

# “Time Junky”: Shamanic Journeyings and Gnostic Eschatology in the Novels of William S. Burroughs

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## Abstract

William S. Burroughs is the inheritor of a magico-religious poetics stemming from ancient shamans and informed by the Gnostic heresies found in the Nag-Hammadi Library. If, in Burroughs's Nova Trilogy shamanic vision is twisted by the Western cultural matrix, however, it is in a way that, true to a genuine shamanic calling, points the way toward cultural and individual healing. I demonstrate the novelist's close connections to South American shamanism, and read key characters in Burroughs's *oeuvre*, Dr. Benway as the unredeemed shaman, the shaman as con artist; Inspector Lee as the con-artist turned shaman; and Mr. Bradley-Mr. Martin as the Gnostic Demiurge. I then analyze the Gnostic work “On the Origin of the World” to show parallels between Burroughsian and Gnostic conceptions of time, and examine the cut-up as an oracular strategy for liberation from the virus of language.

**Keywords:** Beat literature, shamanic praxis, Gnosticism, experimental writing, consciousness studies

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### The Shaman as Con Artist

William S. Burroughs's space age and, at the same time, Wild West version of the Gnostic mythos is at all points informed by shamanic praxis, however recuperated by the novelist in twisted, Western terms such as drug addiction with its attendant street cons. Certainly, Burroughs's research into the effects of psychoactive agents surpasses even De Quincey in its thoroughness. "One more shot—tomorrow the cure," writes Burroughs (*Naked* 91) with every bit of De Quincey's old junky optimism. But while fellow junky De Quincey seems to have stuck mainly with laudanum, Burroughs searches through the pharmacological agents of the earth, ostensibly to find a cure for heroin addiction. This search leads him to discoveries that transcended merely intellectual comprehension to extend into a spiritual dimension that informs an underlying Burroughsian poetics of shamanic dismemberment and reassembly into the Gnostic holism which constitutes experiential "knowing."

Depending on what formal definitions are imposed, there might seem a discontinuity between what I have elsewhere called "the shamanic paradigm"<sup>1</sup> and the Gnostic sensibility I impute to Burroughs. Actually, it is my further contention that such a perceived discontinuity is, in the West, a culturally sustained illusion, and one that Burroughs is concerned in dissolving. In previous essays I have contended that Western forms of magical praxes lying beyond the boundaries of orthodox religious law (such as Gnosticism, Hermeticism and Rosicrucianism) represent a collision between the shamanic impulse which Winkelman describes as "an innate, human, biologically based drive with adaptive significance" (7) and the monolithic, usually monotheistic religions which branded such practices as heretical. Western history, unlike, say, the history of China, is a history of radical discontinuities. Magical and mythic modes of apprehending the world were not absorbed but rather bodily ejected by the rationally-oriented post-Ionian Greek philosophers. With the incursion of the Romans, and the Roman Catholic Church into the British Isles there was a firm line in the sand drawn between the old Celts, traditionally a shamanic, Goddess-based society, and the new, mandatory Christian schema imposed upon them. The schism created by the Protestant Reformation also had the effect of marginalizing those sects, such as the Anabaptists, who had found ways to use the old folk knowledge (such as healing through manipulation of invisible, subtle or spiritual forces) associated with shamanic praxis.

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<sup>1</sup> See Cline, "The Shaman's Song and Divination in the Epic Tradition" 163-87.

In the West, then, a solid wall was erected between magic and religion, between "primitive" tribal beliefs and the more logocentric, formally structured systems of worship currently in dominance. That this has not necessarily been a world-wide phenomenon is illustrated by the fact that in Mandarin Chinese, for example, there is no single term to distinguish between a shaman in a tribal context and a sorcerer. In the west a sorcerer is of a type related to Faust—one who has bargained his soul in hopes of gaining what he shouldn't have been trying to discover in the first place—whereas a shaman remains an ethnographic term, relating most directly to the spiritual explorer, healer, psychopomp and conjuror of otherworldly landscapes found universally in aboriginal tribes. As for the sorcerer, westerners consider he is either fraudulent (at very least fictional) or evil; as for the shaman, most modern ethnologists leave the morality and authenticity of shamanic activities to questions of cultural relativity, and try to envisage the shaman's liminal world in which relative dualisms such as good and evil cannot be absolutely divorced from another.

In actuality, however, the wall between magic and religion is not nearly as formidable as those who erected it would have us believe. Folk customs such as divination, healing through activation of spiritual energies and even the gaining of information through access to trance states, has continued, sometimes as a disguised form of Christianity (as, for instance, we find in Hoodoo and Voodoo traditions in the West Indies and Southern United States), and sometimes in defiance of canonical law, as we find in Wiccan and some Native American traditions. In the Jewish tradition there arose a so-called "Hekhalot literature . . . a bizarre conglomeration of . . . esoteric and revelatory texts produced sometime between late antiquity and the early Middle Ages" (Davila). These texts, which "detail actual practices used to reach trance states, gain revelations, and interact with divine mediators" (Davila) are associated by Davila with both Gnostic and shamanic praxes. That we should find remnants of shamanic customs (and therefore magic) within Judaism should not be surprising since the Jews were themselves originally a tribal, nomadic people. Winkelman has demonstrated the universal dispersion of shamanic customs among tribal societies on every inhabitable continent. Esoteric Judaism, particularly the Cabbala, fueled the Hermetic revival of Marsilio Ficino (1433-99) and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-94), founders of the Platonic Academy in Florence and whose translation of the *Hermetica* (a Gnostic text emphasizing experiential knowledge of God and laying down the basic principles for the operation of magic) Giordano Bruno had studied in depth.

It is clear that Western occult philosophies were influenced by the importation of shamanic cosmologies and ritual practices. In previous essays I have

demonstrated connections between shamanism, Gnosticism and Western myth and magical practice. Allow me to briefly recount some of my findings here. Shamanic motifs such as the flying horse, the sacred oak, the oracular head, the cosmic tree, and the metamorphoses of humans into animals all offer direct historical links between pre-modern and modern worlds. The mythological figures of Orpheus, Odin, Perceval and Cu Chulainn all share distinctly shamanic origins, as do Western systems of divination and magic. Additionally, Gnosticism draws from shamanic lore in positing the existence of other worlds containing spiritual entities, to which the practitioner (or his double) may travel to gain special information. These other worlds or levels of reality, are called *aeons*, each of which is presided over by an *archon*, described by Ripinsky-Naxon as “vestigial counterparts of shamanistic spirits of the Upperworld” (45). Both shamanic and Gnostic experientially-derived doctrines also posit the existence of an etheric double, a practitioner’s “second personality” (Musi 3), linked to the macrocosm in the same way that the shaman’s earthly body was linked to the microcosm. Gnostic and shamanic traditions are alike, as well, in stressing visions, prophetic dreams and out-of-the-body experiences as means of obtaining extrasensory information; moreover, practitioners in both traditions make use of an array of contemplative, meditative and visionary techniques to induce, sustain and map altered states of awareness.<sup>2</sup>

