

hundred per day. However, in an effort to limit strangeness, the translation has been done as under,

Thread your beads in the bright of a bolt
 You never know when the pitch dark will pall.
 Days will drift away in a blink
 Time will devour your breaths, once and for all.

Contemporary and crisp idiom and a certain directness of address definitely impart immediacy and liveliness to translation, more so in case of a Bhakti poem which even in original “espouses *bhava* or 'natural,' 'spontaneous' feeling... draw(s) on the common stock of speech, local dialect, colloquial tones...” (Ramanujan, 1981:164) As avowed earlier, translation keenly followed poetics of the original and thus turned consciously away from normative aspects like poetic diction, convention of expression specific to the canon in favour of a rhetoric of the banal, the colloquial and earthly. For example,

Get ready to live like a pauper, | If you're serious about bhakti.
 Melt away your ego and | Fall at the holy feet of Satguru.

Such a strategic conflation of idea and idiom not only served to accomplish an aesthetic intermixing of local with global but also furnished me an opportunity to juxtapose my personal poetics with that of Ganga sati. Kolatkar has articulated in one his poems collected posthumously this innate desire for merger of his translations of Tukaram with originals and his personal original poetry with Tukaram's translations,

I'll try to pass off mine as yours | I'll create such confusion
 That nobody can be sure about | What you wrote and what I did
 (Quoted in Zecchini, p.86)

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak echoes a similar sentiment, though in a different context, in her famous essay “*The Politics of Translation*” (1993) when she says that a translator must practice total, unconditional 'surrender' to the rhetorical dimension of the original text, similar in intensity to that of a gopi for Lord Krishna, as translation is the most intimate act of reading. The apparent predilection of the ancient Indian translator for adaptation or appropriation over what Tejaswini Niranjana calls literal translation or what Sanskrit scholars called *chhaya* (shadow) or verbatim translation, if absorbed by modern-day translator rendering Indian regional literature into English, should not be miscalculated as an obsequious rubbishing of post-colonial agenda of resistance and transformation. Though the medieval Indian view was primarily to produce a reader-friendly translation, it was never at the cost of what Popovic identifies as “the invariant core” i.e. stable, basic and constant semantic features of a text, as well as specific cultural and historical signifiers embedded in the source text because the fundamental motivation behind undertaking the translation was to be able to understand and enjoy the original rather than to efface it in the interest of an altogether new work. While translating Ganga sati, I could draw a meaningful parallel between the medieval context of translation as reflected in, say for example, the first Marathi poet Jnaeshwar translating

Bhagavadgita (c. 1290) into Marathi as a part of his vernacularizing effort, aiming to have “the blessed era of holy knowledge come to the city of Marathi” so that both his “language of Place and Sanskrit may display their beauty on the self-same throne of the Gita.” (Quoted in Pollock. 2006: 382) and present context that seeks to globalize the vernacular world. Needless to say, in both efforts, “one cannot say which is the original” while fully being conscious of the fact that newness gets added to the world.

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Postmodernist Fiction and Consciousness: A Study of William S. Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*

- Baby Pushpa Sinha

Abstract: Burroughs' career as a writer started when he began to record his experiences as an addict at the age of thirty five. *Naked Lunch* is his first mature work as an artist, the novel that established his reputation as an important writer and the one that still receives the most critical attention. It proposes to examine the effects of addiction to opiates, its treatment and remedy. The novel, consequently explores experiences, memories and hallucinations that accrue as a consequence of being in such a state and its cures.

Keywords: Postmodern American Fiction, Memory, *Naked Lunch*, William Burrough.

