

The Ticket That Exploded Study Guide

The Ticket That Exploded by William S. Burroughs

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Plot Summary

"The Ticket That Exploded" is a science fiction novel written by legendary author and poet William S. Burroughs. It serves as the end of the author's Nova trilogy, which explores the methods of control imposed on the human psyche at all levels. These controls are externalized into alien and fantastic forces that reach humankind and corrupt their behavior through addictions. These addictions are effectively viruses that can continue to degrade and fracture humanity by further heightening conflicts between mutually exclusive groups. To counter these ill-effects, the Nova Police are summoned. Led by Inspector Lee, the department responsible for rewiring human behavior must confront and arrest the Nova Mob, the group of viruses and degeneration causing the problems in the first place. The Nova Police do this by splicing tape recordings, video material, and photography together and modifying the appearances and behaviors of the Nova Mob, then playing it back and continually repeating the process until at last the Mob is undone and humanity is free to thrive once more. The cut-up method employed by the Nova Police also turns out to be the very same method employed by the author to create the text. While this apparently disrupts the natural narrative flow of the story and creates long passages of slight alterations of repeated themes, the technique nonetheless points to a far more abstract series of events, as the words, phrases, sentences and paragraphs all behave under a very different set of rules from the standard novel.

"The Ticket That Exploded" rushes back and forth through space, time, points of view, and myriad conflicts, riding the same set of tightly related themes to the very end. Not intended to be read as a standard book by any means, this novel is one of the most original modern attempts at criticizing society and advocating social change, and remains unique decades after its publication for its experimental technique. The Nova Mob is undone in nearly every chapter as the rewrite method continues to change the passages in small means and ways. Pieces of former works were also included in "The Ticket the Exploded," adding a further layer of complexity to the order laid forth by the cut-up method. The inherent idea in this work is that old patterns must be broken in exactly this fashion if humanity is to keep itself from total destruction, and as such, the book remains true to its own method. This is a book to be explored rather than enjoyed; considered, rather than understood; and appreciated for the subliminal qualities that it brings to light by the technique it employs.



see the action, B.J. and winds of time

see the action, B.J. and winds of time Summary

In see the action, B.J., a man named Lee has been traveling with B.J. for quite some time, and has grown sick enough of him that he thinks of murder on a common basis. In fact, he has attempted to murder B.J. several times now, and been unsuccessful. They are members of a military resistance against aliens, and he believes he's the only sane man left at the base he arrived at a while ago.

In winds of time, two alien-infected humans engage in sex inside an abandoned warehouse, inside a spaceship traveling through galaxy X. Lee recalls this incident, from 1962, after which he becomes involved in a group of assassins known as the "White Hunters." The district supervisor of the assassins warns him that they are not like other organizations in that sometimes he must not obey the orders that they send him. He is to help fight against the enemy invasion, and will receive his instructions in things like books and street signs. He continues to recall the chaos of his first missions, and at some point is led into the Garden of Delights by a guard named Carl, who leads him to a hanged man and tells Lee that they were trying to show the hanged man something when killing him. Carl also tells him that he is responsible for having built the entire place. Lee shoots him twice. Later, he calls Scotland Yard and identifies himself as Klinker, asking for Inspector Murdock. Once he begins talking to Murdock, he asks for information regarding someone nicknamed "Genial" in any of his files. Murdock remembers the man, and finds the file for him. "Genial" is a man named Terrence Weld, and he was twenty years old and 5'11" tall when the information was gathered on him. Two years ago, Terrence was found in the car of a man named John Harrison, who hung himself in much the same way of the body that Carl showed Lee. Harrison rigged up a gallows in his barn that would have taken a long time for him to do all by himself, and was found completely naked. Murdock tells Lee to call S.B. for more information on the case. Lee does so, and speaks to a Mr. Taylor, who refuses to give him any information about "Genial" or the case over the phone. Instead, they meet at the Chandoo Bar that evening to discuss particulars of the situation. Harrison was found with three tape recorders, rigged to record and play back and record over again. He recalls the laughter of "Genial," and Mr. Taylor admits he considered the laughter a disease, or at least infectious. Both Lee and Taylor realize that this laughter is a biological weapon somehow, but neither can determine why "Genial" would target Harrison first. Taylor recorded much of his interview with "Genial," and spliced it up in much the same way as Harrison's tape recorders had been programmed to do. He offers to let Lee listen to them. Lee does play the tapes, which have been altered so that sentences and sounds have been mixed together out of sequence. There is a very strange, hypnotic aspect to the recording, and Lee is convinced that is the nature of the mysterious alien they are fighting—as the alien itself is a virus. At the time of Harrison's death, he was trying to get "Genial" to come back with him, but "Genial" was living with another man called Robert Cunningham. The tape-splicing is clearly what destroyed Harrison and drove him to suicide, and Lee realizes that "Genial" didn't figure out this



method of assassination or recording by himself, which means he must have had help from others who already knew of it. There are in fact, many more people who have produced similar tapes, but Taylor insists that the operators are no longer real people, that is to say that once the recording and permutating process is complete, the tapes themselves transmit the virus, not the people who made them. Lee is told that he can find "Genial" any night at a place called Boots. He returns to his base and goes into the prison that holds many infected humans. A man named Bradly contacts a new Chinese prisoner and they kill an alien guard to release the rest of the prisoners. The group attacks the enemy guard tower and blasts the prison open. A demolition squad is preparing to destroy the rest of the Garden of Delights. From there, Leo goes to Boots and finds "Genial." He helps "Genial" score drug supplies and calls him back to his place. Lee has met "Genial" before, and is immune to the effects of the tape-virus. They travel to a hillside and recall the time they once used to spend together.