It is easy enough to isolate Gnosticism as an historical entity. What Versluis calls “apostolic” (175) Gnosticism mainly refers to a syncretic tradition fusing Jewish, Zoroastrian and Christian thought which existed from the time approximately 100 BCE-300 CE—although there is a Gnostic Church even to this day, centered in Mexico. We can hardly refer to Burroughs as an “apostolic” Gnostic in the limited historic or religious sense. However, Versluis also allows there might exist what he terms an “existentialist Gnosticism,” which accounts for the use of Gnostic themes, approaches and recounted experiences among authors such as Blake, Poe, Kafka and William S. Burroughs. That is, there is simply a certain turn of thought possible among modern Western authors with or without exact knowledge of their historical antecedent, that allows us to find in their work echoes (or re-envisionings) of Gnostic themes, experiential realities and cosmological maps. To a certain degree, one supposes their work to be culturally specific: they seem to be responding to the same repressive entity perceived by the original, historical Gnostics. But Burroughs is unique in bringing the Uruboros full circle, as it were, since, though a thoroughly modern Westerner, he

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<sup>2</sup> See Cline, “Shamanic Praxis and Hermetic Speculation: Leonora Carrington, Giordano Bruno and the Secret of the Flying Horse” 71-104.

also cultivates tribal, shamanic modes of experience which allow individual visionary experiences to be taken as wisdom-bearing with "adaptive significance."

Burroughs authority Greg Autry Wallace identifies Burroughs as a "shamanic figure of the Orphic type":

He has descended into the underworld and returned with a description of our society as seen from the other side of the grave. He began his journey by descending into Columbia, Peru and Equador (in shamanic lore a journey south always represents a journey into the land of the dead) in search of an hallucinogenic vine called Yage, used by shamans in Central and South America to facilitate existentially real journeys into the Otherworld. The Yage Letters gives us an account of Burroughs's first experience with this psychedelic agent, and it colors all of Burroughs's subsequent fiction. (1)

In *Naked Lunch* we are invited to enter "A place where the unknown past and the emergent future meet in a vibrating soundless hum. . . . Larval entities waiting for a Live One" (*Naked* 101). This is the Western Land, the Land of the Dead, and, as such, is a twisted yet recognizable distortion of the Land of the Living. It is everything unliving, everything undead: control, addiction, parasitism, mind control, death penalty, war and the destruction of the individual by the "larval entities" of bureaucracies and advertising jingles.

One may well wonder, Why the bad trip? Typical shamans undergoing interactions with yage or other pharmacological agents may report encounters with extraordinary beings but usually not hideous insectoid aliens whose sole purpose seems to be suck out our brains. Burroughs's nightmarish perceptions and canny trans-cultural insights seem to arise from of a heightened state of awareness, even as was that of Hermes Trismegistus, but has been twisted by the Western cultural matrix. Burroughs's narrative seems less a rational, even fictional, account and more the ragged edge of a raw experience. In view of Burroughs's predominant sci-fi scenarios, it does not seem preposterous that he may have experienced been some form of alien-human encounter, perhaps psychoactively constructed. The Cronenberg film of *Naked Lunch* shows ways this kind of interaction could have taken place beyond the kidnap-by-spaceship which comprises most eyewitness (because first-hand) accounts of alien abduction. Ingestion of DMT, the active alkaloid in ayahuasca has in many documented cases given rise to appearances of, precisely, insectoid space aliens conducting strange experiments.<sup>3</sup> Whitley Strieber describes just such encounters. It seems as if the knowledge-bearingentheogens, and human wisdom itself, is not free of all possible delusion. Burroughs's DMT-induced vision blended with the paranoia

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<sup>3</sup> See Strassman, *et al.*

already implicit in his relationship with street drugs to produce something truly horrifying, but also coinciding in an unusual degree with modern-day fringe UFOlogy. It is no surprise that Philip K. Dick in *Clans of the Alphane Moon*, in which social types are divided by their pathologies, situates the paranoiacs as the true leaders. Their strict awareness to every nuance of a possible enemy gives them the advantage of surprise. The spectre of warring alien civilizations is a basic trope of science fiction but also a sort of pseudo-religion of our time. But we need not look too far for, having seen the enemy face to face we realize, as does the comic strip character Pogo, that “He is us.” Humanity, sensation, native intelligence, is systematically squeezed out of us by a prison of our device. Mr. Bradley-Mr. Martin stand for the two-headed truth-lies offered us by a government and corporate-controlled media. This takes as axiomatic a radical severance between human and angelic realms that is philosophically closed in on itself and ultimately lifeless. The animistic worldview of the shaman sees all of nature, even rocks and especially the planet, as a living thing. While Paracelsus (whose wanderings did include interactions with Eurasian shamans)<sup>4</sup> does have a basic sympathy with this view, it is in contrast with the worldview prevailing among followers of Newton that the earth is unliving, mechanical and rigidly mathematically determinable. In one system, we are earth’s servants; in the other, sustained by some forms of biblical exegesis, we are its masters. Burroughs’ existential experience of colliding cultural paradigms is a central conceit weaving (one might almost say worming) its way through all of Burroughs’s fiction. It figures most prominently in the *Nova Mob* trilogy as an exposé of the problem of addiction. Addiction is a highly culturally determined appellation. It is the shadow side of the wisdom-bearing visions of the shaman. But the drugs which cause addiction are themselves the shadow side of the naturally produced entheogenic agents of the shaman. Ayahuasca, psychoactive mushrooms, peyote and even, to some extent, cannabis are hallucinogenic drugs. Shamanic cultures and even the country of Holland are testaments to the kinds of problems these drugs do not cause. In Western culture our drugs of choice are manufactured: alcohol, cocaine, methamphetamine, heroin. Our tobacco has been specially treated to remove its hallucinogenic properties, while, one might say “hopped up” hallucinogens such as crack cocaine, STP, and MDA are designed (and here we must wonder whether Mugwumps really exist) with the precise view in mind that they form an addiction in the user quickly and in a manner as debilitating as inextricable. Burroughs’s first contact with psychoactive agents was in their guise as

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<sup>4</sup> See Pachter 95.

street drug: heroin, cocaine, and methamphetamine. He comes to inhabit the hell of the addict, which is always and entirely about one thing: more drugs. Maybe it is lucky for Burroughs that he was tuned in with Ginsberg and Kerouac, who knew about entheogenic agents such as peyote, psychoactive mushrooms and cannabis. The entheogenic agents with which Burroughs came into contact under the influence of his Beat cohorts were in diametrical opposition to the street drugs to which Burroughs was addicted. My theory is that Burroughs's encounter with the entheogenic agents brought him face to face with the hellish addictions our culture manipulates for profit and power, or at least for the promise thereof. Burroughs's entire *oeuvre* could conceivably be viewed as an extended version of the shamanic underworld descent which has assumed nightmarish proportions because of the essential conflict between entheogens and street drugs. While *Naked Lunch* and the Nova Mob trilogy display this using a sci-fi scenario, his later Western Lands trilogy makes specific references to items summoning up other culturally structured underworld visitations: whether the scarab associated by ancient Egyptians with death and rebirth or the obsidian axe with which ancient Mayans executed their sacrifices. In *The Western Lands* Burroughs describes:

