunch." Encouraging the reader to act upon this vision is a secondary, though vitally important goal. At times, it seems as though the act of revelation and analysis is sufficient in itself to conquer and destroy repressive control based on abhorrent dualism: "Look down LOOK DOWN along that junk road before you travel there and get in with the Wrong Mob...." (NL 16) However, this impression is belied by most of the text, in which seeing becomes an important beginning, a first step on the path to independence and awareness.

Hence Burroughs is concerned mainly to illustrate and explain his dystopian and paranoid view of society in the twelve sections of *The Naked Lunch* discussed so far. Dominant themes include the fundamental economic mechanism of junk -- inscribing human behaviour in terms of addiction, total need, and limited supply -- as well as the spurious authority Burroughs sees as misused and abused by those in positions of power, especially doctors, lawyers/judges, and police. Doctor Benway becomes an archetypal figure in this regard, expressing inhumanity and malice through his willingness to manipulate, even harm and destroy, the physical and mental integrity of others. The eleventh section completes Burroughs' comprehensive assault upon figures who embody social, political, and cultural power with its parodic attack on iconic figures of all major religions. Burroughs sees religion as providing the moral justification for the acceptance of repression and manipulation as the status quo,



and as providing an explanation of the world, of life itself, which is intrinsically false. As a result, he is particularly savage concerning the role of religion in society, which he sees as being the propagation of bourgeois values of hypocrisy and self-righteousness. For Burroughs, religion is indeed the opiate of the masses.

Burroughs is creating, laboriously, a densely structured worldview, based upon the fundamental institution of dualism (an institution which gives an impression of permanence, of always already existing, which he is keen to dissect), and imaged in terms of junk and addiction. Mottram argues that the primary symptom of systems of control, as portrayed by Burroughs, is capital punishment:

The representative act of the human world... is the erotic act of killing — the central act of transgression against the main taboo of life. Capital punishment is legalized killing, attended by all the hypocrisy of language and anaesthetics of which men are capable. Burroughs describes it with unprecedented realism, intended as a full assault on the erotic nature of power as a structure of orgasmic experience. The pleasure-pain, tension-relief dialectic finds its brutal permissive centre here. (52)

The connective power of capital punishment as an image is clear -- as depicted by Burroughs (through the act of hanging) it becomes profoundly erotic, illuminating the connection between sexuality and power, as well as the dualist preconceptions on which they both rely. A.R.Lee explains the connection fully, in reference to "A.J.'s Annual Party:"

What Burroughs is...diagnosing is the live "pornography" of a society which rests its ultimate authority in the threat of capital punishment. For him, hanging is the final "reel" in a society which has given rein to the cannibalistic, the sexual act of power and control. ...Hanging, a situation in which the victim is placed in total servitude to the punisher is, in Burroughs' view, a sexual act -- one which calls into question the whole psycho-social basis of authority and punishment. Burroughs has transformed this act on the page into a

grotesque, repelling ballet of cruelty and sexuality. The insistence on the oral, the tumescent, the vampiric feeding and devouring, the final anarchy of excrement and snapped vertebrae indeed amounts to a "Blue Movie" -- one which is the terminal point in the power process. (81)

Capital punishment is described as not only the primary symptom of the mutual corruption of sexuality and power, but also as the image in which their connection and corruption are mirrored, and hence made visible to the reader. Sexuality is perverted by dualism according to Burroughs, by dichotomies such as those indicated by Mottram -- pain/pleasure, tension/relief, and above all male/female. Inscribed in the economy of junk, the body, and the sexual pleasure it can give, is a commodity to be traded for profit -- and for power. The hanged man becomes, in *The Naked Lunch*, the image of the passive eroticized victim, penetrated by alien beings (such as a Mugwump [NL 69-70]) even as he experiences the ultimate violation -- of his right to live.

Although the hanged man is a crucial and recurrent image in Burroughs' work, I think that Mottram and Lee overestimate the importance of capital punishment as a theme. I locate the key to understanding Burroughs' attack upon the forms and structures of contemporary society -- through parody, polemic, and the power of images -- in his attitudes and approaches to language:

But words are still the principal instruments of control. Suggestions are words. Persuasions are words. Orders are words. No control machine so far devised can operate without words, and any control machine which attempts to do so relying entirely on external force or entirely on physical control of the mind will soon encounter the limits of control. (AM 116)

Burroughs' paradoxical attempt to break the power of language through the use of language reveals the basic ambivalence he

feels towards linguistic and literary forms, an ambivalence embodied in his valorization of literature as such, yet recognition of its impotence in sociopolitical terms. This ambivalence enables Burroughs to confound dualism to a certain extent -- language becomes the metaphorical site of the corruption imaged through junk and hanging, but also the means through which this corruption can be located, recognized, and documented. Thus also Burroughs attacks all systems of control by revealing, analyzing, and parodying their specific and characteristic uses of language, creating a distinctive textual style for *The Naked Lunch* itself in the process. As Tanner puts it:

Eventually it seems that the attack is aimed at all word-patterns. It is as though a last-ditch stand against determinism and conditioning has taken the form of an all-out attack on the word. ...The emphasis which must concern us is the insistence that the ultimate force which keeps us cowering in these temporal and physical dimensions is THE WORD. ...To this end it becomes part of Burroughs' intent to use arrangements of words that cancel arrangements of words, deploying language to destroy language. (124-125)

The attack on specific linguistic uses and control systems becomes an attack on general linguistic uses and forms, and all forms of power as such:

Burroughs thinks that one of the main ways the alien forces take over people is by addicting them to "images" -- i.e. by sending false but enslaving configurations of images which prevent the receiver from establishing contact with any genuine reality either inside or outside him. ..."the word" remains as the most powerful way in which consciousness is pre-empted by the encircling media. (Tanner 125)

As Burroughs develops and draws together his specific themes throughout the sections already examined, a universalizing tendency becomes increasingly apparent. His political position emerges as one of opposition to all control systems,

which he sees as based on false principles of dualism and separation, imaged through junk and specific (and corrupt) uses of language. His point of view becomes increasingly paranoid, as he accumulates evidence of manipulation and exploitation:

Burroughs' political analysis is a form of the conspiracy theory, the common man's perennial answer to the problems of history and government. A secret few conspire to manipulate and control the many. ...The basic carny social relationship of conman and mark, controller and victim, is the basis of Burroughs' pop analysis of power and the social order. (Skerl, *Burroughs* 38)

In the passage from which the epigraph to this chapter is taken, Lee explains Burroughs' compulsive revelation of and opposition to power structures as such in more profound, even Manichaeian terms:

Burroughs' fictions are indeed acts of exorcism, a confronting of what he views as a new diabolism of control and power. Like his American forebears, Poe, Melville and Hawthorne, he is concerned with the continuing reality of "the unpardonable sin" -- what Hawthorne once defined as "the criminal manipulation of another person for ends that are intellectual, scientific and egotistical." To this list I would want to add "and sexual." (78)

Placed in this context by his literary concerns, Burroughs stands revealed as essentially humanist. Despite his many ambivalences and deliberate ambiguities, and the attempted eradication of the author, his own position emerges as one of vehement opposition to all power systems which manifest the originary and corrupting influence of dualism, and which are hence inevitably cruel and destructive in their effects. Junk and the word are united, their synthesis represented by a new image -- the virus. This synthesis occurs in the thirteenth section of *The Naked Lunch*, "Islam Incorporated and the Parties of Interzone," which constitutes the theoretical basis of the text, and which I will discuss in the next chapter.

Chapter Five: Virus.

"Word and image can penetrate us like a virus because...just as the virus literally empties the body and fills it with its own replicas, so word and image eat out consciousness, replacing mind with junk." (Tanner 131)

The thirteenth section of *The Naked Lunch* embodies the epigraph to this chapter -- synthesizing junk and word in and through the new image of virus. It is also in this section, "Islam Incorporated and the Parties of Interzone," that the nadir of the diagnostic and pessimistic movement is reached. I see it as the theoretical centre of the text, as it is here that the human condition as perceived by Burroughs is fully revealed and the various key images are explicitly linked, giving a sense of completeness and epiphanic realization which barely hints at future redemptive possibilities.

The section is structured by the anecdotal recollections and surmises of an active Factualist agent. His narrative gradually moves from general (and cynical) political comment, such as, "The exact objectives of Islam Inc. are obscure. Needless to say everyone involved has a different angle, and they all intend to cross each other up somewhere along the line" (*NL* 130), to a succinct discussion of the aims and methods of each of the major parties of Interzone (*NL* 131-135). Basically, the Liquefactionists and the Senders are the extremist villains, the Divisionists are moderates, and the Factualists are the "good guys," although, as we would expect in this text, the boundaries between good, evil, and even moderate are clouded, and we are well aware of the narrator's Factualist bias.

The section makes a number of crucial statements: "*You see control can never be a means to any practical end.... It can never be a means to anything but more control.... Like junk...*" (Burroughs' italics, NL 133). This makes explicit the links between the text's political agenda (which advocates the destruction of systems of control) and the dominant image of junk. Control is portrayed as the ultimate and most pure form of addiction -- pure in that its only end is more control. The reader has made the first of a number of vitally important connections, and there are more to come.

The narrator goes on to explain the nature and objectives of the Factualists. They are depicted through three of their Bulletins, one of which declares that they oppose

...any form of organized coercion or tyranny on the part of pressure groups or individual control addicts. We oppose, as we oppose atomic war, the use of such knowledge to control, coerce, debase, exploit or annihilate the individuality of another living creature. (NL 135)

This point of view is positive and humanist in nature. The Factualists believe in and defend individuality and individual human rights. They respect life -- and thus must grant it some kind of value and significance, contrary to the Liquefactionists and Senders. The use of the term "evil" in a purportedly official Factualist document underlines the basic morality and idealism of their position. However, this morality is undercut by the knowledge that it is based on dualism -- judgements of right and wrong, good and evil. Burroughs refuses commitment to any but the most basic moral principles.

The final passage of this section is the turning point of the text as a whole:

The Sender is not a human individual.... It is The Human Virus. (All virus are deteriorated cells leading a parasitic existence.... They have specific affinity for the Mother Cell; thus deteriorated liver cells seek the home place of hepatitis, etc. So every species has a Master Virus: Deteriorated Image of that species.)

The broken image of Man moves in minute by minute and cell by cell.... Poverty, hatred, war, police-criminals, bureaucracy, insanity, all symptoms of The Human Virus.

*The Human Virus can now be isolated and treated.*  
(Burroughs' italics, NL 136)

The virus/junk connection is extended to embody the human condition. The evil of the Master Virus is expressed in terms of an image, albeit a deteriorated one -- the corrupt and corrupting power of language remains prominent. The Master Virus functions through "breaking" and degrading man's image of himself. Its symptoms are the outward manifestations of man's damaged image: bureaucracy, police and so on are indications that man has lost both his individuality and the ability to be independently self-regulating. This fragmentation, and loss of unity and completeness of the self -- a symptom of a profoundly dualist world, of a concept of reality defined by schizophrenia -- is mirrored in the incomplete and fragmentary prose of *The Naked Lunch*.

The relationship between the crucial images linked in this section and *The Naked Lunch*'s political agenda is also explained here. Burroughs' brutal image of repressive and exploitative power, the hanged man, represents the ultimate enactment of externalized regulatory functions -- capital punishment. Hanging becomes the act in which the victim relinquishes responsibility and independence for passivity and helplessness, and loses his life as a result. Thus the trinity of images evoked in this section -- junk, virus, and the word -- also incorporates the image of the hanged man,

which becomes the absolute paradigm of control through separation and opposition.

The final note of the passage is positive -- the virus can now be treated. This evokes the medical axiom that correct diagnosis is more than half the battle. The conclusion of the section is in full agreement with the Factualists' humanist and ethical views. Burroughs' compassion is made explicit for the first time, although it is implicit in the basis of his desire to write, to warn and enlighten the reader. The gloomy dystopian parables of the first half of the novel are illuminated abruptly by the revelation that there are those within such dystopias who care enough about humanity to challenge oppressive systems of power. Although Burroughs' basic belief in the value and significance of mankind is distanced doubly through structuring images and narrative characterization, a grudging confession of compassion does emerge in his work.<sup>1</sup> However, Burroughs' humanism is always redefined, always radical, as the ideal and universal figure of liberal humanism, "Man," is replaced in his work (and in post-structuralist thought generally, according to Chris Baldick) by "the 'subject,' which is gendered, 'de-centred,' and no longer self-determining." (103) In other words, "Man" must give way to the junky in the atomized, fragmented world of *The Naked Lunch*.

Thus for the first time, we see the explicit integration of the text's central metaphors and the full expression of its theories. The broken self-image of man leads to the externalization of inherently personal and individual functions of judgement and regulation, and thus, ultimately,



to the control-addict threat to the individual self. Burroughs' underlying humanism is also revealed in this section, and with the turning point reached at its end, we begin the slow climb out of chaos and despair toward the reconstruction of man's self-image, equipped with a comprehensive, precise, and intimate knowledge of the forces ranged against reader and text, in their complicity. In the thirteenth section, the text validates its parameters' adoption of the role of a practically and morally significant text, ends its essentially explanatory and diagnostic movement, and enters a new phase.

The commencement of an upward movement in the text is evinced in the fourteenth section, "The County Clerk." Lee is forced to negotiate a labyrinthine customs and legal system (echoes of Dickens' Circumlocution Office), run by Southern "rednecks." The County Clerk recounts endless anecdotes to his assistants, and generally avoids any kind of useful function. Lee manages to win his favour by making an anti-Semitic remark in the same manner of speech: "'Well, Mr. Anker, you know yourself all a Jew wants to do is doodle a Christian girl.... One of these days we'll cut the rest of it off.'" (NL 142) The County Clerk responds favourably to this statement: "'Well, you talk right sensible for a city feller.... Find out what he wants and take care of him.... He's a good ol' boy.'" (NL 142)

Lee manages to master the bureaucratic system parodied here by adapting to the precise linguistic and communicatory forms used by its officials. Language is still the key to control and exclusion, but it has become a key which can be mastered

by an individual who is in fact diametrically and ideologically opposed to such a system. We move from the clinical dissection of societal structures to their practical manipulation for the advantage of the individual.

In this first section past the turning point of the text we see a return to the technique of revealing the profoundly corrupt nature of a system by taking its implications to their logical extreme. However, the essential difference made by the thirteenth section is evident in the fact that this section ends with Lee's triumphant manipulation of the system to his own ends, rather than with entropy and disaster (as in Section 10). This section becomes a story of success and survival, of the individual "beating the system."

The fifteenth section is titled "Interzone," and its centerpiece is an anecdotal depiction of this city and some of its inhabitants, such as "[Andrew] Keif the brilliant, decadent young novelist who lives in a remodeled pissoir in the red light district of the Native Quarter" (NL 143), and Marvie and Leif the Unlucky, a pair of hapless and effeminate homosexuals who constantly engage in disastrous trading ventures. In some ways these two epitomize the nature of Interzone, a city reduced to its structuring function of commerce of all kinds.

This section continues with a savage satirical attack on the community of "the Island" (based on Gibraltar). The Island is portrayed as a colony where the natives are completely demeaned and debased by the the domination of the British, with only a semblance of self-government or autonomy. The extent of their degradation is evidenced by the fact that

they deny their own language, and ape the British manner of speech. This linguistic oppression and repression is a sure indicator of the degradation of the Islanders -- they have internalized the task of humiliation, and enacted it upon their deepest selves. They have come to value themselves according to their conquerors' estimates -- as less than human, incapable of decision, judgement, and self-regulation. Their image of self and sense of racial and cultural identity is fragmented beyond repair, and they become the horrifying embodiment of the fate which *The Naked Lunch* strains every nerve to resist and destroy.

Another aspect of the institutional attack upon the integrity of the self, which is then internalized by the victim, is illuminated in the sixteenth section, titled "The Examination." Carl Peterson is examined and interrogated by Dr Benway, in a scene inspired by the interview between Councillor Mikulin and Razumov in Conrad's *Under Western Eyes* (see *AM* 189-191). Benway uses a variety of interrogative techniques to challenge and question Carl's sense of sexual identity (by implying that Carl is a latent homosexual), and later to undermine his very sense of self. Benway moves rapidly between extremes of cold impersonal professionalism and warm jovial friendliness: from "Eyes without a trace of warmth or hate or any emotion... at once cold and intense, predatory and impersonal," to "The doctor raises a coy admonishing finger. 'In any case ...' He tapped the file and flashed a hideous leer." (*NL* 150, 156) Benway also displays a central rift in his own personality: "'Why don't you make The Man a proposition?' he jerks a head towards his glowering

super-ego who is always referred to in the third person as 'The Man' or 'The Lieutenant.'" (NL 155) Benway's divided self is symptomatic of a society which interprets the psyche in terms of Freud's essentially separatist doctrines, doctrines which themselves represent the dualist basis of Western concepts of reality and their complete internalization.

Eventually Carl reaches a stage where he can only construct a sense of his own identity in opposition to Benway. He thus becomes dependent upon Benway's presence in order to exist for and as himself. His loss of independence and control is expressed in the fact that he twice loses consciousness during the course of the interviews. Once he loses control of his sexuality and identity, everything appears increasingly alien and frightening, as he is unable to make sense of the world without his sense of self as the central point of reference. His structured world is fragmented and ultimately destroyed, once the self as centre is violated and displaced. Finally, by the end of the section, he is unable to voluntarily leave Dr Benway's presence:

"It's just that the *whole thing* is unreal.... I'm going now. I don't care. You can't force me to stay."

He was walking across the room towards the door. He had been walking a long time. A creeping numbness dragged his legs. The door seemed to recede.

"Where can you go, Carl?" The doctor's voice reached him from a great distance.

"Out... Away... Through the door..."

"The Green Door, Carl?"

The doctor's voice was barely audible. The whole room was exploding out into space. (Burroughs' italics, NL 157)

Carl's structured world disintegrates completely, leaving room for the entry of enormous and terrifying factors of space, entropy, and anarchy on incomprehensible scales. This would

render Carl incapable of ever recovering his identity within this sheer volume of elements and experience -- the world cannot be restructured once the centre is lost.

Carl's experience reveals a fundamental flaw of dualist conceptions of reality -- over time, the two terms of a binary opposition come to be defined solely in terms of their relationship to each other. Light becomes inconceivable without darkness, and so on, vice versa. Burroughs shows that Carl's attempts to anchor a sense of self in a schizophrenic culture are fragile and easily destroyed. Carl is doomed to experience the solipsistic world imagined by Wittgenstein, where the self is defined in opposition to the world of which it can never be a part.<sup>2</sup>

The disintegration caused by the loss of the structural basis of society is expressed more generally in the seventeenth section of *The Naked Lunch*, "Have You Seen Pantapon Rose." This essentially non-narrative section depicts the lowest level of a generic urban society. There is a constant undercurrent of decay and destruction -- petty criminals of the (unidentified) narrator's acquaintance go to jail, commit suicide, or simply disappear. The means of communication and the sense of a shared language have broken down once again: "Only dead fingers talk in Braille..." and "This is no rich mother load, but vitiante dust, second run cottons trace the bones of a fix...." (both *NL* 158) There are no resources, nor hopes for the future. Junk, addiction to junk, and the crimes the addict commits to acquire junk are the only constant and universal factors, and thus decay and disaster become inevitable. This is expressed in "second run

cottons" -- according to the text, cottons contain left over or spilt junk, and are only used in emergencies. The fact that these cottons are "second run," that is, have been used twice, indicates the absolute sterility of the urban environment and its social structures -- there is not even any new junk, only enough left over to provide "the bones of a fix." It is not even possible to get high/fixed, only to remain anaesthetized to some degree.

The pursuit of this kind of artificial tranquillity is described in the eighteenth section of *The Naked Lunch*, "Coke Bugs." In a narrative which could almost be described as surreal, The Sailor interacts with a boy junky, who needs to score. The Sailor is depicted as insubstantial, and he communicates by violating the substance of others (*NL* 159-160). He requires the time and substance of the boy to validate his own ethereal existence, and to feed his own addiction: "'I don't want your money, Honey: I want your Time.'" (*NL* 160)

The Sailor can be seen as an archetype of a character who becomes increasingly significant in Burroughs' work: the insubstantial creature who inhabits a grey borderline world representing the transition from a Time to a Space framework. That is, such beings have begun the process of transforming their own existence into the context of Space, but the fact that this transformation is not complete ironically renders them crucially dependent upon Time. The significance of such characters becomes apparent in the later trilogy, particularly in *The Place of Dead Roads*. The tale of The Sailor and the boy is continued in the nineteenth section, titled "The

Exterminator Does a Good Job." The Sailor gives the boy pure heroin in return for Time, and makes the boy aware that the span of life is bounded by Death, the ultimate exterminator: "Death fear and Death weakness hit the boy, shutting off his breath, stopping his blood." (NL 162) The intimate relationship between Death and Time is made explicit here, prefiguring *The Western Lands*.

The section ends with a coda, two separate paragraphs related to the rest of the section only by The Sailor's statement that the Exterminator has done almost too good a job of fumigating for "coke bugs" in his apartment. Their importance justifies quoting them in full:

They call me the Exterminator. At one brief point of intersection I did exercise that function and witnessed the belly dance of roaches suffocating in yellow pyrethrum powder.... Sluiced fat bedbugs from rose wall paper in shabby theatrical hotels on North Clark and poisoned the purposeful Rat, occasional eater of human babies. Wouldn't you?

My present assignment: Find the live ones and *exterminate*. Not the bodies but the "molds," you understand -- but I forget that you cannot understand. We have all but a very few. But even one could upset our food tray. The danger, as always, comes from defecting agents: A.J., the Vigilante, the Black Armadillo... and Lee and the Sailor and Benway. And I know some agent is out there in the darkness looking for me. Because all Agents defect and all Resisters sell out.... (NL 162-163)

Who is the Exterminator? He can be read as the "author" referred to earlier by Lee -- the internal author, who is not fully identified with Burroughs himself, and whose existence external to the text is unknown. The authorial nature of the Exterminator is reinforced, possibly, by the fact that Burroughs himself once worked as an exterminator. If we read the Exterminator as an author of some kind, these passages can be interpreted in terms of the authorial desire to maintain

control over his created characters, and the subsequent necessity to destroy (exterminate) them once they have escaped from authorial control and taken on a life of their own ("The Crime of Separate Action," [NL 175]). In this context, the Exterminator's narrative could even be read as an expression of desire for textual closure -- as nostalgia for traditional authorial means of control and definition of a text.

Burroughs sees the desire for closure as basically corrupt and as reflecting the corruption of the literary structures external to, and pressing on, the text, which the text's parameters have sought to avoid and subvert. Thus the author reappears, as a potentially terrible and destructive force within the text, rather than as the vestigial defender or "guard" of the "Atrophied Preface." This fundamental change represents the difference between the ideal world drawn in the text's parameters, and the chaos and despair depicted in the text. The argument seems to be that existing evil must be destroyed before it is possible for the author, or any other figure of authority, to adopt a beneficent role. Destruction must precede regeneration.

The Exterminator's cynicism and indifference render him suitable for his profoundly destructive task. He can also be seen as a bizarre embodiment of the role of executioner implied by the prevalence of capital punishment. His very title, as well as the passages above, suggests a frightening lack of differentiation between cockroaches, bedbugs, rats, and humans. In fact, human agents are specifically identified as a fundamentally parasitic form of life, and this is presumably the factor that makes their extermination necessary



and desirable. The destruction of agents is a necessary precondition of the text's "ideal" world, for they perpetuate control systems which entail secrecy and suffering.

The twentieth section of *The Naked Lunch*, "The Algebra of Need," performs an important culminative function. It opens with a fantastic passage which images the domination of the world by junk and its terms of existence. Once junk becomes universal, communication through widely diverse means becomes possible:

Bulletins from Party Headquarters are spelled out in obscene charades by hebephrenics and Latahs and apes, Sollubis fart code, Negroes open and shut mouth to flash messages on gold teeth, Arab rioters send smoke signals by throwing great buttery eunuchs -- they make the best smoke, hangs black and shit-solid in the air -- onto gasoline fires in a rubbish heap, mosaic of melodies, sad Panpipes of humpbacked beggar, cold wind sweeps down from post card Chimborazzi, flutes of Ramadan, piano music down a windy street, mutilated police calls, advertising leaflet synchronize with street fight spell SOS. (NL 164)

This passage depicts the fundamental decay of language and communication of all kinds -- and represents the basically indestructible nature of communication as such. That is, language has become corrupt and virtually worthless, as consistently illustrated throughout the text, but it is never beyond redemption, as evidenced by the text's efforts to recover or re-establish the integrity of language and literary forms. Once again, the redemptive, reconstructive forces evoked in "Islam Incorporated and the Parties of Interzone" are recalled.

The section ends: "Cancer is at the door with a Singing Telegram..." (NL 165), sounding a fatalistic note. We realize that what is ultimately being communicated by the huge variety of media such as those listed above is profoundly corrupt and

destructive -- Cancer. Cancer, along with virus, is one of the culminative images of the text. It represents all of the forces tending towards corruption, decay, anarchy, chaos, and destruction, and ultimately the violation of bodily integrity and identity by alien forces sited within the self. As such, cancer is an apt image of the condition of modern man in Burroughs' view. Yet it is also a unifying image, one which serves to define and embody the terrifying, because intangible, internal and external forces ranged against mankind. *The Naked Lunch* works on the principle that correct diagnosis leads to correct treatment and thus to (implied) recovery.

The cancer image, complementing that of the virus, not only unifies the forces opposing the self, but also assists the drawing together of the various diagnostic models the text has put forward. The movement required is a reductive, yet redemptive one: the models of the city (Interzone), alien or externalized systems of control, individual experiences of addiction, corrupt societal structures (law courts, hospitals) and cultural practices (mainly religion) are reduced to patterns of junk expressed solely in terms of commerce. Ultimately, junk means addiction, the control of the body and the self by forces external to the self but existing within the body, and thus perpetrating the most profound violation, expressible only in terms of the most terrifying (because incurable) threat to man's integrity -- cancer. The connection between the externalization of man's self-regulatory functions, and the internalization of alien structures of control, expressed by the text's central

theoretical locus is thus made explicit in its full potency. The reductive implications of contemporary society are expressed in the reductive logic of this twentieth section, a logic defined by its title, "The Algebra of Need." Man's alienation is reflected in the disintegration of narrative into cyclical listings of endless permutations (such as the passage above). Linear progression is no longer possible -- it ends with "Fats" Terminal's arrival at the Plaza at the beginning of the section. The question arises: once linear progress is rendered impossible, what happens next?

This question is answered by the twenty-first section of *The Naked Lunch*, "Hauser and O'Brien," which completes the cycle of the text by returning, or pointing back toward the beginning of the text. Of course, the reader can never fully return to his position at the beginning of the text, for he is now cognizant of the text's substance, which spills out beyond its physical and linear confines. Nevertheless the circular movement completed by this last section effects a kind of closure, like that sought by the text's parameters.

In this section the figure of Lee returns as first person narrator and junky, trying to avoid the police. A sense of urgency, of time running out, is projected from the very beginning: "When they walked in on me that morning at 8 o'clock, I knew that it was my last chance, my only chance." (NL 166) The two detectives of the title have been instructed to "'Just pick him up. Don't take time to shake the place down. Except bring in all books, letters, manuscripts. *Anything* printed, typed or written.'" (NL 166) Lee is portrayed as dangerous to the authorities because he is a

writer. This complements the subversive status and potential effectiveness of both writer and text, which *The Naked Lunch* has sought to establish throughout.

Lee escapes, killing the two detectives. The mood of urgency persists, along with the emphasis on the importance of the written word, or text: "My hands were already reaching for what I needed, sweeping my notebooks into a briefcase with my works, junk, and a box of shells." (NL 168) Lee's three most important needs are his texts, to continue his subversive work, his junk to keep him capable of functioning, and ammunition for self-defence. He becomes the first archetypal "writer on the run," or writer-outlaw of Burroughs' work.

When Lee contacts the Narcotics Department the next day, it is as though Hauser and O'Brien had never existed.

I realized what had happened.... I had been occluded from space-time like an eel's ass occludes when he stops eating on the way to Sargasso.... Locked out.... Never again would I have a Key, a Point of Intersection.... The Heat was off me from here on out... relegated with Hauser and O'Brien to a landlocked junk past where heroin is always twenty-eight dollars an ounce and you can score for yen pox in the Chink Laundry of Sioux Falls.... Far side of the world's mirror, moving into the past with Hauser and O'Brien... clawing at a not-yet of Telepathic Bureaucracies, Time Monopolies, Control Drugs, Heavy Fluid Addicts:

"I thought of that three hundred years ago."

"Your plan was unworkable then and useless now.... Like Da Vinci's flying machine plans...." (NL 171-172)

This crucial passage serves to contextualize *The Naked Lunch* as a whole. Its relentless ambiguity undercuts the culminative conclusion of the previous section, and adjusts the reader's perspective through its negative appraisal of the possible effectiveness of the text in the "real" world. In it, the writer is excluded (occluded) from his own narrative, his own fictional world. This reflects the fact that once

read the text moves irrevocably into the past. As such it can be bypassed by history's flow, or become obsolete in political terms, without ever having been accurate or effectual -- like "Da Vinci's flying machine plans." The pessimistic tone is in keeping with the realization that both the narrator-writer (Lee) and the author lose the momentum of their narrative/text, as it becomes fixed in the static world of the past; that is, as the dynamic act of reading the text draws to a close. The return to the narrator and narrative style of the first section of *The Naked Lunch* serves to indicate that both beginning and end are now inevitably past. The dynamism of the text is lost, despite the attempts of the text's parameters to reanimate it, and the recognition of this fact here places the onus of social and political action squarely upon the reader for the last time.

Having documented *The Naked Lunch's* movement from epiphanic climax through anti-climax to closure, I will now look briefly at its overall style and structure. The much-commented upon structure defies the superficial formlessness manifested within the text, giving coherence and relevance to Burroughs' vision of the reality constructed and accepted by contemporary society, and contextualizing his imperatives to the reader to act upon the impetus of this vision. However, it must be remembered that the negative impact of Burroughs' attack upon specific societal forms of power and all systems of control as such far outweighs the text's attempts at rehabilitation, reconstruction, and recovery. Redemption is a long way off, its possibilities mainly suggested through the narrative of

Burroughs' own successful recovery from drug addiction (see Introduction and Appendix of *NL*). To reiterate: the goal of the text is for the reader to see truthfully and clearly, which Burroughs perceives as a first step toward the liberation of man through the reconstruction and reintegration of his shattered self-image.

Despite Burroughs' claim in the "Atrophied Preface" that "You can cut into *The Naked Lunch* at any intersection point..." (*NL* 176), the text is in fact coherently ordered. Skerl argues that the order of the various sections follows a defined pattern, and is "designed to orient and instruct the reader:"

Thus the work is framed by factual, autobiographical sections [the Introduction, the "Atrophied Preface," and the Appendix] that address the reader directly, guiding him into and out of an extraordinary text. Although the routines can stand alone and the form is a montage, the order is not random. There is an overall psychological pattern, an order of increasing complexity in the use of experimental technique, and a didactic frame.

Burroughs chose a montage and improvisational structure for *The Naked Lunch* for three reasons: it is a way to present the flow of consciousness; it is a way to expand the reader's consciousness, and it is an effective satirical technique. (*Burroughs* 44)

The structure of *The Naked Lunch*, its defining and operative framework, functions as a guide for the reader, one which is essential given its combination of radical novelty with the disparagement of established literary forms. This structure also reinforces the organicist concept of the text evoked in the "Atrophied Preface" -- although the text is structured, its structure is an appropriately flexible one, responsive to both the author's imperatives and the reader's needs.

The first twelve sections of *The Naked Lunch* represent the accumulation of specific images and information -- evidence

supporting Burroughs' dystopian view of contemporary society. This movement culminates and is clarified in the thirteenth section, the theoretical centre of the text where the links between its central images are revealed and explained, as stated in the epigraph to this chapter. The remainder of the text expresses a threefold movement: it continues the process of accumulating dystopian images, depicts the possibilities for action by individuals opposed to the system (for example, Lee in "The County Clerk"), and hints at possible alternatives to the dystopian vision expressed by the text as a whole. The text ends with the powerful expression of a desire for closure, for completeness.

Thus the text falls roughly into two halves, as described by A.R.Lee:

The first half of the book is, in fact, the visions of a man under drug-withdrawal, linking his own explicit addiction and vulnerability to that of a society similarly addicted to the control of grotesque "authorities." And Burroughs is at pains to insist that his book is not merely an exercise in the comic/surreal; he wants us to see "the broken image of Man..." (79-80)

In the second half of *The Naked Lunch* Burroughs sets out the skeleton of his "mythology for the space age." He depicts three principal landscapes -- Interzone, Freeland and Annexia --- in which three power-groups grapple for control of mankind. All three groups are expressions of the urge to control and overwhelm... (82)

As depicted here, the first "half" of *The Naked Lunch* is retrospective -- imaging and summarizing the hidden nature of contemporary society -- and the second "half" is projective -- beginning the process of constructing a new mythology, a new series of images, which will make liberation possible. The latter process lacks the comprehensive aspect and certainty of Burroughs' attack on contemporary society, and is diffident

and tentative in contrast. The two aspects of the structure are united by what Skerl calls "the unifying sensibility of Burroughs:"

*The Naked Lunch* is the creation of one man's consciousness even though he deemphasizes this role by calling himself an "instrument" and by calling attention to the collaboration of others. The vision and the voice of *The Naked Lunch* are idiosyncratic, unmistakably the product of one personality called William S. Burroughs. (*Burroughs* 45)

Thus despite the lack of balance between the two movements of the text, they provide a coherent structure, rendering it relatively self-contained yet also projecting beyond to the work that needs to be done (textual and sociopolitical, recalling the function of "blueprint"). *The Naked Lunch* may be complete as a text, but the task it initiates is barely begun.

The relative coherence of the overall structure of *The Naked Lunch* makes possible the fragmentation and atomization found within its sections. That is, the clear pattern established by the relationship between sections enables a considerable degree of randomness and confusion within them. Skerl defines this experimentation form as montage, based on juxtaposition following an "organic and improvisational pattern." (*Burroughs* 43) She argues that:

The effect of montage...is a new vision. Juxtaposition asks the reader to make connections between the elements that are set next to each other. The new mental associations are a form of expanded consciousness. Furthermore, the lack of conventional literary narrative gives powerful impact to the images presented, which are taken out of their ordinary context and assume a dreamlike power. Thus *The Naked Lunch*...is not only a record of one individual's vision, but an attempt to re-create that vision in the reader. (*Burroughs* 44)

Burroughs' desire to defy and subvert literary convention contributes to the definition of his own unique literary



forms. Juxtaposition becomes the key to his work, controverting traditional realist narrative progression through contiguity, and avoiding the impotence and corruption he associates with systematized uses of language. As Tanner puts it:

All tendencies towards a fixed form in the book are countered by a tendency towards atomization. In a sense the book destroys itself as it goes along; there are too many breaks, jumps, unexplained shifts...for us ever to feel so controlled by his vision that we forget we are reading a book. There is no consistent narrator, indeed no narrative principle. ...It is almost as though Burroughs was trying to produce pictures without frames, and he describes his book as spilling off the page in all directions. That this might result in an appearance of a mass of random fragments is a risk he takes. Clearly, for Burroughs, to *appear* to abandon responsibility for the framing of his novel, to *appear* not to be controlling his material, is to cut himself off from many of the traditional ways in which the novel authenticates its existence and the impressions of reality it offers. (Tanner's italics, 122)

*The Naked Lunch* defies realist narrative conventions in its use of language. Burroughs overloads his text with images which lack context and explanation (excluding the major ones of junk, the word, virus, and cancer), in a mode which is essentially playful. Yet this play with linguistic styles and forms becomes a crucial means of attacking the imprisoning power of word and image:

I think this crowding and sporting is an important strategy. If one voice prevailed then one version of reality would prevail. By playing with so many different language habits, Burroughs constantly frees himself from the potential trap of any one of them. It is as though he has constantly to destroy the prevailing languages, and as constantly to reconstitute the fragments to make his own book. (Tanner 123)

Burroughs' use of juxtaposition as a primary structuring principle becomes a way of avoiding the blinkered vision entailed by accepting a single, exclusive version of reality,

and a means of suggesting that there are in fact multiple alternative versions. As Vernon explains: "Burroughs' explosion of the reality image...is an explosion of language too, the very language he uses to describe that explosion."

(99) Burroughs' evocation of a world of multiple possibilities is extended by his refusal to commit himself to any one version of reality, to replace the schizophrenic version of contemporary Western culture with a "better" one:

there is no one safe place....no terminal freedom which can be achieved once and for all. Instead there must be a series of constant acts of liberation. The realization seems to be that you cannot *be* free; instead you must continually be freeing yourself. (Tanner's italics, 123)

Burroughs' idiosyncratic use of language within the individual sections of *The Naked Lunch*, based on a principle of montage, becomes a primary act of resistance to enslavement by control systems expressed through specific linguistic forms.

Burroughs opens up a world of diversity, multiplicity, and possibility, and refuses to close off any of its alternatives. As Tanner notes, freedom becomes a dynamic action rather than a passive state -- the process of becoming free is infinite and ongoing. Language is both the object of Burroughs' attack and his means of liberating the reader from the confines of "either/or" thinking. The two are integrated by Lydenberg's argument that "When Burroughs disrupts the continuity of his narrative, it is to suggest an extension of its boundaries beyond the rules of grammar and syntax, beyond the contiguity of objects in time and space." (*Word Cultures* 34)

The examination of *The Naked Lunch's* overall form and structure reveals Burroughs' intention to create a productive and carefully defined anarchy, one which provides the reader



with space in which to assess the psychological, social, economic, political, and moral structures which determine his own self-image and his relationship to the world in all its aspects. Burroughs' dystopian vision of contemporary reality is a structured one, but he seeks to replace it with an organic and formless freedom, patterned after the primary and instinctual power of myth. "The result is an object-world whose preconfusion, whose nonidentity, *is* its identity, and whose schizophrenia is precisely the accelerated schizophrenia of the real world." (Vernon, his italics 108) The implicit goal of *The Naked Lunch* becomes a form of unity in multiplicity, of individual integrity and identity within a unified whole, which takes us back to the connective powers of the epigraph to this chapter.

Chapter Six: Transition -- From *The Naked Lunch* to *Cities of the Red Night*.

"Could you, by your cutting up, overlaying, scrambling, cut and nullify the prerecordings of your own future? Could the whole prerecorded future of the human race be nullified or altered? I don't know -- let's see." (AM 60)

In this chapter I want to look briefly at the connections, similarities, and differences between *The Naked Lunch* and the *Cities of the Red Night* trilogy. For me, the quotation above encapsulates the relationship between them -- *The Naked Lunch* diagnoses the deterministic ("prerecorded") and dualistic basis of contemporary society, while the later trilogy conducts precisely the kind of experiments described. If *The Naked Lunch* is the diagnosis, the later trilogy (and to a certain extent the intervening works) represents Burroughs' experiments in the search for an effective cure. The former prefigures and makes possible the latter, in the context of an oeuvre of fragmentary works which manifest a holistic vision.

I will begin by looking at the central images common to both *The Naked Lunch* and the *Cities of the Red Night* trilogy, images which are augmented by the continual acquisition of new significations. Images as major as junk, and as minor as that of "the Island" (Gibraltar) recur throughout Burroughs' work, acquiring or losing prominence relative to the functions they can perform. Such images become a crucial part of the "cutting up, overlaying, scrambling" process which defines the transition.

The image of junk, so central to *The Naked Lunch's* structure, worldview, narrative perspective, and paradigmatic function, fades into the background by the time of *Cities of*

*the Red Night*. Burroughs has used the perspective it provides to diagnose, to fulfil his goal of allowing the reader to see, and although the worldview which is a product of this perspective continues to be crucial to, indeed a basic assumption of, his later work, the image itself is superseded by others. Rather than being the central, all-encompassing narrative point of view as in *The Naked Lunch*, in the later trilogy addiction becomes a state of being attributed to certain characters, the most important being Kim Carsons, the protagonist of *The Place of Dead Roads*. The addict becomes a peripheral figure in Burroughs' later work, one who is always present, representative of a subversive underworld and its point of view, but no longer defined solely by his addiction.

Junk is the only image central to *The Naked Lunch* which undergoes this downgrading process. Other principal images maintain their status -- such as "the word" -- or achieve greater prominence, like the virus. Language, the word, remains central in Burroughs' work as manifestation and source of corruption, as well as the means of defying this corruption and attaining some kind of purity. Burroughs experiments with generic uses of language through the trilogy, and Kim Carsons undertakes a quest for the origins of human speech in *The Place of Dead Roads*. The word persists in its function as instrument of control (and instrument of rebellion and subversion in the hands of various writer-characters and Burroughs himself), but takes on new connotations as an outmoded artifact typifying the arrested evolution of mankind:

In the beginning was the word. I think the next step will have to be beyond the word. The word is now an outmoded artifact. Any life form that gets stuck with an

outmoded built-in artifact is doomed to destruction.  
 ...The present form of human being quite possibly results  
 from words, and unless they get rid of this outmoded  
 artifact, it will lead to their extinction. (*Job* 92)

In *The Place of Dead Roads* in particular, this version of the word is aligned with the physical body, both representing for Burroughs a restricted and static form of existence requiring major transmutation in order to make the leap into silence and space.

The word also acquires another function as image in the *Cities of the Red Night* trilogy -- Burroughs connects it literally and explicitly with the virus image which structures *The Naked Lunch's* theoretical core:

My general theory since 1971 has been that the Word is literally a virus, and that it has not been recognized as such because it has achieved a state of relatively stable symbiosis with its human host.... (*AM* 48)

In the later trilogy, the virus image takes over the role of junk to a large extent. Burroughs' virus theory becomes sophisticated and explicit, and I will argue in succeeding chapters that the recognition of the virus parasitically existing within the human organism is a central goal of *Cities of the Red Night* in particular. Burroughs' location of the corruption and evil (embodied by dualism) which he opposes shifts from *The Naked Lunch*, where it is "yet another version of that American paranoia which senses a host of waiting evils in the landscape around the self," to *Cities of the Red Night*, where it is an internalized part of the self (Tanner 117). As a result, Burroughs' focus throughout the trilogy is ever narrowing, always inward, climaxing in *The Western Lands* with the exhaustive exploration of the author's fears and perceptions of death. Thus the virus replaces junk as theory

and image of intrinsic evil.

One important image which emerges between *The Naked Lunch* and *Cities of the Red Night*, and also represents a shift in theoretical orientation is that of "space." The junk world of *The Naked Lunch* is anchored in Time, in the realities of addiction. However, in the *Cities of the Red Night* trilogy Burroughs projects Space as a goal -- as an image of freedom from conditioning and as an alternative reality to that structured by Time. As Burroughs puts it in *The Place of Dead Roads*:

We are like water creatures looking up at the land and air and wondering how we can survive in that alien medium. The water we live in is Time. That alien medium we glimpse beyond time is Space. And that is where we are going. (43-44)

*The Naked Lunch* is not only anchored in Time as such, but in the fragmented, atomistic time of junk. By contrast, Space comes to represent for Burroughs an uncorrupted and holistic medium in which, free of body and language, the individual can finally construct a version of reality free from alienation and separation. Dualism and dichotomy are left behind with the body, in a "landlocked junk past..." (NL 171).

The shifts in prominence of these central images reflect shifts in Burroughs' themes, theories, and agendas. The only relatively major image to retain a constant level of prominence is that of Gibraltar/"the Island," which remains an permanent and potent image of colonial sterility, stagnation and decay. It is a model of imperialist oppression and exploitation throughout all of Burroughs' work. The transformations the other central images undergo also serve to reflect one major shift in his perspective from *The Naked*

*Lunch to Cities of the Red Night* -- from diagnosis to attempted cure. Burroughs shifts from an examination of the dystopian present in *The Naked Lunch* to the exploration of the past and the future in the *Cities of the Red Night* trilogy as a whole. The outcome is the projection of the ultimate transformation: from Time to Space, from corporeality to immortality, from death and dystopia to a new space age.

I want to conclude this chapter by positioning *The Naked Lunch* in relation to Burroughs' subsequent work. It is a seminal and powerfully individual text, as Skerl argues: "*The Naked Lunch* has given its author a permanent place in literary history because of its formal innovations, its powerful attitude of revolt, and the controversy surrounding its publication." (*Burroughs* 46) Although often considered as part of a tetralogy with the three succeeding works -- *The Soft Machine*, *The Ticket That Exploded*, and *Nova Express* -- which share the same source as *The Naked Lunch* and develop its techniques, Skerl argues convincingly that

although the three subsequent novels grow out of *The Naked Lunch*, the latter stands alone as a self-contained work while *The Soft Machine*, *The Ticket That Exploded*, and *Nova Express* form a closely knit, continuously evolving trilogy. Both technique and content separate the trilogy from *The Naked Lunch* and bind the three subsequent novels together. The trilogy introduces the radical experimental technique of the cutup and can be seen as an exhaustive exploration of that method of creating nonnarrative prose fiction. (*Burroughs* 48)

The principle of juxtaposition so crucial to *The Naked Lunch* is taken to experimental extremes in this trilogy through the use of the cutup.<sup>1</sup> Thus the trilogy lacks the originality and individuality of *The Naked Lunch*, exemplifying instead the permutation and combination of existent material which is



central to the author's function as Burroughs defines it. It confirms, as Skerl argues, the power and importance of juxtaposition as a dominant novelistic form, and reaffirms *The Naked Lunch's* contention that "the goal of art is action rather than contemplation." (*Burroughs* 70, 72)

Thus the *Soft Machine* trilogy extends and develops the theory and practice of *The Naked Lunch*, establishing and confirming Burroughs' own style and major preoccupations in the process. He continues to develop and explore his now characteristic style and central themes -- "social criticism, the biological trap of sex and death, and the quest of the writer to free himself and his readers from bondage" -- through a new mythology or "metaphoric world" in the works published between *Nova Express* and *Cities of the Red Night* (Skerl, *Burroughs* 76). Skerl argues that *The Wild Boys*, *Exterminator!* and *Port of Saints* also display a new emphasis on "politics, on sexual fantasy, and the writer's power," as well as "man's positive potential for autonomy, regeneration, and creation" -- elements which I see as prefiguring the preoccupations of the *Cities of the Red Night* trilogy in significant ways (*Burroughs* 76-77). The positive, humanist aspect of Burroughs' thought becomes increasingly apparent throughout the evolution of his work, gradually subsuming, though never wholly replacing or eradicating, the profoundly negative images of *The Naked Lunch*. This emergent humanism is complemented by a shift in Burroughs' narrative style -- away from the dead end of the cutup, back towards "the simple narrative style of popular fiction." (Skerl, *Burroughs* 77)

However, as Lydenberg argues, Burroughs' change of style in

the later trilogy represents the application of what he has learned from the cut-up to conventional writing practice (*Word Cultures* x). He seems to discover gradually that greater potential for subversion lies in the use (and dissection) of popular narrative forms than in the use of radical and experimental ones. However, the originality and idiosyncrasy of his unique style remains:

Burroughs has now created a vocabulary -- diagnostic and therapeutic -- which can engender a theoretically indefinite number of episodes or versions of conflict and victory. This is one of the things that produces that curiously abstract feeling in his prose even when the images are most vivid; one feels the presence of the schematic parable behind the dream images of science-fiction, or the shorthand outlines of the strip cartoon. Scanning the apparently turbulent and broken surface one finds a persistent pattern of curious purity. (Tanner 140)

Burroughs' style and use of form give his work a recognizable consistency and yet flexibility -- they can incorporate new images, myths, and thematic concerns. His creation and use of a new and characteristic literary form -- what Skerl calls "the pop-art novel" (*Burroughs* 96) -- also embodies the constant tension between his feelings about literature as such and his own literary theory and practice. Burroughs' concerns regarding the perceived impotence of modern literature, and his disdain for traditional realism in particular, leads to the gradual construction of his own canon. This canon, which achieves greatest prominence in the *Cities of the Red Night* trilogy, includes the works of Coleridge, Eliot, Rimbaud, Shakespeare, Fowles, and Castaneda, and its significance is prefigured by the role of Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* in "Campus of Interzone University" in *The Naked Lunch* (75-78). Burroughs' individual canon reveals the consistency

and evolution of his work from *The Naked Lunch* through to the *Cities of the Red Night* trilogy, as well as the tension inherent in the relationship between his work and traditional canons. As Skerl puts it:

Burroughs' various technical experiments in the novel create new forms of authorship, of the text, and of the book, as well as corresponding new concepts of consciousness and reality, self and society. The experimentation is unified by a vision and a purpose sustained throughout his works. (*Burroughs* 97)

The spirit of this experimentation is typified by the attitude expressed in the epigraph to this chapter: "I don't know -- let's see." Burroughs is projecting a future in the *Cities of the Red Night* trilogy which is based on a dystopian version of the past expressed and encompassed by *The Naked Lunch*. This trilogy exhausts his project of utopian experiment, and ends not in failure, but with the reassessment of his goals and achievements, and the virtual completion of its mythopoeic processes.

The transition from *The Naked Lunch* to *Cities of the Red Night* problematizes the question of Burroughs' place in relation to literature as such, and contemporary American fiction in particular. *The Naked Lunch*, with its dystopian vision and experimental style, helps to define its own radical genre. It defines itself as blueprint, as "How-To Book," and as manifesto -- as anti- or extra-literary in every respect. Burroughs' experiments with form, his use of the cut-up with its "intercontextual" implications (Zurbrugg), his challenge to the communicative power of language, and his lack of faith in social or political structures per se mark him as an early

postmodernist and radical icon.<sup>2</sup> Yet his work is anchored in modernism, with its (admittedly radical) humanism, and belief in the prominence of myth and the literary power of mythopoeia, as expressed in the *Cities of the Red Night* trilogy. A number of critics have noted the similarities between the life, and ideas, of Burroughs and T.S.Eliot;<sup>3</sup> and *The Waste Land* is an integral part of Burroughs' idiosyncratic canon. His modernist side is also evident in his evocation of cynicism and angry despair grounded in compassion and a persistent belief in the redeemability of the individual, and his belief in the primal integrative force of "the garden" as defined by Vernon.

Thus the shift from *The Naked Lunch* to the *Cities of the Red Night* trilogy reveals Burroughs' modernist and postmodernist aspects. His iconoclastic tendencies, determination to destroy the status quo, use of obscenity and homosexuality, and radical experimentation with form and style are countered, or rather complemented, by his fundamental and inescapable belief in the power of myth and magic and the ultimate value of human life, free will, and literary creation. Burroughs' career moves from intense and early radical experiment, breaking boundaries, shattering genres, and defying literary, moral and social convention, to a return to conventional narrative forms, which still defy generic classification. Burroughs' later works explore the enormous implications of his early literary experiments and the dystopias they evoke. They posit experimental utopias in which the freely self-determining individual subject, "Man," becomes a possibility rather than just a fantasy. Above all,

the *Cities of the Red Night* trilogy posits as its goal unity in multiplicity and holistic integration. Where *The Naked Lunch* is intensive, inward-looking, and focused on the single image of junk, the *Cities of the Red Night* trilogy is extensive, outward-looking (until *The Western Lands*), and incorporative, using a variety of images and ideas. The radical humanism implicit in the early text becomes explicit in the trilogy, as Burroughs allows himself to care, to believe in the possibility of redemption, and to project and locate unity and wholeness. My contention in this thesis is not that Burroughs moves from radical experiment to the reinscription of convention, but rather that *Cities of the Red Night*, *The Place of Dead Roads*, and *The Western Lands* extend and build upon *The Naked Lunch*'s radicalism to create a new, unique, and profoundly humanist vision of the future.

II. Utopia Vs Dystopia: *Cities of the Red Night.*

*Cities of the Red Night* is concerned primarily with the evocation of dystopia and utopia. Its exploration of Burroughs' radical vision is defined by these terms, and marks the continued dominance of binary oppositions in his schema, as well as his desire to reveal, analyze and confound them. Chapter seven deals with the perimeter/parameter function of the text, which defines its structure and agendas through a dialectic incorporating politics (rational) and magic (non-rational). Chapter eight explores the function of the author, which undergoes a transformation from "programmer" in *The Naked Lunch* to "fabricator" in *Cities of the Red Night*. The rest of my discussion is text-oriented, beginning with Burroughs' practices regarding the eliciting and ensuring of readerly complicity in chapter nine, and concluding with an analysis of the text's political and literary agendas, in chapters ten and eleven respectively. I intend to pursue two goals: to demonstrate *Cities of the Red Night's* role in the trilogy as establishing the ideological, conceptual, and symbolic basis of political struggle, and to analyze it as an independent and self-contained text, rendered unique by its strategy of incorporative textuality.

Chapter Seven: Politics and Magic -- The Parameters of the  
Text.

"Your right to live where you want, with companions of your choosing, under laws to which you agree, died in the eighteenth century with Captain Mission. Only a miracle or a disaster could restore it."  
(CRN 12)

The aims and field of activity of *Cities of the Red Night* are defined by its perimeter/parameter sections, in a process similar to that found in *The Naked Lunch*. However, in this case the structures of Preface and Introduction are circumvented rather than inverted, as in that text. In *Cities of the Red Night*, Burroughs uses the conventional novelistic structure of a Foreword, combined with a magical and ritual Invocation, to define and orient the text which is to follow.

In *Cities of the Red Night*, Burroughs fits the meta-textual and traditional literary structures of foreword and preface/introduction into the classic philosophical structure of dialectic. He employs the elements of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, with synthesis becoming the ultimate goal. In so doing, he upholds the theory, progressively developed through Kant, Hegel, and Marx, that a greater good -- in this case, the effective transformation of contemporary society -- can be achieved through "fruitful collisions of ideas" (*Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought* 170). Burroughs' argument here leans toward the Marxist derivation -- that the social and political development of mankind progresses through the conflicts between disparate social systems. I contend that Burroughs regards the Marxist concept of dialectic in the same way as he implicitly regards politics and the political -- as a corrupt and degraded concept, prime for rehabilitation and



recuperation.

