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Degeneration, Gender, and American Identity in the Early Fiction of Edgar Rice Burroughs

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Abstract

Edgar Rice Burroughs rendered a particular construction of womanhood as a remedy for national degeneration and neurasthenia. Progressive-era Americans like Burroughs wondered whether the developmental forces that shaped industrial society might also threaten the character and institutions upon which they believed American society and civilization functioned. Middle-class American observers worried that the character traits responsible for the rise of American greatness were undermined by that very success. In particular, they thought the demands of urban life resulted in neurasthenia, the loss of “nervous energy.” Burroughs employed the powerfully symbolic Pocahontas narrative to construct a vision of womanhood that offered the possibility of redeeming a degenerate and neurasthenic civilization. Burroughs’s construction of womanhood shares much with the traditional ideology of domesticity, yet at the same time challenged Progressive notions of femininity. Burroughs’s female characters are muscular and beautiful, aggressive and independent, and able to handle themselves in dangerous situations. For all of their independence, however, they ultimately perform the traditional roles of wife and mother. Burroughs women fulfill a domestic role, but their muscularity, self-assurance, and independence are seen as a panacea for the perceived problems of degeneration and neurasthenia, not as a threat to gender identity and roles.

Soon after the end of the Great War, Jefferson Turck, an American naval aviator, returned home to a hero’s welcome. Accompanied by his young English bride, Lieutenant Turck had just completed a tour of duty that took him through Europe, North Africa, and eventually East Asia, returning home by way of the Pacific Ocean. Turck witnessed firsthand the physical, psychological, and moral effects of the First World War, and shortly after his return published his observations as a memoir of his exploits in the Old World and as a commentary on American characteristics and traits. In his memoir, Turck confidently wrote,

I am glad it was given to me to be an instrument in the hands of Providence for the uplifting of a benighted Europe, and the amelioration of the suffering, degradation, and abysmal ignorance in which I found her. I shall not live to see the complete regeneration of the savage hordes of the Eastern Hemisphere – that is work which will require many generations, perhaps ages, so complete has been their reversion to savagery; but I know that the work has been started, and I am proud of the share in it which my generous countrymen have placed in my hand. A new epoch for Europe has been inaugurated, with enlightened China on the east and an enlightened Pan-America on the west – the two

great peace powers whom God has preserved to regenerate chastened and forgiven Europe.¹

Jefferson Turck's triumphant return to Pan-America in 1937 marks the final episode in Edgar Rice Burroughs's futuristic tale of the degeneration of European civilization, the price of two hundred and twenty-three years of warfare. *Beyond Thirty*, written in a style similar to memoirs composed by explorers such as Henry Morton Stanley and Theodore Roosevelt, chronicles the degeneration, savagery, brutality, and atavism of an imagined Europe bombed back to the Stone Age.

Purpose

Historicizing Burroughs's text helps to reconstruct the effort writers made at writing within, alongside, or at times against the terms of discourses of national character and identity. To attend to these discourses in Burroughs's texts reveals both its resistance and its surrender to the ideological engines that drove national identity formation during the Progressive Era. As Burroughs narrated the adventures of young Turck, he articulated and reinforced conservative and patriarchal notions of gender, class, and nation. At the same time, he upset racial and ethnic hierarchies, questioned gender and class roles, played with theories of primitivism and degeneration, and inverted Lord Frederick Lugard's notion of the Dual Mandate of European powers to civilize native populations and to open the door to material and moral progress. In doing so, Burroughs commented on the fundamental nature of Progressive Era American society, particularly what he saw as the strengths and weaknesses of American institutions and character.

One of the more popular authors of the twentieth-century, Edgar Rice Burroughs's fiction has caught the attention of cultural historians such as James Salazar, John Pettegrew, John Kasson, and Gail Bederman who have carefully analyzed endeavors of middle class Americans to recast manhood during the early twentieth century.² These historians typically stress Burroughs's male characters, most often Tarzan, but generally overlook the way Burroughs constructs his female characters.³ In fact, if we use critical studies of Burroughs work as a gauge, we might think that his fiction is empty of women even though women certainly populate his texts. At best, they are understood as passive characters; to quote Beauvoir: "women constitute a part of the property that each male possesses and which is a medium of exchange between them."⁴ Literary critic Richard Lupoff's characterization of Burroughs's female characters as stock figures of the pulp era: weak, hapless, passive, beautiful, charming, chaste,

¹ Edgar Rice Burroughs, *Beyond Thirty* (1915; repr. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 3, 102. One of Burroughs's earliest works, *Beyond Thirty* first appeared as a six-part serial in *The Evening Post* newspaper, November 15-20, 1915. In the following decades, Burroughs fans traded nearly illegible yet precious mimeographs and hand-typed pirated editions. The novel returned to print in 1957. In 1963, Ace published a mass-market paperback retitled *The Lost Continent*.

² James Salazar, *Bodies of Reform: The Rhetoric of Character in Gilded Age America* (New York: New York University Press, 2010); John Pettegrew, *Brutes in Suits: Male Sensibility in America, 1890-1920* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007); John Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan, and the Perfect Man: The White Man's Body and the Challenge of Modernity in America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001); and Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995).

³ One notable exception is Jean De Silva, "Edgar Rice Burroughs, Tarzan, and Pulp Fiction: The Making of Modern American Manhood" (PhD diss., Emory University, 2004).

⁴ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Knopf, 1952), 17.

often naïve, adoring, loyal, and inept, can be taken as the default mode for nearly all who comment on Burroughs's texts.⁵ As a result, while excellent studies of constructions of masculinity in Burroughs's fiction abound, there is little attention to the ways gender operates in these very same texts.⁶ True, in Burroughs's fiction, women are passed from male to male, in the tradition of frontier romances. And it is certain that Burroughs's construction of nationhood and character is dependent upon clearly defined and delimited concepts of masculinity. Yet, his female characters are not merely passive coin in the trade between manly men. I offer in this paper an analysis of Edgar Rice Burroughs's rendering of a particular reconstruction of womanhood as a remedy for national degeneration and neurasthenia.

The Idea of Degeneration

During the closing years of the nineteenth-century, Anglo-American writing was replete with anxiety "concerning the collapse of culture, the weakening of national might, the possibly fatal decay – physical, moral, spiritual, creative – of the Anglo-Saxon 'race' as a whole."⁷ The idea of degeneration, defined in the OED as a "reversion or decline to a former type or lower order; to lose the properties of the genus; to revert or decline to the behavior of the bests of barnyard; to lose generative force," was not merely a reconceptualization of classical ideas about the rise and fall of civilization or Biblical notions of a fall from grace.⁸ Degeneration was

⁵ Richard Lupoff, *Barsoom: Edgar Rice Burroughs and the Martian Vision* (Baltimore: The Mirage Press, 1976), 36-37.

