

William
BURROUGHS

NAKED LUNCH

With an introduction by
J. G. Ballard



flamingo

MODERN CLASSIC

William Burroughs

was born in St Louis, Missouri, in 1914. The son of a successful businessman, Burroughs studied English literature at Harvard in the 1930s. A drop-out thereafter, he lived in Mexico, Tangier and the UK, and for many years was a heroin addict. He began writing in the 1930s but had little success until the early 1950s when he wrote two confessional books, *Junky* (1953) and *Queer* (written in the 1950s but not published until 1985). These novels were about drug addiction and homosexuality, themes that have continued to dominate his work. In many of his books, Burroughs experimented with 'cut-up' techniques, borrowing ideas from all areas of popular culture, from films, comics, Westerns and science fiction to create a powerful *mélange*. Much concerned with the abuses of power, he uses addiction as an all-embracing metaphor for the ways in which our lives are controlled.

Although largely unpublished for many years, Burroughs was immensely influential among the Beat writers of the 1950s – notably Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg – and already had an underground reputation before the appearance of his first important book, *Naked Lunch*. First published by the daring and influential Olympia Press (the original publishers of Henry Miller) in France in 1959, it aroused great controversy on publication and was not available in the US until 1962 and in the UK until 1964. The book was filmed by David Cronenberg in 1991.

Burroughs' other works include *The Soft Machine* (1961), *The Ticket That Exploded* (1962), *Nova Express* (1964), *Cities of the Red Night* (1981) and *The Place of Dead Roads* (1984). In 1983 he was elected a Member of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters. Burroughs divides his time between New York and Lawrence, Kansas.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

Junky

Queer

The Soft Machine

The Ticket that Exploded

Dead Fingers Talk

Nova Express

The Wild Boys

Exterminator!

Port of Saints

Cities of the Red Night

The Place of Dead Roads

Interzone

MODERN CLASSIC

WILLIAM BURROUGHS

Naked Lunch

With an

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Introduction by J. G. Ballard

Naked Lunch is a banquet you will never forget. This extraordinary novel is a comic apocalypse, a roller-coaster ride through hell, a safari to the strangest people of the strangest planet, ourselves. It is said of literary masterpieces that their genius is stamped into every line, and this is nowhere so true as it is of *Naked Lunch*. From its opening words we are aware that a unique world – comic, paranoid, visionary, delirious – is being revealed to us. Bizarre and nightmarish scenes flash by, like glimpses of some exotic and decadent city. Only later do we realise that this strange city is the one we all inhabit in our waking lives.

At first sight *Naked Lunch* is dominated by two closely linked themes, drugs and homosexuality, about which Burroughs is unsparingly frank. The landscape of subway dawns and cheap hotels, the numbing wait for the next fix, and the melancholy quest for an ever-elusive sexual happiness together describe the world through which Burroughs moved in the 1950s, in New York, Mexico and Tangier. Drugs are the ultimate merchandise, Burroughs has written, and he sees addiction as part of the global conspiracy by the presiding powers of our world – the media conglomerates, the vast political and commercial bureaucracies, and a profit-driven medical science – which are determined to reduce us to the total dependency of addicts, while teasing us with the mirage of transgressive sex.

Burroughs chooses to explode this conspiracy by inviting us all to lunch, and his menu is a novel that I believe to be the most important and original work of fiction by an American writer since the Second World War. *Naked Lunch* is both the addict's fix, the rush of pure sensation through the brain, and also the stark and unsentimental truth about ourselves, our self-delusions and deceptions, served with a dressing of the spiciest humour. Here you will find a host of hilarious characters, led by the egregious Dr Benway, the most corrupt and charming physician in twentieth-century literature.

After the anaemic fare of most contemporary fiction, sit back and gorge yourself on this feast of a novel.

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Introduction

deposition: testimony concerning a sickness

I awoke from The Sickness at the age of forty-five, calm and sane, and in reasonably good health except for a weakened liver and the look of borrowed flesh common to all who survive The Sickness . . . Most survivors do not remember the delirium in detail. I apparently took detailed notes on sickness and delirium. I have no precise memory of writing the notes which have now been published under the title *Naked Lunch*. The title was suggested by Jack Kerouac. I did not understand what the title meant until my recent recovery. The title means exactly what the words say: NAKED Lunch – a frozen moment when everyone sees what is on the end of every fork.

