

Burroughs as a Political Writer?

Alexander Greiffenstern

University of Duisburg-Essen

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Abstract: In his article "Burroughs as a Political Writer?" Alexander Greiffenstern discusses political elements in William S. Burroughs's work. Greiffenstern looks at Burroughs's text "The Coming of the Purple Better One" written for *Esquire* about the Democratic National Convention in Chicago 1968. By writing a surprisingly personal text, Burroughs might have captured something about the significance of the convention that many later historical accounts miss. In the end, Burroughs leaves the critical reader no other choice than to attempt a historical and political analysis.

Alexander GREIFFENSTERN

Burroughs as a Political Writer?

In August 1968 William Burroughs returned to Chicago, the city where he once worked as a detective and exterminator, to cover the Democratic National Convention for *Esquire* magazine together with Jean Genet and Terry Southern. Afterwards, he wrote a short text called "The Coming of the Purple Better One" that was published by *Esquire* and which can also be found in the collection *Exterminator!* (1973). If one looks at texts about the convention, Burroughs is mentioned sometimes, but his text is never quoted, and for good reason. Reading interviews with Burroughs from the 1960s, or *The Job* (1970), one is confronted with the question: to what extent should we perceive Burroughs as an intellectual with certain political views? If one focuses on Burroughs's aesthetics, which of course entail a certain ethics, should one take his political opinions into account and put them in historical perspective? How to deal with Burroughs as a political writer is a question with which most critics struggle.

For *The Lost Years of William S. Burroughs: Beats in South Texas* (2006), Rob Johnson researched the time Burroughs spent as a farmer in Texas and shows how it influenced his writing. He explains how Burroughs at that time regarded himself in many ways as conservative. In his letters to Ginsberg "Burroughs was refining his worldview—what we would today call a 'conservative' or 'libertarian' view or what Ginsberg styled 'libertarian conservatism'" (101). Evidently, Burroughs took some of his ideas from popular conservative commentator Westbrook Pegler. In a footnote Johnson explains: "Burroughs' famous routine 'Roosevelt after Inauguration,' for example, closely resembles in content and style Pegler's 'Pop Bottle Barrage,' both of which are absurd routines about Roosevelt's stacking of the Supreme Court in order to fast-track his New Deal legislation" (179, note 25). "Roosevelt after Inauguration" was written as part of "In Search of Yage" (1953, published 1963), but was omitted from the first City Lights edition due to its offensive content. *Naked Lunch* (1959) contains another routine that Johnson takes a closer look at in his essay "William S. Burroughs as 'Good Ol' Boy': *Naked Lunch* in East Texas." Johnson argues that the "County-Clerk" routine shows how much Burroughs had internalized the Southern version of racism and anti-Semitism. Even if one reads *Naked Lunch* as a book without any clear moral judgment about, for example, the use of drugs, "it's obvious to anyone reading the "County Clerk" routine that while Burroughs appears to be having a bit too much fun telling these racist and anti-Semitic jokes, he is hardly condoning such opinions" (51). But questioning or fighting such statements was clearly not on Burroughs's mind either when he wrote this routine; the whole scene with the county clerk is strangely matter-of-fact. Lee is not part of the county-clerk culture, but he knows the right "password" to get what he needs. In the sense of a critical assessment of language, the cut-up projects of the 1960s presented a major shift in Burroughs's attitude towards a politically engaged writing. Nevertheless, the presence of anti-Semitic remarks in Burroughs's work is something we should not overlook, as Oliver Harris points out in his Introduction to *Nova Express*: "Burroughs' absolute immersion in the cut-up project, his evangelical promotion and daily living it, had a dark side—unleashing for a while an ugly megalomania, misogyny, and anti-Semitism—but it is integral to the power of his texts and our experience of them" (xxi).

In his article "Cutting up Politics" Harris tries to answer, "To what political analysis were cut-up methods an answer?" (177), and he comes to the conclusion that Burroughs's project was rather anti-political. There is no doubt that the texts engaged with political issues and at some moments became political pamphlets that tried to animate the reader into action, but the goal was rather to destroy politics as such. This is especially true for *Nova Express*, and in his recent introduction to the new edition, Harris stresses the political statements of the book but wonders why there is no apparent change in the manuscript to restore a reference that would have prophetically invoked the Cuban Missile crisis. He writes: "For Burroughs, 'Present Time' was not determined by public events or the official historical record but was a point of personal intersection, and from many pages of cut-up newspaper source material he chose to keep few fragments of 'historical' significance for use in *Nova Express*" (xiv). To offer a new perspective on Burroughs as a political writer, it might be helpful to take a look at a small text like "The Coming of the Purple Better One," because the short form is undoubtedly what comes most natural to Burroughs's writing.