⁶ Following the work of Joan Scott, I understand gender as a flexible tool that conceptualizes gender in terms of the reciprocally constituted and historically variable categories of masculinity and femininity and understands gender systems as themselves reciprocally related in multiple and unstable ways to other modes of cultural organization and experience. See Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Tool of Historical Analysis," *American Historical Review* 91 no. 5 (December 1986): 1053-1075 and Joan W. Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

⁷ Stephen Arata, *Fictions of Loss in the Victorian Fin De Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1. Also see Alexandra Minna Stern, *Eugenic Nation: Faults and Frontiers of Better Breeding in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 52. In the discussion that follows, my focus is not with "literary decadence" or its various supporters and detractors. Rather, I am interested in tracing the formation and circulation of an anthropological and medical language of degeneration that shaped American formulations of national identity and character. For examples of scholarship that investigates questions of literary decadence, see Barbara Spackman, *Decadent Genealogies: The Rhetoric of Sickness from Baudelaire to D'Annunio* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989); Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (New York: Viking, 1990) Edwin F. Block, Jr., *Rituals of Dis-integration: Romance and Madness in the Victorian Psychomythic Tale* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1993); Hans-Peter Söder, *That Way Madness Lie: Max Nordau o Fin-de-Siècle Genius* (High Wycombe: Rivendale Press, 2009).

⁸ Although the idea of degeneration is woven throughout the thought of Progressive social scientists, reformers, socialists, and eugenicists, a comprehensive study of the idea of degeneration in the American case has yet to be written. While largely an analysis of degeneration in the European context, the set of exploratory essays edited by J. Edward Chamberlain and Sander L. Gilman in *Degeneration: The Dark Side of Progress* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985) does contain significant analysis of the idea in the American context and is a good starting point. Other works that treat the idea of degeneration in the American case include Thomas Bender, *American Abyss: Savagery and Civilization in the Age of Industry* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009); Elof Axel Carlson, *The Unfit: A History of a Bad Idea* (Cold Springs Harbor: Cold Springs Harbor Laboratory Press, 2001); R. B. Kershner, "Degeneration: The Explanatory Nightmare," *Georgia Review* 40, no. 2 (Summer 1986): 416-444; and Charles Rosenberg, *The Trial of the Assassin Guitreau: Psychiatry and the Law in the Gilded Age* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1968). For discussions of degeneration in the European context, see Stephen Arata, *Fictions of Loss in the Victorian Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); William Greenslade, *Degeneration, Culture, and the Novel, 1880-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Richard A.

intimately linked to developmental and evolutionary notions such as progress and civilization, the prehistoric and the primitive, all part of a larger constellation of ideas surrounding the anthropological conception of time.

The discourse of degeneration served to pose a vision of internal dangers and crises within the nation. Anthropologists argued that civilization progresses along specific stages of evolutionary development, from savage to barbarism to industrial, the apex of modern civilization. Moreover, as the most advanced stage of human development, anthropologists understood industrial society as a racial accomplishment.⁹ However, during the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century, white middle-class Americans were concerned about the effects of these same evolutionary processes and forces on American society. Specifically, they wondered whether the developmental forces that shaped industrial society might also threaten the character and institutions upon which they believed American civilization and society functioned. Theories of progress always contain ideas of degeneration, with the implication of potential inversions, recalcitrant forces, and subversive Others that must be excluded from society. For middle class Americans at the turn of the twentieth century, argues Daniel Bender, industrial society “raised the specter” of moral and physical degeneration into primitivism.¹⁰ In the American context, the discourse of degeneration played out in several overlapping applications: one concerned with the individual degenerate, another with degeneration of races due to miscegenation, and yet another with the degeneration of nations as a result of over-civilization.

Americans were nervous about the degenerate, atavistic individual that lived among them. This notion of the degenerate was linked to a particular individual whose physiognomic contours could be traced out and distinguished from the healthy. Degenerate individuals were often found to resemble lower races, at times even animals, in important physical signs, in moral behaviors, and in intellectual capacity. In this kind of discourse, degeneracy became the label for the Other, specifically the Other as the essence of pathology. As Nancy Stepan explains, “the urban poor, prostitutes, criminals and the insane were being constructed as degenerate types whose deformed skulls, protruding jaws, and low brain weights marked them as races apart, interacting with and creating degenerate spaces.”¹¹ Degeneration facilitated explanations that often utilized crude binary differentiation between the normal and the abnormal, the healthy and the pathological, the fit and the unfit, the civilized and the primitive.

The discourse of degeneration was deployed to construct pathologies of crime and criminality. Progressive Americans came to understand crime, suicide, alcoholism, and prostitution as social pathologies constitutive of a degenerative process that endangered the life of the nation or the race.¹² The effort to identify and fix a born criminal type with its attention to physiognomy evolved into the enterprise of criminal anthropology, primarily associated with the Italian positivist Cesare Lombroso. Lombroso believed he could distinguish the normal from the pathological by analyzing morphological and typological traits. Lombroso and those who adapted his work sought to discover the “true character” of individuals by reading their

Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration: Eugenics and the Declining Birthrate in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990); Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, c. 1848 – c. 1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); and Robert A. Nye, *Crime Madness and Politics in France: The Concept of National Decline* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

⁹ Bender, *American Abyss*, 15-39.

¹⁰ Bender, *American Abyss*, 9.

¹¹ Nancy Stephen, “Biological Degeneration: Races and Proper Places,” in *Degeneration: The Dark Side of Progress* ed. J. Edward Chamberlin and Sander L. Gilman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 98.

¹² Stephen, “Biological Degeneration,” 112; Greenslade, *Degeneration, Culture and the Novel*, 2.

physiognomic signs. The “born criminal” was an atavistic “reversion to ancestral type who reproduces in his person the ferocious instincts of primitive humanity and the inferior animals.”¹³

Americans often encountered the discourse of the degenerate individual through the prism of visual culture. Public interest in photography increased with the explosion of photographic images in popular periodicals and publications around the turn of the twentieth century. At the same time individuals celebrated weddings and vacations with photographic albums, newspaper, magazine, and textbook editors attracted new readers with photographic images of people and places while gallery directors and museum curators experimented with photographic exhibits.¹⁴

Popular, illustrated accounts of the world’s peoples drew upon anthropological theories of progress and degeneration, the civilized and the primitive. Photographic images of the foreigner, the immigrant, and the criminal served as visual measurements of the space between civilized Americans and the primitive Other.¹⁵ For example, elementary school textbooks, such as *Natural Elementary Geography* (1897), juxtaposed images of middle class white American in modern, dynamic urban and rural setting against non-white peoples of the world in static, primitive, or decaying environments.¹⁶

Furthermore, by the early twentieth century criminologists, psychologists, medical researchers, and sociologists regularly incorporated photographs as evidentiary material of degeneration, atavism, and criminality.¹⁷ Social activists utilized photographic images to inspire the public and persuade the government to improve the human condition. By the early twentieth century photographers such as Lewis Hine were experimenting with ways to use the camera as

¹³ Kershner, “Degeneration,” 430. A proper study of the influence of Cesare Lombroso’s configuration of atavism in American social thought has not been written. On Lombroso, see Nicole Hahn Rafter, “Cesare Lombroso and the Origins of Criminology: Rethinking Criminological Tradition,” in *The Essential Criminology Reader*, ed. Stuart Henry and Mark Lanier (Boulder: Westview/Basic Books, 2005), 33-42; and Mary Gibson and Nicole Hahn Rafter, introduction to *Criminal Man* by Caesar Lombroso, trans. Mary Gibson and Nicole Hahn Rafter (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 1-36. On criminal anthropology generally, begin with Nichole Hahn Rafter, “Criminal Anthropology: Its Reception in the United States and the Nature of its Appeal,” in *Criminals and Their Scientists: Essays on the History of Criminology*, ed. Peter Becker and Richard Wetzell (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 159-182.