Dusk in a Necropolis slum. The streets are so deep that some are darkness at the bottom. Light is the most precious commodity here. And always the streets are worn deeper by the mindless, gibbering dead . . . stratum after stratum of tombs, down into the darkness. (*Western* 132)

The Underworld (or Otherworld) visitation is a quite common conceit of the shaman, and is the source of the shaman's healing power, and here as with Cocteau the underworld of the Hades becomes the underworld of the gangster film. For the shaman, shaman. Ayahuasca, peyote, psychoactive mushrooms and cannabis display a complex weave of intra- and inter- cultural traditions bearing a direct relation to perceptual reality, a role in determining the parameters of an individual's experience while under their effects. Employing the terminology of biochemist Rupert Sheldrake, psychedelic philosopher Terrence McKenna argues that "drugs" which come from the natural world, "use-tested by shamanically-oriented cultures," have, over time and by repetition developed a powerful "morphogenetic field" (29). This means the substance remains at least partially anchored in the usually sacred assumptions about the meaning of its experience in shamanic cultures. The chemically altered components of heroin, methamphetamine and cocaine, McKenna suggests, twist and distort the original morphogenetic field that would have been contained in a less anxiety-producing form in, say, the opium flower or the coca leaf. Street drugs are out of alignment with the original morphogenetic predisposition of the substance in its natural form from

which they were originally conceived or created and so create a twisted nightmare universe that is precisely the Shadow-self (to employ Jungian terminology) that cannot be ignored, that seems an inevitable and unfortunate exigency of fate, but which can in fact be fought against, and has been, and will be again.

The shaman is the one in the doorway, at the margins between modalities of apprehending much less comprehending the universe, and not only offers a way out but a way back in. True magic is a balancing of forces, and can now be apprehended a manner freed from superstition. It all had to do with a misunderstanding concerning duality, that it was singly real, when in actuality it was but one of many manners of apprehension each with its own claim of existential Suchness. The disintegrating parts of ourselves must knit up the raveled sleeve of itself and this comes from apprehension, comprehension and also through activity. Burroughs causes a kind of irritation in the cosmic wound. He displays acceptance of the absurdity but a call for dualities to dissolve into a new system in which apparent oppositions are shown as finally arbitrary.

The ubiquitous Dr. Benway is the unredeemed shaman—the shaman as con artist—or perhaps the con artist as shaman. Benway, the discredited physician, can be looked at as an unregenerate shaman, the shaman turned fraud, the healer's shadow side. In the historical progression from hunter-gatherer to agrarian society, shamanic vision could become a dangerous tool of hegemony, as the shaman's duties were turned over to the priest, whose job was to interpret visions rather than to experience them directly. That Burroughs saw the connection between the snake-oil salesman/drug-pusher and the unredeemed shaman indicates he does not romanticize the shaman. Although the shaman may be accepted in tribal societies, specific forms of praxis do vary from culture to culture. It is, however, generally recognized that there are different grades and virtues which a shaman might lay claim to. Some shamans are more powerful than others, different shamans may have certain areas of concentration in which they are more or less efficacious, some practice black magic (the casting of spells against one's enemies) and some white (healing, bringing the individual or collective into balance); there are even some quacks. In *Naked Lunch*, Burroughs writes about shamanic divination in the jungles of Brazil. The shaman is entrusted with finding of a murderer through the taking of yage (ayahuasca), but villagers sitting at the edge of the tent, Chicago gangster style, wonder if the old boy can be trusted.

“Let's hope Old Xiuptutol don't wig and name one of the boys.”

“Take a curare and relax. We got the fix in. . . .”

“But if he wig? . . . I tell you, Boss, nobody can hit the stuff like that. It cooks the brains.” (*Naked* 100)

Dr. Benway is the shaman that has *wigged*. He now turns his talents as a healer to torture, subjugation and control, and conjures up the figure of the shaman not as a healer and positive visionary but as liar, cheat and confidence man. This is like the Western culture, calcified by language, frozen in Time's eternal waiting room. The persona of the shaman or physician as confidence man, exemplified by Benway, is central to Burroughs's *oeuvre*, and quite possibly it draws from the author's association with sometimes less than trustworthy *brujos*—South American shamans—from whom he learns the secret of ayahuasca preparation. "I have been conned by medicine men," he writes to Allen Ginsberg. "The most inveterate drunk, liar and loafer in the village is invariably the medicine man" (Burroughs and Ginsberg 19). Burroughs recuperates the shaman as con man in Benway's recurrent medicine-show barker voice not too distant from W.C. Fields:

Step right up, Marquesses and Marks, and bring the little Marks too. Good for young and old, man and beast. . . . The one and only legit *Son of Man* will cure a young boy's clap with one hand—by contact alone, folks—create marijuana with the other, whilst walking on water and squirting wine out his ass. . . . Now keep your distance, folks, you is subject to be irradiated by the sheer charge of this character. (*Naked* 102-03)

In his conflation of Christ and con artist, Burroughs shows that other side of the shaman—the shaman as trickster, sleight-of-hand artist and crook. Jung has unequivocally identified Christ with the Trickster archetype. The view that reaches us from the canonical New Testament would seem to argue against this characterization. Jesus does not trick people: He is the real deal. But it is with Him that magic self-wrought by anyone ever after in human form became impossible. After Christ, anyone practicing magic is by definition a charlatan. The West enters a Faustian side of its development, which would see much suffering, but also much development. Nevertheless, it seems Burroughs contends that Christ, no matter how miraculous he "really" was, does contain within himself a shadow side, a shaman that wigged, the dope peddler wiggling his fingers through the elementary school fence. And this too is Benway.

Rather than confront directly the shadow side which would, as Jung suggests, mark Christ as truly human, the bible splits Jesus into two, a sort of Mr. Bradley-Mr. Martin, Jesus and a rival of his, whose name itself has become synonymous with sin, Simon Magus. Simon Magus may be looked upon as a sort of proto-Faust in the West. He was a wandering preacher written about in *Acts*, a contemporary of Christ, credited with performing magical wonders in contests with Christ's disciples. He comes to represent in the Christian tradition a debased form of magic, either unserious in its intent or partaking of outright charlatantry. Yet it is intriguing that Simon is also purported to be the founder of Gnosticism,

a heretical form of Christianity which privileged individual vision which went back before the book of Genesis, thus acting as a sort of prequel for the entire Western Bible. The Gnostic visions, because occurring after the time of Christ, are by nature false, and so the early Church sought the destruction of the writings of this syncretism sect, which actually combined features of Christianity, Judaism and Zoroastrianism. And the destruction would have been complete, too, had it not been for two freakish accidents. First was the preservation of the Corpus Hermeticum by the early Church, due to its false dating of the Hermes Trismegistus to approximately the time of Moses. Trismegistus was probably a Gnostic writer of the first or second century, but while his ideas were obscure enough to countenance a possible hint of biblical truth, they also contained within themselves the seed of magic: "As above; so below." There was from the beginning a tension between Gnostic and Christian thought. Remember Gnosticism *preceded* Christian thought, although its incorporation of Christian materials amounts to no less than a second New Testament. The second bit of fortune shined on Gnostic thought with the discovery of the Nag Hammadi library in the twentieth century, and the slow translation of its contents.