The publication of William Burroughs *Naked Lunch* in 1959, inaugurates the beginning of the postmodern fiction in America. The new novel attempts to capture the domain of "negatives and absence" (*Naked Lunch*, 116). The novelist as a narrator does not claim his authorship, for he is presumed to be dead, or simply reduced to a "recording instrument" (*Naked Lunch*, 221) that generates narratives and also disrupts them. It is in this sense that Burroughs' statement in *Naked Lunch*: "The word cannot be expressed direct It can perhaps be indicated by mosaic of juxtaposition like articles abandoned in a hotel drawer, defined by negatives and absence....," (*Naked Lunch*, 116) becomes the very defining principle of what makes of the postmodern narrative. Thus "negatives and absence" become the constituting principle of the fiction written during the 1960s. *Naked Lunch* was published by Olympia, a Paris based publishing house. On publication it was ignored, for no reviewer thought it worth reviewing. Although *Naked Lunch* was brought before the Massachusetts Supreme Court on obscenity charges in the mid-sixties, while still arousing dismay and disgust in the circle of sophisticated readers, the critical language in which its literary importance was first proclaimed is strikingly moral. The narrative entrée in *Naked Lunch*, which condenses most powerfully and economically, the thematic and stylistic strategies of Burroughs' fiction is the story of the Carnival man who teaches his anus to talk. In this bizarre tale, Burroughs' dramatizes the problematic relationship of body and mind, and the role of language in that relationship, the arbitrary violence of language as a system of naming and representation; and the possibility of an ontology and an aesthetics based on 'negatives and absence'. Burroughs' plan in *Naked Lunch* is to expose the repressive duality of body/mind by confusing and combining word and flesh, making the abstract word literal and concrete. In this, Burroughs even has given speech the physical impact of a sound emitted and received by the body's lower sphere: "This ass talk had a sort of gut frequency. It hit you right down there like you gotta go. You know when the old colon gives you the elbow and it feels sorta cold inside" (*Naked Lunch*, 132). But this strange

narrative is not a parable of the triumph of body over mind, a mere reversal of conventional hierarchy. For once the carny man's brain dies and his "blank periscope eyes" are disconnected (as all junkies' eyes) from the "seat of libido and emotion" (*Naked Lunch*, 230), the anus too seems to fall silent. Language as we know it only persists where there is conflict and the possibility of domination. In his theoretical explorations of the nature of cut-up writing, Burroughs comes to assert finally that all literature is cut-up. For him, as for theorists like Bakhtin, Derrida, Kristeva, and Barthes, any literary text is an intersecting network of many texts, spliced, crossed, and merged. Every writer experiments with language and for Burroughs the cut-up is simply a mechanism for making the relationship between the body of language and the literary tradition clear.

Burroughs has always been prepared to speak quite openly about his use of drugs for literary purposes, and in 1979 he said to Barry Miles in *A Portrait* "I didn't have any experience with opiates until I was thirty years old ... What interested me was what interests anyone who takes drugs – altered consciousness. Altered consciousness, of course, is a writer's stock in trade. If my consciousness was just completely conventional, no one would be interested enough to read it, right? So there's that aspect. Now you may not be doing that for literary purposes at all. You may just be doing it because you want to. But of course, altering the consciousness need not be drug related either. We alter our consciousness all the time, from minute to minute. Altered consciousness is a basic fact of life." (Miles, 53). He also identified another element used in control as simple need. In *Naked Lunch* he uses the analogy of junkies and their need for junk, as the "algebra of need". This need is not confined to drugs. He (Burroughs) said to Barry Miles in *A Portrait*: "By 'the algebra of need' I simply meant that, given certain known factors in an equation, and the equation comprising a situation of absolute need – any form of need – you can predict the results. In other words, leave a sick junk in the back room of a drug store and only one result is possible. The same is true of anyone in a state of absolute hunger, absolute fear, etcetera. The more absolute the need, the more predictable the behaviour becomes, until it is mathematically certain" (105-106). This is a human weakness, exploited to the full by those in control. The title *Naked Lunch* means "a frozen moment when everyone sees what is on the end of every fork." And the title was suggested by Jack Kerouac. Burroughs maintains:

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.... 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. (*Naked Lunch*, v).

If a fictional work is experience sketched or textualized to Burroughs, it holds out the possibility of making ordinary experience extraordinary. As a drug addict he sets himself on the course of moving beyond consciousness. For experience is unlimited and always incomplete remaining suspended in the consciousness. To have a hold on the 'chamber of consciousness' confessional modes suits the author, for he

