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intriguing tribute to an inimitable  
American voice."—SALON

# WORD VIRUS

the **WILLIAM S.**

**BURROUGHS** reader

edited by james grauerholz and ira silverberg

introduction by ann douglas

Praise for *Word Virus*:

“A stringent modernist, a spiritual child of Joyce . . . The reader of this volume will find the anarchy of Burroughs’ finely tuned mind well represented. . . . Editors Grauerholz and Silverberg show sensitivity in their choice of selections from Burroughs’ long and productive career; their dedication to his legacy is evident. There is a very informative and compassionate introduction by Ann Douglas.”—*Booklist*

“*Word Virus: The William S. Burroughs Reader* finally brings the author’s actual writing back to the forefront. In their selections, editors James Grauerholz and Ira Silverberg highlight the many faces of Burroughs: the narrative pioneer, the sardonic stand-up, the asexual Tiresias-like seer, and, in what may be a surprise to many, the humanist. . . . Apocalyptic, carnal and raw, Burroughs’ work bridges the epiphanies of modernism with the Foucaultian cool of postmodernism. He stretches modernist forms and grammar like narrative silly putty, prefiguring the sly mischief of postmodern writers such as Thomas Pynchon and William Gibson.”—*Salon*

“The deadpan granddad of postmodernism is well represented in this bountiful collection of fiction, essays and collaborations from all stages of Burroughs’s (1913–1997) career. . . . Dark humor runs through this collection.”

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“This well-edited collection of Burroughs’ work . . . reminds us of his restless, savage intelligence and complicated insider-outsider perspective on human society.”—*Out*

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—*Bay Area Reporter*

“An endangered forest of words, narcotics, memories, and lessons. The trip is one not to be easily forgotten, full of fun and fury and feverish imaginings. . . . For both the student and the casual reader, [Grauerholz and Silverberg’s] expertise and understanding of the work of William S. Burroughs will provide much food for thought as well as an apt resource for examining the postwar period in American letters.”—*LGNY*

“This book surveys the life’s work of the author whom J. G. Ballard once called the greatest myth-maker of the twentieth century. . . . Readers seeking an introduction to his vast and multifarious oeuvre need look no further than this magnificent volume.”—*Science Fiction Studies*

**WORD VIRUS**  
the WILLIAM S. BURROUGHS reader

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and ira silverberg

with an introduction by ann douglas



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## editor's preface

### by ira silverberg

*Word Virus: The William S. Burroughs Reader* collects passages, routines, chapters, and condensations of the entire literary output of William S. Burroughs. While this is a rather formidable anthology, it only represents about 10 percent of Burroughs' published work.

We have attempted, through our selections, to follow recurring themes and characters in Burroughs' work as well as to chronicle the shifts in style and content which took place throughout the years he wrote. The anthology is meant as much for the general reader as it is for the scholar, and provides links between Burroughs' life and his writing through the chapter introductions written by James Grauerholz. Writer and scholar Ann Douglas' introductory essay provides both an overview of the work and a history of the writer and his contemporaries.

In choosing from almost fifty years of Burroughs' work, we have focused our attention on his most memorable passages and the trademark "routines," along with those which demonstrate a continuity of Burroughs' vision. While stylistic changes took place over time, Burroughs had several literary, artistic, and political concerns which permeated his work. His lack of comfort with the human body, his mistrust of authority and control, his utopian visions, and his early themes of gay liberation are all to be found here. Throughout, one sees these concerns repeat, multiply, take new shape, and adjust to the surroundings in which Burroughs places them. One also sees the formal and physical experimentation with the work—the cut-ups, the fold-ins, the collaborations.

While Burroughs has been frequently relegated to one iconic label or other—"High Priest of Junk," "Godfather of Punk," or "Gay Rights Pioneer"—we have tried to show another side of his character by chronicling the maturation of his emotional concerns. "El Hombre Invisible" emerges through these texts as a man looking for an answer, searching for reconciliation. By including his introduction to *Queer* (in which he writes of the killing of his wife, Joan), as well as the soul-searching texts of his later years, a more complex Burroughs emerges, one which the labels preclude. William Burroughs just wanted to live, and ultimately die, peacefully. He tried hard in his final years to exorcise the demons which both haunted him and infused his work with a characteristic sense of discomfort and otherness.