see the action, B.J. and winds of time Analysis

The opening sections explore something of a daunting and confusing range of subjects, from aliens using viruses to take over the Earth to the effects of that virus on human sexuality. Lee is thus far cast as the main character, but it is probably a good idea at this point for the reader to stop trying to apply such labels to elements in this book. Though it does appear to have something of a plot, the narrative becomes easily sidetracked by large skips in point of view or passage of time. Lee, for instance, claims to be the only sane person left on the base, though he seems to be hallucinating, which would contradict this completely. The stories he tells are not necessarily in order, and it is very difficult through much of winds of time to follow chronologically or even spatially what is taking place. This is not merely due to the difficulties inherent in grasping the author's style. Instead, the author has deliberately put characteristics of the standard story such as "characters" and "plot" away in order to experiment with the cut-and-paste method of story creation. As such, stretches of generally coherent events—such as his time with B.J. and his conversation with Taylor about "Genial,"—are interrupted without warning by flashbacks, point-of-view-shifts, and exposition that appears garbled precisely because it is more or less random placing of odd phrases from the author's previous works. It is all well and good for the reader to try to supply a larger sense of meaning to these sections, but the reader should be equally advised that this book has been deliberately designed to make such attempts impossible, just as it is impossible not to try. This scenario, which the reader might readily interpret as Lee's fractured state of mind, is fairly typical of Burroughs' work, who associated with very well-known members of the literature community in the early 1960s and was himself considered a genius. He was, as a result, able to publish works that experimented with language in this and similar fashions (this is the third such book he released using this method, and they are considered a trilogy). So far, the story appears to focus on Lee's relationships to both "Genial" and B.J., but the cut-up method is nothing if not random, and the narrative begins a dramatic shift in winds of time that will continue through most of the book.



in a strange bed and do you love me

in a strange bed and do you love me Summary

'In a strange bed' finds spaceship pilot Lykin and his copilot Bradley having lost control of their spaceship as aliens hurtle it towards a poisonous gas cloud in space. The ship lands on a strange planet as a telepathic fish-boy they've stowed away with them calls him over. Lykin goes to the fish boy.

Ali suddenly wakes in his apartment, but is thrown out by the manager. He goes out into the streets, then buys a strange creature that looks like a newt with a human head. He leaves and gets lost in a canal maze filled with the same creatures. He finds a prison guard who allows him to stay safe for several days. Meanwhile, the newt-boys are growing up everywhere, and when Ali leaves the series of canals, he must dodge giant land crabs that have appeared. One night an explosion releases a giant cloud of poisonous gas into the air. Ali escapes, but suddenly awakens as he flees toward an open canal. He complains about the interruption of his image-track, but is kicked out onto the streets and experiences very similar events as he did in his image-track. He is eventually hanged in much the same way as Lee witnessed earlier.

In 'do you love me,' Bradley is with a monk who plays a love tape that replays images of love and loss over and over again with the splice method described in previous sections.

in a strange bed and do you love me Analysis

The tapes clearly play an important role in the novel by now. These were created (although perhaps not originally) by "Genial," and several characters seem convinced that they are alien in nature, and can be thought of as either viruses or control devices, depending on who is considering them. Another layer of complexity has emerged—the tapes themselves, supposedly conversations that have been spliced back together to make new ones, not only play a heavy role in the way that characters interpret reality, they also very closely mimic the cut-up method the author used to produce the work in the first place. Much of the "exposition" in this section is a random re-hash of words from other works from the same author. Even more, the section in which Ali wakes up twice is more or less the same writing spliced into the book twice and edited as little as possible. This kind of narrative (not an appropriate word for it, but the closest there is) becomes very common throughout the rest of the book.



operation rewrite and the nova police

operation rewrite and the nova police Summary

In "operation rewrite," it is announced that the word, or "other half" of the human body, has become a virus, a parasitic organism, and it attacks the human mind. It was once healthy, in much the same way cancer cells were once healthy body cells, however it has recently become unhealthy given recent manipulations in technology, which most of human history has been without. The invasion of the virus has taken advantage of this fact and used the technology to spread and corrupt itself further, and a District Supervisor responsible for it feels awful for humans even though it is forbidden to do so. He decides, in fact, that his colonists have managed the situation of the virus outbreak so poorly, that he must call in the Nova Police. Nevertheless, the situation has grown very uncertain and humans have become very difficult to control. Consisting of two halves, humanity was taken over by the Venusian boy-girls, but these possessed a powerful engineering flaw, until eventually the Venusians themselves refused to cooperate. Hence, the invaders realized that they had to rewrite the other half of humanity, but met with even more resistance when trying to do so, from groups such as Heavy Metal addicts, control addicts, and many others. This Venusian Element is known as Johnny Yen, and like the other important officers of the resistance movement, he must either be rewritten or discarded completely.

