How to muzzle Anthony Burgess': Re-Staging Marlowe’s Murder in Iain Sinclair and Dave McKean’s Slow Chocolate Autopsy

Christopher Orchard

Abstract

*Slow Chocolate Autopsy*(1997) is a multi-media novel that is a collaboration between the poet and novelist Iain Sinclair and the graphic illustrator, Dave McKean. It concerns the character Norton, a time-traveller, who is trapped in the layers of London’s historically violent past and is seeking to utilise the river Thames as his passage out of the city. Many of the chapters reveal his angst at his entrapment and he is either instigating violence or is, more frequently, its victim. In the first chapter of the novel, Norton is a witness to the last hours of Marlowe’s life. As he watches the action unfold on that fateful day in 1593, he realises that he ‘knew what was coming, the end of it’ His prophetic anticipation only applies to Marlowe’s death though since he does not foresee that he himself will be his murderer. However, as he predicts the conclusion to the day’s events, Norton reveals his more immediate concern with the representations of Marlowe in the aftermath of his death. In particular his priority is determining ‘How to muzzle Anthony Burgess’, who had written the novel *A Dead Man in Deptford* (1993) about Marlowe’s life and death. This essay will explore why and how Sinclair is attempting to ‘muzzle’ Burgess’s and biographical voices of Marlowe’s life by suggesting an alternative representation of Marlowe’s death. These questions can be answered through four approaches: first, by offering his own interpretation of the reckoning that challenges the choreographic description of the coroner’s report on which subsequent interpretations of Marlowe’s death are based; second, by downplaying biographies’ emphases on the significance of Poley, Frizer and Skeres; third, by prioritising the first-person point of view of Norton; and fourth, by using a psychogeographical reading of motive and behaviour, that uses the psychosis of location to explain human action, specifically the violence of the protagonists in 1593.

Keywords

Marlowe; Sinclair; Burgess

Full Text: PDF

REFBACKS

There are currently no refbacks.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 License.
Burgess was prolific, versatile, and highly intelligent: he published 33 novels, 25 nonfiction titles, produced poetry, short stories and screenplays, composed three symphonies, wrote hundreds of musical pieces and spoke nine languages fluently. He also, when time allowed, worked as a journalist, and in August of 1973 found himself in Rome struggling to conjure up a "thinkpiece" he owed to Rolling Stone magazine. Defeated, he suggested "a 50,000 word novella I've just finished, all about the condition humaine etc. Perhaps some of that would be better than a mere thinkpiece."

Book List: McKean and Sinclair Guest presenter Chiara Ambrosio talks to psycho-geographer and novelist Iain Sinclair and artist Dave McKean about their collaborations such as Slow Chocolate Autopsy and London Orbital, their inspirations and their working methods.

The podcast also includes additional questions from Alex Fitch and others, plus readings by Sinclair and McKean of [...]

---

Downriver, Ulysses And Us: The Art Of Everyday Living... People who like Slow Chocolate Autopsy (Book by Iain Sinclair). Alex Berry @AlexBerry.