

УДК 82.09

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TRANSGRESSION IN W.S. BURROUGHS'S JUNKY*New forms in art are created by canonization of "low" art forms.**Viktor Schklovsky [1]*

W.S. Burroughs is known as the author of *Naked Lunch*, text that led to an obscenity trial and, according to Michael Silverblatt, canonized the genre of "transgressive fiction", displaying "violation of norms, of humanistic enterprise, of the body [10]." Whereas *Naked Lunch* has become an overshadowing figure in writer's legacy, I would like to shift attention to Burroughs's first novel, *Junky*, find out if it also falls under characteristics of transgressive genre, and if yes to what extent. Perceived in the oeuvre of *Jeet, Appolinaire*, other Burroughs's texts, *Junky* makes a case of the first attempt. It is valued as a draft that paves the way to Burroughs's style, but isn't seen as a radical utterance of its own. Literary studies place *Junky* in a wide frame of other texts. It has been analyzed in context of *Naked Lunch* (M.S. Bolton [3]), Burroughs's biography (O. Harris [8]) and novels of addiction (T. Murphy [9]). However, *Junky*'s transgressive value has been implicitly judged as something "less" than *Naked Lunch*. Less radical, less of an avant-garde, less disruptive and therefore less transgressive. But how much exactly the "less" might be? In the light of Burroughs's radical aesthetics analysis of *Junky* as a transgressive text on its own right can either support or question a known transgressive power of both discursive and aesthetic boundaries. What Foucault calls the culture of "nondialectical thinking" [6] and Bataille sees as visions of excess [7].

Oliver Harris stresses the double nature of *Junky* caused by its multiple editions. The difference between the first publication, ordered in 1953 by Ace Books and the 1977 Penguin Classics edition are differentiated by the spelling of the title (*Junkie* against *Junky*), but not but not limited to it. The two editions in fact belong to different literary categories, readership circles and even societies. Between 1950s and 1970s US witnessed

Burroughs's transformation from an unknown pulp fiction writer to a notorious avant-gardist. There was also a change in attitude to drugs in media and society. Frederick Whiting even argues that the two changes are related, and the change in drug description could be influenced by censorship victory of *Naked Lunch*, where, "in the space of three and a half years the unspeakable had become speakable" [11].

The two editions of *Junky* are placed in different contexts, one of 1977 is overshadowed by its successor, *Naked Lunch*, whereas the one of 1953 is buried in the pulp fiction archives of Ace Books, with no audience formed for it yet.

However, to state that 1950s audience was unprepared for addiction discourse of any form would mean to oversimplify the matter. *Junky* was originally published alongside the memoir *Narcotic Agent* by Maurice Helbrant, successful enough to have a second edition. What is more curious, 1950 National Book Award was given to Nelson Algren's novel *The Man with the Golden Arm*, the story of a morphinist, later filmed starring Frank Sinatra in the lead, attracting nation-wide attention to the question.

Increasing interest to the problem of drugs, as Algren's novel show, was referred to a very specific kind of addiction connected with the post-war syndrome and a growing rate of morphine use among the veterans. The story of a hard-working man who served in the war and became addicted to morphine in the hospital while recovering from the injury pleaded to a then increasing middle class. The novel was simultaneously a confession, a cautionary tale and a display of American dream gone wrong.

Ace books editors must have known about the trend in confessional literature on addiction and tried to saturate public's demand. They forced Burroughs to include "confessions" to *Junky*'s subtitle, aiming to attract a wider audience. At this intersection the first signs of Burroughs's transgressive aesthetics came out to the surface. A forced subtitle that begins with a word "confessions" ends up mocking its own status: "Confessions of an Unredeemed Drug Addict" [8, p. 88]. Rather than American dream, it alludes to European decadent tradition in line of Baudelaire or Rimbaud. Presented to unprepared mass audience of Ace Books, the text goes

on to make references to Freud (German doctor), Gide, Baudelaire, Oscar Wilde and Anatole France [4, p. vi].