In regard to Burroughs's assignment to cover the convention, Barry Miles writes in his recent biography that Paul Bowles was very surprised, considering Burroughs the "most apolitical person they could find" (474), and Burroughs's first incentive to go was the prospect of meeting Jean Genet. The text that Burroughs produced after the convention seems to affirm Bowles's judgment, because it cares very little about the democratic debates and even less about the events on the convention floor. Nevertheless, it was clear beforehand that the 1968 Democratic National Convention was going to be a

special event, and if one looks at what is regarded as important by historians, one gets a different view of Burroughs's text.

The accounts of the convention and the riots that accompanied it are plenty, although the narrative seems rather one-dimensional. William L. O'Neill, in *Coming Apart: An Informal History of America in the 1960's* (1971), is at times hardly following the chronological order of events and calls the police brutality "the festival of death" (386) as opposed to the Festival of Life music festival that was organized by the protesters. Although the police force acted brutally, nobody was killed during the riots. The Festival of Life was opposed to the Vietnam War and the support the war got from the Democratic Convention. David Farber devoted only a few paragraphs to the convention in his study *The Age of Great Dreams: America in the 1960s* (1994). He summarizes the police riot as follows: "In specific response to shouted obscenities, a few rock throwers, and the blocking of Michigan Avenue, dozens of police officers went berserk and physically expressed the rage millions of Americans had built up against America's dissidents" (222). Mainly responsible was Mayor Richard Daley, who "had essentially given his police a green light to attack the protesters" (222). Mark Hamilton Lytle gives a more detailed picture in *America's Uncivil Wars: The Sixties Era from Elvis to the Fall of Richard Nixon* (2006), where he points out that Mayor Daley privately opposed the war in Vietnam and that "the violence that erupted was no accident, since both sides had planned for it" (260). Despite pointing out the provocations by the protesters, Lytle still tells his account around Daley who "ordered his police 'to shoot to kill' arsonists" and "prepared a suffocating blanket of security for the convention hall" (258), making him the easily recognizable villain of the unfolding drama. All three books, from three different decades, in addition to documentaries one finds online, tell the same story: it is one of police brutality against peaceful protesters and innocent bystanders, initiated mainly by Mayor Daley; and it is about a convention that ignored the unrest in the streets because everything was decided beforehand or by Daley and influential Democrats in back rooms. While this short version of the story seems to be true to a certain extent, the presidential election historian, journalist, and China scholar Theodore H. White shows a more nuanced picture in *The Making of the President 1968*. In contrast to the later books, White clearly aims at a larger audience and he did so successfully. It is clear that his closeness to some of the major political players leads to a more journalistic approach, especially since the book was published in 1969; but why its content has largely been ignored by the aforementioned authors is rather questionable.

White gives a detailed account of the convention and, more importantly, he is able to explain political strategies and agendas in a clear language. Following White, this is what happened at the convention—which also corresponds with the facts stated in Burroughs's text. People arrived in Chicago on the weekend of the 24/25th of August under difficult conditions. Apparently, there were problems with the flight schedules from the East Coast and a taxi strike in Chicago made it difficult to reach the hotels. Once people reached the hotels, they found out that there was also a telephone strike. Under most stress from these circumstances were the journalists, especially television crews whose technology relied on the landlines. The only phones working were within the convention center, without connection to the outside. To make matters worse, the television crews did not get any support from Daley; on the contrary, security and police harassed them, so they had every intention to make Daley look bad and there came plenty of opportunities to do so. Daley's face, "an unfortunately rough-hewn face which, in anger, with the underlip shot out, looks like a turtle's swollen with rage" (White 309) became one of the symbolic pictures of the convention. Hubert Humphrey looked like the future nominee for the presidency, but this was not so sure during the convention. Eugene McCarthy had a strong visible support (Burroughs speaks of fifteen thousand supporters at the airport [93], which is probably overestimated), George McGovern had entered the race after the assassination of Robert Kennedy, there were rumors that Edward Kennedy would make a move during the convention, and it even seemed possible that Lyndon B. Johnson could change his mind at the last minute and run again.

