



Rub Out the Words: The Letters, 1959-1974

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“Burroughs’s voice is hard, derisive, inventive, free, funny, serious, poetic, indelibly American.”

—Joan Didion

“Burroughs is the greatest satirical writer since Jonathan Swift.”

—Jack Kerouac

Carefully edited from more than 1000 of his personal correspondences, *Rub Out the Words* is a collection of 300 of the best letters of *Naked Lunch* author William S. Burroughs, written between 1959 and 1974. A truly remarkable compendium, it offers an eye-opening and insightful look into the artistic process and complex personal life of the legendary literary outlaw in the post-Beat era—providing a new understanding and appreciation of an author who stood alongside Paul Bowles and Charles Bukowski as one of the most creative and rebellious American artists of the 20th century.

Rub Out the Words: The Letters, 1959-1974 Details

Date : Published February 7th 2012 by Ecco (first published January 1st 2012)

ISBN : 9780061711428

Author : William S. Burroughs

Format : Hardcover 480 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Classics, Literary Fiction



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From Reader Review Rub Out the Words: The Letters, 1959-1974 for online ebook

James Newman says

Having read and enjoyed the first volume of Burroughs correspondence I was excited to chance by this second volume in a London bookstore and wasn't disappointed by these latter letters. Burroughs has his admirers and haters but all should agree that the man was one of the 20th century's most innovative, intelligent and eccentric writers. His letters however are mostly well ordered, concise, and clear. If one can overlook some of the tiresome explanations of his discovery of the cut-up method (smoke a joint, take four pages of writing, yours, somebody else's, cut them into four squares and rearrange them,) then there are some fascinating missives here.

One thing that struck me was the financial support that Burroughs, the few times he had money, gave his friends and son Billy. Many letters enclose checks of several hundred dollars to his close associates. Having been a remittance man for so many years and once after the publication of *Naked Lunch*, and his \$200 dollar a month allowance was stopped Burroughs thought nothing of helping out his close associates. He also gave away a lot of work for free to the underground press of the 1960s - both in London and in the states, thinking, I think correctly, that it was important to keep a presence in the underground press - making sure his books were forwarded as free review copies. It is interesting to read about the early attempts to break into Hollywood with two titles. And more interesting to read his attempts to break into the porn movie market with a film treatment of the *Wild Boys*.

Whereas the first volume of letters were the correspondence of a man yearning to become a professional writer -this second volume is the work of a man comfortable in his trade and reaching what would become the most important phase in his career - the return to New York, wider fame, and a cult following. We can only hope there is a third volume of letters in the archive to document this final third act in the career of this fascinating author - William S. Burroughs.

Nicholas says

As interesting as the first book of letters, this time focusing on literal production, scientology and the dream machine, rather than the sex, drugs and travel of the first volume.

Aaron Wilkinson says

This isn't the same as Burroughs' first collection of letters which I enjoyed more. No more get rich quick ventures of the illegal farming variety (pot, which failed) or even slightly less so (carrots, lettuce, tomatoes, peas harvested by Mexican illegals - failed) and nothing so far about the Chinaman. What we do find is a man free from family obligations (save for a brief father son reunion in "Tanger") traveling Europe and berating his publishers for money. But if I wanted to read about the "cut-up method" and the experiments with flicker and tape recordings I could dig through my old copies of the *Paris Review*. No, I haven't finished the book yet and yes, it may improve. The only reason I haven't finished it yet is because I miss the

struggling Bill Burroughs who was addicted to Eukodol, smoked pot and bummed around Tangier on his parent's dime. It's been almost a year since I started this one so I'll press on to the end...

Interesting to note, now that I've finally finished, how the two volumes of letters have parallels. The years of correspondence in this offering cover the period in Burroughs' life when he actually wrote for a living. Instead of failed ventures we read about failed novels, movie scripts and relationships (most notably between William and his son Billy). But the letters are undeniably engaging and approach a brilliance of written form which I have come to expect from the author. Good stuff.

Mat says

Burroughs is easily the best letter-writer of all the beats that I have read so far. He leaves Kerouac, Cassady and Ginsberg for dead with his eloquent but concise prose laced with his celebrated sardonic humour.

Rub Out the Words is the second volume of WSB letters, this one taking off right after the publication of *Naked Lunch*, Burroughs' most well-known (and notorious) novel.

There is such a plethora of invaluable information for beat lit fans in this book that it's hard to know where to start.