The dichotomy of the gun-toting, substance-abusing queer seeking spiritual refuge might strike some as anticlimactic. But William Burroughs was not what he appeared to be to many of his fans. The work which so many revere as biblical texts in the church of addiction were always seen by the writer himself as cautionary rather than visionary. In constructing this book, we found the visionary texts in routines like "Electronic Revolution" and in the landscapes which presage Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* and William Gibson's *Neuromancer*.

Organized, for the most part, chronologically, *Word Virus* isolates specific periods in Burroughs' writing life. We have intentionally left out collages and letters (with the exception of *The Yagé Letters*, which provides an introduction to *Interzone* and *Naked Lunch*), as they both fall outside the parameters of this collection and are ultimately better presented in their original publications. We have, however, included collaborations with Kells Elvins, Jack Kerouac, and Brion Gysin.

We begin this anthology with very early work in the chapter titled "The Name Is Burroughs," where his literary characteristics can be seen in his teen years. Here, too, we present a chapter from *And the Hippos Were Boiled in Their Tanks*, an early, unpublished collaboration with Jack Kerouac. Burroughs and Kerouac alternated chapters in constructing this novel and this chapter represents Burroughs' first attempt at conjuring the scene around him at Columbia in the 1940s. The mythology of *And the Hippos*. . . is elaborated upon by James Grauerholz.

As the anthology progresses, there is the occasional lapse in chronology. The routine called "The Name Is Burroughs," the *Queer* introduction, and the pieces in the chapter titled "Inspector Lee: Nova Heat" all fall out of sequence for reasons pertaining to the overriding themes of their respective chapters. These instances are also explained in further detail in Grauerholz's introductions. The chapters are broken down as follows: "The Name Is Burroughs," "A Hard-Boiled Reporter," "Interzone," "The Cut-Ups," "Inspector Lee: Nova Heat," "Queer Utopia," "The Red Night Trilogy," and "Late Work."

*Word Virus* ends with sections from the last major work published during Burroughs' life, *My Education: A Book of Dreams*. His last two years of journal writing, which will be published at a later date, have been excluded, as it was our wish to honor the *Word Virus* manuscript that Burroughs approved before his death.

The editing of *Word Virus: The William S. Burroughs Reader* was completed at the end of July 1997, one week before William Burroughs succumbed to a fatal heart attack.

I recall the afternoon I delivered the manuscript to his home. The box it was in was eight inches tall and weighed ten pounds. It landed on William's dining table with a thud and I said, "Here, William, is our attempt at boiling down your life's work." He immediately opened the box, carefully inspected the table of contents, thumbed through some pages, and said, "My dear, you boys have been working very hard and appear to have done a complete job." He thumbed through a bit more and added, "Well, it all seems to be in order." He then closed the box. An anticlimax for sure, but I was well aware of his reticence in such matters, and also sure that he'd have a thorough going-over of the manuscript when I left.

I visited William the next day, and at some point he nodded at the box and said, "I think we shall call it *Just for Jolly*. You realize, of course, these are words of Jack the Ripper, uttered in response to a query as to the motivation for his crimes. 'Just for jolly,' he said. And indeed what else shall we call a life's work?" He'd been reading about Jack the Ripper in those final days; he'd also been reading a great deal of Tennyson, and was fond in particular of the poem "Ulysses," from which we tried to find a line or two for an alternate title. I reminded him of our working title, the title which ultimately stuck, and it took some time to convince him that the book should have a moniker more true to his oeuvre. And so, *Word Virus* it was.

It should be said here, both as a disclaimer and as a testament to the collaborative spirit which William engendered, that this anthology has been put together by two members of the Burroughs “family”—family in the queer sense of the word, the family one chooses. James Grauerholz had been in William Burroughs’ life as friend, companion, manager, and editor from 1974 until William’s death in 1997. He was the most important partner Burroughs ever had and continues as Burroughs’ literary executor. His diligence, hard work, and love of William, the man and the writer, allowed William to enjoy his final years in comfort, and provided him with the luxury of time to pursue his art and writing.

I came onto the Burroughs scene in 1981 and lived in Lawrence, Kansas, from 1982 until the beginning of 1984. Through William and James I became immersed in the world of letters and chose a career in publishing, where, among other things, I have worked as William’s personal publicist and as his publisher (both at High Risk Books and at Grove Press).

While we have both been close to the man, so too have we been close to the work. It is with the inspiration from William’s writing and friendship that we have endeavored to present a fair portrait of his life’s work through our selections.