In "nova police," the nova police are called in to keep the protestors out of the rewrite room. Inspector Lee arrives in order to keep earth from unraveling completely. His method will be to avoid and prevent as many conflicts as possible, as the insurgents have distracted humanity by making as many of these as he can. However, it is the feedback between these conflicts that Nova Criminals exploit. These criminals are specifically referred to as the Nova Mob. They are: Sammy the Butcher, Green Tony, the Brown Artist, Jacky Blue Note, Limestone John, Izzy the Push, Hamburger Mary, Paddy the Sting, the Subliminal Kid, the Blue Dinosaur, Willy the Rat, Mr and Mrs D, who are Mr Bradly Mr Martin. Earth is in terrible shape, and in danger of going nova. The mob needs to be handed over to the Biological Department and modified immediately. Law agencies on Earth were already so corrupted by the mob's influence as to be useless in this matter before the Nova Police could intervene, and as a result, the Nova Police has found its most useful agents in the ranks of criminals and other dissidents, many of whom nevertheless still lose control while trying to make an arrest. The process of arrest involves blocking the Nova Criminal's access to his coordinate points, people actually on Earth, which he or she reaches through whatever form of addiction is present in the human's nervous system. However, at this point, the arrests should be easy because the enemy control machine has been disabled. Sammy the Butcher and Paddy the Sting are arrested almost immediately. Hamburger Mary defects and works with the Nova Police. Green Tony surrenders, and the Nova Police prepare to move in for further arrests. When the operation is completed, the District Supervisor and his staff are ordered to proceed with their rewriting operations.



operation rewrite and the nova police Analysis

The section in which Inspector Lee provides his explanation of what is transpiring on Earth is one of the clearest in the novel. That is not saying much, as no doubt the reader will have begun to cringe at the sight of overhyphenated pages. It should be stated once again that while it is almost unavoidable to try to make sense of the novel, sentence by sentence, doing so will hopelessly frustrate the reader. Consider: this section insists that humans are composed of two parts. The best way, then, to continue to read this work (as it gets profoundly more complicated with each section), is to pay attention to the images or thoughts evoked by each phrase or sentence. The connections between all of the sentences in a paragraph is tenuous at best, at least on the conscious level, and so fighting too hard against the grain of the narrative will result in confusion and frustration. The most important thing for the reader to retain, plotwise, is that the beings invading and manipulating Earth are not biological creatures, and that the members of the Nova Mob did not operate, strictly speaking, with our dimensional limitations. Many of the Nova Mob have already been mentioned in one way or another, and, of course, Lee's role as a Nova Police Inspector has been made clear, if anything at all can be made clear in this text. However, this fact may confuse the reader's expectations somewhat, on several levels. Typically, invasions of Earth are viewed as a threat, but this book focuses on the invasion's mismanagement instead, citing the inevitable problems that arose from humanity having two halves and attempting to control one through manipulating the other irresponsibly. These problems are conflict, such as nuclear war and the idea of Nova, which is essentially a destruction of the planet by trying to control people by replaying their worst habits over and over again.



writing machine and substitute flesh

writing machine and substitute flesh Summary

In "writing machine," metal addicts have gathered inside the exhibition room. All of their music and talking is captured by tape recorders and writing machines that shift sounds and words. Anyone in the room can enter their own text and get out stories with the same text having been shifted and around in the fashion described earlier. Most of the Nova Mob has been caught and disabled.

In "substitute flesh," countless pictures are taken of those who wish to enter the amusement park's sex area. The photos are then matched with prospective partners and fused with them and all sorts of other photographs. This process continues inside the area as well, once people have been admitted. Bradley arrives and begins the procedure alongside the tape playback procedure. Bradley watches the movie that is created as a result, and undergoes the same procedure the very next day, and for many thereafter. A bulletin from the rewrite project reminds readers of it that the best way to resist the Nova Mob is to maintain alertness during sexual activity. Bradley and his companion Hans practice this in the amusement park. The non-biological entities rely on this process to stay in control of humanity and make more of themselves. Bradley helps more subjects into the cubicles, which are lowered to sensory withdrawal or deprivation tanks.

writing machine and substitute flesh Analysis

Both of these sections detail processes that include the tape-splicing method discussed earlier in the book, different variations on the procedure through different mediums such as videotape, photography, and writing. The writing itself strongly resembles these methods, and this is actually the focal point of these sections. The rewrite department is doing their work on the subjects to undo the damage done by using the playback procedure irresponsibly—that is to say all these people need rewrites because they have been listening and playing back the worst aspects of their behavior. This powerful literary device should not be underestimated in its significance throughout the rest of the novel. It is important to remember that in the world presented by this book, language is a virus, and the author is, in essence, showing us how the virus works, how it has been corrupted, and how it can be fixed.



the black fruit and all members are worst a century

the black fruit and all members are worst a century Summary

In "the black fruit," a fish boy tears Lykin's space suit open, and Lykin blacks out. He has visions of being back on Mars, then feels as though he is drifting even farther out to space, struggling in and out of consciousness. He then finds himself in a "Flower Market," accepts a deal of two black fruit, and breaks the surface of the water. His canoe lands on the shore amidst tree-frog people, then he loses consciousness once more. Several hunters come for him and call him away, leading him to an ancient palace deep within the wilderness. He is told that his present form is unsuitable and that he must change.

