



Junk Mail

Will Self

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Will Self is one of the most important British novelists of his generation, and he is as acclaimed in the UK for his outstanding, daring journalism as he is for his fiction. Now finally available in America, *Junk Mail* is an original selection of pieces from Self's nonfiction and journalism that will introduce American readers to Self as a literary journalist par excellence.

Animated by the scathing brilliance and unflinching determination to walk the road less traveled, *Junk Mail* is an often irreverent trawl through a landscape of drugs, culture, art, literature, and current events — topics Self illuminates with a keen and entirely original eye. We follow Self into the operation of an upstanding crack dealer, behind the myth of the "pragmatist" approach to drug legalization on the streets of Amsterdam, and to lunch with Indian author Salman Rushdie. Whether he is writing about bad boy British artist Damien Hirst, how literary renegade William Burroughs has changed our outlook on art and intoxication, or what the current state of transsexuality has to say about gender for all of us, this is a lively and necessary anthology from one of the defining voices of our times.

Junk Mail Details

Date : Published May 12th 2006 by Grove Press, Black Cat (first published April 3rd 2006)

ISBN : 9780802170231

Author : Will Self

Format : Paperback 336 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Writing, Essays, Contemporary, European Literature, British Literature, Short Stories

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From Reader Review Junk Mail for online ebook

Dave says

A bit hit-or-miss, occasionally self-indulgent, but verbally engaging and professionally acerbic throughout.

Thomas says

Generally speaking, roundups of previous journalistic forays are ephemeral and dated pieces that do little more than exhibit the clever curlicues of authorial style (never mind that the subjects have diminuendoed from the public interest at large). However, Self bucks the usual trend of grey water writing with a collection of journalistic pieces that remain surprisingly relevant. On another plus side, it provides us mere cross-atlantic cousins an opportunity to read what we missed, not having our own copies of the Guardian readily available.

Anthony Vacca says

Holding the record for most consistent uses of the word "shibboleth", Will Self's first collection of journalism, *Junk Mail*, is a unrestrained hodgepodge of book reviews, profiles, drawings, humorous pieces, features, and even has two lengthy interviews with J.G. Ballard and Martin Amis. The first portion of this book is entitled **ON DRUGS**, which really just means, "These articles are mostly about my hero William S. Burroughs." I too had a short-lived appreciation for Burroughs, but then I read another book by him other than *Naked Lunch* and realized how much of a one-trick (and not very good) pony Old Bull Lee was throughout his career. (It took Self a little longer to figure this out for himself.) The best parts of this book (for me at least) were the over-stuffed interviews with the two brainy, misanthropic Brit authors mentioned above because - Will Self also being a brainy, misanthropic author - this is clearly where Self is having the most brainy, misanthropic fun. The features are also interesting (especially the piece on cryogenics) but often a feel a little directionless. Overall an enjoyable read but not the best place to start for you readers out there queuing up to leapfrog into the unhinged and lexiconically rewarding world of Will Self.

Ryan Williams says

Despite some naff, mildly snooty pieces, the essays on Bill Burroughs and 'Slack Attack' make this worth the price of a used copy.

Joseph Stashko says

Very good, especially the last two pieces where Self talks at length with both JG Ballard and Martin Amis. Definitely for Self fans only though, his constant references to other literary works and loquacious style will be too much for some.

Marc Nash says

Like any collections of journalistic writing, a bit hit or miss and ripped from context, but the interviews with Amis & Ballard are excellent.

Mason says

This is a collection of articles from a number of sources with little coherence. Self has an enjoyable style, so it makes good crapper reading.

Robert says

A collection of Will Self's articles. For fans only.

feimineach says

I'm not blaming the book, or Will Self, for this. I bought it with a hangover (I think) and didn't realise what it was about. I am tangentially interested in the beat writers but not enough to read a collection of articles about them. No, not that interested at all.

MJ Nicholls says

Not as addictive as "Feeding Frenzy" and obviously rather dated now. Self is eminently readable, but his journalism lacks the fizz of his bumchum Martin Amis.

Michael Palkowski says

A very interesting compendium of Will Self's early journalism that is divided into the following sections. 1)- Drugs, 2)- Humor, 3)- Book Reviews, 4)- Features, 5)- Profiles and 6)- Conservations.

Within the drugs section, there are numerous essays examining William Burroughs, including a very entertaining essay (Naked Tea) where Self and an addiction rehabilitation center airs the David Cronenberg reimagined version of Naked Lunch. The intent is to discern how accurate the depiction of drug taking was in the film and it became a discussion on what if any depictions can truly be genuine. Other essays have interesting sociological dynamics, for example "New Crack City" takes the reader into the home of a crack dealer and you witness the ways in which clients are dealt with, how drugs are stored, prepared and so on. The fact that drug dealers supposedly have a facial code when standing outside London Kings Cross Station.

It all seems elusive and ultimately alien to a straight, boring non druggie like myself.