Politics, as theory and as practice, is a primary concern in *Cities of the Red Night*. Burroughs' distaste for the contemporary nature of politics as he sees it is repeatedly made clear throughout his work:

Politics is the only area where stupidity and ignorance are brazenly proffered as qualification for office... And so, guided by the least intelligent, the least competent, the least farsighted and most ill-informed, the species invites biologic disaster.... (AM 121-122)

He also sees political commitment as a barrier to effective writing:

Well, I think over-commitment to political objectives definitely does limit one's creative capacity; you tend to become a polemicist rather than a writer. Being very dubious of politics myself, and against the whole concept of a nation, which politics presupposes, it does seem to me something of a dead end, at least for myself. (Job 47)

Throughout his career, Burroughs becomes increasingly radical in relation to the realm of the political, although he does tend to oscillate between ideals of destruction and reform, as seen in *The Naked Lunch*. He overtly rejects Marxism and socialism:

D.O. Is there a political path to the liberation of the world? Would a complete ideological change, the replacement of the capitalist world by a socialist world, for example, offer a solution?

W.B. It would seem to me most emphatically no. Because these are just batting around the same old formulas. What happens, for example, when the government takes over the so-called means of production? Nothing. ...I don't think it would make much difference. ...I don't believe in any solution that proposes halfway measures. (Job 64-65)

Burroughs' lack of faith in "halfway measures," his positioning of himself and his work as basically apolitical, undergoes further transformation -- he becomes fundamentally antipolitical:

It probably is necessary to resort to physical violence,

which is happening everywhere. There doesn't seem to be any alternative, since the establishments won't change their basic premises. ...People who are completely verbal, like judges and politicians, just won't change their premises, and of course if people absolutely refuse to change their premises and the development none the less takes place, they're finally displaced by some violence or disaster. (*Job* 40-41)

D.O. Does total destruction seem to you a desirable outcome?

W.B. I would say total destruction of existing institutions, very rapidly, may be the only alternative to a nuclear war which would be very much more destructive. If disorder reaches a certain point, they will not be able to start a nuclear war, which I think is very definitely and obviously the intention of the people in power. ...Of the two, I certainly prefer the total destruction of the present system of society to a nuclear war, which is the inevitable result of its remaining in operation. (*Job* 104)

Burroughs proposes the destruction of contemporary political structures, through the destruction of the society which embodies and enacts them, in order to achieve the implicit rehabilitation of the political, as well as the overt reformation of individual societies. The subtext of his work strives to return the political to its originary definition of simply "having an organized form of society," and this end is achieved in *Cities of the Red Night* in and through the projection of the utopian pirate commune, governed by the "Articles," which embodies Burroughs' political (or antipolitical) ideal.

Through adopting an antipolitical rather than an apolitical stance, Burroughs is able to rehabilitate the concept of politics in *Cities of the Red Night* specifically and in the trilogy as a whole. He recuperates the concept of the dialectic in the same way and these two processes are intimately entwined. This recuperation is enhanced further by the implicit rehabilitation of another concept redefined by

Marxism -- that of ideology. In his work, Burroughs seeks to restore the originary sense of ideology as a coherent system of ideas, in preference to the Marxist sense of the expression of the interests of a particular socioeconomic group.<sup>4</sup> Thus Burroughs rehabilitates and "purges" the concepts of dialectic argument and systematic ideology as part of a grander, largely subtextual, recuperation of the concept of the political as such.

To return to the specific perimeter/parameter functions of *Cities of the Red Night*, it is in this context of recovery that Burroughs uses the dialectic to structure implicitly the text's meta-textual parameters. The foreword, entitled "Fore!", corresponds to the statement of thesis, with its evocation of historical and political possibility through the eighteenth-century pirate commune of Captain Miss(i)on. The antithesis of this sociopolitical grouping is split, represented as dystopian contemporary American society (depicted in "Fore!" and in *The Naked Lunch*), and also by the alternative world of magic and the nonrational evoked by the "Invocation." That is, Burroughs presents two contrasts to Captain Miss(i)on's historically inscribed utopia, that of modern society and an alternative, mysterious world of unknown possibility. The text proper represents the synthesis of all three, in its evocation of a utopian social and political structure which is profoundly egalitarian and idiosyncratically Burroughsian. The brave new world of *Cities of the Red Night* represents the final stage of the dialectic triad, providing a synthesis which "is held to embrace or reconcile the more rational [or in Burroughs' case, less

rational] and acceptable elements in the conflicting and now superseded thesis and antithesis from which it emerges in a 'higher unity.'" (*Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought*) It is this synthesis, the projection of a holistic unity in multiplicity, which is the central concern of *Cities of the Red Night*.

The title of the first of these parameter sections suggests its status as comparable to a Foreword proper, as well as its spatial and temporal position at the 'front' of the text. This title also carries another commonly recognized implication, associated with golf: "(To person in probable line of flight of ball) look out!" The text begins with a promise of what is to come, through its emphasis on the 'front' or beginning, and warning of the power and even danger of the text, suggesting the necessity for the reader to be alert and wary.

This section uses external historical sources to establish a number of themes of central importance. Burroughs quotes at length from *Under the Black Flag* by Don C. Seitz, establishing an intertextual precedent which will inform the rest of the novel. That is, throughout *Cities of the Red Night*, Burroughs uses and footnotes other texts, usually historical ones, in order to create an impression of veracity for his narrative.<sup>2</sup> The information which Burroughs borrows from Seitz's text concerns the 18th century pirate, Captain Misson (renamed Captain Mission by Burroughs, with obvious implications), who established a Utopian pirate commune in Madagascar which was eventually destroyed. The commune denounced slavery and racism, abolished the death penalty, established religious

freedom, and created a language of its own (with elements from French, English, Dutch and Portuguese).

The actual existence of Misson and his commune has been questioned by modern historians, with D.J.Mitchell, for example, portraying his story as a product of Daniel Defoe's imagination:

Libertalia (it is hardly necessary to add) never existed except in the mind of its inventor, Defoe, and, it may be, as a pipe-dream in the minds of some of the ex-pirates he met in Wapping and Rotherhithe. The long chapter on Misson in the *General History* not only lacks psychological credibility, like nearly all utopian propaganda, but is full of discrepancies. (190)

However, the mythic status of Captain Mission and his utopian commune enhances his imaginative resonance in Burroughs' work, and inspires his speculation upon an alternative course of world history based upon the success and expansion of such ideal communities, unhindered by historical fact. Burroughs inverts the binary opposition of history/myth, asserting the energy and life of myth and mythopoeia in contrast to the fixed and static nature of history, which he conceives as textually determined.

"Fore!" concludes with the passage from which the epigraph to this chapter is taken, one with immense resonance for the rest of the novel:

I cite this example of retroactive Utopia since it actually could have happened in terms of the techniques and human resources available at the time. Had Captain Mission lived long enough to set an example for others to follow, mankind might have stepped free from the deadly impasse of insoluble problems in which we now find ourselves.

The chance was there. The chance was missed. The principles of the the French and American revolutions became windy lies in the mouths of politicians. ...There is simply no room left for "freedom from the tyranny of government" since city dwellers depend on it for food, power, water, transportation, protection, and welfare. Your right to live where you want, with companions of your

choosing, under laws to which you agree, died in the eighteenth century with Captain Mission. Only a miracle or a disaster could restore it. (CRN 11-12)

This passage is presented in terms of actual historical possibility, seemingly overreaching the limits of Captain Mission's lack of historical credibility, and invoking his mythic status as utopian ideal. Burroughs' vision of the future here is an imaginatively powerful and profoundly optimistic one -- once again stressing his humanism -- and his pessimistic view of contemporary society as faced with a "deadly impasse of insoluble problems" provides a vivid contrast, as well as an imperative for change. Burroughs goes on to elucidate this opposition in suitably polemical terms, constituting the authorial viewpoint and the role of the reader and the text in terms of this essentially political conflict. This section establishes the thematic scope of *Cities of the Red Night*, while at the same time enticing the reader into complicity with the text with promises and threats regarding the exploration of both utopian and dystopian options. The text goes on to explore the possibilities of such "retroactive Utopia" as this section describes, as well as examining the nature of the "disaster" or "miracle" which will make alternative political theories realistic possibilities (in the rehabilitated context established by the subtext); and return to contemporary man his all-important freedom of choice. As I have argued, this movement is essentially dialectical, constituted in terms of the binary opposition between Burroughs' polemical views of the way contemporary society is, and the way it could be.

The eminently rational emphasis on political imperatives in

"Fore!" is enriched by the "Invocation" which succeeds it. This section presents *Cities of the Red Night* as an essentially magical text, conferring upon it a mythopoeic power and significance which exceeds utopian political idealism. The invocation in this section of various unpleasant magical and mythical figures, largely associated with forms of death and destruction, suggests that the author is calling forth disaster, rather than miracle, as the appropriate response to the dystopia evoked in "Fore!". The Invocation ends by emphasizing a theme of great importance in the rest of the text, one which has been obliquely suggested by the intertextuality of the previous section:

To all the scribes and artists and practitioners of  
magic through whom these spirits have been manifested....  
NOTHING IS TRUE. EVERYTHING IS PERMITTED. (CRN 13)

The all-important theme here is textuality, the insistence upon the irrevocably textual nature of the world as we perceive it, as all our perceptions are conditioned by, and necessarily occur within, the structures of language. Burroughs sees language -- "the word" -- as the originary and defining structure of human consciousness and communication (a theme which is expounded upon further in *The Place of Dead Roads*). For him, the external world is a product of language, of texts, taking to an extreme his assumption that textual/linguistic mediation of perception is universal and unavoidable. Taking this as given, Burroughs attempts to rehabilitate textual and linguistic media as such -- to root out corruption and recover the magical, mystical, and instinctive qualities of human expression. This process also complements the subtextual rehabilitation of the dialectic and

the political, as well as the ideological. The dual aspects of *Cities of the Red Night* -- magical and political -- are explicitly linked through Burroughs' theory of textuality, as Steven Shaviro argues: "The book's subversive strategy is not to critique and exclude, but to efface limits and undermine identities by including everything, beyond any possibility of order or coherence." (204) Thus textuality functions as an incorporative strategy.

The dedication to "scribes and artists," who are aligned here with "practitioners of magic," suggests the significance of the writer's role -- it is through him that these "spirits" are "manifested." Yet for Burroughs, the writer is never merely a vehicle through which "spirits" are expressed. For him, there is a constant tension between the desire to exert the power he undeniably possesses in relation to his work, and the equally strong desire to relinquish the text, to force it to stand independently as an effective political force in the world. This tension is expressed acutely in the parameters of *The Naked Lunch*. Thus one would wish to avoid the reductive and restrictive implications of the dedication to "scribes and artists" found in the Invocation, and indeed, this is partly achieved by the liberation implied in the final epigrammatic statement. The main body of the text also asserts the primacy of the writer's role, and the juxtaposition of "Fore!" and "Invocation," suggests the integration of social and political efficacy with magic and myth as the writer's new function.

The final statement above, "NOTHING IS TRUE. EVERYTHING IS PERMITTED," maxim of Hassan i Sabbah according to Burroughs, helps to define the scope and boundaries of the text. With



its implied liberation from both moral and literary convention, this statement prepares the reader for a text which will be unpredictable and often difficult. Perhaps it is not only the spirits of death and destruction which are unleashed by this Invocation, but also the "spirit of the text." We know from "Fore!" that the spirit of *Cities of the Red Night* will be different from the spirit of *The Naked Lunch* -- it promises a balance between destruction and (re)construction, whereas *The Naked Lunch* was ultimately on the side of anarchy and destruction. The importance of this shift cannot be overestimated -- it marks the full emergence of Burroughs' radical humanism, which was submerged in *The Naked Lunch's* overwhelming evocation of despair. In *Cities of the Red Night* the attack on societal forms which we would expect to find in any Burroughs text will be tempered by the representation of a positive social alternative, that of the utopian (for Burroughs) masculine pirate community, which embodies his synthetic goal. Nevertheless, the continual insistence upon the vital importance of destruction and demystification -- deconstruction -- prior to creatively starting anew is stressed by this Invocation.

Thus the Invocation asserts the magical nature of *Cities of the Red Night* as text, and perhaps by extension the magical nature of all texts. Textuality and mythopoeia represent the magical desire for integration, for syncretism, and provide a context in which myth, literature, and sociopolitical struggle are in fact integrated. It is this integration of the pragmatic everyday with the mythical and wonderful which truly represents the spirit of *Cities of the Red Night*, and this

spirit provides a harmonizing theoretical focus for the dramatic dialectical tensions within the bulk of the text. This kind of harmony is represented by the integration of *Cities of the Red Night's* textual parameters, which, situated together at the beginning of the text, complement and complete each other, and indicate the overcoming of the irrevocable separation represented by *The Naked Lunch's* divided parameters.

The parameters of *Cities of the Red Night* open the text for and to interpretation, rather than closing off and restricting readerly engagement, as in *The Naked Lunch*. In order to effect social and political change Burroughs must alter the reader's consciousness in some fundamental way, and this can only be done by drawing the reader into the text's structures, establishing and ensuring his complicity. Burroughs offers the reader a diverse multitude of possibilities for interpretive engagement, as well as the possibility of experiencing his freedom as reader. The new magical dimension seems to have liberated text, author, and reader, through the prospect of either "a miracle or a disaster." The goal of an effective text -- effective through altering the reader's consciousness -- persists, but Burroughs' strategies for achieving this goal, as defined by the parameters, are new and diverse. Principal among them is the return to narrative, for, as Skerl argues, "Only through narrative does writing differ from other art forms, and only through narrative are alternative worlds created." (*Burroughs* 91) "Alternative worlds" are the primary concern of *Cities of the Red Night*, which returns us to the epigraph to this chapter.

Chapter Eight: Redefining The Author.

"'Who wrote this?'" (CRN 151)

*Cities of the Red Night* takes the concept of the self-eradicating, vestigial author defined by *The Naked Lunch* and uses it as the basis of a thorough exploration of potential authorial roles. This begins in the parameters of the text as "Fore!" combines authorial musing and speculation with considerable intertextual reference; that is, in a sense, the incorporation of other authors and their associated meta-textual authority, into the parameters of *Cities of the Red Night*. The author's authority is reinforced through emphasis on his position as a member of the community of writers. Ironically, Burroughs' use of the work of other writers undermines their authority over their texts by demonstrating that they are open to distortion and manipulation in this way. He magnifies his own authorial status by attacking that of other authors, and the implication is that ultimately *Cities of the Red Night* itself may be subject to this kind of exploitation. Burroughs in fact celebrates this possibility: "Vive le vol -- pure, shameless, total. We are not responsible. Steal anything in sight." (AM 21)

Burroughs' use of intertextuality as seen in "Fore!" adds a new characterization to the role of the author as "programmer" (selecting appropriate linguistic forms to record direct experience, as defined by *The Naked Lunch*) -- that of "thief." *Cities of the Red Night* realizes the potential of intertextuality as a creative strategy in an exploitative mode befitting its piratical theme -- Burroughs plunders the work

of others in order to create his own text. This is particularly significant in the text's parameters, where the long quotation from Seitz's text enables Burroughs to define his own concerns and objectives rigorously.

In "Fore!" there is a sense of the author as playing the role of prophet or seer, as well as that of pirate or thief. With the ambiguous promise of miracle/disaster, the author adopts another, subtly different position of meta-textual authority -- he is able to see ahead, and knows what is to come, while the reader cannot -- one which is a fundamental aspect of the authorial function. The quasi-mystical nature of this aspect of the authorial role is augmented in "Invocation." Here the author takes on the role, and the consequent authority, of a magician or priest, calling forth various deadly and destructive spirits and mythical figures, in tandem with the spirit of the text. He is a powerful and effective figure, one of "the scribes and artists and practitioners of magic through whom these spirits have been manifested...." (CRN 13) The phrasing here would seem to restrict the writer's function to that of a vehicle or medium for the expression of abstract and even alien forces, allowing him little or no creative input, or self-expression. In *Cities of the Red Night* Burroughs perceives the writer's creativity as fulfilling an integrative and unifying role, working with existing materials, rather than as a single generating consciousness. He is vigorously postmodern in his assumption that the writer is not a god-like figure who creates a text out of nothingness or chaos, but an artisan who works with existing materials, searching for new and

stimulating combinations and permutations of the familiar; and positively primitive in his view of the writer as a vehicle or agent for the expression of powerful magical forces. This combinative creative process is again an inherently intertextual one, seeking for new permutations of existing textual structures and material.

It is this dual concept of the writer's role -- as an artisan combining familiar materials in new ways, and as the means of expression of powerful mystical forces -- which informs the text as a whole. According to *Cities of the Red Night*, and as inferred by its parameters, the author's role fulfils an integrative and combinatory, yet expressive, function. That is, the author is responsible for the integration of the motivation of the reader to effect sociopolitical change, with the expression of magical ritual and mythopoeic forces, in a context of limited freedom -- defined only as the freedom to choose any materials and to combine and permute them in any way. The author positions himself at the centre of the text, as a locus of integration of disparate textual materials and the materialization and expression of magical forces, in a shift away from the concept of the vestigial author. Thus, in *Cities of the Red Night*, we see the emergence of integrative and unifying forces and resources, in a bid to defuse, and render positive and effective, the stalemate of eternally dualist binary oppositions. Ultimately, the parameters define for the author a new and powerful function -- to invoke the spirit of the text, and set it in a specifically and idiosyncratically defined motion -- one which is essentially dialectical in

Burroughs' recuperated terms. The author is an artisan, a craftsman working with materials to hand, but his work expresses unseen and unknown forces which are essentially magical and nonrational -- and it is to him that the text is dedicated.

The role of the writer as integrating diverse magical and practical functions is explored comprehensively in *Cities of the Red Night*. Burroughs is concerned with theory and practice of textual production -- both what the writer is and should be doing, and how he is doing it. Various characters within the text adopt writerly roles, most importantly Noah Blake and Clem Snide, and their texts are of obvious significance within the narrative as a whole. The processes entailed in their literary production are laid bare within *Cities of the Red Night* -- rendering it a text about the production of texts, and raising various ethical and moral problems related to issues such as translation and copying, which are acutely relevant.

The roles of these writer-characters are also commented upon by other characters, adding a meta-textual dimension to the already complex layering of texts and processes of textual production which largely constructs *Cities of the Red Night*. Commentary of this kind tends to attribute a mysterious and even mystical significance to the writerly role. Ultimately the text reveals that writers are venerated as the wielders of quasi-magical powers because they are the only ones who can in actual fact change the course of history. This concept deserves further explanation.

It is a familiar tenet of Burroughs' work that the universe

is controlled by beings hostile to humanity, who maintain their vampiric grip on mankind through the control of "pre-recordings." According to him, in a pre-recorded, and hence inherently textual universe, the only way to rebel or break free from such systems of control is to alter, or in effect to *re-write* these pre-recordings. By definition, the only individual with the skills and ability to perform this act is the writer, and thus he is the only one who can bring about actual historical change. The process of the writer-character's realization of this fact, as well as his own crucial importance, is often played out in Burroughs' work, particularly in this trilogy, and it structures the parallel narratives of *Cities of the Red Night* itself to a significant extent. For example, Noah Blake becomes aware of the importance of his private journal through the response of Captain Strobe:

I now have two hours of leisure each day to reconstruct a narrative from these notes, since Strobe has placed a desk and writing material at my disposal, being interested for some reason in printing my account. (CRN 74)

Page from Strobe's notebook:

...Noah writes that I am interested in printing his diaries "for some reason." Does he have any inkling what reason? He must be kept very busy as a gunsmith lest he realize his primary role. (CRN 90)

Noah's significance as writer remains implicit, suggested most poignantly at the very end of the text: "I have blown a hole in time with a firecracker. Let others step through." (CRN 287)

The writer's activity as defined by Burroughs provides a context in which he can re-combine and permute existing factors, in this case the "pre-recordings" of history. An inevitable result is that the writer is always on the side of

rebellion, fighting against the powers that be. He becomes, particularly in *The Place of Dead Roads*, a furtive, solitary, and disguised figure, leading a isolated and lonely existence, unable to trust implicitly in anyone -- such is the importance of his work. He is intrinsically opposed to those in power, who either desire to control him, and make him work for them. For example, the Iguana Twins and Blum and Krup employ Snide as a writer (CRN 137, 151 and 177-179), and others seek to stifle his creativity and destroy him (such as Pierson, the CIA agent [CRN 182-183]). The position of the writer-character is a fundamentally dangerous one -- dangerous in proportion to its political significance and literary implications. He is the only one who can change the textual construct of history, and break the systematic dominance of humanity by alien beings or influences. He is thus also the one who can restore man's shattered self-image by returning to the individual the self-regulatory functions which have become externalized and alienated in dystopian contemporary society as depicted by *The Naked Lunch*.

A further illustration of aspects of the author's role by writer-characters in *Cities of the Red Night* is provided in the eleventh chapter, "Lettre de marque," part of Noah Blake's narrative. This narrative, up until the point at which it merges with the parallel narrative of Clem Snide in a maelstrom of characters and events, is contextualized specifically and carefully as set, and written, in the early years of the eighteenth century. Yet in "Lettre de marque" we find the following passage:

I asked Kelley what it feels like to be hanged.



"At first I was sensible of very great pain due to the weight of my body and felt my spirits in a strange commotion violently pressed upwards. After they reached my head, I saw a bright blaze of light which seemed to go out at my eyes with a flash. Then I lost all sense of pain. But after I was cut down, I felt such intolerable pain from the prickings and shootings as my blood and spirits returned that I wished those who cut me down could have been hanged."\*

\*Daniel P. Mannix, *The History of Torture* (New York: Dell, 1964). (CRN 73)

The citation here, in a narrative specifically contextualized as written in 1702, of a text written in 1964, represents a violent disruption of the text by the author. The author's intrusion into, and violent disruption of the narrative and its chronological context works to insist upon the reader's awareness of the textual, and inherently fictional, nature of Noah's narrative and Noah himself, as well as the fact that this narrative is part of a larger text, all of which is the product of another writer -- thus undercutting the veracity that the citation of the external text would seem to provide, as well as highlighting the ambiguity fundamentally associated with authorial roles (along with the fact that these are, in fact, roles). This is a new and significant use of intertextuality, one which insists upon the reader's awareness of the text as text, as fiction, while still reinforcing the power of the author of *Cities of the Red Night* as such.

Thus the complex concerns of *Cities of the Red Night* regarding the role of the author are embodied by the writer-characters within its central, interlinked narratives, who are engaged frequently in the process of re-writing each other's narratives as well as in constructing their own (for example, Clem Snide's literary creations in "We are the language" resemble Noah's narrative of his early experiences

as a pirate in Book One). This, combined with the incorporation of the vestigial author into the text and the violent authorial eruption discussed above, sets up a multilevel structure of authorial operation, intention, and responsibility. The reader becomes acutely aware of the diversity and conflict associated with the authorial function, as well as the importance of this role.

The writer--characters in *Cities of the Red Night* not only illustrate and exemplify the nature of the author's role in its diverse aspects, but also serve as the focus for debate upon a number of moral and ethical issues intimately connected with the practices of literary production. The first of these is the nature and status of the act of translation from one language to another.<sup>2</sup> This question is confronted in Book One of *Cities of the Red Night*, in the chapter entitled "Even the cockroaches." This chapter, part of Snide's detective narrative, features a number of Spanish phrases, followed by their English translations. At this point, the text is set out as a grammar or technical text, emphasizing the quasi-scientific nature of the translation process:

*Una cosa me da risa*            Something makes me laugh  
*Pancho Villa sin camisa*    Pancho Villa takes his shirt off  
 (CRN 113)

These phrases, which appear at the very beginning of the chapter, seem trivial and irrelevant in the context of the narrative. However, their presence and unique setting-out serve to stress the translatability, and hence the communicative function, of all language. Despite the doubts raised by linguists such as Saussure about the effectively

limited translatability of languages, the reader recognizes that rudimentary, if not eloquent, equivalences can usually be found.

Later in the chapter, phrases from an important conversation in Spanish between Snide and Kiki are translated and presented in the same manner, interspersed with phrases (and their translations) from the song "La Cucaracha," which is playing in the background:

	<i>La cucaracha la cucaracha</i>	
" <i>Cómo?</i> "		"How?"
" <i>Ahorcado.</i> "		"Hanged."
<i>Ya no quiere caminar</i>		Doesn't want to run round anymore
" <i>Nudo?</i> "		"Naked?"
" <i>Si.</i> "		"Yes."
		(CRN 114)

The lines from the song, inserted in the transcript of the conversation, emphasize the fact that for Burroughs, translation does not privilege any particular discourse, but is an egalitarian process. That is, the process of translating an important conversation is no different from translating the seemingly trivial lyrics of a song playing in the background. Burroughs seems to treat translation, and by definition the translator, as a kind of universal ear, uninfected (or uninflected) by cultural biases and preferences, and simply performing a clearly defined task. The translator is neutral, he has no interest in what he translates -- he is concerned only with the act itself. This lends a kind of purity to the act of translation, which is evident in the passage above -- a conversation which is significant in the unfolding of the narrative is given equal status (or lack of status) with the lyrics of background music. Burroughs is asserting here, as he does throughout all

his work, his opposition to the privileging and supposed primacy of certain kinds of discourse. His work operates to break down such value-laden distinctions as those between "literary" and "sub-literary" genres, to destroy the menacing power of privileged discourses by reasserting the equality of all discourse. His experiments in "Even the cockroaches," with their reflections upon the process of translation from one language to another, augment this central project.

The role of the translator, as defined here, is crucially different from the role of the author, yet there are also important similarities. While the cultural assumptions and learned biases of the individual are never absent, in the act of translation as portrayed by Burroughs they become relatively latent, rendering the product of translation an egalitarian discourse. Privilege and primacy are eradicated as the translator performs his limited function. However, the severe restrictions upon this function emphasize the non-creative nature of the translator's role. Like the Burroughsian writer, he is working with and interpreting the linguistic creations of others, but without the writer's freedom to explore and even plunder any source that interests him. The translator must interpret what is already there, on the pages or in the speech of others. He is unable to insert input of his own, due to the very nature of the act of translation which, by definition, entails the rendering of the sense of a linguistic event into a different language or different form of representation. The translator is confined by the practice of the writer or speaker of the original linguistic event. Yet he possesses the freedom to choose the

words which he feels best express the meaning he perceives in the original utterance. Burroughs thus chooses to foreground the process and nature of translation in order to highlight certain aspects and limitations of the writer's role.

The second issue associated with literary production which is raised by *Cities of the Red Night* concerns the ethics of copying, and the status of an original text. This issue addresses equally the dual aspects of work and text, for while it is the text which is "original," that is, unlike any other text, it is the work which is copyrighted, and thus possesses legal protection, as well as having ownership of it asserted by the author and royalties from its sale paid to him.

This issue is raised in the third chapter of Book Two, entitled "We are the language." Here, Clem Snide is given very expensive and realistic copies of a number of strange books, and commissioned to "recover" the originals. When he questions the desire for the originals, given that the copies are "Almost perfect" (*CRN* 151), he receives an answer which is theoretically crucial to the action of the novel:

"Changes, Mr Snide, can only be effected by alterations in the *original*. The only thing not prerecorded in a prerecorded universe are the prerecordings themselves. The copies can only repeat themselves word for word. A *virus is a copy*. You can pretty it up, cut it up, scramble it -- it will reassemble in the same form."  
(Burroughs' italics, *CRN* 151)

A copy, as defined in this quotation, is doomed to infinite repetition of what it already contains. Its limits are determinate and confining -- determined by the parameters and nature of the original text it reproduces.

The primacy of an original text, and the absolutely subordinate nature of a copy, seem to be established clearly

here, without reservation. This primacy also, by definition, asserts a privileged position for the author, as he is the creator of the original, as well as being responsible for its physical existence, while the "copier" remains neutral and anonymous, much like the translator. However, later in the same chapter, doubts are raised about the nature and existence of both copies and originals: "I had already decided to fabricate the complete books if I could find the right paper. In fact, I felt sure that this was exactly what I was being paid to do." (*CRN* 154) Snide proceeds to acquire special inks and paper, which enable him to replicate the appearance of the "original" books.

The issues implied here are extremely complex. Snide's decision to "fabricate" the books is itself a linguistically ambiguous one: to fabricate can mean either to construct or manufacture, or to "invent (story), forge (document)." Thus it is unclear whether Snide's "fabrication" will have the status of an original or a copy. Secondly, we note that Snide plans to fabricate the original from a copy, rather than making a copy of an original, as is commonly the case. Surely, his product would be a copy of a copy, rather than an original. This passage raises some difficult questions concerning the nature of works created in particular contexts and following certain processes. To a certain extent, Snide circumvents the usual methods of establishing the veracity of a work -- examining the work as artifact, the style of printing, the kinds of ink, the age of the paper, and so on -- by using his special equipment: "The books seem to age two hundred years overnight." (*CRN* 157). His method, as well as

his confidence in his product, would seem to suggest that if he can (re)create the physical characteristics of the original work, then he can produce an original of some kind, although its exact status is far from clear.

This confusion or even conflation of original and copy produces an equal conflation of author and "copier." That is, if one can create an original through copying a copy, then the authorial primacy asserted above also becomes acutely problematic. As Shaviro argues: "In perpetrating this forgery, Snide loses control over his production. The power which he exercises is not his own. His activity as an author leads directly to the appropriation of his labor, as he is absorbed into his own script." (202) The author is reabsorbed in the text, as copying becomes a creative process, while creating an "original" seems to lose some of its privileged status and becomes an ambiguous activity. We return to the vestigial, self-eradicating author of *The Naked Lunch*, evoked by *Cities of the Red Night's* parameters, as "fabrication" -- rather than "creation" -- becomes the crucial productive concept, with its double sense of construction/manufacture and invention/forgery.

Thus the position of the author in relation to *Cities of the Red Night* is a problematic one, whose difficulty is intensified by the representations of writer-characters within the text, as well as the debate over ethical issues associated with literary production discussed above. In relation to the work, the actual artifact which the reader possesses, the author remains in a vestigial position, one which he deliberately chooses. However, within the text, the position

of the author becomes intensely complex, as his primacy is asserted and undercut almost simultaneously. Dualism -- in the form of binary opposition -- reappears here in the division between work and text, and the tension between the asserted primacy and the self-eradicating tendencies of the author's role. The concept of the author in *Cities of the Red Night* embodies this text's attempts to deal with the fundamental and corrupting dualism of *The Naked Lunch*'s worldview by placing it in a unifying and integrative -- essentially magical -- context. However, what remains is a function of ambiguity and eternal dialectical process, a function of "fabricator" for and of *Cities of the Red Night*'s brave new world.



Chapter Nine: Reading The Text.

"*Cities of the Red Night* shows the reader how to create alternative realities with material at hand and with the human ability to dream and tell stories. Burroughs wants to stimulate the reader to create his own stories, not to present him with a finished story for his passive consumption." (Skerl, *Burroughs* 90)

*Cities of the Red Night's* evocations of utopia and dystopia occur in a context of integration and syncretism which is new to Burroughs' work. The constant tension between terms of a binary opposition, symptomatic of the fragmented and atomistic world of *The Naked Lunch*, persists, but is diffused somewhat by the invocation of the power of magic and myth. This context invigorates *Cities of the Red Night's* political agenda, as magic becomes a crucial element of political struggle, and politics regains its status as literally a matter of life and death. The integration of the rationalist discipline of politics and Burroughs' political theory with the nonrational domain of magic and myth represents a new project, one which differs markedly from *The Naked Lunch's* goal of causing the reader to see, but follows on from its belated desires for the (re)integration of man's shattered self-image.

Burroughs' attempts at integration are reflected in *Cities of the Red Night's* exploration and combination of different literary and "sub-literary" genres and its experiments with intertextuality, and in its representation of themes which straddle the rational and the nonrational, such as violence, sexuality, and the fundamental nature of death and disease. Both literally and metaphorically, these themes express the complex and dialectical process of integration which is the

text's goal, revealing Burroughs' innate humanism, as well as embodying his frequently expressed despair at the human condition. I see this text as having two major agendas -- political (in the rehabilitated sense implied by the subtext), concerned with power and control -- and literary, concerned with the nature of texts and textual processes. These two agendas are unified by the text's syncretic context, by its experimentation with textual practices, its play with the reader's expectations and redefining of his skills; above all by Burroughs' siting of originary corruption and hence alien control in language. I will discuss *Cities of the Red Night* in terms of its practical relationship with the reader (in this chapter), and in terms of its political and literary agendas and themes (in chapters ten and eleven).

To distinguish between "practices" and "themes" in *Cities of the Red Night* may seem unnecessary, or even obscure. Yet what I am attempting to show is the significant difference between the theoretical aspects of the text, and the way it constructs itself as a novel and operates on the level of the reader. That is, in this chapter I want to look specifically at the practices through which the text ensures and challenges the reader's complicity, as well as addressing the questions of reading, writing, and the nature of the novel and narrative forms, on this level. The working distinction between practice and themes or theory is a useful, though conditional one.

Book One of *Cities of the Red Night* works diligently to establish a system of patterns, practices, and cycles, which the text goes on to pursue and/or disrupt with equal

effectiveness. These carefully (and craftily) created patterns operate to train the reader -- to encourage and develop in him the skills and assumptions requisite for a "correct" reading of the text -- and to "untrain" him, to show him the invalid and spurious nature of many of his most thoroughly internalized and commonly held beliefs and practices regarding reading and understanding. By thus stripping down and cautiously rebuilding the reader's knowledge and learned ability, the text inculcates in him the desire for, as well as the capability to produce, a reading of *Cities of the Red Night* which is ideologically "correct" in Burroughs' idiosyncratic terms. This disruption and rebuilding of the reader's sense of identity as a capable and skilful reader is one of the major factors which render Burroughs' work distinct and unique, and the acceptance (and subsequent participation in) or rejection of this process by the reader may explain the frequently extreme reactions that various readers have to his work.<sup>1</sup> This process also represents the enacting, on a pragmatic level, of one of the most significant imperatives of Burroughs' literary practice -- the alteration of the reader's consciousness, specifically, to change his participation in the text from the mode of passive reaction to that of effective political action. Burroughs "creates powerful imaginary worlds that critique present reality and that show the reader how to alter his consciousness and thus his world." (Skerl, *Burroughs* 91) His imperative to the reader to act upon the basis of the text, first evinced in *The Naked Lunch*, persists as strongly in *Cities of the Red Night*.

This process begins in the first chapter of Book One, "The health officer." This chapter, along with many others in Book One, commences with a careful and detailed realism -- characters and scenes are vividly and specifically evoked, thus bringing into play the suspension of disbelief and other readerly responses associated with realist fiction. Yet at the end of each such chapter this elaborate realist pretence is abruptly deflated, through the disruptive intrusion of fantastic and grotesque elements, and/or through the revelation of, and insistence upon, the theatrical or fictional nature of what has thus far been presented as "real." "The health officer" commences with a deliberate evocation of the life and character of "Farnsworth, the District Health Officer" (*CRN* 17), in the specific chronological context of September 13, 1923, and ends with a fantastic sexual encounter between Farnsworth and Ali, a native boy, in which Farnsworth is transformed into a strange beast (*CRN* 23-24). Although this twists and stretches the realist pretence of what has gone before, it is the final paragraph of the chapter which finally demolishes the narrative's realist status:

*Stage with a jungle backdrop. Frogs croak and birds call from recorder. Farnsworth as an adolescent is lying facedown on sand. Ali is fucking him and he squirms with a slow wallowing movement showing his teeth in a depraved smile. The lights dim for a few seconds. When the lights come up Farnsworth is wearing an alligator suit that leaves his ass bare and Ali is still fucking him. As Ali and Farnsworth slide offstage Farnsworth lifts one webbed finger to the audience while a Marine band plays "Semper Fi." Offstage splash. (Burroughs' italics, *CRN* 24)*

Here, the action of the entire chapter is revealed as a fictional and theatrical pretence, with the characterizations

as roles played by "actors" (a theme which is reiterated throughout *Cities of the Red Night*), and the setting as flimsy theatrical deception, with animal noises from a recording. This is the point at which the reader receives his first significant challenge, as well as his first lesson. He learns to expect the unexpected -- more specifically, to expect the denial and controversion of his learned practices of comprehension and interpretation. He also learns that this is a text which continually purports to reveal itself -- its structures, its practices and techniques, its internal agendas -- and he must choose to accept these basic preconditions or to reject them. Either choice conditions profoundly the reading produced.

Although his choice is made in a context of relative freedom (and remember that the reader is free to disengage from the text at each and every moment, thus explaining the text's rhetorical attempts to ensure complicity), the reader is subtly enticed on to the side of the text by the opportunities it offers. This is by far the easiest option available to the reader -- his only other choices are to continue reading "against the grain," a complex and confrontational process, or to discard the book altogether, which, although it marks a free choice, really achieves little or nothing. Hence although in itself a challenging and difficult option, the choice of reading *Cities of the Red Night* as it would be read is presented as the most appropriate and rewarding choice the reader can make.

The reader's relationship with *Cities of the Red Night* is by no means as confined and restricted as in *The Naked Lunch*.

In contrast to the latter's insistence on defining and limiting the interpretive activity the reader can engage in, *Cities of the Red Night* insists rather on the breadth and depth of the reader's awareness and literary competence. That is, the later text is intent upon exploring the reader's skills, rather than restricting their free play. Burroughs' emphasis shifts from defining the reader's activity to "retraining" the reader, rendering him competent.

This competence has two dimensions. First, the reader of *Cities of the Red Night* must possess a general "literary" competence, that is, he must manifest considerable skill in the employment of learned conventions of reading literature. The significance of this competence in such a complex and multivalent text cannot be overstated, as for the parody of genres and literary styles which is integral to the text to function fully, the reader must be able to recognize the styles and genres being parodied, as well as noting the divergences between original and parody. The reader must not only be able to recognize but also respond to this exploitation of his literary competence, making the connections and deductions necessary for the interpretation and comprehension of the text.

Second, the reader of *Cities of the Red Night* must possess not only a general English literary competence, but also a specific Burroughsian literary competence. That is, the reader is ideally familiar with Burroughs' previous work to the extent that he has internalized the skills, practices, and processes necessary to comprehend a Burroughs text, and render it effective in his terms. The reader is experienced in

making connections between dilatory or divergent narratives (and refusing to make connections which are too obvious), and adept at recognizing the powerful significances of Burroughs' epigrams (for example, "Young boys need it special"). Basically, Burroughs is attempting to condition the reader in a behaviorist way, to render him a textual agent -- reading and interpreting correctly, then taking effective action on the basis of what he has read.

The alarming implications of this attempt at conditioning the reader's behaviour are defused somewhat in Book Two of *Cities of the Red Night*, where the focus shifts from the practice of the reader of this text in particular to the practices of reading and writing in general. The text continues to establish and disrupt patterns and cycles of practice, but the emphasis has shifted away from the reader toward the writer, or "fabricator" of the text. The assumptions and practices underlying textual production are laid bare and commented upon, and this process encapsulates the goals and manoeuvres of Book Two.

The emphasis on literary production as a process or practice appears at the very beginning of Book Two, in the first chapter, titled "Cities of the Red Night." This chapter presents the contents of the pamphlet given to Clem Snide at the very end of Book One. Its presence, and its title, effectively create a concentric pattern -- the pamphlet "Cities of the Red Night" within the novel *Cities of the Red Night*. The appearance of the pamphlet in a climactic moment at the very end of Book One contributes to the epiphany the reader experiences while reading its contents at the beginning

of Book Two. That is, there is a powerful sense that the pamphlet contains crucial information -- crucial to the understanding of the characters' motivations and actions, as well as to the novel as a whole -- which provides a stable basis within the maelstrom of images that the text initiates.

The early appearance in Book Two of a text within the text immediately asserts the primacy of reading, writing, and textuality. This is augmented in "We are the language" (the third chapter of Book Two), where Snide, having read the pamphlet, is presented with another series of books, and experiences intensely sensual reactions as he reads them. His reactions are inspired by the physical nature and texture of the books, rather than response to their intellectual content (which is negligible):

The books are color comics. "Jokes," Jim calls them. Some lost color process has been used to transfer three-dimensional halograms onto the curious tough translucent parchment-like material of the pages. You ache to look at these colors. Impossible reds, blues, sepias. Colors you can smell and taste and feel with your whole body. (*CRN* 152)

The books begin to affect his physical well-being:

As I read on, I became increasingly aware of a feeling of faintness and malaise. The colors were giving me a headache... rising from the books palpable as a haze, a poisonous miasma of color. (*CRN* 153)

Ultimately, Snide seems to lose his conscious sense of self and bodily integrity altogether: "I was looking at the books from above in a spaceship coming in for a landing." (*CRN* 154)

Snide's experiences indicate clearly the power and mystical nature of the act of reading. As presented by Burroughs, this unique experience is an essential preliminary to the act of writing or literary "fabrication" -- Snide's readings inspire his problematic (re)creation of the books. Also, the world



Snide encounters through the medium of the text bears a striking resemblance to the world in which he finds himself in the later chapters of the novel. In Book Two we see that Snide, who we already recognize as narrator and writer/"fabricator," is first and foremost a reader -- and the act of reading, or rather, the ability to read in a certain way, on a specific level, is presented as fundamental to all literary production, "I have never known a writer who was not at one time an avid reader. ...Some knowledge of what *has* been done in writing is, I think, essential," and: "learning to read with discrimination is a crucial step towards learning to write." (AM 33, 38) The prominence of reading as an experience for Snide is indicated in Books One and Two, in his broad knowledge of literature (Fowles, Fitzgerald etc) and his use of literary references in a semiotic subtext (see "The private asshole"). The immense mystical and practical significance of literature -- reading, and writing -- for Snide seems only appropriate for a wholly textual being existent in the insistent textual world of *Cities of the Red Night*.

The reading experience described by Snide in the passages above is essentially an experience of egolessness. Through reading, he first experiences immersion in the world of the senses, of the body and hence of subjectivity and the ego, and then transcends this condition and its restraints: "I was looking at the books from above in a spaceship coming in for a landing." It is this transcendence, this mystical surpassing of bodily and egoistic existence -- of the human condition -- that Burroughs posits as the reader's "reward" for undergoing

the rigorous conditioning I have described. *The Naked Lunch's* intense vision of mankind as imprisoned by the "internal" structures of the body and the ego and the "external" structures of government and repressive control finds an experimental resolution here. The processes the reader undergoes -- strict conditioning followed by possible self-transcendence -- becomes a paradigm of liberation, of freedom for the individual through exhaustive effort and purity of intent, one which is made possible by the new magical dimension of *Cities of the Red Night*.

Yet the act of reading, and subsequent "fabrication," is also shown to have important political ramifications in Book Two. Snide not only discovers that rewriting history is the key to altering the present, but also that "fabrication" is a political act, which can be accompanied by danger and even the risk of death. He discovers, in "Screen play/part one," that his "fabrications" lead to his pursuit by the evil Blum and Krup, as well as Pierson, the menacing CIA agent. Snide also finds himself and his companions, Jim and Kiki, caught up in a horrifying white supremacist plot to destroy the white population, blame other races and retaliate with biological and chemical weapons, and then rebuild the population of the world using genetically "pure" white stock (*CRN* 181).

Snide's role in all of this is clearly laid out for him:

"Pretty neat. And you want me to write the scenario."  
"That's it. You've written enough already to get the ball rolling." (*CRN* 181)

Although reading is presented as an essential, powerful, and mystical practice, writing/"fabrication" is portrayed as fundamentally political in nature. "Fabrication" is presented

as an act which entails risk, danger, and chance -- necessary consequences of the idea that (re)writing is perhaps the only effective means of changing society and the course of history. Burroughs presents reading and writing as two distinct practices -- their vital relationship and interaction symbolizing the integration of the magical (non-rational) with the sociopolitical (rational) that is the "spirit" of *Cities of the Red Night*.

In Book Three the emphasis returns to the process of establishing and then disrupting cycles, patterns, and practices, as in Book One. However, whereas Book One concentrates on the establishment of these procedures rather than their disruption, in Book Three the emphasis is shifted to their disruption, as befits the novel's symmetry.

The primacy of acts of disruption is expressed in the chaotic merging of the text's parallel narrative lines. The result seems to be anarchic -- random scenes featuring a motley collection of characters who represent a bizarre mixture of historical, racial, and cultural backgrounds:

Criminals and outcasts of many times and places are found here: bravos from seventeenth-century Venice, old Western shootists, Indian Thuggees, assassins from Alamut, samurai, Roman gladiators, Chinese hatchet men, pirates and *pistoleros*, Mafia hit-men, dropouts from intelligence agencies and secret police. (CRN 243)

The carefully specified chronological contexts of the text are fractured, and the equally crucial contextualizing forces of the narrative voices of Clem Snide and Noah Blake are lost.

The nature of the characterizations -- as roles played by "actors" -- is insistently reiterated, with even such seemingly integral characters as Clem and Noah transmuting.

This process of endless transfer and alteration is personified in the character of Audrey, who appears only in Book Three. Skerl argues that Audrey replaces Lee as Burroughs' alter ego: "As a version of Burroughs the author, Audrey is often identified as the all-powerful creator of the narratives in which he appears, yet also as a powerless creature manipulated by Burroughs himself." ("Freedom" 191) Both aspects are evident in Audrey's role in Book Three. His rapid shifts of roles, costumes, locations, appearances, names, and time frames illustrate his role as Burroughs' ideal rebel -- in a state of constant metamorphosis which makes him almost impossible to capture or kill. Yet this endless process of transformation takes its toll on Audrey, as he discovers that his ego -- the source of his sense of identity throughout unceasing and disorienting transmutations -- is disintegrating under the stress of the struggle to maintain a sense of self: "Something familiar about Adam, Audrey thinks. Reminds him of something a long time ago. Why... it's me!" (CRN 265) More radically, Audrey's gradual loss of consciousness of self reinforces Burroughs' valorization of egolessness, augmented by the epiphanic realization of the nature of the world that Audrey experiences as his sense of self becomes increasingly diffuse:

Audrey felt the floor shift under his feet and he was standing at the epicenter of a vast web. In that moment, he knew its purpose, knew the reason for suffering, fear, sex, and death. (CRN 267)

This revelation inspires Audrey with a new, highly potent, power and energy. It is as though his loss of ego has enabled him to tap into an immense and powerful life force:

From the depth of his horror and despair, something was

breaking through like molten lava, a shock wave of uncontrollable energy. Audrey felt the chakra at the back of his neck light up and glow.... (CRN 267)

Thus Audrey's loss of identity is not presented in a wholly negative manner, for it is accompanied by an enhanced ability to perceive the underlying structures of power, politics, and society, in the same way that the reader's complicit agreement to relinquish his familiar practices of reading and interpretation enables him to perceive the underlying structures of the text. Egolessness becomes another variety of the formless freedom so fervently sought and desired in *The Naked Lunch* and now in *Cities of the Red Night*.

The central drive of Book Three is the merging of discrete processes and entities, exemplified by Audrey's appearance as a "character" and his subsequent and gradual disintegration. He becomes wholly merged with the world of the text, rather than persisting as a distinct element within it, and this becomes an ideal for the reader to pursue. Equally, this process of amalgamation is evident in Clem Snide and Noah Blake's loss of status as chronologically and historically specific narrators, with recognizable perspectives. They also seem to lose their distinguishing role of writer/"fabricator," presumably disappearing "underground" to avoid detection, and in order to continue their work. They merge in Book Three with the specific textual worlds they have created in the earlier parts of the text, and these specific worlds in turn merge syncretically with the insistently textual world of *Cities of the Red Night* as a whole.

This entire process of integration is smooth and fluid, disrupted only by the violence which the struggle between the

rebels (including Noah, Jerry, Snide, Audrey, Dimitri, etc) and the powers that be (the Countesses predominantly) entails. It is this violence which lends Book Three its frequent sense of dislocation between chapters, as the rebels are constantly forced to change their historical, geographical, and social positions in order to have a chance of defeating the enormously powerful forces ranged against them. The defining characteristic of their rebellion is a struggle against entrenched political and social structures, which leaves them very little space in which to manoeuvre -- hence the constant metamorphosis. Thus although the integrating or merging process the rebels experience is fluent and easy, their lives and situations as a whole are fractured and disrupted by the violence inherent in their struggle for freedom. All of this is reflected proportionately in Book Three itself -- in the usually smooth narrative flow within chapters, easily incorporating the bizarre and grotesque, as well as in the frequently abrupt dislocation between separate chapters.

The negative effect produced by this dislocation, along with the seeming chaos which becomes Book Three's centre, is reduced, to a certain extent, by the implied presence of several "escape options," or routes out of the chaos which the text has become. These "escape options" fulfil precisely that function -- they offer relief from the swarming anarchy of the text and its overwhelming mass of images, as well as providing an interpretive tool, by means of which the reader can take a viable position in relation to Book Three and begin to construct some kind of valid interpretation of it. These options, it should be noted, are tentative and implied at

best, and I see them as a means of testing the reader's complicity with and commitment to the text -- the competent Burroughsian reader is expected to resist taking the easy way out.

The main escape option offered in Book Three is the implicit suggestion, in "Argue second time around such a deal," that all of *Cities of the Red Night* is the fevered imaginings of Audrey in a delirium. This "option" is presented in an incongruously simplistic manner:

Audrey lay back looking at the ceiling. He felt calm and relaxed. He must have had a nightmare. He couldn't remember what it was and it all seemed very remote and unimportant. (CRN 268)

These simple sentences dismiss *Cities of the Red Night's* often fantastic and apocalyptic content, as well as diffusing its mythopoeic power and urgency. The possibility that *Cities of the Red Night* is the result of a fevered imagination, stunning when it is first suggested at a climactic moment (Audrey is destroying one of the Countesses [CRN 267-268]), reminds the reader of *The Naked Lunch's* disclaimer:

Most survivors do not remember the delirium in detail. I apparently took detailed notes on sickness and delirium. I have no precise memory of writing the notes which have now been published under the title *Naked Lunch*. (NL 9)

Yet the complicit reader of *Cities of the Red Night* has learned to be cautious, and this option is too temptingly easy. His suspicions are confirmed at the end of this chapter with the reappearance of familiar figures (Pierson, Dimitri, Jerry, Captain Nordenholz), and the revelation that the boys have been suffering from Virus B-23. These two factors combine to plunge the reader abruptly back into the chaotic world of the text, leaving him with the sense of having been

tested by the text, and either approved (that is, rejecting the "escape option"), or found wanting. Either way, this chapter indicates the importance, even in Book Three, of the continual process of the establishment and disruption of patterns and practices.

The aspect of playfulness which this process lends to the text is also strongly emphasized in Book Three. In the chapter discussed above, the reader is not only tested, but invited to participate in a game --- of making sense of the text, in the face of textual strategies which simultaneously conceal and lay bare submerged structures and forces. The reader is constantly faced with important choices, where the text coyly seems to reveal itself and disappear at one and the same moment. This element of playfulness is highlighted in the chapter titled "We are here because of you," in which

The Billy Celeste High School presents:  
CITIES OF THE RED NIGHT

(CRN 276)

This "play," or rather sequence of vignettes, both encapsulates and parodies the gist of *Cities of the Red Night*, with a strong sense of "play"-fulness in this as a textual strategy and in the relish and glee with which the "boys" play their parts. The "play" provides the reader with yet another "escape option" -- to interpret the text wholly in terms of the theatricality it has so often asserted, and which it reasserts here. This interpretive strategy has the obvious result of again denying the text's sociopolitical and mythopoeic power and urgency, rendering it of equal status with Audrey's fevered imaginings. However, this option, which the competent reader again distrusts, is illusionary and elusive, and at the end of the chapter it simply



disintegrates: "An explosion rumbles through the warehouse. Walls and roof shake and fall on Audrey and the audience. As the warehouse collapses, it turns to dust." (CRN 285) Once again the text has dared the reader to believe in it, to maintain his commitment to it, by testing his resolve to refuse easy interpretive options, and his willingness to participate in textual play.

Thus although Book Three of *Cities of the Red Night* offers the reader possibilities of escape from the chaos into which it seems to descend, these options turn out to be tests of his resolution and commitment, gestures toward simplicity and closure, rather than genuine opportunities for interpretive engagement. Burroughs is prepared to risk the reader's rejection in order to challenge established beliefs and practices which he perceives as outdated, or as based upon dangerously fallacious assumptions. In return, he posits the goal of egolessness and self-transcendence as achievable for the reader if he is prepared to undergo the strict retraining *Cities of the Red Night* provides. The text maintains a powerful momentum, working through parallel narrative movements to a final chaotic whirlpool of images, ideas, and impressions, and the reader is left with a vestigial -- asserted yet undercut -- image of power. The text's ultimate goal, to engage the reader's own creative powers (in essence, to turn him into a writer/fabricator or textual agent) is expressed by the epigraph to this chapter.

Chapter Ten: "Politics here is death."

"My point is very simple. The whole human position is no longer tenable."  
(*CRN* 36)

"Get out of the defensive position" (*CRN*  
title of chapter 22)

*Cities of the Red Night's* political agenda locates itself firmly within the field of human history, which is doubly encompassed within the text by means of its fundamentally textual (written, recorded, subject to interpretation) character as well as the theoretical textuality it insists upon (which asserts that there is nothing which is not textual). Although firmly entrenched in the text in this way, this agenda would seek to unfold ramifications "beyond" the text -- a task which, given the all-encompassing textuality that *Cities of the Red Night* promulgates, becomes restricted to affecting the reader on a level other than the traditionally or purely literary. That is, as *Cities of the Red Night* postulates that everything is textual, conditioned and determined by the structures of language, the effectiveness of its political agenda is restricted to its potential impact upon the reader. This impact consists of attempts to make the reader perceive the text and its imperatives in a politically and socially active perspective. In this chapter I want to look at how the text explores, challenges, and ultimately works within these restrictive parameters -- the ways in which the text's political agenda adapts to this undermining of its urgency and potential effectiveness, and learns to "stimulate the reader to create his own stories...." (Skerl, *Burroughs* 90) and to change his own "world." I will demonstrate how *Cities of the Red Night*

defines the agenda of the trilogy as a whole, and then proceeds to set and pursue its own agenda accordingly.