*New York City, 1998*

# **“punching a hole in the big lie”: the achievement of William s. burroughs by ann douglas**

“When did I stop wanting to be President?” Burroughs once asked himself, and promptly answered, “At birth certainly, and perhaps before.” A public position on the up-and-up, a career of shaking hands, making speeches, and taking the rap held no appeal for one who aspired to be a “sultan of sewers,” an antihero eye-deep in corruption, drugs, and stoic insolence, watching “Old Glory float lazily in the tainted breeze.”

Burroughs started out in the 1940s as a founding member of the “Beat Generation,” the electric revolution in art and manners that kicked off the counterculture and introduced the hipster to mainstream America, a movement for which Jack Kerouac became the mythologizer, Allen Ginsberg the prophet, and Burroughs the theorist. Taken together, their best-known works—Ginsberg’s exuberant take-the-doors-off-their-hinges jeremiad *Howl* (1956); Kerouac’s sad, funny, and inexpressibly tender “true story” novel *On the Road* (1957); and Burroughs’ avant-garde narrative *Naked Lunch* (1959), a Hellzapoppin saturnalia of greed and lust—managed to challenge every taboo that respectable America had to offer.

Over the course of his long career, Burroughs steadfastly refused to honor, much less court, the literary establishment. Invited in 1983 to join the august Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, he remarked, “Twenty years ago they were saying I belonged in jail. Now they’re saying I belong in their club. I didn’t listen to them then, and I don’t listen to them now.” Adept in carny routines and vaudevillian sleights of hand, Burroughs was a stand-up comic, a deadpan ringmaster of Swiftian satire and macabre dystopias, who claimed an outsider role so extreme as to constitute extraterrestrial status. “I’m apparently some kind of agent from another planet,” he told Kerouac, “but I haven’t got my orders decoded yet.”

Unlike Ginsberg and Kerouac, however, Burroughs, born in 1914 to a well-to-do Wasp family in St. Louis, was part of the American elite. Indeed, as he often noted, his personal history seemed inextricably intertwined with some of the most important and ominous events of the modern era. In the 1880s, his paternal grandfather had invented the adding machine, a harbinger of the alliance of technology and corporate wealth that made possible the monstrously beefed-up defense industry of the Cold War years. Burroughs’ maternal uncle, Ivy Lee, a pioneer of public relations, had helped John D. Rockefeller Jr. improve his image after the Ludlow Massacre of 1914, in which Colorado state militia shot two women and eleven children in a dispute between miners and management. In the 1930s, Lee served as Hitler’s admiring publicist in the United States, an achievement that Congressman Robert LaFollette branded “a monument of shame.”

Thin, physically awkward, with a narrow, impassive, even hangdog face as an

adolescent, Burroughs qualified easily as the most unpopular boy in town. One concerned parent compared him to “a walking corpse.” (Burroughs agreed, only wondering whose corpse it was.) Already interested in drugs, homosexuality, and con artistry, devoid of team spirit and “incurably intelligent,” he was at best a problematic student, a troubling presence at several select schools, among them the Los Alamos Ranch School in New Mexico, the site J. Robert Oppenheimer commandeered in 1943 for the scientists engaged in the Manhattan Project. Los Alamos birthed the bombs that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki and brought into being what Burroughs sardonically referred to as “the sick soul, sick unto death, of the atomic age,” the central theme of his work.

In 1936, Burroughs graduated from Harvard, a place whose pretensions he loathed; a blank space appeared in the yearbook where his photograph should have been. He then traveled to Vienna and saw for himself what the Nazi regime his uncle had promoted was up to. For Burroughs, as for Jean Genet, one of his literary heroes, Hitler became a seminal figure; he never forgot that everything Hitler had done was legal. During the 1940s, Burroughs worked as a drug pusher and a thief, but he was guilt-free; a life of petty crime was less “compromising” than the “constant state of pretense and dissimulation” required by any job that contributed to the status quo. When gangsters write the laws, as Burroughs was sure they did, not only in the Third Reich but in most of the post-WWII West, ethics become fugitives, sanity is branded madness, and the artist’s only option is total resistance. “This planet is a penal colony and nobody is allowed to leave,” Burroughs wrote in *The Place of Dead Roads* (1984). “Kill the guards and walk.”