According to a probably incorrect tradition, Gnosticism was founded by the same Simon, the Simon Magus of the bible. Simon was probably a Samaritan, a sect that, though syncretically derived from Zoroastrianism, Judaism and Christianity, reworks the dualism latent in all three traditions to become an injunction to action rather than a hatred of evil. In more exoteric forms of Gnostic speculation there is an initial split between matter and spirit and along with a valuation of the latter a debasement of the former. However, Simonian Gnosticism foreshadows Hermetic and alchemical systems in integrating—marrying—body with spirit, spirit with soul, and male with female. This perceptual merging of apparent dualities is perhaps the most important piece of evidence I can offer that Gnostic vision seems to be of the same impulse as that offered by the shamanic Crisis Journey. In Sethian Gnosticism, "No original world of darkness or of matter is assumed to oppose the primal being," but rather "the dualism of existing reality is derived from an inner process within the one divinity itself" (Jonas 105). Dualism is not viewed as fundamental to reality, but as a construct of the mind. Professor Jonas differentiates between the Sethian or Simonian Gnosticism (which comes from a Syrian or Alexandrian background) and the Iranian Gnostic speculation which, at least at an exoteric level, "starts from dualism as a pre-existent principle" (105). In reworking the radical dualism of Zoroastrianism, Simonian Gnostics seek to return to the non-dualistic stance of their spiritual ancestors the Sethians, the truly aboriginal people of the Middle Eastern tradition.

While we notice that the healers, philosophers and scientists of traditional

societies see the world as fundamentally non-dual and undertake cultural practices to sustain this viewpoint, in the twentieth century, and in the industrialized West non-duality as a primary standpoint from which to organize experience and promote creativity is taken up primarily by the musicians, writers and other artists. Pertinent to William Burroughs were those Beat-era artists who looked to non-dual perceptions and practices to heal both their own personally felt self-estrangements and the gaping wound at the center of a culture cleaved by an increasingly abstract and insensible idealism, on the one hand, and an accumulating reliance on mechanism as an explanatory model for life on the other. Such radical healing requires a revisioning of nature so that the twin conditions of human existence, embodiment and ensoulment are no longer viewed as in conflict but are, rather, viewed as entirely co-existent and co-embedded in one concrete reality. As Burroughs's compatriots, Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac took refuge in the East Asian non-dual perspectives of Buddhism and Vedanta, Burroughs himself looked to the traditional practices of aboriginal American healers to access the imaginative revisioning necessary to access a medicine capable of addressing his (and his culture's) junk/time sickness.

Burroughs sought out and met with *brujos* (healer-shamans) in the Amazon Jungle when he traveled there in the early 1950s, and subjected himself to a regime of the powerful hallucinogen *ayahuasca*, also called yage, commonly used by Brazilian shamans to facilitate otherworldly travel. Indeed his correspondence and journals of the time reveal of *Naked Lunch*, the Nova Trilogy and ultimately his entire *oeuvre* as arising to a critically significant degree from his *ayahuasca* experiences. Burroughs does not engage, except in the most absolute sense, with recreational drug use, but rather uses psychoactive agents to facilitate—and indeed exacerbate—visionary experiences, thus revealing Burroughs's sympathy with Rimbaud's seer or *voyant*. As such, he is the shaman, and seeks to heal the wound within himself, within the culture, within the cosmology. He has been told by locals that "you are supposed to see a city when you take yage" (Burroughs and Ginsberg 21), and, expectations always shaping the plastic hallucinogenic reality, so he does, a twisted Otherworld in which time and space have run together, a multiplicitous dream-city of exotic minarets and junkies on hammocks, of violence and cheap sex, of larval entities and "WWIII pitchmen selling remedies for radiation sickness" (*Naked* 49). In his novels Burroughs calls this city, this Otherworld, "Interzone." While Burroughs's specific relationship with the *brujos* he encountered can only be theorized upon,<sup>5</sup> he does begin to see the universe

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<sup>5</sup> The novelist did receive formal shamanic initiation in a sweat lodge ceremony in Kansas in March, 1992. Navajo shaman Melvin Betsellei reported that Burroughs was the "toughest case" he had ever

in the shamanic way—a way that is neither physical nor meta-physical—but which is dynamic, malleable, a world of oscillating synaesthesias that call forth no closure. As I will indicate later, this lack of resolution is in direct contradistinction to the end of the world scenario rendered in the Zoroastrian-inspired *Book of Revelations*.

Obviously, if Burroughs's fantastic vision—and the novels which have grown out of it—recuperate shamanic material, it is in a manner that has been twisted, distorted, by the Western cultural matrix with which Burroughs is himself intertwined. What he knows best is junk and the world of junk which is a microcosmic mirror of the vast locus of control which keeps all citizens dutifully awaiting their next fix—of sex, drugs, money or smart phones. He applies what he has learned as a junky, his street smarts, to the finding and taking of yage, downing a handy supply of secanols after having a ayahuasca vision in order to come down from the experience. He's an old con man so he recognizes in even the bogus *brujos* himself really. Unregenerate, unredeemed, and like Coleridge's Ancient Mariner doomed to forever retell, or like De Quincey to relive a traumatic experience, Burroughs walks a razor's edge between the shaman as con artist, and the con artist turned shaman, between the wiggled out angel of chaos and the Cosmic Exposé artist tipping off the marks as to the nature of the con, like Burroughs's alter-ego "Uranian Willie the Heavy Metal Kid," whose ". . . plan called for total exposure—Wise up all the marks everywhere Show them the rigged wheel—Storm the Reality Studio and retake the universe . . ." (*Soft* 151). The Reality Studio, as Burroughs critic Michael Sean Bolton has observed, is that venue propagating "Burroughs's model for the oppression and imprisonment of historical linear time" (58). What Burroughs explicitly calls for then is the "breaking of the so-called laws of the universe . . . the monumental fraud of cause and effect" (qtd. in Bolton 58). Later this essay will examine more closely the relationship between linear time, language and duality.