Book One provides clues to its political agenda early, with an immediate and savage critique of forms of authority in modern society. This process begins in the first chapter of Book One, "The Health Officer," where the officer, Farnsworth, is revealed as apathetic, ineffective, and drug-addicted. Apathy becomes active hostility with the portrait of Dr Pierson in the third chapter of Book One, "The doctor is on the market." Like Farnsworth, he uses narcotic addiction to insulate himself from the suffering he has to deal with. Dr Pierson goes beyond indifference to the humanity of his patients, expressing an active dislike: "The doctor looked at the boy's face with distaste. He disliked children, adolescents, and animals. The word *cute* did not exist in his emotional vocabulary." (Burroughs' italics, CRN 29)

The social power and authority of the medical profession have consistently been the targets of some of Burroughs' most savage and virulent attacks. He sees the medical profession as essentially callous and unfeeling, exploiting and even experimenting upon naive patients for purposes of self-aggrandizement. Thus vituperative portraits of Burroughs' standard doctor-type are a common feature of all his work, beginning with Doctor Benway. In *Cities of the Red Night*, Burroughs' typical attack upon the medical profession is less vicious than in *The Naked Lunch*. Rather, it forms an integral part of a general, and powerful, critique of social forms of authority, which extends to scientists, police, law enforcement officials generally, and intelligence agents in

particular. He sees all these professions as deliberately mishandling or abusing knowledge and information as a central function of their social roles. That is, they manipulate and suppress knowledge with the primary end of augmenting and protecting their own position, reinforcing Burroughs' view that "*control can never be a means to any practical end.... It can never be a means to anything but more control.... Like junk...*" (Burroughs' italics, NL 133) For him, the men in these roles are as addicted to the sensation and exertion of power and authority as any junky, as denoted in the drug addiction of Farnsworth and Dr Pierson.

The nature of addiction to control, power, and the exertion of authority is expressed further by Virus B-23, which plays a crucial metaphoric role in the theory and ideology of the text. Virus B-23 bears a remarkable resemblance to the "human virus" of *The Naked Lunch*, which also represents the fundamental nature of mankind and society: "Poverty, hatred, war, police-criminals, bureaucracy, insanity, all symptoms of The Human Virus." (NL 136) The virus is a central image in Burroughs' work, and an apt one for his purposes:

Viruses do not grow in the conventional sense, and are not self-reproducing: they subvert the synthetic machinery of the cells which they infect in such a way as to produce more copies of themselves, and have no existence apart from the cells they infect. (*Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought*)

The profoundly parasitic nature of a virus, and, by implication, the social structures and positions of authority which Burroughs uses the virus to represent, is emphasized here. This definition summarizes exactly Burroughs' view of social structures of power and authority: they are useless,

dangerous, and have no function other than to maintain their position within the "host" and to reproduce themselves endlessly. The one vulnerable point of a virus -- its inability to exist independently of the host -- is also a crucial feature of the social roles it represents, according to Burroughs. It is this vulnerability which inspires the virus's ruthless and desperate, even destructive, attempts to survive and maintain its position of all-important symbiosis with the host. Equally, he sees the social structures of power and authority which the virus engenders as intensely vulnerable to the disintegration of the society within which they exist, and this explains their primary interest in maintaining the status quo -- and hence maintaining "order."

Thus the ultimate enemy of the virus is chaos -- it destroys the ordered and secure environment upon which the virus's continued existence depends. The virus's compulsion to constantly renew and reproduce itself is a product of its vulnerability, as well as a means of assuring the continuity of the hierarchies and structures it needs to exist. The roles fulfilled by police, scientists, doctors, and so on, embody the social structures of power and authority they act for, and these structures are defined as viral in their fundamental nature. The symptoms of this virus, some of which are listed in the quotation from *The Naked Lunch* above, encompass all of society's injustices, inequalities, and vices. Junk, the overriding image of Burroughs' early work gives way to the virus, indicating the increasing depth and perceptiveness of Burroughs' search for images of the causes of mankind's shattered image of self and inability to

(re)construct, as well as his perceptions of historical change in the intervening years between *The Naked Lunch* and *Cities of the Red Night*.

In *Cities of the Red Night*, the virus metaphor becomes more integral to man's nature than in *The Naked Lunch* -- he has internalized and accepted it as a part of the self. This renders the task of eradicating the virus immensely difficult, if not impossible, for the all-encompassing nature of the virus (like textuality) means that it is virtually impossible to take up a neutral or objective position in relation to it. That is, the position of the virus as ingrained at the heart of society, at its most basic and least visible level, means that it cannot be clearly and objectively perceived and hence dealt with. This explains the radical nature of the break which the rebels (and the reader) must make with contemporary society in order to perceive its fundamental corruption, as well as the fact that they must destroy its structures, and hence plunge it into chaos, as, paradoxically, the only means of ultimately preserving its vitality and very existence. This is why Burroughs promotes egolessness as an appropriate goal for the reader -- for in eradicating the ego, which represents the seat of the virus because it is the site of internalized and deterministic concepts of identity and self, one eradicates the virus as well. Burroughs specifically equates the ego with the virus, and posits its dissolution:

What we think of as our ego is a defensive reaction just as the symptoms of an illness... fever, swelling, sweating are the body's reaction to an invading organism, so our beloved ego, arising from the rotten weeds of lust and fear and anger, has no more continuity than a fever sweat.  
(AM 131)

The virus is a pervasive and insidious invader, which needs to

be radically and violently repulsed.

The virus metaphor is given full explanation and theoretical justification in "Politics here is death." The explanation is provided by Peterson, and concerns the nature of the mystery Virus B-23:

"Now let us consider the symptoms of Virus B-23: fever, rash, a characteristic odor, sexual frenzies, obsession with sex and death.... Is this so totally strange and alien?"

"I don't follow you."

"I will make myself clearer. We know that a consuming passion can produce physical symptoms... fever... loss of appetite... even allergic reactions... and few conditions are more obsessional and potentially self-destructive than love. Are not the symptoms of Virus B-23 simply the symptoms of what we are pleased to call 'love'? Eve, we are told, was made from Adam's rib... so a hepatitis virus was once a healthy liver cell.... we are all tainted with viral origins. The whole quality of human consciousness, as expressed in male and female, is basically a virus mechanism.... And I would suggest further that any attempts to contain Virus B-23 will turn out to be ineffectual because we carry this virus with us," said Peterson. (*CRN* 36)

The violent and parasitic nature of the virus's relationship with mankind is evident, as, in the guise of love, the most common and most valued emotion, the virus has invaded the human psyche and society. Burroughs locates the virus in the origins of mankind, which increases its invisibility, its concealment, for how can one objectively perceive the presence of an alien being which has always been a part of one's self? Thus man experiences the virus as irrevocably a part of his definition of self, to the extent that he is able to perceive it at all. As Shaviro puts it: "The host ('human consciousness') has no existence prior to the virus which it harbors. To be 'tainted with viral origins' is to discover that one's interiority is always already contaminated by external forces." (198) The problem of perceiving the virus

is reminiscent of the problems associated with subject positions in *The Naked Lunch* -- Burroughs continues to stress the problematic nature of subjectivity and the virtual impossibility of achieving objectivity, except in rhetorical guises.

Peterson goes on to state the nature of the current crisis in the deadly co-existence of parasite and host, in response to a challenge from Pierson, who tries to recall him to the tacit community of science:

"Really, Doctor, aren't you letting fantasy run away with you? After all, other viruses have been brought under control. Why should this virus be an exception?"

"Because it is the *human virus*. After many thousands of years of more or less benign coexistence, it is now once again on the verge of malignant mutation.... This could result from the radiation already released in atomic testing...." (Burroughs' italics, *CRN* 36)

The "human virus," diagnosed by *The Naked Lunch* and iterated here, has reached a crisis point, a point where it is sufficiently powerful to embark on a struggle to attain total power over its host. That is, through its power of mutation, the virus is poised to conquer its host, mankind, rather than continue to co-exist in an uneasy symbiosis. It is this threat that structures the political agenda of *Cities of the Red Night*. To quote Peterson yet again (as I did in the epigraph to this chapter): "The whole human position is no longer tenable." (*CRN* 36) This is the basic premise of the entire trilogy. It explains the radical necessity of the violence, destruction, and chaos which empower the texts, as well as their powerful imperatives to the reader. The consciousness of every individual must be altered to enable him to perceive the enemy within. The structures of society,



within which the virus conceals itself and thrives, must be convincingly and thoroughly destroyed. Apathy, inaction, and the status quo become the symptomatic expressions of the metaphorical virus enemy. The nature of the problem is such that the struggle must necessarily be conducted on a textual or symbolic level, for it is only through texts and the symbols and metaphors they contain that man can perceive, comprehend, and decisively defeat his worst enemy -- his own fundamentally corrupted nature. Subjectivity, the site of the virus, must be eradicated altogether in favour of an egolessness whose very formlessness resists all structuring tendencies.

This is the basic theoretical agenda of the trilogy as a whole, laid out here on a necessarily metaphorical level (and distinct from *Cities of the Red Night's* political agenda, which, however, it structures and informs). It is a radical and profoundly revolutionary agenda, one which would destroy the society we know, the very world in which the existence of *Cities of the Red Night* as text is predicated. Yet this agenda also reflects a profound humanism typical of Burroughs' basic motives, and concealed by his frequently expressed cynicism and despair at contemporary mankind and society. I hope that an awareness of this agenda will continue to inform the rest of my own text.

Although, through Peterson, Burroughs states the basic premise and subsequent agenda of the entire trilogy in this chapter, he does not allow the specific identity, and individual, perhaps less drastic agenda of *Cities of the Red Night* itself to be overwhelmed or neglected. Its basic

premise is cogently stated by Peterson at the end of "Politics here is death:"

"And one last consideration... as you know, a vast crater in what is now Siberia is thought to have resulted from a meteor. It is further theorized that this meteor brought with it the radiation in question. Others have surmised that it may not have been a meteor but a black hole, a hole in the fabric of reality, through which the inhabitants of these ancient cities traveled in time to a final impasse." (CRN 36-37)

It is this "final impasse" which is explored in Books Two and Three of *Cities of the Red Night*. Thus politics is indeed "death" -- the death of the virus, or the death of mankind's hopes for liberation from the schizophrenic reality of modern Western culture -- as posited by the political agenda. Burroughs urges the reader to see and to act, as in *The Naked Lunch*, but this time the emphasis is on the latter with the imperative to "Get out of the defensive position."

It is at this point that the theoretical and political agenda of *Cities of the Red Night* begins to fuse with its mythopoeic forces, as expressed in the central myth of the Cities. The key role of mythic forces in the text reinforces the theory that the nature of the "problem" it seeks to grapple with is one that can only be grasped -- and enacted -- on a profoundly symbolic level, for it is only through the distancing mechanisms of texts and symbols that man can perceive and come to understand his own essential nature. It is this idea which links the magical and mythopoeic aspects of *Cities of the Red Night* with its revaluing of the non-rational or unconscious elements of the psyche -- for it is by tapping into non-rational and unconscious resources, through the medium of magical and mythical forces both internal and external to the

self, that the reintegration of man's shattered self-image can begin to be achieved through the relinquishing of ego and the (implicit) construction of a new, virus-free, concept of self.

The assertion of the primacy of the non-rational begins in the seventh chapter of Book One, "The private asshole," which also marks the commencement of one of *Cities of the Red Night's* three central narratives, that of the "detective." The detective himself, Clem Snide, reveals that he uses non-rational methods of detection in his work:

"It's true then that you use uh psychic methods?"  
 "I use any methods that help me to find the missing person. If I can locate him in my own mind that makes it easier to locate him outside it." (CRN 46)

Snide proceeds to put such methods into practice in the search for Jerry Green, as well as referring several times to the teachings of the sorcerer don Juan, as recorded in the works of Carlos Castaneda, which particularly emphasize the instinctive and intuitive aspects of perception.<sup>1</sup> Snide's use of non-rational methods of detection is particularly appropriate to the search for the missing boy, for they render him "open" or susceptible to a wide variety of images and impressions which are closed off by the linear paths of logic and deduction.

The power and significance of the non-rational or unconscious mind for Burroughs are indicated at an early stage in this narrative. Their integration with aspects of magic and mythic ritual is also evident in Snide's narrative, as he and his assistant Jim perform various sexual rituals. Snide experiences a series of images as a result of the ritual, including one of Jerry, who becomes an increasingly iconic

figure in the text.

The importance of sexuality as an integral part of magic ritual and non-rational processes is emphasized by Snide before the above ritual takes place: "According to psychic dogma, sex itself is incidental and should be subordinated to the intent of the ritual. But I don't believe in rules. What happens, happens." (CRN 77) Burroughs represents sex as one of the most important instinctual forces of the self. He sees it as a potent means of communicating with one's deepest unconscious processes, as well as achieving a greater communion with magical and mystical forces outside the self. Sex between males, which possesses the greatest significance for Burroughs, is primary because it represents the mystical "coming together" or integration of two beings who are fundamentally alike. Thus a "doubling" or consolidation and incrementation of individual forces is achieved by such a coupling, as well as the overcoming of the male/female dichotomy imposed by systems of morality which Burroughs sees as false and repressive: "I think that what we call love is a fraud perpetuated by the female sex, and the point of sexual relations between men is nothing that we could call love, but rather what we might call *recognition*." (Burroughs' italics, Job 110)

A new element is added to the primacy of sex in magic and the alternative world of the non-rational by Dimitri's assertion in relation to the ritual in which Jerry Green was killed: "A sacrifice involving both sex and death is the most potent projection of magical intention." (CRN 85) That sex and death should be so intimately connected, despite their

seemingly opposite positions at the beginnings and ends of life, is an age-old cliché, one which Burroughs seeks to reinvigorate.

Sex and death are linked in Burroughs' work by an emphasis on their similarities -- of structure and significance -- rather than their intrinsic differences. Both have crucial functions in *Cities of the Red Night's* political agenda: sex is "corrupted" by modern society and its repressive morality, but "restored" to its purity of intention and mystic power by the rebels; while death provides one of the major obstacles to eternal life, transmigration and transmutation, which a combination of magic, ritual, and technology can (hypothetically at least) overcome. The two are specifically linked in the first chapter of Book Two, "Cities of the Red Night," which recounts the history of the ancient Cities. It is theorized here that the elite inhabitants were "Transmigrants," who transferred regularly from one body to another, thus attaining a conditional form of eternal life. Crucially, the means of transfer was through "orgasm death:" "The methods of death most commonly employed were hanging and strangulation, the Transmigrant dying in the orgasm, which was considered the most reliable method of ensuring a successful transfer." (CRN 142)

Orgasm-death becomes a means of transferring the ego to a different body. From this process, the unknown but evidently scholarly narrator of "Cities of the Red Night" argues that:

The alert student of this noble experiment will perceive that death was regarded as equivalent not to birth but to conception and go on to infer that conception is the basic trauma. In the moment of death, the dying man's whole life may flash in front of his eyes back to conception. In the moment of conception, his future life flashes

forward to his future death. *To reexperience conception is fatal.* (Burroughs' italics, *CRN* 144)

Burroughs posits conception and death not as opposite poles in a linear motion, but rather as significant co-ordinates in an endless cyclic process. As such, they become an important feature of the viral origins of mankind, as well as major features of the non-rational or alternate world which *Cities of the Red Night* seeks to promote and explore. Conception and hence sex becomes the inevitable precursor of death, while death is the inexorable result of sex/conception.

...Life is generated and determined by death, but dying is a movement in which no repose, no terminal state, can ever be attained. The process of life is the process of death, but this process is nothing but an all-encompassing illusion. (Shaviro 199)

The "biological trap" (Skerl, *Burroughs* 88) or vicious circle that this eminently natural process has degenerated into is depicted as the result of the Transmigrants' activities:

This was the basic error of the Transmigrants: you do not get beyond death and conception by reexperience any more than you get beyond heroin by ingesting larger and larger doses. The Transmigrants were quite literally addicted to death and they needed more and more death to kill the pain of conception. (*CRN* 144)

Sex and death are inscribed here in the structures of addiction from *The Naked Lunch*. They become commodities, their value determined by desperate need and limited supply. Violence becomes necessary to destroy this dystopian trap, and Burroughs projects a form of magical warfare:

Thousand-mile-an-hour winds -- the fences, barbed wire, and massive iron gates hemming in the Casbah are tearing loose... flying wire decapitates screaming crowds. Pan, God of Panic, rides the wings of Death as the torn sky bends with the wind, prop sky tearing, shredding -- incandescent force -- the pure young purpose blazes like a comet.... (*CRN* 263)

Here, the integrated forces of magic (the wind), myth (Pan),

and the non-rational (Death) completely dominate and even destroy the traditional practices and concepts of warfare, rendering organization into total chaos. Their primacy is asserted positively and with approval ("the pure young purpose"), and the triumph of the forces of the non-rational appears complete. Yet the rebels too, apart from Audrey, are swept away by the wind of chaos and destruction, and thus Burroughs refuses to take what would seem the natural step of establishing the incontrovertible primacy of the non-rational, magical, and mythical forces the text champions. The constraints of *Cities of the Red Night's* theoretical agenda prevent this final asseveration, for the idea of overturning a binary opposition such as that of rational/non-rational by simply reversing the privilege and hierarchy attributed to its primary term is anathema to Burroughs. Instead, he seeks to eradicate altogether such hierarchical oppositions, through revealing their hidden assumptions and demonstrating that there are forces in the universe which humans can invoke but which are far greater than the forces we know, and surpass our ability to control them.

The syncretic "spirit" of the text also entails the total rejection of such oppositions, through exposing them as not only inadequate, but profoundly wrong. This dual rejection and exposure of the arbitrary and ultimately dangerous possibilities of thought prescribed (and proscribed) by the powers that be represents a challenge to those powers even more threatening than that of armed rebellion. The situation of the virus, as entrenched invisibly in mankind's most innate and original being, places it in an ideal position to exploit

the vulnerability of its host's psyche by imposing restrictive patterns of thought in the guise of the ego.

According to Burroughs, the rejection of the fundamental either/or dichotomy -- along with all others, for example, male/female, rational/non-rational -- is the first, most basic step in breaking free from the indomitable control exercised by the alien virus. The refusal to think in the dualist, even schizophrenic terms of Western culture entails a rejection of the rhetoric through which the virus sustains and perpetuates its power and authority, as well as making the examination and interpretation of such rhetoric possible for the first time. The liberation of thought becomes the liberation of language, from exploitation by the media at the behest of the virus. Yet the rhetorical and linguistic uses of power are so entrenched and so effectively wielded by authority, that their outright rejection entails the danger of losing the ability to communicate altogether. It is this danger which Burroughs attempts to avoid through his fragmentation of narrative and dislocation of language and its structures, treading a fine line between incomprehension or incommunicability and the replication of abhorrent power structures. The final result is *Cities of the Red Night* in this instance, and more generally the trilogy as a whole -- works which are necessarily fragmented yet which strive for holism.

The invocation of magical, mythical, and non-rational forces, incorporating the primal forces of sex, war, and death, effectively subverts the structures and rhetoric of authority. This process also works towards the self-realization necessary for the attainment of the political



agenda's dual goals of *recognition* -- of man's virus nature and diseased concept of self -- and *reconstruction* -- of the shattered self-image of man.

The political agenda of *Cities of the Red Night* also promotes a series of limited and concrete political and social objectives, in tandem with its greater goals regarding the restoration of the human spirit. It is significant that these specific objectives refer only to the destructive process of attacking entrenched powers and laying bare their hidden structures. The fact that the text contains no specific objectives in relation to the consequent reconstruction and reintegration that this agenda promotes indicates the difficulty (or even impossibility) of such a task. The text seems to falter, to lose its momentum at the very end, as it acknowledges the enormous complexity of rebuilding, of starting again from scratch, compared to the relatively simple task of destruction.<sup>2</sup> It is these negative forces -- the necessity of destruction as a first step -- which I now want to discuss.

A dialectical movement is created by the conjunction of the processes of social criticism -- the revelation of insidious and pervasive power structures -- and active political rebellion, or the violent overthrow of these alien and dangerous powers. The struggle is presented in Manichaeian terms -- the rebels are entirely "good" with ideologically pure intentions, and the virus powers are profoundly and intrinsically "evil." This Manichaeian division persists in the theme of social criticism which runs strongly through the

text. That is, Burroughs attacks contemporary society by simply presenting concrete examples of social structures positioned at extreme ends of his ideological scale. The contrast is rendered absolute by the presentation of these alternate societies as either utopian or dystopian -- there is nothing in between. Hence the reader, if he chooses complicity with the text, is unable to choose a moderate position, but is instead profoundly radicalized by the choices he is urged to make.

The dystopian nature of modern Western society in Burroughs' eyes, as comprehensively established in *The Naked Lunch*, is reasserted with the attack on particular roles of social authority which I have discussed at the beginning of this chapter. The nature of modern society as dystopian is developed throughout Book One, as Snide's detective work reveals the extent to which hidden evil forces permeate and control social and political structures worldwide (represented by figures such as the Countesses de Vile and de Gulpa [CRN 53], Helen and Van [CRN 52-53], and Marty [CRN 111-112]). This critique of society reaches a climax with the development, early in Book Two, of the detailed parallel world of the mythical Cities of the Red Night.

The Cities provide a paradigmatic dystopia, the victims of innate corruption and external evil. Their nature as legendary and as irrevocably past establishes sufficient distance for them to function as a dispassionate reflection of modern sociopolitical structures. However, once this point has been made, the paradigm recognized and internalized by the reader, the Cities are reactivated from their fossil state,

and projected into the present and the future of the text. They become the crucial battleground of the Manichaeian forces embodied by the rebels and the figures mentioned above. As such, they render fantastic and grotesque events believable, through the reflection of their own mythical and astounding nature, and specifically embody one of the text's political imperatives: the necessity of altering the present by rewriting the past. This process is exemplified by the rewriting of the history or legend of the Cities, which takes place mainly in Book Three.

The Cities are portrayed as the very first victims of the virus, represented in the "Red Night" by which they come to be known:

In the thinly populated desert area north of Tamaghis a portentous event occurred. Some say it was a meteor that fell to earth leaving a crater twenty miles across. Others say that the crater was caused by what modern physicists call a black hole.

After this occurrence the whole northern sky lit up red at night, like the reflection from a vast furnace. Those in the immediate vicinity of the crater were the first to be affected and various mutations were observed, the commonest being altered hair and skin color. (CRN 143)

The alien nature of the virus is symbolized here by its supposed arrival from outer space. The dystopian nature of the Cities is also indicated by the "vast furnace" -- an ominous sign of their mutation into a living hell. The insidious viral will to dominate is indicated by the immediate mutations, and also implied by the subsequent implementation of a new sociopolitical regime by the mutants. It is also revealed that prior to the virus mutations the majority of human beings were black. This underlines the diseased viral nature of the white race, which dominates contemporary society, according to Burroughs, and oppresses those of

different races. Thus the paradigmatic function of the Cities is always predominant in the narration of its hypothetical history.

The dystopian Cities are counterbalanced by the utopian pirate community, presented, through the narrative of Noah Blake, in Books One and Two of *Cities of the Red Night*. However, the scales are ultimately tipped in favour of the negative forces of destruction, for the positive aspects of the pirates' endeavours are subtly undercut, through the insertion of external, doubting perspectives such as that of the sorceress Hironnelle de Mer: "Now, a short rundown on these shabby adventurers plotting to appropriate a continent and remake it to their taste. They are all *puto queer maricones*." (CRN 106) She goes on to disparage the backgrounds of the pirate leaders. Her cynical perspective reinforces Noah's own earlier forebodings:

I don't know what gave me such an impression of shabbiness about this procession, since they all must have chests of gold and precious stones, but for a moment they appeared to my eyes as seedy players with grand roles but no money to pay the rent. (CRN 94)

Noah continues to experience premonitions of doom, disaster, and failure. They are proved correct in the final chapter, when he returns to Port Roger, the pirates' base, and finds it in ruins:

This must be it. Warped planks in a tangle of trees and vines. The pool of the Palace is covered with algae. A snake slithers into the green water. Weeds grow through the rusty shell of a bucket in the *haman*. The stairs leading to the upper porch have fallen. Nothing here but the smell of empty years. How many years? I can't be sure. (CRN 286)

The pirate utopia is constantly undercut, as seen here, its basic tenets eventually becoming the implicit agenda of the

rebels' struggle against the virus powers in Book Three. Once again, Burroughs is content to leave only the vestiges of a concept to haunt the reader and impel him to act on his own behalf. That is, it is in keeping with Burroughs' ideology that he refuses to provide an unconditionally positive sociopolitical alternative to the societies he so fervently attacks. The imposition of his own point of view, through the representation of a supposedly ideal society, would be equivalent, in his eyes, to the viral insistence upon the maintenance of particular social and political forms, and thus the text avoids this trap rigorously, even at the expense of its ideal society.

The pirate community, with its dream of replacing imperialist Spanish hegemony over South America with a system of free communities of individuals possessing full civil liberties, provides an exemplar for modern society. That is, it exemplifies the best aspects of human communal living, whereas the Cities reflect the worst aspects of modern society.<sup>3</sup> In both cases, situations from the supposedly irrecoverable past are projected into the present and future time of the text, to enact or embody the Manichaeian struggle for possession of the heart and soul of mankind which is at the centre of the text. Burroughs' reactivation of the past reveals his humanism, for it gives mankind at least one more chance to translate the diseased past into the essential basis of a positive and healthy future.

Although undercut by Noah's forebodings of dread, as well as Hironnelle de Mer's cynicism, the utopian pirate community embodies many of the political agenda's most positive and

powerful aspects, as the Cities equally enact them in their most corrupt and diseased form. For example, the pirate community has a healthy respect for, and understanding of, the importance of magic (*CRN* 101), and demonstrate Burroughs' version of ideal warfare. Their strategies incorporate medical, biological, magical, and economic weapons, and are sufficiently general to allow for the exercise of individual imagination and spontaneity. The pirate community's reverence for magic and other significant non-rational forces is demonstrated further in their attitude to sexuality. They perform an amazing variety of sexual rituals to impregnate women in order to create further "troops" for their revolution, with a seriousness of purpose made clear by Noah: "I am trying to figure what sort of act I could put on that would have the necessary concentration of purpose to make a child." (*CRN* 105) The pirates also employ sex for non-ritual purposes: as a means of spiritual communion between individual males, sharing fellowship and strengthening their common resolve. Noah uses sex to tap into his own creative and imaginative resources: "I prop the book against the wall on the far side of the desk and bend over a chair. As Hans fucks me, the drawings seem to come alive belching red fire" (*CRN* 120).

Thus the utopian world of the pirates embodies the integration of the non-rational or unconscious with magic and myth in a powerful synthesis. Their incredible racial and personal diversity, united in the pursuit of a common goal, enacts the syncretism which the text's agenda promotes. Their attitudes to sexuality, warfare, and magic ritual reveal their

ideological purity in Burroughs' terms. Yet the already undercut pirate utopia deteriorates further once the actual struggle for power against the viral forces commences. Despite their initial success, the pirates suffer terrible losses, and must undergo painful transmutations (as particularly represented by Audrey's experiences) as the field of struggle widens to encompass all of human history. Utopia and dystopia clash violently, as the rebels find themselves fighting on the battlefield of the Cities. They discover the unpleasant truth that

The violence of political and personal struggle is interminable, like death itself. ...History is a nightmare from which we cannot be awakened, a fatality in which everything ceaselessly recurs. This is what makes the image of revolution so necessary for Burroughs, and yet so problematic. ...Power is as endless as the resistance which it encounters; itself violent, it feeds on the violence which it provokes. The spontaneity of revolt is only a calculated, illusory effect of its operations. (Shaviro 199)

The rebels' defeat is thus foreordained.

Ambiguity and ambivalence become primary factors, confusing previously clear-cut issues, and clouding the rebels' ideological purity. Their refusal to wage war on traditional terms, and their complementary resistance to the rational rhetoric of authority, endanger their ability to comprehend and communicate, just as the constant metamorphosis they must undergo endangers their ability to sustain an ego. That is, to overcome their own diseased nature and viral origins, the pirates must dissociate themselves as much as possible from this all-pervading aspect of their identity, yet still retain some vestiges of self. Like the self-eradicating, vestigial author in *The Naked Lunch*, they must perform "self-surgery,"

eliminating the disease which has permeated every cell, but ensuring the continued life and preservation of the organism. This task is virtually impossible, yet Burroughs presents it as the one and only, admittedly slender, chance for survival and freedom available to mankind. He assumes freely that life as host to the virus is not worth living. As such, the political agenda of the text, with its specific imperatives, urges the reader to seize this opportunity, despite the pirates' (presumed) defeat and powerful forces of dread:

A nightmare feeling of foreboding and desolation comes over me as a great mushroom-shaped cloud darkens the earth. A few may get through the gate in time. Like Spain, I am bound to the past. (CRN 287)

It is evident that all of *Cities of the Red Night's* stringent imperatives are justified ideologically and theoretically by its political agenda. The negative forces of social criticism (including the depiction of the utopian pirate community and the dystopian Cities), and the necessity for warfare and violence, provide the specific and concrete objectives of the destruction of corrupt contemporary society and the eradication of the virus at man's core. They are complemented by the powerful forces represented in the integration of the non-rational or unconscious aspect of man with the powers of magic and myth, embodied in sex and death. The result is a powerful syncretism, or drive towards (re)integration, the complexities of which I have attempted to indicate here. The reader must begin the enormous task set for him by following the advice given in the epigraph to this chapter: "Get out of the defensive position."



Chapter Eleven: "We are the language"

"A number of performances are going on at the same time, in many rooms, on many levels." (CRN 277)

The political agenda just discussed, with its goal of revealing and destroying insidious power structures as well as promoting the integration of rational forces with the powers of myth, magic and the non-rational, is complemented by the "textual" or specifically "literary" agenda of *Cities of the Red Night*. This agenda has as its primary goal the initiation of alterations in the consciousness of the reader, and consequently in the conscious nature and thought patterns of society as a whole. These two agendas represent different aspects of Burroughs' drive to eradicate the human virus, image of mankind's diseased and corrupt nature, and to commence the reconstruction of a more "healthy," as well as ideologically pure (in Burroughs' terms), concept and image of self.

*Cities of the Red Night's* insistence on revealing its own nature and practices as text is explained partly by the fact that it constitutes the relationship between itself and other texts in terms of conflict and competition for the reader's time, attention, and commitment. The depiction of intertextual relationships in this way reflects Burroughs' acute awareness of the problems literature has in competing against more instant, less engaging media such as television:

I think that the novelistic form is probably outmoded and that we may look forward perhaps to a future in which people do not read at all or read only illustrated books and magazines or some abbreviated form of reading matter. To compete with television and photo magazines, writers will have to develop more precise techniques producing the same effect on the reader as a lurid action photo. (Job 11)

In *Cities of the Red Night*, Burroughs engages with this problem by insisting upon the reader's awareness of the text's specifically literary practices and strategies --- emphasizing the value and uniqueness of literature as compared to other media -- and by incorporating strategies, images, and forms from other media, specifically the theatre. Burroughs goes all out to win the reader's attention and commitment, and his perception that *Cities of the Red Night* exists and functions in a context which is essentially competitive is crucial to understanding its literary agenda.

The desire for social and political effectiveness in the face of such competition as well as the ongoing and gradual devaluing of literature, is expressed in both *The Naked Lunch* and *Cities of the Red Night*, but each text deals with the problem in a different way. Whereas the former relies heavily and even desperately upon the action it hopes to inspire the reader to take, the latter brings the world it wishes to change and affect within the parameters of the text, by arguing for the theory of textuality.

It is Burroughs' theory of textuality, which *Cities of the Red Night* embodies, that enables the text to portray a struggle against the dangerous and alien forces it locates and recognizes which is in any way effective. That is, Burroughs' insistence upon the textuality of existence -- his assumption that all thought and action are structured irrevocably by language and its structures -- renders his complex ideological, textual, and sociopolitical imperatives effective, by allowing them to encompass all kinds of "reality," and hence making "everything" the proper concern of

the text. As Burroughs states in the title of Chapter 23 (which I have used as the title of my chapter as well): "We are the language."

This is a different aspect of the perceived battle against the impotence of literature which Burroughs has waged since *The Naked Lunch*. He sought to render that text socially and politically effective by positioning it as non-literary, and hence as of practical use. This essentially defensive strategy is rejected in *Cities of the Red Night*, in favour of a comprehensive assault on the pervasive distinction between "literature" and "reality." Burroughs seeks to demonstrate that the distinction between literature and the "real," and indeed the frequent definition of literature in opposition to supposed "reality," is tenuous at best. Shaviro argues that:

The revelation towards which the book moves is that there is in fact nothing to reveal, no epistemological foundation beneath the parodic play of illusion. Instead of communicating a prior and external truth, the text dramatizes the indeterminate processes of its own production. ...Textuality is not only a control mechanism which creates the imprisoning illusion of the "real," but also a liberating movement whose only reality is that of illusion. (203)

Thus *Cities of the Red Night* continues the assault on concepts of reality begun in *The Naked Lunch*. In this instance, Burroughs represents the text as an all-encompassing imaginative collaboration between the work and the reader, having everything within its proper sphere, or rather, nothing outside it. The text has no concrete objective existence -- it is a mental construct -- and as such Burroughs can stretch it to fulfil his own ends. He does so, in *Cities of the Red Night*, with considerable power and resonance.

*Cities of the Red Night's* insistent textuality complements

the assertive syncretism of its political agenda. Yet it also confines and constrains the magical, mythical, and non-rational forces that this syncretic imperative promotes, by representing them on a purely linguistic level. That is, the magical forces invoked in and by the text are diffused to a certain extent by their expression in and through the everyday, all-encompassing, structures of language, fragmented and dislocated as these structures may be by Burroughs. The representation of these essentially non-rational forces in linguistic, and hence intrinsically rational terms, which is an unavoidable consequence of *Cities of the Red Night's* universal textuality, weakens their power, by eroding their difference.

Thus all-encompassing textuality is a double-edged weapon, one that Burroughs must handle cautiously, and make tacit sacrifices to. Yet its advantages, from Burroughs' point of view, far outweigh its disadvantages. As we have seen, it enables him -- indeed compels him -- to represent the whole of history as a textual construct, and hence to argue for the possibility of effective sociopolitical change through the rewriting of past interpretations of events. This mechanism not only adds a magical quality to the role of the writer -- he can move back and forth freely within and between chronological frameworks -- but also endows this role with a profound significance. As mentioned previously, the writer becomes a powerful figure, inevitably constructed in opposition to the virus powers and able to threaten them through his imaginative powers and creative ability. The augmentation of the writer's position within this specific

text also reflects upon the role of the writer in general, contributing further to the effectiveness of any text in social and political terms.

Universal textuality is a central and crucial force in *Cities of the Red Night*, defining the perimeters of its activity as well as its very nature. It dominates and structures the text, rendering it effective in the external world, a world which paradoxically disappears once textuality is invoked. Once again, what is left is vestigial, yet curiously effective. Burroughs' strategic withdrawal places the onus upon the reader to effect a profound and basic alteration in his own consciousness, and through his own actions.

A necessary consequence of *Cities of the Red Night's* insistent textuality is the primacy attributed to intertextuality as both theory and practice. That is, if everything is textual, structured and mediated by language, as *Cities of the Red Night* asserts, then intertextuality is the only possible source of "original" material for the creation of texts. "Raw" experience becomes an impossibility, given that all experience, according to Burroughs, is unavoidably mediated by language and hence by texts. Thus other, earlier texts are the only conceivable source of material elements, which are permuted and recombined to form new texts.

The first use of existent texts by *Cities of the Red Night* appears in "Fore!" As already discussed, the reference to *Under the Black Flag* by Don C. Seitz (CRN 9) creates an impression of veracity, as well as incorporating "real" events into the ground of the text (see chapter seven). Other

existing texts are footnoted occasionally in *Cities of the Red Night*, for example, Daniel P. Mannix, *The History of Torture* (CRN 73), again to establish a sense of the text as factually accurate, especially concerning historical and medical matters.

The citing of other, particularly non-literary, texts in this way also provides an opportunity for the author to exert his power over the text, and over other texts, which he can cite and exploit. The "world" of the text is his creation, his absolute fiefdom (despite his gestures toward self-effacement), and he demonstrates this by exercising his power to disrupt this world, to throw it into chaos and lay bare its carefully concealed structures. Thus intertextual eruptions such as those mentioned above, and especially those which are footnoted, advertise the author's power and presence, as well as establishing the supposed veracity of his text.

However, within the different narratives of the novel, intertextual references are also used to perhaps more constructive ends than the demonstration of aspects of the author's power. Various texts recur again and again, fulfilling a variety of different functions. Ultimately, some of them take on an iconic status -- they become touchstones, moments of stability in the chaos of the text.

Intertextual references of this kind are most prominent in Clem Snide's narrative. Snide assesses the personality and "credentials" of various characters on the basis of the books they not only possess but openly display. He does this with the Greens, Jerry's parents:

Middle-class loft... big modern kitchen... Siamese cat... plants. Mrs Green is a beautiful woman, red hair, green eyes, a faraway dreamy look. I notice *Journeys out of the Body*, *Psychic Discoveries Behind the Iron Curtain*, the Castaneda books. (CRN 75)

The books that the Greens own and display form a significant part of Snide's -- and the reader's -- assessment of them. Like him, they appear to be receptive to unconventional ideas as well as the realm of the non-rational. Snide assesses Dimitri's library in a similar fashion, "I glanced at the books: magic, demonology, a number of medical books, a shelf of Egyptology and books on the Mayans and Aztecs." (CRN 84) It is evident that Dimitri is also a part of the tacit community of readers to which the Greens and Snide himself belong.

The citing of texts in this way possesses even greater significance for the reader than for the text's detective, Snide. The clues he uncovers provide an effective shorthand method of signifying a character's interests and sympathies. Yet these citations also challenge the reader -- they question his familiarity with such texts, which, through their recurrence, are presented as essential reading, part of Burroughs' idiosyncratic canon. Thus the reader's knowledge and education, his very fitness to read and comprehend *Cities of the Red Night*, are tested by these citations, and at the very least the ignorant reader's curiosity about the works cited is stimulated.

Texts are cited within Snide's narrative not only to challenge the reader, and assess his suitability as reader of *Cities of the Red Night*, but also to challenge the credentials, and uncover the intentions, of other characters

in the narrative. This process depends upon the knowledge of certain works rather than the simple possession of them, and is particularly evident in the hostile but cautious exchanges between Snide and various CIA agents:

"You've read *Future Shock*, haven't you?"  
 "Skipped through it."  
 "It's worth looking at carefully."  
 "I found *The Biological Time Bomb* more interesting."  
 He ignored this. (CRN 88)

Snide and the agent use various works to test each other, to uncover the extent of each other's knowledge and to make veiled threats. Once again, the significances of their conversation depend upon the reader's knowledge of and familiarity with certain texts, and certain kinds of texts.

Snide is especially skilled at using intertextual references to bemuse and humiliate his enemies. He demonstrates this in conversation with Pierson, CIA agent:

"Oh uh by the way... Blum isn't exactly happy about the screenplay."  
 "Nize baby, et up all the screenplay."  
 He looks at me sharply.  
 "What's that, Snide?"  
 "It's a joke. Fitzgerald in Hollywood."  
 "Oh," he says, a bit intimidated by the reference to Fitzgerald... perhaps something he should know about... He clears his throat. (CRN 182)

Snide uses his own knowledge to upset the balance of power in the situation. Pierson's mastery depends upon his assumption of superior knowledge and power, and Snide undermines his control by undermining his self-confidence. Intertextual references provide a handy weapon, for Snide in particular, in the struggle against absolute dominance by the virus powers.

Intertextual references also play a significant role in exchanges between Snide and those characters he knows are sympathetic to his cause. (As we have seen, intertextual



references also contribute to Snide's recognition of sympathetic characters as such). The works cited in this way are used as the basis of various codes through which characters communicate. The necessity for such covert communication is explained by the virtually omnipresent nature of the viral forces of authority, and the precise and specific type of knowledge necessary for such a code to operate effectively virtually eliminates the possibility of infiltration or interception by agents of the virus.

The work which possesses the greatest significance in this context is *The Magus*, by John Fowles. This work is the basis of an elaborate process of making contact and coded communication:

I noticed a worn copy of *The Magus* by John Fowles. As soon as anyone walks into his office, Skouras knows whether he should lend him the book. He has his orders. Last time I was there he lent me the book and I read it.... I pointed to the book. "By any chance..."

He smiled. "Yes. I lent him the book and he returned it when he left. Said he found it most interesting."

"Could I borrow it?"

"Of course." (CRN 50)

The references to *The Magus* in Snide and Skouras' conversation not only establish a tacit complicity between them, but also provide valuable clues to Jerry Green's character. They reinforce the powerful sense of factionalism which the text projects -- there is a vast difference between "one of us" and "one of them" -- and intertextuality is a crucial clue to detecting this difference.

Works like *The Magus* evolve gradually into a different kind of existence within the narratives of *Cities of the Red Night*, through their recurrent citation. That is, they take on a quasi-mythical significance which is not expressed by the sum

of their parts. Such works become touchstones, providing stability and consistency. As such, they acquire significations within *Cities of the Red Night* which they do not actually express or directly suggest. These works come to be treated as scriptural by the text -- they cannot be challenged or argued with, but only handled with reverence and veneration. The tactile metaphor is appropriate, as this process entails the treatment of such works as consisting entirely of a surface, or a title, and ignores or suppresses their interiority, their actual nature.

The works that are treated in this manner in *Cities of the Red Night* also possess a variety of other purposes and significations within the context of the novel. As seen above, *The Magus* becomes the badge of an exclusive and secret membership. *The Tempest* is treated as a source of venerable truth and wisdom, as well as demonstrating Noah's unusual erudition when he quotes from it (CRN 95). *The Great Gatsby* takes on unique resonance, as both the work and its author signify separately within the text. Both author and work are treated casually and familiarly, and it is assumed that the reader enjoys the same intimate knowledge of both, as in the conversation between Snide and Pierson quoted above. *The Great Gatsby* is also tapped by the text as a source of setting and atmosphere, making possible an elegant terseness of description: "The room behind him turns into Gatsby's booklined study." (CRN 163)

All these works become touchstones in the text. Yet even the prominence of these few amongst the myriad cited in *Cities of the Red Night* is eclipsed by the importance of the works of

Carlos Castaneda as a source of intertextual reference. Castaneda's series of works, detailing his initiation into sorcery by his teacher, don Juan, form the ultimate basis of *Cities of the Red Night's* intertextuality. Concepts put forward by don Juan are treated as absolute truths, especially in Snide's narrative:

Don Juan says anyone who always looks like the same person isn't a person. He is a person impersonator. (CRN 49)

Don Juan says that nothing is random to a man of knowledge: everything he sees and hears is there just at that time waiting to be seen and heard. (CRN 51)

It is evident that the teachings of don Juan, as expressed in the work of Castaneda, take on a scriptural status. As such, they enrich and emphasize the integrative, magical, and non-rational aspects of *Cities of the Red Night*. However, they are subtly undercut within the text by the fact that they only surface and are made emphatic in Snide's narrative. That is, they are largely incorporated into the opinions and beliefs of one particular character, and although the reader is encouraged to venerate them equally, the text does not insist that he do so.

All this leads me to suggest that, for Burroughs, intertextuality has both pragmatic and magical uses, just as it informs his text on both a theoretical and a practical level. On a practical level, intertextual references establish codes of communication and methods of mutual recognition between characters, while on a magical level certain texts take on an iconic status, possessing significances as such, within *Cities of the Red Night*, that they would not suggest outside this context. Here,

intertextuality alters the very nature of texts, providing them with new significations in new contexts. The very idea of intertextuality possesses an ideological purity -- all relations become purely and solely textual -- which embodies the stringent and indeed almost unattainable standards of Burroughs' ideology. The syncretic nature of his theory and practice of intertextuality images yet again the integration of the sociopolitical with magical, mythopoeic and non-rational forces, which is the "spirit" of the text.

Thus the "world" of Burroughs' text is contextualized within the parameters of textuality, and activated by its intertextual theory and practice. The specific text, *Cities of the Red Night*, is presented as a unique combination of existent elements -- a "fabrication" -- which expresses individual creativity through its choices of combination and permutation, inclusion and exclusion. The undermining of the authorial role which this process implies is balanced, however, to a certain extent by *Cities of the Red Night's* insistence on "theatricality" and "fictionality." That is, the role of the author is eroded in terms of his (external) relationship to the text and reinforced in terms of his position within it.

This simultaneous erosion and reinforcement of different aspects of the authorial role is completed by *Cities of the Red Night's* insistence upon its own "theatricality." The characters, events, and settings of the text are constantly presented as "theatrical," or as "staged." This process begins in the first chapter of Book One, where, as previously discussed, the carefully constructed realist narrative of "The

health officer" is abruptly disrupted by the revelation of its underlying theatricality: "Stage with a jungle backdrop. Frogs croak and birds call from recorder.... The lights dim for a few seconds. When the lights come up Farnsworth is wearing an alligator suit...." (*CRN* 24)

This assertion of the theatrical nature of the text's various plots works to unsettle the reader, fulfilling Burroughs' ideological imperatives by laying bare the underlying structures of his own textual creation, as well as those of society. The reader is challenged to make sense of such a text, which purports to be realist one moment, and emphasizes its own fabricated, constructed nature the next. This process represents a typically Burroughsian movement -- in *Cities of the Red Night* he attempts to create a literary text, but at the same time to reveal the conventions and practices which underlie this creative process. The ideological purity of his conflicting desires is only heightened by the prominence of their cyclic conflict, and the risks (of unintelligibility and incomprehension) he is willing to take to maintain their momentum.

The emphasis in *Cities of the Red Night* on the theatricality of its various settings or backgrounds (note that these are originally theatrical terms which have come to be applied to novels through analogy) enables the text to make dizzyingly rapid shifts of geographical, historical, and chronological background, from "the muted streets of the little snowbound village on Lake Michigan," to "A vast ruined stone building with square marble columns in a green underwater light" (*CRN* 41,39). It also makes possible the

insertion of passages with bizarre or fantastic settings, which are lent credibility by the theatrical framework, for example, "The tunnels open here and there into caverns where people live in stalactite-and-quartz houses and tend pools of blind fish." (CRN 252-253) Theatricality makes available to the text an expanded range of functions of individual setting, and of transformation or translation from one setting to another.

*Cities of the Red Night's* insistence on its own theatricality refers not only to setting, although this is a central aspect. It also persistently emphasizes that the "characters" as perceived and constructed by the reader are in fact a unique combination of theatrical roles and the "actors" who play them. This ensures that the reader is detached emotionally from the characters -- that his complicity is intellectual rather than emotional. Burroughs wants complicity with *Cities of the Red Night* to be a political choice, and an unemotional one. However, as with the question of setting, the emphasis on theatricality in relation to character in the text does make possible an increased variety of performative or practical functions. The process of endless and constant metamorphosis or transmutation which most of the characters undergo is explained by the theatrical context. Although these transmutations actually involve bodily transfer, costume is still a significant part of the role-playing process -- of "getting into character" -- as we can see from the incredible detail that the text provides:

Audrey is struck by the variety of garb and racial types that flash by like scenes glimpsed from a train window: Mongols with felt boots, eighteenth-century dandies in silk pumps and breeches, pirates with cutlasses and

patches, medieval jerkins and codpieces, ... boots and holsters, djellabas, togas, sarongs, and youths clad in a transparent fabric like flexible glass lounge about... superb Nubians naked except for leopardskin capes and boots of hippopotamus hide... boys in tight rubber suits with smooth poreless faces like green-white glazed terracotta. (*CRN* 252)

The passage also demonstrates how Burroughs takes the concept of costume to an extreme -- specific racial and cultural features become part of an elaborate disguise. Gender is the only relatively constant factor, as Burroughs perceives gender as more integral to the identity than either cultural background or physical appearance.

The continual metamorphosis of most of the characters, justified by the theatrical metaphor of changing costumes and roles, also obliquely highlights the position of the characters who do not undergo this constant process, but retain a stable identity and appearance. Ultimately even the two key narrators, Clem Snide and Noah Blake, embark on this process, but the few characters who do not do so attain an iconic status in the text similar to that of the literary touchstones established intertextually. The two most prominent examples of this are Colonel Dimitri and Jerry Green.

Dimitri retains a constant identity and appearance despite appearing in a number of disparate settings, ranging from modern Athens (*CRN* 54-55) to the rebellion in the Cities (*CRN* 239-244). His function also remains constant: he is a source of wisdom, knowledge, and information, and he represents the deliberately vague and nebulous power and authority which backs the rebels. Dimitri represents the rebels' version of an authority figure -- he functions in the background, using

his power and status as effectively, and as rarely, as possible.

Jerry Green's status is slightly less consistent than that of Dimitri. His death is the starting point of Snide's narrative, but he appears regularly to Snide as a distinct physical apparition (usually grinning), with whom he is unable to communicate directly: "then I see Jerry standing there naked, his body radiating light. There is a skeleton grin on his face, which fades to the enigmatic smile on the statues of archaic Greek youths..." (*CRN* 78). Beginning with his possession of Snide's assistant Jim (*CRN* 89), Jerry is incarnated in various forms during the rebels' struggle against the rulers of the Cities and the virus they embody, but he remains strangely constant and powerfully iconic. Perhaps, as the dual victim of the virus and the evil powers it empowers, he provides a martyr figure, with characteristics that are even saintly (in Burroughs' idiosyncratic view); an icon whose power and intercession can be tapped.

The framework established by *Cities of the Red Night's* emphasis on the theatricality of its very nature thus complements Burroughs' strategy of laying bare the specific conventions and practices of literary production. However, it also makes possible a number of the text's key practices, providing a means for the reader to credibly accept and comprehend such practices, as well as incorporating the visual power and appeal of the theatre. Theatricality becomes both an enlightening and an enabling force.

This insistence on the theatrical nature of the text implies some kind of controlling presence which does the



insisting, a "directorial" presence, in theatrical terms. That is, *Cities of the Red Night's* emphasis on its own theatricality implies a controlling figure, who is both the source of this theatricality and the "director" of its creative enactments by and in the text. The director is responsible not only for the nature and presentation of the scenes we see, but also, indirectly, for the drama itself. Hence the persistence of theatrical images and techniques provides a convenient structure for authorial intention and exertion of power. That is, through the assertion of theatricality the vestigial author is able to exert creative influence on and within the text, but he remains "offstage," where a director properly belongs. The author remains vestigial -- a "fabricator" combining and permuting existing elements (in this case, the "script" and the "actors") -- but his position is extended by the "director" metaphor, which enables him to not only choose and combine textual elements, but also give thematic shape, substance, and coherence to the text. The insistent theatricality of *Cities of the Red Night*, and its complementary use of theatrical metaphor, augments the effective power of the author whilst protecting his cherished vestigial position.

Burroughs' political agenda necessitates the dismantling of these structures once their usefulness is exhausted by the text. In addition, given the essentially deconstructive nature of this agenda, it is wholly appropriate that the ephemeral and constructed nature of such structures is revealed. These dual objectives are fulfilled toward the end of the text, in a simultaneous process of intensification and

disintegration, as the central themes and concerns of the text are condensed metaphorically into a single theatrical performance -- "The Billy Celeste High School presents: CITIES OF THE RED NIGHT" (*CRN* 276) -- which culminates in chaos and destruction.

This production, depicted in the chapter aptly titled "We are here because of you," involves virtually every character in the novel, in an endless transformation of role and setting. The setting is inherently theatrical:

I lead the way through rooms stacked with furniure and paintings, passageways, partitions, stairways, booths, cubicles, elevators, ramps and ladders, trunks full of costumes and old weapons, bathtubs, toilets, steam rooms, and rooms open in front.... (*CRN* 276)

We are in a vast loft-attic-gymnasium-warehouse. There are chests and trunks, costumes, mirrors, and makeup. Boys are taking out costumes, trying them on, posing and giggling in front of mirrors, moving props and backdrops. The warehouse seems endless. A maze of rooms and streets, cafés, courtyards and gardens. (*CRN* 276-277)

It is as though all of the scenes, settings, costumes, and props of the novel are compressed into this chapter, along with the text's many and varied "performers." The "warehouse" represents an incredible multiplicity, contained within a unified structure (like the text). Within it, an astounding variety of permutations and combinations become possible and are enacted.

The "warehouse" also represents a fixed structure, the interior of which is in constant flux, again like the text. Even the audience is no longer a fixed constant -- the role of spectator becomes one among many in a cyclical and continual motion -- imaging the reader's complicity and potential involvement:

A number of performances are going on at the same time, in

many rooms, on many levels. The spectators circulate from one stage to another, putting on costumes and makeup to join a performance and the performers all move from one stage to another. There are moving stages and floats, platforms that descend from the ceiling on pulleys, doors that pop open, and partitions that slide back. (CRN 277)

This passage, from which the epigraph to this chapter is taken, iterates strongly the sense of endless movement, of continual metamorphosis, which the text's insistent theatricality seeks to project. Yet the constraints which inevitably confine the text, any text, entail that infinite motion is not possible within the finite boundaries of a novel. Some kind of end point, either climax or anti-climax, must be reached. Thus, at the end of the chapter the production begins to fold in on itself, as the setting disintegrates: "An explosion rumbles through the warehouse. Walls and roof shake and fall on Audrey and the audience. As the warehouse collapses, it turns to dust." (CRN 285) There is a last resurgence of textual energy, as the "cast" watches a variety of settings imaged in the "western sky." Then there is a final concentration or condensation of this energy, into the character of Waring, who appears as a directorial, as well as a magical, figure: "and finally -- in a last burst of light -- the enigmatic face of Waring as his eyes light up in a blue flash. He bows three times and disappears into the gathering dusk." (CRN 285) The director/author has displayed his magical power, and hence returns to his rightful place in the shadows offstage/margins of the text.

The ending of this chapter represents the ultimate concentration, or the final rendering, of the power and energy that *Cities of the Red Night* evokes. The chapter which follows (the last chapter of the novel), is an elegiac return

to the site of the pirates' commune. The energy which has erupted in the previous chapter, and subsequently been contained by Waring, now seems irrevocably past and dead, rather than vivid and urgent: "Nothing here but the smell of empty years. ...Smell of nothing and nobody there." (*CRN* 286) The framework that theatricality and theatrical metaphor provide makes possible the final radiant explosion of *Cities of the Red Night's* textual energy, as well as its eventual control and confinement. The importance of theatricality as both theory and practice in the text is evident, forming as it does a crucial framework for the world and "spirit" of the text.

