

Everything Lost: The Latin American Notebook of Williams S. Burroughs.

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Volume Editor: Oliver Harris

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Everything Lost: The Latin American Notebook of William S. Burroughs is a major contribution to the study of William S. Burroughs for several reasons. It is the first facsimile reproduction of a manuscript by Burroughs, and this notebook is the only complete manuscript that survives from the early 1950s. The reproduction of the notebook and the editing of the two transcriptions are thoroughly professional and transparent—indeed exemplary. Oliver Harris's introductory essay provides a valuable analysis of the notebook's place within Burroughs's biography and work, adding an important link to the impressive scholarship in his earlier editions of Burroughs's letters, *Junky*, and *The Yage Letters*. Finally, the publication of this notebook offers a fascinating glimpse into Burroughs's creative process in the early 1950s and to the production of texts that later appear in *The Yage Letters*, *Queer*, and *Naked Lunch*.

Everything Lost is the title the editors have given to a notebook written during Burroughs's travels in Latin America in July and August of 1953. This was the end of a solitary seven-month journey taken to avoid the legal consequences of the shooting of his wife in Mexico City and before he joined Ginsberg and Kerouac in New York City that fall where various notebooks and material previously sent by mail were typed in preparation for possible future publication. The notebook is a school notebook, 8"x 6", containing 48 leaves of lined paper with entries written in pencil, beginning with the date July 16 but infrequently dated throughout. The volume the editors have prepared consists of a digital facsimile reproduction of the notebook, a documentary transcription of the text, including excisions and inserts, and an edited fair text version. The documentary transcription includes footnotes identifying references and variant readings. The editing of the fair text is Burroughs's, i.e., the text as it would be printed from his handwritten copy with his revisions. The two transcriptions are presented side by side on facing pages with cross-references to the facsimile's page spreads. Editorial methodology is clearly explained in Smith's "Comments on the Text."

The three editors have done a superb job of transcribing Burroughs's difficult handwritten notes, which include strikeouts, inserts, doodles, and four ripped out pages. The facsimile gives the reader the opportunity to experience the notebook itself as a material object, the informality of the writing materials, the semi-legible scrawl, and the fragmentary entries. The side-by-side transcriptions with cross-references to the facsimile facilitate the reader's ability to compare the three texts and assess the transcriptions, as well as contemplate the three versions of the text as the basis for a scholarly edition and literary interpretation. Smith tells us that Ohio State University Press intends to publish a series of Burroughs's work from the extensive holdings in the university's Rare Books and Manuscripts Library. Based on this initial volume, we can look

forward to high-quality, scholarly editions that will provide a significant contribution to Burroughs studies.

The library and the press were lucky to have Harris's participation in this project, given his previous experience with Burroughs manuscripts. In the introduction, Harris expertly explains the place of this notebook in Burroughs's life in 1953 and in relation to the work written before *Naked Lunch* but not published until much later. His analysis of the notebook supplements his scholarly introductions to the new editions of *Junky* and *The Yage Letters*, further clarifying the composition of those works, as well as *Queer*. Harris analyzes the notebook's form, noting that it is a book of sketches intended for literary use, not a travel diary or journal, and he explains how the material in this notebook is combined with material from other notebooks and manuscripts in subsequent publications. He identifies the mood of the notebook as "dead-end despair and disaster" symbolized by the phrase "everything lost," which appears near the end of the manuscript, and he explicates the literary references to Kafka, Melville, Conrad, and St.-John Perse that Burroughs employs to connect personal loss to cultural catastrophe. Harris also notes that the style of the notebook presages Burroughs's mature style with its juxtaposition of travel notes, private reflections, fictional sketches, dream reports, repeated refrains, and an early routine ("Friendly Finance").

Coming to this notebook for the first time, I, like Harris, was struck by the notebook's central and painful theme of looking for and longing for the lost lover—Lewis Marker, sometimes fictionalized as Allerton. It is this loss that lends such a desperate air to the travels, the dreamlike dislocations, and the threatening insinuations of the Friendly Finance skip tracer. It is also striking to see Burroughs in an early notebook linking his sense of personal doom not only to literary forerunners, but also to contemporary political events, such as Hiroshima, the postwar draft, the execution of the Rosenbergs, Truman's Point Four program, a news article about lynching, and DP's (displaced persons). These references link the personal to the political in a Spenglerian end-of-the-world vision that Burroughs, Kerouac, and Ginsberg shared at that time. Also, the intense emotion, dreamlike scenes, and repetitions sometimes result in poetic prose that shows Burroughs moving away from the dry factual tone of his first book, *Junky*, and towards the style of *Naked Lunch*. Loss and despair make this notebook a poignant document, but the literariness of the sketches, as well as the fact that Burroughs revised in the notebook, also shows a desperate effort to survive by writing. Thus, one small, shabby notebook from two months in 1953 offers a wealth of new information and makes this publication of great value to Burroughs studies.

This fine work of recovery and scholarship has one flaw (which fortunately does not affect its contents) and that is the cover design which is in conflict with the book's serious purpose. The front cover has a shiny, black surface which lends this 8" x 10" volume the appearance of a coffee table book or textbook. The title "Everything Lost," which appears in a tan band across the center of the cover is presented in a decidedly odd, barely readable script. Burroughs's signature appears vertically down the right side of the front cover, which is appropriate, but it is almost invisible because it is in black on a black background. There are also some black-on-

black abstract line drawings, perhaps indicative of the doodles in the notebook, but also not very visible. It is difficult to interpret the purpose of this design, which sends the wrong message about what kind of book this is: a scholarly facsimile edition. Is the cover aimed at attracting fans rather than scholars? Or, is this an attempt to capture the aura of the transgressive artist? Whatever the intention, the cover does not reflect the nature of the editorial project or of Burroughs's notebook—a deceptively modest record of loss, longing, and literary transformation.