



Last Words: The Final Journals of William S. Burroughs

By William S. Burroughs



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Last Words: The Final Journals of William S. Burroughs is the most intimate book ever written by William S. Burroughs, author of *Naked Lunch* and one of the most celebrated literary outlaws of our time. Laid out as diary entries of the last nine months of Burroughs's life, *Last Words* spans the realms of cultural criticism, personal memoir, and fiction. Classic Burroughs concerns -- literature, U.S. drug policy, the state of humanity, his love for his cats -- permeate the book. Most significantly, *Last Words* contains some of the most personal work Burroughs has ever written, a final reckoning with his life and regrets, and his reflections on the deaths of his friends Allen Ginsberg and Timothy Leary. It is a poignant portrait of the man, his life, and his creative process -- one that never quit, not even in the shadow of death.



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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Perhaps the last-ever fix for devoted fans of *Junky*, *Interzone* and *Naked Lunch*, these pages trace the meditations, amusements, memories and obsessions of the noted Beat author, wit, actor and substance abuser during his last year of life (1996-1997). Like many other writers' journals, this one mixes lengthy plot outlines, anecdotes and arguments with much briefer drifting thoughts and images. Burroughs considers his old age with a mix of wry humor, scattershot rancor and intimate rue: "Yes, where are the snows of yesterday. And the speedballs I useta know?" Clear throughout is Burroughs's real feeling for cats, several of which he kept; the very first page laments the death, by car, of Calico ("Cat was part of me"). Another oft-repeated theme is the "Evil of the Drug War, the War Against Drugs." Burroughs's brief, violent fantasies seem sad compensations for his increasing powerlessness. Elsewhere, his technique of associations continues to unearth memorably gloomy bizarrerie: January 31, 1997, brings "a hill of 'snirt' in Dakota, where folks can quick-freeze and shatter like icicles when they go out for the mail. 'Snirt' is a thing of the spring. If you make it through the cabin fever to the 'snirt.' Winner take 'snirt.'" A final entry resurrects "What I feel for my cats, present and past," then asks, "Love? What is It? Most natural painkiller what there is." The volume's fragmentary and personal nature will make it precious to all Burroughs devotees; its patches of wit and pathos, though real, may not be enough to endear it to other readers. Burroughs's friend Grauerholz, who edited the volume, supplies a compassionate introduction; an appendix glosses references and names. (Feb.) Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc.

From Library Journal

These two books reveal the breadth of Burroughs's preoccupations and literary appeal. His last journal contains 168 entries and spans from November 1996 to three days before his death in July 1997. In it, he returns to well-worn themes like the rise of the police state, the pernicious effects of U.S. narcotics laws, and the superiority of cats over humans. Although he was in fairly good health as he was writing, his thoughts also turned frequently to death--no surprise given the recent loss of old friends like Herbert Huncke, Timothy Leary, Allen Ginsberg, and Calico, his favorite cat, who died four days before the journal opens. The book is sprinkled with allusions to literary figures ranging from Shakespeare to Walter de la Mare to Mario Puzo. The Burroughs we encounter here may have lost some of his gleam, but he has not yet turned to rust. For all serious literary collections. In the latest installment of Mississippi's "Literary Conversation" series, Hibbard (English, Middle Tennessee State Univ.) collects 22 interviews spanning 35 years. They range from a playful piece by Allen Ginsberg and Gregory Corso, first published in the *Journal for the Protection of All Beings* (1961), to "Grandpa from Hell," an interview that appeared in the *L.A. Weekly* in 1996. Sources for the interviews include *Esquire*, *Penthouse*, and *Rolling Stone* as well as scholarly journals like *Modern Language Studies*--a diversity that reflects Burroughs's status as both a serious literary figure and a popular icon. Like most collections of interviews, Hibbard's contains a good deal of repetition, but his chronological arrangement provides a clear window into Burroughs's changing consciousness over half a lifetime. For public and academic libraries.

-William Gargan, *Brooklyn Coll. Lib., CUNY*

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From Kirkus Reviews

This last testament by American cultural icon Burroughs (*Ghost of Chance*, 1995, etc.) comprises the disjointed diary entries the terminally ill author jotted down between November 14, 1996, and August 1, 1997. In one diatribe after another, the self-described writer, scribe, and by ancient analogy priest addresses a

host of topics from US drug policy to feline purring habits. While most of his ramblings are incoherent, one message is heard loud and clear: What the American Narcotics Department is doing is pure Evil. Burroughs tirelessly extols the benefits of cannabis as a painkiller and an aphrodisiac, attributing his own best writing to its stimulating effect. Disposing of political leaders as "certifiably insane," he goes on to attack "American values" for their blunt hypocrisy, psychoanalysis for shifting responsibility and overlooking the organic causes of many disorders, Bible Belt Christianity for "ignorance, stupidity, and barely-hidden bigotry," and feminists for humorless self-righteousness. When Burroughs shows rare signs of affection, it is directed either to his house cats or to friends like Allen Ginsberg, whom he lauds for publicly addressing "explicit homo-sex." Despite citations of Keats, Verlaine, Villon, Stein, and Fitzgerald, literary matters rank low on Burroughs's priority list. He shows some concern for the future of writing, but his brief remarks about his own reading material ranging from spy novels to *The New Yorker* are uninspiring. His bodily functions preoccupy him far more, and the reader will be repeatedly informed about "the toll Chinese food took" on his gut, and his sensations after a cataract operation. Dreams about sex (often with strangers), insects, and pets are central to most entries. The telegraphic style is mitigated by epigrammatic witticisms ("As for Humanity, most of them is only good to feed cats") and puns ("Gingrich, Squeaker of the House"). Perhaps not intended for the public eye and definitely in need of heavy editing, these notes may disappoint even the most fervent Burroughs fans. -- Copyright ©2000, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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Walter Burchett:

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