Shaviro connects the insistent theatricality of the text with its denial of, or refusal to represent, interiority or a priori truth:

Burroughs' theater of illusion comprises nothing more than the action which it depicts. This action is not the representation of an independent reality, nor does it take place in any preexisting scene. Its repeated movement is always one of violation and disintegration, but there is no norm in comparison to which it could be judged a transgression. ...What is repeated obsessively is not any identity of form or content, but only the violence of continual metamorphosis. For Burroughs' discourse encompasses contradictory exigencies of obsession and freedom, replication and mutation, disaster and utopia, satire and celebration, unity and duality, reality and illusion, death and life. Each of these terms is conditioned and contaminated by its supposed opposite. (197)

Energy and release become Burroughs' principal concerns, liberated by the catharsis of theatrical performance which in turn embodies the integrative spirit of the text.

*Cities of the Red Night's* insistence on, and employment of, theatricality is complemented by a parallel insistence on the "fictionality" of the text. That is, in tandem with the

revelation of its "staged" nature, and inherently theatrical structures and metaphors, the text asserts equally its nature as fictional, as apart from, although possibly reflecting, the truth values of the "real" world. It is clear that *Cities of the Red Night* continually asserts its own character as constructed text, and seeks to lay bare the structures, conventions, and practices which make up its very being. However, it is equally clear that the text seeks to wield both political and magical power, to fulfil a useful and effective role in the inherently textual world which it perceives beyond its own limits. These imperatives find their admittedly partial resolution in Burroughs' concept of fictionality. As Skerl puts it: "Fiction and reality thus portrayed is a world of possibility, illustrating again Hassan i Sabbah's maxim, 'Nothing is true. Everything is permitted.'" (*Burroughs* 90)

Traditionally, the concept of fiction is taken to embody a distance between the world of the text and the world of the reader, although they may parallel or reflect one another. As Abrams puts it:

Fiction is a term often used inclusively for any literary narrative... which is feigned or invented, and does not purport to be historical truth. (61)

This definition is encompassed and reinforced by *Cities of the Red Night*, with the emphasis on its theatrical nature, as well as the self-disruption, authorial intrusion, and fantastic or magical sequences which are among its most prominent features (although it does purport to begin from a basis of historical fact). These aspects and others create a sense of unreality, a "suspension of disbelief" on the part of the reader. They proclaim the nature of the text as a work of literature, a

work of the individual imagination, although one which is hedged by conditions and theories of textuality and sociopolitical efficacy. Yet this very sense of unreality, of anti-realism, challenges traditional concepts of fiction, particularly the doctrine of its distance from the world of the reader. This challenge can best be explored by citing a further statement from Abrams:

Both philosophers and literary critics have concerned themselves with the logical analysis of the types of sentences which constitute a fictional text, and especially with the question of their "truth-value" -- that is, whether, and in just what way, they are subject to the criterion of truth or falsity. Some thinkers have asserted that "fictional sentences" -- which seem to refer to nonexistent persons, places, and events -- are to be taken as references to a special world, "created" by the author, which is analogous to the real world, but contains its own setting, beings, and mode of coherence.... (61)

It is the socially and textually constructed nature of "the criterion of truth or falsity" which Burroughs seeks to challenge and dissect in *Cities of the Red Night*. The text attempts to reveal the underlying structures, hidden agendas, and originary motives concealed within the apparently simple binary opposition of true/false. In so doing, Burroughs creates a "world" in *Cities of the Red Night* such as that described by Abrams, related analogously and paradigmatically to the alternate world with which the reader is familiar. It is in this world of the text that the traditional concepts of truth-values and true/false oppositions are surpassed, as Burroughs projects on to the backdrop of the text different standards of truth, the possible, and the real. These standards blur and confuse the stark black and white of well-worn oppositions such as true/false, mind/body, thought/feeling, either/or. They upset the balance of these

traditional dichotomies, plunging them, and the world they help to structure, into a vivid chaos, from which only nostalgia and poignant recollection are resurrected at the end of the novel. As Skerl puts it: "Burroughs' pop-art novels both critique current reality and represent a new form of consciousness in which conventional polarities are seen as part of a field of possibilities." (*Burroughs* 96)

It is in this still analogous world of dialectical flux that theatricality, fictionality, textuality and intertextuality have their essential being. For it is in the context that these theories and practices create that Burroughs' political imperatives are empowered and activated. Fictionality, with all its necessary consequences, is at the heart of the novel, in the powerfully iconic form of narrative, as Skerl suggests:

The writer's power to create experiences for the reader replaces Burroughs's earlier idea that the artist re-creates in writing a nonliterary psychic experience. Burroughs now adopts a performative rather than a mimetic theory of art. Psychic exploration occurs within his fictions, not outside them. The goal of producing an experience in the reader, of changing his consciousness, remains the same, but the experience is now created by the text through mental structures that only texts can create, that is, through narrative. (*Burroughs* 91)

The key word here is "performative," for it describes precisely how *Cities of the Red Night's* imperatives and theories function. The reader encounters them in process, in constant cyclic motion, enacted and embodied in the characters, settings, and events of the text. The theatrical metaphor holds true: *Cities of the Red Night*, the goals of its literary agenda ably summarized by Skerl, is in essence a performative fiction.

III. From Time Into Space: *The Place of Dead Roads.*



In *The Place of Dead Roads* the momentum of the entire trilogy is condensed and intensified. It represents the theoretical core of the trilogy, and is the text in which Burroughs' political imperatives are rendered most explicit. It is also the text in which mythopoeic processes come to the fore, and it is these processes which inject a sustained and explosive energy into the trilogy as a whole.

In *Cities of the Red Night* the emphasis of the various agendas is squarely placed upon political correctness. The Cities themselves fulfil a primarily paradigmatic role, rather than functioning as mythopoeic constructs for the most part, as does the pirate community. Although magic and myth are constantly represented as significant forces, and their integration with the rational domain of politics and pragmatic activity is promoted, these forces are never fully realized in the text. They are cited, valorized, and implied, but never activated, never represented as an integral and potent part of the text, but rather as latent and powerful forces in the utopian world the text seeks to realize. This in itself highlights the dystopian nature of contemporary society as perceived by Burroughs -- in this context he is unable to write an overtly magical text, and can only suggest or imply the power and purity of such forces in an ideal world. Accordingly, *Cities of the Red Night* is bitter and anguished.

In *The Place of Dead Roads* the power of magic is again not realized as an integral part of the text, and Burroughs continues to lament this forced omission. However, myth and mythopoeia come to the fore, as Burroughs simultaneously invokes and distorts the enormously powerful and resonant

mythology of the American West. The use of this mythology provokes an entire discourse on its emotive power in the collective American mind, and the dangers attendant on its deliberate subversion, as well as its continued propagation and glorification within mainstream society. *The Place of Dead Roads* not only voraciously incorporates (and tampers with) this mythology, but also includes ancient Egyptian myth (primarily that concerned with death, rebirth, and afterlife), and mythic elements of Burroughs' own earlier work (for example, the Wild Fruits are a new and updated version of the Wild Boys). All these elements are idiosyncratically combined and permuted by the text, which also develops and explains the theory and ideology often only implied in *Cities of the Red Night*.

*The Place of Dead Roads* performs a dual function in the context of the trilogy. It explains and clarifies the political theory and ideology implied (and rehabilitated) in *Cities of the Red Night*, personalizing this theory through the dual character function of Kim Carsons/ William Seward Hall, and extends and explores a mythopoeic movement barely initiated by the earlier text. Whereas *Cities of the Red Night* was impelled by its political urgency, its despair and humanist anguish, *The Place of Dead Roads* is propelled by the joyous and liberating power of myth, which Burroughs seeks to release from the social and political constraints he sees as imposed upon it by the alien virus forces. It is this new struggle (built on the foundations established in *Cities of the Red Night*), to liberate myth and reinstate mythopoeia as the fundamental and defining function of free will and human

integrity, and consequently to enable man to restore and rebuild his shattered image of self, which energizes *The Place of Dead Roads*.

My discussion of this text will begin with structural considerations. Chapter twelve is concerned with the text's perimeter/parameter functions, as well as its integration of linear and cyclical actions. Chapter thirteen explores the complex developments of Burroughs' concepts of the authorial role, a discussion which must necessarily remain inconclusive to a certain extent, given the persistent multiplicity of authorial roles in his schema. Chapters fourteen to sixteen identify and examine the text's tripartite dynamic, constituted broadly by the mythology of the American West in Book One, the explanation of Burroughs' idiosyncratic "theology" in Book Two, and the successful definition and location of an integrative locus or site of unity in multiplicity -- "the garden" -- in Book Three. *The Place of Dead Roads* is one of Burroughs' most "successful" texts in many ways, and its success as such is a liberation which enables the inward focus of *The Western Lands*.

Chapter Twelve: Defining (A) Space.

"So the Johnsons have an incalculable advantage. They aren't playing. They want to end the whole stupid game. To us, intelligence and war are only means to an end: SPACE EXPLORATION." (AM 123)

The first parameter of *The Place of Dead Roads* is the brief preface, which introduces the dual elements of mythic prominence and political imperative. The second parameter is represented by the various accounts of the gunfight in the Boulder cemetery between Kim Carsons/William Seward Hall and Mike Chase, which again simultaneously emphasizes the crucial aspects of myth/mythopoeia and political necessity. The presentation of this parameter as an integrated part of the text, rather than in a meta-textual form as in *The Naked Lunch* and *Cities of the Red Night*, marks the increasing prominence of syncretism and integration in Burroughs' work. The circular symmetry created by the cyclic (re)iteration of the gunfight is balanced by the forward linear movement from a Time to a Space framework which the text both projects (beginning with the preface) and strives to realize. Essentially and chronologically, the novel ends precisely where it began, but in the meantime the reader has travelled a vast distance in spatial and metaphysical terms within the bounds of these parameters.

The preface consists of two short paragraphs, and is terse and direct, avoiding the rhetorical circumlocution Burroughs usually employs to establish the parameters of a text. The first paragraph is concerned with Burroughs' primary mythopoeic concept of "The Johnson Family" code of conduct.<sup>1</sup> It defines appropriate Johnson behaviour:

A Johnson honors his obligations. His word is good and he is a good man to do business with. A Johnson minds his own business. He is not a snoop, self-righteous, trouble-making person. A Johnson will give help when help is needed. (PDR 7)

The Johnson code, which is reiterated and elaborated throughout the text, rests on the dual principles of reliability and refusing to pass judgement on others. The importance of this code of behaviour is demonstrated by the opening sentence of the preface: "The original title of this book was *The Johnson Family*." At times the Johnson code seems to be elevated, implicitly, from social code to metaphysical mode of existence, particularly in the conflation of the Johnson Family organization with aspects of Burroughs' idealized "Academy 23" (see *Job* 123-192), which takes place in Book Two of *The Place of Dead Roads*.

The significance of the concept of the Johnson Family for Burroughs is made explicit in Ted Morgan's biography. As a teenager, dabbling in fiction and experiencing social alienation, Burroughs discovered a book titled *You Can't Win* by an apocryphal "Jack Black." The code of petty criminal behaviour elaborated in this book influenced Burroughs enormously:

...(Burroughs) saw in the Johnsons a model of moral behaviour in marked contrast to the hypocrisy, busy-bodiness, and double-dealing of the right-thinking citizens of the St. Louis establishment. ...He saw that there existed a society of outcasts and misfits, who were, in their own way, decent people, living by their own rules. (*Literary Outlaw* 37)

For (Burroughs), who already saw himself as an outsider, *You Can't Win* was a revelation. He felt somehow that Jack Black and Salt Chunk Mary and ... all the others were his kind of people. He was not alone. The Johnsons became a part of his personal mythology. The world was divided into "us" and "them." In later life, any stranger who did him an act of kindness in a tight situation was a Johnson.... (*Literary Outlaw* 38)

The personal myth of the Johnson Family comes to structure Burroughs' life to a certain extent, as well as his later writings. In *The Place of Dead Roads* it becomes not only an idealized code of behaviour, but the only possible social alternative to the virus-ridden and corrupt contemporary society evoked in *The Naked Lunch* and *Cities of the Red Night*. The Johnson way of life becomes a source of action, inspiration, and community. As a (utopian) metaphor, its power is equal to that of the (dystopian) virus.

The second paragraph of the preface seems to abruptly change its direction:

The only thing that could unite the planet is a united space program ... the earth becomes a space station and war is simply *out*, irrelevant, flatly insane in a context of research centers, spaceports, and the exhilaration of working with people you like and respect toward an agreed-upon objective, an objective from which all workers will gain. *Happiness is a by-product of function*. The planetary space station will give all participants an opportunity to function. (Burroughs' italics, *PDR* 7)

This passage reveals Burroughs' obsession with the need for mankind to venture boldly into the underexplored realms of Space. The motives he gives for this fundamental transformation in the human condition are manifold, and serve a variety of political and theoretical ends. They range from the artist's elitist desire to escape the constraints of urban middle-class society, to a yearning for adventure and sense of destiny frequently expressed by Burroughs' adolescent protagonists such as the young Kim Carsons: "...Kim takes for granted that the only purpose of his life is space travel." (*PDR* 43)

In the passage above, the appeal of Space is pitched on a quasi-utilitarian level -- a united space program will ensure

the peaceful and happy existence of the participants. The philosophical emphasis of the passage is particularly American and middle-class in its assumption that work is a source of happiness, as well as being an end in itself and a means of achieving "an objective from which all workers will gain." This passage of the preface could be interpreted as revealing Burroughs' unconsciously held middle-class American values -- the valorization of work as both means and end, and the good of the majority or community as a greater good than that of the individual. Yet, given the extent to which these values conflict with Burroughs' radical, elitist, individualist, and anti-bourgeois views, as frequently and strongly expressed elsewhere in this and other works, I contend that these notions are deliberately employed within the preface in this (far from subtle) manner for a number of ends.

Firstly, Burroughs is challenging the reader to deconstruct, in a radical fashion, the assumptions presented so simplistically in this passage. That is, the competent Burroughsian reader (see chapter nine) will be alerted to the possibility of a hidden agenda by the shift in emphasis from the interests of the individual to the good of the majority; from realization of individual potential (even if in a communal framework like that of the Johnson Family) to "happiness" as a "by-product" of "function." This disparity occasions speculation about the use of these particular strategies in the specific context of a preface -- a context which Burroughs frequently employs. The meta-textual (and, in a sense, "pre-textual") nature of the preface form signifies for Burroughs a means of initiating the process of action and

reaction which constitutes the complicit engagement of reader with text. At the same time, the Burroughsian preface works to reveal and undercut the structures of the authority it in fact exerts. Thus the competent Burroughs reader interprets the passage above in terms of the blatant utopian appeal designed to draw him irrevocably into the world of the text (choosing to conditionally bestow or withhold complicity according to his own judgement), while simultaneously reading its subtext, which criticizes the society (American, middle class) embodying the values the passage purports to uphold. The key to the superficially simplistic preface, therefore, as well as to an ideologically correct (in Burroughs' terms) reading of the text, lies in the disparity between Burroughs' known philosophy, with which the competent reader is already familiar, and the casual evocation of unquestioned values in the preface. This disparity creates, significantly, a *space*, between text and subtext, explicit and implicit, into which Burroughs can shift his most crucial textual operations. Thus "space," in one sense or another, is both the philosophical end and productive locus of the text, as suggested by the title of this chapter.

A second, and subordinate end of *The Place of Dead Roads's* prefatory manoeuvres is the evocation of an utopian environment which complements the ethos of the Johnson Family. The Johnsons' qualifications as ideal space dwellers and desire to move into Space (as seen in the epigraph to this chapter), combined with the implicitly exclusionary nature of the proposed space program (the use of the term "participants" implies that there will be non-participants as well), reveals



the elitism underlying the preface's purported egalitarianism. Although the Johnson Family would appear to be a community, a social grouping, its valorization of trustworthiness, privacy, and the right of consenting adults to pursue their own desires renders it an effective, rather than constraining, sociopolitical organization in Burroughs' terms, although it is an organization all the same (and as such, he frequently feels the need to move beyond its structures within the text of *The Place of Dead Roads*, as does its nominal leader, Kim Carsons). Burroughs' ideal social or political structure is one which achieves its stated ends, with a maximum of efficiency and fluidity and a minimum of hierarchy and rigidity, and then spontaneously self-destructs. Indeed, this paradigm also represents the ideal Burroughs text -- self-eradicating, operating in the margins, working in terms of vestiges and residues.

A close reading of the apparently simple preface to *The Place of Dead Roads* reveals its functions as parameter and perimeter -- setting the bounds to the text's field of play whilst opening up a space in which significant textual (and subtextual) operations can and will occur. This space, "located" in the disparity between familiar Burroughsian agendas and typical American middle-class values the preface appears to endorse, represents the spatial context the text seeks to replace the chronological and strictly linear framework of Time. The preface and the text work to create or locate spaces or contexts -- such as the Johnson Family framework, or the gap between text and subtext, explicit and implicit, traditional values and Burroughsian ideals -- within

which the fundamental transformation from chronological/historical existence to life in Space can commence. Literally and metaphorically, as both means and end, *The Place of Dead Roads* is a text concerned above all with space, particularly the "space *between*" terms of a binary opposition (NL 111).

A similarly close reading of the other textual parameter, the reiterated gunfight, also reveals its functions as both parameter and perimeter. In this case, the parameter function predominates, as the accounts of the gunfight are integrated into the text, rather than providing a containing framework like that of a preface. The gunfight establishes a (relatively) constant moment within the text, one to which both reader and protagonist must keep returning. However, the perimeter function does not disappear, as the gunfight works in tandem with the preface to determine the constraints on the text as a whole, as well as structuring the "space" available to Kim Carsons as protagonist.

Book One of *The Place of Dead Roads* begins with a newspaper account of the deaths of William Seward Hall and Mike Chase in what appeared to be an Old West style shootout in the Boulder cemetery (PDR 13-14). It is revealed that both were killed by rifle shots fired from a distance. The date on the newspaper is September 17, 1889, and the date of the shootout is given as September 16. The use of the past passive tense, as well as the technique of a text within a text, in the recounting of the shootout emphasizes the nature of the text, any text, as artifact -- as irrevocably part of the past. With the

presentation of the first account of this crucial encounter in this manner, it would seem that the novel is finished before it is barely begun. In a sense, Burroughs is inverting the typical reading process as defined in *The Naked Lunch* -- the activation of a text followed by its fossilization as "work" -- in a daring, yet not unconventional manoeuvre which seeks to circumvent this process altogether. That is, by initially presenting the text as passive artifact, Burroughs challenges the reader to activate it and to maintain its rage and energy beyond the reading process. Once again, we see a shift in Burroughs' strategies from the defensive to the offensive, accompanying the evolution of his work from *The Naked Lunch* to *Cities of the Red Night* and beyond. *The Place of Dead Roads* downplays its own dynamism in order to fully engage the reader's energy.

This first version of the gunfight insists that it is precisely the reader's energy, and not his empathy, that the text seeks to elicit. The entire tone of the newspaper passage suggests emotional detachment:

What appeared to be an Old Western shoot-out took place yesterday at the Boulder Cemetery.

...Police investigating this bizarre occurrence have as yet no clue to the possible motives of the men. (PDR 13)

The presentation of the first account of the gunfight as a text within a text, specifically as a newspaper article, challenges the reader to consider the nature of generic differences between texts, as well as appropriate responses to different genres. The first account of the gunfight stresses the continuing importance -- and ambivalence -- of the author for Burroughs. The author is inscribed metaphorically in the

figure of the unknown rifleman, who represents the hidden, yet fatal, element of the encounter:

At first glance it appeared that Chase and Hall had killed each other in a shoot-out, but neither gun had been fired, and both men were killed by single rifle shots fired from a distance. Chase was shot from in front through the chest. Hall was shot in the back. Nobody heard the shots, and police believe the rifleman may have employed a silencer. (PDR 13)

This passage not only inscribes the vestigial and mysterious position of the author -- peripheral to the text by choice, central to it by nature -- but also indicates the presence of unknown forces within the text, which are not explained fully until *The Western Lands*. The identity of the rifleman remains a crucial mystery throughout *The Place of Dead Roads*, a point of uncertainty which admits the author, defining his limited position, and circumscribes the range of the text and its protagonist, Carsons/Hall. The mystery also serves to recall both protagonist and reader to this point again and again, in a futile attempt to resolve the uncertainty.

This version of the shootout is immediately followed by a direct and conventional narrative account of a shootout between Kim Carsons and Mike Chase on September 17, 1889 (PDR 15-17). In this account Carsons bluffs Chase into rushing his draw, and kills him after he misses his shot. The narrative then retains its prosaic tone as Kim and his companions shoot holes in the moon and sky, sending the "Director" into a frenzy.

The juxtaposition of these two accounts of the gunfight in the first chapter of Book One continues the process of locating or opening up a space, defined by oppositions and contradictions, in which significant and often subversive

textual operations can take place. The events of the second version of the shootout differ dramatically from those of the first -- while Chase is still killed, this time by Carsons, Carsons (instead of Hall) survives to demolish the setting. As the competent Burroughsian reader would expect, the conflict is not simple to explain. Although the events of the second account seem to fit most accurately with subsequent events in the narrative, the first account is given greater authority and veracity by its presentation in the form of a newspaper article. Thus the first account is established simultaneously as verifiable and eminently textual in nature -- it is presented as a text within a text, and invokes both reader and author. The second account, by contrast, is presented as essentially theatrical or dramatic in nature, invoking as it does the archetypal Burroughsian figure of the Director, and film technicians.<sup>2</sup> The emphasis on theatricality generally works to undermine the veracity of this account -- its truth becomes conditional upon the necessary suspension of disbelief which the concept of theatre (stage/audience) entails. A newspaper requires no such conditions.

Both accounts of the gunfight in this first chapter of Book One represent different aspects of *The Place of Dead Roads's* thematic concerns. A crucial episode in the narrative is presented as both textual process and theatrical performance, forms which share a common basis in textuality (dramatic performance is based on the text of a play, or script), yet differ in their approaches to reader/spectator complicity and commitment.

Although some of the conflict between the two accounts can be resolved in terms of the relationship between theatricality and textuality as expressed above, a surplus of contradictions remains. For example, the date of the first shootout is given as September 16, 1889 (with the date on the newspaper being September 17), while the date given in the second account is September 17, 1889. The change of date could be said to emphasize the fact that the textual account of the gunfight is of much greater importance than the gunfight itself -- hence the gunfight as textual embodiment, and as theatrical process, coincide chronologically. It could also be argued that the change reflects the proposition that in a context of universal and unavoidable textuality, factual accuracy becomes a minor function of context and narrative, and can thus be challenged and opened up to play. This argument is further supported by the fact that in the third and fourth accounts of the gunfight the date is altered yet again to September 17, 1899, presumably to allow Carsons to take his revenge for Tom Dark's murder in 1894. Yet, rather than attempt to explain away all the contradictions between accounts in such terms, I myself as reader prefer to allow a surfeit of mysterious paradox to persist, and to accept it as such. For although the rational explanation of apparent contradiction is certainly an appropriate procedure in the reading and interpretation of the Burroughs text, respecting and acknowledging the persistence of non-rational and paradoxical elements in such a text is an equally crucial part of the reading process. Burroughs' dialecticism embraces and valorizes the non-rational and, through the use of such subtly shifting parameters, the text

resists the reinscribing of hierarchical oppositions such as rational/irrational, true/false.<sup>3</sup>

The third account of the gunfight, in the second chapter of Book Two, reveals yet another aspect of the gunfight as parameter, despite its brevity (*PDR* 110-112). This version, which is essentially the same as the second, not only lays bare the multitude of connections which bind the essentially alien protagonist, Kim Carsons, to the text, but also reveals the fundamental inescapability of Time as a condition of existence.

It is the context in which the gunfight is presented, in this case, which determines its significances; its events, given full description in the other accounts, are compacted here into a single disjointed and imagistic paragraph. What is stressed instead is Carsons' journey to the scene of the shootout, and his actions consequent to it. The gunfight is presented as almost a troublesome interruption in his busy schedule, emphasizing his role as leader, or rather co-ordinator, of the Johnson Family organization and its attempt to create an alternative sociopolitical structure to that dominated by the virus. In this context of politics in Burroughs' rehabilitated sense the gunfight comes to seem less significant, a personal vendetta conflicting to a certain extent with the demands of a greater struggle which Carsons must lead. Yet the reiteration of the gunfight at this point reminds the reader that Carsons is still an individual, and as such he has his own destiny to fulfil, and his own needs to pursue. His sense of personal alienation and isolation persists, despite his close involvement with the Johnson

Family: "Kim sees his life as a legend and it is very much Moses in the bullrushes, the Prince deprived of his birthright and therefore hated and feared by the usurpers." (PDR 110) The tension between Kim's individual needs and the exigencies of his position as leader of the Johnson Family is evoked, poignantly.

This version of the shootout begins to appear as the central moment anchoring Carsons in the past -- in the text as artifact and in history as linear discourse -- and in Time as an entire frame of reference. On another level, the shootout as represented here also anchors the progression from Time to Space in the narrative structure of the novel, which is of course focused on the the character of Kim Carsons. The recurring shootout is the shifting centre, which locates the intersection of the circular structures which constitute the text's framework. Each cycle of imagery and event passes through this centre, thus locating and rendering intelligible the multi-level progression from Time to Space. The intersection provided by the significant recurrence of the shootout in *The Place of Dead Roads* also serves to interlock the mythopoeic progression of the trilogy as a whole with the traditional mythic structures employed within this text.

The fourth account of the gunfight, in the last chapter of the novel, combines a number of the significant elements of previous accounts (PDR 267-268). Context is important -- as in the third account -- as the combatants' intentions, expectations, and preparations are given in some detail. The events narrated in this account are the same as those of the first. However, in contrast to the presentation of the first



account as artifact (newspaper article, text within a text) and hence irrevocably past, the fourth account enacts these events vividly before the reader's eyes. *The Place of Dead Roads* defines itself as artifact to begin with, in order to stimulate the reader to (re)activate it, and then seeks to (re)animate its narrative at the very end in an attempt to remain active in and through the reader. Despite this inversion, the fourth account is pervaded by a sense of finality and loss, of the weight of the past (and history) and the end of a cycle of great adventures. Carsons expresses this the night before the shootout:

He looked down at his naked body, an old servant that had served him so long and so well, and for what? Sadness, alienation ... he hadn't thought of sex for months.  
 "Well, space is here. Space is where your ass is."  
 (PDR 267)

It is clear that Carsons' adventures in both Time and Space are coming to an unspecified conclusion. The passage expresses resignation, and even a sense of failure, in that a conclusion of some kind is necessary to the essential structure of both a life and a novel, despite Burroughs' and Carsons' attempts to invert the birth-death process, textually and biologically. In fact, *The Place of Dead Roads* is the most coherently "closed" and self-contained novel of the trilogy, given the close concurrence of its structure and momentum with the cyclic episodes and chronological progression of Carsons' life and mythic career. Although Burroughs' works generally evade or resist closure, it seems inevitable in *The Place of Dead Roads*, and the inversion which the first and last accounts of the gunfight attempt becomes a rearguard action, fought more out of principle than

conviction.<sup>4</sup>

The fourth account of the gunfight also marks a conclusive point for Mike Chase, the constant foe:

This is going to be his last bounty hunt. Time to move on to more lucrative and less dangerous ventures. He will put his past behind him, take a new name. He has a good head for business, and he'll make money, a lot of money, and go into politics. (PDR 268)

Throughout the text, Mike Chase represents one version of the Burroughsian archetypal enemy: the ruthless and skilful agent, whose potential is realized in the service of others. Unlike most archetypal enemies in Burroughs' work, Mike Chase is a fully realized character, with a past and projected future:

...Mike Chase né Joe Kaposi in the Polish slums of Chicago's West Side. ...Joe had come a long way. Kim noted the petulant, discontented look. Anyone with that look is sure to get rich. Money will simply accrete itself around him. It was a strong face, high cheekbones, brown eyes well apart, full lips, and slightly protruding teeth. Yes, a face that could even be president if he played his cards right.

He knew Old Man Bickford was grooming Mike for a career in politics. (PDR 111)

Chase functions as Kim Carsons' nemesis within the text: Carsons must confront him again and again if he is to realize his destiny and achieve his goals. Mike Chase is both character and symbol, individual and archetype, representing the essential stasis and rigidity of the forces that Carsons seeks to overcome.

In this account of the gunfight, all the versions are melded together, forming a syncretic and comprehensible whole, from the point where Kim performs the same trick as in the second account, the "phantom grab." The events of the gunfight are those described in the second and third accounts, but the result is that of the first: the death of both Carsons and Chase at unknown hands. The novel ends emphatically and

conclusively:

Kim's hand flicks down to his holster and up, hand empty, pointing his index finger at Mike.

"BANG! YOU'RE DEAD."

Mike clutches his chest and crumples forward in a child's game.

"WHAT THE FU—" Someone slaps Kim very hard on the back, knocking the word out. Kim *hates* being slapped on the back. He turns in angry protest ... blood in his mouth ... can't turn ... the sky darkens and goes out.

(Burroughs' italics, PDR 268)

There is an overwhelming sense of closure here, as the death of both characters is accompanied by a theatrical darkening of the "set." The sense of finality is augmented by Carsons' penultimate feelings of alienation and ultimate exclusion from contemporary society and even human existence: "Wouldn't mind being reborn as a Mexican, he thought wistfully, knowing he really can't be reborn anywhere on this planet. He just doesn't *fit* somehow." (Burroughs' italics, PDR 266)

*The Western Lands* takes the reader into the only conceivable final stage of the trilogy, one which is entirely played out in the realm of (or beyond) death, and which brings the mythopoeic and ideological drives of the trilogy to their ultimate conclusion. The fourth account of the Chase-Carsons/Hall gunfight, in the last chapter of *The Place of Dead Roads* simultaneously effects the closure of this text and the opening of the next in the trilogy, all through the mysterious agency of the unknown rifleman.

The dual parameters of the preface and the collective accounts of the Chase-Carsons/Hall gunfight express the dialectical aspects of the text, with contemporary society (as defined in *The Naked Lunch* and *Cities of the Red Night*) as thesis, the

Johnson Family as its antithesis, and Space as a synthesizing locus. The text is centred around, or driven by (I prefer the kinetic metaphor to the static) this dialectic, constituted through a series of significant binary oppositions.

Burroughs' work consciously locates and generates its own energy and dynamism in and from the conflicts of dualism.

The Burroughsian text-as-process (once again, I seek to emphasize its dynamic nature) constructs itself through a dual process of creating or locating a space through the interplay and conflict of binary oppositions, and then energizes and activates this space through its integrative momentum; that is, its unifying imperative. *The Place of Dead Roads* confronts and employs the "enemy" of dualism and the integrating force of syncretism, in a dynamic process of *becoming* a text which maintains a constant and productive tension. Space becomes the ultimate goal of the text, its protagonist, and its author, as indicated in the title and epigraph of this chapter.

Chapter Thirteen: From Fabricator to Ghostwriter -- AuthorialRoles.

"Writers operate in the magical universe and you will find the magical law that like attracts like often provides a key note." (AM 101)

The role of the author in *The Place of Dead Roads* represents a new stage in the process of authorial construction throughout all of Burroughs' work, one in which he deliberately explores diversity and multiplicity. In *The Naked Lunch* Burroughs sought to eradicate himself from the text as author, operating on the periphery and leaving only traces of traditional authorial authority. His goal was a "free-standing" text; one which existed independently of its author -- who became little more than a name on a cover -- and taking responsibility for its own basic nature. In *Cities of the Red Night*, by contrast, Burroughs' authorial strategies shifted from defensive rearguard action to an offensive all-out assault on the privilege and power of the authorial position. He sought to eliminate the very need for an author as a locus of textual origin and responsibility by attempting to bring the world outside the text (in which the author is perceived to exist and function) inside its perimeters. Burroughs does this through the simplistic mechanism of proclaiming the textuality, or irrevocably textual nature, of all thought, speech, and action, on the basis that the psyche and therefore everything that springs from it is inevitably structured by or as language.

In *The Place of Dead Roads*, authorial strategies take another sharp turn, this time expressing the full realization

of what has previously been a relatively minor practice. That is, in this case Burroughs inscribes the author in the text -- metaphorically and literally, theoretically and personally. The authorial role continues to express and personify dualism for Burroughs -- the author is constructed as individual writer and textual function, as latent force and vestigial operator. Above all, the author of *The Place of Dead Roads* is constituted as a locus of textual operation and as a qualitative (dis)embodied force. Ambivalence and ambiguity are his defining characteristics.

The constitution of the author's role in this fashion permits Burroughs to pursue the familiar path of employing the traditional meta-textual authority of the author toward particular ends, while at the same time revealing and dissecting the structures of this meta-textual authority in a radical gesture. This process, which is essential to maintain the ideological purity sought by Burroughs, reflects a dual imperative which in turn expresses the demands upon the author as textually manifested. That is, the author must demonstrate his potential and actual power over and in the text, usually by disrupting or erupting into the narrative, and at the same time he must critique and undermine this power, removing himself from the centre of the text and (re)locating in its margins. *The Place of Dead Roads* in particular fulfils this dual authorial imperative, with a sense of clarity, intimacy and purpose. The author is inscribed within the text in two contexts: as the "unknown rifleman" of the Chase-Carsons/Hall gunfight parameter, symbolizing the disruptive and even destructive power of the

author, and as an element in the complex dichotomy of the Carsons/Hall character function, ensuring the author's marginality. I will examine these two manifestations of the author within the text in some detail.

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the author of *The Place of Dead Roads* is represented by the unknown rifleman, who kills Mike Chase and Kim Carsons/ William Seward Hall "from a distance" (PDR 13) in the most definitive versions of the gunfight. The inscription of the author within the structuring parameter of the reiterated gunfight in this way emphasizes a number of important points concerning the powers of the author, as well as what Burroughs would see as his proper function.

To begin with, the (dis)embodiment of the authorial function as the unknown rifleman stresses the ultimate meta-textual power of the author. The ability of the author to intervene in or disrupt the narrative at each and every moment is revealed in this extreme instance, which also demonstrates the extent of this disruptive power -- two characters are killed, yet subsequently "resurrected" without explanation or comment. Creation and destruction are asserted equally.

The fact that the existence of the rifleman (although not his identity) is revealed only in the framework of a text within a text (the newspaper article [PDR 13]) symbolizes the nature of the Burroughsian author's position as obscured by and in the text. The author/rifleman is able to disrupt the narrative without even manifesting a presence -- as symbolized by his presumed use of a "silencer" (PDR 13). The sense of

the author-function as an unknown, generally latent but potentially dynamic force within *The Place of Dead Roads* structures the reader's consciousness of the text and his own role to a considerable extent, in tandem with the textual perimeters.

This gradual depersonalization means that the author comes to be perceived as a magical presence -- Burroughs defines magic as the expression of an individual will, and art (specifically literature) as a product of this expression:

What we call "art" -- painting, sculpture, writing, dance, music -- is magical in origin. That is, it was originally employed for ceremonial purposes to produce very definite effects. In the world of magic nothing happens unless someone wants it to happen, *wills* it to happen, and there are certain magic formulae to channel and direct the will. The artist is trying to make something happen in the mind of the viewer or reader. (Burroughs' italics, *AM* 61)

The goal of the magical operation of writing as defined here is one from *The Naked Lunch* and *Cities of the Red Night*: "The goal of producing an experience in the reader, of changing his consciousness," (Skerl, *Burroughs* 91) while its new magical context is defined by the epigraph to this chapter.

The increasing depersonalization of the author-function within *The Place of Dead Roads* not only shifts Burroughs' concept of author from the traditional and typical toward the mythical and magical, but also enables him to escape his personal bugbear of responsibility for or even ownership of the text. As the author becomes more and more the scribe or fabricator evoked by *Cities of the Red Night* -- the mystical vessel of enormously powerful and unexplained forces -- he becomes less recognizable as the typical author who writes a book, receives royalties from its publication and sale, and



has his name printed on its cover. In sum, the author is portrayed as simultaneously present and absent in the text -- he operates in its margins, working with the vestiges of meaning and signification, yet at the same time structures the entire text in a mystical collaboration (or even communion) with the reader. The role of scribe (vessel of mythopoeia and expression of magical will) is combined with that of fabricator (constructing a text out of vestiges and residues) in the ethereal figure of the unknown rifleman, who performs his task with optimum skill and efficiency, and then disappears, eradicating himself once more.

The rifleman's representation of aspects of the authorial function in *The Place of Dead Roads* is complemented by the roles of Kim Carsons and William Seward Hall. Whereas the rifleman represents the exertion of traditional and magical powers in the construction of a text, Carsons and Hall enact Burroughs' primary process of revelation and analysis. In a sense, the rifleman represents entrenched structures of power, while Carsons and Hall enact the role of revolutionary or rebel against these structures of power; and the fact that the rifleman kills both Carsons and Hall, combined with their virtual resurrection or reanimation, indicates the binary and absolute nature of the conflict between the rebels and the powers that be.

In *The Place of Dead Roads*, Burroughs makes it overwhelmingly clear which side he chooses to support in this struggle, which reveals the inescapable political dimensions of authorship. He does this by inscribing himself within the dimensions of the Carsons and Hall character functions to a

considerable extent, personalizing both characters and text (and countering the depersonalization consequent upon the roles of fabricator and scribe). By situating himself in the text on the level of character (in a conditioned and restricted way), Burroughs avoids the strictures of traditional authorial responsibility, as well as undercutting the power structures that this responsibility entails. Carsons and Hall in turn represent two different sides of the authorial persona that Burroughs projects into *The Place of Dead Roads*, which I will now examine.

Taken as a whole, Carsons, Hall, and Burroughs himself form a kind of "unholy trinity." Kim Carsons is young, homosexual, and occasionally attractive in an obscene manner. His most significant attribute is his reiterated alienness -- he does not, and will never, fit into the social structures he encounters (including the Johnson Family to a certain extent). His profound alienation from contemporary American society reflects Burroughs' perceptions of himself as a (latently homosexual) teenager:

Kim is a slimy, morbid youth of unwholesome proclivities with an insatiable appetite for the extreme and the sensational. ...In short, Kim is everything a normal American boy is taught to *detest*. He is evil and slimy and *insidious*. Perhaps his vices could be forgiven him, but he was also given to the subversive practice of *thinking*. He was in fact incurably intelligent. (Burroughs' italics, PDR 23)

Much of *The Place of Dead Roads* is structured around descriptions like this, narrating Kim's childhood, adolescence, education (as a shootist, primarily) and career, as well as his theories and writings. A significant portion of his education consists of reading, particularly about favourite Burroughs topics such as disease, magic, and figures

such as Hassan i Sabbah (*PDR* 25-26). His "extensive and eclectic" (*PDR* 25) reading is crucial to his development as a writer (see *AM* 33,38). Carsons actively and imaginatively participates in what he reads, providing a model for the reader. His adolescent writings mirror those of Burroughs himself: "Kim occupies himself with his sketches and maps, poems and stories. He'd written a story he wanted to publish in *Boy's Life*." (*PDR* 35)

Thus Carsons represents the writer in embryo, his adolescent development and education reflecting both Burroughs' idiosyncratic theories and his idealized teenage persona. The link between them is intensified by the fact that their fathers share the Christian name Mortimer. However, as Carsons matures he shifts away from the role of writer, coming to represent the physical and pragmatic momentum of the movement from Time to Space, and as such his mythic role as shootist is given greater emphasis. The writerly role is taken over by Hall, who represents another side of Burroughs' projected persona.

Hall and Carsons exist in a symbiotic relationship in *The Place of Dead Roads*. Hall is Carsons' alter ego, and his spiritual and philosophical complement in the Time-Space progression. He ghost writes Carsons' account of his adventures, *Quién Es?* and in turn uses "Kim Carsons" as a pen name. My contention that they represent two aspects of a single character-function, rather than separate characters, is supported by their interchangeability with regard to the recurring gunfight. The destiny of both is the shootout with Mike Chase.

However, Hall has another significant dimension besides that of complementing Carsons' idealized and virtually permanent adolescence with the wisdom and spirituality of the mature writer. Hall is the scribe, the defender of the knowledge held sacred and perpetuated by Waghdas, the evanescent City of Knowledge:

The Traveler, the Scribe, most hunted and fugitive of men, since the knowledge unfolding in his being spells ruin to our enemies. He will soon be in a position to play the deadliest trick of them all...*The Piper Pulled Down the Sky*. His hand will not hesitate. (Burroughs' italics, PDR 107)

Hall conceals and reveals this knowledge in his fictional works, which are generally tales of the Old West (once again stressing the unquestioned prevalence and hence usefulness of this mythology). His mission, the overriding importance of which is clearly established, is a profoundly dangerous one:

he has every contract on the planet out on him. The slow, grinding contract of age, and emptiness... the sharp vicious contract of spiteful hate... heavy corporate contracts... "The most dangerous man in the world." (PDR 107)

Hall's mission complements Carsons' equally dangerous quest to escape the virus powers by transmutation into Space, and also reveals the writer's potential power. The text continually stresses the gravity of the situation and the high stakes involved. As revealed in the quotation, the threat that Carsons/Hall represents to the virus powers is at least as great as the personal danger he risks. The stakes are so high that merely to comprehend and communicate the truth, through the magical operation of writing, represents a triumph: "And to what extent did he (Hall) succeed? Even to envisage success on this scale is a victory. A victory from which

others may envision further." (PDR 107-108)

Hall's writings, which reveal the danger and communicate the knowledge necessary to defeat it, mirror *The Place of Dead Roads* itself -- Burroughs' attempt to perform the same task. The parallels are blatant, including the sharing of Christian names between Burroughs and Hall (William Seward), and the powerful and dominating context of Old West mythology in both their writings. Thus Hall synthesizes Carsons and Burroughs' own projected persona as author. In keeping with this synthetic role, as well as the spirituality of his position as scribe and fugitive defender of the knowledge of Waghdas, Hall possesses no definite persona of his own:

Hall's face and body were not what one expects in a sedentary middle-aged man. The face was alert and youthful, accustomed to danger and at the same time tired. The danger has gone on so long it has become routine. Yet his actual life was comparatively uneventful. (PDR 108)

This is the closest the narrative gets to a physical description of Hall. The lack of a specific physical identity serves to emphasize the intangibility of his task, as well as his lack of realism as a character: "he was a corridor, a hall, leading to many doors." (PDR 107) Hall constitutes a cohesive, spiritually defined framework, which the focused identity of Carsons as protagonist can move in and out of as well as within, and which also reflects Burroughs' authorial persona.

Thus the "unholy trinity" embodies and enacts many of the literal and metaphorical dimensions of the authorial role in *The Place of Dead Roads*. However, the question of the relationship between the two dominant characters and Burroughs himself is one which also takes us outside the novel to a

certain extent. Skerl has noted Burroughs' drive to mythologize himself as writer and mythic persona through the creation, or rather re-creation, of his own life as legend: "The creation of legend is a part of Burroughs' art which must be separated from fact by the literary historian but incorporated into his oeuvre by the literary critic." (*Burroughs*, Preface) Similarly, Burroughs is distinctly present on the periphery of the trilogy, embodied in the function of fabricator in relation to the individual text. He cannot resist projecting a version of himself into the mythopoeic process, and fragments of the persona he projects in *The Place of Dead Roads* are evident in Carsons and Hall. In sum, Kim Carsons represents the active fulfilment of Burroughs' ideology in an essentially romantic sense, as well as embodying the thrust of the mythopoeic drive in *The Place of Dead Roads*. As such, he is also the self-constructed centre of the Western myths which structure the novel, as well as its protagonist. The character of William Seward Hall bears a more direct resemblance to Burroughs himself than Carsons, as the labelling of Hall with Burroughs' Christian names would suggest (as we have seen, Hall's surname accurately describes his function). While Carsons represents a nostalgic version of Burroughs' youth, Hall is closer to a version of Burroughs' contemporaneous persona as middle-aged writer. The loosely structured, yet ideologically definite, characterization of Hall clearly suggests Burroughs' identification of his own literary persona -- primarily as the fugitive defender of profound but unpalatable truths which must be preserved and propagated at all costs.<sup>1</sup> Burroughs,

like Hall, sees himself as both a means of passage (a corridor/hall) to a new, self-made, or self-mythologized world, and as a fighter on behalf of this world.

The romantic valuation of self, or even vanity, implied in this concept is expressed in *The Place of Dead Roads* in Carsons' drive to seek literary immortality as one of the many forms of eternal life:

Kim has never doubted the possibility of an afterlife or the existence of gods. In fact he intends to become a god, to shoot his way to immortality, to invent his way, to write his way.... And the immortality of a writer is to be taken literally. Whenever anyone reads his words the writer is there. He lives in his readers.... And my saga will shine in the eyes of adolescents squinting through gunsmoke. (PDR 45)

The circular structure of the Carsons/Hall/Burroughs trinity is emphasized here. The goals of the archetypal writer figure and the idealized (yet fundamentally actual) writer are expressed by the adolescent protagonist, a gesture which highlights the implicit naiveté and optimism of such goals. Burroughs' desire for immortality, as well as his self-mythologization, are perpetuated through his self-transcendence as the author of the literary artifact (instead, the author is inscribed as a function within the text); as the maker of myths and mythology, and finally as a presence within the artifact (both peripheral and central), and a constitutive element of the mythopoeic process. Burroughs himself enacts symbolically the simultaneous presence and absence of the author.

Part of Burroughs' radical redefinition of the author's role as within the text involves a stress upon the practice of writing itself. As we have seen, writing is essentially a

magical operation for him, involving the exertion of will through known formulae. The combination of magical and pragmatic elements that it represents is expressed through the dual authorial figures of scribe and fabricator. This synthesis of the rational and non-rational aspects of writing is expressed further in the significance of "ghostwriting" in *The Place of Dead Roads* -- Carsons' autobiography, *Quién Es?* is ghostwritten by Hall, and is in itself an important textual artifact, if an apocryphal one.

The fact that Carsons' autobiography is ghostwritten by Hall indicates the integration of these two figures into a single character-function, as well as the distinction between their specific tasks and skills. The text itself conflates the two:

Ghostwritten by William Hall, punch-drunk fighter, a shadowy figure to win in the answer, Master of Assassins, Death for his credentials, Lord of *Quién Es?* Who is it? Kim, ka of Pan, God of Panic. Greatest of human dreams, *Quién es?* The horse that comes from there, who is it? Lord of the future son, does he exist? Inferential agents of a singularity, the fossils fading leave the whole human comedy shredding to yellow dust.... Unknown with no commitments from birth. (PDR 182)

By the end of this passage, Carsons and Hall are fully integrated, and have virtually disappeared into a vague and mystical realm ("Unknown with no commitments from birth"). The projected authorial persona of Burroughs himself is also a part of this mystical communion, as the representation of updated versions of his own adolescent writings as Carsons', in the early chapters of the novel, renders him yet another ghostwriter. The "unholy trinity" is reintegrated through the mysterious process of ghostwriting.

A ghostwriter is defined as "an artistic or literary hack



doing the work for which his employer takes credit." However, I would argue that Burroughs redefines the term in *The Place of Dead Roads*, emphasizing the mystical and supernatural overtones of "ghost" (soul of a dead person in hell, spectre of the dead appearing to the living), and combining it with an equal emphasis on the active nature of the ghostwriting process (to "ghost" is to haunt, prowl, act as a ghost; or to act or write as a ghostwriter). These two elements combine to suggest accurately the ethereal persona and pragmatic function which constitute Hall, while Carsons' embodiment in and by the ghostwritten text is revealed by the emphasis on its cover:

Kim's first book, a luridly fictionalized account of his exploits as a bank robber, outlaw, and shootist, is entitled *Quién Es?* Kim posed for the illustrations. Here he is in a half-crouch holding the gun in both hands at eye level. There is an aura of deadly calm about him like the epicenter of a tornado. His face, devoid of human expression, molded by total function and purpose, blazes with an inner light.

QUIÉN ES?

By Kim Carsons. Ghostwritten by William Hall. (PDR 181)

*Quién Es?* is inscribed as literary artifact within the text of *The Place of Dead Roads*, and comes to symbolize Carsons' changing fortunes and destiny:

There's a book on the table. The youth stretches out a languid hand. You can see that he has been very ill.

The book is entitled *Quién Es?*

On the cover is a skeleton figure with black vest and sheriff's badge. On the badge is written *MOI*. (PDR 256-257)

Like the picture of Dorian Gray, the cover of *Quién Es?* inscribes Kim Carsons' fate.

The book's title is immensely significant. Translated as "Who is it?" (according to legend the last words of Billy the Kid), it emphasizes the integration of Carsons and Hall -- it is always impossible to tell the ghostwriter from the

purported writer -- as well as stressing their psychological unreality as characters. The text plays with the implications of the title, opening up a variety of possible meanings or significations:

*"Quién es?"*

Last words of Billy the Kid when he walked into a dark room and saw a shadowy figure sitting there. Who is it? The answer was a bullet through the heart. When you ask Death for his credentials you are dead. (PDR 181)

In this context of Old Western mythic narrative, "Quién es?" becomes the ultimate rhetorical question, a final and hubristic gesture. Its mythic significance, and that of Carsons' autobiography as well, is underlined by the invocation of Billy the Kid, possibly the single most famous and most legendary character of Old West mythology. The passage proceeds to question the nature, and even the very fact of Kim Carsons' existence:

*Quién es?*

Who is it?

Kim Carsons does he exist? His existence, like any existence, is inferential... the traces he leaves behind him... fossils... fading violet photos, old newspaper clippings shredding to yellow dust... the memory of those who knew him or thought they did... a portrait attributed to Kim's father, Mortimer Carsons: Kim Carsons age 16 December 14, 1876.... And this book. (PDR 181)

The last phrase deliberately makes it unclear whether the book in question is *Quién Es?* or *The Place of Dead Roads*. In so doing, it emphasizes the wholly and inescapably textual nature of Carsons' being, as well as the "inferential" process of textually constructing a character. The fact that this textual construction is performed by a ghostwriter within the text, one with whom Carsons has an intense and symbiotic relationship, initiates a process in which the text's multiple levels of authorial construction begin to condense and

conflate. Carsons as teenage "scribbler," Hall as ghostwriter, scribe, fabricator, and more -- all these figures are revealed suddenly as inherently and irrevocably textual. The fundamental nature of their being (or the perception of this being by the reader) begins to change, as they "disappear" into the textual structures of language from whence they came.

This process is recounted in detail in the subsequent passage, where the nature of Kim Carsons' existence, especially in relation to Hall and ultimately Burroughs as author, is laid bare:

He exists in these pages as Lord Jim, the Great Gatsby, Comus Bassington, live and breathe in a writer's prose, in the care, love, and dedication that evoke them: the flawed, doomed but undefeated, radiant heroes who attempted the impossible, stormed the citadels of heaven, took the last chance on the last and greatest of human dreams, the punch-drunk fighter who comes up off the floor to win by a knockout, the horse that comes from last to win in the stretch, assassins of Hassan i Sabbah, Master of Assassins, agents of Humwawa, Lord of Abominations, Lord of Decay, Lord of the Future, of Pan, God of Panic, of the Black Hole, where no physical laws apply, agents of a singularity. Those who are ready to leave the whole human comedy behind and walk into the unknown with no commitments. (*PDR* 181-182)

The rhetoric here is appropriately apocalyptic in tone, evoking as it does the collapse of contemporary society at the same time as it initiates the collapse, or folding in upon itself, of the text.

Thus the concept of ghostwriting returns the reader yet again to the inescapable structures of language and text, but with an intensified awareness of the invidious nature of the position of the ideologically correct (in Burroughs' terms) author or writer. Although writing, for Burroughs, is a powerful magical operation, it is ultimately betrayed and

rendered powerless by the unavoidable context and constraints of language and textuality, a betrayal which *The Place of Dead Roads* reveals at its deepest levels. Overall, the concept of "author" as expressed in this text is enormously complex. The metaphorical inscription of the author in and by the text, through the figures of Carsons, Hall, Burroughs' projected persona, and the unknown rifleman, reveals the confrontation between the powerful magical function of writing, and the ultimately castrating confines of language and textuality. The author is revealed and concealed symbolically in the figures of fabricator (from *Cities of the Red Night*), scribe (prefiguring *The Western Lands*), and ghostwriter (exclusive to *The Place of Dead Roads*), in a process which enacts the simultaneous presence and absence of the Burroughsian author in relation to "his" text. What remains, after the mystic cycle of the death and resurrection of the author, is a belief in the syncretic and integrative power of the magical operation of writing, a belief expressed in the epigraph to this chapter.

Chapter Fourteen: From Cowboy to Cosmonaut -- Book One.

"We are like water creatures looking up at the land and air and wondering how we can survive in that alien medium. The water we live in is Time. That alien medium we glimpse beyond time is Space. And that is where we are going." (PDR 43-44)

*The Place of Dead Roads* is structured primarily by the linear progression from Time to Space and the cyclical fulfilment of Kim Carsons' quest for a way of defeating the virus powers defined by *Cities of the Red Night*. These dual actions are expressed in the parameters of the text, as we have seen. The following chapters are concerned with how these different movements are embodied in the text, how they are used to express pervasive Burroughsian themes and ideas, and how they are synthesized into an integrated whole, a whole which is greater than the sum of its parts.

I see Kim Carsons' quest, which is connected inextricably with the context of Old West mythology, as the primary force in Book One. This section of the text foregrounds Carsons' childhood, education, and early career as a shootist, and commences in the first chapter, with two accounts of the all-important gunfight. The movement initiated here appears to be linear, but in the context of the novel as a whole it comes to be seen as cyclical, structured by the recurring gunfight.

Book Two of *The Place of Dead Roads* emphasizes the projected shift from Time to Space. Associated with the Time-Space progression is a heavy load of theory and speculation, which the reader must come to terms with. Book Two also initiates the integration of the two drives of the text -- Carsons' "suicide" with the Wild Fruits liberates him

for the Burroughsian space program, and much of the theory in the text is presented in the context of his writings.

Book Three of *The Place of Dead Roads* completes this process of integration. An emphasis on language and textuality (through the quest for the origins of speech and the collecting of "famous last words") serves to synthesize Carsons' individual destiny with the Time-Space shift. In its final chapters, the text enacts a conditional closure, one with a profoundly "spatializing" effect.

