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Before he was gunned down in the Palace Chop House in Newark, New Jersey, in October 1935, Arthur Flegenheimer, alias Dutch Schultz, was generally considered New York's Number One racketeer. Taken to a hospital following the gangland shooting, he survived for two days. His room was guarded around the clock, and a police stenographer was stationed at his bedside in the hope of learning who his assailant or assailants were. Instead, what was recorded were Dutch's fevered fantasies, stemming from his childhood and youth, as well as his recent past. Taking these "last words" as his starting point, Burroughs has created his own fantasy of Dutch Schultz, casting his fiction in the form of a film script.

The Last Words of Dutch Schultz: A Fiction in the Form of a Film Script Details

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T4ncr3d1 says

Leggere e poi recensire una sceneggiatura non è cosa semplice. Se poi la sceneggiatura è ad opera di William Burroughs ed è stata scritta per rimanere tale, l'impresa sembra impossibile.

Un testo davvero strano, questo, che si distanzia di parecchi anni dalla precedente produzione letteraria di Burroughs; esaurite le combinazioni offerte tramite *cut-up* del manoscritto originale di *Pasto nudo*,

Burroughs sembra indirizzarsi verso la ricerca di linguaggi nuovi. Sebbene l'autore dimostri, nel testo, di avere in mente un film, il libro pare essere proprio un romanzo in forma di sceneggiatura, già "finito".

Singolare è la scelta tematica: la vita (e soprattutto la morte) di Dutch Schultz, gangster degli anni Trenta.

Burroughs ripercorre la sua giovinezza, la sua sfrenata ambizione, l'ingresso nella malavita, la rapida ascesa e poi il crollo, il processo, anche lui, per evasione fiscale, la ripresa e poi l'improvvisa morte. E' soprattutto la morte ad interessare Burroughs: nella lenta agonia il gangster proferà un lungo monologo delirante, registrato da un attento infermiere, sconnesso e confuso al punto da sembrare proprio un testo uscito dalla penna di Burroughs. Peccato, però, che l'autore si limiti a raccontare la sua storia, nel suo solito modo confuso, senza dare alcuna particolare coloritura alla trama. Tutto il suo interesse, al contrario, è rivolto all'aspetto tecnico: in questo, almeno, si riconosce il tocco di Burroughs. L'autore gioca con i personaggi, immaginando attori che ricoprono almeno due ruoli diversi, quasi all'oscuro dello spettatore; gioca con le tecniche di sovrapposizione delle immagini e soprattutto dei suoni, con personaggi che parlano senza aprire bocca e così via.

Un testo breve e singolare, non di facile lettura. Un esercizio estremamente tecnico e poco più.

Bryan says

I've started revisiting Burroughs after years of neglect.

Based on the real life last words of gangster Dutch Schultz, Burroughs presents Schultz' life as experimental film. Burroughs' nightmarish surrealism only appears in controlled bursts. (Many argue this when his work is most effective. See my review of the new audio version of Naked Lunch I'll be writing soon.)

I recommend this book to anyone interested in old school gangsters or experimental film. It's a shame this was never shot by a good director with a proper budget.

The Viking Press hardback is littered with great period photographs and art deco design work.

Jayaprakash Satyamurthy says

One of the best books I've read by Burroughs. The format forces a certain narrative tautness on him. The subject matter, with its immersion in the world of violent crime and a certain seedy, roaring 20s milieu is a natural fit for Burroughs with his fascination for the marginal and disreputable. A wounded gangster dies in a hospital room as the police transcribe his last words hoping to find out who shot him. Instead they get a rambling overview of his life. Burroughs fills in the gaps in the transcribed real-life (or perhaps real-death)

last words of Schultz, telling us a fragmented but vivid tale of delinquency, crime and the rise and fall of a gangster. It's very surreal at times and grittily realistic at others. The interspersed photographs add to the momentum and immersion. This is the real deal, a gangster tale with almost mythic but never romanticised resonances, told in a multimedia-like format by a writer who seems to be at the height of his considerable powers in this work.

Fishface says

Intriguing, slightly surreal rendering of the mob hit that killed Dutch Schultz.

Craig Werner says

Odd duck, even by Burroughs standards. Written as a hybrid film script, gangster novel, and psychological reverie, *Last Words* has moments of intensity reminiscent of *Naked Lunch* or *The Ticket That Exploded*. But most of it is pretty standard gangster rise and fall. For aficionados of Burroughs and mostly for those who have read pretty much all of the fiction.

