

Interzone's a Riot: William S. Burroughs and Writing the Moroccan Revolution

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A survey of *Burroughs Live*, a collection of interviews with William S. Burroughs spanning the years between the publication of *Naked Lunch* in 1959 and his death forty years later, reveals that interviewers made little of his life in Morocco beyond classifying it as just another curious fact in an already scandalous biography of a homosexual and sometime heroin addict who felt at odds with his own government.¹ Indeed, despite living in Tangier's International Zone from 1954 through its dissolution following Moroccan independence two years later, Burroughs was far more likely to be asked his opinion about United States politics than his views on Moroccan politics.² This proved true even in the 1960s, when he still spent much of his time in Tangier. Critics such as John Tytell and Mary McCarthy have long argued that Burroughs's work frames a reaction against the restrictive US political climate of the time: the cold war, suburbanization, McCarthyism, and American exceptionalism.³ However, anticolonial violence in Tangier had, I will contend, a profoundly significant impact on Burroughs's writing.

Reacting against US authoritarianism is indeed an important component of Burroughs's oeuvre, but its primacy has tended to overshadow the equally significant influence of the nationalist violence and anticolonial riots the writer witnessed in Tangier. Burroughs's biographers have typically underemphasized the influence of the more violent aspects of the revolution on his creative output. Even Ted Morgan's excellent *Literary Outlaw* glosses over the bloody riots. While the biography does engage Tangier's myth and mystique and discusses the city as a place of artistic and personal liberation for Burroughs, Morgan makes only passing mention of the historical events behind Moroccan independence.⁴ Even significant collections such as Davis Schneiderman and Philip Walsh's *Retaking the Universe: William S. Burroughs in the Age of Globalization* have largely underemphasized the impact of the revolution

on Burroughs.⁵ It is only relatively recently, through the work of Michael Walonen, Kurt Hemmer, and a few other scholars, that the critical discourse on Burroughs's work has begun to investigate the impact of the period on his writing.⁶ In *Morocco Bound*, for example, Brian T. Edwards contends that "[w]hat is inspiring to Burroughs about the ensuing chaos is not violence per se but the possibility for disrupting the established order that rioting and chaos present. He sees revolution as opportunity, not as the replacement of one control mechanism with another."⁷ Allen Hibbard in "Tangier and the Making of *Naked Lunch*" also emphasizes the impact on Burroughs's writing of a Tangier transitioning from "international-zone status toward integration within a newly independent Morocco."⁸ For both Edwards and Hibbard, the role of anticolonial violence is acknowledged but pushed aside in order to focus on the influence of Tangier's transformation from a city under foreign control to a Moroccan city within an independent Morocco. For these critics, the violence is just a small part of Tangier's larger influence on Burroughs's work.

However, Burroughs frequently refers to the disruptions and tensions of living in the transnational space of a colonial Tangier undergoing a movement towards independence. He not only mentions violence often in letters but also incorporates depictions of actual incidents into early drafts of *Naked Lunch*. More than this, Burroughs's writing underwent an unprecedented shift during this time. The themes, subject matter, and narrative structure of *Naked Lunch* are worlds away from those of his previous novels, *Junky* and *Queer*. This evolution can be directly traced to his first-hand encounters with revolutionary elements operating within Tangier. In a 1955 letter to Allen Ginsberg, Burroughs himself first acknowledges the connection between the political situation and his writing, commenting that "Tangier is looking up [...] There's a war here I want to dig."⁹ Later in the same letter, he recounts an incident that stimulates him creatively. He believes that he was nearly assaulted while walking through an Arab neighborhood. Whether the aggression he felt from the native residents was real or imagined is irrelevant. What matters is that Burroughs thought he was threatened because he was a Westerner. Equally important is that his immediate response was to use the incident as fodder for *Naked Lunch*: "I used to complain that I lacked material to write about. Mother of God! Now I'm swamped with material. I could write 50 pages on that walk" (295). In another letter, he writes, "I have entered a period of change more drastic than adolescence or early childhood. [...] There is something special about Tangier. It is the only place when I am there I don't want to be any place else. No stasis horrors here. And the beauty of this town that consists in changing combinations" (329). The transformative potential of these "changing combinations" became the catalyst for the bulk of *Naked Lunch* and strongly impacted much of his later work, specifically the anticolonial impulses outlined in his *Red Night Trilogy*, which consists of his final three novels, *Cities of the Red Night*, *The Place of Dead Roads*, and *The Western Lands*. While *Naked Lunch* is not overtly anticolonial in the way these later novels are, it does have striking moments

of political and narrative disruption that closely mimic the city's bloody riots and sociopolitical uncertainty.

Morocco has been culturally significant for the US from at least December 1777, the year Morocco—as the first state to do so—officially recognized the United States of America as an independent country, and the two nations have since maintained a close if complicated relationship. Morocco and the United States had almost come to war in 1784 when Moroccans captured the *Betsey*, a US ship trying to enter the Mediterranean. The move was ordered by Sidi Muhammad ibn Abdallah, ruler of Morocco, in retaliation for the refusal by the fledgling United States' Confederation Congress to discuss trade agreements with the North African country.¹⁰ War was averted and the *Betsey* was released, however, with the agreement of the Moroccan–American Treaty of Peace and Friendship, negotiated by Thomas Barclay and Taher Ben Abdelhack Fennish and subsequently endorsed and signed by John Adams and Thomas Jefferson.¹¹ According to Michael B. Oren in his history of the United States' involvement in the Middle East, *Power, Faith, and Fantasy*, the treaty signaled “the longest-standing contract in American diplomatic history and the first one to bear an Arabic inscription and the Islamic date (‘The Ramadan Year of the Hejira 1200’). The American consulate in Tangier, established under the treaty, would become America’s oldest legation building and its only national landmark abroad.”¹²

Nearly a century later Mark Twain famously ridiculed the US Consul General in his book *The Innocents Abroad*. After his meeting with the US Consul General in Tangier on June 30, 1867, Twain wrote that “[i]t is the completest exile that I can conceive of. I would seriously recommend to the Government of the United States that when a man commits a crime so heinous that the law provides no adequate punishment for it, they make him Consul-General to Tangier.”¹³ The portrait Twain paints of the city is one of desperate loneliness and complete cultural isolation. While he was not the only American writer to pass through Tangier in the nineteenth century, Twain’s record of this visit remains one of the most significant accounts of the city written by an American during this time.

