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English 697

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Annotated Bibliography: William Burroughs and Related Research

Baldwin, Douglas. “‘Word Begets Image and Image is Virus’: Undermining Language and Film

in the Words of William S. Burroughs.” *College Literature* 27.1: (2000). 63-83. Print.

Baldwin argues that Burroughs reveals a “bi-polar” response to the advancements in media technology in his writing, especially with film. On one end, Burroughs is fascinated with imitating the language he closely identifies with the moving image as a “cinematic storytelling.” On the other, a growing suspicion lingers as Burroughs’s anxieties of technological control develop over the individual. He furthers that Burroughs sees writing as the only real means to mimic processes of perception, at which visual and verbal narratives fail, which redefines how people “see.” In this sense, Burroughs challenges the traditional narrative and frees readers from forms of control found in visual and verbal storytelling by denying this representational norm and offering a rebellious alternative narrative style.

Besley, Tina. “Digitized Youth: Constructing Identities in the Creative Knowledge Economy.”

*Policy Futures in Education*. 8.1 (2010): 126-41. Print.

Besley examines how the digital world informs notions of identity and engagement in the American youth. She considers how creativity among users is captured in the formation of identities and worldviews and how these same users resist particular excesses of the online market while engaging and negotiating with social media. The last section of her

article considers pedagogical approaches to the new generation of electorate users and considers how education might be reformed to take an active role in this “creative knowledge economy.”

Bolton, Micheal S. “Get Off the Point: Deconstructing Context in the Novels of William S. Burroughs.” *Journal of Narrative Theory*. 40.1 (2010): 53-79. Print.

Bolton considers how Burroughs’s novels pose a difficulty for the reader inasmuch as they provide no narrative framework from which to contextualize a given part. He argues that this intent of Burroughs is important not only for the liberation of the text—the text being controlled—but, too, for the reader. Instead, Bolton argues that reader must make create contexts spontaneously, which do not rely on fixed binaries that would never cease to exist in his work. For the reader, Bolton asserts, a sense of intimacy is required and thus established with the text, since such a text requires a more active participation.

Breu, Christopher. “The Novel Enfleshed: *Naked Lunch* and the Literature of Materiality.” *Twentieth Century Literature*. 57.2 (2011): 199-223. Print.

Breu examines how capitalism informs the work of Burroughs. He suggests that Burroughs’s intent is not toward “fictional abstraction,” but rather, it is a means to uncover the excess—in its “abjected, degraded, obscene and discarded forms”—of materiality. *Naked Lunch* is certainly about language, and Breu uses Lacanism to reveal how language obscures and refuses production (in a Foucauldian sense). Moreover, the fragmentation of the text can be understood in the way language is reduced to isolated phrases and signifiers, as syntax breaks down forms of materiality. In doing so, Burroughs is able to access a reality by means of the symbolic.

Jarhne, Karen. "David Cronenberg on William Burroughs: Dead Ringers Do *Naked Lunch*."

*Film Quarterly*. 45.3 (1992): 2-6. Print.

This article is actually a transcribed interview between Michael Cronenberg (director of the film, *Naked Lunch*) and Karen Jaehne. What is most important in this interview is understanding how the purpose of the film was *not* to create a film version of the text. In fact, Burroughs had very little to do with the film's production, and had chosen to stay relatively removed from the entire process altogether. Cronenberg makes some interesting points on the controversial topics like homosexuality, which he had a difficult time exposing in the film. The demarcation Cronenberg places between the two mediums of *Naked Lunch* is one that is essential when reconsidering this film.

Paton, Fiona. "Monstrous Rhetoric: *Naked Lunch*, National Insecurity, and the Gothic Fifties."

*Texas Studies in Literature and Language*. 50.1 (2010). 48-69. Print.

Paton historicizes *Naked Lunch* and contends that Burroughs is responding to the political climate of 50s. By looking at the Gothicism in the text, she finds that these obscenities mirror the very obscenities considered in that time: homosexuality (referred to as "creatures"), communism (seen as a "monstor"). This commentary on the 1950s is much more than a "self-indulgent psychosis masquerading as art." Rather, it is a way to understand a time when monstrosity was used as a label for the fear of otherness. The text reveals, too, how Burroughs is influenced by the very monstrosity he attempts combat in *Naked Lunch*, which understood in how his identity as a masculine queer is shaped by the dominant culture.

Peterson, R. G. "A Picture Is a Fact: Wittgenstein and The Naked Lunch." *Twentieth Century*

*Literature*. 12.2 (1966): 78-86. Print.

Peterson contends that although *Naked Lunch* is filled with obscenities and mazes, it could best be understood by considering against Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. By mirroring the two texts, Peterson finds a philosophical pattern between them. The basis of his arguments stems from Burroughs's introduction when a razor is introduced to reveal how the unnecessary must be "cut out." Peterson likens this to Wittgenstein's assertion that unnecessary signs are meaningless, which he then equates back to Burroughs's rhetorical question, "and what is More UNNECESSARY than junk if You Don't Need it?" Peterson relies on his audience having read Wittgenstein and makes several connections between the two texts. This article is interesting in how it provides context to the responses of *Naked Lunch* shortly after its release.

Punter, David. "The Scene of Addiction." *Gothic Studies*. 11.2 (2009): 74-82. Print.

Punter draws a correlation between Gothicism and Burroughs, suggesting that Burroughs strips notions of addiction from his language, leaving an absence that is Gothic. The key, he suggests, is understanding how this absence is the insight of the addict, the rhizome hidden but still holding everything together. The very thing that makes Burroughs texts gothic, Punter suggests, is that they remain relatively the same in how they treat obscenities, which always seem to be without "point [or] alleviation."

Rickert, Thomas. "Toward the Chora: Kristeva, Derrida, and Ulmer on Emplaced Invention." *Philosophy and Rhetoric*. 40.3 (2007): 251-73. Print.

Rickert reconsiders how the mind, often conceptualized as separate from the body, is repositioned by the way rhetoric is being transformed. The demarcation, he suggests, is breaking down because unlike the older paradigm (literacy), the new paradigm reveals how Plato's concept of "chora" and rhetorical invention implicate the way our mind is

embodied with emotion and sensation via topoi (commonplaces). Thus, Rickert seeks to refocus the way chora changes rhetorical spaces into inventive ones by moving from “static ideas to vital activity.”

Wilson, Meagan. “Your Reputation Precedes You: A Reception Study of *Naked Lunch*.”

*Journal of Modern Literature*. 35.2 (2012): 98-125. Print.

Wilson’s article gives a thorough overview of the existence of *Naked Lunch*. She examines the production and reception of the text in order to argue that the text was predisposed to being controversial based on its marketing. Following its obscenity trial, however, the marketing of Grove Press dictated how the book would be received, which Wilson argues is contingent upon the front and back covers. This article is far less argumentative as it is informative. It functions as an authoritative resource for historical accuracy when referencing events surrounding and occupied within the production of *Naked Lunch*.