In his vision of the shamanic Otherworld—the intertextual city called Interzone—Burroughs expresses a complex dynamic. He realizes that, "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 . . ." (*Naked* 105). Interzone shimmers at the peripheries of in-betweenness. It is both cultural and personal, at once both an interconnected and fragmentary. It is like finding a convenience store on a corner in Hell. "What the Mariner actually says is not important" (*Naked* 79). Burroughs has his hapless

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encountered, and reported seeing, hovering over Burroughs, a winged white skull with no eyes (Miles 258).

professor say about Coleridge's unredeemed visionary. "He may be rambling, irrelevant, even crude and rampant senile. But something happens to the Wedding Guest like happens in psychoanalysis" (*Naked* 80). For Burroughs, as it was for the Ancient Mariner, but also for Rimbaud, Black Elk, and William Blake, the vision calls itself into being both in the interior psyche of the visionary and in the world as an instrument of healing. If basic human sacraments—sexuality, spirituality, the shamanic ingestion of psychoactive agents—have become twisted profanations in the Western cultural matrix and it is with a view toward restoring all of these things to their proper relations that Burroughs's vision turns to the Otherworld—the shadow-side of consensus reality. In this way he/Lee becomes a shaman in spite of himself, a healer whose claim to authenticity was that he was once very, very sick.

### **Gnostic Genesis and Eschatology**

Coincident with shamanic themes is Burroughs's employment of Gnostic models. Shamanic praxis, Gnostic speculation and experimentation in writing intertwine on the margins of philosophy and literature. Canonical Christianity considers Gnostic texts spurious because they are speculative, but perhaps it is precisely their speculative quality that makes them authentic. Burroughs, like the ancient Gnostic scribes, dares to speculate. In speculating, he opens his text up to chance and whimsy—which perhaps would seem to detract from the seriousness of Burroughs's message. But chance and whimsy allow the egoistic confines of the author to drop away and the voice of the Collective Unconscious—the Third Mind—to speak.

In Burroughs's Gnostic retelling of our origins, language is perceived as a virus from outer space infecting the human host. Language is alien to us, even hostile to our interests, and yet we are its willing victims. Language holds us in place in time by constantly referring us back to it, back to the logos which it cons us into believing preceded it and us. Language, logos, creates the Law, to whom we give our moral authority, as we give our perceptual energies to language, which mediates and finally subsumes our understanding of reality. Language allows us to externalize our consciousnesses in the world; but then this externalization becomes a Frankenstein monster running amok. We start believing that good and evil exist independently of their conceptualizations. And thereby we become our own worst enemy.

In the Nova Trilogy language and image is manipulated by the Nova Mob, who are trying to inch the planet toward nova, destruction. As the mob's arch-

enemy, Inspector J. Lee of the Nova Police puts it:

The basic nova technique is very simple: Always create as many insoluble conflicts as possible and always aggravate existing conflicts. (*Ticket* 54-55)

Running cross-concurrently with this plan for perpetuation of conflict, this use of language as a control mechanism, is the use of language to rewrite old scenarios, to revise the brainwashing script. Burroughs employs language—dismembered via the cut-up—*against itself*, to revise paradigmatic cultural and psychological scripts. Inspector Lee, “Clem Snide, Private Asshole,” and other Burroughs surrogates, move in a shadowy realm between warring parties, rearranging language, using it against itself by folding back into the psycho-political-cultural machine the message “Dismantle Thyself” (*Soft* 149).

In common with Gnostic visionaries, Burroughs tells a story of humanity’s genesis which traces the root causes of our human condition. Burroughs blames the origin of our problems on what he calls “the talking sickness,” the “cold screaming sickness from white time” (174)—in other words, language. Language is “the white worm thing” (175) inside us that causes our slow physical and moral deterioration. Those who can survive the implantation of the virus differentiate themselves from the apes. The language-virus empowers humankind to enslave the natural world but then enslaves humankind. Next thing we know, we’re fighting wars over “shit-encrusted pieces of armadillo gristle” (177) while the Think Police secrete the Board Room Accounts and leave us, the living beings of this planet, in the “gasoline crack of history” (178).

Burroughs’s myth is clearly in the tradition of the Gnostics, whose chief *modus operandi* seems to have been to rewrite (even to *unwrite*) Western mythic conceptions of our ultimate beginnings and endings. *On the Origin of the World*, part of the Gnostic *Nag-Hammadi Library*, for instance, recounts a creation myth that shows up the failings of the Genesis account. It begins with an examination of a central duality of the Jewish creation myth—the all-important division between chaos and form which marks God’s creation of our universe. The author of the Gnostic work maintains that form did not “depart from chaos” (172) but that the two are interlinked. Form was from the first inherent in chaos. Form and chaos are really part of the same yin/yang system. The “God” Yaldabaoth, imaged by the ancient author as an “aborted fetus” (173) is created as the result of a cosmic act of jealousy in which the shadow of creation grows envious of creation itself. The Demiurge Yaldabaoth takes this creation as his own, imposes his will on it. Yaldabaoth is the “bile” that remains after this first radical duality is imposed by nascent consciousness upon the fabric of creation. Over time (since now time exists), the Demiurge convinces himself he really is God,

and always acts to repress the truth, which is, that even he is contained within some greater totality, within the dynamism of the time that he has created.

Like Burroughs, the author of *On the Origin of the World* seeks back to find the root causes of humanity's enslavement. Before he arrives at the creation of man in the progress of his tale the ancient Gnostic tells of Yaldabaoth's creation of the heavens, the angels, the archangels, cherubin, seraphin, in all, a splendid hierarchy. The only problem is, all of these magnificent beings, these beautiful palaces and chariots have been created only to serve this false God, this self-proclaimed master. All of creation is, as it were, a monument to the ego of Yaldabaoth. He boasts that he is the supreme God. This act of supreme egotism is also essentially dualistic, assuming a kind of break in the continuity of space-time, a division between God and non-God, between creator and human. The Demiurge or Cosmocrator is aware of this disjuncture, but attempts to hold onto power through the employment of archons—agents who anchor humanity in time to keep us from realizing the spark of the true creator God lying within us.

Burroughs's Nova boss "Mr. Bradley-Mr. Martin" has been identified by Stephenson as the Gnostic Demiurge. Burroughs himself has stated:

Mr. Bradley-Mr. Martin, in my mythology, is a God that failed, a God of conflict in two parts so created to keep a tired old show on the road, The God of Arbitrary Power and Restraint, Of Prison and Pressure, who needs subordinates, who needs what he calls "his human dogs" while treating them with the contempt a con man feels for his victims . . . (Burroughs and Gysin 97)

It is this dual—even schizophrenic—personality, Mr. Bradley-Mr. Martin whose image, stored in binary code and written at the molecular level, forms the viral "information molecules" (101) which infect humans and turn them into replicas of this selfsame dual-headed construct. The gnostic Demiurge Yaldabaoth, roughly equivalent to the Jewish Jehovah, is, like Bradley-Martin a false God, the enforcer of false dualities, claiming credit for creation and turning men into his slaves. But although he claims to be ultimate Good, he is really only part of a system that includes both Good and Evil.