Twain’s account ushered in a long line of American writers journeying to Tangier looking for the exotic, for alterity, and for escape from the familiar. Indeed, over the next half century so many Americans traveled there that in 1917 Edith Wharton characterized Tangier as “cosmopolitan, frowsy, familiar Tangier, that every tourist has visited for the last forty years.”¹⁴ Gertrude Stein, whom Paul Bowles credits with recommending Tangier to him, visited in 1901.¹⁵ The city made such an impression on her that she used it as the setting for her first novel, *Quod Erat Demonstrandum*.

When Twain’s ship made port in 1867, Morocco was a sultanate, but fifty years later, on March 30, 1912, the Sultan of Morocco, whose control over the country was tenuous, and Eugene Regnault, a representative of France, signed the Treaty of Fez, in which Morocco ceded its autonomy. The treaty contained language establishing

Tangier as a “special zone which would be granted a system of government to be determined later.”¹⁶ This arrangement was formalized in 1923 when agreements between France, England, and Spain established Tangier as an international zone. This move was seen as a betrayal by many Moroccans and significant riots broke out in the capital city of Fez. The United States had long been aware of Tangier’s importance as a port of entry for US goods into North Africa, and by the end of World War II participated in its international administration. On April 10, 1947, Sultan Mohammed V, partially inspired by the anticolonial sympathies expressed to him three years earlier by US President Franklin Roosevelt during a dinner at the Casablanca Conference, delivered a speech in Tangier’s international zone in which the Sultan issued a reaffirmation of his sovereignty and a declaration of his country’s independence.¹⁷ Abdelhai Azarkan, in “Statecraft and Sovereignty,” points out that Mohammed V’s speech avoids using the words “independence, protectorate, colonization, foreign forces, nationalist forces, resistance forces or national political parties;” instead it focuses on the Sultan’s absolute authority: “It was undoubtedly this announcement of total sovereignty, inseparable from the act of governing the whole country and all its subjects, which enraged the French colonial forces.”¹⁸ On August 20, 1953, shortly before Burroughs arrived in Morocco, the French deposed the Sultan by force, replacing him with his more amenable cousin Mohammed Ben Arafa. This initiated a strengthening of support for nationalist movements throughout the country as well as a period of “intensifying urban and rural revolt.”¹⁹ Trains were derailed, numerous Europeans were killed or assaulted, and explosions were common, including one in a crowded Casablanca market on Christmas Eve.²⁰ Not even Tangier, with its international designation, was immune to the violence and rioting, though there it was not as frequent. Attempts by France to enact “vague” reforms and renegotiate its image as a benevolent authority were unsuccessful and “anti-French terrorist activities” persisted.²¹ In 1955, Mohammed V returned to Morocco and in March 1956, Morocco gained its independence from France. Tangier relinquished its international zone status on October 29, 1956 and was reintegrated into independent Morocco.

When Burroughs first arrived in January 1954, the country was in turmoil. He was disappointed, having expected the International Zone to completely match the exotic portrait painted by Paul Bowles in *Let It Come Down* (1952), which he had read and enjoyed. Bowles had first visited Tangier in 1931 and became so enamored of the city that he lived there permanently from 1947 until his death in 1999. Yet Morocco changed considerably during Bowles’ lifetime, and, as a consequence, Bowles’ Morocco during this time was frequently one of nostalgia. Michelle Green states in *The Dream at the End of the World* that Bowles began his third novel, *The Spider’s House* (1955), in an effort to document the country’s “traditional pattern of life.”²² His semi-orientalist representations in *Let It Come Down* and other early works conflicted with the riots and bloodshed Burroughs encountered when he disembarked. In one of the first letters written after his arrival, Burroughs complains, “What’s all this old

Moslem culture shit? One thing I have learned. I know what Arabs do all day and all night. They sit around smoking cut weed and playing some silly card game. And don't ever fall for this inscrutable oriental shit like Bowles puts down (that shameless faker). They are just a gabby, gossipy simple-minded, lazy crew of citizens."²³ Indeed, much as critics have frequently argued about Bowles, it is easy to argue that Burroughs exhibits typical imperialist tendencies. Kurt Hemmer suggests that Burroughs failed in his anti-imperialist obligations and actively engaged in decidedly pro-imperialist discourse.²⁴ Greg A. Mullins, interrogating the relationship between imperialism and Burroughs's role as a sexual tourist in *Colonial Affairs*, argues that, as a result of his American nationality, Burroughs was able "to exist outside social boundaries" and exploit the colonial situation.²⁵ However, while a convincing argument can be made that Burroughs arrived in Tangier and lived his first year as a part of the colonial machine, these attitudes did not last for long.

By the end of his second year in Morocco, Burroughs largely leaves these colonialist impulses behind and revises his assessment of the city and its inhabitants: "The chaos in Morocco is beautiful."²⁶ He argues that "it is sheer provincialism to be afraid of them as if they was something special, sinister and Eastern and un-American" (345). He demonstrates sympathy for the nationalist cause and calls the riots a justified response to "outrageous brutalities by the French cops" (349). He emphasizes that "ARABS ARE NOT VIOLENT [...] They do not attack people for kicks or fight for kicks like Americans" (emphasis in original; 349). The specific wording of this accusation—that fear of Arab unrest is akin to a naive fear of the unfamiliar—reads like a recrimination of Burroughs's first year. He has grown more open and receptive to the pulse of life outside of his apartment and it is this new engagement with Tangier and the Moroccan political struggle that helps to instigate the change in his writing.