The convention opened on Monday Night at 7:30 p.m. and White writes: "No linear account can give a correct description of what followed at Chicago—all too many events were happening at once; too many forces were present; the environment of television which dominated the convention was itself, as we have seen, unsettled; and no single person had complete understanding of all that was happening while it was happening" (324). The mood leading up to the convention was very nervous, because the week before, the Soviet Army had invaded Czechoslovakia. Together with the military-style security in Chicago, this added to the already tense atmosphere at the convention center where delegates discussed the Vietnam War, while the protesters outside had violent encounters with police forces. The city had been threatened by several peace movements during the preparation of the convention and nobody knew how many protesters would come, so Chicago police forces were prepared for the worst. In the end probably no more than 30,000 people came but most of them had already been there for some days before the convention started. People slept in public parks, which was forbidden in Chicago and

this led to the first violent ruptures. On Wednesday, a protest march that was not allowed took place in which Burroughs actually took part. "I find myself in the second row of the nonviolent march feeling rather out of place since nonviolence is not exactly my program. We shuffle slowly forward the marshals giving orders over the loudspeakers ... We come to a solid line of cops and there is a confab between the cops and the marshals. For one horrible moment, I think they will let us march five bloody miles and me with my blisters already from walking around in the taxi strike. No. They won't let us march. And being a nonviolent march and five beefy cops for every marcher and not being equipped with bulldozers it is an impasse" ("The Coming" 96). So, Burroughs is happy he does not have to walk and that he can go back to doing tape recordings while he ignores how close he was to getting severely beaten up. Other people were less lucky the very same evening. A few thousand people marched on Michigan Avenue when the police started a riot. For about 15 minutes, policemen clubbed and tear-gassed the crowd in the most violent manner. The evening Hubert Humphrey accepted his nomination, this police riot produced the television images that are forever connected with the Democratic National Convention in Chicago.

Of course, Burroughs's text was never intended to present an accurate account of the events in Chicago. But what does it do exactly? "The Coming of the Purple Better One" can be divided into three parts. The first part recounts Burroughs's stay in Chicago, the second part gives his solution to America's five most important questions and the last part is a routine in the tradition of "Roosevelt after Inauguration" that has its own (sub)title: "In Last Resort the Truth." The text begins as follows: "Saturday August 24, 1968: Arrive O'Hare Airport, Chicago. First visit in 26 years. Last in Chicago during the war where I exercised the trade of exterminator./ 'Exterminator. Got any bugs lady!/' 'The tools of your trade' said the customs officer touching my cassette recorder" (93). In 1942, Burroughs had worked as an exterminator at the Nueva Fumigating Co. in Chicago (Miles 88), an experience that left several traces in his writing, for example in *Naked Lunch*, which invokes resonant memories of the city early on: "Chicago: invisible hierarchy of decorticated wops, smell of atrophied gangsters, earthbound ghost hits you at North and Halsted, Cicero, Lincoln Park, panhandler of dreams, past invading the present, rancid magic of slot machines and roadhouses" (11). When he returned to Chicago in 1968, he had done years of cut-up experiments with texts, film, and sound recordings. So, directly at the beginning, Burroughs points towards his past and puts it in connection to his present work, the tape recorder experiments. "The Coming of the Purple Better One" has to be read from this perspective.

This strategy of intersecting the past with the present leads to interesting connections. When Burroughs describes the events in Lincoln Park on Tuesday night, what appears to be an encounter with a protester fleeing the police is actually the vigilante taken verbatim from the second page of *Naked Lunch*. The "Vigilante" becomes a "youthful demonstrator," the "old rusty six shooter" is turned into "an old rusty police force from 1910," and the "bullets" are substituted with "tear-gas canisters."

At this point I look up to see what looks like a battalion of World War I tanks converging on the youthful demonstrators and I say 'What's with you Martin you wig already!' He just looks at me and says: 'Fill your hand stranger.' And hauls out an old rusty police force from 1910 and I take off across Lincoln Park tear-gas canisters raining all around me. From a safe distance I turn around to observe the scene and see it as a 1917 gas attack from the archives. I make the lobby of the Lincoln Hotel where the medics are treating gas victims. The *Life-Time* photographer is laid out on bench medics washing his eyes out. Soon he recovers and begins taking pictures of everything in sight. Outside the cops prowl about like aroused tomcats. (95-96)

Burroughs is not really interested in the foreseeable procedures on the convention floor, but in walking around with his tape recorder looking for precise intersection points. In Lincoln Park he found a point where his past, transformed into a routine for *Naked Lunch*, connected with the present. His present is the critique of *Life*, *Time*, and *Fortune* whose photographer does something similar to what Burroughs himself does. Following the text of *Naked Lunch*, the vigilante becomes an unknown demonstrator, but the "original" text ends with "And he hangs three fags before the fuzz nail him. I mean the Vigilante earned his moniker" (*Naked Lunch* 4), while the description here goes on to the hotel and the reporter, thereby making a new association: the police eventually stop the Vigilante, but the reporter from *Life-Time* continues relentlessly after a short interruption.