¹⁴ Todd Gustavson, *Camera: A History of Photography from Daguerreotype to Digital* (New York: Sterling Innovation, 2009); Vicki Goldberg, *The Power of Photography: How Photographs Changed Our Lives* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1991), 59-73; and Naomi Rosenblum, *A World History of Photography* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1984). For a discussion of the codes and conventions of American illustrated journalism, designed to convey the “true character” of people and events through typification and physiognomy, that informed the uses of photography as an emerging form of representation, see Joshua Brown, *Beyond the Lines: Pictorial Reporting, Everyday Life, and the Crisis of Gilded Age America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

¹⁵ Stephanie Hawking, *American Iconographic: “National Geographic”, Global Culture, and the Visual Imagination* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010), 62-101; Catherine Lutz and Jane Collins, *Reading National Geographic* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 187-258; Linda Street, *Veils and Daggers: A Century of “National Geographic’s” Representation of the Arab World* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000), 32-77; and Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1867-1917* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000), 109-127.

¹⁶ Jacques Redway and Russel Hinman, *Natural Elementary Geography* (New York: American Book Company, 1897). On geography textbooks, see Susan Schulten, *The Geographical Imagination in America, 1880-1950* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 92-147.

¹⁷ John Wagner, ed., *Images of Information: Still Photography in the Social Sciences* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1979).

part of the “survey,” the presentation of a wide range of data gathered by social activists.¹⁸ Surveys such as the Pittsburgh *Survey* (1909-1914), perhaps the exemplar of the Progressive survey and in which Lewis Hine and Jacob Riis took part, can be read as a commentary on the progress of American civilization. The representations of tenement residents, child laborers, immigrant families, and industrial workers presented in these surveys provided a visual language that implicitly suggested an evolutionary hierarchy rooted in anthropological notions of time and development.¹⁹

During the Gilded Age, photographs also became instruments of surveillance and control for lawyers and judges, asylum and prison administrators, and police and immigration officials. Because photographs were understood as natural and truthful images, institutions utilized photographs to identify and control their populations. For example, in the wake of racialized immigration restrictions beginning in 1882 with Chinese exclusion, immigration officials increasingly relied upon visual systems of observation and documentation. As Anna Pegler-Gordon argues in her study of role of photography in the development of immigration policy, “these processes of observation, documentation, and representation helped reinforce popular and official understandings of different immigration groups” as occupying particular positions on a hierarchical arrangement of discrete stages of civilization.²⁰

In Burroughs’s fiction, the antagonists are frequently depicted as degenerates, throwbacks from an earlier time. This is particularly the case in *Beyond Thirty*. The character that poses the greatest threat to Turck and Victory is Menelek, the Emperor of the Abyssinians, who are vying with the Chinese for control of Europe. Overturning racial hierarchies, Burroughs depicts the Abyssinians as superior in physique, technology, and morals to the Europeans, characterizing the African officers and soldiery as honorable, educated, and attractive. However, Burroughs’s characterization of Menelek could have been drawn from Lombroso’s textbook on criminal anthropology. Menelek is both a physical and moral degenerate; crafty, cruel, and licentious, and whose main interest is affecting the rape of Victory.²¹

Attitudes about race mixing during the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century reflected the scientific racism that had come to dominate discussions of race in anthropology and biology.²² The study of degeneration in human races seemed especially critical by providing information about the extent of racial variation in physical and psychological traits in the human species and the changes brought about by reproduction, especially those from crosses between

¹⁸ Alan Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs: Images As History, Mathew Brady to Walker Evans* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989), 190-209.

¹⁹ The Pittsburgh Survey, as the whole project came to be known, was a major study sponsored by the Russell Sage Foundation on the life and labor of the industrial districts of Pittsburgh. The results of the study were presented in lectures, traveling exhibits, magazine spreads, and newspaper articles, and finally published in a six-volume set between 1909 and 1914 (reissued by the Arno Press and the University of Pittsburgh Press). Within a generation, the photographs had become standard fare in America history textbooks. See Maurine W. Greenwald and Margo Anderson, eds., *Pittsburgh Surveyed: Social Science and Social Reform in the Early Twentieth Century* (Pittsburgh: The University of Pittsburgh Press, 1996).

²⁰ Anna Pegler-Gordon, *In Sight of America: Photography and the Development of U.S. Immigration Policy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

²¹ Burroughs, *Beyond Thirty*, 88-92.

²² Robert Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture, and Race* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 4-5; Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and The Making of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 1-2; Elise Lemire, “Miscegenation”: *Making Race in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 115-144; Louise K. Barnett, *The Ignoble Savage: American Literary Racism, 1790-1890* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1975), 92, 114-120.

very different races. Scientists and other cultural spokespersons discussed race mixing in disparaging terms. From the late-eighteenth century until well into the twentieth century, the idea of degeneracy was explicitly linked to miscegenation in the writing of anthropologists and biologists. Moreover, certain races in and of themselves were thought to be “degenerate types” as ideas of race became increasingly typological. It was argued that the races, like animal types, tended to be confined to specific and defined locations on earth and the movement out of place caused degeneration.²³

Burroughs studiously avoids the specter of miscegenation. In many of his early novels, the plots are driven by a series of rescues of the heroine by the protagonist “from a fate worse than death,” a plot formula derived from the frontier romance. The most heinous crime in Burroughs’s imagined worlds was interracial rape. *Beyond Thirty* is no exception in this regard. The climax of the narrative occurs with Turck’s rescue of Victory from the sexual depredations of Menelek.²⁴

In addition to uneasiness about individual degenerates and the effects of miscegenation, a wide variety of early twentieth-century social reformers, activists, writers, and artists applied theories of progress and degeneration by linking the study of the natural world to the study of the modern city. For these activists, the realities of urban life and industrial work raised the specter of degeneration. The dominant American discourse about the development and progress of Western civilization suggested that Western/European civilization eternally advances, progresses, and modernizes. In this schema, civilization began in the Near East and has been progressing westward ever since, an idea Americans found particularly relevant to their history. Europe forged ahead of all other civilizations far back in history and had since passed the torch to America. A mix of two of explanations were generally offered to account for this triumphal narrative: racial superiority and the qualities of Europe’s, and later America’s, environment.²⁵

As the American anthropologist Henry Lewis Morgan taught and the World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893 displayed, European Americans through arduous labor and mental effort had worked their way up to the pinnacle of civilization. Industrial society stood as the highest stage of civilization: factories and mechanized production were the highest achievement of mankind and evidence of the evolutionary development of American civilization. Industrial society also suggested a way of life, characterized by diligence and energy, innovation and progress. Americans felt they could congratulate themselves on the progress of civilization: Modern Americans were physically, mentally, and morally superior; their social arrangements and institutions were more complex; their religion and their science were more advanced. The clearest sign that civilization had indeed approached the threshold of far-reaching advance was the development of the science of anthropology, the latest example of the civilization. The

²³Pick, *Faces of Degeneration*, 9; Stephen, “Biological Degeneration,” 97-99, 112-113; Arata, *Fictions of Loss in the Victorian Fin de Siecle*, 11-32; and Greenslade, *Degeneration, Culture and the Novel*, 15-31.