The political situation in Morocco stimulated Burroughs and activated his own antiauthoritarian impulse. Michelle Green describes Burroughs as "excited" and "eager to see rioting in the streets."²⁷ Whenever a riot threatened or an act of violence occurred close to home, Burroughs hurriedly wrote of it to Ginsberg. On February 17, 1956, for example, he tells of a series of recent incidents that had the city on edge: "A friend of mine waylaid and stabbed in the back for no reason, not even robbery. [...] The old Dutch pimp who runs the place where I used to live set upon by five Arabs and beaten to a pulp. An Argentinian queer severely beaten by a gang of youths."²⁸

Perhaps the episode that personalized the situation for him the most happened in August 1955 and involved an Arab acquaintance running amok and killing several people on the street, an incident that was also written up in the *London Times* (278). In Burroughs's retelling of the incident, the man, Marnissi, feigned friendly acquaintanceship and asked to borrow money from him. Burroughs tells Ginsberg that despite Marnissi's obvious capacity for violence, "there is something curiously sweet about him, a strange, sinister jocularity, as if we knew

each other from somewhere, and his words referred to private jokes from this period of intimacy” (278). Burroughs declined Marnissi’s request and in subsequent encounters, the latter’s “communications” grow “progressively more cryptic” (278). Marnissi accuses Burroughs of being “an agent” and “a creature of the Embassy” (278). He asks Burroughs, “Why does the American Embassy have wires in my head?”²⁹ When Marnissi snapped and hacked his way through the noon-day crowds, Burroughs could not help but think that Marnissi was maybe after him: “If I had followed my usual routine, I would have been right where he started [...]. Not to be paranoid, but I felt that in some ways this was aimed at me” (158).

Incidents such as these clearly reverberated with Burroughs and inspired corresponding routines in the *Naked Lunch* manuscript. Early in the “Benway” section during the jail break at the Reconditioning Center, Burroughs imagines a scenario where an Amok—Burroughs’s name for one who runs amok—uses a flame thrower in Grand Central Station and later, in imitation of the “sweetness” of Marnissi, has “Amoks trot along cutting off heads, faces sweet and remote with a dreamy half smile.”³⁰ In an outtake from the same section, Burroughs, through the persona of Dr. Benway, explores the entire phenomenon in greater detail, and this passage reveals Burroughs struggling to understand the Amok phenomenon for himself. In the text, Benway interviews a young doctor and attempts to clear up some misconceptions the young man may have concerning Amoks: “Why do Amoks always use knives? Why not a gun or a flame thrower? Is their predilection for knives merely a result of their general backwardness—Amoks are not a phenomenon of eighteenth-century drawing rooms, over-civilized urban environments—or does it have a deeper root?” (264). Benway then wonders what “finally activates the deeply repressed killing reflex” and hypothesizes that it takes more than simple bad manners to jump-start an Amok’s murderous rampage; however, as the doctor begins to work himself up into a really good allocution explaining the precise relationship between environmental factors and anxiety that precipitates an attack, the text is abruptly cut off and the reader is forced into intimate contact with an emergent Amok who perfectly illustrates Benway’s argument: “Spilling out in ambiguous dancing and sudden electric outbursts of violence, a young man leapt to his feet—thrusting out a knife and spinning around, his knife vibrating with a sort of electric life scream ...” (ellipsis original, 264–65).

What is intriguing here is that much of the work on the “Interzone Hospital” routines was completed within months of Marnissi’s August 1, 1955 attack. The Benway routines, with their frequent Amok interruptions, received a lot of work during this time, and Burroughs was likely ruminating on the incident. At first glance this dialogue between Benway and the young doctor appears uncharacteristic for Burroughs, who was strongly in favor of personal defense: Benway’s prescription for avoiding attacks is an argument against resistance and self-defense. However, context shows that Benway’s advice here is not meant for the individual; instead he is laying blame for the attacks at the feet of the colonizers. He argues that attacks

happen because the authorities suppress the natives in order to prevent future attacks, commenting “[they will only] attack us if we fear and succumb to anxiety and defend ourselves against them ...” (266). Further, Benway compares the young doctor to a colonial oppressor and states that “the patient would not be Amok if you had done your job” (266). This passage especially illustrates Burroughs’s waffling views on Arabs in general and anticolonial violence in particular. It was written during an evolution in his thinking about the revolution and subsequently discarded from the completed *Naked Lunch* manuscript before publication. In this outtake, Burroughs contradicts himself by simultaneously chastising the French for failing to completely oppress the native population and praising indigenous Moroccans for resisting foreign control.

In addition to these specific episodes drawn from Burroughs’s experience of the Moroccan revolution, *Naked Lunch* also includes passages infused with a combination of exhilaration and anxiety, something the violence and political uncertainty inspired in Burroughs, despite his bravado in letters to home. The riots in particular affected Burroughs and several of them make it into the published version. Michael Walonen, in *Writing Tangier in the Postcolonial Transition*, argues that, despite the portrayal of “the rioting Arab in Burroughs work [as] menacing,” the depiction of riots in *Naked Lunch* “has an alluring aspect to it” and that this is a result of Burroughs’s own attraction to the chaos.³¹ Indeed, Burroughs writes to Ginsberg of an incident in October 1956, “Really, rioting must be the greatest, like snap, wow. I mean I dug it watching them Arabs jumping around yelling and laughing, and they laugh in serious riots. We laugh when anxiety is aroused and then abruptly relieved. Now a riot is, for participants a classical anxiety situation: that is the complete surrender of control to the id.”³² Thrilled, Burroughs even imagines himself joining in when the next riot breaks out: “If they stage a *jihad* I’m gonna wrap myself in a dirty sheet and rush out to do some jihading of my own” (341). Walonen suggests that this “imaginative act of racial crossdressing” demonstrates Burroughs’s evolving views of the Istiqlal, the primary Moroccan nationalist party, and the independence movement: “The fact that the sheet [...] is ‘dirty’ shows that this Otherness is an object of repugnance even as it is manifested in a will to embodiment.”³³ Burroughs sympathizes with the cause; however, he cannot resist the impulse to mock it. His identification with the rioters, even if it is tempered by ridicule, demonstrates genuine affinity. Moreover, Burroughs defends the rioters’ violence, commenting that “[r]iots are the accumulated, just resentment of a people to outrageous brutalities.”³⁴ As with much of his espoused beliefs, Burroughs’s position on the “rioting Arab” can be inconsistent. Overall, however, while he tends to be savagely critical of the Istiqlal, his sympathies lie with the common people. Early in the “Ordinary Men and Women” section Burroughs depicts an ordinary street boy getting the better of the Nationalist Party Leader during an impromptu exchange at a party luncheon.³⁵