In September 1951, in a drunken attempt at William Tell-style marksmanship, Burroughs inadvertently shot and killed his wife, Joan, while the couple was living in Mexico with their four-year-old son, Billy. Burroughs never considered himself anything but homosexual. He saw his intermittent sexual relations with Joan as a stopgap measure when the “uncut boy stuff” he preferred was unavailable. Joan worshipped him, but he admitted to a friend that the marriage was in some sense “an impasse, not amenable to any solution.” Regarding the feminine sex in general as a grotesque mistake of nature, a biological plot against male independence and self-expression, he never made a woman central to his fiction. Starring roles went instead to wickedly updated, flagrantly queer versions of the classic male hero, to tricksters, gunmen, pirates, and wild boys. Like Genet, Burroughs saw homosexuality (as opposed to effeminacy and faggotry, for which he had no tolerance) as inherently subversive of the status quo. Women were born apologists; (queer) men were rebels and outlaws. Nonetheless, Burroughs knew that rules are defined by their exceptions. He adored Joan’s brilliantly unconventional mind and elusive delicacy. He never fully recovered from her death.

Cool, even icy in manner, acerbic in tone, Burroughs once remarked that all his intimate relationships had been failures—he had denied “affection . . . when needed or supplied [it] when unwanted.” He had not responded to his father’s sometimes abject pleas for love nor visited his mother in her last years in a nursing home. In 1981, after an impressive debut as a novelist, Billy Burroughs, who had been raised by his grandparents, died of cirrhosis, believing that his father had “signed my death warrant.”

Although the cause of Joan's death was ruled "criminal imprudence" and Burroughs spent only thirteen days in jail, he held himself responsible. He had been "possessed," and, in the magical universe Burroughs believed we inhabit, to be the subject of a successful possession was the mark of carelessness, not victimhood. If you knew, as he did, that life is a contest between the invading virus of the "Ugly Spirit" and the vigilant, if existence is predicated on preter-natural watchfulness, what excuse could there possibly be for falling asleep on the job? In a sea swarming with sharks, he remarked, it is strongly advisable not to look like a "disabled fish."

In the introduction to *Queer* (1985), he tells his readers that Joan's death "maneuvered me into a lifelong struggle in which I had no choice but to write my way out"; his art was grounded in his culpability. It mattered greatly to him that Calico, one of the beloved cats of his later years, who reminded him of Joan, had never been mistreated, had never required or suffered discipline at his hands. A matchless revisionist of received wisdom, Burroughs thought there was a very real point in closing the barn door after the horse had gone. Mistakes, he explained in *Exterminator!* (1973), are made to be corrected. Filled with the ironies of belatedness as it is, life is education to the last breath, and beyond.

In the same spirit, Burroughs rejected the notion that his familial and geographic proximity to the forces of darkness represented by corporate wealth, Hitler, and the Manhattan Project were "coincidence," a word he disdained. For his first novel, *Junky* (1953), he took his nom de plume, "William Lee," from his mother and his uncle; always uncannily alert to the subterranean implications of his friend's personae, Kerouac described *Junky* as the work of a "Goering-like sophisticate." Nor did Burroughs leave unexamined the class and race privileges to which he had been born. As a lifelong student of the ways in which power passes itself off as nature, he believed that nothing happens without our consent; we are always complicit in what we take to be our God-given circumstances. "To speak is to lie—to live is to collaborate."

"I don't mind people disliking me," Burroughs wrote in *Queer*. "The question is, what are they in a position to do about it?" In his case, the answer was "apparently nothing, at present," but he knew how and where his relative immunity was manufactured. He escaped the full rigor of the law not only in the case of Joan's death, but on various occasions when he was caught red-handed with illegal drugs, not because the wind is ever tempered to the shorn lamb, but because those who have usually get more. He always had some family funds at his disposal, and he was quite aware that he possessed, in Kerouac's word, "finish"—it was visible at all times that he did not belong to the "torturable classes."

Almost alone among the major white male writers of his generation, Burroughs viewed whiteness and wealth as in some sense criminal and certainly man-made, a con job passed off as a credential. Whites, he liked to complain, were the only ethnic group who marshaled an army before they had enemies. This hardly meant that Burroughs wanted, as both Genet and Kerouac on occasion said they did, to cease being white; he conducted no romance with negritude, an infatuation he took to be simply another form of the sentimentalism he disdained. He remained imperturbably himself in all climates, speaking no language but English despite the years he spent living in various parts of North Africa and Latin America. Strangers sometimes mistook him for a

banking official, even a CIA or FBI agent, and he was never averse to trading on his patrician aura in a tight spot. “Keep your snout in the public trough” was a Burroughs maxim.