²⁴Burroughs, *Beyond Thirty*, 93-96.

²⁵J.M. Blaut, *The Colonizer’s Model of the World: Geographical Diffusionism and Eurocentric History* (New York: Guilford Press, 1993): 3-8; 61-94. Ernst A. Breisach, *American Progressive History: An Experiment in Modernization* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 7-13. For an example of this sort of approach in history texts, see William O. Swinton, *Outlines of the World’s History, Ancient, Mediaeval, and Modern, with Special Relation to the History of Civilization and the Progress of Mankind* (New York: Ivison, Blakeman, Taylor, 1874). A similar example for geography texts can be found in Jacques W. Redway and Russell Hinman, *Natural Elementary Geography* (New York: American Book Company, 1897). Also see Josiah Strong’s *Our Country: Its Possible Future and Its Present Crisis* (New York: Published by the Baker & Taylor Company for the American Home Missionary Society, 1886) which sold one hundred and seventy five thousand copies by 1916, and individual chapters were reprinted in newspapers and magazines, and published separately in pamphlet form.

science of studying humanity's savage past was a means of reassuring contemporary culture of how far it advanced. The further back in time one traveled, the further civilization was said to have progressed.²⁶

However, middle class observers came to believe that Americans might be paying too high a price for an industrial society, particularly that the character traits responsible for the rise of American greatness were undermined at the very moment of their triumph. Burroughs was writing at a time when many observers feared that American civilization was threatened from within by cutthroat competition and savage machine politics, and from without by inferior, even primitive immigrants from southern and eastern Europe. If industrial society called up visions of technological triumph, it also suggested an unwelcome transformation of society and morals, associated with massive immigration, the growth of cities, and the rise of a distinct laboring class. The idea of industrial evolution raised the specter of degeneration, the moral and physical reversion to primitivism, calling to mind "dark satanic mills" and other locations of machines and mass production including not only mines and mills, but also sweatshops and even homes.²⁷

During the decades leading up to World War One, spokespersons for the middle class became worried about the character development of their children, and were particularly concerned that the demands of urban life were weakening their will and sapping their strength. As Clifford Putney observed, middle class critics "entertained fears of well-bred but overeducated weaklings succumbing before muscular immigrant hordes."²⁸ Middle class observers were nervous that their stature would decrease; their physical appearance would deteriorate; their character would degenerate; and they would be unable to withstand the New Immigrant, the New Woman, and the New Negro. With the closing of the frontier, they were uncertain that their urban-reared children had the character and fortitude to lead the nation the way their vigorous pioneering ancestors did.

In *Beyond Thirty*, Burroughs envisions a Europe reverted to a primitive and savage existence as a result of the very technological developments that once placed European society the apex of Morgan's stages of civilization. Turck arrives on the shores of England anticipating an encounter with a community of "civilized and enlightened people." Instead, he finds all of Europe a "primeval wilderness" where every sign of civilization had been erased by the "utter and appalling devastation of the Great War ... the sad decadence of a once enlightened race." The degeneration is so extensive that animals now rule over the remains of the people that once "ruled half the world." The peoples he encounters are as equally primitive as the landscape. Burroughs describes the descendants of the once enlightened Europeans as hirsute, barely clothed, and armed with crude spears. They have no knowledge of history or geography, have no religion or literature, and recognize no law other than the law of might. Marriage is unknown among them and males fight for the favor of females. They practice infanticide, and kill the aged and the physically unfit.²⁹

²⁶ Robert Rydell, *All the World's a Fair* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 38-46; Sandra Siegal, "Literature and Degeneration: The Representation of "Decadence," in *Degeneration: The Dark Side of Progress*, ed. J. Edward Chamberlin and Sander L. Gilman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 203.

²⁷ Bender, *American Abyss*, 2-14.

²⁸ Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 31.

²⁹ Burroughs, *Beyond Thirty*, 29-31, 39, 46-49, 56.

Neurasthenia: Over-civilization and Degeneration in the American Experience

Influential American reformers, such as Theodore Roosevelt, Josiah Strong, George Beard, and G. Stanley Hall, came to believe that modern urban life was a threat to white middle class specifically and the nation generally.³⁰ Theodore Roosevelt believed that nations, races, and civilizations did not remain always young. Roosevelt ascribed to a theory of stages of development derived from Morgan, which he applied to races, nations, and civilizations. First was savagism, a state of disorganized chaos. Barbarism was the next stage when military virtues were developed. The third stage, civilized, was one of “social efficiency,” where military virtues were combined with a love for order and race fecundity. However, the final stages were marked by diminished virile virtues, a love of ease, softness, willful sterility, a contemplative life, and material possessions. At the end of the evolutionary continuum, lamented Roosevelt, lay the specter of racial and national decadence.³¹

The fate of those that lost the primary virtues was clear for Roosevelt. Greed, luxury, materialism, and sensuality ate like acids into the fiber of the upper class. Perhaps most important to Roosevelt, decadence occurred when the average citizen lost the fighting edge. Roosevelt feared that entire peoples, including Americans, lusted after ease and luxury, sought refinement, desired culture, and generally risked losing the rugged, virile virtues.³²

In particular, they thought the demands of urban life drained the individual’s supply of “nerve force” or “nervous energy,” resulting in “nervelessness,” nervousness, or neurasthenia. As explained by George Beard in 1881, “The chief and primary cause of this development and very rapid increase of nervousness is modern civilization.” Those who exhibited worry, melancholia, nervous exhaustion, irritability, and a paralysis of the will were diagnosed as neurasthenics, who, according to Gail Bederman, “were highly evolved white middle-class who had overtaxed their vital energies by over stimulating themselves with civilization.” For the neurasthenic, illness was caused by civilization itself.³³

Not only was neurasthenia associated with the stresses of urbanization and competitive business environment, critics also held writers the likes of Sarah Hale, Lydia Sigourney, Catherine Beecher, Harriet Stowe and Louisa May Alcott accountable for producing a romanticized, over-civilized Protestant culture that endangered middle class American character. Middle class Americans felt themselves ensnared in the paradoxes of their own progress. Caught between an imagined, fading American past and an uncertain industrial, technological future, reformers felt a particular responsibility to retrieve that past in order to take a hand in determining and shaping America’s future.³⁴

³⁰ Theodore Roosevelt, “The Strenuous Life,” in *The Strenuous Life: Essays and Addresses* (New York: The Century Company, 1900), 1-21; Strong, *Our Country*; George Beard, *American Nervousness: Its Causes and Consequences* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1881); and G. Stanley Hall, *Adolescence: Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education*, 2 vols. (New York: D. Appleton, 1914).

³¹ Thomas Dyer, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Idea of Race* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1980), 36-37.

³² Dyer, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Idea of Race*, 147-148. Gerstle, *American Crucible* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 25-43. Richard Slotkin, “Nostalgia and Progress: Theodore Roosevelt’s Myth of the Frontier,” *American Quarterly* 33 (Winter 1981): 620-629.