Instead, let me outline a few reasons why you should read this book...

- 1) You will enjoy reading letters written by one of the sharpest minds of the 20th Century. WSB's letters to Brion Gysin I found especially fascinating to the point where I am now incredibly fascinated with Brion Gysin and would like to read some of his work, especially *Here to Go* and *The Process* to find out what makes this man tick. Gysin, if you do not know already, is credited with inventing not only the dream machine (which reportedly can provoke hallucinatory effects in its users without resorting to the use of any chemicals to create said desired effect) but also the cut-up method itself, which Burroughs then adapted to his experimental form of writing. And the rest is history as they say.
- 2) You will see some really funny and scathing letters. The most common victim is one of the scientologists, especially Ron Hubbard. Another person on the receiving end of Burroughs' lashing tongue is Truman Capote. Here is a little sample of a letter to Capote - "You have placed your services at the disposal of interests who are turning America into a police state by the simple device of deliberately fostering conditions which give rise to criminality and then demanding increased police powers and the retention of capital punishment to deal with the situation they have created. You have betrayed and sold out the talent that was granted you by this department. That talent is now officially withdrawn. Enjoy your dirty money. You will never have anything else. You will never write another sentence above the level of *In Cold Blood*. As a writer you are finished. Over and out". Ouch!
- 3) You get an insight into how useless, unreliable and indecorous some publishers and editors can be. Burroughs' relationship with Girodias has extreme ups and downs and I was pretty amazed how WSB stuck by him through thick and thin even though Girodias would invest Burroughs' money in doomed-to-fail schemes or even gamble it away sometimes. Reminded me of Corso's ignoble act of forging Ginsberg's signature on manuscripts to sell them to get money to buy dope.

I thought Ginsberg and Corso would be mentioned more in this book but Gysin is definitely the main man, and mentor, in whom Burroughs decided to place his trust.

My only disappointment with this book was there was no letter from Burroughs to Ginsberg and Corso and Orlovsky after Kerouac died in October 1969. As I read my way through the book I eagerly awaited that dreaded day but no letter from Burroughs, although we must remember that these are selected letters and by no means comprehensive. Bill Morgan says in the introduction that Burroughs wrote many very similar letters around the same period and decided to choose the best or most interesting one which reflected that particular style and content at any given point in Burroughs' career. And what a career WSB had. Extreme

sexual proclivities aside, I have grown to respect this man the more and more I read about him. Wonderful stuff. Best book of letters I have read so far!

A big thank-you to Maruzen (Japanese bookshop) for having this in stock on the shelves.
A strong five stars.

Tosh says

As a writer, I'm fascinated with another writer's obsessions for their work and what they have to do, to get through that jungle, which is writing. I'm also a fan of reading correspondence because it captures the writer thinking, without going back and re-checking their work. In that sense, the volume two of the letters of William S. Burroughs "Rub Out the Words" is remarkable. When I was a teenager, Burroughs was my literary hero. I like the straight looking man in a world of craziness, and of course, Burroughs is crazier than all of them put together. I also thought that he was a wise man, but now that I'm old, I think I fell for the image of him. In other words, he became a product. A counter-culture figure that looked like a banker or an insurance man. That look on a man never fails me, especially if that figure is a writer.

"Rub Out the Words" covers the years from 1959 to 1974, and it was the heart of Burroughs doing experiments with film, writing, and recording which are the cut-up's he was doing with his partner-in-crime Brion Gysin at the time. To this day it is still a controversial method of putting the text together. Burroughs credits Gysin, but I think the original idea came from Tristan Tzara. With Burroughs and Gysin, it's the practice of taking newspapers, and folding them up in a specific manner, and then cutting out sections and putting the words together. They felt that one gets another way of looking at writing or text, that is an almost scientific procedure. His other obsession at this time was narcotics and a process to cure addiction that he totally believed in. There is also his interest in Scientology, but he didn't care for the organization but loved the practice or theory behind Scientology.

The fun of reading Burroughs is his many adventures to find new things. He was very much of an adventurer, but now I don't think he was the great writer that I once thought he was. Still, an excellent introduction to another world, and he was the perfect host to various subjects such as literature, narcotics, politics, and so forth. I also like his commentary and communication with multiple publishers of his time. It's a delicate relationship, and it seems Burroughs was very thorough in communicating with his various presses in how he wanted his books presented, as well as money issues. He was a good letter writer, and very generous to his friends. I have always had this picture in my mind that he was a terrible father, and that may be the case, but still, in this correspondence to his son, there is a caring side to the man that I wasn't aware of from his literature. For Bill fans a must, but also a good view of the 1960s, via the writing of Burroughs.