Burroughs's feud with Henry Luce and his media empire is a well-known topic of Burroughs's writing during the 1960s. His critique of Time Inc. is one reason why Burroughs can be regarded as a political writer. In the famous interview with Conrad Knickerbocker (1965), Burroughs is asked: "Do you admire Mr. Luce?" (73). Burroughs replies in the negative and goes on to compare the "Luce system" to the Mayan calendar: "It is a control system. It has nothing to do with reporting. *Time*, *Life*, *Fortune* is some

sort of police organization" (73). But Knickerbocker might not be that far off with his question. One can certainly detect envy of "the greatest word and image banks in the world" (73). Burroughs is in a competition with Luce over mechanisms of control and collecting an archive to execute it. The files he shows to Knickerbocker, like the one on Luce or his collection of "sea disasters," are an expression of this competition. The reporter at Lincoln Park is an agent with the same mission as Burroughs, alias William Lee: to collect data. The difference is that Burroughs is using a tape recorder instead of a camera and uses his recordings directly. "I walk around the park recording and playing back, a beauteous evening calm and clear vapor trails over the lake youths washing tear gas out of their eyes in the fountain" ("The Coming" 96).

Burroughs foregoes a description of the police riot from Wednesday evening, probably because he was not there. Instead, he chooses to find another point of intersection, describing the Chicago police force under Mayor Daley as an anachronism "left over from 1910" (97) and inserting a small piece of text in style and content reminiscent of pulp fiction stories from the 1920s, Burroughs's youth. In "The Coming of the Purple Better One" Burroughs then gives his opinion on five questions that he thinks have to be answered. On Vietnam, he offers the possibility that the Gobi desert is the result of a nuclear war, which happened a long time ago, so "America should get out of Vietnam and reach an immediate agreement with Red China" (98). On alienated youth, Burroughs thinks that the establishment has to offer young people something similar to what China does. The Black Power movement should get whatever it demands. On the police and judicial system, Burroughs states that most laws are enforced only sporadically and the system would break down if they would actually enforce everything. This paragraph already begins to segue into a short routine before, finally, he draws a comparison to inflation in the Weimar Republic and thinks this could lead to civil war, or as Burroughs calls it: "*Total confrontation*" (101; emphasis in the original).

These pamphlet-like demands and arguments are what sometimes make it hard to regard Burroughs as a political writer, because, although he raises some important issues, he gives superficial answers that show a certain degree of ignorance. Thus, the civil rights movement was much more than Black Power, and it was very clear what they demanded; "Find out what they want and give it to them" (99) shows, if anything, an unwillingness to do so himself. In the context of this text, this section reads like a parody of a programmatic political speech given by a candidate for the presidency. Burroughs is most convincing when he falls into a routine on the police and judicial system. Although his numbers are comically outrageous—"The number of internees is swelling ominously ... forty million ... fifty million ... sixty million ... 'America is a thin shell around a pulsing core of sullen violators'" (100)—mass incarceration has become a major problem in the US, which today has the largest prison population in the world.

The final section, "In Last Resort the Truth," appears as a routine in the tradition of *Naked Lunch* and "Roosevelt after Inauguration" as we find A.J. introducing the former Supreme Court justice Homer Mandrill, who is obviously a monkey, as candidate for the presidency. On first glance, the routine simply feels attached to the preceding text, without a clear connection, as if it was added for length. But the second glance reveals that the routine, which even has its own headline, is actually a reply to the five points Burroughs made before. A.J. starts with explaining how mankind evolved from monkeys: "Raymond A. Dart of the University of Johannesburg was the strident voice from South Africa that would prove the southern ape to be the human ancestor. Dart put forward the simple thesis that Man emerged from the anthropoid background for one reason only: because he was a killer. ... Man's original nature imposes itself on any human solution. ... Who more fitted to represent our glorious Simian heritage than Homer Mandrill himself a descendant of that illustrious line?" (102-03).