³³ Beard, *American Nervousness*, vi; Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 84-88.

³⁴ See Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), 227-256; David I. Macleod, *Building Character in the American Boy: The Boy Scouts, YMCA, and Their Forerunners, 1870-1920* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), 16; T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), 47-58.

Burroughs does not tell us much about Pan-America, the America of the twenty-second century and the home of Jefferson Turck, but what he does reveal suggests a nation that has become overcivilized. Burroughs writes, “Now, in all the Western Hemisphere dwells no man who may not find a school house within walking distance of his home, or at least within flying distance. The wildest beast that roams over our waste places lairs in the frozen north or the frozen south within a government preserve, where the curious may view him and feed him bread crusts from the hand with perfect impunity.” The schoolhouse and the tame animals indicate domestication and overcivilization. In fact, the civilized or domesticated zoo animals have long gone extinct in Pan-America while the wild animals in Europe thrive, “free for which nature had intended.” When Burroughs negatively compares the “stuffy halls of our museum,” the final resting place for wild animals in Pan-America, to the wilderness of Europe, he implies a critique of the modern, domesticated, urban life of middle-class America as he understood it.³⁵

To observers in the early twentieth century, neurasthenia and other forms of mental illness seemed ubiquitous. H. Addington Bruce warned readers of the *North American Review* in 1908, “Already there are indications that neurasthenia, as well as insanity, has a firm foot hold in every section of the country... in the life of every American city, town, and hamlet - in the life, even, of the most remote farmhouse. Who among those chancing to read these lines fails to number among his acquaintances some of unstable temperament, of flighty impulse, of unsound mind? On every street, at every corner, we meet the neurasthenics.”³⁶

Doctors offered a myriad of remedies and therapies, from the rest cure made famous in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” to patent medicines and electrotherapy. However, the most significant prescription was participation in the strenuous life. Eager to redeem the nation from “slackness” or overcivilization, advocates of the strenuous life emphasized duty, bodily vigor, action over reflection, experience over “book-learning,” and pragmatic realism over sentimentality. In this vein, Burroughs’s fiction is a component of wider interest a more strenuous life and literature. As historian Curtis Hinsley observed, “middle class Americans slowly discovered [that] the age of science and industry left little room for imagination, mystery, and romance. If one can measure by tastes in magazine fiction, by the end of the century a large reading public was turning outward to far-flung scenes for vicarious excitements. A flaccid, neurasthenic society seemed to require exotic tonics.”³⁷

The Pocahontas Narrative in American Literature

The Pocahontas narrative originates out of the well-know story of Pocahontas, the daughter of chief Powhatan.³⁸ John Smith, one of the English settlers who arrived in Virginia in April 1607, was captured by a hunting party of Powhatan Indians while exploring the Chickahominy River. Brought into chief Powhatan’s presence at the capital city of Werowocomoco, Smith was saved from certain death by the chief’s daughter, Pocahontas. In his

³⁵ Burroughs, *Beyond Thirty*, 4, 34, 60.

³⁶ H. Addington Bruce, “Insanity and the Nation,” *North American Review* 187, no. 626 (January 1908): 73.

³⁷ Curtis Hinsley, *The Smithsonian and the American Indian: Making a Moral Anthropology in Victorian America* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1981), 190.

³⁸ This overview of the Pocahontas narrative is drawn from Philip Young, “The Mother of Us All: Pocahontas Reconsidered,” *The Kenyon Review* 24, no. 3 (Summer 1962): 391-415; Ivor Noël Hume, *The Virginia Adventure: Roanoke to James Town: An Archaeological and Historical Odyssey* (Charlottesville: The University of Virginia Press, 1997), 171-180, 323-349; and David Price, *Love and Hate in Jamestown: John Smith, Pocahontas, and the Heart of a New Nation* (New York: Knopf, 2003).

1616 letter to Queen Anne, Smith wrote "... at the minute of my execution she [Pocahontas] hazarded the beating out of her own brains to save mine; and not only that, but also prevailed with her father, that I was safely conducted to Jamestown."³⁹ Smith claims in his *Generall Historie* that Pocahontas aided the colonists during that first year. He reports that every "four or five dayes, Pocahontas with her attendants, brought him so much provision, that saved many of their lives, that els for all this had starved with hunger."⁴⁰

Later, in 1613, Pocahontas was captured by the English Captain Argall and held in Henricus for nearly a year as security for English prisoners of war and equipment captured by Powhatan during the first Anglo-Powhatan war (1610-1614).⁴¹ During her captivity in Henricus, Pocahontas met tobacco farmer John Rolfe, whose wife and son had died during the journey to Virginia. Rolfe applied to Governor Thomas Dale and was granted permission to marry Pocahontas. They were married April 5, 1614, and lived together for the next two years on Rolfe's plantation. She bore Rolfe a son, Thomas, in 1615. Subsequently, Governor Dale sent the couple with their son to England to publicize the success of Jamestown colony and to promote investment in the venture. Arriving in England six weeks after the death of Shakespeare, the now famous couple, along with perhaps eleven other Powhatans, was entertained at a variety of social events in and around south and southeast England, including a presentation to the King of England at Whitehall. At the onset of the couple's return journey to Virginia in March of 1617, Pocahontas died of an unknown illness. She was buried at Saint George's Church, Gravesend.

The Pocahontas narrative has been idealized, mythologized, incorporated into Anglo-American legend and culture, serving first the evolving dramas of colonialism and then later conscripted for the creation and delineation of a gendered and racialized national identity during the nineteenth century. As the literary scholar Rebecca Faery reminds us, to understand the longevity and persistent popularity of the story of Pocahontas's rescue of John Smith and the romantic love-and-marriage epic that arose in its wake requires that we consider whose interest the story has served.⁴²

Colonial Constructions of the Pocahontas Narrative

The powerfully symbolic Pocahontas narrative had been with us since the seventeenth century. During the colonial period, the cultural work of the Pocahontas narrative functioned to domesticate and render docile the colonized body of the figuratively feminine New World. Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century constructions of the American colonies configured the New World as feminine, gendering its exploration, conquest, and settlement. Europeans constructed

³⁹ John Smith's 1616 Letter to Queen Anne of Great Britain. *Digital History*. Retrieved 16 January 2012. http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/learning_history/pocohontas/pocahontas_smith_letter.cfm

⁴⁰ John Smith, *Generall Historie of Virginia, New England, and the Summer Isles*, in *Captain John Smith: Writings with other Narratives of Roanoke, Jamestown, and the First English Settlement in Virginia*, ed. James Horn (1624, repr. New York: The Library of America, 2007), 321-322.

⁴¹ Henricus, founded by Thomas Dale, was a settlement located in the swampy areas near Jamestown. John Rolfe's tobacco plantation was located across the James River from Henricus.