wants to reveal the facts. Thus “naked lunch” signifies simultaneously seeing and what is being seen and the use of the term in the title in the introduction and the preface establishes the ‘naked lunch’ as a procedure of seeing, and particularly, seeing the naked lunch itself. William Burroughs’ *Naked Lunch* is about sickness. The sickness that Burroughs maps out implies a kind of social pathology that is “necessarily brutal, obscene and disgusting” (*Naked Lunch*, xii). The pathology of the social transparently connects the external with the internal, the conscious with the unconscious. The literary imagination is not certainly redemptive or transcendental, it is agonizingly personal and cultural in that the individual moves through moments of sleep and awakening. The author awakes at the age of forty-five to the naked reality of his existential condition. *Naked Lunch* is also a metaphor of protest. This protest is contextualized in demythologisation of the body. Body’s purity is debunked for it is conditioned to capture the provoking states of hallucination under the effect of drug. Doping is privileged not only to underline social protest, but also to test the limits of the body. At the cultural level, *Naked Lunch* symbolises literature as protest. In its anti-cultural stance, the novel relativizes truth in its search of meaning in meaninglessness. The naked lunch of human life is depicted in the book in the form of cannibalism, orgasm-death, oral-anal sex and caprophagy. “To lunch” is to have the vision and also be a part of it, for no one can avoid the human condition. Only a form of mental freedom is indicated by the act of seeing distinctly. Burroughs chose a design structure for *Naked Lunch* on three grounds: firstly, it is a mode of portraying the flow of consciousness; secondly, it is a mode of expanding the reader’s consciousness, and thirdly it is a suitable satirical technique. *Naked Lunch* is openly described as a record of the writer’s consciousness. The characters that Burroughs creates are his alter egos; the plot, his inner conflicts; the structure, his actual experience; the texture, his individual perceptions; the themes, his own spiritual quest and discovery. We come to know from the introduction and preface that the novel contains notes consumed during the withdrawal sickness of a drug cure known as a paranoid schizophrenic state that gives the surreal visions the status of fact. In his work *Junkie*, withdrawal is considered to have produced some kind of rampant sociability and a disclosure of distasteful intimacies. *Naked Lunch* is a diary that takes into account the experience as it happens, and considers the act of recording as part of the experience. In this novel the quest finally ends in heightened visions of the here and now. Time and again we see the visionary episodes in the novel that show the permanent alienation of the disillusioned protagonist who resists the deception of addiction with his new insight:

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
(*Naked Lunch*, xiii).

The terms “addiction” and “junk” are not to be interpreted literally only in *Naked Lunch*. They are also terms for the human state. From the previous addict’s special angle of vision he perceives that all of humanity is victimized by some form of addiction. The addict’s experience has

brought about the realization that the body is a biological net and society is governed by "control addicts" who make use of the needs of the body to gratify their obsession with power. And hence the narrator can announce: "The junk virus is public health problem number one of the world today." (*Naked Lunch*, 71) Burroughs creates a popular mythology and makes his entry into the field of popular literature and thereby making popular science as what we now call as science fiction. He makes use of popular literary sources like news media, advertising, and popular fiction in all of its forms such as comics, movies, radio, magazines and television serials in his *Naked Lunch*. He incorporates from news media and advertising and Burroughs follows the goal of writing to change consciousness: "Naked Lunch is a blue-print, a How-To-Book... How-To extend levels of experience". (*Naked Lunch*, 224). Burroughs creates his plot, characters and many characteristic images drawn from the different forms of popular fiction in his works. *Naked Lunch* incorporates in itself from sources like detective story, older science fiction, the gothic tale, pornography etc. What all these popular forms have in common is a paranoid view of the world that Burroughs accepts as valid. Popular art, like pseudoscience, reveals what society would like to repress. The new vision of *Naked Lunch* is projected in the form of an experiment derived from painting, photography, film, and jazz. Burroughs makes use of a technique called collage or montage in the field of visual arts. The overall structure of *Naked Lunch* that he follows is a montage of "routines" that can be read theoretically in any order. To begin with, *Naked Lunch* has the factual and autobiographical introduction as its opening which explicates the addiction and cure of the author. It also has the first routine which recapitulates the biographical journey of Junkie. From this point, the novel enters into fantasies of addiction and control, adding up to the main routines like "The market", "Ordinary Men and Women", "Islam incorporated and the parties of Interzone", "The Country Clerk", and "Interzone". This cluster of routines has the elaborate descriptions of Interzone with its inhabitants and the mythic plot and Burroughs' wide social satire. The rest of the routine chiefly centres on the theme of addiction and control with the extra themes of escape and rebellion. The novel has the frame of factual and autobiographical sections which address the reader directly and guiding him into and out of an extraordinary text. The routines are independent and the form is collage, but the order is not random. There is a sense of psychological order in the use of experimental technique and a didactic frame. Burroughs further maintains and says to Warren French:

"Possession" they call it Sometimes an entity jumps in the body – outlines waver in yellow orange jelly – and hands move to disembowel the passing whore or strangle the nabor child in hope of alleviating a chronic housing shortage. As if I was usually there but subject to goof now and again 'wrong! I am never here' Never that is 'fully' in possession, but somehow in a position to forestall ill-advised moves.... Patrolling is, in fact, my principle occupation No matter how tight security, I am always somewhere 'Outside' giving orders and 'Inside' this straight jacket of jelly that gives and stretches but always reforms ahead of every movement, thought, impulse, stamped with the seal of alien inspection....(221).