Mitch says

I have the Grove Press version of this book. Fabulous and dark. Great take on the gangster's actual last words..

Nate says

Deeply occult, absolutely unfilmable screenplay. Satisfied my jones for literary experimentation, gangster lore and massive mojo aimed at adepts.

Perry Whitford says

The Literary Outlaw looking for wisdom in the dying words of gibberish muttered by the Prohibition era gangster Dutch Schultz as he lay in hospital, slipping into the Big Sleep, murdered by The Mob for being too reckless.

As the sub-title suggests, this is basically a film script, fully realized with very specific directions with regards action and sound, highly experimental with quick cuts, loops, characters merging into each other, and even variations of a barking dog for a Greek chorus.

In one sense it's a fairly straight narrative, as we see Dutch from his unwanted birth to his violent death, from truancy to petty criminality and on to full mobsterhood, scenes of sex and violence intercut with archive footage from the Great Depression; and of course, this being Burroughs, apropos of very little, image upon

image of junkies shooting up.

I don't think the film ever got made, but reading this is as good as seeing the final thing, so visual, oral and definitive is the script itself. It may have made a good film, or just as readily an indulgent mess.

I liked the version I conjured up in my head anyway, but I don't think it would have had much commercial appeal.

Scott says

This is a good one from Uncle Bill, but not one of the greats. This screenplay has got a lot of nice imagery plus the screenplay's style of having the film's action running alongside the sound is innovative. You feel like you're watching the movie from reading it, which is great... but this would have worked better as a book. It reads like a routine from "Naked Lunch," though maybe a little tamer. It's fun to see him go into a different literary direction with a screenplay, but this didn't really give him a new dimension of literary power like adopting the cut-up techniques had previous to this. Recommended for Burroughs fans only, newcomers won't see what the fuss is about.

Mike Davis says

Mike is now friends w/Mick Coll & Otto "Abba Dabba Berman."

Louis-ferdinand Goffin says

For the lovers of Old Bill. Same fever as usual in his inimitable style. Liked it !

Dane Cobain says

This is one of Burroughs' more fascinating works, a screenplay that's based upon the death of Dutch Schultz, an American gangster who met his end after being shot in the toilet of a bar - his last words were surreal and nonsensical, and Burroughs twists them even further to give them a brand new meaning and to suit his narrative purposes.

The screenplay was never turned in to a film - in fact, it was never supposed to be one - but it should be. The screenplay's well worth a read.

Leonard Pierce says

Burroughs really finds his metier here. He never strays from his obsessional themes, but the format (an aborted screenplay) lets him get tighter and more precise than he's ever been, and the results are spectacular,

with tons of amazing images.

Jon(athan) Nakapalau says

A very strange book - strange in the beauty it reflects on a very bad person.

Tosh says

Burroughs dice and slice or a re-mix of a dying gangster's last words or thoughts that comes out of his mouth without being totally aware - or aware in quite a different manner. It's a fascinating read of 'history' in a sense, and in the hands of Burroughs it becomes very much a poetic text.

Gabriel Valjan says

In 1969, Burroughs offered up to readers what I think is a neglected masterpiece: *The Last Words of Dutch Schultz* with had the intriguing subtitle "A Fiction in the Form of a Film Script." No film was ever made, though. His kinky humor is there in the script and so is the nightmare, but earlier reviewers had missed one crucial fact: Burroughs had used the last words of the gangster Arthur "Dutch" Flegenheimer verbatim, a mere 2,000 of them, which police stenographers had captured at his bedside after he had been shot at the Palace Chophouse in Newark in October, 1935. The cops had hoped to learn who had shot Dutch and his three colleagues. Tough guy to the end, Dutch was no rat.

There is a famous photo of Dutch face down at his table, which would lead any viewer to conclude that he was dead. Wrong. Dutch was shot in the men's room and, not wanting to die on a bathroom floor, staggered out to his table, sat down, and requested someone call him an ambulance. That someone was Schultz's bodyguard, "Lulu" Rosencrantz, who was mortally wounded, and like a scene out of a black comedy, the big man gets up off of the floor, had staggered over to the barkeep, who was hiding under the counter, and demands change for a quarter so he can use the phone for an ambulance. Dutch had a brandy and tipped the medic \$10,000 to get the best care. Dutch would die two days later.