Unlike Algren's character who follows a straight narrative of deterioration, Junkie's narrator William Lee undergoes two circles of addiction and comes out of them more confident if not healthier than before. In the epilogue he reinforces the opening claim that he has become a healthier and more knowledgeable person, ("I have never regretted my experience with drugs. I think I am in better health now as a result of using junk") [4, p. viii]. As a character Lee doesn't travel from point A to point B, but finds his consciousness perpetuated in the circle of what he calls "the junk equation" [4, p. ix]. In fact, prologue becomes a brief summary of the text that follows.

Lee presents the case of a drug addict, but not the kind that could be understood by American discourse of 1950s. His story is not linear and not finished. He's not a hard-working type forced to drugs by social trauma or war heroism. The novel starts with the description of Lee's well-off mid-west upbringing, ("my parents were comfortable" [9, p. 5]). For a consumer of Ace Books ("subject to a symbolic economy of cold war America", according to Harris [8, p. 72]) such a beginning with descriptions of wealth could be redeemed only by catastrophe of upper-class values, and the narrator hints at it:

"All the props of a safe comfortable way of life that is now gone forever". [4, p. 5]

The line promises an unexpected change that could have never been predicted, following premises of a fairy tale, what can be called "initiation", or the rite of passage from the world of expensive colleges to the world of NY subway, habitual place for the audience of Ace Books. But Lee's social discourse abruptly stops to transform into magical one as he mentions "a maid" talk about opium bringing "sweet dreams" and says (still as a child), "I will smoke opium when I grow up" [4, p. 5]. Made by Lee in full consciousness, statement undermines both the rule of linearity and the rule of a magical prophecy as well as breaks up with the myth of child's purity. This myth is ultimately erased when the narrator mentions forming "a romantic attachment for another boy" [4, p. 6]. He does not

reflect or give any opinion on the matter. There is no follow-up on the subject of Lee's homosexuality. He shows that "confessions" indicated in the subtitle of the book are limited to narcotics, and seen through them. Hence abrupt shifts and mystifications of childhood opium dreams. As if it was the only of Lee's concerns by virtue of the adjective "unredeemed", addiction is also put in brackets. The line of Lee's homosexuality as well as that of his marriage has no logical development in the narration, apart from casual remarks. No explanations are given about the circumstances of his marriage, and already in the prologue the reader is given a signal that the texts with a subtitle "confessions" is not intended as such in full sense. Freud, to whom Lee makes an allusion in the beginning, would argue that a subject who makes a prompt confession and readily admits one act does it in the gesture of covering up another act, the implicit real cause of expression [2, p. 15]. But it won't be until the next novel *Queer* that we find out other sides of narrator's personality. The text of *Junkie*, or *Junky* can be a shadowy double aimed to cover up "nightmares" Lee is willing to disregard by avoiding certain strata of his life. Burroughs writes in the letter to Ginsberg that his first and second novels are limited within one paradigm ("[Junky] is on junk, [Queer] is off" [5, p. 107]).

Because narration in *Junky* comes from Lee "post-addiction" (b), the reader never gets the chance to meet Lee "before addiction" (a). Thus we are presented with the transformation of a character whom we never get to know in the first place. In the gesture of erasing his previous versions post-addicted Lee is a figure with unknowns implicitly put in brackets: $a+x=b$, where "x" represents facts of the narrative, and "a" – Lee "before addiction" – an unknown digit the reader has to deduce from the novel's equation. William Lee neither tells lies, nor misjudges with respect to the narrative audience. He conceals information without awareness, the function of this concealment seems to be intended not at the audience, but show a part of Lee's mode of existence, something he conceals from himself by the other discourses, from the opponent other than the audience. It is someone concealed from Lee by Burroughs. In a way Lee is not a junky, he is "JUNK" (incidentally the initial title of the manuscript), the

junk that speaks through narrator. Many statements can be in fact seen as narration from the drug's point of view:

When you stop growing you start dying. An addict never stops growing. [...] [4, p. 8-9].