⁴² Rebecca Blevins Faery, *Cartographies of Desire, Captivity, Race, and Sex in the Shaping of an American Nation* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 118. Also see Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 19-41; and Louis Montrose, "The Work of Gender in the Discourse of Discovery," *Representations* 33 (Winter 1991): 1-41.

the New World was as a naked, wild, savage native woman, and a stand in for both her people and the countryside they knew as home. Europeans represented the native Indian woman as aggressive, militant, and armed with spears and arrows, often standing with her foot on the body of a slain enemy. Depicted as a “bare-breasted, Amazonian Native American,” she was the exotic, powerful, dangerous, and beautiful “other woman.”⁴³

Accordingly, the Pocahontas - Rolfe marriage, a powerful metaphor for the marriage of the New World and the Old World, served as a useful and irresistible trope for Europeans engaged in the colonial project in the Americas. The English colonists in North America celebrated the Pocahontas – Rolfe marriage because it symbolically consolidated England’s colonial presence and power in the New World. Signified as a double captive: both taken captive and captivating, Pocahontas herself had to be taken captive and had to fall in love with English colonialism in the person of an Englishman who was its representative. This doubled representation of Pocahontas performed cultural work as a suitable symbol of the New World as a dangerous woman “ripe for sexual address.” Pocahontas thus became a significant locus for resolving tensions and oppositions in the two competing images of the New World as the Other woman. Pocahontas signified a compassionate, welcoming, and receptive virgin Indian bride who nurtured and sustained the English colony and at the same time safely held in abeyance the spectral image of terrifying, frenzied, cannibalistic, aggressively libidinous Amazon warrior.⁴⁴

However, Pocahontas was necessarily transformed into a “suitable symbol for an America that loved Englishmen and was eager to be colonized.” At the core, argues Rebecca Faery, the transformation consisted of rendering Pocahontas white. Pocahontas’s aboriginal identity had to be erased and her position recreated as aligned with the English and their colonial project. Whether through conversion to Christianity, by romance and marriage, or by mothering an English child, Pocahontas was reimagined in a way that detached her from her native culture by making her exceptional rather than typical.”⁴⁵

Consequently, renderings of Pocahontas were projections upon the blank screen of her body and her identity. The Pocahontas narrative becomes less about portraying a historical female Indian and more a vehicle for artists and authors to represent idealized versions of womanhood, character, and American identity. During the colonial period, for example, Pocahontas in her marriage to Rolfe had to be reimagined as somehow different from other indigenous peoples and their son Thomas had to be distinguished from others of Indian-white descent. In this case, as the daughter of a Powhatan chief, the royal lineage of Pocahontas was stressed over her aboriginal roots. In this way, her aristocratic and noble “disposition” was transmitted to her descendants, avoiding the possibility of a savage lurking somewhere beneath the otherwise white visible surface.⁴⁶

⁴³ Montrose, “The Work of Gender in the Discourse of Discovery,” 2-4; Rayna Green, “The Pocahontas Perplex: The Image of the Indian Woman in American Culture,” *The Massachusetts Review* 16, no. 4 (Autumn 1975): 702.

⁴⁴ Faery, *Cartographies of Desire*, 94-95. Green, “The Pocahontas Perplex,” 702. Also see E. McClung Fleming, “Symbols of the United States: From Indian Queen to Uncle Sam,” in *The Frontiers of American Culture*, ed. Ray B. Browne, et. al. (Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1967), 1-24; and E. McClung Fleming, “The American Image as Indian Princess, 1765-1783,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 2 (1968): 65-81.

⁴⁵ Faery, *Cartographies of Desire*, 103.

⁴⁶ Åsebrit Sundquist, *Pocahontas & Co.: The Fictional American Indian Woman in Nineteenth-Century Literature: A Study of Method* (New Jersey: Humanities Press International, 1987), 202-203. On the problem of mixed race marriages and the Pocahontas narrative during the colonial period, see Robert S. Tilton, *Pocahontas: The Evolution of an American Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 9-33.

Nineteenth Century Constructions of the Pocahontas Narrative

Pocahontas figured prominently in nineteenth-century American literary projects that attempted to offer American rather than European themes. Narratives, poems, and plays recreated her character in frontier romances, sang her praises from the pages of literary magazines, and staged her rescue of John Smith at popular playhouses throughout the nation.⁴⁷

Nineteenth-century authors who reconstructed the Pocahontas narrative focused almost exclusively on her relationship to Smith rather than her marriage to Rolfe. The alternatives available writers who deployed this widely recognizable and appealing narrative were either to provide Pocahontas-like rescue scenes in romances that deemphasized her marriage and motherhood or to make adjustments to the narrative where elements of the Pocahontas – Rolfe marriage were recognizable but presented as moments in the lives of alternative characters. In this way, whenever the heroine is a young native woman who in one way or another acts as a protector of the male leader of the white race, it is fair to say that Pocahontas would have been called to mind. In other words, there were many Pocahontas who functioned as saviors in antebellum romances.⁴⁸

Nineteenth century writers, suggests Faery, tried to construct Pocahontas as an American heroine by rendering her both exceptional, that is, different in significant ways from other Native people, and at the same time in some way white or ally her inextricably with whiteness.⁴⁹ By the early twentieth century, Pocahontas is rendered completely white, as in Edison Kenny Odell's *The Romance of Pocahontas* (1912) where Pocahontas is portrayed as a white captive from Roanoke.

In this nineteenth-century rendering, the Pocahontas rescue was celebrated as a myth that articulated racial difference without posing the dangerous prospect of its being deconstructed through intermarriage. By stressing the Smith rescue and downplaying the Rolfe marriage that was featured in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century constructions, nineteenth-century American writers could avoid the taint of miscegenation.⁵⁰ In mainstream nineteenth-century American thought, miscegenation produced what were regarded as “hybrid forms,” which were seen to embody threatening forms of degeneration and perversion. The idea of interracial marriage as “unnatural” was thoroughly and effectively woven in to the fabric of American society. Because of the strength of the miscegenation taboo, readers of nineteenth century fiction will seldom find interracial marriage or hybrid characters; and when they do, hybridity generally results in an identity crisis or racial confusion. White heroes wed white heroines and produce viable offspring, while hybrid characters “die out” without descendants.

Intertextuality: The Pocahontas Narrative in Burroughs's Early Fiction

Burroughs, in *Beyond Thirty*, performs an interesting reversal of the Pocahontas narrative. In his depiction of Europe's reversion to savagery as a consequence of world war, Burroughs personifies the Old World in the character of Victory, her name a conflation of Queen

⁴⁷ Jay B. Hubble, “The Smith-Pocahontas Story in Literature,” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 65 (July 1957): 275-300; Green, “The Pocahontas Perplex,” 698-714.

⁴⁸ Tilton, *Pocahontas*, 76.

⁴⁹ Faery, *Cartographies of Desire*, 122. Consider, for example, Joseph Mozier's “Pocahontas Statue” (1859) and John Esten Cooke's narrative *My Lady Pocahontas: A True Relation Of Virginia* (1885).

⁵⁰ Tilton, *Pocahontas*, 2-4, 76; Faery, *Cartographies of Desire*, 121.

Victoria and nationalist wartime propaganda. By signifying the Old World as feminine, Burroughs taps into the enduring cultural work of the Pocahontas narrative; Victory domesticates and renders docile the colonized body of the figuratively feminine Old World.