The Sickness is drug addiction and I was an addict for fifteen years. When I say addict I mean an addict to junk (generic term for opium and/or derivatives including all synthetics from demerol to palfium). I have used junk in many forms: morphine, heroin, dilaudid, eukodal, pantopon, diocodid, diosane, opium, demerol, dolophine, palfium. I have smoked junk, eaten it, sniffed it, injected it in vein-skin-muscle, inserted it in rectal suppositories. The needle is not important. Whether you sniff it smoke it eat it or shove it up your ass the result is the same: addiction. When I speak of drug addiction I do not refer to keif, marijuana or any preparation of hashish, mescaline, *Bannisteria Caapi*, LSD6, Sacred Mushrooms or any other drug of the hallucinogen group . . . There is no evidence that the use of any hallucinogen results in physical dependence. The action of these drugs is physiologically opposite to the action of junk. A lamentable confusion between the two classes of drugs has arisen owing to the zeal of the U.S. and other narcotic departments.

I have seen the exact manner in which the junk virus operates through fifteen years of addiction. The pyramid of junk, one level eating the level below (it is no accident that junk higher-ups are always fat and the addict in the street is always thin) right up to the

top or tops since there are many junk pyramids feeding on peoples of the world and all built on basic principles of monopoly:

- 1 Never give anything away for nothing.
- 2 Never give more than you have to give (always catch the buyer hungry and always make him wait).
- 3 Always take everything back if you possibly can.

The Pusher always get it all back. The addict needs more and more junk to maintain a human form . . . buy off the Monkey.

Junk is the mold of monopoly and possession. The addict stands by while his junk legs carry him straight in on the junk beam to relapse. Junk is quantitative and accurately measurable. The more junk you use the less you have and the more you have the more you use. All the hallucinogen drugs are considered sacred by those who use them – there are Peyote Cults and Bannisteria Cults, Hashish Cults and Mushroom Cults – “the Sacred Mushrooms of Mexico enable a man to see God” – but no one ever suggested that junk is sacred. There are no opium cults. Opium is profane and quantitative like money. I have heard that there was once a beneficent non-habit-forming junk in India. It was called *soma* and is pictured as a beautiful blue tide. If *soma* ever existed the Pusher was there to bottle it and monopolize it and sell it and it turned into plain old time JUNK.

Junk is the ideal product . . . the ultimate merchandise. No sales talk necessary. The client will crawl through a sewer and beg to buy. . . . The junk merchant does not sell his product to the consumer, he sells the consumer to his product. He does not improve and simplify his merchandise. He degrades and simplifies the client. He pays his staff in junk.

Junk yields a basic formula of “evil” virus: *The Algebra of Need*. The face of “evil” is always the face of total need. A dope fiend is a man in total need of dope. Beyond a certain frequency need knows absolutely no limit or control. In the words of total need: “Wouldn’t you?” Yes you would. You would lie, cheat, inform on your friends, steal, do *anything* to satisfy total need. Because you would be in a state of total sickness, total possession, and not in a position to act in any other way. Dope fiends are sick people who cannot act other than they do. A rabid dog cannot choose but bite.

Assuming a self-righteous position is nothing to the purpose unless your purpose be to keep the junk virus in operation. And junk is a big industry. I recall talking to an American who worked for the Aftosa Commission in Mexico. Six hundred a month plus expense account:

"How long will the epidemic last?" I enquired.

"As long as we can keep it going. . . . And yes. . . . maybe the aftosa will break out in South America," he said dreamily.

If you wish to alter or annihilate a pyramid of numbers in a serial relation, you alter or remove the bottom number. If we wish to annihilate the junk pyramid, we must start with the bottom of the pyramid: *the Addict in the Street*, and stop tilting quixotically for the "higher ups" so called, all of whom are immediately replaceable. *The addict in the street who must have junk to live is the one irreplaceable factor in the junk equation.* When there are no more addicts to buy junk there will be no junk traffic. As long as junk need exists, someone will service it.

Addicts can be cured or quarantined – that is, allowed a morphine ration under minimal supervision like typhoid carriers. When this is done, the junk pyramids of the world will collapse. So far as I know, England is the only country to apply this method to the junk problem. They have about five hundred quarantined addicts in the U.K. In another generation when the quarantined addicts die off and pain killers operating on a non-junk principle are discovered, the junk virus will be like smallpox, a closed chapter – a medical curiosity.

The vaccine that can relegate the junk virus to a land-locked past is in existence. This vaccine is the Apomorphine Treatment discovered by an English doctor whose name I must withhold pending his permission to use it and to quote from his book covering thirty years of apomorphine treatment of addicts and alcoholics. The compound apomorphine is formed by boiling morphine with hydrochloric acid. It was discovered years before it was used to treat addicts. For many years the only use for apomorphine which has no narcotic or pain-killing properties was an emetic to induce vomiting in cases of poisoning. It acts directly on the vomiting center in the back brain.