I have exaggerated the simplicity and the clarity of the distinctions between the three major sections of *The Place of Dead Roads* here in order to highlight the importance of each of the text's drives, as well as their gradual synthesis, and to facilitate discussion. It is as well to bear in mind that the Time-Space shift (prefigured by the preface) and Kim Carsons' personal quest to defeat the virus co-exist in all parts of the text, informing its structures and constituting it as a holistic entity. Ultimately, the linear and the cyclic meet and are integrated on the ground of the text.

The predominance of Old West mythology in Book One of *The Place of Dead Roads*, entitled "Stranger Who Was Passing," is established in its very first chapter, along with the prominence of Kim Carsons as protagonist. This chapter also initiates a process of employing, but also parodying and subverting the traditional mythic narrative structures of the American West.<sup>4</sup> A major factor in the process of subverting these structures is Kim Carsons' overt homosexuality, which adds a new dimension to the traditional tale of the education

and career of a gunfighter. His growth toward sexual maturity is portrayed as an integral part of his mental and spiritual maturation, as each of the boys he has sexual experiences with contributes to his prowess as a shootist (*PDR* 55-70).

Carsons' sexual preferences mark him indisputably as an outlaw in modern terms, and as the violator of a traditional Christian taboo. However, his sexuality sits uneasily with the Old West concept of an outlaw, who represents an intense, although usually chaste, masculinity.<sup>2</sup> Carsons is undeniably constructed as an outlaw figure -- he represents individualism and resistance (typically violent) to unfair laws and oppression, as well as a rejection of social conventions and family life -- with an added and particularly modern element of social exclusion due to sexual preference. That is, the character of Carsons not only embodies the outlaw archetype but reveals its underlying sexual conservatism, and posits a radically new and extreme concept of "outlaw."

The constitution of Kim Carsons' overt homosexuality in this way suggests that there is an ideological and philosophical justification for the rampant homosexuality which pervades the entire trilogy, rather than simply attributing it to Burroughs' avowed personal misogyny and homophilia. The definition of all of the significant characters of the trilogy as not only homosexual, but misogynistic as well, gives them an indisputable outlaw status, as well as contributing a powerful element of subversion. This in turn assures the trilogy of cult of "subculture" status in conventional modern society. In all his works, especially early ones such as *Naked Lunch*,

Burroughs has consistently probed and challenged the frontiers of censorship, moral outrage, and public acceptance. His identification with the character-function of Carsons/Hall, and his obvious perception of himself as a literary outlaw (as in the title of Ted Morgan's biography) are elements of the constant pressure to redefine standards of acceptance and morality which his works exert upon the reader.

The distortion and critique of a traditional Western mythic role by the important fact of Carsons' homosexuality is complemented by a variety of untraditional perspectives which Burroughs brings to bear on the narrative in *The Place of Dead Roads*. His use of the Western myths is never simple -- there is always (what could be called) a metamythical level. On this level, Burroughs uses a number of techniques and strategies to increase the reader's awareness of the value-laden basis of these powerful American mythic structures, as well as to emphasize their fundamentally textual nature -- *they find their main expression in literature and film.*

The importance of film to the propagation of Old West mythology is revealed in the first chapter of Book One, where, after killing Mike Chase in the shootout, Kim Carsons sends the Director into a frenzy by shooting holes in the "backdrop:"

...Kim shoots a hole in the sky. Blackness pours out and darkens the earth. In the last rays of a painted sun, a Johnson holds up a barbed-wire fence for others to slip through. The fence has snagged the skyline... a great black rent. Screaming crowds point to the torn sky.

"OFF THE TRACK! OFF THE TRACK!"

"FIX IT!" the Director bellows....

"What with, a Band-Aid and chewing gum? Rip in the Master Film.... Fix it yourself, Boss Man."

"ABANDON SHIP, GOD DAMN IT.... EVERY MAN FOR HIMSELF!"

(PDR 17)



This passage recalls the stress on theatricality in *Cities of the Red Night*. Carsons defies theatricality by destroying the film set, yet paradoxically reinforces it by his dramatic interpretation of the role of destroyer. I see Carsons as attempting to destroy the "prerecordings" (here, the "Master Film") posited by *Cities of the Red Night*, which determine the eventual destiny of every being. He seeks to destroy the Director's created context, and to create his own; to become his own director, and hence to choose and control his own destiny. This passage introduces the task of the Johnson Family as led by Carsons -- to destroy the "reality film" and replace it with an alternative reality, one which fulfils their ideals and represents the eradication of virus powers entrenched in politics and society, as represented here by the paternalistic and tyrannical Director. By creating a new film, or rather enabling each individual to create his own, Carsons and the Johnsons further the reintegration of rational and non-rational forces and the restoration of man's shattered self-image -- the self-created, self-directed film acts as a mirror in which man can see an augmented and holistic image of self.

However, the fulfilment of these goals is not enacted in this chapter. Rather, Carsons simply destroys the existing filmic context, creating a chaos which makes possible escape from a rigidly structured situation. Options multiply, as proscriptive structures are demolished, at least symbolically. The concluding exclamation above recalls *Cities of the Red Night* yet again, invoking the important journeys and characters of the "Billy Celeste" and the "Great White," as

well as that text's conception of Earth as a space ship or space station, echoed in the preface to *The Place of Dead Roads*. This first chapter of the text represents the end of the "journey" of *Cities of the Red Night*, whose theories and images are invoked here with a certain nostalgia, as well as sadness due to the fact that the virus powers remain undefeated --- and the beginning of *The Place of Dead Roads's* "journey," as personified in the individual quest and destiny of Kim Carsons. Carsons' (and the Johnsons') task is encapsulated in the passage above, contextualized by the filmic metaphor as well as the prevalent structures of Old West myth. The two come together to suggest the possibilities and options of a destiny which is not yet, and need not be, irrevocable.

Kim Carsons continues, throughout Book One, to display a self-consciousness comparable to that of an actor, particularly an actor being filmed. He is constantly aware of his own position and appearance within a scene, and is able, as it were, to see himself from "outside:"

As Kim walked out into the sunlight carrying his "alligator," as he called his Gladstone bag, he saw himself as a mysterious world traveler, travel-stained and even the stains unfamiliar --- "for he on honey-dew hath fed/And drunk the milk of Paradise." (PDR 52)

Carsons' psychological maturation is also evidenced through his imaginative acting-out of roles, for example, "Kim sees himself as the legendary raccoon who killed a whole pack of dogs before he succumbed to his wounds...." (PDR 38) These tendencies persist throughout the text, emphasizing the powerful film metaphor and the stress on theatricality in both *Cities of the Red Night* and *The Place of Dead Roads*.

The importance of film in relation to *The Place of Dead Roads* in general and to the mythology of the Old West in particular is equalled by the significance of the other main expression of this mythology -- in literature. In particular, Burroughs reveals the structures and assumptions underlying the mythic narratives of the Old West through the employment of a favourite strategy -- that of intertextuality. In his essays, as well as in his novels, Burroughs vigorously attacks the idea of "words as property:"

Words, colors, light, sounds, stone, wood, bronze belong to the living artist. They belong to anyone who can use them. Loot the Louvre! *A bas l'originalité*, the sterile and assertive ego that imprisons as it creates. *Vive le vol* -- pure, shameless, total. We are not responsible. Steal anything in sight. (AM 21)

Burroughs applies this principle in *The Place of Dead Roads*, using a wide variety of intertextual sources within the structures of Old West myth, some of which sit rather uneasily in this context. In fact, this text takes this idea to an extreme, "stealing" its protagonist:

You can move character and story to another time and place, always looking for the right slot where it can fit. ...That is what writing is about: time travel. So I drafted Denton Welch to be the protagonist of a 19th-century Western [*The Place of Dead Roads*] on which I was then working. (AM 43)

The evocation of the English author and artist, Denton Welch, as a significant element of the character-function of Kim Carsons enriches and augments this characterization, as does the nominal evocation of Kit Carson, legendary "mountain man" and scout.<sup>3</sup> For Burroughs, intertextuality is not merely a source of quotation, but a means of access to character, setting, and narrative style, as well as a major principle of artistic creation, one which recalls the writer's function as

fabricator. Intertextuality is also an important critical tool, allowing the text to reveal the irrevocably textual nature of the myths which it employs.

Some of the intertextual sources invoked in *The Place of Dead Roads* work to suggest the essential conservatism of Old West myth (and all myth), by demonstrating that Carsons in particular is too fully rounded a character to be contained wholly within the outlaw archetype. His quotations from authors like Shakespeare and T.S.Eliot jar in the Old West context, both chronologically (in the case of Eliot) and intellectually -- Carsons' erudition inversely reveals the implicit anti-intellectualism of the Western hero, who is defined by Slotkin as materialistic, anti-intellectual, and loving exploit and violence (307-308). Carsons quotes from De Quincey (*PDR* 59), Coleridge (*PDR* 52), Rimbaud (*PDR* 22), and Wordsworth (*PDR* 100), suggesting the archetype of Romantic rebel, with all that that implies. The concept of Carsons as idealistic and intensely literary Romantic rebel co-exists comfortably with his role as Western outlaw to a considerable extent, casting a sidelight on the profoundly literary basis of the mythic outlaw figure. Once again it is stressed that the prosaic, terse, and anti-intellectual nature of the Old West outlaw is expressed and defined in the irrevocably textual forms of literature and film.

Another important series of works intertextually evoked (once again) in *The Place of Dead Roads* are those of Carlos Castaneda, narrating his gradual induction, by a Mexican Yaqui Indian known as Don Juan, into the practices of magic and sorcery. Burroughs uses the ideas in these texts as

touchstones throughout his works, as, for example, when Carsons uses the "sorcerer's gait" taught by Don Juan, augmented by his own peculiar technology, "It was his practice to move on foot and he could cover up to fifty miles a day with his sorcerer's gait and his specially designed spring-walking boots...." (*PDR* 20) Many of the characteristics of Castaneda's works fit comfortably into the quasi-19th-century Western context of Book One of *The Place of Dead Roads*. The settings and general atmosphere of both are similar and closely related -- Mexico, the setting of Castaneda's texts, is frequently mentioned and even visited in *The Place of Dead Roads*. Don Juan's ideas are more compatible with the narrative of *The Place of Dead Roads* than they are with *Cities of the Red Night*, where they are frequently referred to by Clem Snide (see chapter eleven).

However, for Burroughs, Castaneda's work is more important as a theoretical touchstone. There are countless available examples of Don Juan's ideas which Burroughs co-opts, but I see the most important of them as being Castaneda's ultimate task, set by Don Juan, of overcoming mind-body dualism:

I said that I could not conceive that my body was acting by itself as if it were an entity separate from my reason. "It isn't, but we have made it so," he said. "Our reason is petty and it is always at odds with our body. This, of course, is only a way of talking, but the triumph of a man of knowledge is that he has joined the two together." (*Tales of Power* 88)

The reader is already aware of the importance of overcoming dualism in Burroughs' theories. In *Tales of Power*, Castaneda himself achieves the reintegration of the separate elements of the self, that is, mind and body, the rational and the non-rational. However, this reintegration is centred around

an awareness of the separateness or individuality of each of these elements -- it is unity in multiplicity, which becomes Burroughs' highest goal. This unity cannot function or occur on a rigorously logical level -- it is both more and less than the sum of its parts. It is a container, an entity, and yet again something entirely other. In *Tales of Power*, the unity of the self which can be achieved is not a simple sum of the "tonal" (the everyday) and the "nagual" (the unseen). Rather, the tonal contains and structures the nagual, while the nagual contains the tonal and the self, and also the entire world. Given these logical impossibilities, feeling and intuition become as important as reason -- not more so, for in the ideal unity in multiplicity of the self, nothing is privileged and binary oppositions merge holistically.

As well as using intertextual references to reveal and dissect the narrative structures of Old West mythology, and to posit the goal of unity in multiplicity, *The Place of Dead Roads* invokes literary sources which are a part of this mythology. Particular reference is made to an archetypal Western novel, *The Virginian* (1902) by Owen Wister:

Kim stands there all square-jawed and stern and noble like the Virginian getting set to hang his best friend for rustling the sacred cows on which the West is built.

If I had any shame I would gag on a speech like that, Kim thinks.... "Who cares about fucking cows.... MOOO MOOO MOOO...." (PDR 125)

Novels such as *The Virginian*, probably the most famous of its kind, represent the literary glorification of the Westerner, and his subsequent elevation to the status of mythic hero. This in turn marks the modern (twentieth-century) commencement of the powerful and influential reign of the Old West

mythology in the consciousness and literature of the American people. The extent of its influence on modern American mythopoeic processes cannot be ignored, even when it is mocked or parodied, as in the passage above. The strength and significance of its structures, as well as its pervasiveness, are apparent in the fact that a writer such as Burroughs can use them, in distorted and critical ways, as the constitutive basis and immediate emotive touchstone of a subversive and politically revolutionary text such as *The Place of Dead Roads*. In so doing, he provokes an entire discourse on the emotive power of this mythology in the collective American consciousness, evoking dangers attendant on its deliberate subversion as well as its continued propagation. I would argue that the excitement and dynamism of much contemporary American fiction arises from direct confrontation with pervasive popular myth, and the consequent challenge to its primary place in the American psyche. This represents a conflict with the very essence of American self-perceptions and constructions of national and individual identity, and as a result it is perceived as both threatening and subversive. This is precisely what Burroughs is trying to achieve on one level of *The Place of Dead Roads*, through his use of and comment upon dominant American myths.<sup>4</sup>

The invocation of literary touchstones demonstrates Burroughs' awareness of the "fabricated" nature of mythology -- he emphasizes myth as artifact.<sup>5</sup> *The Place of Dead Roads* explores the origin and nature of myth through the deliberate use of traditional mythic narrative structures of the Old West for a calculated readerly response -- through the construction

of a new and distinctly original (or "consummatory" [Slotkin 12]) mythology in the trilogy as a whole, and through Kim Carsons' search for the origins of human speech. The latter could be said to be synonymous with the origins of mythopoeia, such is the strength of the human mythopoeic drive for Burroughs.

In *The Place of Dead Roads* Burroughs focuses on the literary origin and nature of myth in particular, as in his intertextual invocation of a disparate collection of canonized works.<sup>6</sup> This emphasis is augmented by the use of an archetypal and often hackneyed narrative convention in the description of Carsons' career as a shootist -- the reminiscences of the "old timer" about the lost and golden days of the gunfighters' and outlaws' heyday:

I saw him in a gunfight once. Wasn't much of a fight. Just a punk looking for a reputation: he killed Kim Carsons. Not so young. About thirty. Kim never cut notches, he said it ruined the gun butt, and his were all special-made to his hand.... (PDR 78)

This passage displays terseness (lack of adjectives, brief phrases instead of sentences), yet eloquence, which marks it as a typical narrative of this kind.<sup>7</sup> The depiction of the scene, as well as the fame of Carsons and hence the reflected glory of the narrator, are coloured by hindsight and nostalgia.

The chapter of the novel which contains this passage (PDR 73-78) enacts Carsons' transformation from unknown adolescent gunfighter to legendary shootist and outlaw. Potent and evocative names are dropped -- Bat Masterson, Pat Garrett, Dodge City -- as the events of Carsons' career are recounted from the perspective of nostalgic hindsight illustrated above.



(Indeed, such name-dropping is an integral part of this type of narrative.) The central theme is apparently Carsons' unique and individual style of gunfighting, but there is an intrusive subtext asserting the reflected glory of the narrator, who was "there."

Truth, or rather historical fact, is irrelevant to the legend of Kim Carsons which is constructed in Book One of *The Place of Dead Roads*. The legend's power does not lie in a factual basis, but in its enrichment of Old West mythology, as well as the structuring and approving forces it draws from it. That is, to be a part of this mythology confers acceptance and status, as well as imaginative power. It is these forces that Burroughs seeks to draw upon, as well as critique, in *The Place of Dead Roads*. However, there are dangers in being incorporated in such a mythology -- a protagonist can, ironically, lose his individuality when defined in such a way (for example, as archetypal outlaw) and become two-dimensional. Carsons flirts with this dangerous precedent, as the legend constructed around him and his exploits becomes an integral part of his identity and self-image, "Kim sees his life as a legend....." (*PDR* 110) Ultimately, the other, equally crucial dimensions of his character-function -- such as his quest to move into Space and his writerly function, shared with his alter ego Hall -- restore Carsons' "fullness" as a character, and prevent his constriction within the limits of the outlaw archetype, even as redefined by the text. However, the pervasive and reductive danger of the role of Western mythic hero is demonstrated in the fact that Carsons must actively destroy

his legend in order to fulfil his other priorities and functions:

Kim had now gone underground and in any case the days of the gunfighter were over. So far as the world knew he was just a forgotten chapter in western history. He was d-e-a-d. ...He had in fact taken pains to remain anonymous and dispatched his henchmen to remove records... from libraries, newspaper morgues and even from private collections of old western lore.... (PDR 91)

Through the use of narrative forms drawn from the myths of the American West, *The Place of Dead Roads* illustrates the power and status that can be drawn from these forms and their associated roles, as well as the restrictive and reductive position they ultimately trap the protagonist in. Having discussed Burroughs' general use of the mythology of the American West and its ramifications, I will now look specifically at the dual strands of Carsons' education -- the gradual realization of the fundamental and concealed nature of contemporary society, which provides the basis of the theoretical development central to Book Two, and Carsons' construction of himself as shootist and outlaw in a traditional mythic context, which is the central movement in Book One.

The early chapters of Book One which depict Carsons' training as a shootist reflect the traditional structure, rather than the actual narrative forms, of the legendary outlaw biography. After a lonely and isolated childhood, in which he experiences popular hatred and prejudice because of his "difference," Carsons chooses the romantic career of shootist after his father's death leaves him independent. For him it is a suitably defiant choice, in the face of pressure to submerge his alienness in an acceptably eccentric and

marginal outlet, such as art or acting (PDR 47). Carsons chooses to assert rather than conceal his uniqueness, necessitating skill in self-defence: "Kim decides to go west and become a shootist. If anyone doesn't like the way Kim looks and acts and smells, he can fill his grubby peasant paw." (PDR 48) Carsons' wholehearted adoption of the role of shootist/outlaw is revealed here in the narrative form of his thoughts -- he is already thinking in the brutal yet romanticized terms of the gunfighter role. However, his choice of career is not merely conditioned by his imaginative idealization of the shootist's or outlaw's role in the mythic texts he has encountered. It is also determined by certain realizations concerning the current state and ideal destiny of mankind, which he experiences due to social ostracism and, significantly, wide and esoteric reading.

Carsons' first theorization of the nature and structures of society is structured by the metaphors and concepts of *Cities of the Red Night*, and expressed in the form of a text within a text, in his story "The Baron Says These Things" (PDR 35-38). This story mostly enacts homosexual fantasies in a science-fiction context, but it also contains the following significant exchange between the Baron and a raw recruit:

"But sir, aren't the B.B.s (Bible Belts) and their equivalents in other countries, the bigoted ignorant basically frightened middle class, just dupes and lackeys of the very rich and the politicians, exploited for votes and labour and the consumption of consumer goods while they also serve as convenient guard dogs to protect the status that benefits the very rich?"

"Yes, but they are still vectors, carriers of the virus. How do you control yellow fever? You kill the mosquitoes first, right? Now some vectors are more potent than others. ...As an integral part of the Shiticide Program master vectors will be pinpointed and assassinated...." (PDR 37-38)

It is evident that Carsons is beginning to perceive the nature and corruption of sociopolitical structures, but he is still thinking in terms drawn from the theories of others. Shortly before his decision to become a shootist is taken, he begins to construct his own version of the situation, and to indicate a possible solution:

Kim considers these imaginary space trips to other world as practice for the real thing, like target shooting. As a prisoner serving a life sentence can think only of escape, so Kim takes for granted that the only purpose of his life is space travel....

...Kim knows that the first step toward space exploration is to examine the human artifact with *biologic* alterations in mind that will render our H.A. more suitable for space conditions and space travel.... We are like water creatures looking up at the land and air and wondering how we can survive in that alien medium. The water we live in is Time. That alien medium we glimpse beyond time is Space. And that is where we are going. (Burroughs' italics, PDR 43-44)

This crucial passage, from which the epigraph to this chapter is taken, reasserts the prominence of "space" in the text, as symbol, locus, and ultimate destination. The passage links this theme, the necessity to move from Time to Space, with the Western context, referring to the necessary preparations as "like target shooting." In this light, Carsons' decision to adopt the role of shootist is conditional, given his long-term goal of moving into a non-chronological, and therefore non-historical context. The Old West mythology becomes a shield or screen, within whose powerful, yet clichéd structures Carsons can conceal his true intentions and present a particular public image of himself.

The element of youthful idealism in Carsons' choice is iterated, as, once his choice is made, he retires to the family farm to hone his shooting skills (PDR 48-72). As already noted, his increasing knowledge and ability are

complemented by his progress toward sexual and emotional maturity, as his sexual partners teach him various quasi-mystical aspects of the art of gunfighting (*PDR* 70). This mysticism is balanced by rational study, as Carsons learns the relevant anatomy of the body, as well as studying ballistics and other necessary elements, to provide himself with a fully rounded education (*PDR* 67).

Carsons' first kill displays the successful maturation of his skills, and is recounted in the language common to such narratives:

Kim's arduous training has paid off in hard currency. As Kim looks down at the two bodies crumpled there, spilling blood and brains on the floor, he feels good --- safer. Two enemies will never bother him again. Two lousy sons of bitches, melted into air and powder smoke. (*PDR* 72)

The language of this passage is that of the archetypal gunfight in popular media. The use of metaphor and imagery is extensive, yet the colloquialisms and short sentences give an impression of terseness and brutal realism. The romantic and vicarious appeal of the outlaw/gunfighter figure is obvious, ironically, through the apparent realism of the account.

After his skills are proven and his legendary status established, Carsons begins to meet kindred souls, such as Tom Dark, the photographer (*PDR* 79-86), and Sven, Boy, and Marbles (*PDR* 86-87). At this point, Carsons shifts from his role as lone gunfighter to a position as co-ordinator of the Johnson Family effort to recover control of the Earth. He and his comrades work together to create the ultimate outlaw community (in the sense of the expanded terms of reference already established). To this end, Carsons "recruits a band of flamboyant and picturesque outlaws, called the Wild Fruits"

(PDR 90), and submerges his own larger-than-life identity, as we have seen. The Wild Fruits represent the integration of the Johnson Family structure, and its goal of existence in Space, with the mythic Western context.

Given the potent synthesis of central themes embodied by the Wild Fruits, it is appropriate that it is in this context that Kim Carsons comes to virtually his most comprehensive realization of the forces ranged against him and his desires. Here, we see the completion of the metaphoric shift from the "virus" in *Cities of the Red Night* to the "aliens" of *The Place of Dead Roads* as archetypal evil:

Kim now realizes that *they* can take over bodies and minds and use them for their purposes. So why do they always take over stupid, bigoted people or people who are retarded or psychotic? Obviously they are looking for dupes and slaves, not for intelligent allies. In fact their precise intention is to destroy human intelligence, to blunt awareness and to block human beings out of space. What they are launching is an extermination program. And anyone who has sufficient insight to suspect the existence of a *they* is a prime target.

He listed the objectives and characteristics of the aliens.... (Burroughs' italics, PDR 92)

Carsons goes on to give a detailed and precise account of the "aliens'" intentions and the kind of human vessels that are most suited to their ends. This important passage provides a coherent analysis of the nature of contemporary existence, as well as an ideological justification for Carsons' and the Johnsons' actions and intentions. Their "policy" is explained, clearly and even simplistically, a few pages on:

Their policy is Manichaeian. Good and evil are in a state of conflict. The outcome is uncertain. This is not an eternal conflict since one or the other will win out in this universe. The Christian church, by calling good "evil" and evil "good," has confused the issue. The church must be seen as a dedicated instrument of alien invasion. (PDR 96)

This interpretation of the Johnson Family agenda in absolute, moralistic, and even apocalyptic terms reveals the true nature of the text's theoretical drive as theological, or even evangelistic. That is, in tandem with the emphasis on faith and belief asserted through the prominence of myth, the text continually stresses the importance of a conflict which centres around the hearts, souls and minds of not only the combatants but all of humanity. The positing of the conflict in terms of a binary opposition reasserts Burroughs' loathing of dualism and desire for the unity in multiplicity of the self as described by Castaneda. Once again his radical humanism is evident.

This impassioned statement, a virtual declaration of war, is followed by a pragmatic assessment of significant characters who embody different aspects of "alien" control. Bickford, Hart, and Colonel Greenfield represent three different kinds of people whom Burroughs sees as embodying wealth and political and social power in American society, demonstrating by the way how little their characteristics have changed in the past two centuries. They provide specific and concrete manifestations of the evil the Johnsons seek to eradicate.

Old Man Bickford is powerful, but rough-edged, and thrives on manipulating others. He controls primary industry ("cattle, oil, and real estate") and "is one of the poker-playing, whiskey-drinking, evil old men who run America." (*PDR* 96) He is both subtle and crude, greedy, and materialistic. Mr Hart is a newspaper tycoon, thus controlling the all-important power of the media: "The word of

course is one of the most powerful instruments of control as exercised by the newspaper" (*Job* 18). Bickford and Hart together exert a seemingly total control over the American public, embodying alien directives. Hart loathes people in general: "Other people are different from him, and he doesn't like them." (*PDR* 97) Like Carsons, Hart is obsessed with immortality, but unlike Carsons, Hart is terribly afraid of death, and cowardly in his quest for eternal life.

Bickford and Hart are united by a consuming hatred of Carsons: "On one point Hart and Bickford agree: neither of them wants to see the power of life and death in unpredictable hands." (*PDR* 97) They are provided with a perfect vehicle for their hatred in Colonel Greenfield, a figure from Carsons' boyhood: "'I don't want that boy in the house again,' said Colonel Greenfield. 'He looks like a sheep-killing dog.'" (*PDR* 24) Greenfield symbolizes Burroughs' version of the typical army officer -- hidebound by tradition and a rigidly conservative and proscriptive morality which he will defend unto death. As a result, he is chosen to lead the attack on the Wild Fruits at Fort Johnson: "In charge of the expedition is Colonel Greenfield, a self-styled Southern Gentleman, with long yellow hair and slightly demented blue eyes. He has vowed to capture and summarily hang the Wild Fruits." (*PDR* 101)

However the decisive conflict that the last chapter of Book One seems to be leading up to is abruptly sidestepped. Under attack from the cavalry led by Colonel Greenfield, the Wild Fruits commit suicide en masse, symbolically thumbing their noses at the American Flag ("From the flagpoles Old Glory, a



cloth skunk, tail raised, cleverly stitched in" (PDR 101)), and the triumvirate above:

From a gallows dangle effigies of Colonel Greenfield, Old Man Bickford, and Mr. Hart. From the crotch of each effigy juts an enormous wooden cock with a spring inside jiggling up and down as the dummies swing in the afternoon wind. (PDR 102)

The mass suicide marks the end of the first, most traditionally structured (in mythic and literary terms) cycle of the novel, and the end of the carefree days of Kim Carsons' adventures and exploits. Through their ritualized and self-inflicted deaths, the Wild Fruits liberate themselves from the framework of Time, and the restrictions of the physical body. They are free to move within an existential framework of bodily vessels and social roles, without the painful transmutation necessary in *Cities of the Red Night*. In other words, they are released from the restrictions of Time and physical aging, and are in a position to launch forth into the Space continuum. As a result, they are capable of moving back and forth within the structures of Time, and the concepts of past, present, and future cease to be meaningful. This is reflected in the seemingly haphazard progression of events and circumstances in the rest of the text. Although dates retain some significance as a means of locating Carsons within the structures and momentum of the narrative, and as points of reference in relation to other important events, their usual function, as signposts of chronological progress, is obscured. In sum, after the turning point provided by the ritualistic suicide of the Wild Fruits, Time becomes one frame of reference among others, rather than the inescapably binding context of all life.

Chapter Fifteen: From Virus to Aliens -- Book Two.

"What Hassan i Sabbah learned in Egypt was that *paradise actually exists and that it can be reached...* This is the Garden that the Old Man showed his assassins.... *It cannot be faked any more than contact with the Imam can be faked.* This is no vague eternal heaven for the righteous. This is *an actual place at the end of a very dangerous road.*" (Burroughs' italics, *PDR* 154)

The mythology of the Old West influences Carsons' choice of career, structures the narrative of his education and prowess as shootist, screens his true intentions and desires, and contextualizes his realizations of the nature of power, society, and alien control. At the end of Book One, as we have seen, the structural and thematic coherence provided by Old West myth becomes further integrated with the theoretical and projected shift from Time to Space, preparing for the theoretical and even evangelistic intensity of Book Two. In "His Father's Picture" the narratives of this mythology continue to structure Carsons' career, and to screen his activities, but the narrative as a whole takes on broader dimensions as befits the ambitious scope of its projected goals.

The intensely theoretical and even theological nature of Book Two presents problems for author and reader. The text must present and explain a significant quantity of idiosyncratic Burroughsian theory which is crucial to the sociopolitical agenda of the text and the trilogy, while at the same time sustaining readerly complicity and engagement and preserving the text's status as novel -- as literary. Rather than constitute the reader as the quiescent locus of textual performance, as would seem appropriate to Burroughs'

theoretical didacticism, the role of the reader in Book Two (and in the text as a whole) is construed as performative in nature, like the text. The reader is alternately enticed, challenged, defied, cajoled, and propelled into realizing the text's "triple dynamic" -- to *activate* the text, *sustain* its energy, and *realize* its imperatives. The first two aspects require the reader to comprehend and interpret the text on a variety of levels, as well as holistically. Once this has been achieved, the reader can fulfil the third demand -- to realize the text's political imperatives, effecting a transformation in sociopolitical structures and those of his own psyche.

In Book Two of *The Place of Dead Roads* Burroughs strives to maintain the performative nature of the reader's role through the strategy of integrating the explanation of theoretical matters with the presentation of specific and practical actions carried out by the Johnson Family (Carsons' prominence as protagonist diminishes somewhat in Book Two, as he becomes integrated into the structures of the Johnson Family). While Carsons gradually and painfully acquires the knowledge required to defeat the alien virus powers, the Johnson Family violently destroys the Mafia and other concrete manifestations of parasitic power structures (*PDR* 144-147). Book Two defies the binary opposition between narrative action (active, practical, realistic, specific) and theoretical analysis (passive, anti-realist, imprecise); the boundary between them is blurred by the frequently fantastic and imagistic nature of the text's specific action, and the concrete, rigorously rational presentation of Burroughsian theory. Once again,

Burroughs refuses hierarchy and privilege by inverting expectations and appearances.

The explanatory process begins with the complex problem of the place of death in a mythic schema defined by the two poles of Time and Space. This problem is tackled in relation to the peripheral yet significant character Joe the Dead, whom Carsons has saved from the brink of death:

Joe the Dead was saved from death by morphine, and morphine remained the only thing holding him to life. It was as if Joe's entire body, his being, had been amputated and reduced to a receptacle for pain. ...He had constructed and installed an artificial nose... with a range of several hundred yards. Not only was his sense of smell acute, it was also selective. He could smell smells that no one else had ever dreamed, and these smells had a logic, a meaning, a language. He could smell death on others, and could predict the time and manner of death. Death casts many shadows, and they all have their special smells.

Joe had indeed brought back strange powers and knowledge from the grave, but without the one thing he had not brought back, his knowledge was of little use.

Of course, Kim thought. When you save someone's life, you cheat Death, and he has to even the score. Kim was aware of the danger from Joe the Dead, but he chose to ignore it. (PDR 118)

This passage establishes the marginality as well as the symbolic significance of Joe the Dead, which comes to epiphanic fruition in *The Western Lands*. Joe symbolizes Carsons' quest to cheat death, to achieve immortality, as well as his (admittedly limited) ability to do so. Joe's predicament also reveals Carsons' perceptions of the nature of death, perceptions which the narrative seems to endorse. Death is embodied in the text as a figure --- the word itself becomes the name, "Death." Personified as such, Death can be "cheated," as in Carsons' rescue of Joe the Dead. However, Death has marked Joe indelibly, as we see in his very name, as well as his mystical powers. Death is a powerful figure in

Burroughs' personal mythology, one who can be cheated, temporarily and conditionally, but never escaped. Joe the Dead becomes Carsons' nemesis, embodying the symbolic forces of Death (and hence stasis) which both text and protagonist strive resolutely to defeat.<sup>1</sup> The Manichaeian, absolute, nature of this struggle is also revealed in the passage above -- it is a zero-sum game. Thus absolute victory must be possible, even if incredibly difficult and arduous to achieve. Having revealed the configuration of death in his mythology, Burroughs proceeds to elaborate upon the images of the "evil" powers he posits:

He [Doc White] was one of the first to see the virus as an alien life form, highly intelligent from its virus point of view. ("Gentlemen, the human cell can only divide and reproduce itself fifty thousand times. This is known as the Hayflick Limit. But a virus can do it any number of times. The virus is immune to the deadly factor of repetition. Your virus is never bored.") (PDR 123)

The redefinition of the image describing the forces controlling society and humanity, from virus to alien, marks an important turning point in *The Place of Dead Roads*. There is a shift from the symbols and concepts of *Cities of the Red Night* to those of *The Place of Dead Roads*, marking the mythopoeic progress of the trilogy.

In *Cities of the Red Night*, the battleground was the past, history, and the goal of both sides (rebels and virus powers) was to seize or maintain control of the "prerecordings" which determine and map out humanity's destiny, as well as the destiny of each individual. The virus was portrayed as dominating mankind from within, corrupting the most fundamental structures of the psyche and shattering man's image of himself. Thus the possibility of defeating the virus

was predicated on the grounds of constant bodily transmutation, and revealing and analyzing basic structures of consciousness, as well as liberating one's thinking sufficiently to recognize the symbolic manifestations of the virus -- in and through the structures of language, which the virus has corrupted. For the rebels of *Cities of the Red Night*, language is the tool of the enemy, one which they must seek to recover by "rewriting" history and by fracturing the typical structures of narration and communication.

In *The Place of Dead Roads*, and as seen in the passage above, the powers controlling mankind are still inscribed metaphorically as "virus." However, they have a significant new dimension -- they are "alien," that is, they come from Space. Space is where Kim Carsons and the Johnson Family urgently want and need to be, and this provides a crucial motive for the aliens' attempts to destroy them. The aliens are increasingly depicted as "vampiric" particularly in their manipulation of particular characters, such as Greenfield, Hart, and Bickford.<sup>2</sup>

Although the concept of "virus" remains crucial, it is altered by its inscription in the alien realms of space, both in an extraterrestrial sense ("outer space") and in the context of a mythical "space," representing total freedom from control and ultimately even from the body. The spatial emphasis of *The Place of Dead Roads*, with its concentration on particular locations (Fort Johnson, Alamut) is iterated here. Mythopoeia is redefined as the desire and need to create or locate a mythical space where ultimate and utopian goals can be realized. It seems that Burroughs has rejected the

possibility of creating an utopia within the dystopian contemporary world (as *Cities of the Red Night* strove to do), and now seeks an entirely different context -- defined, in a multitude of ways, by the concept of "space." All this is reflected in the transformation of "virus" powers into "alien vampires," inscribed as fundamentally evil (in a Manichaeian sense) as a virus cannot be.

The shift in the metaphorical embodiment of the forces opposing Kim Carsons and the Johnson Family is complemented, in the fifth chapter of Book Two, by a precise description of the human "vessels" who are particularly suited to function as unwitting agents of the aliens, or carriers of the virus:

We have observed that most of the trouble in this world is caused by ten to twenty percent of folks who can't mind their own business because they *have* no business of their own to mind any more than a smallpox virus. Now your virus is an obligate cellular parasite, and my contention is that what we call evil is quite literally a virus parasite occupying a certain area which we may term the RIGHT center. The mark of a basic shit is that he has to be *right*. And right here we must make a diagnostic distinction between a hard-core virus-occupied shit and a plain ordinary mean no-good son of bitch....

Victimless crimes are the lifeline of the RIGHT virus.... If the right to mind one's own business is recognized, the whole shit position is untenable and Hell hath no more vociferous fury than an endangered parasite. (Burroughs' italics, *PDR* 140-141)

Burroughs personal loathing for this kind of person is expressed violently and frequently throughout his work, as well as in the intensely prejudicial name given to this group of people -- "shits." The text's seeming compassion for man as victim of the virus/alien powers is undercut here, by the revelation of Burroughs' persistent elitism. The character who expresses the views in the passage above, presumably Kim Carsons, proposes a typically elitist solution to the problem

he has diagnosed: "We seek a Total Solution to the Shit Problem: Slaughter the shits of the world like cows with the aftosa." (*PDR* 141) This "Total Solution," redolent of the Nazis' Final Solution, is explained thus:

The Johnsons kill to rid the spaceship Earth of malefactors who are sabotaging our space program. It's like you see somebody knocking holes in the bottom of the lifeboat and shitting in the water supply. (*PDR* 150)

This attempt at justification, through the invocation of the right to self-defence or self-preservation, has only limited success in softening the shock of Burroughs' deep-rooted and callous elitism, as expressed in the previous passages.

Burroughs is generally careful to condition and qualify his elitism, for example, confining it to specific areas such as that of politics and government: "I'm an elitist. I believe in government by those able to govern. There are very few people who are good at anything..." (*AM* 121-122) Although I would not deny Burroughs' strong autocratic tendencies, I see his elitism as a result of his cynicism concerning the current state of mankind. This cynicism is underpinned by a fundamental, though conditional, belief in the redeemability of mankind. Burroughs puts the impasse between his elitism and his radical humanism to productive use as yet another space -- textual and ideological -- in which the vampiric aliens come to symbolically represent, as well as bear responsibility for, the plight of contemporary man. Although Burroughs can be merciless and savage in his social criticism (for example, the "shits"), ultimately his theorizing regarding the aliens/virus lets mankind off the hook.

As we have just seen, the explanatory function of Book Two generates productive discourse on a divergent variety of



topics. The most important chapter of this section, in terms of provoking thought and stating key theoretical positions, is the seventh, in which the evangelistic or theological drive of the novel finds a central image in the figure of Hassan i Sabbah.

Kim studies the scant sources on Hassan i Sabbah, the Old Man of the Mountain. This man is the only spiritual leader who has anything to say to the Johnsons who is not a sold-out P.R. man for the Slave Gods. Slave Gods need slaves like a junky needs junk. Only by stunting and degrading the human host can they maintain their disgusting position. Above all they must keep the Johnsons out of space. No one must ever be allowed to leave *their* planet. (Burroughs' italics, *PDR* 153)

The study of Hassan i Sabbah contributes greatly to Kim Carsons' construction of an overall scheme of alien control. The Christian church in particular, and organized religion in general, have already been specifically defined as enemies of the Johnsons and their quest. In the passage above, Carsons finds a "spiritual leader" who focuses the anti-established religion attitude of the text, making it specific and concrete. Hassan i Sabbah is not only an alternative spiritual leader to the ones Carsons despises, as well as one who has something of value to offer the Johnsons, but also a specific and symbolic figure -- a locus around which Carsons and the Johnson Family can begin to construct a coherent strategy to defeat the vampiric alien powers. This process becomes even more central in *The Western Lands*, where Hassan i Sabbah steps down from his iconic pedestal to become a protagonist, mortal and vulnerable.

Burroughs constructs his own mythic version of Hassan i Sabbah. According to *The Place of Dead Roads*, Hassan was the leader of the Ishmaelite sect, and based himself and his

followers, whom he trained as elite and expert assassins, in the fortress of Alamut in northern Iran. His power over his followers was based on "self-evident spiritual truth." (PDR 154) The crucial secret of his power was learned during exile in Egypt:

What Hassan i Sabbah learned in Egypt was that *paradise actually exists and that it can be reached*. The Egyptians called it the Western Lands. This is the Garden that the Old Man showed his assassins.... *It cannot be faked any more than contact with the Imam can be faked*. This is no vague eternal heaven for the righteous. This is an *actual place at the end of a very dangerous road*. (Burroughs' italics, PDR 154)

At this point Burroughs' theories regarding the origin and basis of organized religion coalesce with his ideas about the alien forces manipulating and suppressing humanity, to form an integrated and syncretic theology. The narrative takes on an evangelistic tone: a seemingly rational analysis of Christian doctrine is combined with an ecstatic sense of revealing an irresistible truth and thereby converting the unbeliever.<sup>3</sup> The intensity of this simultaneous explanation and revelation is such that the text's coherent theology can be expressed in a few passages drawn from two pages of this chapter:

The Garden of Eden was a space station, from which we were banished to the surface of the planet to live by the sweat of mortal brows in a constant losing fight with gravity. But banished by whom? An asshole God who calls himself Jehovah or whatever. Only one spiritual leader found this out, and found a key to a garden... for once you have the key there are not just one garden but many gardens, an infinite number.

He found the key in Egypt. But the Egyptians didn't have a key. The Gods held all their keys and admitted only favored mortals. And favored why? Because they served as energy conduits to maintain the station. They were in fact trained vampires put out on mummy leads to suck the energy the space station requires, because the station, from time immemorial, is rooted in time and supplied by time. (PDR 154)

The integrative impetus of this passage is astounding, as

metaphor and symbol, concept and theory, myth and image, theology and ideology come together to form a syncretic and holistic totality. Egyptian myth is integrated with the legend of Hassan i Sabbah and Burroughs' idiosyncratic interpretation of creation myth to form a coherent theology, or even cosmology, which is subsequently brought up to date in a concise and authoritative manner:

To what extent has the situation changed? Not much. The mummy has been replaced by a virus culture, inserted into suitable human hosts. The Virus 23 serves exactly the same function as a mummy: an energy conduit to keep the ranch going and the human cattle out there on the range getting fat and ready.... (PDR 155)

This passage marks the resurgence of Old West mythology, with the metaphorical description of the Earth as a "ranch" and human victims as "cattle." This mythological context, structured by the realization of the complete picture of human subjugation and repression, is used further to structure the figure of Hassan i Sabbah as legendary and mythical "outlaw:"

The Old Man was a renegade. His assassins struck down the foremen and overseers who manage the Big Ranch. And every time they did this, they grabbed a key. So the Old Man set up his own station, the Garden of Alamut. (PDR 155)

The extended Western theme structures the text's entire scheme of the system controlling and exploiting mankind. This American mythology becomes a source of metaphoric structure as well as narrative form. The mass of humanity are the cattle, indoctrinated and controlled by Christianity and conventional morality, as well as by the symbolic fences of the Big Ranch. Those in league with the alien controllers, especially Hart and Bickford, are the foremen, and Hassan i Sabbah and his followers are an elite outlaw community — outlaws because of their knowledge of, and vehement opposition to, the system.

As such, the Ishmaelites become the ideal model for the Johnson Family, who are in turn presented to the reader, in the preface, as a social model.

As with the secret city of Waghdas, knowledge, of a specific and subversive nature, is both the motive for becoming an outlaw and the means of attacking the system which has outlawed them. For Burroughs, knowledge is both sacred and profane --- it has a powerful and inviolable integrity of its own, yet it can be used to discredit and destroy belief and value systems. Indeed, Burroughs posits the right to know as fundamental and universal:

*All knowledge, all discoveries belong to everybody.... A world-wide monopoly of knowledge and discoveries for counter revolutionary purpose is the basic issue. ...All knowledge, all discoveries belong to you by right. It is time to demand what belongs to you. (Burroughs' italics, Job 74-75)*

The call to knowledge, as formulated by Burroughs, is a call to power and to responsibility for one's own existence. Burroughs' version of Hassan i Sabbah enacts fully the role of outlaw as expanded and redefined by the text. He uses homosexuality to subvert and circumvent the system of control and exploitation:

The Old Man found a way to bypass the mummy route. Present-day immortalists have not done so. ...The Old Man's route is sex between males. Sex forms the matrix of a dualistic and therefore solid and real universe. It is possible to resolve the dualistic conflict in a sex act, where dualism need not exist. (PDR 155)

Thus Hassan i Sabbah symbolically resolves the problem of dualism, one of Burroughs' greatest obsessions, through the integration of the instinctive force of sex with the power of subversive knowledge. He not only integrates, but bypasses altogether implicit divisions. Hence Hassan i Sabbah comes to

represent the ultimate achievement of syncretism -- the conquest of dualism.

Despite the integrative power of the symbolic figure of Hassan i Sabbah, he is portrayed on yet another level as grappling with the practical problems associated with the liberation from Time in what is still a profoundly dualistic universe:

"Nothing is true. Everything is permitted." Last words of Hassan i Sabbah. And what is the truest thing to a human mark? Birth and Death. The Old Man showed his assassins freedom from rebirth and death. He created actual beings, designed for space travel. (*PDR* 156)

The "last words of Hassan i Sabbah," as recorded above, come to have an epigrammatic, meta-textual function for Burroughs. They signify the release of Hassan's followers, past and present, from all conventional dogma and ethics. If nothing is true, the ideological basis of society, structured around certain assumptions considered to be true, is effectively destroyed. If everything is permitted, the concepts of taboos and moral compulsions, of good and bad and right and wrong, are suddenly irrelevant and meaningless. The resultant world is anarchic and chaotic, in desperate need of a political structure, an explanatory theology, and a guiding morality, as well as a mythology to make sense of reality. It is here that Burroughs steps in to fill the void he has created, with his idiosyncratic mythopoeia.

Ultimately, however, this ecstatic revelation of irresistible and mythical truth must be put into some kind of narrative context. The context in this case is a multi-dimensional one -- that of Kim Carsons' quest to achieve the transformation from existence in Time to existence in

Space. In the text as a whole, this quest leads Carsons to three significant epiphanic moments, and these three points are vital to its theoretical structure. Each of them represents the solution to a particular problem or obstacle impeding the Time-Space transfer, and taken as a whole they provide Carsons and the Johnson Family with the powerful and dangerous knowledge they need to break free from Time. As we have seen, the knowledge acquired concerns the entire structure, mode of operation, and theoretical basis of the alien-controlled system of human societal behaviour. Kim Carsons' gradual unearthing of this knowledge, and construction of a holistic schema, structures the narrative in Books Two and Three of *The Place of Dead Roads*, largely replacing the traditional Western mythic structures of Book One on an overt level. I have just examined the first, and most powerful, epiphanic moment of Kim Carsons' quest. The others will be discussed in the next chapter, along with the final integrative movement of the text.

Chapter Sixteen: From the Map to the Garden -- Book Three.

"The shift from the map to the garden... is a shift from one kind of schizophrenia to another, from an insane sanity to a sane insanity, from the polarization of aspects of experience to their unity."  
(Vernon xiii)

Book Three of *The Place of Dead Roads* is concerned primarily with language and textuality. Its title, "Quién Es?", indicates a relationship with Kim Carsons' ghostwritten autobiography of the same name, and recalls the importance of Old West myth by invoking the legend of Billy the Kid. The explanatory processes of Book Two are continued in Book Three -- revealing its major structural function as synthesis. That is, Book Three integrates the mythic narratives of Book One of the theological explanations of Book Two into a unified whole. The stress on language and textuality finally enables the integration of myth -- with its intensification of readerly complicity through insistence on faith and belief -- and literature -- with its multitude of rhetorical and narrative strategies and intellectual and moral freedom. This chapter will demonstrate the integrative power of Book Three, exemplified in the completion of Carsons' quest to construct and true and complete schema of power, and the symbolic significance of *The Place of Dead Roads* as spatial context.

The integrative process actually begins in the last chapter of Book Two, where the metaphor of the "master film" or "prerecordings" re-emerges, erupting into the narrative:

"What the fuck happened?" the Director bellows.  
The technician shrugs.... "Old gangster film stock is worn right down to the celluloid. ...I can do a chewing-gum patch... turn the glass into rain...."  
"Well how about a hurricane blowing glass splinters down the street?"  
"A hurricane? Jesus fucking Christ. ...Look, Boss,

*there is just so much energy... so much IT... You use too much over there, you don't have enough over here.... We're overdrawn, Boss.... Right now we don't have enough IT to fry an elderly woman in a rooming-house fire...."*

*"Well we'll have to start faking it."*

*"All right, Boss...anything you say...."*

*He turns to a switchboard muttering: "So we start faking it... using up film stock that isn't being renewed.... You take a real disaster and you get a pig of IT. You can underwrite the next one. But if the first one is a fake you got nothing. You can't underwrite. You start borrowing everything in sight.... Then the bottom falls out and you start springing leaks in the Master Film...like this Carsons thing...Boss wants to hit him. I film it. Carsons and his boys kill the hit men...and every time he slides out from under, he cuts the film.... (Burroughs' italics, PDR 159)*

The master film becomes an all-embracing image of the way in which the alien controllers construct an appearance or notion of "reality" to preserve the ignorance of their human victims. The truth of their condition is concealed from humanity by a film, in two senses of the word: there is not only a film over man's eyes which prevents him from seeing the truth, but the controllers project their version of the truth, of reality, as a "Master Film." The Director and Technician are lackeys of the controllers, patching together and reconstructing the necessary prerecordings. The fact that they have to do this, in tandem with the lack of "IT" to provide veracity and the semblance of life, reveals the increasing success of Carsons and the Johnsons. The Johnsons are cutting and damaging the Master Film incessantly, from the first chapter where Carsons shoots holes in the backdrop (PDR 17). The attempted destruction of the Master Film reflects the totality of Kim Carsons' efforts to reveal and eradicate what he sees as false perceptions of reality and the nature of society, in an effort to enable mankind, in the individual guise of the reader, to perceive the true conditions of his existence and hence to



enact significant changes in them.

The metaphor of the film, reasserted so powerfully here, is used to structure Carsons' further realizations in the third chapter of Book Three. He argues that the "present-day controllers" (*PDR* 193) have put an end to human evolution and mutation because they are incapable of creation, and because the current human artifact is ideal for their vampiric and predatory needs. Hence they sabotage "any meaningful space program" (*PDR* 194) like that of the Johnsons, which entails evolutionary progress and fundamental biological alterations. From this point, Carsons speculates about the nature of the current controllers:

To put it country simple: the Christian God exists. He *is not the Creator*. He stole someone else's work after the manner of his parasitic species. He steals and curses the source. The Christian God, and that goes for Allah, is a self-seeking asshole planning to cross us all up. Like all colonists he despises those he exploits. To him we are nothing but escape energy. He needs our energy to escape because he has none of his own. (Burroughs' italics, *PDR* 194)

God is represented as a colonist, through a resonant image of empire and exploitation, redolent of "the Island" in *The Naked Lunch*.

Carsons' theories move from this (re)construction of the control hierarchy into an explanation of how the system of control and exploitation actually works, using the structuring metaphor of the film, which, as we have seen, conceals the "truth" in two senses. This passage also clarifies the reasons why the Johnsons' space program is opposed so violently:

See human history as a vast film spread out in front of you. Take a segment of film:

This is a time segment. You can run it backward and forward, you can speed it up, slow it down, you can

randomize it do anything you want with your film. You are God for that film segment. So "God," then, has precisely *that* power with the human film.

The only thing not prerecorded in a prerecorded universe is the prerecordings themselves: the master film. The unforgivable sin is to tamper with the prerecordings. Exactly what Kim is doing. (Burroughs' italics, *PDR* 194)

God becomes the Director, manipulating a film which he has not created and which always already exists. The merging of Christian symbolism with the film metaphor characterizes Carsons' actions as "the unforgivable sin." The progressively clear (re)construction of the system of control, and the symbolic embodiment of vague and disembodied concepts in specific and concrete roles, reveal the clarity and certainty of Carsons and the Johnson Family's position in opposition to the forces gradually emerging from mysteries of reverence and indoctrination and the misleading "master film." This process allows Carsons to contextualize further the Manichaeian struggle of which he is a part:

So our local war revolves around a basically simple situation: a conflict between those who must go into space or die and those who will die if we go. They need us for their film. They have no other existence. And as soon as anyone goes into space the film is irreparably damaged. One hole is all it takes....

Castaneda would describe it as a sudden eruption of the Nagual, the unknown and unpredictable, into the Tonal, which is the totality of prerecorded film. This violates the most basic laws of a predictable control-oriented universe. Introduce one unforeseen and therefore unforeseeable factor and the whole structure collapses like a house of cards. (*PDR* 195)

Carsons reduces the nature of the control system and the key to its defeat to the simplest possible denominators, an act made possible by the integrative focus of Book Three.

Up to this point, Carsons' quest has been a quest for origins, for information relating to the sources of systems of belief and control. The quest for origins continues with his

search for the origins of human speech, but he is no longer in search of strategic information for the purpose of confounding his enemies. Instead, the search for origins becomes interlocked with a search for endings, with the collecting of famous figures' last words, and the search for the Place of Dead Roads itself, connecting with the questing movement of the narrative toward an appropriate ending or closure.

The quest for origins and endings is structured by language -- Carsons is looking specifically for the beginnings of human speech and collecting famous last words. The nature of this quest not only symbolizes the whole of the Johnson Family effort to defeat the alien controllers, but also illustrates the inescapable nature of language (and text) as medium. Burroughs sees the structures of language as fundamentally corrupted by their co-optation by the "aliens." Carsons' search enacts a basic desire to rehabilitate the structures of language, looking for sources and endpoints in an attempt to achieve a fuller understanding, as well as in the hope of finding some kind of original purity.

Carsons' quest to find the origins of human speech begins simply enough as a mission for the Linguistic Institute:

"As you may have gathered, your mission is to discover more about the nature and function of words.... That is why you have been selected. You are a writer who can not only gather the information we are seeking but transcribe it as well...."

The doctor got up and pointed to a map.... "Now in this area, the highlands of Yemen, there are a few remote valleys where the original link between ape and man that led to speech may still survive. These beings have sex by talking in each other's throats." (PDR 186-187)

The subversive nature of Carsons' role as a seeker of truth and knowledge is emphasized in this cycle of the novel. The latent power of such discoveries as that he seeks here is made

clear in the fifth chapter, along with its practical implications for the Manichaeian struggle:

"The theory is when flying saucers or whatever kind of spacecraft land I'll be able to communicate with them through a breakdown of communication units...."

"Maybe they've already landed in the human brain and nervous system," Kim says.