Burroughs took the transcript and crafted a narrative from Dutch's humorous, stream-of-consciousness ramblings and moments of lucidity. There are cracks about dogs and navy beans. Sure, WSB provides the back-story of the Dutchman's rise from thug to Emperor of Beer Suds and the Harlem Numbers Racket. We get the deal-making, back-stabbing power-plays, the rogue's gallery of criminals, including Bo Weinberg, whom E.L. Doctorow would depict ready for his one-way swim in concrete shoes in the opening pages of *Billy Bathgate*. One expects to hear a dying man's non-sequiturs, the cliché of the 'life flashing before one's eyes,' but WSB goes beyond that. Way beyond.

The script layout is in two columns. Burroughs imagines what the audience should see, with instructions to the cameraman in the left column while, in the right column are Dutch's actual words, at least for the hospital scenes. The left side of the page becomes a running commentary, a call-and-response interaction with the dialog on the right. The reader really gets a glimpse of WSB's extraordinary command of cinematography. He frames each scene with a painter's eye for detail. The dying man's words are what they are from the official transcript, but the genius is in how Burroughs plays the forensic writer who fabricates

scenes in a logical yet illogical, coherent yet incoherent mélange of sights, sounds, and utterances.

WSB creates a memorable character named The Whisperer, who speaks without moving his lips; he uses a tape recorder and his voice sounds like Dutch's. He is Kafka creepy, uncanny. The Whisperer can also speak backwards. He looks like a “grey, anonymous corpse.” It is as if WSB had created a Marvel Comics character, but has him emerge from a drug-induced vision.

Photographs of Dutch Schultz litter the pages, including the dead Dutchman, the German-Jew who died Catholic, sins expunged with Last Rites, the wife in the hallway, father to one son, and millions supposedly locked away in a water-proof safe in the Catskills. It is dark, disturbing, and very gothic in the way only Uncle Bill could write it.

Dan says

Dutch Schultz was a New York gangster of the 1920s and 30s. On October 23, 1935, he was shot by Charles Workman, a hit man who worked for Murder Inc. Schultz was taken to the hospital where he remained alive for 22 more hours; during this time, he was in and out of consciousness. Detectives and a police stenographer sat by his bed, questioning him and writing down what he said. Some say that Dutch Schultz's last words represent a mind in delirium; others think that they are clues to secrets about the criminal underworld. They could also be read as an instance of stream of consciousness poetry.

Although William S. Burroughs's *The Last Words of Dutch Schultz* is structured around the event of the shooting and the police interrogation, in fact this text is not only about Schultz's last words, but also about Schultz's life from his childhood until his death. The text does not include Schultz's last words in their entirety (but there are websites on the Internet where you can read the transcript).

This work differs from other Burroughs works in that it is not a novel, but a film script, with the events in the narrative divided by shot. In addition, the text is divided into columns, with the right hand side describing what is happening on screen, and the left hand side describing what is heard on the soundtrack.

Another difference between this book and other fictions by Burroughs is that this one is relatively linear. While cause and effect relations between scenes are not always clear, the events in the narrative are represented in roughly chronological order, beginning with Dutch Schultz in the hospital, and then flashing back to his childhood and his criminal activities as an adult. However, there is little conventional exposition; I found I had to look up some details about Schultz's life in order to be able to follow the script (and to find out which of the characters are in fact Burroughs's fictions, as opposed to those characters that are based on actual people).

While the dialogue is not experimental in comparison with Burroughs's novels, some of the ideas he suggests for filming the script are. In one section, for instance, Burroughs suggests that the conventions of silent film be employed to represent a particular sequence of events. Elsewhere, he specifies shots using stock footage. There are experiments with the soundtrack, as well as with visual representation. For example, the script includes sequences in which a film sequence is “looped,” and repeatedly interrupts the main action. As well, there are scenes that repeat other scenes, except that they employ different actors.

The book also contains reproductions of photographs, some representing Dutch Schultz and people with whom he is associated, and others representing details from the period in which Schultz lived.

Will Lashley says

“Pardon me, I forgot I am plaintiff and not defendant. Look out. Look out for him. Please. He owed me money; he owes everyone money. Why can't he just pullout and give me control? Please, mother, you pick me up now. Please, you know me. No. Don't you scare me.”