In "all members are worst a century," the population of Ward Island is plagued by a hallucination-causing disease that eventually cripples the one infected. The viewpoint character (most likely Lykin, possibly Lee), is taken through this island until they reach a pier. The island's only hotel owner tells him that Ward Island used to export fruit (like the black fruit mentioned in the previous section), but was quarantined. The owner also tells him that none of the natives will take him to the center of the island since that is where the disease originated. This turns out to be the case as the viewpoint character and his assistant purchase their own canoe and make their way into the center of the island on July 8, 1862. He encounters the disease by the ninth, and it is, not surprisingly, the tape disease. He and his man, Jimmy, are both infected and quickly are driven mad from the disease. He begins to fantasize about hanging himself.

the black fruit and all members are worst a century Analysis

The physical presence of any of the characters should be highly suspect to the reader at this point. Several times now, a scene has begun on a spaceship only to shift suddenly to a completely different locale. Many different layers of reality have been squashed together, and so what began as Lykin having his suit ripped open became a search on this new island. The reader is not told what he is searching for, where he comes from, or even what planet he is on. The personalities of the characters is also highly flexible—mentions of his man Jimmy sound as though this were one of the Nova Mob, but the nature of the novel is such that any definitive description of the characters quickly loses traction. Just as space is far from absolute, time is distorted. The narrative switches from 1862 to 1962 and back again relatively quickly.



combat troops in the area and vaudeville voices

combat troops in the area and vaudeville voices Summary

In "combat troops in the area," combat troops are deployed to fight the Insect People of Minraud. Crab people try to use Green Boy to find a way to stay in control of the situation. A crab guard makes his way towards Green Boy, who reveals his controller, an old woman shouting for her guards. The barrier collapses, the other extraterrestrial beings are pushed back. Kiki wakes from a dream in a strange bed, and when he goes outside, a voice in his head, from Ali, God of the Streets, tells him to stand aside. Ali directs him to the "towers" and is told that he is responsible for organizing Venusian front lines, and that they are charged with sabotaging enemy communication. He shows him how to do this, and suddenly John and Bill are trying to listen to static through a phone. John tells Bill that time isn't measured by actions, but words, and that he wants them to listen forward ten years, which eventually they succeed in doing.

In "vaudeville voices," Lee speaks to B.J. once again, and says that after this, America can be everything that it wasn't before. The Shakespeare squadron, the writers that is, are recalled to the base. They are going to write history as it happens, in present time. They want to rewrite America's roles into something valuable, arranging five new divisions to help fight against the corrupting invaders.

combat troops in the area and vaudeville voices Analysis

What was once an interstellar policing action has taken on the visage of a war, the methods by which it is fought are unclear, and the conflict appears to range over vast periods of time, always invoking strange ways of thinking and apparently delusional perspectives. The character Ali has returned, only now he is God of the Streets. Lee's dialogue has also reappeared, and the alien resistance takes on a very different form from what it was given in prior chapters. The conflict has scaled itself down from an existential one to a national one, but not completely. Fantastic characters still color the scene, and the strange logic of the narrative continues.



terminal street and last round over

terminal street and last round over Summary

In "terminal street," Bradly walks through the streets of Minraud as a boy explains his surroundings and tells him that he's going to meet his Elder, inside of a round metallic chamber. Bradly is the first human to be here, and he is very dangerous as a visitor. The guide places him into a cubicle, where they begin the tape splicing process again. The world Bradly is now on works very differently from Earth, as heat is known to kill emotion.

In "last round over," the rewrite on Mr Bradly Mr Martin continues, imploring him to remove all of his "White Smoke," and other forms of control. The tapes of him fade, he says goodbye to the other Nova criminals, and Mr Martin is ejected from his dual being.

terminal street and last round over Analysis

The story, or as much as a work like this can be called a story, is approaching its climax. Where we have previously seen the tape-splicing method employed to corrupt and then improve human behavior, this passage demonstrates how it is used to eject malfunctioning programs. Bradly, originally identified as one of the Nova Mob members, is in the process of being rewritten. And, why not? Much of the book prior to now appears to have rewritten itself many times over, giving the entire narrative the feeling of impermanence, and yet despite this perception, the story continues to draw nearer to its ephemeral conclusion. As the rewrite department's job is to try to fix what is going wrong in human behavior, Bradly is the perfect candidate to follow completely through the process.



call the old doctor twice and shuffle cut

call the old doctor twice and shuffle cut Summary

In "call the old doctor twice," the word dust begins to fall, and the international board representing global business interests has its control machine disconnected. The Nova Mob frantically attempt to pack their belongings and bail from Earth, in a desperate effort to evade the Nova Police. They call their Doctor, but he's of no use. They try to call Green Tony, but Tony has already bailed to another galaxy. They then try to shove the Doctor out into space, but he awakens, and when the remainder of the Mob ask him how to deal with the Nova Police, he informs them that the entire act was a set-up from the very start, and that there is no way to avoid the end. George Raft enters to protest the situation.

In "shuffle cut," the Nova Police move in quickly to make more arrests. The mob panics and argues frantically with itself. Deadliners are called in—and nearly destroy the Earth with a very high energy version of poker. However, the act does not succeed, and the mob is forced to watch their control system come apart, along with the Garden of Delights.

call the old doctor twice and shuffle cut Analysis

The stories' nature has, from the outset, been entirely repetitive, and one should not that demolition squads moved in and destroyed the Garden of Delights near almost the beginning of the novel. Even different-seeming struggles (crab people v. insect people, and Nova Mob v. Nova Police, for example) still operate under similar rules and explore the same themes. Many of the scenes with Bradly, Lykin, and Ali mimic themselves in a similar fashion, carrying out the same idea under slightly different variations.



in that game? and showed you your air

in that game? and showed you your air Summary

In "in that game," the Fluoroscopic Kid warns the reader to watch and pay careful attention to the game before trying to play, so that one can understand it entirely. He discusses the "other half" and the cessation of speech. He then insists on playing poker, and says that the other half was never necessary for humanity to begin with.