The doctor nods.... "Same problem.... You've got an alien inside you, how do you communicate? Find out what he wants... make him leave.... You have to find him first, and you find him by inference units... study of the larynx people could give us a vital clue... a way to descend into our own minds and confront the intruder on what he is trying to make his home ground." (PDR 218-219)

The powerful political implications of knowledge in general, and knowledge concerning the origins and true nature of structures such as language in particular, are apparent here. Before Carsons descends into the valley of the primitive "smouners," the high stakes at risk are stressed, adding an air of tension and expectation to the narrative.

What Carsons finds in the valley is truly horrible: "And now they hear it.... a thick slimy whisper that sticks to them like rotten garbage... an ancient evil crooning sound that stirs and twists in their throats...." (PDR 223) Carsons is revulsed, and keen to depart. Later, he realizes the full significance of what he has witnessed.

"In the beginning of time was a deed so foul that we have been fleeing it ever since, down the months and down the days, down the labyrinth of the years... hiding behind a million empty masks to cover a bottomless terror.

...Building cities, waging wars, playing games, anything to keep us from seeing the horror of our origins...."

"...We saw the origins of human speech, the beginning and end of the word. We saw the start of a plague that will rage through cities of the world like a topping forest fire." (PDR 227)

This plague, the "Talk Sickness," makes possible the rehabilitation of language -- its recovery from alienation and corruption -- precisely by unleashing, and hence making

visible, the full horror of its hidden origins. "Original sin" takes on a new meaning, representing the Words's fall into fleshly corruption. Redemption finally becomes possible, as Burroughs turns the destructive power of language upon itself to reveal the alien source of its corruption and root it out. Burroughs moves from revelation to redemption, through an act of epiphanic violence. Knowledge is the key to acquiring freedom and release, a means of focusing and wielding power. All secrets are revealed, all taboos are broken, and Hassan i Sabbah's maxim -- "Nothing is true, everything is permitted" -- becomes the only "truth."

Once Carsons' search for origins is completed in this way, his quest changes direction, with the search for endings becoming primary. The two are synthesized in "the beginning and end of the word." Kim's painfully acquired knowledge of the origins of speech is complemented by his collection of famous people's last words: "Kim collected last words, all he could get his hands on. He knew these words were pieces in a vast jigsaw puzzle. Big Picture he called it...." (PDR 184) The "Big Picture" symbolizes Carsons' holistic vision, and the synthesis he has always striven for. After time spent in conflict with the Venusians, once again revealing and embodying alien control, Carsons turns his attention to the quest for the Place of Dead Roads.

The guide traces the area on the map with his finger....  
 "The Place of Dead Roads, *señor*. This does not mean roads that are no longer used, roads that are overgrown, it means roads that are *dead*. You comprehend the difference?"

"And how can this area be reached?"

The guide shrugged. "It is usual to start in a City of Dead Streets.... And where is this city? In every city are dead streets...." (Burroughs' italics, PDR 248)

Carsons begins travelling leisurely down a slow, vast river. From this point onward, the narrative begins to fold in on itself, increasing rapidly in tempo as the cycle of events becomes more and more compacted. Images and events from the entire novel are echoed or repeated in an increasingly condensed fashion. Within this shrinking "whirlpool" structure, the progression toward the Place of Dead Roads is a constant anchoring thread. Carsons travels through fetid and stagnant landscapes until he comes to a deserted pier: "We step ashore... through the broken walls and weeds of a deserted garden... dilapidated arches... A boy, eyes clotted with dreams, fills his water jug from a stagnant well." (PDR 251)

The nature of the Place of Dead Roads remains something of an enigma. The partial explanation given in the narrative shortly before it is reached serves to further intensify the problem:

"And what is a dead road? Well, *señor*, somebody you used to meet, *uno amigo tal vez*...."

Remember a red brick house on Jane Street? Your breath quickens as you mount the worn red-carpeted stairs.... The road to 4 calle Larachi, Tangier, or 24 Arundle Terrace in London? So many dead roads you will never use again....

The guide points to a map of South America. "Here, *señor*... is the Place of Dead Roads. (PDR 250)

The full significance of the Place of Dead Roads remains elusive. It is a catalytic point of some kind, both a beginning and an end. It is the body -- a static and outmoded form or site of existence, one of the "dead roads you will never use again." It is also a place where "roads," representing the schizophrenic "map" function of contemporary Western culture (see chapters on *The Naked Lunch*), become

irrelevant, especially once bodily existence is transcended. The "map" with its "roads" is replaced in the narrative by the "garden" Vernon posits as the ideal alternative structure -- Kim arrives in "a deserted garden," and Hassan i Sabbah creates a garden which is a form of paradise (*PDR* 154). The theoretical implications of this shift are significant, as Vernon argues that:

The garden is the principle of unity, or integration, rather than mergence. Mergence is brought about when integration is separated from separation, when integration is thought of in terms of map structures and made one of a pair of mutually exclusive polar opposites, mergence and separation. But the true sense of integration unites itself with its opposite, integrates mergence and separation, which is the same as saying that the true sense of the garden unites the garden and the map, in a condition previous to the separation of these two. ...When mergence and separation are united... they are so much themselves as to be each other, are totally open to each other while being themselves; hence their chief feature is freedom, liberation. (111)

The garden, symbol of integration, of unity in multiplicity and the freedom these concepts represent, is Burroughs' ultimate -- and for the first time explicit -- goal. *The Place of Dead Roads* externalizes the schizophrenia of Western culture, through its emphasis on space, textual and extraterrestrial, and its drive to embody materially nebulous and abstract forces of control. The Place of Dead Roads is the climactic site of this process, representing a garden in which Time and Space are juxtaposed, if not integrated.

Once Carsons has reached the Place of Dead Roads, the telescoping of the narrative begins in earnest: "As Kim moves back in time he leaves a wake of disasters behind him, which is only logical since he is retracing his space in time, leaving a time vacuum behind him." (*PDR* 252) He becomes the Traveler, changing location, timeframe, and identity rapidly

and incessantly. He moves through all the cyclic structures of the novel, through the mythic structures and events invoked and created, in and out of the film; gradually moving westward, and returning to the western origins of the text.

*Drang nach Westen*: The drag to the West. When the Traveler turns west, time travel ceases to be travel and becomes instead an inexorable suction, pulling everything into a black hole. Light itself cannot escape from this compacted gravity, time so dense, reality so concentrated, that it ceases to be time and becomes a singularity, where all physical laws are no longer valid. From such licence there is no escape.... (PDR 263)

There is an urgency about moving westward -- or stepping westward, isn't it? A wildish destiny? One is definitely a jump or a tick ahead of something... the Blackout... the countdown... or the sheer, shining color of police? Perhaps you have just seen the same Stranger too many times, and suddenly it is time to be up and gone. (PDR 264)

Once the westward movement is completed, Carsons is back at the point at which the novel begins: "...Kim remembers the ambush. Time to settle that score." (266) The collapsing and enfolding of the text enables him to reach a point where Time is so "dense" and "reality so concentrated" that Space is the only dimension.

Once again the text returns to space as concept and context. I will conclude this chapter by considering some of the images, concepts, and particular constructions of "space" in *The Place of Dead Roads* as a whole.

The mythology of the American West, which provides significant structures, themes, and images in the text, has a particular concept of "space" at its core. A large part of the romanticized attraction of the West was the notion of enormous expanses of space, in the sense of uninhabited (by white men at any rate) land, in which an individual could



raise cattle, grow crops, and ultimately become prosperous, and, importantly, an owner of property. This drive is necessarily self-defeating, as it means that the space of land on which the concept of the West is based is gradually taken up, and is no longer available (and indeed the "closing of the frontier" around 1900 was a significant event, socially, politically, and culturally).

However, the concept of space in the mythology of the Old West was not merely centred around land and its potential availability. It also evoked possibilities of solitude and individualism -- space for a man to get away from society, family, and even moral conventions to a certain extent, to be alone, to be himself. Thus the American West offered a kind of "inner space" as well, in which a man could spend time alone, come to terms with his personality and individuality, and wholeheartedly pursue his instincts and desires (as long as he did not cross the implicit moral boundaries which persisted nevertheless). An important part of this self-examination and development was the opportunity to test one's strength and resourcefulness against a harsh environment -- a space in which one could confront and perhaps defeat "nature," both human and environmental.

Slotkin argues that the Western mythic hero's actions typically "demonstrate his peculiar combination of love for the wild country and the urge to destroy, digest, and remake it in his own image. ...He is simultaneously a passionate devotee and lover of the wilderness... [and] a professional killer, a solitary acolyte perpetually sacrificing and consuming his god." (426) This unique conflict informs and

defines Kim Carsons' role in Book One of *The Place of Dead Roads*. He reveres the wilderness, yet is obsessed with creating a social order within it, in the form of the Johnson Family. Yet his desire to become a shootist is motivated by romantic idealism as much as hidden agendas, and the ideal of a space away from, if not completely free of, conventional society and its moral standards. It is in this sense that the Western setting becomes significant to the Time-Space progression, and Hassan i Sabbah's legendary Alamut becomes inscribed in the American West as Fort Johnson.

As the text progresses concepts and images of space, drawn from American myth, integrate with the desires and goals of Burroughs and the central characters. This syncretic process is complemented by the specifically textual practice of opening up "spaces" in which crucial readerly, authorial, and textual operations can occur. This practice commences with the preface, in which the gap opened up between conventional middle-class values and Burroughs' anti-bourgeois elitism provides a locus for a subtextual discourse on the seemingly unavoidable nature of dualism and Burroughs' desire for syncretism. This practice continues throughout the text. Aporias and binary oppositions are located and drawn out, establishing spaces in which the reader and author can inscribe their own roles and positions, as well as acting as sites of textual operation and dialectical ambiguity. Once the process of "spatializing," or locating spaces within the text begins, it becomes a primary and dynamic structural force. Burroughs finally and successfully achieves his goal of putting the concealed spaces of binarism to productive, and

subversive, use.

The image of "space" is a useful and valuable one in relation to the images and concepts the text evokes, as well as in its conceptualization and construction of itself as text. Space, in an extraterrestrial sense, also comes to be the ultimate goal of the text's political agenda. After the implicit failure of the attempt to defeat and eliminate the "virus" in *Cities of the Red Night*, this vital enemy comes to be metaphorically embodied as "vampire" and "alien" in *The Place of Dead Roads* --- the virus is still an important metaphor, but it becomes unclear whether the alien controllers are basically viral in nature, or if the virus is the central metaphor for their mode of operation. Through a series of epiphanic and necessarily symbolic revelations, Carsons comes to realize that the only way to defeat the "aliens" is to escape from Time, which he perceives as the central construct in their scheme of control and repression, one which is defined by the sequentiality of the "Master Film," imposing frame after frame. A spatial context, in the sense of "outer space" as well as freedom from chronological constraints, becomes the only ideologically sound alternative. Ultimately, the text projects the ideal of overcoming even this Time-Space binary, through the vague possibility of moving freely in both Time and Space. It is a liberation from contexts of all kinds which is ultimately implied -- represented by Vernon's "garden."

Many of these aspects of "space" as concept, mythic structure, and symbol are synthesized in the concept of the Western Lands, which Burroughs co-opts from Ancient Egyptian

mythology and alters to suit his purposes. According to Burroughs' version of this myth, the Western Lands is where the existence of the soul continues "after" death for all eternity, provided the mummified body remains intact in the world left behind. Burroughs divorces this idea of immortality from the need for the preservation of the body, turning away from materiality and "objectness", and projects the Western Lands as both a specific region which, like the "gardens" of Hassan i Sabbah, can be reached, and as a paradigm of holism. The Western Lands come to represent the synthesis of the mythology of the American West with Egyptian myth, through the insistence on a mythical "West" in both as well as certain conceptual similarities. Carsons' scheme of alien control posits the Western Lands as corrupted and taken over by the aliens, and one of the Johnson Family goals is to conquer and reclaim it.

There is a paradox at the heart of Burroughs' concept of the Western Lands in *The Place of Dead Roads*. The Western Lands represent the site of immortality, of eternal life for Kim Carsons and the Johnson Family, yet they also symbolize the possibility of escaping Time and therefore escaping alien control as well. Thus, for Burroughs, the Western Lands simultaneously represent temporality and escape from temporality --- they are inscribed metaphorically in the text as the potential for eternal life, and as a spatialized context of existence in which immortality as such becomes irrelevant. This paradox remains unresolved and dynamic in the context of *The Place of Dead Roads*, becoming the subject of the final text in the trilogy, *The Western Lands*. Yet the

paradox also reflects Vernon's model of integration in the "garden" -- an integration which is able to incorporate separation and merge, temporality and incorporeality.

"Space" is the overriding thematic concern, structuring symbol, and projected ideal of *The Place of Dead Roads*. It links the dual imperatives of Kim Carsons' quest and the Time-Space progression, and, through its very pervasiveness, exerts a syncretizing and integrative force in and on the text as a whole. Textually, intertextually, and meta-textually, on levels of metaphor and theory, symbol and ideology, myth and theology, "space" is at the centre and the boundaries of *The Place of Dead Roads*, permeating both the text itself and interpretation of it. It is contextualized by Burroughs' goal of unity and (re)integration -- map space is replaced by the space of the garden -- as evoked in the epigraph to this chapter. The epiphanic violence that Burroughs unleashes enables the reader to see the forces oppressing him, by embodying them -- as language, text, virus, parasite, alien vampire -- and thus rendering them visible, and profoundly vulnerable.

IV. Death And Closure: *The Western Lands.*

In passing from *The Place of Dead Roads* to *The Western Lands* we move from action to passivity, from life to death. The central drive of *The Western Lands* is towards recognition, catharsis, and resignation. Adventure is relegated to the background, while the scrutiny and exploration of interior structures of reality and truth comes to the fore. The struggle to regain control of one's self shifts from the politics of *Cities of the Red Night* and *The Place of Dead Roads* to "so-called natural laws of the universe" (see epigraph to Chapter Seventeen). The text is organized around a recognition of political failure, and an acceptance of defeat -- forces that are only implied in the rest of the trilogy. Yet, through its myriad processes, *The Western Lands* searches for and finally achieves not only acceptance and resignation, but also a degree of serenity, highlighting the necessity to take joy in victories on the smallest scale.

In *The Western Lands* the trilogy turns in on itself. Its relentless drive to extend and even break the bounds of textuality and narrative is refocused in a withdrawal deep within the bounds of the writer's self. Appropriately, this is the most deeply personal text in the trilogy. In it, Burroughs draws a sharply defined, harshly realistic portrait of himself as both writer and old man. He is driven to retreat from the ideological excesses of earlier texts, and to construct a authorial persona which reaches his still stringent standards of truth and openness. In so doing he withdraws from not only the practice and theory, but also from the very idea of writing, detaching himself from the imperative to keep writing, while continuing to define himself

as writer. *The Western Lands* is Burroughs' last published work to date, and after its completion he renounced writing as such for other artistic forms, specifically painting: "Over the past few years William Burroughs has devoted much of his time to creating visual works and he claims to have given up writing altogether." (Renton 93)

In *The Western Lands*, we not only see Burroughs coming to terms with his age and his effective renunciation of writing, but also projecting and exploring his own death. This process is primary and instinctual, structured by the Ancient Egyptian myths concerning death and immortality, and given momentum by the primacy of the mythopoeic drive in text and trilogy. These myths provide the context and specific embodiment of Burroughs' quest for self-acceptance and the projection of his death. The integrative imperative in Burroughs' work becomes stronger than ever before -- the desire for unity in multiplicity, represented by the peace of the "garden," complementing the desire to reach conclusion, once and for all.

Closure becomes the absolute goal of *The Western Lands*, in contrast to Burroughs' earlier works, in which closure is defied and resisted as far as possible. In this text Burroughs is driven to make an end to the trilogy, and possibly also to his literary career, to reach a point of stability and serenity at which the ceaseless tumult of his imagination can rest. The possibility of closure takes on a magical aspect, and becomes allied with the concept of the Western Lands, which he perceives as a place of eternal rest. The search for the Western Lands not only symbolizes



Burroughs' desire for textual closure, but also represents the cathartic process of coming to terms with old age and death. As a result, the endless quest for political effectiveness is replaced by introspection and self-analysis. Rather than seeking to destroy repressive alien control systems and taking over the universe, the characters in the text seek an eternal state of freedom, serenity, and independence, embodied by the Western Lands of the title.

Chapter Seventeen: Shifting Parameters.

"Joe the Dead belongs to a select breed of outlaws known as the NOs, natural outlaws dedicated to breaking the so-called natural laws of the universe foisted upon us by physicists, chemists, mathematicians, biologists and, above all, the monumental fraud of cause and effect...." (TWL 30)

Rather than being constituted by a crucial event or section of the text, the parameters of *The Western Lands* are two characters -- the "old writer" and Joe the Dead. Burroughs has moved far beyond the simplistic and deterministic textual structures of his earlier work, and this progression is evident in the evolution of parameter structures from the didactic "Atrophied Preface" of *The Naked Lunch*, through the "Invocation" of *Cities of the Red Night* and the gunfight in *The Place of Dead Roads*, to the two central characters of *The Western Lands*. Although Joe the Dead appeared as a peripheral yet curiously significant figure in *The Place of Dead Roads* (117-119), the old writer is a new figure, one who represents the new intimacy of the text.

The two characters are construed as parameter/perimeter functions in the first few chapters of *The Western Lands*, although they overflow this definition to a considerable extent. The relationship between them is defined in terms of interdependence as well as opposition -- they represent opposite aspects of the text's imperatives, opposites which need their contradiction in order to exist at a clearly defined locus. In this chapter I will look at how the two parameters are defined and constructed, individually and in opposition to each other, and examine how they structure the textual space that they delineate through their functions as

parameter/perimeter.

Evolution from, and reaction to, the central aspects of *The Place of Dead Roads* is a crucial feature of the definition of Joe the Dead as character and as textual parameter. In Chapter Two of *The Western Lands* Joe is revealed as the "unknown rifleman" of *The Place of Dead Roads*, the hitherto anonymous killer of Carsons/Hall and Mike Chase:

Joe the Dead lowered the rifle, like some cryptic metal extension growing from his arm socket, and smiled for a fleeting moment. A blush touched his ravaged features with a flash of youth that evaporated in powder smoke. With quick, precise movements he disassembled the telescoping rifle and silencer and fitted the components into a toolbox. Behind him, Kim Carsons and Mike Chase lay dead in the dust of the Boulder Cemetery. The date was September 17, 1899. (TWL 26)

Joe is revealed abruptly as both opposing and surpassing Carsons. In *The Place of Dead Roads*, dominated by Carsons' personality as well as his allegory of alien control and the war against it, Joe is construed as a minor character -- a Technician whose debt of gratitude to Carsons (for saving his life) renders him a lowly functionary in the Johnson Family organization. Although Carsons does perceive that Joe is a threat to him, "Kim was aware of the danger from Joe the Dead, but he chose to ignore it." (PDR 118)

Once Joe is revealed as the "unknown rifleman," the reader's previous perception of his powers and status is inverted suddenly. Firstly, Joe's implicit opposition to Carsons is made explicit:

Joe understood Kim so well that he could afford to dispense with him as a part of himself not useful or relevant at the present time. He understood Kim's attempt to transcend his physical structure, to which he could never become reconciled, by an icy, inhuman perfection of attitude, painfully maintained and refined to an unbearable pitch. Joe turned to a negation of attitude, a

purity of function that could be maintained only by the pressure of deadly purpose. (TWL 29)

The fundamental difference between Carsons and Joe is explained here as the difference between "attitude," or appearance and manner, and an emphasis on "function" and "purpose." Carsons is concerned with means, and how those means appear to an observer, while Joe is concerned with ends, with achieving maximum function and therefore fulfilling his goals.

Despite their polarity, Carsons and Joe share an overwhelming obsessiveness with regard to their different ends. Their equivalent and opposite intensity creates an intimacy which is strengthened by the profound knowledge they have of each other -- a relationship which can only be achieved by irrevocable and powerful enemies. As enemies, and as the warriors they indubitably are, Carsons and Joe are bound together in a painful and intimate relationship -- so intimate that Joe can comprehend and conceive of Carsons as "a part of himself." Part of the pain of this relationship comes from the implicit knowledge that their fates are inextricably intertwined, yet only the death of one can give any peace to the other. The equivalence of their relationship is illustrated by the fact that although Joe kills Carsons, he is resurrected as the protagonist of particular narratives in the text, inscribed in the new context of *The Western Lands* as "Neferti." Like two other great and pure warriors, Coriolanus and Tullus Aufidius, Kim Carsons and Joe the Dead must strive to destroy their implacable enemy -- who is also part of their most intimate being and their only equal -- in order to survive.

The relationship between Joe the Dead and Kim Carsons is construed in terms of absolutes, although good and evil are ascribed to neither side. Each is the other's nemesis, but also their reason for continuing to struggle, although they are, nominally and technically, on the same side. Their relationship can be perceived in terms of entirely different allegorical schemes of human existence -- Carsons represents that of *The Place of Dead Roads*, while Joe symbolizes the fresh viewpoint of *The Western Lands*.

Joe the Dead is depicted as manipulating major figures from the previous text: "...Joe the Dead has two sets playing against each other: Bickford and Hart, both Rens, Directors, with their Sekem Technicians and an army of Guardian Angels." (TWL 10) He has power over Carsons as well:

No regrets about Kim. Arty type, no principles. And not much sense. Sooner or later he would have precipitated a senseless disaster with his histrionic faggotries...a chessman to be removed from the board, perhaps to be used again in a more advantageous context. (TWL 26)

The chess metaphor is an apt one -- Joe is inscribed in the structures of power established in *The Place of Dead Roads* as a powerful and controlling "player." His powers far exceed the scope of the central characters in that text, as well as the perimeters of their conflict.

The depiction of Joe the Dead as not only dominating but also surpassing the power structures and hierarchies of *The Place of Dead Roads* also marks the reinscription of the Manichaeian conflict which is the basis of that text, on a new level of sophistication and intensity. It is no longer a struggle between factions for control of existing sociopolitical systems and the right to live in Space, but

rather a conflict between the "laws" of the universe, and the powers of humanity -- raised to their utmost level, and condensed within a single individual, Joe the Dead:

Joe the Dead belongs to a select breed of outlaws known as the NOs, natural outlaws dedicated to breaking the so-called natural laws of the universe foisted upon us by physicists, chemists, mathematicians, biologists and, above all, the monumental fraud of cause and effect....  
(TWL 30)

As described here, in the passage I have taken as the epigraph to this chapter, Joe's goal is to defy the limits of human thought. He seeks some kind of fundamental alteration in the way we perceive and construct our world, and hence our own being. This is a radical struggle, one which goes far beyond the concept of spatial existence so crucial to *The Place of Dead Roads*. In *The Western Lands* the burning issue is not *where* we can choose to exist, but *how* and on what terms.

Joe the Dead is ideally positioned to dismantle the structures of thought and consciousness which Burroughs perceives as imprisoning mankind. He is partially liberated from the bonds of normal existence, halfway between life and death: "Joe the Dead was saved from death by morphine, and morphine remained the only thing holding him to life." (PDR 118) Yet this halfway position does not imbue him with the detachment and clarity one would expect. Instead, the very essence of Joe's being, and the motive for his murder of Kim Carsons, is pain:

There were a number of valid reasons for eliminating Kim and Chase....

But the real reason was PAIN. In a universe controlled and delineated by Kim and his obsession with antiquated weaponry, Joe was in hideous and constant pain. His left arm and side clung to him like a burning mantle. That pain could be alleviated by morphine. The other pain, the soul pain, morphine and heroin could not touch. Joe had

been brought back from the Land of the Dead, back from Hell. Every movement, everything he looked at, was a source of excruciating pain. (TWL 27)

It is Joe's pain which necessitates his drive to redefine human existence -- for his own existence is intolerable. The particular task he sets himself, to redesign and fundamentally alter the human artifact and hence the nature of existence, is necessitated by the origins of his pain: "This continual pain is a sanction imposed by Nature, whose laws he flouts by remaining alive." (TWL 29) Joe chooses to specialize in "evolutionary biology:"

He dedicates his dearly bought knowledge of pain and death to cracking two biologic laws:

Rule One: Hybrids are permitted only between closely related species and then grudgingly, the hybrids produced being always sterile. The Biologic Police bluntly warn: "To break down the lines that Mother Nature, in her ripe wisdom, has established between species is to invited biologic and social chaos."

Joe says, "What do you think I'm doing here? Let it come down."

Rule Two: An evolutionary step that involves biologic mutation is irretrievable and irreversible. (TWL 32)

We are on familiar conceptual ground here: Joe seeks to defy the constraints of Time and locate a radically redefined and hence pain-free existence. His function as perimeter in and of the text is indicated here -- his pain impels him to break the traditional forms of existence and to redefine its limits. He must become a perimeter in order to replace the ones he has destroyed. Joe simultaneously embraces and rejects his condition, putting his pain to productive use while desperately seeking to eradicate it once and for all.

As a result of the process of redefinition that he undertakes, Joe also represents the shift from the images and themes of *The Place of Dead Roads* to those of *The Western Lands*. In the terms of *The Place of Dead Roads* Joe is a

"Technician," with Bickford and Hart (also Carsons to a certain extent) functioning as "Directors." In the new metaphor of *The Western Lands*, based upon the Ancient Egyptian concept of seven souls as explained by Norman Mailer in *Ancient Evenings* (1983), the Directors become Rens: "Top soul, and the first to leave at the moment of death, is Ren, the Secret Name. ...He directs the film of your life from conception to death." Joe becomes Sekem: "Energy, Power, Light. The Director gives the orders, Sekem presses the right buttons." (both *TWL* 4)

This system would seem to define Joe as subordinate in yet another hierarchy of power -- as the instrument of the Director/Ren. Yet Joe expands the concept of Sekem/Technician to surpass this rigidly structured role:

Over the centuries and tens of centuries, Joe had served many men -- and many Gods, for men are but the representatives of Gods. He had served many, and respected none. "They don't even know what buttons to push or what happens when you push them. Push themselves out of a job every fucking time."

Joe is the Tinkerer, the Smith, the Master of Keys and Locks, of Time and Fire, the Master of Light and Sound, the Technician. He knows the how and the when. The why does not concern him. He has left many sinking ships. "So I am to take orders from a birdbrained posturing faggot? Just leave the details to Joe.... Well, he left one too many. They all do." (*TWL* 28)

Joe is depicted as the servant of gods, and as godlike himself, with diverse mystical titles. He enacts his role within the hierarchy, but at the same time exceeds it, taking control into his own hands, and subtly manipulating the Rens who are supposedly controlling him. This simultaneous fulfilling and exceeding of rigidly defined roles is a crucial part of Joe the Dead's function as perimeter/parameter in *The Western Lands*. He is both character and parameter;



Sekem/Technician yet controller of Rens/Directors. He is a perimeter, yet also a force which defies and exceeds all perimeters, and all natural laws -- which make the existence of parameters possible. The powerful and expansive force of Joe the Dead is in contrast to the reflective and introspective aspects of the opposing parameter, the character of "the old writer." The differences between them are defined in binary terms -- creative as opposed to speculative, practical to reflective, active to passive, and so on. Where Joe is efficient, powerful, and capable, as well as being fearless and strong, the old writer is impotent and powerless, frightened and weak. The only advantage the old writer would seem to have is that he is beyond the kind of suffering that Joe has to live with, and achieves a kind of serenity through the cathartic recognition and acceptance of his own impotence. The old writer is concerned with scrutinizing his own past actions and his conscience in order to achieve a serenity and peace which will allow him to make the transition to a state of ultimate passivity -- death.

The reflectiveness and introspection which the old writer evinces render him a peculiarly open character to the reader. This intimacy is intensified by the fact that the old writer vividly represents Burroughs himself, thinly and nominally disguised as William Seward Hall. In *The Western Lands* we see the most revealing and intimate self-portrait in Burroughs' work since *Junky* and *Queer*. Burroughs writes himself into the trilogy at this point in order to come to terms with his identity and his career as writer. Unlike his other authorial personae in the trilogy, the old writer of *The Western Lands*

is not idealized, nor intensely symbolic. The self-portrait is harshly realistic, even caustic and savage, and directs a searching scrutiny at Burroughs' contemporary identity as old man. Through the persona of the old writer, Burroughs examines what it is like to be old, to be past the height of one's physical and mental powers (as he sees it), to perceive one's potential for literary and sociopolitical efficacy as irrevocably past:

Forty years ago the writer had published a novel which had made a stir, and a few short stories and some poems. He still had the clippings, but they were yellow and brittle now and he never looked at them. If he had removed them from the cellophane covering in his scrapbook they would have shredded to dust. (TWL 1)

The derelict state of the old writer at the beginning of *The Western Lands* -- living in an old boxcar, and "He lived on a small welfare check..." (TWL 1) -- represents the failure of a literary career, a possibility which haunts every writer:

After the first novel he started on a second, but he never finished it. Gradually, as he wrote, a disgust for his words accumulated until it choked him and he could no longer bear to look at his words on a piece of paper. It was like arsenic or lead, which slowly builds up in the body until a certain point is reached and then... he hummed the refrain of "Dead Man Blues" by Jelly Roll Morton. (TWL 1)

Burroughs is projecting an alternative version of himself, one whose career is terminated by writer's block and poisoned by words. In this sense the old writer is Burroughs' projected alter ego, a role he feels compelled to enact in this text possibly through a sense of guilt at his own success, or because of a simple desire to explore what might or could have been.

Although the physical circumstances of the old writer enact an alternative version of Burroughs' literary career at the

beginning of *The Western Lands*, his function rapidly shifts from embodying past possibilities to exploring and examining future ones. That is, the old writer begins to explore the possibilities of his own, and hence Burroughs' death, through the only medium he knows --- that of writing. He begins to see written passages in his dreams, and starts to write again, this time with a purpose of terminal seriousness:

The old novelists like Scott were always writing their way out of debt...Laudable...a valuable attribute for a writer is tenacity. So William Seward Hall sets out to write his way out of death. Death, he reflects, is equivalent to a declaration of spiritual bankruptcy. One must be careful to avoid the crime of concealing assets...a precise inventory will often show that the assets are considerable and that bankruptcy is not justified. A writer must be very punctilious and scrupulous about his debts. (TWL 3)

The old writer attempts to resurrect his powers of literary creativity in order to demonstrate that he is not spiritually bankrupt and therefore ready for death. This act is parallel to Burroughs' intentions in writing *The Western Lands*. In this text he explores what it means to be close to death, and also projects a model of what death could be like. However, above all this text represents an attempt to evade or postpone death, by invoking creativity and literary (as well as mythical) immortality. Thus the old writer's role as parameter, defining as well as revealing one of the text's most significant and profound imperatives, is apparent here.

The intimate association between Burroughs himself and the figure of the old writer, as well as the necessary distance and differences between them, is represented in the constant shifts between first and third person in the old writer's narratives. The use of the first person demonstrates the close connection between Burroughs and the old writer, while

the use of the third person illustrates the gap between them. However, when the two merge in the narrative they do so wholly, even going so far as to form a trinity with another familiar character:

August 16, 1984, Thursday

The sheer nightmare horror of my position, of all human positions, waiting for some lunatics or conspirators going to ride out on the blast like a surfboard to explode the atoms we are all made of. A lucky survivor, blind, stumbling about in my ruined house, hungry mewling cats underfoot. How about that, Kim? ...Debonair heartless Kim striking histrionic poses on the buckling deck of a doomed planet...reflecting a flawed unbearable boy image in an empty mirror. Radiant Kim, the fearless ostrich, escape child of a frightened old man. Anybody isn't frightened now simply lacks imagination. Is there any escape? Of course. A miracle. Leave the details to Joe. (TWL 13)

The old writer aligns himself with Kim Carsons at first, taking credit for his creation (and thus revealing his textual nature). A poignant contrast is drawn between Burroughs, as writer, "a frightened old man," and Kim Carsons, the product of his imagination, an "escape child." However, despite the nostalgic invocation of Kim Carsons' idealized and eternal adolescence, the passage ends with Burroughs as writer aligning himself with Joe the Dead. This shift in loyalties is a result of fear -- Joe is perceived as the only hope for escaping a nuclear apocalypse, the only one who can work the necessary "miracle." Burroughs takes a practical decision to transfer his focus from the idealism of Kim to the capability and pragmatism of Joe. In the face of the nuclear disaster evoked here, escapism and imagination, as represented by Kim, fail to offer any kind of hope, unlike Joe's efficiency and wide-ranging abilities. In *The Western Lands*, Joe the Dead becomes the character on whom everything depends, and the old writer must necessarily be aligned with him to a certain

extent (constituting as they do a textual perimeter), despite the conflicts and contrasts between them.

The relationship between these two characters is, as I have indicated, a complex and difficult one. Despite their alignment in certain respects, they are constructed mostly in terms of stringent opposition. Given the pragmatic orientation of Joe the Dead's aims and actions, he can be said to represent the political agenda of the text. That is, his actions are aimed at achieving an actual alteration in the common conditions of existence, fulfilling not only his desperate need to escape his pain, but also Burroughs' fundamental drive to change the way in which we perceive and comprehend ourselves and the terms of our existence. Thus Joe's activities are political, in the rehabilitated sense established in *Cities of the Red Night* and *The Place of Dead Roads* -- they are concerned with structures of (specifically thought) control.

The old writer's speculative and reflective orientation aligns him with the "literary" agenda of *The Western Lands*, as does his function as writer. He also illustrates the weakening significance and eroding power of literature and the literary in the text. The production of literature is revealed as an activity structured by contrivances and rhetorical gestures, and hence distanced from the fundamental problems of existence. All this is expressed in the old writer's disillusionment with the practice of writing, and his ambivalence toward creativity in the face of death.

The dual agendas represented by the parameter figures of Joe the Dead and the old writer demonstrate effectively the

seemingly irreconcilable differences between them. Yet the opposition of the literary and political agendas is subsumed, rather than resolved -- in the primary context of myth and mythopoeia. Literature and politics lose their prominence, but find a new identity, in the syncretic context of myth.

Thus it is myth, and the primary activity of mythopoeia, which constitutes the defining context of the text as a whole. The parameter/perimeter function of Joe the Dead and the old writer defines the text within this context, and structures the specific textual space in which particular myths are invoked and enacted. The syncretizing power of myth and mythopoeia is evident in the integration of the themes and images of *The Place of Dead Roads* with a new symbolic, myth-based system unique to *The Western Lands*. Once again, unity in multiplicity is the goal.

The integrative power of the mythic context is evident in the incorporation of ideas and themes from the entire trilogy, especially from *The Place of Dead Roads*. Characters whose positions seemed virtually impregnable in the previous text become passive playthings, to be manipulated by Joe: "Hart and Bickford, poor players to strut and fret their hour upon the stage." (TWL 11) Bickford and Hart are transformed from "Directors" into "players." Yet they are also inscribed in the new metaphor of *The Western Lands* as Rens, "top souls" in the hierarchy established by Egyptian myth (while Joe is a Sekem), which is then also inverted to reveal the manipulation of Rens by a Sekem. The process of integration is extended by the reinscription of the alien vampires/virus of *The Place of Dead Roads* and *Cities of the Red Night* in this new context.

These forces appear as "dirty rotten vampires" (TWL 7):

The Venusian invasion is a takeover of the souls. Ren is degraded by Hollywood down to John Wayne levels. Sekem works for the Company. The Khus are all transparent fakes. The Bas is rotten with AIDS. The Ka is paralyzed. Khaibit sits on you like a nagging wife. Sekhu is poisoned with radiation and contaminants and cancer. (TWL 6)

This passage evokes and synthesizes the metaphors and imagery of *Cities of the Red Night* (virus: cancer, radiation), *The Place of Dead Roads* (film: Hollywood, John Wayne), and *The Western Lands* (the Egyptian seven souls). It also contains images of evil which pervade all of Burroughs' work, such as corporate structures ("the Company") and female domination ("a nagging wife"). A new and particularly pertinent symbol is that of AIDS -- a peculiarly modern virus which has the potential to represent many of the evil forces evoked in his work. AIDS has particular relevance to Burroughs due to his homosexuality and lengthy periods of heroin addiction, which render him a member of both of the groups at greatest risk from the virus. As a symbol, AIDS has the potential to integrate the evil represented as viral in Burroughs' work with the peril posed to people like himself by those who object to the lifestyles and sexual behaviour of others (the "shits" or "Bible Belts" of *The Place of Dead Roads*).

Although it is only mentioned here, and indeed was little-known when Burroughs wrote the first two texts of the trilogy, the AIDS virus has the potential to retrospectively represent the modes of behaviour which Burroughs is concerned to depict throughout his work.

The integrative context of myth in *The Western Lands* is centred by the concept of seven souls construed by the Ancient

Egyptians, which is explained early in the text, as befits its importance:

The ancient Egyptians postulated seven souls.

Top soul, and the first to leave at the moment of death, is Ren, the Secret Name. This corresponds to my Director. He directs the film of your life from conception to death....

Second soul, and second one off the sinking ship, is Sekem: Energy, Power, Light. The Director gives the orders, Sekem presses the right buttons.

Number three is Khu, the Guardian Angel. He, she, or it is third man out.... The Khu is responsible for the subject and can be injured in his defense -- but not permanently, since the first three souls are eternal. They go back to Heaven for another vessel. The four remaining souls must take their chances with the subject in the Land of the Dead.

Number four is Ba, the Heart, often treacherous.... Many a hero has been brought down, like Samson, by a perfidious Ba.

Number five is Ka, the Double, most clearly associated with the subject. The Ka... is the only reliable guide through the Land of the Dead to the Western Lands.

Number six is Khaibit, the Shadow, Memory, your whole past conditioning from this and other lives.

Number seven is Sekhu, the Remains. (TWL 4-5)

The Egyptian concept of seven souls is compared and related to other concepts and metaphors, while previous schema are iterated in its new terms. This concept becomes a powerful contextualizing force in its own right.

The dominance of myth in *The Western Lands* is matched by the insistence on textuality which pervades the entire trilogy. A balance is achieved through the revelation immediately following the passage above, in which Burroughs asserts that the source of his version of the concept of seven souls is not only textual (which is inevitable and unavoidable), but profoundly intertextual:

I first encountered this concept in Norman Mailer's *Ancient Evenings*, and saw that it corresponded precisely with my own mythology, developed over a period of many years, since birth in fact. (TWL 5)

The revelation that the source of this all-important concept



is a literary one changes its complexion entirely. Burroughs not only emphasizes the fundamentally textual nature of all myths available to us (the propagation of most myths depends upon their being written), but also indicates some aspects of the relationship between myth and literature -- a relationship which he sees as interdependent. He promotes literature as the primary expression of mythopoeia in contemporary society, and tries to evoke the belief and commitment myth demands in the readers of his own work. Burroughs posits mythopoeia as not only the primary level of writing, but also as a context in which unity in multiplicity can be sustained, and human contentment and fulfilment achieved. Myth becomes a frame of reference which can inform and structure every quest and condition every existence. As a context it is far from static, for it is continually modified, through adaptations of existing myths and the creation and incorporation of new ones.

The fact that the parameter/perimeter function of *The Western Lands* is represented by characters, rather than episodes or sections of text reflects this text's nature as speculative, reflective, and theoretical -- passive rather than active. Its explanatory passages are of greater importance than the episodes and adventures which link them and which become imaginary diversions, instead of propelling the text. Textual momentum and energy in the trilogy shifts from a locus in action in *Cities of the Red Night* to speculation and theory in *The Western Lands*, with *The Place of Dead Roads* synthesizing both aspects. Thus the goals of *The Western Lands* as defined by its parameters are the completion of the process of mythopoeic construction which informs and

structures the entire trilogy, and, more intimately, an attempt to recognize and come to terms with the author's persona, perceived political failure, and the inevitability and projected nature of his death. The expansive force and energy of the earlier texts in the trilogy turns in on itself, focusing on the author's innermost self rather than the reader and the world he knows. The compulsive drive to closure entails that the focus is on Burroughs himself, and the cathartic processes he undergoes -- made real for the reader through the sites and symbols of myth.

Chapter Eighteen: Letting Go -- The Author of *The Western*

*Lands.*

"Writing, if it is anything, is a word of warning...

LET GO!" (TWL 213)

"The old writer couldn't write anymore because he had reached the end of words, the end of what can be done with words."  
(TWL 258)

The author-centredness of *The Western Lands* --- a result of its focus on Burroughs himself through the figure of the old writer --- emphasizes the nature of writing as a practice, rather than the aspects which operate to draw forth a reader's response. In this text writing becomes a vocation, a lifelong, inescapable means of self-definition and social classification, with the emphasis on individual authorship complementing the general mythic context. It is in this context that Burroughs considers the exigencies of writing, as well as its demands and rewards. His desire for closure also permeates his consideration of the nature of writing and the writer's role in *The Western Lands*, as evoked in the second epigraph to this chapter.

The direct and intimate relationship between the authorial figure within the text, the old writer, and Burroughs himself renders superfluous the efforts in *Cities of the Red Night* and *The Place of Dead Roads* to define and construct an authorial persona from which he can dissociate himself if necessary. Burroughs' previous attempts to evade traditional authorial responsibility for the text -- to provide himself with an escape option and also render the text independent and self-supporting --- are rejected in *The Western Lands*. The

result is diminished authorial prominence. In *Cities of the Red Night* and *The Place of Dead Roads* (and also *The Naked Lunch*) Burroughs' efforts to escape traditional concepts and insert distancing structures and personae between himself and the text were, necessarily, the focus of much textual rhetoric and concern. In *The Western Lands*, however, the adoption of a more or less traditional authorial role allows the author to go about his business in relative obscurity, fulfilling and enacting the functions described above.

Joe the Dead is, in some ways, an incarnation of earlier Burroughsian concepts of author: his essential mode of being is action, and he is concerned with political and social (rather than artistic) effectiveness and truth. Indeed, Joe is aligned with the authorial constructions of *The Naked Lunch*, with their emphasis on action and factual accuracy. However, despite Joe's affinity with earlier authorial roles in Burroughs' work, in *The Western Lands* he defines this role by representing everything the author is not. That is, Joe the Dead represents the alter ego of the author specific to *The Western Lands*, the negation of his qualities.

The radical shift in definition and construction of the authorial role does not, however, signify a complete break between authorial concepts in the trilogy. Rather, the commentary on writing as such occasioned by the figure of the old writer develops and draws substantially upon notions first advanced in *Cities of the Red Night* and *The Place of Dead Roads*. For example, the text's first descriptions of the old writer reveal the pitfalls of writing as a profession, as first evinced by Clem Snide and William Seward Hall, as well

as the sheer physical hardships it can entail:

The old writer lived in a boxcar by the river. This was fill land that had once been a dump heap, but it was not used anymore: five acres along the river which he had inherited from his father, who had been a wrecker and scrap metal dealer. (TWL 1)

The old writer's circumstances represent sordid poverty and isolation, rather than the transient and fugitive existence of the writer in *Cities of the Red Night* and *The Place of Dead Roads*. Whereas in the earlier texts the writer's life is under constant threat because he in turn threatens the basic structures of vampiric alien control, in *The Western Lands* the writer is alone and forgotten, dismissed as of no significance. Yet despite the lack of drama in the old writer's existence, he is still a victim of the exigencies of his profession, just as Clem Snide and William Seward Hall are. With the rejection of political goals in *The Western Lands* it is inevitable that the writer's existence will become less dangerous, and hence less exciting -- thus the old writer's life is routine and habitual, even boring: "He lived on a small welfare check and he walked a mile to a grocery store once a week to buy lard and canned beans and tomatoes and vegetables and cheap whiskey" (TWL 1). Yet the very lack of physical activity and excitement in his daily existence, the fact that the old writer exists on the margins of society, rather than operating subversively at its centre, implies that his interior life is richer and more productive. That is, it is precisely because the old writer is not engaged simultaneously in a struggle to stay alive and a conflict with alien forces controlling mankind that he has both time and space for reflection and philosophical inquiry, to consider

matters ever deeper and more profound. Taken together, the experiences of all the writer figures in the trilogy present a diverse yet holistic portrait of what it means, or can mean, to be a writer.

The conditions of the old writer's existence also reveal another important characteristic of the writer's role as defined by Burroughs -- that writing, once started, is a lifelong and inescapable profession:

Forty years ago the writer had published a novel which had made a stir, and a few short stories and some poems. He still had the clippings, but they were yellow and brittle now and he never looked at them. (TWL 1)

Although this character has not written for forty years he is still defined, by the text and by himself, as a writer. For Burroughs, writing is a vocation, a function that takes precedence above all others. Writing as a profession requires a high degree of integrity and commitment: "'There are no bargains on the writer's market. You have to pay the piper. If you are not willing to pay, seek another vocation.'" (TWL 4) In *The Western Lands* Burroughs attempts to count the cost of fulfilling this vocation, in both a universal and individual sense. He also tries to find a way in which to end a career in writing, to pass into a new and different mode of being. The search for a way in which to renounce successfully the burdens of authorship as well as the label of "writer" informs and is symbolized by the characters' quest for the Western Lands. The necessity of passing through the Land of the Dead in order to reach this goal only confirms Burroughs' underlying suspicion that the only way to escape the vocation of writer is to die.

Burroughs' concept of writing as vocation reveals the primacy he attributes and has always attributed to writing as a function. In the earlier parts of the trilogy writing is depicted as a means of achieving actual sociopolitical change, and knowledge and realization are equated with action.

Burroughs withdraws from this overstretched position in *The Western Lands*, conceiving the text as a source of knowledge and potentially the will to power, rather than as a manifesto of overt action. The renunciation of the earlier point of view is made explicit by Joe the Dead's rejection of the idea (from *Cities of the Red Night*) that to rewrite history, to rewrite the "prerecordings," is to alter fundamentally the past and hence the future:

Joe didn't have ideas about rewriting history like Kim did. More of Kim's irresponsible faggotry: he's going to rewrite history while we wait. Well, let determined things to destiny hold unbewailed their way. DESTINY prances out in an atomic T-shirt -- her glow in the dark. (TWL 59)

Burroughs' earlier theory, now attributed to Kim Carsons, is mocked and parodied, along with his concept of human destiny. This iterates the opposition between Carsons and Joe -- although both are largely concerned with sociopolitical action, Carsons has a theoretical or philosophical dimension that Joe almost entirely lacks. However, as both characters are defined by pain (Joe of his partial and incomplete death, Kim of his alienness and profound isolation), so they both work to define the nature and function of writing -- positively and negatively, through action and reaction.

Thus various characters in the text represent different aspects of Burroughs' ideas concerning writing: rendering concrete and specific the exploration of what it means to

write and to be a writer. The reappearance of Kim Carsons recalls the authorial definitions of *The Place of Dead Roads*, and also provides occasion for comment upon and criticism of that text's ideas. This process is crucial to Chapter Four of *The Western Lands*:

[Kim] receives a summons from the District Supervisor.

"So how come I'm not the Supervisor? After all, I wrote the Supervisor."

"No you didn't. You *discovered* the Supervisor. Or rather, you found out where the Supervisor is written and read it back. Writers don't write, they read and transcribe something already written. So you read orders, which are then conveyed through your spokesman, the Supervisor. The Iman. The Old Man."

"So I am the man for a very important and, you may add, very dangerous assignment?"

The D.S. permitted himself a narrow smile.

"I thought my last assignment was of the same category."

"It was, and a proper hash you made of it." (Burroughs' italics, *TWL* 74)

The passage conflates writing with reading, contravening the distinctions carefully established in *Cities of the Red Night* and *The Place of Dead Roads*. As a result, Carsons' previous role as writer now translates into one which combines the (lesser) functions of reader and scribe -- reading and transcribing what is always already written. He becomes an archeologist, in line with the Egyptian metaphors of the text, rather than a creator. This passage also contextualizes Kim Carsons' political efforts in *The Place of Dead Roads* as inevitable failures: "a proper hash you made of it." He is rehabilitated as character and protagonist by *The Western Lands*, given one last chance to fulfil an important mission and make good. Carsons is a useful vehicle for Burroughs' self-examination and analysis in *The Western Lands*, for by attributing his earlier ideas to this character he establishes sufficient distance to attempt a comprehensive



critique of them. Carsons' roles are redefined and conflated, rendering him the self-conscious narrator of his own adventures.

The redefinition of Kim Carsons as self-conscious narrator/observer rather than protagonist/adventurer, creates a space which is filled by another character from *The Place of Dead Roads* -- William Seward Hall. Hall's established role of writer persists in *The Western Lands* -- he is loosely aligned with the old writer figure -- but is largely subsumed in his new role of narrative subject. The positing of a selfconscious narrator who is separate from the active protagonist creates problems which Burroughs recognizes and grapples with:

There is nothing more elusive than a writer's main character, the character that is assumed by the reader to be the writer himself, no less, actually doing the things he writes about. But this main character is simply a point of view interposed by the writer. The main character then becomes in fact another character in the book, but usually the most difficult to see, because he is mistaken for the writer himself. He is the writer's observer, often very uneasy in this role and at a loss to account for his presence. He is an object of suspicion to the world of nonwriters, unless he manages to write them into his road. (AM 177)

In an inversion of the roles marked out in *The Place of Dead Roads*, Carsons represents the virtually invisible, self-eradicating point of view inserted between text and writer, characters and author, while Hall takes his place as narrative subject/protagonist instead of peripheral observer. Although still inscribed as a writer, Hall is only a symbolic or figurative one in *The Western Lands*, as he loses the literary selfconsciousness and marginal status of the writer/observer, which Carsons subsequently acquires. Hall

loses his meta-textual awareness, but his loss is Carsons' gain.

Hall first appears as protagonist/narrative subject in Chapter One of *The Western Lands*, dispensing advice, but not actually functioning as a writer: "Hall once admonished an aspiring writer, 'You will never be a good writer because you are an inveterate check dodger.'" (TWL 3) Despite his affinity with the figure of the old writer, also established in the first few pages, there is a distinct gap between them, which is evident here. Hall symbolizes an ideal version of the old writer: where the latter's life is realistic, static, and sordid, Hall's is idealized, active, and exciting. Hall moves freely within, as well as in and out of, the imaginary worlds the text projects, while the old writer remains anchored in a stagnant reality. However, the two do occasionally coincide, for example in the episode where Hall, in the physical situation of the old writer, befriends a phantom cat and dies as a result (TWL 250-251). Here, Hall as old writer is a pathetic figure, destroyed emotionally and mentally by the extinction of his literary career: "'I learned not to refer to his writing another book. He looked very sad and asked me please never to mention the subject again, the way someone might feel about a bereavement, and I guess that is the way he did feel. He had killed himself in the story.'" (TWL 250-251)

Hall's function as writer is relevant, but not central, to these two episodes. What is more important is his function as symbol, as archetype, embodying Burroughs' imaginative projections of what it is like to be in a position to dispense

advice to other writers, or to experience a sterile existence once writing becomes impossible, to take just the two examples given here. Hall is a protagonist, acting out the roles that Burroughs projects, and hence enabling the analysis of these roles and their ramifications.

Hall's function as unselfconscious narrative subject climaxes with the episode in Gibraltar, where he is waiting for an important package of books and a ship to Venezuela (*TWL* 165-169). This episode recalls Gibraltar's function as symbolizing a sterile and repellent environment, the stagnant result of grovelling acceptance of colonial exploitation and humiliation (see *NL* 146-148, for example). Hall shares the reactions of earlier Burroughsian protagonists, as his unselfconscious thoughts and actions are presented in the narrative in a traditional realist form: "The first night Hall spends at the Rock Hotel. He finds the English colonial fog unbearable, the room small and uncomfortable...." (*TWL* 165-166) Once again, Hall's writing as such is not important -- it is the act of writing, or even the desire to write, which is significant -- as the chapter ends: "He opens his portable typewriter case...." (*TWL* 169) Thus Hall embodies aspects of the actual physical existence of the writer which Burroughs is concerned with in *The Western Lands*, complementing those aspects evoked by the old writer.

*The Western Lands* incorporates yet another writerly archetype besides those of *The Place of Dead Roads* and the writer as protagonist/adventurer. Chapter Five is centred around the figure of Neferti, who is construed as an unselfconscious narrative subject like Hall in the episodes

above, but in a mythical context -- he is a scribe in Ancient Egypt. The narrative of his acquisition of a scribe's status and skills is an account of the accumulation of power, magical and politically subversive, as well as providing an occasion for comment and speculation upon the nature of languages and writing as such.

The position of scribe is established as one with considerable social status in this chapter: "People turn from him and the women cover their faces, for he is a Scribe, an elite class that is feared and hated." (TWL 99) Within this dimension of social power, based on the exclusive knowledge of writing and the ability to manipulate it, we are given two portraits of individual scribes -- "old Sesostris, the pederast" (TWL 99), and his student Neferti. Sesostris is an archetype corresponding in some ways to the figure of the old writer -- he is impotent, ineffectual, and fearful:

[Sesostris] was a kindly, ineffectual man of a vacillating disposition. He could not bring himself to take sides in the fierce controversy raging over the One God concept. Gently Neferti pointed out that a neutral position was untenable.... His enemies had waited for this chance. In Sesostris's attempt to make no enemies, he would succeed only in making no friends he could trust. (TWL 101)

For Sesostris, the status and knowledge of a scribe simply puts him in danger, for he has neither the courage nor the will to wield his power and knowledge even to defend himself. Once again, Burroughs depicts old age as eroding the will to fight and the will to win, replacing them with an expedient desire to please in order to survive. Sesostris's knowledge and erudition imperil his very existence without the strength to wield them.