~ Dutch Schultz, aka The Dutchman, on his deathbed

When the bootlegger and gangster Dutch Schultz (original name: Arthur Flegenheimer) was shot down with four of his underlings in the Palace Chop House in Newark, NJ in 1935, the police put him under guard in a local hospital. Stationed by his bed was the police stenographer John Long recording every utterance of the dying man, and a police sergeant detective, Lou Conlon, trying to question the mobster, summoning Shultz in vain through his delirium, trying to prompt some admission or confession or even an accusation against his attackers. Schultz said over 2,000 words during his final night, 23-24 October, 1935, sometimes even drifting into consciousness, his body temperature soaring to 106° F, but when he died the next morning the headline in the New York Times read, “Schultz Dies Of Wounds Without Naming Slayers; 3 Aides Dead, One Dying”. He had taken the Last Rites. (Flegenheimer had converted from Judaism, and was buried in a Catholic cemetery, even though his mother draped a talis over his corpse.). They never read Schultz his Miranda Rights, but it didn't mean a goodamn thing. Dutch had gone to his maker without leaving the law even a clue about his underworld operations and the vast fortune he had hidden away, much of it earned from Schultz's control of the numbers racket.

The notorious beer baron was the man who had taken out “Legs” Diamond and Mad Dog Coll, and many, many others, sometimes torturing his victims before dispatching them. At the time of his death the New York Special Prosecutor Thomas Dewey had indicted Schultz, and The Dutchman retaliated with a death threat of his own, a blood oath against the future Governor and Presidential candidate. He was only 33 years old, but it was rumoured that Schultz had stashed over \$7,000,000 in hiding places in the Catskills Mountains. Even today, fortune hunters walk the banks of the Esopus Creek near Phoenicia, NY in search of Dutch's buried loot. (See Laura Levine's 2001 documentary “Digging for Dutch: The Search for the Lost Treasure of Dutch Schultz”.)

“Mother is the best bet, and don't let Satan draw you too fast.” This was just one of the mysterious things Dutch muttered on his deathbed. When William S. Burroughs learned of the story of Schultz's “last words”, it inspired him to turn his current conceptions of the cut-up, automatism, and the “death of the ego” to the criminal's rambling sleep talk. Burrough's fascination with outlaw violence and the dissolution of language into silence fueled his imagination, and he added to it, inventing parallel ravings and additional intimate oaths, placing them in the mouths of The Dutchman and his actual mob cronies such as Bernard “Lulu” Rosenkrantz, Otto “Abbadabba” Berman and Abraham “the Misfit” Landau, all murdered in the ambush the Palace Chop House. But Burroughs also devised characters of his own making; molls, pimps, flunkies, junkies, deadbeats, corrupt officials, and vicious killers.

The whole mélange was served up with Prohibition era photographs: Dutch and his gang; mugshots; newspaper headlines; pouting floozies; and, silent corpses taking their stories to the grave with them. It was published as a two column screenplay: “The Last Words of Dutch Schultz: A Fiction in the Form of a Film Script”. It is, in my opinion, one of Burroughs' crowning achievements, a conceptual tour de force in the mode of the Warner Brothers gangster films of the 1930s, mayhem, mortal sin, and eternal darkness. It is also very funny in parts, ferocious in others, and a stuttering, feverish, cinematic flood of imagery.

My admiration for "The Last Words of Dutch Schultz" is that it takes the notion of "language as virus" to the final effacement - the death of the author, the extinction of the ego and the reconstitution of aesthetic judgement as the essential creative impulse. As Burroughs wrote in "The Job": "I follow the channels opened by the rearrangement of the text... I may take a page, cut it up, and get a whole new idea for straight narrative, and not use any of the cut-up material at all, or I may use a sentence or two out of the actual cut-up. ... It's not unconscious at all, it's a very objective operation."

Burroughs himself disavowed any experimental intentions. "This is a perfectly straight film treatment, perfectly intelligible to the average reader, in no sense experimental writing," he told Daniel Odier in a 1970 interview.

"Come on, open the soap duckets. The chimney sweeps. Talk to the sword. Shut up, you got a big mouth! Please help me up, Henry. Max, come over here. French Canadian bean soup. I want to pay. Let them leave me alone..."

~ the very last words spoken by The Dutchman, from the police transcripts

Mat says

This is superb. Great story, extremely visual - Burroughs' finest hour if you ask me. This short 'screenplay' is based on the delirious utterings of New Jersey mobster Dutch Schultz as he slowly died from gunshot wounds. Only Burroughs could pull something off like this. and he does it with brilliant panache. the short pan-ins and pan-outs of each mini-scene shot reminded me of the highly effective and highly original cinematography of Jim Jarmusch.

tENTATIVELY, cONVENIENCE says

Burroughs seemed to have entered a very calculated & focused new phase w/ this one. + the publishers seemed to've decided that he deserved careful layout w/ many pictures. This bk is a milestone for me, both for Burroughs & for writing in general. He gets to combine the life of a criminal & delirious writing - both neatly dovetailing.