I found this vaccine at the end of the junk line. I lived in one

room in the Native Quarter of Tangier. I had not taken a bath in a year nor changed my clothes or removed them except to stick a needle every hour in the fibrous grey wooden flesh of terminal addiction. I never cleaned or dusted the room. Empty ampule boxes and garbage piled up to the ceiling. Light and water had been long since turned off for non-payment. I did absolutely nothing. I could look at the end of my shoe for eight hours. I was only roused to action when the hourglass of junk ran out. If a friend came to visit – and they rarely did since who or what was left to visit – I sat there not caring that he had entered my field of vision – a grey screen always blanker and fainter – and not caring when he walked out of it. If he had died on the spot I would have sat there looking at my shoe waiting to go through his pockets. Wouldn't you? Because I never had enough junk – no one ever does. Thirty grains of morphine a day and it still was not enough. And long waits in front of a drugstore. Delay is a rule in the junk business. The Man is never on time. This is no accident. There are no accidents in the junk world. The addict is taught again and again exactly what will happen if he does not score for his junk ration. Get up that money or else. And suddenly my habit began to jump and jump. Forty, sixty grains a day. And it still was not enough. And I could not pay.

I stood there with my last check in my hand and realized that it was my last check. I took the next plane for London.

The doctor explained to me that apomorphine acts on the back brain to regulate the metabolism and normalize the blood stream in such a way that the enzyme system of addiction is destroyed over a period of four or five days. Once the back brain is regulated apomorphine can be discontinued and only used in case of relapse. (No one would take apomorphine for kicks. *Not one case of addiction to apomorphine has ever been recorded.*) I agreed to undergo treatment and entered a nursing home. For the first twenty-four hours I was literally insane and paranoid as many addicts are in severe withdrawal. This delirium was dispersed by twenty-four hours of intensive apomorphine treatment. The doctor showed me the chart. I had received minute amounts of morphine that could not possibly account for my lack of the more severe withdrawal symptoms such as leg and stomach cramps, fever and my own

special symptom, The Cold Burn, like a vast hives covering the body and rubbed with menthol. Every addict has his own special symptom that cracks all control. There was a missing factor in the withdrawal equation – that factor could only be apomorphine.

I saw the apomorphine treatment really work. Eight days later I left the nursing home eating and sleeping normally. I remained completely off junk for two full years – a twelve year record. I did relapse for some months as a result of pain and illness. Another apomorphine cure has kept me off junk through this writing.

The apomorphine cure is qualitatively different from other methods of cure. I have tried them all. Short reduction, slow reduction, cortisone, antihistamines, tranquilizers, sleeping cures, tolserol, reserpine. None of these cures lasted beyond the first opportunity to relapse. I can say definitely that I was never *metabolically* cured until I took the apomorphine cure. The overwhelming relapse statistics from the Lexington Narcotic Hospital have led many doctors to say that addiction is not curable. They use a dolophine reduction cure at Lexington and have never tried apomorphine so far as I know. In fact, this method of treatment has been largely neglected. No research has been done with variations of the apomorphine formula or with synthetics. No doubt substances fifty times stronger than apomorphine could be developed and the side effect of vomiting eliminated.

Apomorphine is a metabolic and psychic regulator that can be discontinued as soon as it has done its work. The world is deluged with tranquilizers and energizers but this unique regulator has not received attention. No research has been done by any of the large pharmaceutical companies. I suggest that research with variations of apomorphine and synthesis of it will open a new medical frontier extending far beyond the problem of addiction.

The smallpox vaccine was opposed by a vociferous lunatic group of anti-vaccinationists. No doubt a scream of protest will go up from interested or unbalanced individuals as the junk virus is shot out from under them. Junk is big business; there are always cranks and operators. They must not be allowed to interfere with the essential work of inoculation treatment and quarantine. *The junk virus is public health problem number one of the world today.*

Since *Naked Lunch* treats this health problem, it is necessarily

brutal, obscene and disgusting. Sickness has often repulsive details not for weak stomachs.

Certain passages in the book that have been called pornographic were written as a tract against Capital Punishment in the manner of Jonathan's Swift's *Modest Proposal*. These sections are intended to reveal capital punishment as the obscene, barbaric and disgusting anachronism that it is. As always the lunch is naked. If civilized countries want to return to Druid Hanging Rites in the Sacred Grove or to drink blood with the Aztecs and feed their Gods with blood of human sacrifice, let them see what they actually eat and drink. Let them see what is on the end of that long newspaper spoon.

As I write I have almost completed a sequel to *Naked Lunch*. A mathematical extension of the Algebra of Need beyond the junk virus. Because there are many forms of addiction I think that they all obey basic laws. In the words of Heisenberg: "This may not be the best of all possible universes but it may well prove to be one of the simplest." If man can see.