To follow Stephenson's analogy, Mr. Bradley-Mr. Martin's Nova Mob—Sammy the Butcher, Hamburger Mary, Izzy the Push and all the rest—are the Gnostic archons, portrayed in *The Apocryphon of John*, also part of *The Nag Hammadi Library*, as seducing man through the creation of sexual desire, and through many other forms of what is called "counterfeit spirit" (119). It is the archons, for instance, who rule over the principalities of the earth, and who steer humans into trouble through the skillful introduction into our culture of gold, silver, and other precious metals (121). What the archons accomplish through

an enforced haptification of desire, Burroughs's Nova Mob accomplishes through the introduction of addiction. In the Burroughsian universe the shaman's tool for healing, the entheogenic agent, is distorted by Western commodity culture and made perverse. Psychoactive agents are stripped of their sacrality to enforce the monopolization of visionary experience.

If the Nova Mob, the archons, are agents of deceit and destruction, Inspector Lee plays the Christ-like role of redeemer both in his exposure of the archon's plot and in his rewriting of the text of culture, of history. Lee is often spoken of as an "agent," and it is significant that this word has a dual meaning in English. It may be a person or it may be a thing. Christ, the Host, the One who welcomes us to life becomes equivalent with the host or eucharistic bread which he offers to his disciples as his divine body. In its role as sacrament, also, ayahuasca can act as an agent of healing. It has the capacity to give man the gnosis or knowledge he needs to recognize the divine spark within himself. Mexican shaman Maria Sabina also speaks of psychoactive mushrooms as being one form of sacrament. But Christ's redemption of humanity in Gnostic myth is provisional, not the permanent and final redemption that is portrayed in the canonic *Revelations*. The apocalypse is portrayed in exoteric Christianity as a final battle between God and the Devil, after which will reign peace on Earth forever. But this is only one articulation of the Persian model upon which St. John's vision of the end times is based. To understand what Burroughs is saying about the end of the world it is necessary to understand the esoteric Gnostic conception of time and the movement of human history. It is this Gnostic conception, in its most esoteric form, we find at the heart of Gnostic eschatology.

In "Gnosis and Time," Henri-Charles Puech contrasts the Gnostic view of time, which emerged to flourish in the first two centuries after Christ's death, with two conceptions that had preceded it—the old Greek view, which sees time as cyclical, and the new Christian view, which sees time as linear. The Gnostics seem to combine elements of both Greek and Christian systems, but they do so with an attitude decidedly different from either. Puech's essay reveals that, whereas for the Greek and Christian, time is perceived as proof of the bounty and beauty of the universe or of God, for the Gnostic time is conflict, pain, suffering, and presents us with neither a possible return to a Golden Age nor heavenly choirs to sing in the reign of God after the revelations of St. John are fulfilled. For the Gnostics Hell is captured in the image of a human being plunged into pure time (Puech 66). As Burroughs writes, "Where we are *is* Hell" (Burroughs and Gysin 188). Hell is us in the here and now. It *is* our reality, rather than some place we might or might not go after we are deceased.

Mazdaism, a highly exotericized offshoot of Zoroastrianism, sees the mean-

ing of time as tending toward a final great battle between the forces of light and dark, but even here there is also an esoteric strand of thought which brings into question the radically dual position implied by simplistic definitions of Mazdaist eschatology. For instance, the Zervanist sect of Mazdaism maintains that both Ohrmazd, Time, the Creator, and his great Adversary were originally created in the mind of a God of Absolute Time, Zervan. Thus the apocalyptic clash at the end of time "is conceived as a drama within the supreme deity himself" (Corbin 129). This is obviously similar to the Gnostic myth, in which the apparent God is not God at all but Himself a creation of some even more infinite being.

If the battle between the Mr. Bradley-Mr. Martin's Nova Mob and Inspector Lee's Nova Police is analogous the clash between Creator and Adversary in the Zervanist apocalypse, though, we might say that the final battle is really taking place inside the split brain of Mr. Bradley-Mr. Martin, the mad scientist, the Creator God gone wrong. In which case even he would have to be a creation of something else, in this case the text on the page interacting within the mind of the reader and the larger cultural text of which it is a portion.

Along with their rewriting of the myth of our ultimate beginnings, the Gnostics supply a further development of the myth of the end of the world. Whereas exoteric Mazdaism, as Corbin demonstrates, articulated three great acts of time as, 1) Creation (perfection), 2) Catastrophe (the entry of evil into the world from without, and the ensuing admixture of good and evil that constitutes our present existence), and 3) Transfiguration (a final battle and ultimate separation of good and evil) (120-21), the more esoterically-inclined Ismailist sect of Persian Zoroastrian-inspired Gnosticism rewrites this schema to include

... three "moments": an anterior moment, in which Light and Dark lived separately; a median moment, in which Light is attacked and conquered by Darkness and the two unengendered and a-temporal substances are mixed; and a *posterior* moment, in which their original disjunction will be re-established. (Puech 82-83)

The point I am trying to stress is that even in the Myth of Apocalypse there is encoded a non-linear temporal element. Exoteric interpretations of the myth, it is true, are plotted rather like Hollywood westerns with the town first at peace, then menaced by evil, then championed by good and restored to peace again. Such a structuring implies a final end to the evil menacing the town. The exoterically conceived return movement from peace to chaos and back to peace again is not a movement to something, however, but a movement precisely to nothing—a neutrality and amniotic suspension of reality to which we crave to return but which was never really there in the first place. In the more esoteric forms of the Persian tradition as embedded in Gnosticism, human history is conceived as a movement from disjunction to disjunction, with an intervening

period of struggle. This version of the myth seems to me to more fully articulate the actual reality of life; in life, certainly, there is no absolute good, no absolute peace, no absolute truth, but only a series of provisional moments of grace like occasional signposts along a road of suffering that seems always to bend toward some greater mystery.

It is this more esoteric form of the Persian myth of the end of time, one version of the Gnostic view, that we encounter in Burroughs's Nova Trilogy, and only by bearing it in mind will we be able to fully comprehend Burroughs's vision. Burroughs's myth, like Gnosticism, is a rewriting of our basic cultural and psychological assumptions. The Demiurge Mr. Bradley-Mr. Martin and his henchmen seek to trap humans "in present time form" (*Ticket* 55), to strand us in a Gnostic hell of pure time which is endless repetition without purpose. Bolton comments: "For Burroughs, to remain fixed in or fixated upon time, whether a moment or a determined span of time, creates a binary—now is not then and then is not now" (57). The reification of time, particularly linear, and most especially apocalyptic time, is the ultimate duality since it subsumes all of human life into a narrative that is fundamentally *inhuman*. Language is a virus from outer space.