In "Let us Intoxicate", a discussion that usefully examines anthropology and drug use as a ritual in other cultures makes the following point, which was underlined in my edition, "The point is that drinking or drug-taking is only pathological in so far as it departs from meaningful ritual". The discussion of environment and its affects on the psyche during drug taking was also interesting. The same drug in different spaces/places will bring out a different reaction, including alcohol. Self in perhaps, a more philosophically wistful phase of his life goes on to remark, "Alcoholics and drug addicts are merely that statistically definable component of our collectivity who are paying with their lives for our inability to take a more constructive view of intoxication". A view he credits to Thomas Szasz's book, "Ceremonial Chemistry". There is an interesting critical essay on Terence McKenna and he rightly predicted the ways in which his quotes would be used as t-shirt syllogisms in the future. Although Self is unable to grasp the meaning of or depth that McKenna conveyed in his work and research. Self's critiques here are quite weak in the end and don't get at the substantive philosophical work in the McKenna cannon, particularly his anthropological discussion of the stoned ape hypothesis. Occasionally Self will introduce a book to you that sounds like it might be worth reading.

For example in "Reeling and Writhing", the discussion of Sandar Gilman's "Crack Wars" which uses "Heidegger, Freud, Nietzsche, Baudelaire, Gutier, Arendt, Burroughs, Benjamin, Derrida and Lacan" to look at how drugs have been viewed through these thinkers. Self's critique is right on the money, he rightfully cites Adorno's Jargon of Authenticity, since the book is infested with obscurantism. Whilst these reviews are fun to read as a throwaway newspaper article in the Observer would be, it ultimately is like reading a scrap book, which has been saved by the author's over-bearing and over emotional mother.

Other essays in this section therefore can be thin, sparing and filler in quality. Others are poor attempts at being contrarian. In "Junking the Image", Self argues that Burroughs has become like an usurped, decontextualized image. Burroughs was reinvented, sort of humanized due to his later life admission that he would never have wrote a word had it not been for his accidental killing of his wife. The humanity forces a sort of emotional reimagining of the work which came before, which is strange considering the depravity, madness and stupidity that ultimately is a large part of the Burroughs Cannon. The fact that his readers ascribe some affinity to the experimental sexual sadism that features in most of Burroughs cut up novels, is as beguiling as is his popularity as a junkman. Burroughs entire literary persona was his ability at amassing this cult counter culture fandom through his life and his wacky obsessions. Stories that recount the Burroughs lifestyle are often more interesting than his own work was. His 23 enigma discovery, his obsession with general semantic theory, his occult interests that persisted with his conservative image and ultimately politics. Junking the image therefore would be a dismissal of the entire Burroughs canon. His work is a lot of show sometimes without the substance. His nova express trilogy is a complete mess, but is heralded as an example of experimental writing, using a technique that supposedly innovates, randomizes, shows the insanity of the universe or whatever the fuck he was trying to do.

Self is at his best in this scrap book when he looks at English culture, or when he examines bizarre subjects with a genuinely curious analytical gaze. An example is his discussion of Cryonics, which is fascinating. The demographics of those who freeze, the debates within cryogenics about the nature of the freezing itself, the lack of medical expertise in the preservers. The storing methodology, the location of the tanks, the fear of death that means they eliminate death. Death is removed by jargon, it is now the deanimated phase, a phase that is like buffering waiting for your next reincarnation of yourself to load into the future. Another essay is Self discussing circumcision and his Jewish identity. It is interesting because Self views himself as a "weird jew" because he wasn't circumcised. The essay sees him going

Other stand out pieces include his long profile of Ellis, which is ultimately a sardonic defense of the man. A man who like Martin Amis, was vilified by the media and depicted in nefarious ways. A more interesting text of course would simply be the transcript of the meal they had together. The Martin Amis discussion is also good in that it is intimate enough to create connection, but detailed enough for you not to rest on cheap emotional glue. These profiles do their job, they make you appreciate the author being examined that bit more. This is fleshed out better in his conversation with Amis at the end of the book.

Buy second hand and read selections. It is worth the read and there is charm, intellect and interest in the pieces, which is felt particularly in pieces which are not time specific. His life on Orkney, the drawings, the jargon etc. You get a lot of substance here, that won't be offered in other journalism collections.

Cristen Boorman says

Intelligent, funny and such interesting topics.

Chris says

Though sometimes in his writing he seems to think a little too highly of himself, I find Will Self's take on our world to be incredibly interesting.

This collection of mostly newspaper or magazine articles focuses on music, literature, and art with a few essays that wander off the path into intriguing territory.

Amy says

Really like the writing style but wasn't expecting it to be a collection of reviews, essays etc. Should have started with some of Self's novels.

Barry says

What a troublesome book. I read it to see if what I remembered from the time (early-to-mid nineties) about Self and Burroughs was correct, in light of Self's comments on WSB on the BBC recently.

As well as that, though, I learned new things about JG Ballard and had to buy another copy of 'From Shanghai to Shepperton' - since I've never opened mine (signed copy - he was so clearly going to die) - and of 'Concrete Island' today.

Along the way he led me to a new discovery: I picked up Nicholson Baker's Vox (which I read last weekend) and ordered 'The Fermata', which arrived yesterday.

What I didn't remember was the personal relationship between Self and Martin Amis. At the time I used to rage against them both for their London-centricity - I'd never even visited London until 1995. I'm in the middle of reading (or, in most cases, re-reading) Self's whole canon... and I feel I need to re-read a lot of Amis. To see how I've changed.