Post Script. . . . Wouldn't You?

And speaking *Personally* and if a man speaks any other way we might as well start looking for his Protoplasm Daddy or Mother Cell. . . . *I Don't Want To Hear Any More Tired Old Junk Talk And Junk Con. . . .* The same things said a million times and more and there is no point in saying anything because *NOTHING Ever Happens* in the junk world.

Only excuse for this tired death route is THE KICK when the junk circuit is cut off for the non-payment and the junk-skin dies of junk-lack and overdose of time and the Old Skin has forgotten the skin game simplifying a way under the junk cover the way skins will. . . . A condition of total exposure is precipitated when the Kicking Addict cannot choose but see smell and listen. . . . Watch out for the cars. . . .

It is clear that junk is a Round-the-World-Push-an-Opium-Pellet-with-Your-Nose-Route. Strictly for Scarabs - stumble bum junk heap. And as such report to disposal. Tired of seeing it around.

Junkies always beef about *The Cold* as they call it, turning up their black coat collars and clutching their withered necks . . . pure junk con. A junky does not want to be warm, he wants to be Cool-Cooler-COLD. But he wants The Cold like he wants His Junk – NOT OUTSIDE where it does him no good but INSIDE so he can sit around with a spine like a frozen hydraulic jack . . . his metabolism approaching Absolute ZERO. TERMINAL addicts often go two months without a bowel move and the intestines make with sit-down-adhesions – Wouldn't you? – requiring the intervention of an apple corer or its surgical equivalent. . . . Such is life in The Old Ice House. Why move around and waste TIME?

Room for One More Inside, Sir.

Some entities are on thermodynamic kicks. They invented thermodynamics. . . . Wouldn't you?

And some of us are on Different Kicks and that's a thing out in the open the way I like to see what I eat and *visa versa mutatis mutandis* as the case may be. *Bill's Naked Lunch Room* Step right up. . . . Good for young and old, man and bestial. Nothing like a little snake oil to grease the wheels and get a show on the track Jack. Which side are you on? Fro-Zen Hydraulic? Or you want to take a look around with Honest Bill?

So that's the World Health Problem I was talking about back in The Article. The Prospect Before Us Friends of MINE. Do I hear muttering about a personal razor and some bush league short con artist who is known to have invented The Bill? Wouldn't You? The razor belonged to a man named Ockham and he was not a scar collector. Ludwig Wittgenstein *Tractacus Logico-Philosophicus*: "If a proposition is NOT NECESSARY it is MEANINGLESS and approaching MEANING ZERO."

"And what is More UNNECESSARY than junk if You Don't Need it?"

Answer? "Junkies, if you are not ON JUNK."

I tell you boys, I've heard some tired conversation but no other OCCUPATION GROUP can approximate that old thermodynamic junk Slow-DOWN. Now your heroin addict does not say hardly anything and that I can stand. But your Opium "Smoker" is more active since he still has a tent and a Lamp . . . and maybe 7-9-10 lying up in there like hibernating reptiles keep the

temperature up to Talking Level: How low the other junkies are “whereas We – WE have this tent and this lamp and this tent and this lamp and this tent and nice and warm in here nice and warm nice and IN HERE and nice and OUTSIDE ITS COLD. . . . ITS COLD OUTSIDE where the dross eaters and the needle boys won't last two years not six months hardly won't last stumble bum around and there is no class in them. . . . But WE SIT HERE and never increase the DOSE . . . never – never increase the dose never except TONIGHT is a SPECIAL OCCASION with all the dross eaters and needle boys out there in the cold. . . . And we never eat it never never never never eat it. . . . Excuse please while I take a trip to The Source Of Living Drops they all have in pocket and opium pellets shoved up the ass in a finger stall with the Family Jewels and the other shit.

Room for one more inside, Sir.

Well when that record starts around for the billionth light year and never the tape shall change us non-junkies take drastic action and the men separate out from the Junk boys.

Only way to protect yourself against this horrid peril is come over HERE and shack up with Charybdis. . . . Treat you right kid. . . . Candy and cigarettes.

I am after fifteen years in that tent. In and out in and out in and OUT. *Over* and *Out*. So listen to Old Uncle Bill Burroughs who invented the Burroughs Adding Machine Regulator Gimmick on the Hydraulic Jack Principle no matter how you jerk the handle result is always the same for given co-ordinates. Got my training early . . . wouldn't you?

Paregoric Babies of the World Unite. We have nothing to lose but Our Pushers. And THEY are NOT NECESSARY.

Look down LOOK DOWN along that junk road before you travel there and get in with the Wrong Mob. . . .

A word to the wise guy.

– *William S. Burroughs*