As Louis Montrose observes, not only was the New World gendered feminine, its exploration, conquest, and settlement was sexualized. Western representations of colonized women and their societies as exotic and erotic has been a feature of the imperialist project since the sixteenth century, and features prominently in Burroughs fiction. The earliest visual representations of the New World juxtapose the “allegorical personification of the Americas as a female nude with a feathered headdress” with European males possessing the “ideological and technological instruments of civilization.” In Burroughs’s day, colonial administrators, soldiers, settlers, and tourists sent home “eroticized and surprisingly standardized” postcard images of colonial women.⁵¹

Burroughs participates in the Western representation of eroticized colonized women that “nurtured an appreciative fascination with these cultures” while justifying the civilizing project by his deployment of the Pocahontas narrative. Nearly all of Burroughs’s women characters placed in exotic settings are depicted in various states of undress, and are characterized, like Victory in *Beyond Thirty*, as eroticized primitives, simultaneously a childlike “uncultured little savage” and an “altogether lovely picture of youthful femininity.” Burroughs describes Victory as “of medium height, well formed, with fine, clear-cut features. Her forehead was high, and her eyes both intelligent and beautiful ... [with an] oval face, sun-tanned; smiling lips, revealing white and even teeth; brave eyes that harbored no shadow of guile; and a tumbling mass of wavy hair.” She was dressed in “a simple light deerskin about [her] hips, for it was summer and quite warm, ... [her hair] was confined by a rawhide thong passing about the forehead and tied behind. In this leathern band was struck feathers, flowers, or the tails of small animals. [She] wore necklaces of the teeth or claws of wild beasts and ... numerous metal wristlets and anklets.”⁵²

Burroughs employs the rescue motif featured in the Pocahontas narrative, taking advantage of a literary formula his readers would recognize. In *Beyond Thirty*, Turck is rescued by Victory in a manner almost identical to the Pocahontas-Smith rescue. In addition, Burroughs’s protagonists marry an indigenous princess as a necessary step in their imperialist designs. In the course of the Burroughs’s reconstruction of the Pocahontas narrative, Turck and Victory marry and return to England, endeavoring to “reclaim England for her Queen,” coded language for the “civilizing project” of opening the Old World to the material and moral progress, an interesting and suggestive reversal of the Dual Mandate.⁵³ In the same way Pocahontas herself had to fall in love with English colonialism in the person of an Englishman who was its representative, Victory marries herself to Turck and the colonizing project he represents. And like his nineteenth-century novelist predecessors, Burroughs dutifully avoids miscegenation in his fiction. The ethnic identity of Pocahontas is erased in Burroughs’s configuration of the Pocahontas narrative. Burroughs heroines are ethnically white princesses, or of American aristocracy; that is, from respectable white upper-middle-class families. In *Beyond Thirty*, Victory descends from the English royal family.

Burroughs heroines are not ethnically different, instead their strangeness is due to being displaced in time; that is, she might be anthropologically primitive but nevertheless white.

⁵¹ Montrose, “The Work of Gender in the Discourse of Discovery,” 4. On colonial postcard images, see Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases*, 42-43.

⁵² Burroughs, *Beyond Thirty*, 38.

⁵³ Burroughs, *Beyond Thirty*, 77, 102.

Burroughs's princesses are exceptional, different in character from the other women in his stories, and are explicitly rendered white. In this way, Burroughs reverses the common notion that the atavistic primitive heralded the degeneration of race and nation. Burroughs reconstructs the Pocahontas image as a primitive, not ethnically different but rather chronologically strange, whose character traits are necessary for the survival and regeneration of the American nation in the face of overcivilization and degeneration. It is in this manner that we can understand Burroughs's construction of womanhood and its role in the formation of American identity and character.

Constructions of Womanhood and Character in Burroughs's Early Fiction

The Progressive era inherited the dominant nineteenth-century gender ideology variously known as the domestic ideal, the cult of domesticity, the doctrine of separate spheres, or true womanhood.⁵⁴ Largely a creation of the white urban middle class through nineteenth-century mass magazines, the domestic ideal constructed women and men as designed by God and nature to function in different "spheres." The central convention of the domestic ideal was a distinction between the home and the world. Men performed in the public world of business, politics, and intellect, defined as masculine. The woman's place came to be understood as the private world of home, morality, and affection, defined as feminine. In this way, the home was valued for its separation from the business world and for its affective function for the members of the household. The domestic ideal held in tension the interest of the masculine business world with the disinterest of the feminine domestic world.

In significant ways, Burroughs took the domestic ideal for granted. Specifically, his construction of womanhood trades on perhaps the core value of true womanhood: The assumption that women were morally superior to men. One aspect of this value is the idea that before she married, the true woman would "guard herself against the temptations of the flesh in order to protect her virginity."⁵⁵ For Burroughs, this also means protecting themselves from the desires of less worthy men; Burroughs's women, including Victory, go to extreme lengths to avoid "a fate worse than death." More importantly for Burroughs, the domestic ideal constructed the central woman's role as upholding and reproducing the higher ideals of life, the "mother of civilization [whose] task it was to guard the national soul and strengthen the moral fiber of America."⁵⁶ Most writers on domesticity exercised a unique and critical role in the public sphere through their moral influence in the private sphere. In the domestic ideal, the purpose of women's vocation was to stabilize society by generating and regenerating the American character. In Burroughs's fiction, this plays out in the ways women inspire men to higher principles. Burroughs fiction is replete with similar passages of morally superior women inspiring men to good deeds and greater character. In *Beyond Thirty*, Victory inspires higher ideals in Jefferson Turck.

⁵⁴ The domestic ideal has perhaps been the most widely studied American gender ideology. It is not my purpose to examine whether the domestic ideal conforms to the lived experiences of women and men. While evidence demonstrates that lived experience was much more fluid and dynamic than the ideology suggests, my interest is in representation. For an overview of the scholarship, see "The Big Tent of U.S. Women's and Gender History: A State of the Field," Cornelia H. Dayton and Lisa Levenstein's contribution to the OAH's state of the field round table on women's and gender history in *The Journal of American History* 99, no. 3 (December 2012): 793-817.

⁵⁵ Silvia D. Hoffert, *A History of Gender in America: Essays, Documents, and Articles* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2003), 126.

⁵⁶ Mary Ryan, *Womanhood in America* (New York: New Viewpoints, 1975), 175.

However, while it is clear that Burroughs constructs a feminine ideal that trades on traditional notions of womanhood, he also offers an alternative to the domestic ideal. Burroughs's female characters may be pure and virginal, nurturing and uplifting, and encouraging and inspiring, but they certainly were not pious, passive, and submissive. The most familiar alternatives to the domestic ideal during the Progressive era were the New Woman and her working class counterpart, the Woman Adrift. Generally speaking, the New Woman sought a life and career outside of the domestic sphere. College educated, independent, self-sufficient, and strong willed, they were perhaps most recognizable by, and heavily criticized for, their disinclination to marry and bear children.⁵⁷ The Woman Adrift appeared on the urban landscape at about the same time as the New Woman. The Woman Adrift differed from earlier single woman wage workers in that a significant percentage lived on their own, outside the supervision and authority of their families.⁵⁸ Adherents of the nineteenth-century of the domestic ideal claimed that the ideology of separate spheres ensured a balance between the corrupt and competitive male oriented public sphere and the unadulterated, nurturing, female oriented private sphered. The New Woman and the Woman Adrift entered the public world in a way that generated concerns about the meaning of gender, morality, and character in the modern world.