Burroughs remarked in *Junky* that one reason he drifted into a life of “solo adventure” and addiction was that a drug habit supplied the close-to-the-margin knowledge of emergency his comfortable background had forestalled. Yet, finally, his aim was not to undertake slumming expeditions among his social inferiors but to use his wit and his mind to write his way out of his condition. It was a task for which he was superbly equipped.

Among his contemporaries, only Thomas Pynchon and Kurt Vonnegut begin to match the wild brilliance of Burroughs’ laconic extravaganzas of black humor. In one inspired moment in *The Place of Dead Roads* (1983), Burroughs’ stand-in, William Hall, is driving on a dimly lit road at night, wondering if he’ll be able to summon the “correct emotions” for the parents of the child he imagines himself running over. Suddenly a man swings into view, carrying a dead child under one arm; he slaps it down on a porch, and asks, “This yours, lady?” None of Burroughs’ peers were his equal in brainpower megawattage, in sheer, remorseless intelligence. In his own phrase, he was a “guardian of the knowledge,” a Wittgenstein of the narrative form. A critique of the family is implicit in Burroughs’ fantasy about the dead child; even the most hallucinatory inventions of his imagination are grounded in hard, clear, powerfully analytic and authoritative thought. Dickens and Tolstoy remind us that great authors need not be intellectual geniuses, but part of the special excitement and pleasure in reading Burroughs at his best lies in the shock of encountering someone so much smarter than oneself. Burroughs’ work is an intellect booster, Miracle-Gro for the mind—the reader has been handed the strongest binoculars ever made and for the first time sees the far horizon click into focus.

Burroughs claimed that after one look at this planet, any visitor from outer space would say, “I WANT TO SEE THE MANAGER!” It’s a Burroughs axiom that the manager is harder to locate than the Wizard of Oz, but Burroughs holds what clues there are to his whereabouts; his work draws the “Wanted, Dead or Alive” poster, and his delineations are executions, fearless and summary. “The history of the planet,” he wrote, “is a history of idiocy highlighted by a few morons who stand out as comparative geniuses.” In an essay titled “The Hundred-Year Plan,” he compared Cold War politicians, bravely proffering patriotic stupidity, crass ignorance, and a gung-ho weapons program as qualifications for office, to prehistoric dinosaurs, whom he imagined gathering for a convention many millennia past. Faced with down-scaling or extinction, a dinosaur leader announces, “Size is the answer. . . increased size. . . . It was good enough for me. . . . (Applause) . . . We will increase . . . and we will continue to dominate the planet as we have done for three hundred million years! . . . (Wild Applause).” In this arena, Burroughs believed his elite status worked for him. Revolutionaries are always disaffected members of the ruling class; only the enemy within can lay hands on top-secret information. The insider is the best spy.

Like Hemingway, like Ginsberg and Kerouac, Burroughs aspired to “write his own life and death,” to leave something like a complete record of his experiment on the planet; by his own admission, there is finally only one character in his fiction—himself. In a guarded but uncannily astute review of *The Wild Boys* (1971), Alfred

Kazin analyzed what he took to be the solipsism of Burroughs' narrative form; Burroughs wanted "to make the fullest possible inventory and rearrangement of all the stuff natural to him . . . to put his own mind on the internal screen that is his idea of a book." Yet Burroughs was not in any usual sense a confessional or autobiographical writer.

A leader of postmodern literary fashion in the 1960s, Burroughs early discarded the Western humanistic notions of the self traditionally associated with autobiography. In a 1950 letter, he commented severely on Ginsberg's recent discovery that he was "just a human like other humans." "Human, Allen, is an adjective, and its use as a noun is in itself regrettable." Burroughs took his starting point to be the place where "the human road ends." In his fiction, identity is an affair of ventriloquism and property rights—everything is potentially up for reassignment or sale. In a compulsive gambling session described in *Naked Lunch*, a young man loses his youth to an old one; lawyers sell not their skills, but their luck to the hapless clients they defend. Most things in Burroughsland function as addictive substances, and the "self" can be simply the last drug the person in question has ingested. Or it may be a random object, someone else's discard, an "article abandoned in a hotel drawer."

Yet if postmodernism is, as a number of its critics have said, a disavowal of responsibility, Burroughs was no postmodernist. In his view, the elite's last shot at virtue lay in taking responsibility for the consequences of its power, and Burroughs for one—and almost the only one in the ranks of recent, major, white male American authors—was willing not only to shoulder responsibility, but to extend it. In Burroughs' magical universe, if we are everywhere complicit, we are also everywhere active. "Your surroundings are *your* surroundings," he wrote in *The Soft Machine*. "Every object you touch is alive with your life and your will."