In addition to being fascinated by the chaos and bloodshed, Burroughs was also drawn to the political context surrounding the riots. Specifically, he was inspired by rumors that some riots may have been set off by the European colonial powers. One such riot occurred just before Burroughs arrived in the International Zone, on the fortieth anniversary of the Treaty of Fez, March 30, 1952. According to Green, the riot was “one of the worst” in the Zone’s history.³⁶ The incident was allegedly manufactured by the Spanish in order to wrest control of the International Zone from France. The Spanish were believed to have paid tribesmen to help agitate the disturbance (103). Burroughs reimagines the circumstances of this riot in *Naked Lunch* near the end of “Ordinary Men and Women.” The Party Leader and his Lieutenant orchestrate a “spontaneous” expression of the people’s anger. The two discuss the possibility of setting off a riot “like a football play.”³⁷ Burroughs emphasizes the choreographed nature of the riot by introducing the concept of Latahs—brainless rioters who simply imitate those around them and drive the rest into an even greater frenzy. Their personal interest in the riot is minimal, but they help swell the crowds and, much like the way in which the Spanish were said to have used the tribesmen, the nationalists can just set them off like toppling dominoes and then go home for dinner. However, Burroughs complicates the situation by preempting one coordinated disturbance with another. While the nationalist leaders are plotting their riot, another riot is ignited by the appearance of Clem and Jody, double agents of Interzone, dressed as stereotypes: “The Capitalist in a Communist mural” (119). Acting the role of imperialist, the two brazenly foment unrest: “[W]e have come to feed on your backwardness” (119).

The subsequent riot quickly becomes a Boschian spectacle, with Burroughs describing the violence staccato fashion. However, intercut with the specific scenes of surrealist violence afflicting Interzone are echoes of the real riots Burroughs witnessed in Tangier. In this instance, the tension builds slowly: “Riot noises in the distance—a thousand hysterical Pomeranians. Shop shutters slam like guillotines. Drinks and trays hang in the air as the patrons are whisked inside by the suction of panic” (120). In a 1956 letter to Ginsberg, Burroughs observes that from a distance riot noises sound like “strange yips” and throughout *Naked Lunch* rioters are described as yipping.³⁸ Kurt Hemmer observes that “[i]f Burroughs chose Pomeranians because of their ridiculous appearance and annoying bark, this could contradict the empathy he shows for the rioters in his January 1957 letter to Ginsberg.”³⁹ However, it is important to remember that Pomeranians also have a reputation as easily trained lapdogs. The Party Leader tries to assume responsibility for and control of the situation and announces that the mob is the “voice of the people.”⁴⁰ Frightened citizens flee the impending violence: “The Market is empty except for an old drunkard of indeterminate nationality passed out with his head in a pissoir. The rioters erupt into the Market yipping and screaming ‘Death to the French!’ and tear the drunkard to pieces” (120). The riot is quickly suppressed and order is restored: “Squads of police with thin lips, big noses and cold grey eyes move

into the Market from every entrance street. They club and kick the rioters with cold, methodical brutality” (121). Burroughs uses graphic imagery to illustrate the horror left behind in the riot’s aftermath: “The rioters have been carted away in trucks. The shutters go up and the citizens of Interzone step out into the square littered with teeth and sandals and slippery with blood” (121). The section concludes with the reader catching snatches of conversation as life in Interzone resumes, the riot having accomplished nothing.

Burroughs’s extensive use of Latah imagery at the beginning of this section demonstrates his view that relatively little of the energy released during a political riot is legitimate anger or frustration. The imitative Latahs represent ineffective reaction, not proactive political action. Throughout *Naked Lunch*, anticolonial sentiment tends to be manufactured and orchestrated by native elites rather than occurring as a result of genuine populist response to colonialism. However, Burroughs does recognize the injustice and lack of dignity inherent in Morocco’s colonial situation and demonstrates this sympathy in a routine satirizing the colonial arrangement between France and Morocco. Here, he imagines an island off the coast of Interzone under British control:

England holds the Island on yearly rent-free lease, and every year the Lease and Permit of Residency is formally renewed. The entire population turns out—attendance is compulsory—and gathers at the municipal dump. The President of the Island is required by custom to crawl across the garbage on his stomach and deliver the Permit of Residence and Renewal of the Lease, signed by every citizen of the Island, to The Resident Governor who stands resplendent in dress uniform. The Governor takes the permit and shoves it into his coat pocket:

“Well,” he says with a tight smile, “so you’ve decided to let us stay another year have you? Very good of you. And everyone is happy about it? ... Is there anyone who isn’t happy about it?”

Soldiers in jeeps sweep mounted machine guns back and forth across the crowd with a slow, searching movement. (152–53)

Morocco’s colonial grievances may be legitimate and the imperial system corrupt and dehumanizing to the colonized; however, Burroughs does not feel that much of what is happening outside his front door in the International Zone is an authentic reaction. Indeed, he contends that one mechanism of control (i.e., French colonialism) will simply be replaced by another (Moroccan nationalist ideology), just as odious, and ordinary Moroccans will be no better off than they were before,

especially since each of the revolutionary groups only strives for what is in its own interest.

Burroughs's criticism of both the colonial power and the anticolonial movement becomes evident in *Naked Lunch* in the lengthy section detailing the various political factions at play in Interzone. The Liquifactionists are a party of dupes, easily led; Senders remain ignorant of nearly everything important; the Divisionists are moderates who try to populate the world with replicas of themselves; the Factualists vehemently oppose all of the other organizations out of basic contrariness; Islam Inc., a clear satire of the Islamist movement, seems to be a Western creation that cannot get its act together. Meetings of Islam Inc., however, are so unbelievably disruptive and anarchic that Interzone has prohibited a gathering "within five miles of the city limits" (122).