David Corvine says

Really for those with a keen interest in William S. Burroughs. The previous collection of letters contained much material to appear, in some form, in The Yage Letters and Naked Lunch. This collection is mainly concerned with the writer's daily concerns.

Ana-Maria Cărciova says

'I cannot understand why you think it at all remarkable to come when fucked. Lots of people do I find. Also people come from being beaten, kissed, etc. Its all electric brain stimulation. As you may know you can now make someone come by pressing a button'- p.397.

Gosh! I love this dude! I want more!

By reading this book I've found out many things I didn't know about him (that make him more inspiring than ever for me): creativity expressed differently than in any of his books, thirst for knowledge, he is never tired to search in order to get to know everything from scratch, his sarcasm, really funny jokes, his politeness, diplomacy, reasoning, vigour, affability, integrity, exotic way of stating his thoughts (which were sometimes difficult but worthy to understand) inquisitiveness etc. This dude had everything and knew how to be the best of himself even if life dashed him into the worst, that's why he is one of my favourite peeps out there! Loved this book!

Gaylord Dold says

Burroughs, William (ed. Bill Morgan). Rub Out the Words: The Letters of William S. Burroughs, 1959-1974, Ecco/Harper Collins, New York, 2012 (440pp., illustrated, \$35)

Iconoclast, part-time heroin addict, and father-confessor to the Beat Generation, William S. Burroughs, who at the end of his life chose to live in Lawrence, Kansas, was in 1959 living in Paris at 9 Rue Git-le-Coeur, a rickety pile of sticks that came to be known as the Beat Hotel because so many poets and writers had taken up residence there. Burroughs had recently published the justly famous "Naked Lunch", a cause celebre in France and a source of consternation in the United States where writing about sex, drugs and metaphysics was frowned on.

Burroughs is best known for his controversial experiments with psychedelic drugs and an offbeat literary style erected from pastiche and "cut-ups", and for his confessor/lover-style relationships with Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, and Gregory Corso. They had met in New York while the younger men were students at Columbia.

But Burroughs was older than the Beats, went his own way, dabbling in L. Ron Hubbard's Scientology and Wilhelm Reich's orgone treatment therapy, while undergoing the unusual apomorphine treatment for his heroin addiction in London. He was an early supporter and friend of Timothy Leary, both men bent on rendering their inner lives by the use of drugs like peyote and LSD.

Books like "Junkie" and "Naked Lunch" and "The Soft Machine" announced an utterly black view of America, a topsy-turvy psychological and biological understanding of language, capitalism, culture and art, as well as an astoundingly profound way of approaching words on paper. Perhaps only Henry Miller was so unusual an against the grain writer.

The letters collected in this beautifully made volume were mostly written outside the United States while Burroughs lived in Morocco and London, or was traveling. At the time, Burroughs was experimenting with Brion Gysin with the cut-up method and with tape-recorded montages. They reveal an astoundingly lucid Burroughs whose literary ambition and business acumen may come as a surprise to some. They also reveal an acute judge of character in a man who is often thought of as freaky or dialed-out. At least a few of these letters are to Burroughs' son Billy, himself a tormented addict, and reveal Burroughs to be a distant but supportive father. Many letters are to luminous figures like Allen Ginsberg, Paul Bowles, and the French publisher Maurice Girodias, to the doomed addict-writer Alex Trocchi, and to American publishers like Barney Rosset of Grove Press.

The collection includes a selection of historical photographs and an excellent index of sources. Fans of

Burroughs, readers of Beat literature, and literature enthusiasts in general will read “Rub Out The Words” with great pleasure.

Sara says

I was lucky to win a copy of this book via the GoodReads giveaway.

This is a wildly intimate collection of letters written by Mr. Burroughs to his friends, publishers, fellow artists, son and more. It is a good record of his travels from Paris to London to the US etc. He describes some of his famous writing and art techniques - the "cut up" process, the flicker machine, collaging etc. He discusses Scientology quite a bit as well as other spiritual experiences with and without the aid of drugs.

Among the highlights of these letters is a hilarious recounting of his failed experiments with Timothy Leary, who he is not in sync with, and claims was almost killed by in failed drug experiments.

