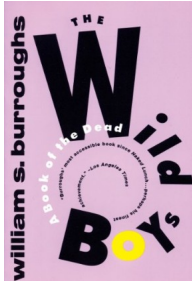




Lambda Sci-Fi

DC Area Gaylaxians



The Wild Boys
By William S. Burroughs
Discussed May 2001

Background

The "plot" of *The Wild Boys* is easily summarized. In 1969 (the time *The Wild Boys* was written and first read), street gangs in Marrakech are brutally suppressed. Survivors go underground or escape into deserts where "they evolve different ways of life and modes of combat." Subsequent worldwide fascist repression leads to further resistant strains of teenboy humanity, each group developing "special skills and knowledge until it evolves[s] into humanoid subspecies." At the end, "the family unit and its cancerous expansion[s]" promise to be "eradicate[d] at its vegetable roots."

Discussion Questions

1. No one would claim *The Wild Boys* is an example of the fantasy genre. It seems rather to fall into the apocalypse/dystopia sub-genre of science fiction. Yet clearly, *The Wild Boys* is more fantastic than scientific. How would you classify this work?
2. Burroughs eventually describes the sex & war practices of the wild boys in some detail. Did they come to life for you?
3. Additionally, he devotes significant parts of the book to other sex/magic practices (mostly Mexican/Mayan). Do these lend credibility to the wild boys?
4. Many characters seem interchangeable. ("I have a thousand faces..." etc, p. 140. Is Kiwi, for example, the same in his many manifestations?) But Audrey Carsons, the most developed character, is different, i.e. he seems the same character throughout. Yet do we ever know what Audrey's relationship with the wild boys is/was/becomes? Does that matter?
5. By mid-book ("The Silver Smile"), explicit sex passages are frequent and (some may say) unremitting. Many of them have nothing to do with the wild boys directly. Are these sex passages pornographic? Would you sympathize with a straight person who found them tedious or obnoxious?
6. These sex passages are pretty unrepresentative even of "standard" (i.e. popcult promiscuous) gay male sexuality. Is this a fault?

7. The most unconventional writing occurs after these sex scenes, re-presenting it in fractured, asyntactic images and phrases. What do you think Burroughs was trying to accomplish in these passages? Did he succeed? How did your response to them change, if it did, as you read through the novel?
8. Burroughs has generally been accused of being anti-feminist. Can *The Wild Boys* be adduced as evidence? Should it?
9. Burroughs is a savage satirist: Colonel Greenfield, Le Gran Luxe, the potty crusaders of 1976.... These function to discredit the civilization the wild boys are sweeping away. Did you enjoy the satire? Think it was on target? Was there too much of it? Too little?
10. *The Wild Boys* is clearly a product of its times (the late 60s) and written from a very pre-Stonewall sensibility. Does that milieu and sensibility date it? What, if anything, survives as living literature?