

May 13, 1989<sup>1</sup>  
PO Box 147  
Lawrence, Kansas 66044

Dear William Brown:<sup>2</sup>

1. Don't remember<sup>3</sup> when I read the Wonderful Country.<sup>4</sup> Early '60s circa. Mr Bradley Mr Martin is a high level behind the scenes manipulator. Gunslinger? He tends to delegate such menial tasks but it might amuse him to play the part. He is a spirit of a thousand names and a thousand faces.

2. Met Alex<sup>5</sup> at the Edinburg Writer's Conference in 1962.<sup>6</sup> I don't make anything of these French Literary movements<sup>7</sup> with their manifestoes and directives fold sweet etcetera to bed.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Written in response to a letter I'd sent to Burroughs, whose address I'd obtained from John Giorno. A photograph of this letter can be found here:

<http://www.notbored.org/WSB-letter.JPG>. At the time, I was writing a doctoral dissertation on the theme of cowboys and Indians in Burroughs' work for the English Department of the State University of New York at Buffalo. My dissertation advisor, Leslie A. Fiedler, had been the first to call attention to the significance of Burroughs' reworking of themes from American Westerns.

<sup>2</sup> My name is indeed William Brown, but I rarely go by "William," preferring "Bill" instead. But in this case, I'd highlighted in my letter to Burroughs that there was a "William Brown" in Jack Black's *You Can't Win* (1926), a novel that he greatly admired.

<sup>3</sup> All mistakes in original.

<sup>4</sup> A Western novel, written by Tom Lea and published in 1952. Its protagonist is Martin Brady, from whom Burroughs had clearly derived Mr Bradley Mr Martin, a character in his Space-Age Western, *The Ticket That Exploded* (1962).

<sup>5</sup> Alexander Trocchi (1925-1984) was a Scottish novelist, best known for *Cain's Book* (1959). He was of particular interest to me because Trocchi had been, on the one hand, a member of two European avant-garde groups (the Lettrist and Situationist Internationals), and, on the other, a supporter of the American Beats and the American counter-culture in general. It was through Trocchi's "Project Sigma" (1965) that people like Allen Ginsberg ("How to Make a March a Spectacle") and Bob Dylan ("Love Minus Zero/No Limit") first learned about the situationists.

<sup>6</sup> It has been claimed that the Edinburgh Writers' Conference of 1962 "changed the world of literature" (cf. Stuart Kelly, "How the Edinburgh writers' conference changed the world of literature," *The Guardian*, 11 August 2011. Present at the conference were Trocchi, Burroughs, Norman Mailer and Henry Miller, among others.

<sup>7</sup> I'd asked in particular about the Lettrist and Situationist Internationals, which were active in Paris at precisely the same time that Burroughs was living there (1959). Note well that Timothy S. Murphy, "Exposing the Reality Film: William S. Burroughs Among the Situationists" (*Onscenes*, 4/6/2017) reports that, on 28 July 1967, Burroughs wrote the following to Mary Beach, his French translator: "Do you know of a French group called Situationist International – correspondence B.P. 307-03 Paris? Seemingly a

3. I am not at all knowledgeable about rock bands<sup>9</sup> but I am flattered by their interest in my work

4. It isn't a painting.<sup>10</sup> Its a photo taken 1884 or thereabouts photographer unknown. Saw it and bought it in Boulder about '78. The Western Lands<sup>11</sup> is Egyptian paradise. No reference to the Old West. Must cut short. Packing for trip to Europe for art shows.<sup>12</sup>

\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$ all the Best

William S. Burroughs

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sophisticated anarchist group, I think they would be an excellent outlet for the short pieces I am writing now. Just read a very intelligent analysis of the Watt [*sic*] riots by this group.” <https://onscenes.weebly.com/film/exposing-the-reality-film-william-sburroughs-among-the-situationists>

<sup>8</sup> In addition to the cut-up technique, which involved cutting up and pasting back together various texts to create new and unexpected juxtapositions, Burroughs experimented with the fold-in technique, which involved juxtaposing texts that had been folded together. It would seem that the striking phrase “fold sweet etcetera to bed” was produced by one such experiment.

<sup>9</sup> I'd made particular reference to Iggy Pop's song “Lust for Life” (1977), which quotes directly from Burroughs' *The Ticket That Exploded*. Other musicians clearly influenced by Burroughs' work include Daevid Allen, Lou Reed, and David Bowie, among others.

<sup>10</sup> The image in question serves as the cover of Burroughs' novel *The Place of Dead Roads* (1983). It shows both ex-Europeans and Native Americans together in a group. One of the later looks distinctly startled or disconcerted: Burroughs claimed that, at the moment the picture was taken, he'd seen what the future held in store.

<sup>11</sup> *The Western Lands* is the title of a novel Burroughs published in 1987. It was somewhat of a disappointment to me that there was indeed no reference in it to the American Old West.

<sup>12</sup> I believe he was showing his “Gunshot paintings,” which were made by placing aerosol spray-cans in front of blank canvases and then shooting them (the cans) with bullets, thus causing them to explode.