In some ways, Burroughs's construction of womanhood is drawn in opposition to the New Woman, and it is unlikely that the New Woman found much to admire about Burroughs's fictional women. Burroughs's female characters seem to exist to be rescued, marry, and bear children. While some were educated, we seldom see a Burroughs female character engaged in professional or wage work outside the home. More to the point, all of Burroughs's characters exhibit a strong inclination to matrimony and motherhood. In this way, Burroughs likely agreed with critics of the New Woman such as H. Stanley Hall and Theodore Roosevelt. A centerpiece of Hall's psychology was that the chief function of womanhood was to bear and raise children. "No normal woman is complete without bearing children," wrote Hall. "Her body and soul were meant for motherhood." He characterized the New Woman as a biological "monstrosity" and created a small publishing industry on books about how to make women more womanly. In his 1899 speech to the Hamilton Club in Chicago, Roosevelt strongly condemned middle class women who feared maternity and refused to raise "many healthy children." "When women fear motherhood," Roosevelt warned, "they tremble on the brink of doom."⁵⁹

In part, Burroughs may have drawn inspiration for his female characters from the "Gibson Girl," Richard Dana Gibson's media and branding creation. Gibson created a female image that was both classically elegant and feminine and at the same time tall, self-assured, and athletic. The Gibson Girl was often depicted displaying a calm mastery of some mildly strenuous sport such as cycling, tennis, or golf. The Gibson Girl appeared everywhere, it seemed.

⁵⁷ Hoffert, *A History of Gender in America*, 283, 290. Jane Hunter argues that the place to look for the New Woman and her admirers is "neither in the workplace nor in the tiny population of college graduates, but instead in the schoolgirl, especially in the increasing numbers of high school girls who experienced the spirited jousting of which took place within coeducational high schools and academies in the late nineteenth century.... High school girls, more than college girls, constituted a large enough cohort to lay claim to changing culture." See Jane H. Hunter, *How Young Ladies Became Girls: The Victorian Origins of American Girlhood* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 373.

⁵⁸ Joanne Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880-1930* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988).

⁵⁹ G. Stanley Hall, *Morale: The Supreme Standard of Life and Conduct* (New York: Appleton, 1920), 248-249; Theodore Roosevelt, "The Strenuous Life," in *The Strenuous Life: Essays and Addresses* (New York: The Century Company, 1900), 4.

The Gibson Girl inspired look-alike pageants, song and essay contests, and dances and drinks. Her image was on china dishes, drinking glasses, furniture, calendars, flasks, cigarette cases, flatware, paper dolls, dress patterns, hair ribbons, ink blotters, and so on down a long list ending in thimbles and lockets.⁶⁰

The Gibson Girl's athleticism is associated with the increase in women's participation in competitive sports during the Progressive Era. Physical education and athletics had long been part of women's education in nineteenth-century America. The function of physical education for women was to enhance their ability as wives and mothers. Physical education instructors designed individualized exercise programs with the goal of correcting specific physical weaknesses and creating young women fit to take on a maternal role. Cycling, gymnastics, hiking, and archery were understood as programs to prepare women for their traditional domestic duties.⁶¹ However, the rise of women's interest and participation in competitive sports, especially basketball, seemed to threaten her role as child-bearer. Female athletes, according to Clifford Putney, worried those who saw their acceptance of muscularity and display of competitiveness as a deviation from acceptable roles for women. Critics worried that competitive female risked becoming "overly muscular and overly competitive" women endangering their prescribed maternal role.⁶²

In fact, Burroughs's female characters share much with the athletes in girls' college fiction at the turn of the twentieth century. Sherrie A. Inness notes that basketball stories in particular presented a muscular physique and athletic vigor as desirable traits in female college students. Female athletes in these stories "display physical prowess and an interest in winning." Female athletes are admired by their classmates "for their brawn and beauty ... that had nothing to do with conservative aims for Progressive Era educational reformers."⁶³

Conclusion

Burroughs's construction of womanhood shares much with the traditional ideology of domesticity, yet at the same time undermined Progressive notions of femininity. Burroughs's female characters are muscular and beautiful, aggressive and independent, and able to handle themselves in dangerous situations. Yet at the same time, they ultimately perform the traditional roles of wife and mother. Burroughs women fulfill a domestic role, but their muscularity, self-assurance, and independence are not seen as a threat. We can see Burroughs construction of womanhood most clearly depicted in the character of Victory, the heroine in *Beyond Thirty*.

When Jefferson Turck, the American naval aviator stranded in a prehistoric Europe two hundred years in the future, tries to find his traveling companions in a hostile environment, he considers leaving Victory behind, thinking he will be "cumbered with the care of a young woman." When Turck explains the situation to Victory, "she only shrugged her shapely

⁶⁰ Betsy Israel, *Bachelor Girl: The Secret History of Single Women in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Harper Collins, 2002), 124-126.

⁶¹ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg and Charles Rosenberg, "The Female Animal: Medical and Biological View of Women and Their Role in Nineteenth-Century America," in *From "Fair Sex" to Feminism: Sport and the Socialization of Women in the Industrial and Post Industrial Era*, ed. JA Mangan and Roberta Park (London: Frank Cass, 1987), 13-37; and Patricia Vertinsky, "God, Science, and the Market Place: The Basis for Exercise Prescriptions for Females in Nineteenth Century North America," *Canadian Journal of the History of Sport* 17, no. 1 (May 1986): 38-45.

⁶² Putney, *Muscular Christianity*, 47-49.

⁶³ Sherrie A. Inness, "'It Is Pluck But Is It Sense?': Athletic Student Culture in Progressive Era Girls' College Fiction," *Journal of Popular Culture* 27 (Summer 1993): 107-117.

shoulders and pointed to her knife.” Victory is both confident and capable to take care of herself. Victory was certain she could prevail in any dangerous situation. And she does. Victory is able to defend herself from all manner of dangers, including wild animals and an attempted rape. Turck sings Victory’s praises after she saves him by slaying a lioness. “Victory, animated by a bravery no less ferocious than that of the dumb beast assailing us,” with a long knife held between her teeth swam directly toward the lioness and struck it with the knife. Burroughs writes, “Ah such a girl! I could not wonder what one of our own Pan-American women would have done under like circumstances; but then, of course, they have not been trained by stern necessity to cope with the emergencies and dangers of savage primeval life. Victory is a wonder. Each day we were together brought new proofs of it. ... Nor was it her courage and vitality only which amazed me. She had a head on those shapely shoulders of hers, and dignity. My, she could be regal when she chose!”⁶⁴

In *Beyond Thirty*, Burroughs presents the reader with a degenerate Old World, but the possibilities for redemption are figured in the princess, an uncorrupted virginal white woman whose morals and character have been developed through exposure to the rigors of primitive life. Upon her body was written the future reclamation of both the over-civilized New World and the degenerate Old World.

⁶⁴ Burroughs, *Beyond Thirty*, 53, 64-67, 79.

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