Burroughs's fascination with mechanisms of control in Moroccan politics mirrors the concerns voiced by Frantz Fanon in neighboring Algeria during the Algerian struggle for independence during roughly the same period. Fanon's investigation into the phenomenon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, was published in 1961, two years after *Naked Lunch* was released. In his work, Fanon worried that "class aggressiveness" would cause "the native bourgeoisie" to assume the role previously fulfilled by "foreigners."⁴¹ He warns that for "the national middle class," "nationalization quite simply means the transfer into native hands of those unfair advantages which are a legacy of the colonial period" (152). When a colonial power grooms an entire class of colonial subjects to mediate between it and the people as a body, the intermediary class moves in to fill the vacuum left after the colonial power vacates its position of dominance. For Burroughs, there is little difference between the reality of French rule and the promises offered by the Istiqlal. Despite the appearance it may take, government in any form translates into regulation and control. As Edwards argues, Burroughs's "disapproval of the nation form extends to the Maghrebi nationalists' projected imposition of a new nation and culture of control to substitute for French colonialism."⁴²

Burroughs's most damning condemnation of the Moroccan political environment comes in the routines utilizing the aforementioned Party Leader and the Lieutenant. In addition to their orchestration of spontaneous riots, members of the Nationalist Party are shown as being completely out of sync with the rest of the population. The Party Leader is described in overtly hypocritical terms; he is a bad Muslim who "strides about in a djellaba smoking a cigar and drinking scotch. He wears expensive shoes, loud socks, garters, muscular hairy legs—overall effect of successful gangster in drag."⁴³ The nationalist leader is more Western than Moroccan, indicating political motives that are self-serving rather than patriotic. In addition, when a street boy crashes the meeting, his answers to the Party Leader's questions demonstrate just how out of touch the party actually is. When Michael Walonen proposes that "the boy's point of view is closer to that of the text itself" than is the Party Leader's,⁴⁴ this means that Burroughs—a foreigner—speaks for the

country's "ordinary men and women" better than the party claiming to represent them. When the Party Leader informs the boy the French are vampiric, the boy thinks he is being solicited for sex: "Look mister. It cost two hundred francs to suck my corpuscle."⁴⁵ When he's asked if he hates the French, the boy says that he hates everyone, just like all Arabs and Americans do; it is a "condition of the blood" (103). The Party Leader is nonplussed at the boy's responses and "wonder[s] if this will go down. You never know how primitive they are ..." (103). Failing in his efforts to educate one of the "ordinary" people, the Party Leader ascribes it to their base nature, equating himself with the French he so vehemently opposes. Citing a previous engagement with "a high-type American client," the boy is unimpressed with political rhetoric and is much more concerned with daily survival (103). The nationalists' final effort to persuade the young hustler that "it's shameful to peddle your ass to the unbelieving pricks" goes ignored (103). The party has pretty rhetoric and politicians perform as they feel they are expected to, but they are completely out of touch with the reality on the ground.

In another of the Nationalist Party routines, a "dignified old man" in an act of pure devotion and fealty throws himself before the wheels of the Party Leader's convertible (114). The Party Leader is unable to recognize patriotic allegiance when he sees it and accuses the old man of petty Soviet jealousies: "Don't sacrifice your old dried-up person under the wheels of my brand new Buick Roadmaster Convertible with white-walled tires, hydraulic windows and all the trimmings. It's a chip Arab trick—look to thy accent, Ivan—save it for fertilizer ..." (114). The Nationalist Party is as much a part of the bourgeois capitalist mechanism governing the country as the colonizing French are. Still, Burroughs continued to find the instability of the political situation inspiring.

As focused as *Naked Lunch* is on disruption and chaos, it takes another twenty-five years for Burroughs to fully explore the transformative potential that political revolution represents. *Naked Lunch* was an immediate reaction to the revolutionary fervor he encountered on the streets of Tangier while he worked on the manuscript. He takes a different approach in the Red Night trilogy, although it features many of the same motifs that Burroughs explored in *Naked Lunch*. A distance of a quarter of a century had given him perspective and allowed him to think through the aspects of the revolution he considered a success and those he labeled a failure. *Naked Lunch* successfully reflected the turmoil and instability of Morocco's transition to independence. However, while it contained passages of anticolonial commentary and parodies of imperialism, it is not an outright anticolonial novel. Conversely, the Red Night trilogy is staunchly anticolonial, and much of its inspiration derives from Burroughs's crucial years in Morocco.

Naked Lunch is the novel that receives the bulk of the critical attention, and, as a result, the impact of Burroughs's North African sojourn on his later novels has been ignored almost entirely. Of the critics that explore the connection between the International Zone and *Naked Lunch*, only Greg A. Mullins extends this exploration to

include two later works, *Port of Saints* and *The Wild Boys*.⁴⁶ And while there is indeed a relationship between Tangier and these novels, it is primarily, as Mullins suggests, in Burroughs's treatment of language and sexuality.⁴⁷ However, I would like to suggest that, as a reflection of Burroughs's complex political investments and attitudes, the Red Night Trilogy is much more a product of the Tangier years.

Taken together, the three Red Night novels demonstrate the political, cultural, and personal consequences of successfully removing governmental oppression and interference through varying degrees of violence. Each of the novels focuses on a different aspect of control: colonial, bureaucratic, and bodily. The first novel deals almost entirely with decolonizing the Western hemisphere, an idea that almost certainly occurred to Burroughs during his excursions into the South American jungle in the early fifties, and an idea that might have been driven home by the oppressive colonial conditions in Morocco while he lived there. Burroughs comments on *Cities of the Red Night* (1981) that "[w]hat happened there was like commandos were parachuted behind enemy lines in time and they sort of cleaned up and drastically altered South and Central America."⁴⁸ He uses the device of time-traveling "commandos" to move the invention of the exploding projectile forward by a century or so, thereby influencing the course of history. The only way to effectively eliminate all traces of colonialism from the new world is to fight off the Spanish before they can get a foothold—in other words, attacking them in the early 1700s. *The Place of Dead Roads* (1983) does the same for "North America and the protestant ethic and the Bible Belt ..." (573) by fostering the development of "a takeover by the Johnson Family, by those who actually do the work, the creative thinkers and artists and technicians."⁴⁹ "The Johnson Family" is a term referring to a guild of honorable thieves. The novel is set in the Old West and is modeled on the dime novels of that era. *The Western Lands* (1987) is a bit different from Burroughs's other two novels in that it functions as a sort of Burroughsian Book of the Dead and attempts to counteract the tyranny of mortality.

