

Flush with Meaning: Philosophical Hermeneutics in Samuel Beckett's *Watt* and William S. Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*.

Abstract:

Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics has been ascribed a conservative position in relation to textual interpretation. I wish to explore what effect radical texts (texts which challenge Gadamer's definitions of textuality) have upon philosophical hermeneutics. I chose to work with *Watt* by Samuel Beckett and *Naked Lunch* by William S. Burroughs because both texts challenge assumptions surrounding meaning and understanding, two key facets of philosophical hermeneutics. Both novels illustrate the effect of fragmented historical horizons upon the interpretative process. This observation is accessible through Gadamer's descriptive theory and allows the interpretation of both *Watt* and *Naked Lunch* to engage with the meta-hermeneutic concerns in both avant-garde texts. The close-reading of both novels will illustrate how they challenge Gadamer's notion of play between horizons, and I will show this to be productive for both interpretative understanding as well as responding to Gadamer's critics. It is my contention that Gadamer's theoretical description offers a unique way to read *Watt* and *Naked Lunch* but crucially, philosophical hermeneutics is indelibly changed by an interaction with these two novels.

Keywords:

Philosophical hermeneutics, interpretation, effect, historical horizon.