In this light Lee's omissions of certain personal facts can be seen not as an ellipsis. On the contrary, partial personal facts that resurface from the discourse of junk become discursive excess. Casual remarks about a "circle of rich homosexuals" or Lee's wife, signify the inability of Lee to hide what Bataille calls visions of excess, or transgression. They fall outside of a planned paradigm of junk. This point is supported by Lee's statement, that "kicking the habit involves the death of junk-dependent cells [4, p. 9,19] and consequently reveals other sides of his personality:

"After ten days of the cure I had deteriorated shockingly. [...] My emotions spilled out everywhere. [...] Several times I made the crudest sexual propositions to people who had given no hint of reciprocity." [4, c. 107]

Dynamics of the text is built around the three stages of addiction, forming the habit, staying in the habit and refusing it. The logic of Lee's discourse follows a three-step pattern. However it isn't a fixed pattern of narrative dialectics of thesis-antithesis-synthesis. In concert with Foucault's "non-dialectical language" both Junky's plot and its discursive patterns develop within transgressive aesthetics, where synthesis is replaced by a second contradiction, yet more radical and pushing the boundaries further.

If deconstruction looks for two self-contradicting statements, Junky always presents three conflicting messages that follow one another. The third gesture does not reinstate the power of the first one, but is meant to erase the trustworthiness of both previous theses. Lee's attempt to join the army is a characteristic example. Having been rejected "from five officer training programs" (thesis), Lee is drafted as a soldier (antithesis), but ultimately decides that he's not going to "like the army", and quits on the premises of his "nut-house record" (transgression) [4, p. vii]. Lee doesn't explain his decision. Instead he shifts the focus to the stay at the psychiatric hospital which in turn develops into another three-movement narration.

Lee makes a statement that he “once got a Van Gogh kick” and “cut off a finger joint to impress someone” [4, c. vii]. This first statement has no premises and no follow-up explanations. It is another vision of excess, a fact of Burroughs’s biography (not Lee’s) that spills out into the text but is detained in the embryonic state by Lee, the narrator, or the junk itself (“there were two books to be writ, one written on the junk, one off”) [5, c. 81].

The only function of the finger story is to explain how the character got from one governmental institution (army) to the other (psychiatric hospital), to simultaneously discriminate both and make Lee as a character remain intact with his three-step dynamics of storytelling.

Having mentioned the “Van Gogh kick”, i.e. a sound reason for being admitted to the hospital, Lee goes on to say,

“The nut-house doctors had never heard of Van Gogh. They put me down for schizophrenia, adding paranoid type to explain the upsetting fact that I knew where I was and who was president of the U.S [4, p. 7].”

Lee undermines qualifications of the doctors, who are shown as not only uneducated, but also synonymous to the middle class identity, during this time considering involvement into politics even on the level of knowing who the president was as an aberrant, abnormal behavior.

Lee’s madness, his discourse drives the reader to question the very idea of madness as a qualifiable disease. The thought goes in concert with Foucault’s description of psychiatry as an institutionalized discipline, or a disciplinary institution in the “Madness and Civilization” [7].

Throughout the text Lee presents reality as a relative social institution. He begins with a fact post-war reader can recognize and relate to, but the intention is to undermine and transgress. Like Algren’s Frankie Machine Lee first encounters morphine through the army. But does it in a very different manner. When he mentions that Norton, or Morelli, introduces him to junk through his connections in the US army supplies, Lee characterizes Morelli as a “hard-working thief” [4, p. 1]. This subversive description simultaneously undermines morals of the US army and the idea of “hard work” central to the post-war American lifestyle.

In the style of anthropologist Lee describes the world of narcotics not as a separate marginal phenomenon, but in context of illusive nature

of marginality as such. Junky's drug addicts are often well-dressed and belong to upper class ("his father has been a bank president somewhere in Maryland – and he had front" [4, p. 35]). Marginality, on the other hand, is shown as an image formed by outsiders, such as a seaman who states: "The same people control narcotics and communism. Right now they control most of America. [...] Who gets the jobs, [...] American white men like you and me?" [4, p. 59] Lee, who listens to the seaman, doesn't only represent all of the groups feared by the seaman as an abstract threat, but states to have figured out the equation of both junk and post-war dialectics of threat. The key factor that unites both rich hustlers and poor seaman, states Lee, is motivation or the lack of it:

"I came in contact with junk, became an addict, and thereby gained the motivation." [4, p. 8]

This lesson, unlike the lesson of Algren's character degradation, is extracted by Lee, a narrator of junk to be taken further to Burroughs's developing aesthetics. "Junk equation" culminates in the radicalism of Naked Lunch's "algebra of need". Whereas on the surface and in comparison to the later texts Junky might look like a straightforward confessional novel, it actually isn't. Both in the concept of ellipsis that transgresses into excess, and on textual level with its three-step narrative technique it is aimed to place the reader in perpetual doubt. In conclusion, transgressive discourse is inherent to Junky. Placed under examination the text shows both non-linearity of thought and subversive politics of storytelling, which can give us new perspective on understanding Burroughs's later work.