Whereas, as Burroughs confesses, "whole sections of *Naked Lunch* certainly come from Tangier,"⁵⁰ in *Cities* it is primarily the final third of the novel that channels the city. After the narrative begins to fracture and sputter following the successful defeat of the Spanish in the eighteenth century and the action is taken even further back in time to the ancient Cities of the Red Night, the reader encounters a number of parallels to both Tangier and the International Zone during the period of Moroccan Independence. Initially, when describing the chaos in Tamaghis, Burroughs uses language reminiscent of that he used to report on the Moroccan riots to Ginsberg. Similar to the Nationalist Party's machinations during the Interzone riots, the Tamaghis riots are manufactured and not spontaneous at all. Audrey notices that "there is more here than just a spontaneous explosion of overcrowded poverty-ridden slums. The whole scene has been staged from above to point up the need for a strong police force, and some of the mob ringleaders turn out to be agents of big money."⁵¹ Additionally, Tamaghis and Tangier of the late fifties share some of the

same physical characteristics: both are cities grown beyond their original protective wall with relatively small populations but with the capacity to hold a much larger one.

However, it is the city of Ba'dan, situated on the river across from its mortal enemy, the city of Yass-Waddah, that reflects Tangier during Moroccan Independence the most. In a description that mirrors Mark Twain's claim in *Innocents Abroad* that Tangier is the oldest city in the world, Burroughs creates a lecturer who calls Ba'dan "the oldest spaceport on planet Earth" (274). And like Tangier, Ba'dan has an area roughly corresponding to the International Zone: "an international and intergalactic zone known as Portland. Portland has its own administration, customs, and police" (277). Much of the scenery used to describe Ba'dan is almost verbatim from the descriptions of Interzone in *Naked Lunch*. The city is also subject to control by a much stronger power across the water, which Burroughs invites us to associate with France or Spain.

Ba'dan's bid for independence is a copy of the one undertaken by Morocco in 1956. In a passage that echoes Fanon, Burroughs writes that the middle class is ignorantly working against the interests of the city by supporting a movement that calls for "a crackdown on the Casbah, and an end to the international status of Portland" (282). Audrey's unease over the freedom fighter's fomentation of the riots reflects Burroughs's discomfort at co-opting a strategy he satirized so effectively in *Naked Lunch*; however, in this case, as opposed to the situations in Interzone and Tamaghis, the revolutionary leaders have goals more noble than selfish, and after several days of rioting and strategic violence, Ba'dan gains its independence from Yass-Waddah.

Ultimately, however, the various revolutionary groups in the different dimensions of *Cities of the Red Night* fail. Spain is indeed utterly destroyed, but unintended consequences arise. As Fanon predicts and Burroughs fears, another form of government takes over exactly where the previous left off. In one scene, the train carrying Audrey across North America passes through a tip of French Canada. The train is boarded by customs agents who confiscate the US passports of all on board, "[d]ocuments purportedly issued by a government which ceased to exist two hundred years ago ..." (253). The history of the United States was rewritten when Spain was destroyed, and the subsequent power vacuum was quickly filled by the French. And if not the French, then some other power. Audrey is similarly appalled by the historical change occasioned by a revision of the infamous shoot-out at the OK Corral when drunken cowboys begin hanging women.

The novel ends with regret. The final chapter depicts Audrey strolling through the compound at Port Roger, empty as a ghost town, full of memories:

I didn't want to write about this or what followed. [...] The easiest victories are the most costly in the end.

I have blown a hole in time with a firecracker. Let others step through. Into what bigger and bigger firecrackers? Better weapons lead to better and better

weapons, until the earth is a grenade with the fuse burning.

[...] A nightmare feeling of foreboding and desolation comes over me as a great mushroom-shaped cloud darkens the earth. A few may get through the gate in time. Like Spain, I am bound to the past. (332)

Noah Blake's inspiration to combine the principle of an exploding firecracker with a cannon ball allows the boys to defeat the Spanish, but it also jump starts an arms race that reverberates through history, culminating in the atomic explosions that destroy the Cities of the Red Night and unleash Virus B-23. Additionally, Audrey finds that by winning the war with the colonizing power, he has written himself out of history, echoing Lee's dilemma in the culminating chapters of *Naked Lunch* when Lee discovers that he has been "occluded from space-time."⁵² And, as with the Moroccan anticolonial revolution, political independence does not guarantee social liberty or personal freedom from control.

The Tangier chapter of *The Place of Dead Roads* is much less revolutionary than the Moroccan portions of *Cities of the Red Night* and does more to replicate Burroughs's life in the city than it does to depict anything revelatory about the city itself. The way Kim Carsons stalks through the city is in direct imitation of the Burroughs method that Kerouac found so amusing during his 1957 visit. Burroughs was given the nickname "El Hombre Invisible" by the locals because of his ability to go unnoticed.⁵³ Kim does the same, "[b]rushing aside a horde of beggars, guides, and procurers [...] and wrapping himself in a cloak of invisibility."⁵⁴

Kim's purpose for exploring Tangier relates to an undercover mission that requires learning the Moroccan dialect via a language injection. On one level, this type of language acquisition is nothing more than a spy novel gimmick. And on another level, the ease with which Kim acquires Moroccan speech reflects Burroughs's own regret that he never did take, as he had written to Ginsberg that he intended to do, the time to learn the language himself.⁵⁵ If the thread of Kim as avatar for Burroughs is pulled hard enough, then the language injection Kim receives represents an indictment of Burroughs's own early years in Morocco, the years in which he frequently expressed disappointment that the actuality of the Zone did not match his expectations.

But on a third level, Burroughs's reliance on the artificiality of this method echoes a criticism of Western thinkers laid out by Edward Said in his analysis of orientalism after World War II: "The exaggerated value heaped upon Arabic as a language permits the Orientalist to make the language equivalent to mind, society, history, and nature. For the Orientalist, the language *speaks* the Arab Oriental, not vice versa."⁵⁶ Said argues that Westerners frequently equate mastery of the Arabic language with a full understanding of Arabs as individuals, as a people, and as a culture. This is exactly what Burroughs does here; as a result of the shot, Kim's

intuitive understanding of reality shifts and his comprehension of Arabic culture improves as the new language rewires his brain circuitry. He begins to think like an Arab: “Kim can feel the language stirring in his throat with a taste of blood and mint tea and greasy lamb. [...] The words are eroding English like acid ... later ... time sense is not segmented into hours, but laid out spatially like a road ...”⁵⁷ Kim’s newfound awareness of time harkens back to Lee’s discovery in *Naked Lunch*; both epiphanies occur as a result of contact with Arabic culture and, for both, as Westerners, understanding can only be achieved through artificial means. For all Burroughs’s empathy with Morocco’s political struggle, he still perceives the separation between East and West as inviolable without extraordinary effort.