Neferti is the complete opposite of Sesostris. He is

young, capable, and highly motivated:

Neferti learned the glyphs with breathtaking speed. Sesostris had never seen such a student. Neferti knew that it was dangerous to depart from the norm in any direction, and most particularly in the direction of excellence. But he didn't have much time. (TWL 99)

Once he has acquired and honed the necessary skills -- that is, he has learned to write, to manipulate language -- Neferti becomes involved in a political struggle, albeit one with a religious dimension: "Neferti aligned himself with the rebels and followers of Many Gods." (TWL 101) His goal is a text, one which is the key to the Egyptian system of immortality:

Neferti intended to obtain the secret Western Land papyrus. Scribes at his level were not supposed to know even that such a papyrus existed. He carried at all times an alabaster tube of poison, in case of arrest, and a thin dagger with a grooved tip dipped in cobra venom. (TWL 101)

His search for the Western Land papyrus is a search for knowledge, and a quest to make this knowledge readily available to all. The qualified altruism of his goal ironically renders him much hated, by those who seek to retain the exclusive power that elitism gives them -- Neferti becomes "a target for hate and envy, solid as the blow of a fist and sharp as an ax." (TWL 102) Part of the reason for such hatred of Neferti is his dedication to his goal -- he possesses an intensity of purpose resented by those who oppose him as well as those who lack his determination: "he has incorporated his female component into a deadly concentration of incandescent purpose." (TWL 118)

The other factor inspiring such hatred of Neferti is his mastery of language, of the scribe's skills. His education as a scribe, and subsequent experiments with language as a medium, provide a commentary upon the nature and function of

language and writing as such. The language Neferti learns is hieroglyphic, significant for Burroughs because it represents a language which is purely graphic, and which cannot be spoken. That is, rather than representing sounds, hieroglyphs are images, constructing a total picture rather than a sentence or paragraph which can be spoken aloud. Thus writing and speech are irrevocably separate in the Egyptian society that Burroughs projects, the latter available and familiar to all, the former only to an elite class.

For Burroughs, hieroglyphs illustrate crucial aspects of writing and its use as a medium of effective sociopolitical control:

Image and word are the instruments of control used by the press. Of course, an instrument can be used without knowledge of its fundamental nature or its origins. To get to the origin we must examine the instruments themselves; that is, the actual nature of word and image. Research along these lines is discouraged by those who use word and image as instruments of control. So we do not know what a word is or what an image is. The study of hieroglyphic languages shows us that a word *is* an image -- the written word is an image. (Burroughs' italics, *Job* 51)

Burroughs uses this concept of the written word as image to speculate about the conditions which then become necessary for the propagation of information through writing:

An oral society, travelling at the low speed of sound, might function in the dark. In the beginning was the word and the word was made flesh in darkness, but, with the invention of writing in any form, light was necessary to see the image which became another form of proliferation whose limits are the speed of light. The only thing which cannot be taken from the picture is light -- everything else can be utterly transmuted or can go. (*Job* 169-170)

A society whose language is entirely oral experiences no limits or qualifications on the conditions of communication -- speech functions even in the dark. A society which can write

does experience a qualification in the conditions of communication -- it must have light. However, the relative advantages of each medium are symbolized by the speed of sound (approximately 330 metres/second) and the speed of light (approximately 300 000 kilometres/second). Thus for Burroughs, writing has inestimable benefits which outweigh the disadvantages he perceives. This explains his desire to reclaim language and writing from alien controllers, and the purity of intention he projects for it.

It is in this context that Neferti's experiments with hieroglyphs take on particular significance. First, he learns to think in glyphs, to avoid subvocalized thought and hence the corrupted form of speech: "He can think in glyphs as he walks, writing from the pictures he passes: a horned owl, legs, eyes, a mouth, an empty road waiting." (TWL 100) As a result, he is able to think in silence, a quality (or even a medium) which Burroughs values highly, for silence is a means of subverting the linguistic media which are corrupted by alien control. To think in silence means to think freely, to avoid the restraints and inhibitions placed upon thought and internalized by the individual as he acquires language. Words are corrupt, while visual images and silence provide opportunities for subversion and escape.

Neferti experiments further with glyphs, exploring possibilities of combination and permutation, recalling *Cities of the Red Night's* authorial function of "fabricator:"

Individual glyphs can be delineated in many different ways. They can be incorporated into a picture, and the pictures can move. Panels of glyphs can be shifted into various combinations. Neferti devised glyphs of his own to indicate whole panels and ways in which they can be fitted together. Where the horned owl lights, a

connection is made. (TWL 100)

Neferti begins the process of conceptualizing the system of glyphs with which he has become familiar. That is, he not only learns to combine and manipulate the images he knows, but also invents new ones to represent particular combinations -- these glyphs are concepts. Burroughs demonstrates that hieroglyphic language, commonly regarded as unsophisticated because of its pictorial quality which would seem to limit what can be accurately and recognizably portrayed, possesses an abstract conceptual and theoretical sophistication equal to that of modern English.

This sophistication is demonstrated further in the description of different styles of glyphic representation:

The Scribes were divided into a number of schools: the Traditional, the Naturalistic, the Functional, the Situational, the Punctual, the Random, the Picture Puzzle.

... In Picture Puzzle scripts, the glyphs are incorporated into the big picture: an eye, a phallus, water, birds, animals spell out the story. At first it is just a picture with a special look, then glyphs swim out of clouds and water, pop out of swift lizards, run with the hare of hours, sit with the toad of a million years, spatter out of excrement thrown by an angry ape, trickle out of streams.... (TWL 100-101)

The difference in styles indicates the artistic nature of hieroglyphic writing, as well as the opportunity it offers for individual self-expression. Any competent scribe can produce distinctly original work, which expresses his identity like that of a painter. The Picture Puzzle school recalls the magical nature of writing as a function, as established in *The Place of Dead Roads* and in Burroughs' essays: "What we call 'art' -- painting, sculpture, writing, dance, music -- is magical in origin.... The artist is trying to make something happen in the mind of the viewer or reader.... The influence



of art is no less potent for being indirect." (AM 61) The establishment of glyphic writing as an artistic form stresses that to write, as an Egyptian scribe does, is to create, to enact art, irrespective of the writing's "content" or "message." Content is entirely subsumed by form in this context, in contrast to modern writing, where the ubiquitous sameness of print renders form irrelevant and content predominates -- as all print looks more or less the same, *what* is written becomes more significant than *how* it is written.

In his works, and as symbolically represented here, Burroughs attempts to reassert the importance of form, whilst not denying the equal importance of content, and ultimately seeks to integrate the two into a dynamic entity. The depiction of the role of scribe, represented by Neferti and Sesostris, combined with the projection of the potential and function of hieroglyphic writing, works toward this end. The passages examined above not only provide an occasion for a critique of present systems of manipulation of communication media, but also make the reader aware of the print on the page, as it were. This chapter represents an exercise in readerly awareness and enlightenment through its depiction of writerly roles and possible functions of writing.

*The Western Lands* not only projects writerly roles, in order to comment upon and analyze their nature, but also depicts particular operations in or kinds of writing. These instances are more relevant to Burroughs' concerns about the functions and ends of writing, and complement the text's exploration of what it means to write, and to be a writer.

The first and most prominent of these examples demonstrates the powerful and magical negative uses of writing, which particularly affect the novelist:

Writing prejudicial, off-putting reviews is a precise exercise in applied black magic. The reviewer can draw free-floating, disagreeable associations to a book by implying that the book is completely unimportant without saying exactly why, and carefully avoiding any clear images that could capture the reader's full attention.

...There are other tricks: the use of generalities like "the man in the street" and the editorial "we" to establish a rapport of disapproval with the reader and at the same time to create a mental lacuna under cover of an insubstantial and unspecified "we." And the technique of the misunderstood word: pack a review with obscure words that send the reader to the dictionary. Soon the reader will feel a vague, slightly queasy revulsion for whatever is under discussion. (TWL 46-47)

The reviewer is portrayed as undertaking a magical operation -- to "curse" the writer and his text. Burroughs attributes this "black magic" quality to all journalism: "They stick pins in someone's image and then show that image to millions of people." (AM 49) Just as magic has its specific formulae which transform intention into reality, according to Burroughs, so there are established practices for writing a negative review: "There is a definite technology for the negative use of words to cause confusion, to create and aggravate conflicts, and to discredit opponents. This is the opposite of what a writer does." (AM 36)

Thus the reviewer, as portrayed by Burroughs, possesses evil intent and a "technology" of writing which enables him to assassinate both author and text. The sharp distinction Burroughs draws between reviewers and "legitimate" writers is evident in the last quotation above, as well as in *The Western Lands*'s evocation of a specific reviewer figure:

Julian Chandler, book reviewer for a prestigious New York

daily, knows all the tricks. He has chosen for his professional rancor the so-called Beat Movement, and perfected the art of antiwriting. Writers use words to evoke images. He uses words to obscure and destroy images. (TWL 47)

The text goes on to demonstrate the hatred such a man inspires, as his world begins to disintegrate mysteriously once a small black dog starts to follow him (TWL 49-50). There is a personal element to this attack upon reviewers -- Burroughs has frequently suffered at their hands -- as the review attributed to Chandler concerns *The Place of Dead Roads*, although the work is not actually named (it is in fact attributed to W.S.Hall [TWL 50]). In this chapter Burroughs envisions and analyzes the writing practices of reviewers and wreaks a fantastic and imaginary vengeance upon them all, through the apocryphal figure of Julian Chandler.

The second function of writing depicted (albeit briefly) in *The Western Lands* concerns the role of "chronicler" or recorder:

I am the chronicler of this expedition. I have also some knowledge of the others' specialties, superficial to be sure, but enabling me to see connections that might otherwise have gone unnoticed. (TWL 85)

This role not only provides the text with a selfconscious narrator, at least a temporary one, but also with a protagonist, as he is an active part of the expedition whose adventures he is recording. The role of chronicler is an important if minor one, performing an integrative function of recording significant events and drawing forth their essence.

Another function of writing depicted in the text is that of warning. This function posits the writer as prophet of doom, foreseeing and proclaiming disaster:

I saw a picture of a balloon suddenly and unexpectedly

soaring and some people still holding onto the ropes connected to the balloon were suddenly jerked into the air and most of them didn't have the survival IQ to *let go in time*. Seconds later they are sixty, a hundred feet off the ground. Those who didn't let go fell off at five hundred or a thousand feet. A basic survival lesson is: *Learn to let go. ...*

Suppose you were holding one of those ropes? Would you have let go in time, which is, of course, at the first upward yank? I'll tell you something interesting. You would have a much better chance to let go in time now that you have read this paragraph than if you hadn't read it. Writing, if it is anything, is a word of warning...

LET GO! (Burroughs' italics, *TWL* 213)

The minimalist and pragmatic definition of writing as warning complements Burroughs' renunciation of the potential sociopolitical effectiveness of literature in *The Western Lands*. As defined here, a literary text cannot compel the reader to act on its imperatives, but can only warn him of danger and encourage him to act on his own (rather than the text's) behalf. In this passage Burroughs is attempting to increase the reader's chances of survival, rather than transform him into a fully-fledged activist.

The particular functions and operations of writing which are explored in *The Western Lands* illustrate many different aspects of writing and the writer's role(s). Writing is revealed as moral and amoral, practical and magical, useful and destructive. The writer himself can evince all or any of these qualities, depending on the ends and means he pursues. Writing becomes the archetype of unity in multiplicity, as Burroughs explores the possibilities and ramifications of writing, and of language and textuality, both within and outside the bounds of the literary. However, the author's overriding purpose in the exploration of such modes and practices is to find a way of escaping, once and for all, the exigencies of writing -- to put an end to this vocational

existence and pass into another mode of being. The main mode of being which the text projects for the writer's escape is death.

Hence the writer's position in relation to death, and his role in confronting, imagining, explaining and demystifying it, is crucial to *The Western Lands*. The text seeks to project and thoroughly explore death, as commonly perceived and as imaginatively delineated through the structures of Egyptian mythology. Death provides an integrating force within the text -- it promotes the synthesis of the writerly roles and functions the text examines (for example, the role of chronicler and the function of warning). The author ventures forth imaginatively and symbolically into the realm of death, recording his adventures.

Burroughs has always seen death as integral to art:

can you imagine a writer or an artist who would be afraid to hear the word DEATH? I sure can't. Any writer who cannot hear that word is not a writer. It can only mean one thing: he is trying to play Death and is not sure of his credentials, like a fake cop doesn't want to see a real one. (AM 50)

Burroughs goes so far as to deny the status of writer to those who fear death. For him, death is both a word and a symbol, an active entity and a site of existence, an inevitable end and a mode of being. It informs and structures all his work as he struggles to come to terms with its irrevocable and unavoidable nature, to face it down and defeat it. This struggle reaches a peak of intensity, intimacy, and pain in *The Western Lands*. At the end of the text, Burroughs denies and renounces the vocation of writer and its potential effectiveness:

The old writer couldn't write anymore because he had reached the end of words, the end of what can be done with words. And then? "British we are, British we stay." How long can one hang on in Gibraltar... clinging to their Rock like the rock apes, clinging always to less and less. (TWL 258)

In this passage writing is compared to Gibraltar, Burroughs' archetypal metaphor of sterility and decay. The exploration and analysis of the potential and functions of writing, as well as the many dimensions of the writer's role, which reaches a climax in *The Western Lands*, comes to an irrevocable end with the conclusion of this text. The old writer, and hence, symbolically, Burroughs, has reached the end of his vocation, explored its possibilities, and exhausted his creativity and the medium of his art -- language. The tenacity and determination with which Burroughs as author and writer has pursued his manifold purposes throughout the trilogy is gone. Instead, the final imperative in this undeniably author-centred text, which has redefined and thoroughly examined its projected writerly roles, is one from the function of writing as warning: "LET GO!"

Chapter Nineteen: Mythic Sites.

"...the Western Lands cannot have disappeared without leaving a blueprint behind.

We set out to find that blueprint."  
(*TWL* 195)

We have seen that the absolute goal of *The Western Lands* is closure -- of text and trilogy, career and even life. The desire to conclude, to make an end, informs every aspect of the text. Yet the conclusion Burroughs posits is far from simple. He seeks to establish a final unity in multiplicity, to render the text an holistic and permanent entity.

Burroughs is not merely concerned with the resolution of specific narrative movements, but with achieving a particular kind of closure -- one which is idealistic, humanistic, powerfully positive, and, above all, syncretic. Thus the imperative to syncretism complements that of closure in importance. In fact, the two become completely integrated in the sense posited by Vernon (see Chapter Sixteen) by the end of the text, each subsuming the other.

Syncretism has always been a powerful psychological and ideological force in Burroughs' work. Despite the superficial cynicism evoked by his despair at the condition of mankind, Burroughs cares deeply about the fate and future of his fellow beings. According to him, man is trapped by his body, which has become alien to him through a process metaphorically inscribed as vampiric and viral. Man has lost control, lost his self-regulatory function, which has become externalized and hence alien. Burroughs' solution to this impasse is necessarily radical -- he advocates symbolic and literal transmutation, a major step forward in evolution, which will

render possible existence in Space as opposed to that in Time.

Thus Burroughs desires the termination of contemporary modes of existence, and projects new and radical ones. This drive is typified by *The Western Lands*, which explores death as site and process, as an entirely new and unknown way of being. The concept and projection of death in *The Western Lands* replaces and subsumes Space as the ideal location of perfectible existence. Traditionally, death is perceived as an end to being -- at the very least it is posited as the beginning or means of passage to a new and unknowable existence. Burroughs uses these typical concepts, and those drawn from myth, to project death as an unknowable but not unimaginable realm or mode of being, as well as locating within it a space in which his idiosyncratic imperatives can be fulfilled. With its intense resonance, death represents not only a final closure for Burroughs, but also a context in which unity in multiplicity and individual integrity can be achieved and sustained -- a context which itself comes to symbolize an ideal holistic entity.

In this and succeeding chapters I intend to pursue the dual imperatives of syncretism and closure as inscribed and operative in the text, and to indicate their resolution, and the resolution of text, trilogy, and even Burroughs' career, in the powerful context of death. In this chapter my focus is on the particular mythic sites in the text -- the Land of the Dead, Last Chance, the River Duad, and the Western Lands -- and their diverse functions. Chapter Twenty will focus on the mythic and narrative functions of specific characters -- Kim Carsons, Joe the Dead, Hassan i Sabbah -- in relation to the



imperatives of syncretism and closure, as well as the intertextual basis of Egyptian myth in the text. Chapter Twenty-One will conclude this discussion with a consideration of the text's major goals and its ending -- Burroughs' final exploration of the possibilities of closure.

The balance between syncretism and closure is asserted by Burroughs' desire to complete his personal mythology through a series of integrative and incorporative acts. The text pursues a conclusive point of integration -- one which is final and comprehensive. Although Burroughs would see mythopoeia generally as a ceaseless and ongoing process, he is driven to complete his own mythology, to realize what he depicts as literally his life's work. *The Western Lands* can in fact be seen as a compulsive attempt by Burroughs to write his death, to inscribe it in mythicized and textual terms, before he is forced to endure it, presumably in the hope that he can in some way mitigate it, or at the very least prepare himself for it.

The equivalent primacy of syncretism and closure as imperatives is also established by the particular Egyptian myths Burroughs chooses to structure his text. The concepts and stories drawn from this mythology are centred, unsurprisingly, around death and immortality -- mummification, the Land of the Dead, the River Duad, and finally the Western Lands are all vividly inscribed in the text. The mythic sites and concepts Burroughs co-opts serve to focus his ideas and theories concerning death and the possibilities of immortality as such, as well as providing actual situations as part of the

characters' quest for immortality. That is, Burroughs' cathartic quest to inscribe and confront, in mythic and textual terms, the exigencies of his own dying, and his passage through despair to serenity and recognition, is made concrete and specific through the characters' quest to find the Western Lands (or alternatively their "blueprint," their textual embodiment), passing through the Land of the Dead and dealing with such obstacles as the River Duad. Thus Egyptian mythology, as textually mediated by Burroughs and Mailer, provides the specific loci of Burroughs' quest to imagine, confront, and decipher his own death.

The Land of the Dead is the tacit site of much of the narrative action, and this is its precise function -- as location or context. Burroughs posits the journey through the Land of the Dead as one which is not so much physically challenging as spiritually cathartic. It is in the Land of the Dead that the individual soul must come to terms with the confusing alienness of his new situation, as well as realize fully that he is in fact dead. It is here also that the individual must reflect back upon his past life, and draw upon his resources and knowledge, particularly his knowledge of myths concerning his present situation, to prepare himself for what lies ahead. The dead soul must reach and maintain a complex state of warlike serenity, fearlessness and total acceptance to pass through the next stages of his death. Essentially, he must create a narrative of his former life and present state, drawing strongly upon the mythic narratives with which he is familiar. This narrative condenses and purifies his past and present being, blending knowledge and

realization to render an essence of the individual, one which is tempered to confront and withstand the obstacles ahead.

In and through its function as the locus of these crucial operations, the Land of the Dead comes to possess a distinctly Burroughsian character. It typifies the seedy environments of his earlier work, swarming with repulsive denizens who are unable to proceed any further:

Joe retained fragmentary memories of the Land of the Dead: stone streets streaked with oil patches... a green haze of palpable menace and evil... tornado green. But this is a static tornado, a heavy, sucking emptiness. Faces in the street swim by in the heavy green medium, faces pressed and pulled out of all human semblance by hatred, evil and despair... faces torn by hideous unknown needs and hungers. Winds of searing pain sweep the dark streets in waves of screams and moans, whimpers, and the wild, maniacal laughter. Eyes glowing and sputtering blue flame.... (TWL 185)

This passage reveals the essential nature of the Land of the Dead -- haunted by the despairing evil of those who have failed to negotiate its real and imagined obstacles. Passing through the Land of the Dead purges and strengthens the dead soul, permitting him to slough off the petty and venal aspects of his former existence. He is rendered resolute and courageous, able not only to construct but enact the narrative of his quest for eternal life, and to defeat the challenges his mythic knowledge posits.

The most significant of these challenges is the River Duad, a concrete and symbolic obstacle blocking passage to the Western Lands. Whereas the Land of the Dead functions as an all-encompassing site of ritual catharsis, the Duad is a single and symbolic test of the purification the dead soul has already undergone, as well as his commitment to his quest:

The Duad is a river of excrement, one of the deadliest obstacles on the road to the Western Lands. To transcend

life you must transcend the conditions of life, the shits and farts and piss and sweat and snot of life. A frozen disgust is as fatal as prurient fixation, two sides of the same counterfeit coin. It is necessary to achieve a gentle and precise detachment, then the Duad opens like an intricate puzzle. (TWL 155)

The Duad represents not only the cathartic abandonment of the body, of existence as embodied, but also the rejection of all conditioning, social and cultural. The essence of the individual which can successfully pass the Duad must be truly pure and ascetic, completely dedicated to the goal of reaching the Western Lands.

The Duad has its own peculiar odour: "Now he can smell the Duad, a reek of rotten citrus and burning plastic." (TWL 185) This smell, described elsewhere by Burroughs as the smell of modern evil, clings to Joe the Dead in both *The Western Lands* (35) and *The Place of Dead Roads* (118). This suggests that Joe had got as far as the negotiation of the Duad before being recalled by Kim Carsons' medical skills. Joe's death, like his life, is thus incomplete, and the source of his alienation and difference, as well as his pain. He is driven to return to the Duad, to re-enact his passage through the Land of the Dead, and this time bring it to completion. His quest for the Western Lands is a truly desperate one.

The Western Lands functions as both context and symbol in the text, but is never rendered as specific and concrete as either the Land of the Dead or the Duad. Instead, it represents an idealized space, the locus of Burroughs' most difficult and nebulous concepts. Unlike the other two, it represents an end in itself, a final goal, rather than a stage in a quest, an essential rite of passage. It is the point which Burroughs strives to reach, the closure he seeks to

effect, and as such it is not and can never be embodied specifically in and by the text.

Burroughs attempts to render the Western Lands non- or anti-textual. He projects it as a place, a mode of being, which is somehow beyond textuality, beyond writing. Ironically, his attempt follows a wholly textual path: the text struggles to reclaim the Western Lands from its mythicized and hence inherently textual context by discovering its blueprint (also an inherently textual form), and then constructing a new Western Lands which surpasses the textual in its potential signification.

However, we have not as yet made the first step to locate the Western Lands and to gain access. Do the Western Lands still exist? Conquerors usually attempt to destroy the old gods. Had the conquerors been Christian, this would have been unnecessary. The Egyptians take to Christianity like vultures to carrion. Both believe in the resurrection of the body. That's what mummies are all about.

But Islam is another crock of shit altogether. However, the Western Lands cannot have disappeared without leaving a blueprint behind.

We set out to find that blueprint. (TWL 195)

Burroughs is attempting to rehabilitate the spiritual purity of the Western Lands, which he sees as corrupted by its co-optation to vampiric and alien ends. The very means through which the Western Lands is rendered concrete and specific -- "real" -- are also the source of its innate corruption: "The Western Lands are fashioned from mud, from *fellaheen* death, from the energy released at the moment of death." (TWL 196)

The key to the entrapment of the Western Lands in physicality and hence corruption is mummification. The necessity for embalming and preserving the dead body and its

organs, central to Egyptian practice, not only excludes the poor from the Western Lands and hence immortality (they can afford neither embalming nor tomb), thus rendering eternal life an elite prerogative, but also anchors immortality in corporeality and hence temporality. It is precisely this connection -- which permits alien vampiric corruption and is its source -- that Burroughs seeks to break:

It may be said that any immortality blueprint depending on prolonging the physical body, patching it together, replacing a part here and there like an old car, is the worst plan possible, like betting on the favorites and doubling up when you lose. Instead of separating yourself from the body, you are immersing yourself in the body, making yourself more and more dependent on the body....  
(*TWL* 151)

Burroughs seeks to eliminate the body -- and hence corporeality and temporality -- from the Western Lands (although it remains an unavoidably temporalized concept as the site of immortality). His rejection of the body as a vehicle of immortality is also a rejection of the ego, which he sees as the basis of psychological reality. That is, for Burroughs, the body and the ego work to anchor the seven souls in the doubly restrictive framework of psychological identity and corporeal physicality. The danger projected is that of stasis: "'In fact, a fixed image is the basic mortality error, a ME that cannot be allowed to change....'" (*TWL* 158)

Change -- transformation and transmutation -- has always been part of the Burroughsian solution, in both theory and practice. Here, the projected change overturns the three anchoring forces of text, body, and ego, starting with the latter:

Neferti is dropping his Ego, his Me, his face to meet the faces that he meets. There is nothing here to protect himself from. He can feel the old defenses falling,

dropping away like muttering burlap, dripping from crystal bone, burning out like a Coleman mantle... the black mantle shreds in the night wind.

...Khaibit, my shadow, my memory, is shredding away in the wind. (TWL 158)

The next to go is the body, in an attack that is becoming increasingly politicized:

"We know that mummification can ensure a measure of immortality." He turns to Neferti. "And what can you offer that is better than such precarious survival?"

"I can offer the refusal to accept survival on such terms, the disastrous terms of birth. I can offer the determination to seek survival elsewhere. Who dictates all this mummy shit?"

"The Gods."

"And who are they to impose such conditions?"

"They are those who succeed in imposing such conditions."

"To reach the Western Lands is to achieve freedom from fear. Do you free yourself from fear by cowering in your physical body for eternity? Your body is a boat to lay aside when you reach the far shore, or sell it if you can find a fool... it's full of holes... it's full of holes." (TWL 162)

Burroughs asserts the circularity of the theoretical basis of domination by mythical gods, who become facades for vampiric exploitation. The next step is the postulation of an overt manifesto:

We can make our own Western Lands.

We know that the Western Lands are made solid by *fellaheen* blood and energy, siphoned off by vampire mummies, just as water is siphoned off to create an oasis. Such an oasis lasts only so long as the water lasts, or the technology for its diversion. However, an oasis that is self-sustaining, recreated by the inhabitants, does not need such an inglorious vampiric lifeline.

We can create a land of dreams.

"But how can we make it solid?"

"We don't. That is precisely the error of the mummies. They made spirit solid. When you do this, it ceases to be spirit. We will make ourselves less solid."

Well that's what art is all about, isn't it? All creative thought, actually. A bid for immortality. (TWL 164-165)

Burroughs overcomes the problem of unavoidable textuality by translating it into a mode of achieving immortality -- as art. Once egolessness and incorporeality are attained, what remains

is spirituality, which is, virtually by definition, always already immortal. The passages above also demonstrate an implicit critique of concepts and constructions of the "real" -- the world as perceived through the media of language, the body, and the ego. When Burroughs dismantles or incorporates these forms he is not redefining or expanding the boundaries of the "real," as his earlier work sought to do, but refuting the necessity of all conceptualization of reality, ironically through the most "real" medium of all, that of death. That is, Burroughs uses death, as mythic context and symbolic entity to posit a spirituality which renders concepts of "reality" irrelevant. The Western Lands are deliberately nebulous and undefined because they contain and represent everything and nothing, literally, metaphorically, and conceptually. They are the "nagual" of Don Juan's magical world -- unseen but always present, effortlessly encompassing the "tonal," or everyday. Above all, the Western Lands represent closure -- as a version of death, and as an end in themselves -- and syncretism -- they incorporate and locate Burroughs' text.

The Land of the Dead, the River Duad, and the Western Lands are linked with another primary mythic context, that of the American West from *The Place of Dead Roads*, by the appearance of a fourth mythic site, the Town of Last Chance. Last Chance is an integral part of Burroughs' Western Lands schema, another stage in the passage to immortal life:

Few pilgrims reach the town of Last Chance. Sloth, self-indulgence, alcohol, addictions, old age, stupidity, all are obstacles. But lack of a special courage is the only insuperable barrier -- the courage to confront your opponent, your final enemy. If you lack this courage, you



will never reach Last Chance. Any pilgrim who has in life solved problems with violence must go through Last Chance or back to square one. No one leaves Last Chance without mortal combat. To be tested in this combat is to risk the second and final death. In Last Chance you play for keeps. (Burroughs' italics, *TWL* 141-142)

Last Chance lives up to its name -- providing a final opportunity for the dead soul to test its "special courage" and essential purity by confronting, and defeating, its nemesis. This confrontation is made specific through the metaphor of the duel, or gunfight, in keeping with the Western context. In a fantastic sequence, duelling becomes an incessant process, involving strange weapons (flails, whips, venoms) and rituals: "Since the challenged has the choice of weapons, a barroom bully doesn't know what he might be getting into... a dogfight with World War I biplanes, a medieval joust or a motorcycle duel with bicycle chains." (*TWL* 146) Last Chance is the ultimate battleground, the site of final and deadly conflict, appropriately inscribed as Old West town.

The confrontation with one's nemesis validates the town's existence:

The atmosphere of Last Chance is polite, deadly, purposeful. For Everyman comes here to find *his* enemies, and Everyman who gets this far has deadly enemies to whom he can never become reconciled and who can never be reconciled to him. You will meet your enemies in Last Chance sooner or later. (Burroughs' italics, *TWL* 147)

The search for one's enemy is as important as defeating him, as illustrated by Kim Carsons' search for Zed Barnes the "Honey Badger" (*TWL* 147-150). Tracking him down entails the sustaining of cool and nerveless deadly purpose, the desire to kill kept in check by calm caution and alertness. The necessity for psychological preparedness highlights the fact that the right state of mind, or spirit, is essential if one

is to reach Last Chance, let alone find and defeat one's ultimate enemy.

Thus Last Chance represents another stage in the tempering and purification of the dead soul, as well as the expression of its courage through the elimination of deadly obstacles. As such, it indicates the function of such specific mythic structures -- the embodiment of spiritual and hence invisible processes in textual terms. This function is complemented by that of integrating two primary mythic contexts, Egyptian and Old Western, whose compatibility is considerable and surprising.

These mythic contexts are linked further by the symbolism of roads in *The Western Lands*. The emphasis on roads as metaphor and image, means and end, is evident in *The Place of Dead Roads*, and persists in *The Western Lands*, where the Western Lands become the Place of Dead Roads, the final point at which further journeys become impossible and unnecessary. As well as structuring the entire text around the journey along the metaphorical road to eternity, passing through the Land of the Dead, Last Chance, and crossing the Duad, Burroughs plays with the clichés and potential significations associated with the concept of a road:

The Road to the Western Lands is devious, unpredictable. Today's easy passage may be tomorrow's death trap. The obvious road is almost always a fool's road, and beware the Middle Roads, the roads of moderation, common sense and careful planning. However, there is a time for planning, moderation and common sense. (TWL 151)

Burroughs posits a confused schema in which the protagonist, a dead soul in this case, must intuitively recognize when to act rationally and non-rationally. He is given no logical basis or deductive premise from which to begin, and must make his

instinctive choices in a context where a wrong choice is invariably fatal. Burroughs integrates various significations of "road" to posit these choices, as well as demonstrating the prevalence of roads as metaphor, particularly in the context of quest -- symbolic, mythic and psychological. The road is a metaphor which appears in all mythologies and all mythic systems, and Burroughs illustrates this by using this pervasive symbol to integrate Old West and Egyptian myth. The road to the Western Lands, to the Place of Dead Roads, runs through both Last Chance and the Land of the Dead. The road to death is the road to immortality, but there is always a right road and a wrong road. Ultimately, *The Western Lands'* roads become one and reach their end with the end of the text, expressing the dual imperative of syncretism -- their integrative power -- and closure -- there is a Place of Dead Roads.

The mythic contexts of *The Western Lands* are also linked and informed by another binary opposition of symbols -- that of cats and dogs. Apart from the hatred of dogs Kim Carsons expresses in *The Place of Dead Roads* (21), and the general valorization of feline animals in both the earlier texts, this symbolic opposition is unique to *The Western Lands*. Burroughs uses it to represent good (cats) and evil (dogs), the non-rational and the rational, the magical and the prosaic, although these contrasts are sometimes blurred.

Much of the symbolism of cats in *The Western Lands* is drawn from the Egyptian mythic context, which venerates them. Cats are mythic, godlike beings, or even the representatives of gods, such as Bast. The cat gods or spirits can be either

co-operative or deadly, depending on the individual who invokes them:

Many Gods are known only to a few initiates, like the Shrieking Scorpion: half cat and half scorpion, said to have been conceived by a union between Bast and the Scorpion Goddess. With her lashing tail loaded with deadly venom, her rending cat claws and insect mandibles, she is evoked only by the most terrible curses. (TWL 102)

Burroughs sees cats as possessing an affinity with certain humans and antipathy to others (who relate better to dogs). The affinity with cats is absolute -- one possesses it or one does not, and in *The Western Lands* it is the "good" characters who have this affinity, and are able to call on the help of mythical cat gods, as well as rely on ordinary cats for companionship. In the Land of the Dead, a "Cat Coin," part of a qualitative coinage, "will only be found by a cat lover." (TWL 237)

There are other magical cats in the text: "The Deercat is the spirit of total revolution and total change. The Deercat is the spirit of the Black Hole." (TWL 243) However, the most powerful cat of all is Margaras, who operates in any context:

Our most versatile agent is Margaras, the dreaded White Cat, the Tracker, the Hunter, the Killer, also known as the Stone Weasel. He is a total albino. All his body hair is snow-white, and his eyes are pearly white disks that can luminesce from within, a diffuse silver light, or can concentrate into a laser beam. Having no color, he can take all colors. He has a thousand names and a thousand faces. ...

There are those who say we have violated the Articles by invoking Margaras. He is too dangerous. He can't be stopped once he gets the scent. He has not come *justa smella you*. (TWL 56)

Margaras is the ultimate weapon, a deadly and inexorable force. His feline qualities -- stealth and predatory skill -- symbolize his dangerousness. Margaras operates through light:

The dim silver light of Margaras can invade and wipe out

other programs. He is the Call. The Challenge. The Confront. His opponents always try to evade his light, like the squid who disappears in a spray of ink. (TWL 57)

A radiant cat glowing with a pitiless white light, light on secret files and ops, light on directives and memos, light everywhere. No corner of darkness left. Power shrivels and turns to dust in the light.

Light on lies and contingency plans for drastically reduced personnel, a self-chosen few who will survive the holocaust they have themselves unleashed. (TWL 177)

Margaras' light attacks and destroys those powers who operate in the dark, in the shadows. His light is both a metaphorical weapon -- revealing secret plans and operations -- and an actual one -- the "laser beam. Margaras and his light also represent the Many Gods, destroyed or driven into exile by the One God. As such, he is the embodiment of the partisan struggle for control of the Western Lands:

Do they fear a harmless, necessary cat? No. They stand in deadly fear of the Gods and spirits that the White Cat represents. "That male cat is Ra himself." And many other powers as well, large and small -- powers they thought long dead, blocked out or blockaded. (TWL 176)

Margaras is the symbol of Burroughs' belief in the Egyptian pantheon. His light is the light of knowledge, of searching inquiry, as well as a weapon in its own right. Margaras is not only a supreme mythic being, but a locus of conflict, focusing the power of light upon the darkness which Burroughs sees as enveloping the world.

Hence the manifestation of affinity with cats becomes a means of identifying those involved in the struggle to reach and reclaim the Western Lands. Several characters express this affinity, especially Joe the Dead, who finds that feline beings are the only ones who can connect with him on an emotional level:

Cats see him as a friend. They rub against him purring, and he can tame weasels, skunks and racoons. He knows the

lost art of turning an animal into a familiar. The touch must be very brave and very gentle. ...If the touch fails, the animal may attack like a demon from Hell. Several people have been killed trying to tame the Tiger Cat, a twenty-pound wildcat found in Central America. Only those who can be without fear can make a familiar. And Joe has nothing left to fear. (TWL 29)

Joe sees cats as representing a degree of biologic and evolutionary perfection, "mute evidence that at one time a Creator with skilled, delicate and loving fingers drew breath on planet Earth, before the bad animal, Man, put an end to creation and so brought the evolutionary process to a halt." (TWL 41) Thus cats are the embodiment of the link between spiritual purity and physical perfection.

Other characters are also identified by their feline affinity, particularly William Seward Hall/the old writer, who becomes deeply attached to Smoker, a phantom cat, who causes his death (TWL 246-251). Burroughs also portrays himself with a cat in the text, "An old man in a rented house with his cat, Ruski...." (TWL 13) Ted Morgan's biography details how Burroughs came to develop an affinity with cats in the early 1980s:

The biographer was astonished, for he had never seen Burroughs drop his emotional guard, and here he was talking to his cats in an unguarded, openly affectionate tone, a tone he found it impossible to adopt... with humans. (*Literary Outlaw*, 585-586)

Burroughs' actual cats, Ruski, Fletch, Smoker, and Wimpy all appear in *The Western Lands*. Their appearances invoke the function of cats as familiars: "How can any danger come from an old man cuddling his cats? Danger comes always from the most unlikely direction. Huge black cats are lapping up the Milky Way." (TWL 176) Here, the seemingly harmless figure of an old man and his pet cat is portrayed as the guise of a

powerful magician and his familiar. Burroughs' belief in familiars is documented by Morgan:

Burroughs thought of cats as psychic familiars. Once wild, they had been recruited by the ancient Egyptians to kill the rats in their grain storage bins and were domesticated. They could, Burroughs felt sure, perform psychic reconnaissance missions, and they could put a receptive person in touch with the level of subverbal awareness in which they operated. Also, they could act as screens or representations of people in the past. (*Literary Outlaw*, 586)

Burroughs' cats also become the textual vehicle for speculation about this "level of subverbal awareness," as well as its symbol:

Smoker, the gray cat, is an ally in this dim, oily area. The night Ruski got lost and I was thinking I shouldn't have brought him out here, Smoker found him and brought him out, just as Fletch brought the Russian Blue kitten down from the tree. (*TWL* 235)

Burroughs' cats, and his affinity with them, play important roles in *The Western Lands*. They are his familiars, his means of access to an unknown world or new level of awareness, and the symbols and evidence of that world. They also serve to identify him in the text as character and author, to establish his feline affinity and hence his alignment with other like-minded characters.

By contrast, dogs symbolize primary negative and prosaic nonmagical forces for Burroughs. His detestation of dogs is also documented by Morgan:

Burroughs.... was living with five cats, and had developed a hatred of dogs, against which he protected himself with canes, a sonar device called a Dog Chaser that emitted a high-pitched wail audible only to dogs, and cans of Mace. "I gave the Airedale at the corner a squirt last winter," he said, "and he stopped right enough. Last I saw of him he was wiping his face in the snow." (*Literary Outlaw*, 584)

This hatred, and his love of cats, are synthesized in *The Western Lands* by the experiences of Hassan i Sabbah (HIS):

As always, the dogs go mad at the sight and smell of HIS, leaping and biting at the gates. HIS finds this senseless hate unnerving because he knows the dogs see him, not just as any stranger or intruder, but as a threat to their lives, something basically undoglike. No food, no love, no home will ever come to a dog from this man or his followers. (Burroughs' italics, *TWL* 206-207)

The dogs' hatred of HIS demonstrates their instinctive recognition of an enemy, one who is alien to their kind. To evade their clamour, HIS acquires a dog amulet, made by an old man who worships the cat goddess Bast:

"For every Goddess, there is also a God. Few know of the Cat God Kunuk, and he is stronger for being unknown. A known God, you see, has so many claims that it drains his power."

Kunuk is depicted as small -- five feet in height -- covered with fine silver fur, with eyes like opals. ...

This is a wild, free spirit, capricious, swept by icy passions. In the hands of a weak or timorous man his amulet is worse than useless, attracting attacks which Kunuk refuses to deal with. Too starved an argument for his sickle, or his terrible three-inch claws that can disembowel with one quick flick. Sometimes he beheads dogs and juggles the heads in remote transient markets.

His voice is as sharp as his sickle. Few can hear it and fewer still can imitate it. No dog can endure the voice of Kunuk. It is like red-hot needles jabbed into his ears until blood flows from his nose and eyes. To a cat the voice is a delicate caress. They arch and whine and purr. (*TWL* 207-208)

The symbolic opposition between cats and dogs is made explicit here. The dogs are by definition anti-magical, anti-mystical, anti-spirit. They represent the prosaic, the everyday, in and through their enslavement by mankind. The eternally independent cat, as represented by Margaras and Kunuk, is an individual, defined by a name, while a dog is defined generically in Burroughs' text.

Burroughs defines dogs as having affinity with, and symbolically representing, the "shits" of the world, to use a term from *The Place of Dead Roads*. They are narrow-minded, concerned only with the petty issues of venal lives. They are



materialistic and grasping, constantly interfering in the private affairs of others, unable to keep to themselves. The "shits" believe what they read in the papers and what they are told, and are thus ideal viral agents. All of this behaviour is typified for Burroughs by the dog -- lacking self-reliance and self-sufficiency, eternally dependent: "Ignore a dog and he gets desperate, whimpering and showing his teeth in little dog smiles...." (TWL 173) Indeed, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between dog and owner:

about ten huge scavenger dogs were closing in around him, behind them a ragged pack of snarling grave robbers.

He looks at them and smiles and turns on his radiance. He emits at first a pale glow like a firefly's, just enough to guide the dogs right to his crotch and his throat and the backs of his legs. ...Can feel it now, a ball of fire just below the navel, sweeping up and out his eyes in a brilliant flash of light. The dogs and the grave robbers are thrown back. They turn and run, yelping, whimpering, snarling. (TWL 132)

The degradation of the humans who behave like the dogs (and whose dogs behave like them in a degenerating vicious circle) is apparent. Neferti's feline instincts are also evident -- like Margaras, he uses radiant light as a weapon -- and he is a powerful and unique being unlike the indistinguishable grave robbers and their dogs.

Dogs represent an intrusive enemy, internalizing and expressing their owners' behaviour just as their owners' internalize and adopt theirs. Dogs represent a constant danger to the cats and feline characters in the text, always loudly proclaiming their recognition of a stranger, an enemy: "Dogs immediately see him with deep hatred as the Stranger, but he can make himself invisible to dogs, incapable of being seen because the dog's eyes would hurt, so that the dog skirts

the perimeters of his cover." (TWL 29) Their limited intelligence, dependent natures, and narrow focus render them vulnerable to the stealth and predatory skill of a cat.

Despite their representation of the prosaic and everyday aspects of existence, dogs do have a magical function of their own in *The Western Lands*, that of "door dogs:"

door dogs never make a sound. Silent and purposeful, they stray a few inches behind the heels of the target. No matter how quickly he turns, the door dog is always behind him. They are small creatures, not more than twenty pounds, with a long, pointed muzzle, something like a Schipperke. Door dogs are not guarders, but *crossers* of the threshold. They bring Death with them. (Burroughs' italics, TWL 45)

In spite of their mythic and mystical resonance as harbingers of Death, the source of the door dogs is intertextual -- in fact specifically literary -- rather than mythic: "For a literary precedent, we turn to *The Unbearable Bassington*, by Saki (H.H.Munro)...." (TWL 45) The door dogs are denied the kind of mythic credentials that beings such as Margaras and Kunuk possess (even apocryphally).

Like Margaras, the door dog is an ideal and deadly weapon. However, unlike that cat, the door dog is entirely subsumed by its function, existing only as a harbinger of death:

And a harbinger can readily be converted into a bearer. The door dog is loaded with doom and misfortune, as a snake in spring is loaded with venom. The door dog is directed toward a specific target. It has been said that man makes dogs in his own worst image. Certainly your door dog is reciprocally fashioned as a vehicle for the worst image of the target. The door dog fits a target as a key fits a lock. (TWL 46)

The function of door dogs represents the only magical canine function that Burroughs is prepared to admit. This function is ironic, in that it involves the persecution, by the door dogs, of individuals who most closely represent what could be

called Burroughs' canine model of human behaviour. The ironic destruction by the door dogs of those who possess the greatest canine affinity demonstrates the stupidity of canine behaviour as defined by Burroughs, as well as its suitability for corruption and alien control.

The opposition between cats and dogs, unique to *The Western Lands*, is not merely a product of Burroughs' newfound infatuation with his own pet cats. It is a profound symbolic opposition between forces, individuals, sociocultural groupings, and modes of existence. Burroughs uses this opposition to draw out feline and canine characteristics, and to ascribe them to significant characters. The opposition between cats and dogs is an opposition between independence and dependence, freedom and enslavement, and Burroughs makes it clear which side he and his characters are on. Above all, the supremacy of cats marks the supremacy of the Egyptian mythic context, with its veneration of the feline, and hence the search for the Western Lands, as described in the epigraph to this chapter.

Chapter Twenty: Unity in Multiplicity.

"I am HIS and HIS is me. I am not an agent or a representative, to be abandoned when the going gets tough, or disowned by some Chief in a distant office. That is what HIS training achieved. The Ka of his assassins merged with HIS Ka. From that moment on, he is in as much danger, in fact exactly the same danger, as his assassins." (TWL 203-204)

The mythic context of Ancient Egypt is augmented, and connected further with that of the American West, by a number of character-functions in the text. These characters also serve to link myth and literature, narrative action and self-conscious textuality, while highlighting different aspects of these relationships. Such characters surpass and subsume the primary imperatives of syncretism and closure, reaching instead towards the higher goal of unity in multiplicity. Integration (as defined by Vernon) becomes Burroughs' main concern, and the potential context of the closure he seeks -- a closure structured and informed by myth.

Kim Carsons not only links *The Western Lands* and *The Place of Dead Roads*, but also, in his role as Neferti, links their mythic contexts. He functions as both author ("After all, I wrote the Supervisor" [Burroughs' italics, TWL 74]) and narrative subject ("escape child of a frightened old man" [TWL 13]); and as protagonist both living and dead. He helps to define Joe the Dead, by constituting with him a binary opposition (see Chapter Seventeen), in which he represents the allegorical system of *The Place of Dead Roads*.

In a sense Kim, like Joe, straddles the boundary between life and death. However, rather than being irrevocably trapped between the two like Joe, Kim crosses back and forth

between them. In so doing, he demonstrates the permeability of this boundary -- which Burroughs posits as an ideal. His (re)incarnations, and passages back and forth in Time, and between Time and Space as well as life and death, lend an essential optimism to the text, by demonstrating human potential. His integrative function reaches a revelatory peak in *The Western Lands*: "'Mother, I want you to meet Kim Neferti Carsons, Great Pharaoh of the Two Outhouses, he who breathes in right and truth, surest gun west of the Pecos....'" (TWL 189).

Joe the Dead fulfils similar functions to these, although as I have already discussed his functions at some length in Chapter Seventeen, I will only look at them briefly here. In relation to the imperative to unity in multiplicity, Joe's most important feature is his defining context of indescribable pain. This context, which surrounds and envelops Joe, mediating his every thought and act, sets him apart. That is, his unimaginable suffering separates him from others, proving an effective barrier to simple human contact: "He can't love a human being, because he has no human place to love from." (TWL 39) The extent of his pain makes empathy impossible. Yet, Joe's pain is a result and expression of the universal human condition -- trapped in a fragmented and incomprehensible world, an alien and damaged body, between life (as fully and idealistically lived) and death (the unavoidable end). As such, Joe's pain is Everyman's pain, the suffering entailed by contemporary existence. He signifies syncretism and closure through his suffering and his overwhelming desire for death, for an end to his pain.

The third important character in this respect is Hassan i Sabbah, who makes his first appearance as fallible narrative subject, as opposed to infallible religious icon, in *The Western Lands*. This shift, from touchstone to protagonist, represents the integration of idiosyncratic theology and narrative action in the text, which in turn demonstrates the narrative embodiment of essentially spiritual processes and imperatives, a function which Hassan i Sabbah enacts along with Kim Carsons and Joe the Dead.

Hassan i Sabbah is first invoked in *The Western Lands* as religious icon, recalling his function in *The Place of Dead Roads*: "He knew there was only one man who could effect the basic changes dictated by the human impasse: Hassan i Sabbah: HIS. The Old Man of the Mountain." (TWL 28-29) It is not until Chapter Three that he first appears as a character within the narrative (rather than an icon outside it):

This was his first meeting with Hassan i Sabbah, who was sitting directly opposite, six feet away. He wrote in his diary:

I had an immediate impression of austerity and dedication, but it was a kind of dedication I had never seen before. There was nothing of the ordinary priest-fanatic here at all. A priest is a representative and, by the nature of his function, a conveyor of lies. Hassan i Sabbah is the Imam. It cannot be falsified. You notice his eyes, of a very pale blue, washing into white. His mind is clear and devious as underground water. You are not sure where it will emerge, but when it does, you realize it could only have been just there. (TWL 69-70)

The description of Hassan i Sabbah in the form of a diary entry assets the inherent textuality of his being. That is, a result of his transformation from icon to character is the loss of his exteriority, his meta-textuality. Burroughs resists this reductiveness by defining Hassan i Sabbah as little or as vaguely as possible:

Oh, yes, I knew him personally, but I never knew him at all. He was a man with many faces and many characters. Literally, he changed unrecognizably from one day to the next. At times his face was possessed by a dazzling radiance of pure spirit. At other times the harsh gray lineaments of fear and despair gave notice of defeat on some battleground of the spirit. Battles are fought to be won, and this is what happens when you lose. (TWL 198)

Hassan i Sabbah's lack of definition augments his new function in *The Western Lands* -- as the site of particular integrative movements. That is, he actively embodies a number of important concepts and imperatives, as well as becoming the focus of the struggle to recover control of/recreate the Western Lands: "HIS... was planning to take over the Western Lands by assassinating the demon guards, through their human representatives. Already he was drawing up lists." (TWL 193) This quotation highlights the fact that Hassan i Sabbah's main mode of operation is assassination. His struggle to reconstruct or rehabilitate the Western Lands, the purported site of immortality, is furthered by dispatching his enemies into death. His affinity with death, with closure, is evident, and entails that he become the vehicle of Burroughs' speculations concerning the nature of death, and ways in which it can be faced or even defeated. His status as the head of a mystical religious cult gives him a spiritual authority which Burroughs employs:

Is there a technique for confronting death without immediate physical danger? Can one reach the Western Lands without physical death? These are the questions that Hassan i Sabbah asked.

Don Juan says that every man carries his own death with him at all times. The impeccable warrior contacts and confronts his death at all times, and is immortal. So the training at Alamout was directed toward putting the student in contact with *his death*. Once contact has been made, the physical assassination is a foregone conclusion. His assassins did not even try to escape, though capture meant torture. By the act of assassination they had

transcended the body and physical death. The operative has killed *his death*. (Burroughs' italics, *TWL* 191-192)

The ideas of Hassan i Sabbah become integrated with those of another iconic figure in Burroughs' work -- Don Juan of Castaneda's works. The invocation of Don Juan reasserts the inherent textuality of Hassan i Sabbah and Don Juan himself -- both exist in and through texts. Their ideas, as interpreted by Burroughs, merge in this passage, ironically drawing their resonance from the spurious meta-textual authority of two inherently textual beings.

Hassan i Sabbah also becomes the vehicle of political critique and the reassertion of the space policy:

Modern agents are protecting and expanding political aggregates. HIS was training individuals for space conditions, for existence without the physical body. This is the logical evolutionary step. The physical body is not designed for space conditions in present form. Too heavy, since it is encumbered with a skeleton to maintain upright position in a gravity field.

Political structures are increasingly incompatible with space conditions. They are inexorably cutting our lifelines to space, by imposing a uniformity of environment that precludes evolutionary mutations. (*TWL* 192)

Hassan i Sabbah synthesizes Burroughs' earlier ideas, combining the need for evolutionary progress through biological mutation with the desire to be in space. His role as integrative focus is evident. Yet Burroughs' next step is to recontextualize Hassan i Sabbah as character, imagining his relationship with his assassins in the terms of the Egyptian concept of seven souls:

Unlike other masters, HIS *becomes* his servant. If the servant loses and fails, HIS also loses and fails. So he does not accept servants lightly. In fact, he does not accept them at all. How can an extension of himself be a servant? One maintains distance with a servant. Here is a special closeness, an identity, in fact, that is the basis of the relationship.

...The commitment of the Guardian is total. His



position is almost the same as the Ka's, but not quite. You can say that the Ka is the Guardian's Control Officer. (Burroughs' italics, *TWL* 210)

Hassan i Sabbah's relationship to his assassins is described comparatively in terms of the Egyptian mythic context. His identification with them inverts the traditional master-servant relationship, fulfilling Burroughs' drive toward sociopolitical equality. As Burroughs construes the Ismaelite cult, the Imam, Hassan i Sabbah, is merely the vessel of God, of revelation, rather than the possessor and wielder of religious, and hence social and political, power. The passage draws upon this construction of the Imam's role to invert the master-disciple relationship, placing the burden of care and protection squarely upon the "master," Hassan i Sabbah. The importance of this inversion to Burroughs' various schema is demonstrated by his revelation concerning, and empathetic embrace of, Hassan i Sabbah:

I realize that my whole approach to HIS has been faulty. I have put him on a remote pedestal; then, with a carry-over of Christian reflexes, have invoked HIS aid, like some Catholic feeling his saint medal. And when I was defeated I felt betrayed. I did not stop to think that he was also defeated, that he is taking his chances with *me*. ...I asked another question: Did HIS have as bad a time in Egypt as I had in the Empress Hotel? Immediately I knew that the answer was Yes!

I am HIS and HIS is me. I am not an agent or a representative, to be abandoned when the going gets tough, or disowned by some Chief in a distant office. That is what HIS training achieved. The Ka of his assassins merged with HIS Ka. From that moment on, he is in as much danger, in fact exactly the same danger, as his assassins. (Burroughs' italics, *TWL* 203-204)

Burroughs merges his own identity with that of HIS. This sets up a mirroring process -- Burroughs seeks to model his relationship with his characters on that of Hassan i Sabbah and his assassins. The revelation is significant: HIS is liberated from the limitations of his former iconic role,

becoming free to act.

However, Hassan i Sabbah's new-found status is demolished by the text, following the evocation of his role as fugitive:

What is life worth when the purpose is gone? Skulking in an ill-fitting body from a shabby bargain long void, he is, if anything, the carrier of the child formed from his mind and body. Every assassin he trained became his child. He *became* his agents, his messengers.

...He is safe here in Alamout. No one can touch him. But safety is the most dangerous of all conditions. (Burroughs' italics, *TWL* 226-227)

Hassan i Sabbah is portrayed as exhausted by the very process which gave him his power and assured his invulnerability -- the total identification with his assassins. He is worn out and wasted by the effort of nurturing and protecting them all. As a result, he retreats to Alamout, his fortress, which represents only an illusion of safety -- for as the passage implies, safety is a state of mind, of alertness and preparedness, rather than an actual situation. Thus the source of his power has a fatal flaw -- the personal cost is too high. He cannot sustain his assassins and maintain a purity of deadly purpose indefinitely. Ultimately, something must give way, and the sacrifice of one aspect means the eventual destruction of all.

Hassan i Sabbah, in this aspect, represents a fundamental dualism -- of purpose and achievement, means and end. Combining the dual functions of leadership (maintaining the objective and sustaining his followers) within himself, he represents unity in multiplicity, but one which cannot hold and is doomed to shatter. Hassan i Sabbah becomes a symbol of the "wrong" kind of unity, one with too narrow a base (a single mind) to preserve its structural integrity. It takes a

greater force, and a broader base, to sustain the holistic entity which Burroughs has in mind. Unity in multiplicity remains the ultimate goal of the text's drive to closure, but it is a unity which is constantly redefined and remodelled.