Meanwhile, the Subliminal Kid has defected to the Nova Mob and joined the Nova Police. He has moved to the rewrite department to handle all subliminal rewrites. He explains that the process requires three recording devices, one on five-second playback, another on record, and another on three-second playback (though the third tape can be changed after a while). He also explains that the same procedure can be used to the same effect with two videotapes spiced together at 24 frames per second. He cites the effects and situations of his previous experimental uses of these techniques and other similar ones.

In "showed you your air," the Subliminal Kid reveals himself to be Inspector Lee. He tells the rewrite department to write as many alternatives to the explosion of the planet as possible. He orders the Nova Mob to shut off their sound-tracks. He replaces their sounds and actors, and ends their ticket with his subliminal bulletins, saying goodbye to Mr Bradley Mr Martin in particular

in that game? and showed you your air Analysis

Inspector Lee appears once again, this time revealing himself to have been the Subliminal Kid, once a member of the Nova Mob. This character revelation further distorts the nature of all the characters, but not by much. Even though Lee was once one of the more coherent voices in the novel, the fact that he is also the Subliminal Kid does very little to disrupt the book, and only reinforces the ephemeral quality of the characters in general. The account of how Inspector Lee completes his rewrites is very telling, but again is no surprise, as it is completely similar to the methods described throughout the book to this point. Again, the reader is confronted by a narrative that, even though it clearly lacks anything coherent enough to genuinely be called a story, nonetheless follows its own logic, and in fact does so very closely. Every phrase, every sentence, and every paragraph is charged with its own order, and though the logic of these arrangements is far from typical, it is nonetheless very strong, and exists on a subliminal level.



let them see us and silence to say goodbye

let them see us and silence to say goodbye Summary

In "let them see us," the reader is told that a recording played back with thirty-five frames per second causes many of the frames to enter the brain subliminally, so that many of the images are subliminal in nature, and go directly into the viewer's unconscious, rewriting it directly. The symbols of American culture are reviewed briefly.

In "silence to say goodbye," the actors onstage bid farewell to the viewers. John takes Billy and sits him in front of the boxes of recorders, asking him to read from his novel. He wants them to be able to listen to it at the same time ten years from now. They perform the tape-splicing procedure with the words read. John takes an hour to rearrange them, and Bill reads a story written by F. Scott Fitzgerald. The boy complains that they are all dead, have turned into viruses, and are in hell, and that the only way to escape from hell is through repetition. He implores them that it is unacceptable to adopt anyone else's identity because the consequences are disastrous. The sale of heavy metal, or indeed any addictive substance is strongly discouraged, and the only solution is "total exposure." A general appears to soldiers and tells them all their work was worthless. They loot the "Beauty Banks," and Image contests begin to spiral out of control in America until the American public wises up to what's going on. The writers are encouraged to give it up. Mr Bradly Mr Martin is blamed for the actors who disappeared. Goodbye's and explanations of characters like Johnny Yen, Ali the Incandescent Streetboy, Kiki, Poo Poo the Dummy, and Miranda the Orchid girl are given weakly.

let them see us and silence to say goodbye Analysis

Even though the book was spliced together in a considerably random fashion, this near to the end of it still reads as though it were reaching a swift conclusion, as the words and images employed by the Nova Mob continue to unravel and are remade into new ones. The interaction between John and Bill also manages to sound like one that occurred much earlier in the book, and again, this is still the process which has been explained constantly throughout the book. These are the rewrites, the undoing of Mr Bradly Mr Martin's dual nature and erasure of the stage presences that once made life on Earth doomed to failure in destruction.



the invisible generation

the invisible generation Summary

The idea that what we see is in large part what we hear is reiterated, and it is explained once again that switching the sounds of two separate scenes appears to lend aspects of the one to the other. It again reviews the process for splicing sounds together to make words. This process, according to the narrator, creates sense from meaninglessness, and can be used to generate entire events if used responsibly. It is highly recommended by the narrator that people try this technique on all sorts of things, and be experimented with on the streets and in parties and other situations. This process can improve a person's skill at a certain task if properly employed. The more people who record conversations, the more applications for the technique will be discovered and explored by the people experimenting with the method. b. and j., for example, are subjects in this experiment, and countless variations of the process are possible. In this fashion one can better control one's responses, stop arguing and complaining, and become a better person, or at least a person with a better role to play in life. One can even combat facism and promote social change. This process is already being used to make things awful. Take newspapers, for example. The only way to counter this is to cut up the ugly recordings into smaller and smaller bits and couple them with positive recordings.

the invisible generation Analysis

Though the rest of the book may in all honesty be considered somewhat garbeled and difficult to distill, if not outright random, the author presents a fairly cogent argument about breaking patterns of behavior at the very end of the book. It begins sounding somewhat fantastical, and the method is almost certainly not successful, but his point about the media magnifying the worst aspects of human behavior is well-taken, and this is even more true in many ways than when the book was written over fifty years ago.