Even though *The Place of the Dead Roads* does not deal with the Moroccan independence movement to the extent that *Cities* does, Kim still learns from watching the anticolonial demonstrations in the streets: “Military operations of one kind or another were always in progress, most of them totally senseless, or rather making a different kind of sense that means nothing to a Westerner. Thought about in Arabic, however, Kim could make out some sort of design” (239). Insight gleaned from considering these maneuvers through the Arabic language is subsequently added to the Johnson Family repertoire. However, Kim’s death at the hands of Joe the Dead in the final sentence of the novel ultimately renders these insights meaningless. Once again, Burroughs expresses his frustration at the revolution’s failed promise to introduce real change. Kim’s death sends him to the Egyptian land of the dead, where he attempts to subvert death’s interference in life.

The imagery used to describe the urban landscape of the Land of the Dead in *The Western Lands* is eerily reminiscent of Burroughs’s descriptions of Interzone in *Naked Lunch*. Indeed, many of the passages could have been lifted directly from *Naked Lunch*. Inspired by conditions in Tangier, boundaries in Interzone and the Land of the Dead are malleable; privacy and personal space do not exist. Interzone “is a single, vast building. The rooms are made of a plastic cement that bulges to accommodate people, but when too many people crowd into one room there is a soft *plop* and someone squeezes through the wall right into the next house—the next bed that is, since the rooms are mostly bed where the business of the Zone is transacted.”⁵⁸ Similarly, in *The Western Lands*, Burroughs writes: “A word about conditions in the Land of the Dead: quarters are precarious and difficult to find one’s way back to, and privacy is fleeting. Doors are flimsy, often absent, leaving your quarters open to corridors, passageways, streets, and there are always other means of access, so one is subject to find anybody or anything in one’s digs, if one is lucky enough to have digs.”⁵⁹ Tellingly, since the Land of the Dead is an Arabic landscape, Burroughs returns to the closest suitable locale he knows, namely Tangier. And as Tangier is the model for both Interzone and the Western Lands, it is only appropriate that the two environments merge into one.

However, anachronistically, Tangier is itself manifested as a distinct region in the Land of the Dead. Early in *The Western Lands* Kim journeys back to Tangier

searching for Nazi war criminals posing as Jewish refugees, a cover story that was a fairly common rumor attached to several German expatriates during Burroughs's time in the International Zone.⁶⁰ Like Audrey in *Cities*, Kim stages a riot in order to demonstrate to several prominent Tangerinos that the city is unsafe and the inhabitants unpredictable; the speculators should invest their money elsewhere, ideally back in Switzerland since Swiss banks are responsible for financing the enterprise. The riot is set off when Kim threatens to unleash a pack of hogs inside a mosque. Kim does not use actual swine; he simply plays recordings of previous riots intercut with hog noises. Here, the squeals and grunts of the pigs, an animal forbidden to Muslims, replace the yips and howls of dogs from *Naked Lunch*. The riot is another return to the events that excited Burroughs so much in Tangier, and his descriptions of the events are derived from experiences he witnessed thirty years previously and echo those in both *Naked Lunch* and *Cities*. In this instance, however, an important difference is that the event is told from the point of view of one of the riot's twenty-three victims: "Oh Christ, it's happening! They SEE him! Someone pushes him hard from behind. He stumbles forward and falls."⁶¹ This shift in perspective from thrilled spectator to brutalized victim reflects a shift in Burroughs's thinking about riots themselves. With *Naked Lunch* he was still very much enraptured by the Moroccan revolution's potential for disrupting the established order and creating meaningful change. However, by the time he writes the Red Night Trilogy, the last novels he will ever write, his thinking has changed. He has become aware that a revolution's potential for failure and disillusionment is far greater than the potential for positive change.

The ending of *The Western Lands* is similar to the endings of the other two novels in the trilogy; there is an air of futility and nostalgia that radiates off the page. The Parade Bar, a popular expatriate pub in Tangier, was Kim's first stop in the Tangier of the Land of the Dead, and it is also where the novel ends. In the early novels *Junkie*, *Queer*, and *Naked Lunch*, Burroughs was careful to obscure the names of real people. In the latter novel, for instance, he renames Paul Bowles Andrew Keif. In *The Western Lands* he has no such qualms and allows people and places from his past to remain undisguised. The bartender Kim encounters is the bartender Burroughs regularly ordered from. The bar is lovingly described and in the reader's first encounter, the place is active and full of life. It is where Kim contracts the job to stage the riot. In the novel's final sentences, however, the bar has been recast to reflect the decline of the old writer, whom the reader knows to be a manifestation of all the writers in the books: Kim, Audrey, Clem Snide, Mike Chase. The reader also perceives each of these writers as avatars for Burroughs himself, similar to Lee in *Naked Lunch*.

By concluding his final novel with an undisguised reference to Tangier, Burroughs returns to the beginning. That city is where he found his written voice amidst a revolution, and it is where the writing stops as the echoes of the revolution finally fade: "The old writer couldn't write anymore because he had reached the end

of words, the end of what can be done with words. And then? [...] In Tangier the Parade Bar is closed. Shadows are falling on the Mountain. ‘Hurry up, please. It’s time’” (258).

Notes

¹ See *Burroughs Live: The Collected Interviews of William S. Burroughs, 1960–1997*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer (Cambridge, MA: Semiotext(e), 2001). Conrad Knickerbocker, “White Junk,” in *Burroughs Live*, 72–73; Robert Palmer, “Rolling Stone Interview,” in *Burroughs Live*, 164, 176; Jim Pennington and Graham Dawes, “Snack,” in *Burroughs Live*, 202–203.