A.J.'s argument is that true conservatives have to return to the roots, so why not choose a real monkey as leader who is closer to where human beings came from? Interestingly, this view of history as linear and teleological development of humankind stands in opposition to the contingent view Burroughs presented in point one; there Burroughs suggests that highly-developed civilizations have existed before: "If we have come from stone axes to nuclear weapons in ten thousand years this may well have happened before" (98).

In the second point, "Alienated youth," Burroughs already suggested that the Western establishment should declare "their bad intentions. Let them come all the way out in the open with their bad intentions, declare a Secret Service overwhelming majority, and elect a purple-assed baboon to the Presidency" (99). Burroughs also suggests that "the only establishment that is supported by its young people is Red China" (98), to which the Simian candidate responds with threats to China: "'And after that [Vietnam] we are going to wade in and take care of Chairman Mao and his gang of cutthroat slave drivers'" (104). To Burroughs's idea to simply give Black Power whatever they demand, Homer Mandrill answers with blatant racism while "to wild applause a picture of the world-famous statue in Natchitoches Louisiana

flashes on screen. As you all know this statue shows a good old Darkie with his hat in his hand and is dedicated to All Good Darkies Everywhere" (105). This lets us return to Rob Johnson's earlier argument. Burroughs proves to be a true son of the old Midwest and of the South. He knows the language—"as long as there is a gas pump handy we all know the answer to that" (105)—of open and unconcealed racism. But he is also aware of the more subtle ways to remind African-Americans of their position as "Good Darkies." The statue of Natchitoches, Louisiana had been part of a political debate for some time that was renewed by the civil rights movement in 1968, something Burroughs was obviously aware of.

Homer Mandrill takes up Burroughs's exaggerated warning that the prison population would rise when he declares marijuana to be "deadlier than cocaine. And what are we going to do about the vile America-hating hoodlums who call themselves hippies, Yippies and chippies? We are going to put this scum behind bars like the animals they are" (105-06). The so-called "war on drugs" is one of the main reasons for the mass incarceration in the US, and in Homer Mandrill's declaration the connection between the demonization of marijuana and the ability of getting rid of unwanted political voices becomes obvious. He further responds as if he was talking directly against Burroughs's arguments from before: "I have heard it said that this is a lawless nation that if all the laws in this land were truly enforced we would have thirty percent of the population in jail and the remaining seventy percent on the cops ... I pledge myself to uphold the laws of America and to enforce these hallowed statutes on all violators regardless of race, color, creed or position" (106).

In *Minutes to Go* (1960), Burroughs claims that the dollar collapsed in 1959, which he renews: "Figuring ten years time lag the dollar should collapse in 1969" (101). Homer Mandrill rejects this "as Communist-inspired rumors" and pledges himself "to turn the clock back to 1899 when a silver dollar bought a steak dinner and good piece of ass." (Thunderous applause as a plane writes September 17, 1899, across the sky in smoke)" (106). Even a direct threat to Burroughs himself is announced: "'And I'll tell you something else. A bunch of queers, dope freaks, and degenerated dirty writers is living in foreign lands under the protection of American passports from the vantage point of which they do not hesitate to spit their filth on Old Glory. Well we're going to pull the passports off those dope freaks' (The technician pushes a sex button and the Simian begins to masturbate.) 'Bring them back here and teach them to act like decent Americans.' (The Simian emits, hitting the lens of a *Life-Time* photographer)" (106).

Finally, the *Life-Time* photographer appears again, thereby becoming a point of intersection, but this only shows how blurred the identity of figures in Burroughs are. Although the five points before can be attributed to the author, Burroughs, the clearly fictional Simian candidate responds to them with direct answers and threats against Burroughs; for this he uses one of Burroughs's own signatures, the date September 17, 1899, showing that he apparently knows Burroughs's claims very well and shares a certain hostility towards *Life-Time* with him. The Simian candidate, who can be traced back via Burroughs's routine "Roosevelt after Inauguration" to his conservative views of the early 1950s, is another intersection with the past. He presents another part of Burroughs and the text externalizes an inner discussion Burroughs probably at some point had with himself. In a way this internal dialog is already explained in *Naked Lunch*'s most famous routine: "the Talking Asshole." The Simian is exactly the part of Burroughs that simply does not want to shut up, and while writing he is unable to control it. (I am following here Oliver Harris's reading of the routine in *William Burroughs and the Secret of Fascination*, 215-40.) The strength of Burroughs is that he rarely mimics an outside source; all his figures, Benway, A.J., the Sailor, the Simian, etc., are part of himself.