Characters

Bradly

Mr Bradley Mr Martin is a member of the Nova Mob who is targeted and subjected to rewriting. His character is featured the most throughout the novel, and in this sense he functions as the main character, however his personality, circumstances, and objectives appear to shift greatly throughout the novel. Most commonly, his character is seen experiencing the rewrite process of the cut-up method. By the end of the book, Mr Martin is eliminated from Bradley's dual nature, and this action helps free him from the endless cycle of degeneration. Bradley also possesses many bizarre sexual habits. He also serves as Lykin's copilot on a spaceship early in the novel. During Inspector Lee's lecture on the Nova Mob, he is also referred to as Mr and Mrs D, but that name is not repeated again throughout the novel.

Inspector Lee

Inspector Lee is a member of the Nova Police who arrives and controls operations against the Nova Mob. The nature of his character is somewhat puzzling, however, as he also later reveals himself to be the Subliminal Kid, a member of the Nova Mob (merely reflecting the unusual structure of the novel itself rather than being a bonafide contradiction). Inspector Lee is a major proponent of the cut-up method, and explains it numerous times throughout the book, insisting it is both what has gone wrong with humanity and the means to fix it. In some scenes, Lee addresses his thoughts and dialogue towards his longtime companion, B.J., and although B.J. never responds, Lee hates the other man and has tried to kill him several times.

Ali

Also known as Ali the God of the Streets and Ali the Incandescent Street Boy, this character wanders the streets and undergoes the cut-up method in a few sections. Like Bradley, he has bizarre sexual habits. He often provides sexual favors to people in return for places to stay or other services.

Lykin

Lykin appears to be a spaceship captain stranded on an unfamiliar planet. He is attacked by a fishboy and nearly dies, but awakens to find himself wandering Ward Island, although it is not clear at this point that "he" is still Lykin. He makes this trip with his man, Jimmy. Both are infected by the cut-up virus.



B.J.

B.J. is apparently a longtime companion of Lee's who accompanies him to the base where everyone has been driven insane. The two share a mutual dislike for each other, and spend considerable time trying to kill one another.

Jimmy

Jimmy is an assistant to Lykin in a few chapters. He gets infected by the cut-up virus alongside Lykin.

District Supervisor

The District Supervisor is responsible for smooth operations on Earth, and when it becomes clear how badly the planet has been mismanged, he calls in the Nova Police to combat and get rid of the Nova Mob.

John

John Harrison is a man who hung himself after being deserted by "Genial," but also appears to be a friend to a man named Billy. He may also be Johnny Yen and Limestone John from the Nova Mob. He has Billy record sections of his novel and re-records them using the cut-up method, wanting them to be able to listen to exactly the same recording in ten years.

The Doctor

The Doctor is called by the Nova Mob to help them make their escape, but when he confesses there is nothing they can do, they grow angry with him and try to eject him out into space.

The Flourosopic Kid

The Flourosopic Kid is a sort of cosmic card-player who warns the reader to watch the game carefully for a long time before playing. He may possibly be the Subliminal Kid and Inspector Lee, but the text is unclear on this point.

Billy

Billy is Johnny's friend, who reads his novel as John uses the cut-up method on it. There is a large chance that "Billy" is actually the author, William.



Sammy The Butcher

Sammy the Butcher is a member of the Nova Mob who is arrested almost immediately.

Paddy The Sting

Paddy The Sting is a member of the Nova Mob who is arrested almost immediately.

Hamburger Mary

Hamburger Mary is a member of the Nova Mob who defects almost immediately.

Green Tony

Green Tony is a member of the Nova Mob who surrenders.

The Brown Artist

The Brown Artist is a member of the Nova Mob.

Jackie Blue Note

This person is a member of the Nova Mob.

Izzy The Push

This person is a member of the Nova Mob.

The Blue Dinosaur

The Blue Dinosaur is a member of the Nova Mob.

Willy The Rat

Willy The Rat is a member of the Nova Mob.



Objects/Places

Tape Recorders

Tape recorders are used in the novel to record, splice, playback, and record again. This is both the method that the viruses (or Nova Mob) uses to make itself stronger, and the process by which they are arrested and disposed of.

Video Cameras

A similar technique is used with Video Cameras as is with tape recorders.

Heavy Metal

Though the nature of this substance is never revealed, it is a source of addiction for many people in the novel and a means of control utilized by the Nova Mob.

Spaceships

Spaceships are featured a few times in the novel.

Fish boys

These alienesque creatures are featured throughout the book

Newt boys

Ali purchases a newt boy and walks through a community of them near a series of canals.

Crab Guards

Crab guards are another alien race vying for control of earth.

Insect People

Insect People from the City of Minraud battle against the crab people for control of earth.



Nova Mob

The Nova Mob is a group of intergalactic criminals responsible for the degeneration of humanity.

Nova Police

The Nova Police are an intergalactic group of enforcers that tries to prevent worlds from going nova.

White Smoke

White smoke is another substance used by the Nova Mob to maintain control over Earth.

Garden of Delights

Featured several times throughout the Novel, the Garden of Delights is a sort of twisted amusement park that serves alternately as the Nova Mob's control center and the rewrite department's base of operations.

Ward Island

Ward Island is an undeveloped Island under quarantine because of the tape virus that broke out there in 1862

City of Minraud

The City of Minraud is home to the alien insect people and shelters their Elder. Apparently, human visitors are dangerous to this place.



