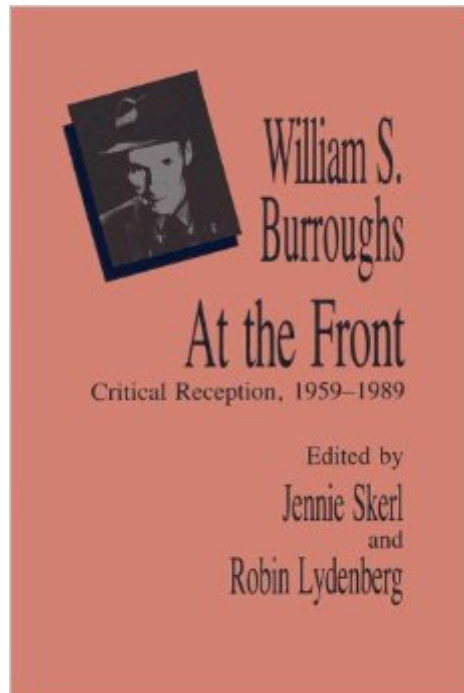


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William S. Burroughs At The Front: Critical Reception, 1959 - 1989



Synopsis

Jennie Skerl and Robin Lydenberg have selected twenty-five critical essays on Burroughs that reflect the historical reception of his work, both positive and negative, decade by decade, and that represent the best essays written about him. The essays cover Burroughs' major novels—including the cut-up and new trilogies; the censorship issue, and his work in film and painting. The chronological organization brings into critical focus the shift from moral questions raised by the novels' content, through examinations of Burroughs' relationship to humanism and modernism, and finally to more focused literary and linguistic issues. In their introduction, the editors survey the progress of Burroughs' critical reception and examine the reasons for the varied and intense responses to the work and the theoretical assumptions behind those responses. The reviewers include prominent figures such as Mary McCarthy and Marshall McLuhan as well as major academic critics such as Cary Nelson, Tony Tanner, and Ihab Hassan.

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Customer Reviews

In one of the last essays in this text, James Grauerholz says of Burroughs' foray into painting: "The challenge of contextualizing his work is a red herring, because the true context is the body of his own wide-ranging work and life." By the end of this collection of essays, one sees that literary critics over the decades came around to thinking the very same way about Burroughs' writing. When he first came on the scene with 'Naked Lunch,' there was simply no drawer to file Burroughs in. But

that didn't stop the critics from trying, and reading the contemporary accounts of such attempts demonstrate just how very revolutionary the novel was -- more dramatically than any post-facto analysis can. Essays from Burroughs scholars are balanced with the Sunday-Paper-Critics, and moving through the book, one finds a genuinely thorough, multi-faceted picture of Burroughs' WORK and its evolution -- more or less unclouded by the Burroughs MYTH. This book is perhaps the very best 'port of entry' for serious Burroughs scholarship, and even a good 'end point' for anyone who doesn't plan to dig any deeper.

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