His letters are wry, bitter, hilarious, loving and all across the emotional spectrum. It helps you understand this most fabled writer in his own words, in a way that his works alone cannot.

John Porcellino says

Great collection of letters written by WSB covering the years between the publication of Naked Lunch and his permanent return to the US in 1974. Pretty much you already know if you're gonna be interested in this book. As a writer, I was particularly fascinated with the discussions of his working relationships with various publishers and artists, the nitty gritty of his business dealings. Nice selection of photos too.

Kilburn Adam says

Been reading the Authorized King James Bible for fucking ages. I've read 46%. I've only reached the book of Jeremiah, and it's shit. Put it down for a bit to read some other books.

Beyond any doubt the words of William S Burroughs, are far superior to God's words.

I read both volumes of Burrough's letters. And it's a captivating insight into his life.

He's my most read author, and maybe one of my favourites.

So many of his ideas, inspiration, and personal life are covered in detail in this book.

If you want to know more about Burroughs the person, without reading a biography written by someone else, then I highly recommend reading his letters.

In the first volume his main correspondent was Allen Ginsberg. But later on he becomes much closer to Brion Gysin.

I thought the letters to his son Billy Burroughs Jr alluring, as he lived a troubled life.

The letters stop at 1974. So hopefully there will be another volume.

I'm now going to go back and reread The Naked Lunch now. As I might view it differently this time.

Bonnie says

I was recently going through my books and came across this one I had won. I forgot I had read it and did not review it--

Very interesting reading these somewhat "wild" personal letters. Was surprised at the amount on Scientology. Must say a very interesting person. Actually really liked this book--something about reading intimate letters. It really lets you into someones mind and most private thoughts. This guy was really "strange" which made for some interesting ideas he shared in his letters.

Cheryl says

I had so much fun reading this book. It's literally letters. Letters written by William S. Burroughs, edited by Bill Morgan. We get insight into Burrough's personal and professional life, seeing his inspiration for his works as well as his problems.

This book is so incredibly interesting, and I will read it again soon. The way he writes to his friends and family is injected with love and humor, and I now want to write tons of letters.

Guy Salvidge says

If you love Burroughs then you will love the second volume of his letters (1959-1974). He was one mad mofo but if you've read him this will come as no surprise :) One of the interesting aspects of this volume is that it covers WSB's rise to popularity and commercial success. So early on in the letters WSB is basically penniless, but toward the end he has plenty of money to throw around in the directions of his friends and especially his son, William Burroughs Jr. Incidentally, the bio of Jr, Cursed From Birth, is a very moving and sad tale. I'm yet to read Jr's novels Speed and Kentucky Ham. Anyway, even though WSB certainly wasn't a model citizen or even a decent human being in many ways (particularly see his mysoginism) he did support his son financially for many years. It's been a long 18 years since the first volume of the letters was published, so I'm hoping that it won't be another 18 years until we get what would presumably be the final volume, 1974-1997. Highly recommended for WSB fans; Barry Miles (author of a WSB Bio, El Hombre Invisible) has done an excellent job here.

Ben says

Do you suggest people will stop reading books and going to films?

Yes, but not right away. Give it five years more or less.

Why do sex films siphon interest from other films?

Because they *all* hinge on hidden or partially revealed sex. All life does.

You mean people will not want to see any images?

Yes, for the same reason.

When they no longer want to see the pictures, will they still want to do it?

For a little while longer. Soon they will not, for the reason already cited. When it is all there, nothing held back, you have *done* it. Years ago Kiki came to me in a dream in front of the Muniria [Hotel] and said in English or American, "Sex is finished." I have seen it happen on screen to the actors.

But they still line up to see *The Godfather*.

Oh, yes, for a while. But I don't want to see it after seeing just one sex flick. No doubt I could see someone strangled naked shit and come all over in some SM film sooner or later. Turn on the blue snow, his eyes didn't pop out good. So why watch people throw catsup around?

But surely sex is only part of life?

Wrong. It is all of life and all of time. As you will understand when you read the book I am sending you and the chapter on time: *Sex is time made solid enough to fuck*. There is very little time left on set.

The revolution is over and we have won.

WORD FALLING

PHOTO FALLING

IMAGE FALLING

BREAKTHROUGH IN DARK ROOM.

Winner take nothing. There is nothing left. So let's grab enough \$ to sit it out to the end.