Eventually the police want to see A.J.'s permit, which he does not have, and the monkey is shot in the ensuing brawl. The final irony is that exactly the things Homer Mandrill supported end his candidacy: the enforcing of all laws and the reckless practice of violence. If one reads the Simian candidate as part of Burroughs, it is a strong statement against his past political viewpoints. Nevertheless, the author of "the Talking Asshole" is aware that this end will not silence the other voice indefinitely.

A.J. regards the killing as political murder mimicking conservative southern opinions of a Communist conspiracy in liberal Washington. A.J.'s speech and the text end as follows: "We will realize the aspirations and dreams that every American cherishes in his heart. The American dream can be must be and will be realized. I say to you that Grant Park will be a shrine for all future Americans. In the words of the all-American poet James Whitcomb Riley 'Freedom shall a while repair. / To dwell a weeping hermit there'" (109). Of course, the quotation is not by James Whitcomb Riley, but by William Collins, an English poet of the eighteenth century. We are reminded that A.J., who is a trickster and a con-artist, is also a product of Burroughs; and the trickster is maybe more dominant than the political commentator. The agent who arrived at O'Hare Airport was able to find many points of intersection: in the end, Burroughs establishes connections from eighteenth-century England via late nineteenth-century North America to Chicago 1968.

When we recognize Burroughs's attempt to reconnect the present with the past, the routine at the end of the text becomes a political statement. The violent death of the Simian candidate in the year that already saw the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy was surely regarded as outright offensive. But as we have seen, the text was not intended as an allegory of the political issues of the day. Burroughs is again more interested in the mechanisms of the political machinery as such, avoiding obvious historical references in a text that is otherwise filled with personal connections. Foremost, Chicago 1968 was a welcome opportunity to explore once more his own history and connect his personal demons and, more importantly, his own writing to the event. In this sense, Burroughs's text is a definitive instance of what, in *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature*, Deleuze and Guattari define as "minor literature" (on Deleuze and Burroughs more generally, see Murphy, *Wising Up the Marks*), whose second characteristic "is that everything in them is political. In major literatures, in contrast, the individual concern (familial, marital, and so on) joins with other no less individual concerns, the social milieu serving as a mere environment or a background ... Minor literature is completely different; its cramped space forces each individual intrigue to connect immediately to politics. The individual concern thus becomes all the more necessary, indispensable, magnified, because a whole other story is vibrating within it" (17). So too, in Burroughs's text, his personal history becomes part of the political event, which he tries to put in a larger historical context. But the boundaries between personal history, his writing, and the events become completely blurred. Although we might be able in a textual analysis to identify, for example, a passage from *Naked Lunch* as a source, this does not mean that the text focuses on Burroughs's individual concerns. On the contrary, Burroughs's unique style makes the political that is "vibrating within it" palpable. Burroughs's writing resonates within itself and, because of its aesthetics, also with the past, the present, and the future. Whether we call it "minor literature" or not, this had long been part of Burroughs's project, seeking that "place where the unknown past and the emergent future meet in a vibrating soundless hum" (*Naked Lunch* 91).

Theodore H. White wrote about Chicago 1968: "But in 1968 the name Chicago won a significance far beyond date and place. It became the title of an episode, like Waterloo, or Versailles, or Munich. At Chicago, for the first time, the most delicate process of American politics was ruptured by violence, the selection of Presidents stained with blood. 1968, throughout, was a year in which the ghosts of America's past returned to haunt the present; but at Chicago the goblins of America's future first appeared to haunt tomorrow" (301). One of the ghosts that returned to haunt America in 1968 was a former exterminator who had worked in Chicago 26 years before; and when a recorder of historical events uses this kind of language, we get the feeling that Burroughs probably was the right person to cover the event; furthermore, today's reader might feel compelled to get engaged with the political history and the significance of the convention. Like Burroughs, White sees connections to historical events that shaped the following eras, and predicts something similar for the coming years in the US. It is eerie how correct he was in this prediction. "The Coming of the Purple Better One" offers another perspective on Theodore H. White's realization.

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Author's Profile: Alexander Greiffenstern is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Duisburg-Essen. His interests in scholarship include cultural studies, literary theory, and history and literature of the nineteenth and twentieth century. He published with Josef Raab the edited volume *Interculturalism in North America: Canada, the United States, Mexico, and Beyond* (2013). Email: <alexander.greiffenstern@uni-due.de>