When Burroughs wrote, in a famous line from *Naked Lunch*, that he was merely a "recording instrument," he wasn't implying, as a number of his critics and fans have thought, that he made no choices, exerted no control over what he wrote, but rather that he wanted to learn how to register not the prepackaged information he was programmed by corporate interests or artistic canons to receive, but what was actually there. In a 1965 interview with *The Paris Review*, he explained that while the direction of Samuel Beckett, a novelist he admired greatly, was inward, he was intent on going "outward." For Burroughs, the "control machine" is almost synonymous with the Western psyche. The point, as he saw it, was to get outside it, to beat it at its own game by watching and decoding the extremely partial selections it makes from the outside world and then imposes on us as "reality."

Like Marshall McLuhan, himself a fan and brilliant expositor of Burroughs' work, Burroughs saw that Western man had "externalized himself in the form of gadgets." The media extend to fabulous lengths man's nervous system, his powers to record and receive, but without content themselves, cannibalizing the world they purportedly represent and ingesting those to whom they in theory report, like drugs inserted into a bodily system, they eventually replace the organism they feed—a hostile takeover in the style of *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. Instead of reality, we have the "reality studio"; instead of people, "person-impersonators" and image-junkies looking for a fix, with no aim save not to be shut out of the "reality film." But Burroughs believed that a counteroffensive might still be possible, that the enemy's tactics can be pried out

of their corporate context and used against him by information bandits like himself. Computers might rule the world, but the brain is the first computer; all the information people have forgotten is stored there. The problem is one of access.

In the 1960s, as he developed the “cut-up” method of his first trilogy, *The Soft Machine* (1961), *The Ticket That Exploded* (1962), and *Nova Express* (1964), Burroughs became fascinated by tape recorders and cameras. A how-to writer for the space age for whom science fiction was a blueprint for action, dedicated to “wising up the marks,” he instructed readers in the art of deprogramming. Walk down the street, any street, recording and photographing what you hear and see. Go home, write down your observations, feelings, associations, and thoughts, then check the results against the evidence supplied by your tapes and photos. You will discover that your mind has registered only a tiny fraction of your experience; what you left unnoticed may be what you most need to find. “Truth may appear only once,” Burroughs wrote in his journal in 1997; “it may not be repeatable.” To walk down the street as most people perform the act is to reject the only free handout life has to offer, to trample on the prince in a rush for the toad, storming the pawnshop to exchange gold for dross. What we call “reality,” according to Burroughs, is just the result of a faulty scanning pattern, a descrambling device run amok. We’re all hard-wired for destruction, in desperate need of rerouting, even mutation.

How did this happen? How did Western civilization become a conspiracy against its members? In his second trilogy, *Cities of the Red Night* (1981), *The Place of Dead Roads* (1984), and *The Western Lands* (1987), which taken as a whole forms his greatest work, Burroughs fantasized the past which produced the present and excavated its aborted alternatives, the last, lost sites of human possibility. The first is the United States that disappeared in his boyhood, the pre- and just post-WWI years when individual identity had not yet been fixed and regulated by passports and income taxes; when there was no CIA or FBI; before bureaucracies and bombs suffocated creative consciousness and superhighways crisscrossed and codified the American landscape—“sometimes paths last longer than roads,” Burroughs wrote in *Cities of the Red Night*. In the heyday of the gunman, of single combat, and of the fraternal alliances of frontier culture, the promises of the American Revolution were not yet synonymous with exclusionary elite self-interest. Now, however, Burroughs wrote, there are “so many actors and so little action”; little room is left for the independent cooperative social units he favored, for the dreams that he saw as the magical source of renewal for whole peoples as well as individuals.

Globally, Burroughs located a brief utopian moment a century or two earlier, a time when one’s native “country” had not yet hardened into the “nation-state” and the family did not police its members in the interests of “national security”; before the discovery by Western buccaneers and entrepreneurs of what was later known as the Third World had solidified into colonial and neocolonial empire, effecting a permanent and inequitable redistribution of the world’s wealth; before the industrial revolution had produced an epidemic of overdevelopment and overpopulation and capitalism had become an instrument of global standardization.

Burroughs had no sympathy for the regimented, Marxist-based Communist regimes of Eastern Europe. He saw the Cold War administrations of the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. not as enemies but as peers and rivals vying to see who could reach the goal of total