Themes

Infection

One of the earliest themes explored by the novel is that of a viral or parasitic infection. This theme is present through many works of science fiction and in particular is commonly explored in the works of William S. Burroughs, and usually is paired with some kind of alien invasion. In the case of this particular virus, language has become corrupted and is the source of the contagion. It is important to keep in mind that Burroughs does not insist that language itself is the problem, but instead the way in which language is utilized in modern society, which when coupled with technologies just emerging in the early 60s, became agents for the rapid spread of what Burroughs considered to be vulgar and corrupt. This infection, according to the author, was driving humanity towards certain destruction, and the only way to combat it is to use the cut-up method on the language it used to spread, which was also represented by addiction, the Nova Mob, and international corporations. It is interesting to note that the Nova Mob, which was in many ways the personification of this virus, attempted to contact The Doctor in order to help them escape the Nova Police. The nature of this virus is not biological, strictly speaking, but operates independently on the mind through the agents of the Nova Mob, who are attempting to destroy the earth.

Addiction

Very closely related to the concept of infection in this novel is that of addiction. Numerous addictions, including drugs, "Heavy Metal," "White Smoke," and control are cited throughout the novel, and all are used as a means of control from the Nova Mob to the humans on Earth. The cycle of addiction is ultimately self-destructive, and this cycle plays itself out on many levels throughout the novel. On the individual level, characters are exposed to the worst aspects of their own behavioral makeup until they self-destruct, typically by hanging, as this image recurs several times in the text. On the social level, addictions are also paired with processes like language and international affairs, in which the worst aspects of any given situation tend to repeat themselves and get worse with each repetition. This function of social behavior is adequately viral and addictive in its processes, that the author is able to draw a fairly clear relation between the two themes, and both are generally explored hand in hand, though when using the perspective of infection the word "virus" is typically used, and when looking at the problem through the lens of an addiction the Nova Mob is more commonly utilized. The author himself had several powerful drug addictions in his lifetime, and the text reflects a very personal understanding of the way in which addiction influences one's state of mind.



Invasion

The aliens in this novel do not represent any sort of physical threat to the planet Earth, and indeed it is far from clear whether they are really physical entities at all. Additionally, in this particular novel, the invasion appears to have taken place a long time ago in the guise of the District Supervisor and his subliminal department. That is to say, that the invasion may just represent the continual progress of human society, just as the virus and Nova Mob represent society's degeneration. This is strongly supported by the fact that Inspector Lee himself appears to be an extraterrestrial force, and works against the mob to prevent the world from going Nova, or destroying itself in a nuclear war. Just as the invasion itself is primarily non-physical, the means to control it and improve humankind do not involve direct interference, but rather the cut-up method, applied to the members of the Nova Mob. The strange nature of the world which is featured in *The Ticket That Exploded* makes absolute connections between objects, subjects, and metaphors difficult to establish with any certainty, and there are doubtless many allegorical connections between the invasion and aspects of society at large. Supporting this idea is the fact that the invasion takes on several different physical forms, being Crab Guards versus Insect People at one point, prisoners defeating their captors at another, and the Nova Police arresting the Nova Mob in still other chapters.

Style

Point of View

The point of view of the novel is constantly shifting from first person to third person to third-person omniscient with a conversational tone directed at the reader. The point of view can hardly be characterized as reliable, as it is extraordinarily difficult to determine what is happening, and indeed doesn't make sense throughout most of the novel to say that something is, in fact "happening" at all. However, the point of view presented in this novel is critical in many ways, far more so than elements like characters and plot, since it is developed by the cut-up method and demonstrates the main ideas as explored by the author. This allows the message of the novel itself to play a huge role in its own construction, and winds up having significant value all throughout the book.

The book contains mostly random-seeming phrases and sentences, generally connected together through the use of dashes rather than periods, though in some instances periods are used, and in others punctuation is foregone altogether. This is due to the experimental nature of the novel, which was created by the cut-up method, and while it is confusing to try and follow the story in any typical way, the separate passages do appear to follow a vague and elusive logic of their own. This is, however, a very difficult novel to read through, as it is likely completely different from anything the reader will have encountered. It appears to be a short work, but may present quite a challenge to the reader to finish.

Setting

The novel is set in a fantastical world of alien invasions, bizarre humanoid creatures, and highly unusual gatherings. To make matters even more complicated, the setting often seems to erase itself halfway through a chapter or paragraph, and the reader suddenly finds that the region described by the book has changed dramatically. It makes less sense to describe the setting in terms of physical location than it does in terms of the language used to describe the areas therein. Many structures, creatures (such as fish boys and newt boys) glow with phosphorescence, also referred to as iridescence. Even clouds of poisonous gas seem to glow. The streets of Earth or whatever other planets the narrative may describe are always filled with bizarre humanoid characters performing lewd acts and typically hooked up to vaguely described machines that enhance or otherwise alter the experience. Distant galaxies are apparently traveled to instantaneously, and many of the scenes described appear to either have been dreams or images created by technological machines that allow people to experience things without going anywhere. The prisons do not seem well-guarded, and instead of being walled in, the prisoners themselves appear to roam free in vast labyrinthine structures. Two specific times, 1962 and 1862, are mentioned, but do not appear to play a very significant role in the novel.



