

“Life is a cut-up”

In London for *The Final Academy*, a musical celebration of his influence, **WILLIAM BURROUGHS** is joined by **BRION GYSIN** for an interview. “Dentists use music as a painkiller,” says Burroughs. “They always ask me if I want novocalm or music and I tell ’em novocalm.”

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THIS MIGHT NOT be the Garden Of Eden, but God strike me down if the sunshine don't bring it somewhere close. Breakfasting out on the patio – Chelsea Arts Club, September 30, 1982 – basking in the delayed summer heat are William Seward Burroughs and Brion Gysin, venerable serpents if ever there were a pair, whose forbidden fruit has been the most nourishing food for thought and savage amusement these past 23 years.

Nibbled at by every subsequent generation and taken up in earnest by *The Final Academy* students Psychic TV, Cabaret Voltaire, 23 Skidoo and Z'EV, it is still subjected to hysterical howls of moral indignation or ardent admiration, the polarisation itself confirming the pair's position at the forefront of what Jon Savage describes as “the information war” – or “the war between knowledge and anti-knowledge” (Genesis P-Orridge).

Burroughs entered it in earnest in 1959 with the publication of *The Naked Lunch* (his second novel after 1953's *Junky*), which described a phantasmagorical journey back from The Fall from God's grace to a hellish heaven of man's own dreaming via addiction, arousing sex fantasies and unsettling caricature of stereotypes – all pointing a way to violent shedding of conditioning.

Though the controversial campaigning, litigation and literary debate, which finally secured the right to publication in Britain, belongs very much to the lingering post-war puritanism of the early '60s, its impact on an individual picking it up for the first time today is probably as great now as it has ever been.

So the significance of its publication victory rightly pales besides the more lasting influence Burroughs has exerted in that same information war. He »

PAUL NAYKIN / GETTY

“The history of this planet is the history of war”: William S Burroughs in Chicago, March 25, 1981