Standing against the oppressive illusion of linear and, indeed, circumscribed Time is Inspector Lee of the Nova Police. However, Lee can but recommend to us methods to extricate ourselves from the subliminal control of the Mob, methods which will show the Mob and its creations for what they are—illusory constructs. Even Inspector Lee, though, is finally as insubstantial as any other culturally or psychologically determined projection. Like Christ in Gnostic myth, all Inspector Lee can do is show us what is already within. He has no other power. In this sense he is quite literally an *In*-spector, the ghost who dwells within. "Let he who has ears, hear," said Christ. "The only thing I can give you is my gun. I can't use it. You can" (189), Burroughs writes. And since Burroughs implies an escape from temporal restraints imposed by the archons or Nova Mob, we cannot take it that, as in a western movie, the white hat wins in the end. There is a momentary reprieve perhaps, a moment of grace or illumination from God or enlightenment akin to the Buddha's. But this is really only the first step in a vaster project that spans all timelessness. After "the danger of nova is removed from this planet" (54) Lee and his special agents will move on to other assignments. They are not setting up a permanent police state, since that would be to repeat the repressive actions of the Nova Mob, and thereby become the Nova Mob in its stead. Following Gnostic eschatology we can see that there will be no perfect world to come; it is simply up to each individual to wrest power away from Time, as they can, moment by moment.

To say that Gnostics see humanity as imprisoned by time is really to say that they advocate breaking free from that prison. To break free from it we must understand it—we must see what it is and what it isn't. One must have the proper tools and, when necessary, weapons. Burroughs is the cosmic con artist, seeking to wise up the marks. He's not seeking truth—in fact he's derisive of such conceptualizations—but seeks instead to return language to its original, dynamic matrix.

### The Cut-Up

The chief weapon recommended and used by Inspector Lee in the battle against the archonic the Nova Mob is the cut-up. The cut-up is a method by which the existing cultural text, composed as a brainwashing device by the Nova Mob, can be rewritten and subverted. The notion of rewriting and subverting the script of the Reality Movie is key to both Burroughs's *oeuvre* and the Gnostic project. The cut-up incorporates and rewrites elements of previous texts in a way that shows these previous texts as illusory. What the Gnostics accomplish through a radical rewriting of Christian, Jewish and Persian traditions, Burroughs effects by folding into what he images as a gigantic cement mixer of language the very stories the Nova Mob have propagated along with another message directed at the prisonhouse of Time: "Dismantle Thyself" (*Soft* 149). The cut-up, a manipulation of language, is a weapon against time because it is language that imprisons us in time. Burroughs writes: "What scared you all into time? Into body? Into shit? I will tell you: '*the word*.' Alien word '*the*.' '*The word* of Alien Enemy imprisons '*the*' in Time" (*Nova* 4, italics original). Language imprisons us in time because it gives rise to a false construct—*itself*. We believe what we read—textual language. We believe what we hear—spoken language. We believe what we think—language on a sub-vocal level. But Burroughs demonstrates the illusory nature of all language. He does this first by separating out what he calls "the sound track" and "the image track" of the Reality Movie we are watching. Burroughs suggests a simple experiment.

Turn off the sound track on your television set and use an arbitrary recorded sound track from your tape recorder: street sounds . . . music . . . conversation . . . recordings of other TV programs, radio, etcetera. You will find that the arbitrary sound track seems to be appropriate. . . . people running for a bus in Piccadilly with a sound track of machine gun fire looks like 1917 Petrograd. (*Ticket* 168)

This experiment shows that "what we see is dictated by what we hear" (168). Language ("the sound track") acts to crystallize belief, but also to reify concept.

We have to break through language by breaking down language, by slowing down the movie, frame by frame, until we can notice the spaces between the frames. In these spaces the Reality Movie is just silence and white light.

Or we might think of the image track as thought or mind and the sound track as the body. Mind versus body is another dualism often connected with popular conceptions of Gnosticism. But such conceptions generally arise from reports originating from the early Church fathers, who are primarily concerned with establishing reasons that Gnosticism should be considered heretical. Under such conditions, an over-simplification of the Gnostic position may have well occurred. Ironically, by purging heretical from non-heretical forms of Christian worship, the early Church fathers create their own duality—between heretical and non-heretical forms of belief. But Simonian Gnosticism, associated with Gnosticism's legendary if not historical origin, has been shown to take a non-dual stance that welcomed a variety of forms of worship. Simon Magus was apparently a student of Dositheos, founder of the Jewish sect, the Saducees. The form of Gnosticism practiced by Dositheos and Simon has been termed Sethian Gnosticism for its supposed transmission directly from Adam to Seth, who took the place of Cain and Abel in the heart of Adam and received directly from this first man the primal revelation of God. Seth is supposedly the direct ancestor of Jesus Christ. In Sethian Gnosticism, "No original world of darkness or of matter is assumed to oppose the primal being," but rather "the dualism of existing reality is derived from an inner process within the one divinity itself" (Jonas 105). Dualism is not viewed as fundamental to reality, but as a construct of the mind. Professor Jonas differentiates between the Sethian or Simonian Gnosticism (which comes from a Syrian or Alexandrian background) and the Iranian Gnostic speculation which "starts from dualism as a pre-existent principle" (105). In reworking the radical dualism of exoteric Zoroastrianism, Simonian Gnostics seek to return to the non-dualistic stance of their spiritual ancestors the Sethians, the truly aboriginal people.

Simon, who declared himself to be "God of the absolute beginning" and claimed the creation of the universe as his own deed, traveled around with a prostitute called Helen or sometimes Selena (Moon) whom he claimed as the "First Thought" of his spirit, and the mother of all things. She was equivalent to Epinoia, Ennoia, Sophia and Holy Spirit, and also with Helen of Troy, who, legend had it, once fell from the earth to the moon (Jonas 109). The female principle in Gnostic thought descends into matter and copulates with the male principle to effect the interpenetration of matter and thought which is life. The myth of Sophia, the mother of all, who comes down to redeem man, was reenacted by Simonian Gnostics in the form of ritualized and free sex. They also practiced

magical incantations, the concocting of love potions, oneiromancy and consultation with spirits (Doresse 16).

Exoteric Christian assumptions about the body being evil, or the mind-body split implied by Descartes in his privileging of thinking over embodiment, is commented upon by Blake in the "Voice of the Devil" section of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. Blake, whose relationship to Gnostic thought has been commented upon by many critics,<sup>6</sup> writes:

All Bibles and sacred codes have been the causes of the following errors:

1. That Man has two existing principles Viz: a Body and a Soul.
2. That Energy, calld Evil, is alone from the Body, & that Reason, calld Good is alone from the Soul . . . .

But the following contraries to these are true:

1. Man has no Body distinct from his soul for that calld Body is a portion of Soul . . . .

(34)

Burroughs images Blake's theme most distinctly in the omnipresent Mr. Bradley-Mr. Martin, a creature of unmitigated evil sometimes joined as at the hip, and other times split into two distinct personages. Compared with Bradley-Martin, Dr. Benway is strictly a small time huckster, for it is Bradley-Martin that presides over the Nova Mob as Demiurge. His power is based on the duality that he himself creates—between creator and created, between subject and object, between logos and eros, and most importantly between mind and body. Only as long as these false dualities are in place is the control mechanism operational. Bradley-Martin is that control mechanism personified. But, like the Gnostic Demiurge, he is not God, but only a crude representation thereof. The control mechanism, then, lacks a final substantiality. It is an illusion to be seen through—if one has eyes to see.