The specific literary source of *The Western Lands*' primary mythic context, Mailer's *Ancient Evenings*, advances a particular version of unity in multiplicity, one which both respects and subsumes dualism. To give one example from the many available:

These emotions I received as directly as if she had spoken, and understood, if I had ever doubted, that being possessed of two separate eyes and two ears, two arms, two legs, two lips for taste (one for the good taste, one for the bad), two nostrils by which to breathe (the male Gods to one side, Goddesses to the other), and that even as Egypt was the nation of the Two-Lands, and the Pharaoh had a Double-Crown, and a Twice-Royal Seat, the Nile had two banks, and there was day and night, so could my mind receive the thoughts of two people at once. (*Ancient Evenings* 484)

This passage reveals the fundamental dualism which Mailer posits as structuring the Egyptian consciousness. They perceive dualism in their own bodies, their environment, and their geographical situation, and even worship their Gods in a dualistic fashion (they tend to have at least two names and functions). Dualism and multiplicity, celebrated ritually and politically, become a source of strength, of unity. This strength and unity are embodied in the Pharaoh, who is represented as the most powerfully multiplicitous being -- he has fourteen souls instead of the usual seven.

The Pharaoh is predominantly an integrative locus. His Double-Crown represents the unification of Upper and Lower Egypt under his rule, as does his Twice-Royal Seat. He also rules over a number of conquered minorities, mostly of

different races. The Pharaoh is a god, but he is also human, and he is expected to draw strength from both aspects of his being, to unify them and render himself majestic and powerful. He symbolizes the dualism and multiplicity of Egyptian consciousness and draws together its diverse elements, forging a unified whole. A strong Pharaoh draws his strength from this multiplicity and diversity, and uses it to maintain unity, to sustain the identity that is Egypt. However, by the end of *Ancient Evenings*, a weak Pharaoh is defeated by dualism, by multiplicity (just as Hassan i Sabbah was). He is unable to hold all the diverse elements together, to maintain control, and Egypt begins to splinter and fall apart. Mailer shows the fallibility of the Egyptian system of government and control -- although its Pharaoh is given absolute power, it requires great strength to wield that power, to create unity and harmony. However, the text ends by reaffirming the significance of unity in multiplicity as a philosophical basis and a political goal, as the Kas of the two Menenhetets, grandson and grandfather, unite in order to ascend to the "Boat of Ra." The celebration of diversity, of difference, within a unified and thus harmonious context remains as an ultimate and worthy end.

Burroughs' use of *Ancient Evenings* as the primary intertextual source of *The Western Lands* seems curious and significant, given his persistent opposition to, and constant attacks upon, the dualist conception of existence: "I've spoken of unworkable formulas and possibly the most unworkable formula is the whole concept of a dualistic universe." (*Job* 91) His work consists, in a sense, of vehement assault upon

the principle of dualism, often in the form of attacks upon what he terms the Aristotelian either/or. In other words, how and why does a committed and confirmed anti-dualist employ a mythic and intertextual context which is not just fundamentally but emphatically dualist?

The answer is that he treats it firstly as paradigmatic, and secondly as suitable for rehabilitation. In *The Western Lands*, Burroughs endeavours to show how dualism is a source, a point of entry, for alien corruption, as well as the ideal mode for its vampiric operations. Dualism admits and sustains alien forces by creating and maintaining divisions, differences, dichotomies. The binary structure of consciousness, of being as exemplified by the Egyptian system creates and locates a space in which viral corruption can flourish:

"Find out how the Western Lands are created. Where the Egyptians went wrong and bogged down in their stinking mummies. Why they needed to preserve the physical body."

Kim gives him the textbook answer: "Because they had not solved the equation imposed by a parasitic female Other Half who needs a physical body to exist, being parasitic on other bodies. So to maintain the Other Half in the style to which she has for a million years been accustomed, they turn to the reprehensible and ill-advised expedient of vampirism." (*TWL* 74)

Dualism is inscribed as female and, for Burroughs, as stereotypically evil. He locates corruption, alien entry, at the point where humanity is divided into male and female, and even posits the individual body as dualistically male (natural, good) and female (alien, parasitic, evil). Kim Carsons uses this formulation to posit a solution to the problem of dualism and alien control:

"If, on the other hand, the Western Lands are reached by the contact of two males, the myth of duality is exploded and the initiates can realize their natural state. The

Western Lands is the natural, uncorrupted state of all male humans. We have been seduced from our biologic and spiritual destiny by the Sex Enemy." (TWL 74-75)

The Western Lands are represented here as a kind of "boys only" club, a refuge from female evil. They also become a symbolic state of originary purity, somehow located "before" sex and gender and hence "before" duality. "Natural" becomes a powerful term of valorization and approbation, suggesting a mythical purity and goodness, which can be nostalgically recalled, and perhaps even recreated.

In the passage above the Western Lands shift from their location at the "end" of life -- the point of final rest, of immortal life -- to a mythic state preceding existence. This transformation indicates the potential for rehabilitation the Egyptian system possesses -- Burroughs is able to reinscribe one of its important concepts in terms which surmount and confront dualism as such. He uses Hassan i Sabbah and the Egyptian system posited by Mailer as paradigmatic forms of unity in multiplicity which are unsuccessful and unsustainable because they are unable to eradicate the evil that dualism embodies and permits. As such, they are also examples of the rehabilitation process Burroughs posits, but never actually enacts in his texts, preferring to shift the burden of action on to the reader.

As we have seen, the mythic context of *The Western Lands* is foregrounded in its narrative and thematic concerns. Through specific sites, symbols, and characters, as well as its general contextualizing capabilities, it structures and informs the text, expressing and fulfilling the dual

imperatives of syncretism and closure. However, the generalized and impersonal context provided by myth in the text is countered by the author's insistent presence. *The Western Lands* is the most personal and intimately expressive of all Burroughs' texts, concerned as it is with the cathartic process of coming to terms with old age, death, and the possible end of a career, a vocation. The imperative to closure incorporates Burroughs' introspection concerning death and the end of his writing career, as well as the completion of the mythopoeic processes already discussed at some length. Thus I want to conclude this chapter by briefly examining the peculiarly personal and interior aspects of *The Western Lands* -- Burroughs' revelation and self-scrutiny -- as well as the exteriorized confrontation of old age, death, and the final assessment of a long career. Ultimately, these aspects are integrated with the mythic context and overt narrative action to form the holistic entity which is the text.

Burroughs' comprehensive assessment of his career in *The Western Lands* involves the projection of harshly realistic self-portraits throughout the text. He externalizes his feelings about himself, rendering them as text, in order to establish distance and hence objectivity. Although this process is often focused on the figure of the old writer, at times Burroughs discards this guise and appears simply as himself: "An old man in a rented house with his cat, Ruski. So he looks about in quiet desperation for an escape route..." (TWL 13), and: "So here I am in Kansas with my cats, like the honorary agent for a planet that went out light-years ago." (TWL 252)

Burroughs not only situates himself specifically in the text (as "an old man cuddling his cats..." [TWL 176]), but also provides occasional reminiscences, as well as frank commentary upon what he is actually trying to do: "I want to reach the Western Lands...." (TWL 257) He even reflects cynically upon his own literary concerns: "'Sun cold on a thin boy with freckles,' Burroughs repeats for a thousand years." (TWL 203)

The personalization of the text in this way complements the less direct expression of Burroughs' self-image and self-analysis in the figure of the old writer. The degree of intimacy and honesty Burroughs is prepared to risk reaches a climax in *The Western Lands*, and I contend that the intensified sense of his presence works to integrate the text's disparate elements and further its closure and that of the trilogy. It is the sense of closure, imminent and actual, which make possible Burroughs' frankness -- the painful revelatory mode he adopts does not have to be sustained indefinitely. As Skerl puts it, in reference to *Cities of the Red Night*:

His power to create "reality" is total for his characters, is a powerful model to his readers, but is an endless cycle of bondage to himself -- a bondage ending only in death. For the writer of the later works is unable to free himself from his personal and cultural past; nor can he escape the very mental constructs of fiction and reality that allow him to create. He can only show the way for others. (*Burroughs* 80)

The writer's proximity to death, and hence to closure, makes possible a final intensification of his message in *The Western Lands*.

The intimate nature of *The Western Lands*, and the confessional and revelatory narrative modes which Burroughs



adopts, are complemented by the characters' mythic quest to find, or recreate, the Western Lands. The emphasis on this quest, on action and adventure, balances the introspective and reflective aspects of the text, and the two are wholly integrated, as the quest for the Western Lands represents the externalization or embodiment of Burroughs' inner quest to imagine, confront, and demystify death, to project a situated immortality, and to find a way of reaching it. The mythic and active episodes of the text enact symbolically Burroughs' reflective interior processes. The latter are made concrete by the former -- made perceptible and, above all, readable.

The introspective processes of the text are also typified by the hardships and vicissitudes of a writer's career. The role of the old writer, (and) William Seward Hall is to embody the writer as Everyman, to demonstrate, in vivid and painful terms, what it means, and what it costs, to adopt the vocation of writer. The archetypal figure of the writer expresses Burroughs' self-analysis and introspection, making it specific for the reader in the same way as the mythic quest, though on a lesser scale.

One of the most potent symbols associated with the archetypal writer in *The Western Lands* is that of writer's block. It destroys the old writer's career, and is described as "a disgust for his words" which "was like arsenic or lead, which slowly builds up in the body until a certain point is reached and then... he hummed the refrain of 'Dead Man Blues' by Jelly Roll Morton." (TWL 1) Writer's block becomes synonymous with death (through poisoning), representing the death of a career. For the old writer, writer's block is not

merely a temporary obstacle but a terminal one, forcing him into an unsatisfactory existence defined almost solely by his failure to fulfil his vocation. However, writer's block is also presented in its more traditional sense as a temporary obstacle in *The Western Lands*: "The most severe visitation of writer's block has fallen as my narrative comes to Hassan i Sabbah in Egypt.... I realize that my whole approach to HIS has been faulty." (TWL 203) Writer's block becomes an obstacle like the River Duad -- one which requires purity and courage to defeat, but, once surpassed, gives admission to a new and superior mode of being or state of mind. The block Burroughs experiences in dealing with Hassan i Sabbah eventually becomes the source of an epiphanic realization concerning him, a realization which is not only inspired but made possible by the block.

Writer's block is both a means and an end. It can purify and strengthen the soul, challenging the individual's resources, and providing admittance to higher states of being, once surpassed, or it can cruelly terminate a text, a career, even a life. Writer's block has a random quality in *The Western Lands* -- it appears and disappears apparently without cause and unbidden. Above all, it represents the writer's condition as Burroughs sees it, oscillating between creative triumph and defeat or despair. For my purposes, it also serves to demonstrate the specific embodiment of Burroughs' inner quest in the alternative figure of the archetypal writer, as well as the characters' mythicized quest for the Western Lands.

Chapter Twenty One: Endings.

"It all reads like sci-fi from here. Not very good sci-fi, but real enough at the time. There were casualties... quite a number.

Well, there isn't any transport out. There isn't any important assignment. It's every man for himself. Like the old bum in the dream said: Maybe we lost. And this is what happens when you lose." (TWL 252)

The primary concerns of the inner quest which *The Western Lands* expresses and symbolically enacts, through the mythic quest for the Western Lands and the experiences of the old writer/William Seward Hall, are, as we know, death and immortality. The axis Burroughs projects in this text -- from death to immortality -- comes to replace the Time-Space axis which has oriented *Cities of the Red Night* and *The Place of Dead Roads*. Although Burroughs continues to propagate his space policy in *The Western Lands*, as a goal it is subsumed by immortality -- ironically a concept of time.

Time continues to appear as an imprisoning context in *The Western Lands*: "And in Time, any being that is spontaneous and alive will wither and die like an old joke." (TWL 111)

Burroughs' attitude toward Time as a context oscillates between hatred and disdain, taking for granted its dominance as well as its innate corruption: "And what do years mean, apart from human measurement and perception? Does time pass if there is no one there to register its passing? Of course not, since Time is a figment of human perception." (TWL 223)

Time is inscribed as a function and condition of human existence, represented powerfully and visibly in the aging of the body, but this apparent inevitability is challenged by Burroughs' portrayal of Time as "a figment of human

perception." He also depicts Time as a context which determines the aging and decay of the universe as a whole: "Any factor that can be measured is quantitative, and any quantitative factor runs out in a time universe." (TWL 234) The function of Time established in *Cities of the Red Night* and *The Place of Dead Roads*, is recalled: it contextualizes and inevitably restricts the possibilities of human endeavour. Time symbolizes for Burroughs the innate yet alien corruption of human consciousness, through the prevalence of unquestioned and externally imposed structures of perception and "reality."

In *Cities of the Red Night* and *The Place of Dead Roads*, Space was presented as an alternative to a chronological existence, to aging and decay. Space, textual and extraterrestrial, inner and "outer," became both a means of escape and an end in itself -- the location of an idealized existence. In *The Western Lands*, space persists as part of Burroughs' agendas:

Our policy is SPACE.

Anything that favors or enhances space programs, space exploration, simulation of space conditions, exploration of inner space, expanding awareness, we will support.  
(TWL 25)

This formulation of Burroughs' space policy, which appears at the end of Chapter One of *The Western Lands*, is in the tradition of *The Place of Dead Roads*. However, space as concept and symbol, end and location, is rapidly integrated into the later text's agenda:

To endure in time, any structure must present predictable recurrences. The visions, the glimpses of the Western Lands, exist in space, not time, a different medium and a different light, with no temporal coordinates or recurrences. (TWL 242)

The Time-Space axis of the trilogy merges with the

death-immortality axis of *The Western Lands*, in and through the concept of the Western Lands. They are inscribed as both chronological -- the locus of immortality -- and spatial -- "outside" time in some way, as described above. The Western Lands subsume Time and Space, integrating them with the concepts of death and immortality which are more appropriate to this text's personalized emphasis and introspective orientation. A potent synthesis is enacted, enabling the new predominance of death and immortality in the text.

Death, in *The Western Lands*, is conceived as a means of passage and an end in itself, a locus of suffering and eternity, and a symbolic and active entity. Burroughs uses the Egyptian concept of death (drawn from *Ancient Evenings*) to project a First Death, which represents the termination of bodily life and subsequent progression through the Land of the Dead, and a Second Death, which is irrevocable and eternal, though not unavoidable: "Total Death. Soul Death. It's what the Egyptians called the Second and Final Death." (TWL 9) This distinction creates a boundary, a perimeter of death which contains the Land of the Dead with its various challenges, and also the text as such.

Death is also defined more prosaically in *The Western Lands*: "Death is an end product of purpose, of destiny. Something to be done in a certain time, and once it is done there is no point in staying around." (TWL 60) Death is a final fulfilment of function, an end, a termination. In this sense, death can be inscribed as both presence and absence:

Death is that which, when it occupies you, you are dead. Death is eviction from the earth body. Death is an unbearable presence. People die to avoid it... Death can

be simply defined as what kills you.... (AM 142)

Death is both an occupation of and an eviction from the physical body. The occupying agent, which Burroughs defines as viral in the trilogy as a whole, and specifically as cancer in *The Western Lands*, becomes the inspiration for a novel plan to defeat death:

The ultimate purpose of cancer and all virus, is to replace the host. So instead of trying to kill the cancer cells, help them to replicate and to replace host cells.

...Instead of trying to keep the patient alive, we will keep his Death alive. If he can become Death, he cannot die.

Death is incidental to function. When function is accomplished, death occurs. So instead of joining the retarded medical profession and desperately trying to keep Death out, why not let Death all the way in? (TWL 60-61)

Burroughs advocates the relinquishing of bodily integrity and physical, even cellular identity in favour of sheer survival. Defined in this way, death is totally prosaic, restricted in its signification, inscribed merely as occupation and eviction, presence and absence. Qualified immortality is possible, but only by renouncing one's own identity and becoming the virus. Given the overwhelming antipathy to the virus in the trilogy -- it is the metaphorical embodiment of mankind's innate corruption and degradation -- the solution proposed here is speculative and provocative.

Burroughs' description of death as fundamentally prosaic and meaningless<sup>1</sup> contrasts sharply with other descriptions in the text:

Don Juan says that every man carries his own death with him at all times. The impeccable warrior contacts and confronts his death at all times, and is immortal. So the training at Alamout was directed toward putting the student in contact with *his death*. (Burroughs' italics, TWL 191-192)

Death becomes a symbolic entity, inscribed by the iconic

figure of Castaneda's Don Juan. The world of the warrior is an inherently magical and mystical one, entailing an alternative perception of the world. Death is further embodied in and by the text:

Death doesn't like to be seen that close. Death must always elicit surprised recognition: "You!"

The last person you expected to see, and at the same time, who else? (Burroughs' italics, *TWL* 246)

Death is an individual, a physical being. Its tangibility ensures its defeatability -- knowing and confronting one's enemy is half the battle. Thus death, as represented in *The Western Lands*, is an actual entity in the world, as well as the negative termination of bodily existence and, in the sense of the Egyptian First Death, a means of passage to either immortality or the Second and Final Death.

The projection of immortality integrates the contrasting definitions of death in the text. That is, the greater goal of immortality subsumes the different versions of death, in and through the symbolism of the Western Lands:

The road to the Western Lands is by definition the most dangerous road in the world, for it is a journey beyond Death, beyond the basic God standard of Fear and Danger. It is the most heavily guarded road in the world, for it gives access to the gift that supercedes all other gifts: Immortality. (*TWL* 124)

Burroughs' version of immortality is not the indefinite prolonging of bodily existence, but an utterly different, unknowable, and perhaps inconceivable, way of being. Its radical difference or otherness is defined by the fact that it goes beyond everything that is familiar and known. Thus Burroughs projects the Western Lands as the metaphorical site of an ideal existence -- one which is ideal precisely because of its radical otherness.

Despite his longing for immortality, Burroughs is alternately pessimistic and optimistic regarding the chances of actually achieving it. Near the beginning of the text he despairs of the survival of the soul, given man's contemporary condition of corruption, symbolized by nuclear weapons:

Can any soul survive the searing fireball of an atomic blast? If human and animal souls are seen as electromagnetic force fields, such fields could be totally disrupted by a nuclear explosion. The mummy's nightmare: disintegration of souls, and this is precisely the ultrasecret and supersensitive function of the atom bomb: a Soul Killer, to alleviate an escalating soul glut. (TWL 7)

Man's externalized self-hatred and capacity for self-destruction is revealed to its fullest extent. The capability to destroy not only the body but also the potentially immortal soul symbolizes for Burroughs the profound extent of the alien corruption he envisages. Yet, having plunged the reader into the abyss of his despair at this early stage, Burroughs proceeds to lead him out of it, casting around for ways and means of (re)constructing the Western Lands and hence achieving immortality.

There are two distinct approaches to immortality in *The Western Lands*: the theoretical, which is historically oriented, and the practical, which is concerned with imaginatively locating and reaching the Western Lands. The theoretical approach centres largely around Burroughs' imaginative projection of the presumed conflict between Egyptian religion or theology and Christianity:

How did the Egyptian Gods and Demons set up and activate an elaborate bureaucracy governing and controlling immortality and assigning it, on arbitrary grounds, to a chosen few? The fact that few could qualify is evidence that there was something to qualify for.

Limited and precarious immortality actually existed. For this reason no one challenged the system. They wanted



to become Gods themselves, under existing conditions....

Then come the one-God religions: Judaism, Christianity, Islam, promising immortality to everyone simply for obeying a few simple rules. ...Pray and believe -- believe an obvious lie, and pray to a shameless swindler.

Immortality is purpose and function. Obviously, few can qualify. And does this Christian God stand with his worshippers? He does not. Like a cowardly officer, he keeps himself well out of the war zone, bathed in the sniveling prayers of his groveling, shit-eating worshippers -- his dogs. (TWL 70)

A sliding scale is operating here -- Burroughs is intensely critical of both systems of immortality, but finds the Christian one far more repellent than the Egyptian. He portrays the Egyptian system as based upon elitism, the protection and maintenance of power and privilege through limited admission to immortality, while the Christian system is portrayed as based on a lie, a false promise of immortality to ensure obedience to arbitrary social and moral codes. Burroughs' preference for the Egyptian system yet abhorrence for its nature and premises as well as those of Christianity, is encapsulated in the symbolic conflict between the "One God" and the "Many Gods." This conflict is represented in the subversion of the Egyptian system by monotheism:

There was war in the heavens, as the One God attempted to exterminate or neutralize the Many Gods and establish a seat of absolute power. The priests were aligning themselves on one side or the other. Revolution was spreading up from the South, moving in from the East and from the Western deserts. (TWL 101)

The struggle between the Gods is a political one -- it is a struggle for control, for absolute power, and the ultimate symbol (and prize) of this conflict is immortality, inscribed as the Western Lands.

Burroughs' sympathies in this struggle are clear: "Neferti aligned himself with the rebels and the followers of Many Gods." (TWL 101) This alliance is depicted as purely

practical in one sense -- Neferti's goal is to find the Western Lands papyrus, the textual blueprint of the Western Lands, and to subvert all corrupt systems of power and control. Yet, in another, nostalgic sense, Neferti's choice embodies Burroughs' desire for a magical world:

It is of course assumed by Western savants that the Egyptian animal Gods are the fantasies of a primitive and backward people, who did not have the advantage of the glorious gains of the Industrial Revolution, a revolution in which a standardized human product overthrows himself and replaces his own kind with machines (they are so much more efficient).

However, all fantasy has a basis in fact. I venture to suggest that at some time and place the animal Gods actually existed, and that their existence gave rise to belief in them. At this point the monolithic One God concept set out to crush a biologic revolution that could have broken down the lines established between the species, thus precipitating unimaginable chaos, horror, joy and terror, unknown fears and ecstasies, wild vertigos of extreme experience, immeasurable gain and loss....  
(*TWL* 112)

Burroughs' longing for what might have been (and could still be) merges with his despair at what is. The struggle between the Many Gods and the One God becomes more than a struggle between competing theologies and political systems, different methods of sustaining power and control. Rather, it is a conflict between magic and logic, the non-rational and the rational, spontaneity and the predictably banal. Hence this conflict expresses the desire which is basic to the quest for immortality as well as the quest for space -- the desire for escape.

The possibilities for escape, for immortality, which the Many Gods represent, seem to be doomed by the rise of monotheism:

But the One God has time and weight. Heavy as the pyramids, immeasurably impacted, the One God can wait. The Many Gods may have no more time than the butterfly,

fragile and sad as a boat of dead leaves.... (TWL 113)

The immutable, ponderous joylessness of the One God ensures his eventual victory -- he has weight and can wait. His victory is a triumph for stasis, for stagnation and decay:

Consider the One God Universe: OGU. The spirit recoils in horror from such a deadly impasse. He is all-powerful and all-knowing. Because He can do everything, He can do nothing, since the act of doing demands opposition. He knows everything, so there is nothing for him to learn. He can't go anywhere since He is already fucking everywhere, like cowshit in Calcutta.

The OGU is a pre-recorded universe of which He is the recorder. It's a flat, thermodynamic universe, since it has no friction by definition. So He invents friction and conflict, pain, fear, sickness, famine, war, old age and Death. (TWL 113)

This passage is a familiar Burroughsian account of the basis of Christianity. The Christian God, who is always a controller, never a creator, is depicted as the explicit source of both stasis -- the failure to move forward, to evolve and transmute -- and decay -- the gradual loss of energy, aging, and finally death. This God is a destroyer, and must in turn be destroyed.

But how does one destroy a God, overturn a dominant theological (and inherently political) system? Burroughs' answers to this question in *The Western Lands* tend to be deliberately vague, emphasizing the difficulty of the task, as well as the strength and purity (and supernatural assistance) required even to attempt it:

God of the Long Chance, the impossible odds, the punch-drunk fighter who comes up off the floor to win by a knockout, blind Samson pulling down the temple, the horse that comes from last to win in the stretch, God of perilous journeys, Helper in the voyage between death and rebirth, the road to the Western Lands.

To be reborn at all makes your condition almost hopeless. He is the God of Almost, the God of If Only, the God of Miracles, and he demands more of his followers than any other god. Do not evoke him unless you are ready to take the impossible chances, the longest odds. Chance

demands total courage and dedication. He has no time for welchers and pikers and vacillators.

...God of Mutation and Change, God of hope in hopeless conditions, he brings a smell of the sea, of vast open places, a smell of courage and purpose... a smell of silence confronting the outcome. (TWL 114-115)

The diverse functions of this God, one of the Many Gods, demonstrate the multiplicity of the magical universe Burroughs projects to replace the static Christian one (the OGU), as well as the difficulty of rendering this universe actual. The quest for immortality, for the Western Lands, aided by the God of Long Chance, enacts Burroughs' redefinition of existence, his desire to overturn oppression and start anew -- reconstructing, recreating. And the first site to be reconstructed is the Western Lands.

In this process, and as its result, immortality becomes a site of synthesis, embodied as the Western Lands. The destructive desire to defeat alien control, to subvert oppressive systems, merges with the constructive desire to (re)create a magical universe, one which is chaotic but offers enormous possibilities for the fulfilment of human endeavour and function, in a context of eternal life which allows the full exploration of these possibilities. Focused in the Western Lands, immortality comes to represent freedom, possibility, and wholeness, and escape from a restricted and fragmented existence.

It is in this mode of idealistic projection that the text explores the "Great Awakening," the mass uprising against oppression in the form of pilgrimage to the newly rediscovered Western Lands:

Just as the Old World mariners suddenly glimpsed a round Earth to be circumnavigated and mapped, so awakened pilgrims catch hungry flashes of vast areas beyond Death

to be created and discovered and charted, open to anyone ready to take a step into the unknown, a step as drastic and irretrievable as the transition from water to land. That step is from word into silence. From Time into Space.

The Pilgrimage to the Western Lands has started, the voyage through the Land of the Dead. (TWL 115)

The trilogy's major metaphors for the necessary transmutation are synthesized here: water to land, word to silence, Time to Space, and death to immortality. Immortality provides the focus, the purpose necessary to weld humanity into a single entity (a unity in multiplicity) which can defeat its oppressors and pursue its quest with resolve and dedication. Like death, immortality is both an end in itself and a means to an end; an ideal place to be and a way of getting there.

Despite the holistic completion of his total schema which the synthetic function of immortality embodies, Burroughs continues to goad the reader into embarking upon a quest of his own:

Look at the prison you are in, we are all in. This is a penal colony that is now a Death Camp. Place of the Second and Final Death.

Desperation is the raw material of drastic change. Only those who can leave behind everything they have ever believed in can hope to escape. (TWL 116)

As always, Burroughs' rhetoric is in terms of absolutes. Desperation becomes the source of inspiration, of action and hence fulfilment of function. It is out of despair that Burroughs projects the various textual axes of the trilogy --- water to land, language to silence, Time to Space, Death to immortality -- and it is through his desperation, and that which he attempts to inspire in the reader, that they will become actual, and their endpoints will be reached.

Thus the axis of death-immortality subsumes that of Time--Space, rather than simply replacing it. As such, it

embodies the political and spiritual imperatives of the trilogy as a whole, as well as expressing Burroughs' personal quest for cathartic self-acceptance. The axis of death-immortality, with its distantly recalled origin in everyday existence, informs and structures the text, fulfilling its dual imperatives to integration and closure.

Given the mythic and personal contexts of *The Western Lands*, structured by the axis of death-immortality and the imperatives to synthesis and closure, there is still one imperative which resonates throughout the entire trilogy as well as this text and which is a powerful constant in all of Burroughs' work. This is the imperative to knowledge, and hence to power -- over one's self and one's destiny.

Knowledge is the lodestar of all Burroughs' agendas, the persistent and resilient survivor of his rejection of the potential sociopolitical effectiveness of literature. Despite the many reversals and modifications that his theories undergo, the will to knowledge remains his "categorical imperative," and knowledge itself takes on an iconic status, whilst still retaining an essential dynamism and potential for activism.

In *The Western Lands*, knowledge is the source of courage -- to act, to confront and change one's destiny: "Knowing you might not make it... in that knowledge courage is born." (*TWL* 11-12) The propagation of crucial and secret knowledge inspires the Medical Riots of 1999 (*TWL* 60-67), and the mass pilgrimage to the Western Lands (*TWL* 115-116). Knowledge is also a locus through which one must pass, acquiring essential

skills and information for the completion of one's quest (even information about the appropriate end and nature of this quest). As such, knowledge is embodied in characters like William Seward Hall -- writers and therefore possessors and propagators of knowledge -- and above all by Waghdas (one of the Cities of the Red Night): "The road to Waghdas, the City of Knowledge, is a long, circuitous detour through labyrinths of ignorance, stupidity and error." (TWL 124)

Knowledge is non-rational and mystical in *The Western Lands*, as well as rational and deductive. One of its most important sources, besides texts/authors, is dreams:

You need your dreams, they are a biologic necessity and your lifeline to space, that is, to the state of a God. To be one of the Shining Ones. The inference is that Gods are a biologic necessity. They are an integral part of Man. (TWL 181)

Our dreams are how we realize, that is, come to know, our own potential, our godlike essence. In a world where magic and logic, intuition and rational thought are distinct and divided, dreams provide the connection between consciousness and inner being, innate potential. They are the ideal vehicle of self-knowledge in a dualistic and fragmented world.

Knowledge is everywhere, awaiting animation by the desire to know:

Knowledge takes many forms and contexts. Cloistered ivy-covered hall, serious youths in academic garb... the typical is so often *not* where it's at, deliberately avoided like a cliché, that it becomes in time atypical, and by the inexorable logic of fashion, is once again where it's at. (Burroughs' italics, TWL 125)

Knowledge is also an immense source of potential power, telling one what to do and why, as well as when to act. It is an ultimate epiphanic force:

Knowledge can be as explosive as Matter into Energy, as deadly as the virus for which the only cure is Death. Knowledge can bind men together in secret brotherhood, the knowledge of some unspeakable deed or rite so foul that an outsider could not conceive of it. So the brothers are safe if they stay together and keep silence. (TWL 125)

Burroughs has depicted a number of such concealed, because foul and unspeakable, acts throughout the trilogy, such as the origins of human speech in the "smouners" of *The Place of Dead Roads*. His goal is to break the bonds of secrecy, of conspiracy, to represent the unspeakable in language so that it can be seen, discussed, and *known*, for according to Burroughs, to withhold knowledge is a cardinal sin:

*All knowledge, all discoveries belong to everybody. ...A world-wide monopoly of knowledge and discoveries for counter revolutionary purposes is the basic issue. ...All knowledge, all discoveries belong to you by right. It is time to demand what belongs to you. (Burroughs' italics, Job 74-75)*

Knowledge is imprisoned by secrecy, and mankind is enslaved by ignorance. The liberation of knowledge is the liberation of mankind, unleashing a powerful imperative to act, to take responsibility for the nature of one's existence and to accept the power to change it. To know one's self is to be one's self, fully and completely, without fragmentation and alienation. Knowledge is the source and site of unity in multiplicity, welding body and spirit into a single integrated individual, and individuals into a unified and holistic social structure. Like death and immortality, it is both a means and an end, a mode of successful achievement and a new and greater state of self-awareness. If death-immortality is the axis of *The Western Lands*, then knowledge is at its centre.

I will conclude this chapter by looking at the end of *The*



*Western Lands* -- as the end of the individual text and of the trilogy. In so doing, I will determine whether the balance between syncretism and closure is sustained, and whether Burroughs can finally achieve a textual version of the holistic unity in multiplicity he so fervently desires.

The last few pages of Chapter Ten -- and of the text -- represent a hectic synthesis of many aspects of the trilogy: recollections of Paris in the 1950s, fantastic conflicts and catastrophes, personal reminiscences both real and imagined, and evocations of familiar figures (for example, the Director); and, significantly, Burroughs himself in present time. Burroughs situates himself decisively: "So here I am in Kansas with my cats," (*TWL* 252) and reflects back upon his own life and the trilogy as a whole, seamlessly integrating the events of both. In a sense, he is re-experiencing and analyzing two lives he has lived concurrently, in the world and in his work -- "real," yet inherently textual (because always structured and conditioned by language), and textual, yet "real" (for to write is to create a version of "reality").

Burroughs' reflections on his life, self-appointed mission, and the trilogy as such combine the textual and the political:

It all reads like sci-fi from here. Not very good sci-fi, but real enough at the time. There were casualties... quite a number.

Well, there isn't any transport out. There isn't any important assignment. It's every man for himself. Like the old bum in the dream said: Maybe we lost. And this is what happens when you lose. (*TWL* 252)

Burroughs is coming to terms with his perceptions of failure -- failure to galvanize the contemporary reader into action, failure to reach Space, failure to defeat the innate yet alien virus enemy. For Burroughs, defeat is represented in the fact

that nothing has changed (as he sees it), and that the long and vivid cycle of textual adventures, his and the characters', is over:

The Director reels around on an empty deck giving meaningless orders. The radio is out. The guns stopped working light-years ago. The Shadow, Memory, horribly maimed, clings to the Remains, Sekhu. The spirit that must remain in the body after all the others are gone: the Remains, that enabled the others to leave, by giving them a receptacle to occupy in the first place. (TWL 252-253)

The dual imperatives of syncretism and closure are both evident in Burroughs' evocation of the meaning and consequences of failure. Different metaphors and symbols are integrated with Burroughs' self-portrait to give a holistic picture. However, this syncretic integration takes place in an overwhelming context of death and failure -- of closure. Thus failure becomes the link between syncretism and closure in these final pages.

Burroughs continues to portray himself caustically, perhaps in an attempt to assert his own identity, as well as forcing himself to come to terms with the non-writerly aspects of his existence, such as the physical realities of aging:

Once a police car stopped and drove part way out on the road, looked at me, backed up and turned around.  
 "Just an old fuck with a cane and his trousers rolled."  
 At least I dare to eat a peach. (TWL 253)

Yet Burroughs' depiction of himself continues to be intertextually mediated -- in this instance by Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." This practice of inscribing himself in insistently textual and intertextual contexts, continues:

I am looking at a big book, the paper made of some heavy, translucent material.... I am looking at the book when two Chinese girls intervene and say to someone else I can't see clearly. "This is ridiculous. After all, he is just an *old bum*." (Burroughs' italics, TWL 253)

Burroughs describes himself as reader, but also as an "old bum," a figure which suits his concept of himself as marginal and peripheral, uninvolved in society's concerns, and thus able to prophesy its doom with complete detachment. This position is reminiscent of the old writer's social isolation. The role of peripheral observer appeals strongly to Burroughs, as it allows him to preserve the emotional detachment he prizes in both reader and author. In a sense, Burroughs is also detaching himself from his perceptions of failure, and from his career as writer (the old writer becomes an old bum), and even from life itself.

This renunciation of previous values and precepts is an integral part of acceptance of failure and preparation for death, for closure. It involves the reassessment of previous standards of success and defeat, of past conflicts:

There were moments of catastrophic defeat, and moments of triumph. The pure killing purpose. You find out what it means to lose. Abject fear and ignominy. Still fighting, without the means to fight. Deserted. Cut off. Still we wore the dandy uniform, like the dress uniform of a distant planet long gone out. Messages from headquarters? *What* headquarters? Every man for himself -- if he's got a self left. Not many do....

Battles are fought to be won, and this is what happens when you lose. However, to be alive at all is a victory. (Burroughs' italics, *TWL* 253-254)

This passage represents a radical reassessment of Burroughs' previous absolute standards of victory and defeat. Before, to win at all costs was the only victory worth having. Now, survival becomes more important -- failure can be endured, but death cannot. Burroughs not only comes to terms with specific defeats, but with the possibility that victory may in fact be beyond anyone's reach, that defeat may be inevitable. In the light of this realization, the text begins to re-examine death

as a possible means of escape from an irrevocably doomed planet:

Soul Death takes many forms: an eighty-year-old man drinking out of an overflowing toilet clogged with shit.

"*We lost!*"

Cancer wards where death is as banal as a bedpan. Just an empty bed to prepare for the next Remains. The walking Remains, who fill up the vast medical complexes, haunted by nothingness.

The door closes behind you, and you begin to know where you are. This planet is a Death Camp... the Second and Final Death. Chances of getting out are maybe one in a billion. It's the last game. (Burroughs' italics, *TWL* 254)

The Egyptian concept of First and Second Death comes into play as Burroughs begins to consider death as a means of escape from a no-win situation. He projects a sliding scale of deaths, ranging from the repulsive to the banal. The goal is not just to come to terms with the fact of imminent physical (First) death, but to find a way of dying which will preserve the integrity and identity of the individual.

The next short section of Chapter Ten (*TWL* 255-257) actually projects a form of death, enacted by Joe the Dead. It is a process of slow disintegration, the sloughing off of the physical body, the immortal "Top Souls," and the irrelevant minutiae of everyday life:

His self is crumbling away to shreds and tatters, bits of old songs, stray quotations, fleeting spurts of purpose and direction sputtering out to nothing and nowhere, like the body at death deserted by one soul after the other. (*TWL* 255)

The passage goes on to depict the desertion of Ren, Sekem, Khu, and Ba, and the pain of the remaining Ka: "Trapped here, unable to escape, unable even to formulate any place to escape to...." (*TWL* 256) Joe's physical body is decaying and disintegrating: "Even lust is dead," and "The bullets crash

into his chest, knocking the breath out. Standing on an empty hillside, a rusting gun in his arthritic hand, like an old root growing around the cracked handle." (both *TWL* 256) Joe travels back through his life, re-experiencing poignant moments drawn from Burroughs' own life (for example, schooling at Los Alamos) and that of other characters. The process of decay and disintegration accelerates, encapsulated in the last paragraph of this section, a "cut-up" from the entire text.

The "cut-up" symbolizes the final destruction of the body and the subsequent breakdown of the narrative forms it helps to structure. That is, grammar and syntax -- the ordering of language and hence of consciousness -- are lost, and consciousness becomes an awareness of multiple fleeting images rather than the construction of coherent, ordered thought. The ability to think, to reason, is sloughed away with the body and the ego, leaving behind a final essence of self which simply exists.

The next and final short section (*TWL* 257-258) is located in the realm between the First and Second Deaths, in the Land of the Dead:

I want to reach the Western Lands -- right in front of you, across the bubbling brook. It's a frozen sewer. It's known as the Duad, remember? All the filth and horror, fear, hate, disease and death of human history flows between you and the Western Lands. Let it flow!  
(*TWL* 257)

Burroughs returns to his own persona for this section, identified as usual by his cats: "My cat Fletch stretches behind me on the bed. A tree like black lace against a gray sky. A flash of joy." (*TWL* 257) Burroughs is celebrating the simple pleasures of life -- a pet cat, a view from a window -- appreciated all the more because of the context of pain and

suffering:

How long does it take a man to learn that he does not, cannot want what he "wants"?

You have to be in Hell to see Heaven. Glimpses from the Land of the Dead, flashes of serene timeless joy, a joy as old as suffering and despair. (TWL 257-258)

The equilibrium of the text is reasserted, as Burroughs posits the equivalence of joy and despair. The source of joy is transformed from Manichaeian victory, absolute and total, to an appreciation of the small triumphs associated with sheer survival, with the preservation of one's faculties and abilities. Desire fades, to be replaced by acceptance and serenity. Syncretism and closure persist, but as natural occurrences, equal and opposite, rather than as stringent imperatives. Thus Burroughs has passed through his inscribed death, through his catharsis, to a state of acceptance and serene joy.

The last paragraph of the text returns us to its very beginning:

The old writer couldn't write anymore because he had reached the end of words, the end of what can be done with words. And then? "British we are, British we stay." How long can one hang on in Gibraltar, with the tapestries where mustached riders with scimitars hunt tigers, the ivory balls one inside the other, bare seams showing, the long tearoom with mirrors on both sides and the tired fuchsia and rubber plants, the shops selling English marmalade and Fortnum and Mason's tea... clinging to their Rock like the rock apes, clinging always to less and less.

In Tangier the Parade Bar is closed. Shadows are falling on the Mountain.

"Hurry up, please. It's time." (TWL 258)

This time, the old writer's block is complete and terminal. There will be no more writing -- it is over, finished, complete. Once the writerly vocation is renounced, the ensuing sterility of life is represented by Gibraltar,

consistently symbolizing for Burroughs the epitome of exploitation and colonialism, corruption and inefficiency, as well as sterility, stagnation and decay. Burroughs rejects the "Gibraltar" option -- clinging desperately to a false and worthless existence for the sake of survival. Instead of infinite and slow decay, like that also experienced by Joe, he projects closure, symbolized by the closing of the Parade Bar in Tangier. Thus closure -- textual conclusion and physical death -- becomes the preferred option to slow stagnation and creeping decrepitude.

The last line of the passage above not only represents the final and absolute conclusion of text and trilogy, decisively and effectively, but also reminds the reader of what the author/protagonist is leaving behind -- the constraining context of Time, in which the reader remains. It is time to leave this context for Burroughs, time to finish text and trilogy, to make an end. Yet it is also Time that is the enemy, the signifier of aging and decay. Time is Death, and the defeat of both, through immortality, sited symbolically in the Western Lands (as mythic concept and text) is the ultimate syncretic force that the text projects. Thus text and trilogy end by decisively effecting closure in a context which renders this closure a powerful integrating force. The context that Burroughs locates in death, and the imperative to knowledge, to know one's self, are integrated symbolically and textually. The ending of the text reaches out toward the Western Lands, site of immortality and integration, but settles for serenity and acceptance, for the discovery of, and ending at, a final place of rest. Perhaps "this is what happens when you lose."

## Notes

*A Note On Language*: I have used the masculine pronoun almost exclusively throughout this dissertation. Given Burroughs' misogyny and homophilia, and the virtually complete absence of female figures in his work, I think it is reasonable to assume that the readerly and authorial roles his texts project are exclusively and deliberately male. The problems associated with the construction of a feminist perspective on Burroughs' work are beyond the scope of my discussion, but some interesting issues have been raised by critics such as Lydenberg (*Word Cultures*) and Jardine (*Gynesis: Configurations of Woman and Modernity* [Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985]).

Introduction

1 Ted Morgan describes the controversy over Burroughs' proposed admission to the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters in 1983 (4-13).

2 This is in fact the title of Morgan's 1988 biography of Burroughs.

3 The *Soft Machine* trilogy has been comprehensively dealt with by a number of critics, including Tony Tanner, Eric Mottram, John Vernon, Jennie Skerl (*Burroughs*), and most recently Robin Lydenberg (*Word Cultures*).

4 His use of idealized concepts or entities to reveal and expose is exemplified by the mystical cat Margaras, who sheds a piercing and pitiless light on all that is covert and hidden (TWL 56-58).

5 Burroughs does not have much faith in man's ability to evade apocalypse, demonstrated by his grim and frequent



description of it, but he does seem to have some faith in man's survival, possibly in an "inhuman" form, and persists in regarding one of the primary functions of writing as that of warning (see *TWL* 213).

6 In fact, Lydenberg seems to revise her opinion in her recent review of *The Western Lands* ("El Hombre Invisible"), arguing that "Despite his efforts to escape from memory, emotion, the body; despite an experimental style that has more often repelled than invited readers, the goal of Burroughs' writing has always been to make contact and to leave a legacy." (236)

7 For example, in Skerl and Lydenberg's collection of essays on Burroughs, his work is described in terms of utopia/dystopia by Mary McCarthy, Jennie Skerl, Steven Shaviro, David Glover, Robin Lydenberg, and Wayne Pounds.

8 In his book *The Garden and the Map* Vernon tracks the cultural shift from the structure of the "map," which "refers to that schizophrenic structure whereby areas of experience are extricated from each other," to that of the "garden," which "unites opposites and enables all areas of experience to be accessible to each other." (xii) I will use and develop his argument throughout my discussion.

## Chapter One

1 Skerl argues that Burroughs' second mythology appears in *Exterminator!* and *The Wild Boys*, but I contend that this stage of his work does not reach fruition until the *Cities of the Red Night* trilogy. (See *Burroughs* Chapter 4)

2 The Appendix, Burroughs' "Letter From A Master Addict

to Dangerous Drugs" to *The British Journal of Addiction* also fulfils a significant, but peripheral, defining function, quantifying and explaining Burroughs' addiction experiences.

3 Unless otherwise stated, all definitions are from *Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary*.

4 These definitions of "deposition" and "testimony" from *Oxford English Dictionary*.

5 "Deposition" can also mean "The taking down of the body of Christ from the cross," as well as the "placing of a saint's body or relics in a new resting-place." "Testimony" has the alternative meanings of "The Mosaic law or decalogue as inscribed on the two tables of stone," as well as "Open attestation or acknowledgement; confession, profession."  
(OED)

### Chapter Three

1 The ubiquitousness of junk as image of existence in capitalist society is exemplified by the nature of sexual intercourse in *The Naked Lunch*. Sex is commoditized, becoming a purely commercial transaction no longer determined by instinct and emotion (which are repressed and corroded by junk): "The Zone is a single, vast building. The rooms.... are mostly bed where the business of the Zone is transacted. A hum of sex and commerce shakes the Zone like a vast hive...." (NL 143) Detached from love and desire, sexual intercourse become the mechanical fulfilment of physical urges, and one's body a commodity to be traded, dispassionately, for commercial advantage.

2 Lydenberg provides an excellent discussion of the

metonymic, and anti-metaphoric, aspects of *The Naked Lunch* (*Word Cultures* 31-35).

3 Being injected with drugs by another person becomes an even more intensely erotic experience: "'Turn over.... I'll give it to you in the ass.' She slides the needle in deep, pulls it out and massages the cheek.... She licks a drop of blood off her finger." (*NL* 179-180)

#### Chapter Four

1 Benway first appears in "Twilight's Last Gleamings," a story written in collaboration with Kells Elvins in 1938. A reconstructed version can be found in *Interzone*.

2 This particular addiction takes on added resonance in view of the fact that in Burroughs' mythology, centipedes represent one of the lowest and most abhorrent forms of life, superior only to vegetable states of being.

3 The city is a crucial concept in Burroughs' version of contemporary existence as defined and determined by junk. As Tanner puts it:

The City is the structure of society, and although it constantly produces "junk" (which may serve to stand for every kind of rubbish and dead waste), it is also constantly self-perpetuating. Burroughs here seems to have an eye on the circular paradox that man builds the City but the City determines man's consciousness. (120)

Like junk, the city is a man-made construct which passes beyond control, as a result of the alienation and fragmentation contingent on fundamental dualism, and comes to dominate man through its very materiality (as object and therefore as anti-subject).

4 Lydenberg relates this anecdote back to the principal problem of the word, arguing that it represents a

dramatization of "the problematic relationship of body and mind, and the role of language in that relationship; the arbitrary violence of language as a system of naming and representation; and the possibility of an ontology and an aesthetics based on negativity and absence." (*Word Cultures* 19) She proceeds to give an excellent and comprehensive account of the "talking asshole" anecdote (*Word Cultures* 19-28).

### Chapter Five

1 For example, in *The Job*:

D.O. How do you feel about human beings?

W.B. They have possibilities of development, but they aren't going to realize them unless they can get rid of the factors and the individuals who are suppressing them and deliberately keeping them right where they are.... Nothing basically wrong with the human beings themselves, but they certainly will have to make a very basic forward step in evolution. (92)

Burroughs' air of clinical detachment and pseudo-scientific evaluation fails to conceal a desire to save humankind from self-imposed oppression and even destruction, a desire manifested in his desperate manoeuvres to impel the reader to act.

2 See Peterson, especially p81.

### Chapter Six

1 A great deal has been written about the cut-up: see for instance Lydenberg, *Word Cultures*; Skerl, *William S. Burroughs*; Mottram, *The Algebra of Need*; Anne Friedberg, "'Cut-Ups:' A Synema of the text" and Oliver Harris, "Cut-up Closure: The Return to Narrative" both in Skerl and Lydenberg. Burroughs

himself has written extensively about the cutup, especially in *The Job* and *The Third Mind*.

2 Lydenberg notes the similarities and parallels between Burroughs' ideas and those of radical theorists such as Derrida, Barthes, and Kristeva. See *Word Cultures*, especially p119.

3 For example, Theodore Solotaroff and John Tytell in Skerl and Lydenberg.

### Chapter Seven

1 In fact Burroughs' use of ideology corresponds to Mannheim's concept of a "total" ideology, or *Weltanschauungen* -- a complete commitment to a way of life (*Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought*).

2 I will argue in chapter eight that these intertextual eruptions also allow the author to disrupt the text and emphasize his own power and presence.

### Chapter Eight

1 I want to stress that I am only concerned here with the act of translation as defined by Burroughs in *Cities of the Red Night*, and its implications for this text, not with the accuracy or inaccuracy of his definition as such.

### Chapter Nine

1 For example, see the collection of controversial letters inspired by the negative review of *The Naked Lunch* in the *Times Literary Supplement*, 1963 (Reprinted in the Paladin edition of *NL* 203-250; excerpts in Skerl and Lydenberg 41-53).

## Chapter Ten

1 The series in question is *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge*; *Journey to Ixtlan: The Lessons of Don Juan*; *A Separate Reality: Further Conversations with Don Juan*; and *Tales of Power*.

2 Shaviro argues that the text pays a heavy price for its defiance of and resistance to closure: "The unconstrained promise of the future cannot be separated from the imminence of catastrophe or from the fatality of the past. *Cities of the Red Night* affirms even disaster and failure, the pathos of loss, opening itself to a limitless play of violence and death...." (206-207)

3 As Skerl puts it: "Burroughs' dystopian cities and utopian communes are placed in conflict in the present as metaphors for opposing forces in contemporary society...." (*Burroughs* 90)

## Chapter Twelve

1 The use of the term "family" for an organization of which Burroughs strongly approves is ironic in the context of his many attacks on the typical concept of the family in Western nations (see *Job* 41-42). However, the Johnson Family can be seen as a radical redefinition of the concept of family.

2 There is a slight metaphorical shift here, from the theatre, as predominant in *Cities of the Red Night*, back to film, the central performative image of *The Naked Lunch*.

3 This process recalls Lydenberg's argument in relation to *The Naked Lunch* that Burroughs confounds and disperses

binary oppositions by introducing a "third," uncontainable element, similar to Derrida's "supplement" (*Word Cultures* 124-125).

4 The shift towards closure throughout Burroughs' work is completed by *The Western Lands*.

### Chapter Thirteen

1 Burroughs' adoption of this position explains his identification with and frequent vehement defence of people such as Wilhelm Reich and Count Korzybski (see *The Job* and *The Adding Machine*).

### Chapter Fourteen

1 Richard Slotkin, in his book *Regeneration Through Violence*, defines myth as

a narrative formulation of a culture's world view and self-concept, which draws both on the historical experience of that culture and on sources of feeling, fear, and aspiration...deep in the human subconscious and which can be shown to function in that culture as a prescription for historical action and for value judgement. (294)

I have used this definition of myth in relation to the mythology of the American West throughout my discussion of *The Place of Dead Roads*, which is also grounded in Slotkin's argument that this mythology possesses genres, each with their own distinctive narrative structure (242-243), and his contention that literary narrative is the dominant American mythopoeic form (6).

2 Kent Steckmesser argues that "In legend, most outlaws love their mothers...." (91) His discussion of the literary transformation of Billy the Kid from "satanic" to "saintly"

analyzes numerous mythical outlaw traits, and is the basis of my discussion here (see Chapters 6-9, esp. 100-102).

3 For a comprehensive discussion of the life and legend of Kit Carson see Steckmesser, Chapters 2-5.

4 Slotkin would locate Burroughs in the "consummatory" stage of mythopoeia, in which "the artist acts as prophet rather than as priest or ministrant to his people, shaking minds and hearts with new visions rather than providing customary balm for normal social and personal anxieties." (13)

5 Slotkin emphasizes that "The mythopoeic mode of consciousness is dependent on -- but distinct from -- the myth-artifact." (8)

6 Both Slotkin and Steckmesser confirm that American Western mythology has a particularly intense and problematic relationship with literature, given that it originated after the invention of the printing press. (See Slotkin Chapters 1 and 8, esp. 6; Steckmesser Preface and Chapter 1.)

7 Steckmesser discusses a narrative of this kind, "I Rode and Robbed with Billy the Kid" (98).

### Chapter Fifteen

1 The conflict between Kim Carsons and Joe the Dead is played out fully in *The Western Lands*, where Joe is revealed as the unknown rifleman -- Kim's assassin.

2 Vampirism is the key to Carsons' analysis of the Egyptian blueprint for immortality in Book Three (*PDR* 173).

3 Indeed, the religious practice of the Ishmaelite cult centres around the ecstatic revelation of God's word through the direct medium of the Imam.



Chapter Twenty One

1 Burroughs takes his depiction of death as insignificant and nonmystical to an extreme in Chapter Six of *The Western Lands*, rendering it completely trivial:

There is no mystery, no magic. Death is as prosaic as the daily paper to flattened minds, a bedpan to a terminal cancer patient. There can be nothing beyond, since there is nothing in front or to the sides in this dead empty place without purpose or meaning. (TWL 129)

Burroughs has boxed himself into a corner, from which he must retreat.

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250-273.

ERRATA

page 82 line 17 should read

However, Burroughs' humanism is always redefined, always radical, as the ideal and universal figure of liberal humanism, "Man," is replaced in his work by "the 'subject,' which is gendered, 'de-centred,' and no longer self-determining."  
(Baldick 103)

page 87 line 10 should read

Carl comes to define himself in terms of opposition to a world, a way of being, in which he can never truly participate.

page 140 line 6 should read

The text's agendas are unified by its syncretic context....

page 209 line 1 should read

The passage is a ringing endorsement of American and middle-class assumptions that work is a source of happiness, an end in itself as well as a means of achieving "an objective from which all workers will gain."

page 364 second paragraph should read

The role of writer's block in *The Western Lands* is dualistically conceived. It can purify and strengthen the soul, challenging the individual's resources and tenacity and providing access to higher states of being. However, it can also cruelly terminate a text, a career, even a life. Writer's block has a random quality in *The Western Lands*. It appears without cause and unbidden. Ultimately it represents the arbitrary and inescapable nature of the writer's vocation.