Language and Meaning

Though the Language and Meaning of the novel is absolutely central to the work in a very unique way, the nature of this language is so evasive and indirect as to make the identification of its smaller elements exceedingly difficult. The language of the novel is a highly complex structure that does not operate in the same fashion as the standard novel. The cut-up method used to create this book literally involved the author cutting up pieces of this work and previous works, and generally pasting them together in a seemingly random fashion. Though this result was edited, it was not edited for clarity and cohesion, at least not in any graspable sense of those words. Instead, the strange subliminal and aesthetic appeal of the sentences themselves were fostered, so that while two phrases or sentences might in fact have no relation to one another, they nonetheless appear to be part of the same idea by virtue of them having been next to one another. The meaning of this book is exactly to demonstrate that bizarre principle of language, and in the more coherent parts of the text, similar procedures and observations are made about conversations, people, and places. The idea that Burroughs is trying to elucidate is that most of what humankind takes to be common and inevitable is really just these sorts of recordings playing themselves over and over, and though it would be difficult to say that he made his point well through the book, the words do appear to follow an eerie logic of their own.

Structure

The book is divided into twenty-one sections. Each section is labeled with a short, completely lower case phrase, and none of the sections run very long. Their length is very possibly standardized by the cut-up method used by the author in creating the book. The sections are generally named with something that relates vaguely to the contents. Some of the sections, most notably the first and last, contain relatively simple and easy to understand passages, but for the most part the majority of all sections contain large portions of cut-up text, which is for the most part a random collection of words where the reader must supply the majority of the meaning and significance. While extraordinarily difficult to adjust to in the beginning, the structure of the novel nevertheless is of critical importance to the book, being a very strong example of the cut-up method that the author wishes to demonstrate.

The novel cannot be said to have anything along the lines of a "pace," as it is an erratic and chronologically jumbled piece of work, and rarely deals with events at all. For the most part, it is a series of strange observations about what changes or experiences the characters have.



Quotes

"Mr Taylor was dressed in a light-blue suit the shoulders so broad as to give an impression of deformity...little scar where a harelip had been corrected..red face..light-blue eyes" (Winds of Time, p. 15).

"(The concomitance or rather juxtaposition with this relentlessly successful though diagrammatic schemata by sexualizing syntactically delinquent analogous metaphor)" (Winds of Time, p. 27).

"Mr. Brion Gysin suggests that a nuclear disaster in what is now the Gobi desert wiped out all traces of a civilization that made such a disaster possible" (Do you love me, p. 50).

"Roller skates twisted in metal arcades—pools and canals reflected carrying grey umbrellas - flickering over swimming boys as the magnetic silver light popped sound a image flakes" (The writing machine, p. 63).

"Absent tentants stood naked - Ghost disease spattered on victim - Muttering to himself interrogates substance of other invisible presence—He becomes dirty with the speed of "Want it"" (All members are worst a century, p. 98).

"A camera and two tape recorders can cut the lines laid down by a fully equipped studio —The ovens and and the orgasm death tune can be blocked with large doses of apomorphine which breaks the circuit of positive feedback" (Combat troops in the area, p. 111).

""Remember show price? Know who I am? "Good Bye Mister' is my name..."Wind and Dust" is my name..."Never Happened" is my name" (Vaudeville voices, p. 123).

"So pack your ermines, Mary - Write back to the old folks at home - you see this happen before—three thousand years of that old ace in the hole - There was something that had to happen and it happened somehow" (Call the doctor twice? p. 143).

"Get it out of your head and into the machines. Stop talking stop arguing. Let the machines talk and argue. A tape is an externalized section of the human nervous system" (In that game? p. 163).

"Gongs of violence show alternative answers to any question - Artists take over the entire answer battery of automatic junk state - I extend this to other flesh - Counterorders issued" (Showed you your air, p. 171).

"He guided Bill with gentle precise fingers and sat him on stool in front of a box lined with metal. The box was wired to a series of boxes progressively smaller. In the last box was a crystal cylinder that rotated on a copper rod" (Silence to say goodbye p. 184).



"Look around you. Look at a control machine programmed to select the ugliest stupidest most vulgar and degraded sounds for recording and playback which provokes uglier stupider more vulgar and degraded sounds to be recorded and play back inexorable degradation look forward to dead end" (Invisible generation, p. 215).



Topics for Discussion

Why is the cut-up method (the one that requires someone to physically cut the tape) considered a virus? What similarities does it share with a physical virus? What is different about it?

Discuss the characters Inspector Lee and Bradly. Do they have any direct contact with each other throughout the novel? What makes them so important to the point the author is trying to make? Is Lee's B.J. a separate individual in the novel, or is it the other side of his dual half in the same way that Mr Martin is Mr Bradly's other half?

Considering all of the characters that appear more than once throughout the novel, is it even safe to say that they are the same characters, or do they have significant differences in each sections (hint, think about Lee's first appearance and contrast it with at least two other appearances of his in the novel).

The world in "The Ticket That Exploded" is head for disaster, most likely in the form of nuclear war. What specific conflicts may the author have been concerned about that led him to believe that such an outcome was inevitable? Was it simple paranoia on the part of Burroughs, or was there in actuality some sort of international conflict that had alarmed a large number of people and nations?

Describe the cut-up method used and demonstrated in this novel to the best of your ability.

What does Ward Island, as explored by Lykin and his man Jimmy, signify in context of the novel? Why does it switch back and forth between periods of time?

"The invisible generation" makes a point about the images and sounds we see from the media on a regular basis. Explain the point that is made, and whether or not it still applies to the media today. For example, are we destined to worse and worse news if we continue to play those particular soundtracks back?