Gnosticism's "radical dualism," we see, is much more complex than is generally assumed. Often it has more to do with the battle against dualism *itself*—Bradley-Martin—than the embracing of spirit at the expense of matter. Burroughs's existentialist Gnostic intuition allows one to see that not all Gnostic thought definitively favors the schizophrenic, Cartesian mind-body split we have seen in the West. What Burroughs is showing us is that the mind-body dynamic continually shifts. There never is a point at which we can say, *This is mind*, or, *This is body*. There is a continual dynamic assumed. The mind and body tracks are only aligned as they are due to our ability to find meaning, to make a coherent picture out of even disparate items, like the image and its disembodied sound-track. While mind, as conceived in Western terms, is separate

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<sup>6</sup> See Sorenson; Nuttall.

from the body, what the Gnostics were alluding to, as far as I can construe from most of the writings in the Nag Hammadi Library, was a spiritual force that transcends mind and body even as it unifies the two.

Language is a construct that holds us in place in time; the cut-up is the tool of our escape. The effect of the cut-up upon Burroughs's work is to construct a four-dimensional, holographic text. In Burroughs's novels there is no clear linear time, but rather a series of temporal mutations, linked to one another but never quite coinciding. Through writing—the cut-up—we can alter time. We can slow down sound and image tracks to see their subliminal coding, and insert codes of our own. Or we can speed the film up or run it backwards, stretch it, distort it, or move sound and image track out of phase. All of these activities actually allow us to travel in time. According to Burroughs, “when I fold today's paper in with yesterday's paper and arrange the pictures to form a time section montage, I am literally moving back in time [to] when I read yesterday's newspaper, that is travelling in time back to yesterday . . .” (*Soft* 82). While we can move back into the past and rearrange it by cutting-up yesterday's newspaper, we can move forward in time through an oracular function built into the cut-up process.

The cut-up, though, is not only a weapon, but recuperates as well the oracular powers of the shaman by allowing the Third Mind to speak. Burroughs and Gysin use cut-ups as a way of rewriting existing texts by taking advantage of the accidental. Around the same time as the Burroughs-Gysin experiments, John Cage was experimenting with musical composition based on chance procedures with the *I Ching*. These chance procedures, like the Surrealist game of Exquisite Corpse, are oracular, even magical, at root. Burroughs describes the cut-up technique as “a sort of *I Ching* or table-tapping procedure” but questions, “How random is it actually? Don Juan says that nothing is random to a man of knowledge: everything he sees or hears is there just at that time waiting to be seen and heard” (*Cities* 43-44). The cut-up is a randomizing procedure akin to sortilege. The shaman's traditional techniques of scrying the future are here employed to see the larger patterns of time, which larger patterns reveal time as mutable, not a solid thing.

In fact we may see the cut-up as an activity, on a textual level, akin to the shamanic dismemberment typical of many shamanic initiation narratives. Dismemberment as part of spiritual rebirth is one of the world's oldest mythemes. We see it reflected mythologically in the stories of Osiris, Dionysus and Christ, and in the shamanic initiatory experiences extending from ancient times into the present day. Often, the physical dismemberment is the price the shaman must pay to gain his special powers. After he was slain, flayed, boiled in a pot and

beaten by a hammer, one neophyte among the Avam Samoyed was taught "how to 'read inside his head,' how to see mystically without his normal eyes and how to understand the language of plants" (Drury 25). Burroughs's dismemberment and reassembly of language might likewise be thought of as part of a larger healing process. Like the Dadas who preceeded him, Burroughs offers the text, holistically the world, to the scissors in the same spirit that the novice shaman offers his body to dismemberment. After undergoing ritual dismemberment, the shaman arises anew, a resurrected being. The text also, after its ritual dismemberment, becomes a vehicle of healing and gains a special efficacy to summon synchronicities to itself. That is, it becomes oracular.

Burroughs is using the text to undermine linear Time, the ultimate duality, not because there's any hope of ever doing so, permanently, because that would be just another form of linearity, or, indeed, duality. We fight against the mad tyrant Time because to not do so is to join the legions of the walking dead. At exactly the point at which we accept the terms of the rigged game we've gotten ourselves involved in, we've already lost, surrendered the divine spark within us, as well as the numinous field of intelligence surrounding us, and given up all hope of finding life's mystery. Burroughs sounds a Gnostic battle cry. "Premature?" Burroughs asks. "I say these words are not premature. These words may be too late" (*Nova* 4). The Wild West shootout at the Armageddon corral scenario collects to itself its own Apocalypse. Witness the strife in the world around us, all based on carefully drawn divisions between countries, races, belief systems, economic statuses, political powers, corporate allegiances and a multitude of other false dualisms. The Reality Studio's production of the End of the World has a certain strange attraction. We can sit back in our velveteen seats and watch Absolute Good triumph over Absolute Evil. We are, of course, constantly encouraged by the soft drink commercials to forget it is all a projection of our own minds. But to not succumb means we must struggle—endlessly—against the Bradley-Martin that lives within each of us, without the illusory hopes offered by Dr. Benway's wandering hypodermic needle, and without even any substantial assistance from Inspector Lee. All this we must do and on the other hand not become vainglorious. Each of us is lucky if we can survive and at the same time remain truly alive to life's subtle, spiritual energies. This is a war that goes beyond guns and money. Diane Di Prima's "war against the Imagination" goes on, on an ever grimmer battlefield every day.

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## 〈時間迷幻者〉： 威廉·布洛斯小說中的巫師式旅程與 諾斯提教末世論

### 摘要

身為美國五〇年代的垮掉的一代文學潮的重要成員之一，威廉·布洛斯承襲了一種法術與宗教的詩學，此乃源自於遠古巫術，以及諾斯提教之異教教義的聖經那格哈馬帝之古抄本中。設若威廉·布洛斯的小說新星三部曲的巫術觀點為西方文明所曲解，他的看法仍是忠於巫術之召喚，仍是指向一條通往文化以及個人的心靈復原之路。本文闡述威廉·布洛斯與南美的巫術主義之間的緊密關係，並檢視他作品中的幾位主要角色：班威醫生原是一位江湖巫醫，後轉變為一位誑騙藝術者；相對的，檢察長李則從哄騙者成為一位導人以正途的巫師；而伯得利先生，亦同時是馬丁先生，則代表諾斯提教的反派造物主。因此，本文分析了諾斯提教派的作品〈論世界的起源〉，並據此比較威廉·布洛斯與諾斯提教派對時間概念的相通處，也強調其刻意的文句與概念的重新拼湊，乃是一種從語言之毒中解放出來的一種神諭式的敘述技巧。

**關鍵字：**垮掉的一代文學，巫師煉金術，諾斯提教主義，實驗派寫作，意識研究