² See Jeff Shero, “Revolt!” in *Burroughs Live*, 98–113; Felix Scorpio, “Tactics of Deconditioning,” in *Burroughs Live*, 116–18; and Jean-Francois Bizot, “Establishment Garbage,” in *Burroughs Live*, 133–34.

³ See John Tytell, “The Broken Circuit,” in *William S. Burroughs at the Front*, 149–157; and Mary McCarthy, “Burroughs’ Naked Lunch,” in *William S. Burroughs at the Front*, 33–39.

⁴ Ted Morgan, *Literary Outlaw: The Life and Times of William S. Burroughs* (New York: Henry Holt, 1988), 255, 261.

⁵ See Davis Schneiderman and Philip Walsh, *Retaking the Universe: William S. Burroughs in the Age of Globalization* (London: Pluto Press, 2004).

⁶ See Michael K. Walonen, *Writing Tangier in the Postcolonial Transition: Space and Power in Expatriate and North African Literature* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2011) and Kurt Hemmer, “‘The natives are getting uppity’: Tangier and Naked Lunch,” in *Naked Lunch @50: Anniversary Essays*, ed. Oliver Harris and Ian MacFadyen, 65–72 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2009).

⁷ Brian T. Edwards, *Morocco Bound: Disorienting America’s Maghreb, From Casablanca to the Marrakech Express* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 171.

⁸ Allen Hibbard, “Tangier and the Making of Naked Lunch,” in *Naked Lunch @50: Anniversary Essays*, ed. Oliver Harris and Ian MacFadyen (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2009), 56.

⁹ *Letters of William S. Burroughs: 1945–1959*, ed. and introd. Oliver Harris (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 292.

¹⁰ Michael B. Oren, *Power, Faith, and Fantasy: America in the Middle East, 1776 to the Present* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007).

¹¹ “The Barbary Treaties 1786–1816: Treaty with Morocco June 28 and July 15, 1786.” Ed. Hunter Miller. *Treaties and Other International Acts of the United States of America*. Vol.

2. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1931). Yale Law School, Lillian Goldman Law Library, The Avalon Project. 31 July 2017.

¹² Oren, *Power*, 28.

¹³ Mark Twain, *Innocents Abroad* (New York: Penguin Books, 2002), 59.

¹⁴ Edith Wharton, *In Morocco* (Las Vegas: IAP, 2010), 11.

¹⁵ Paul Bowles, *Without Stopping: An Autobiography* (New York: Harper, 2006), 124.

¹⁶ Graham H. Stuart, *The International City of Tangier* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1955), 53.

¹⁷ Karim Bejjit, "US–Moroccan Relations in the 1940s: A New Beginning" (Tangier American Legation Institute for Moroccan Studies, 2017 April Seminar "Tangier 1947 — Two Speeches: Independence and Women's Education"), 6 April 2017. <http://legation.ipower.com/blog/?p=1313>.

¹⁸ Abdelhai Azarkan, "Statecraft and Sovereignty in Mohammed V of Morocco's Tangiers Speech (1947)," *African Yearbook of Rhetoric* 4, no. 1 (2013): 22, <http://www.africanrhetoric.org/pdf/3%20Azarkan.pdf>.

¹⁹ Jonthan Wyrzten, *Morocco Bound: Colonial Intervention and the Politics of Identity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), 28.

²⁰ C. R. Pennell, *Morocco Since 1830* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 284.

²¹ Ryo Ikeda, "The Paradox of Independence: The Maintenance of Influence and the French Decision to Transfer Power in Morocco," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 35, no. 4 (2007): 573–75, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03086530701667526>.

²² Michelle Green, *The Dream at the End of the World: Paul Bowles and the Literary Renegades in Tangier* (New York: Harper, 1992), 136.

²³ In Harris, *Letters*, 195.

²⁴ Hemmer, "The natives are getting uppity," 68.

²⁵ Greg A. Mullins, *Colonial Affairs*, 69.

²⁶ In Harris, *Letters*, 339.

²⁷ Green, *Dream*, 164.

²⁸ In Harris, *Letters*, 307.

²⁹ Green, *Dream*, 158.

- ³⁰ William S. Burroughs, *Naked Lunch: The Restored Text*, edited by James Grauerholz and Barry Miles (New York: Grove Press, 2001), 32–33.
- ³¹ Walonen, *Writing Tangier*, 85.
- ³² In Harris, *Letters*, 341.
- ³³ Walonen, *Writing Tangier*, 86.
- ³⁴ In Harris, *Letters*, 349.
- ³⁵ Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, 101–03.
- ³⁶ Green, *Dream*, 103.
- ³⁷ Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, 117.
- ³⁸ In Harris, *Letters*, 339.
- ³⁹ Hemmer, “The natives,” 70.
- ⁴⁰ Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, 120.
- ⁴¹ Fanon, *The Wretched*, 155.
- ⁴² Edwards, *Morocco Bound*, 171.
- ⁴³ Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, 101–02.
- ⁴⁴ Walonen, *Writing Tangier*, 84.
- ⁴⁵ Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, 102.
- ⁴⁶ Mullins, *Colonial Affairs*, 80–85.
- ⁴⁷ Mullins, *Colonial Affairs*, 80–81; 83–85.
- ⁴⁸ Interview with William Burroughs in Chris Bohn, “Bill and Brion,” in *Burroughs Live*, 573.
- ⁴⁹ William S. Burroughs, *The Place of Dead Roads* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1983), 104.
- ⁵⁰ Gerard Malanga, “Memory-Traces,” in *Burroughs Live*, 289.
- ⁵¹ Burroughs, *Cities of the Red Night* (New York: Henry Holt, 1995), 227.
- ⁵² Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, 181.
- ⁵³ Morgan, *Literary Outlaw*, 261.
- ⁵⁴ Burroughs, *Place*, 215.
- ⁵⁵ Edwards, *Morocco Bound*, 182.

⁵⁶ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 321.

⁵⁷ Burroughs, *Place*, 209.

⁵⁸ Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, 149.

⁵⁹ Burroughs, *Western Lands*, 213.

⁶⁰ Morgan, *Literary Outlaw*, 244.

⁶¹ Burroughs, *Western Lands*, 22.

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