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Анотація

В.С. Гривіна. Трансгресія в «Джанкі» Вільяма Берроуза

Стаття присвячена дослідженню першого роману Вільяма Берроуза «Джанкі» і трансгресивній естетиці, яка згодом стає головною характеристикою авторського стилю. В той час, як окремі літературознавчі роботи розглядають роман як пряmlinійне оповідання в стилістиці бітницького потоку свідомості, або як продовження традиції американської сповідальності, аналіз тексту виявляє витоки наративного експерименталізму, характерного виключно для Берроуза. В ході дослідження автор статті приходить до висновку, що трансгресивна естетика «Джанкі» висвітлюється на двох рівнях. По-перше, не зважаючи на підзаголовок «сповідь», в романі постійно виникають змістовні лакуни. За інтенцією автора, яку він формулює в листуванні, текст повинен виражати виключно голос «джанка». По-друге, текст не співпадає із характером літературного поля США 1950-х. Коріння «Джанкі» знаходяться раніше в європейській, а не американській традиції. Берроуз продовжує європейську лінію в подальших роботах. Естетика «Джанкі» базується на поєднанні підривних висловлювань на кшталт порівняння залежності з розвитком особистості, а також змістовних лакун, які

автор створює для досягнення ефекту присутності читача у фрагментизованій свідомості наратора.

Ключові слова: трансгресія, надлишок, маргінальність, Батай, Фуко.

Аннотация

В.С. Гривина. Трансгрессия в «Джанки» Уильяма Берроуза

Статья посвящена исследованию первого романа Уильяма Берроуза «Джанки», а именно характерной для автора трансгрессивной эстетике, которая в дальнейшем становится визитной карточкой Берроузовского стиля. В то время, как некоторые литературоведы рассматривают роман как пример прямолинейного нарратива в стиле битнического потока сознания, или как продолжение американской традиции литературной исповеди, анализ текста выявляет корни экспериментального дискурса, характерного исключительно для Берроуза. В статье автор приходит к выводу, что трансгрессивная эстетика «Джанки» проявляется на двух уровнях. Во-первых, вопреки подзаголовку «исповедь», текст изобилует смысловыми лакунами. В личной переписке Берроуза мы находим подтверждение того, что намерением автора был создание одного голоса, «джанка». Во-вторых, текст не совпадает с характером литературного поля США 1950-х. Корни «Джанки» – не в американской, а в европейской литературе, что подтверждают последующие тексты автора. Эстетика «Джанки» основана на сочетании подрывных высказываний, подобных сравнению зависимости с личностным развитием, и содержательных лакун, которые создают эффект присутствия читателя в фрагментированном сознании рассказчика.

Ключевые слова: трансгрессия, избыток, маргинальность, Батай, Фуко

Summary

V.S. Grivina. Transgression in W.S. Burroughs's Junky

The aim of this article is to analyze W.S. Burroughs's first novel Junky from the angle of transgressive aesthetics the author comes to be known for in his later works. Whereas a number of literary studies categorize this text as an attempt at straightforward stream of consciousness narrative in style of the Beats, or emulating American confessional tradition, a thorough investigation into Junky's discursive technique shows experimentalism Burroughs will develop later. We would argue that traits constituting Junky's transgression can be divided in two groups. First, in spite of its initial deceiving subtitle "confessions", Junky hides lacunas of information about the narrator, and does it

intentionally as we can see from Burroughs's letters. Second, the text makes no attempts to conform to 1950s audience. Junky shows that its roots are in European rather than American tradition of storytelling, paving the way for Burroughs's later texts, be it Naked Lunch or the Red Night Trilogy. Junky's aesthetics is based on the clash between subversive evocations the likes of comparison of the dependency to personal growth, and semantic lacunas aimed at invoking the reader with an effect of presence.

Keywords: transgression, excess, marginality, Bataille, Foucault

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