



# ArchivesSpace

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## William S. Burroughs papers 4078569

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This finding aid was produced using ArchivesSpace on January 13, 2025.

Description is written in: English.

Describing Archives: A Content Standard

### Rare Book and Manuscript Library

Butler Library, 6th Floor  
Columbia University, Mail Code 1127  
535 W. 114th St.  
New York, NY 10027  
Business Number: (212) 854-5153  
Fax Number: (212) 854-1365  
[rbml@libraries.cul.columbia.edu](mailto:rbml@libraries.cul.columbia.edu)  
URL: <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/indiv/rbml/index.html>

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## Summary Information

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<b>Repository:</b>	Rare Book and Manuscript Library
<b>Creator:</b>	Burroughs, William S., 1914-1997
<b>Title:</b>	William S. Burroughs papers
<b>ID:</b>	4078569
<b>ID:</b>	MS#0174
<b>Date [inclusive]:</b>	1957-1976
<b>Physical Description:</b>	2.5 linear feet 6 document boxes and 1 oversize item
<b>Language of the Material:</b>	English .
<b>Abstract:</b>	Author, artist, spoken word performer, and founding member of the Beat Generation. The William S. Burroughs Papers contain manuscripts and galley proofs of some of Burroughs's novels, as well as biographical material on Burroughs.

### Preferred Citation

Identification of specific item; Date (if known); William S. Burroughs papers; Box and Folder; Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Library.

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## Biographical / Historical

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William S. Burroughs was born in 1914 in St. Louis, Missouri. He attended private schools in St. Louis before a brief stint at the Los Alamos Ranch School in New Mexico. He received a bachelor's degree from Harvard in 1936.

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## Biographical / Historical

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After graduating from Harvard, Burroughs spent a few years traveling through Europe, followed by a short stint in the US Army. After his discharge from the Army Burroughs moved to Chicago where he worked a string of odd jobs and spent time with his friend David Kammerer and Kammerer's obsession, University of Chicago student Lucien Carr. When Carr transferred from UC to Columbia University, both of the older men used this as an impetus to move to New York City as well.

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## Biographical / Historical

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It was through Carr that Burroughs met Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac. The three, along with Carr, Kerouac's girlfriend Edie Parker and her roommate Joan Vollmer, forged close friendships centered around a shared love of literature, drugs, and a bohemian lifestyle. It was during this time that Burroughs was first introduced to narcotics through the well known Times Square hustler, and writer, Herbert Huncke and quickly became addicted to opiates. Jean Vollmer, Burroughs's lover, and later common-law wife, also suffered from an addiction that eventually resulted in her hospitalization for acute amphetamine psychosis. The two had a son, William S. Burroughs Jr., before Burroughs accidentally, but fatally, shot Vollmer in Mexico City.

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## Biographical / Historical

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Burroughs began working on the manuscript that would eventually become *Junky* in Mexico City before Vollmer's death. Though he had briefly worked on the short story "And the Hippos Were Boiled in Their Tanks" with Jack Kerouac, he did not have literary aspirations. Even while working on *Junkie* he assumed that the autobiographical novel would be an anomaly, not the beginning of a literary career.

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## Biographical / Historical

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After his trial over Vollmer's death, Burroughs thought it prudent to leave Mexico. He spent more time traveling in South America researching the hallucinatory drug yage and corresponding with Allen Ginsberg, who was by this point acting as his literary agent, about his search for the drug and its effects. These letters formed the basis of Burroughs and Ginsberg's book *The Yage Letters*. After the yage quest, Burroughs returned, briefly, to New York where he initiated an intense but mostly one-sided romantic and sexual relationship with Ginsberg before leaving the United States for a brief stay in Rome and then Tangier.

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## Biographical / Historical

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While in Tangier Burroughs completed the text that would become *The Naked Lunch*. *Interzone*, as he called the working manuscript, was, in opposition to his earlier works *Junkie* and *Queer*, a non-linear collection of loosely connected episodes. Allen Ginsberg, who, along with Peter Orlovsky and Jack Kerouac, had traveled to Tangier to help collect and type a clean copy of the manuscript, presented *The Naked Lunch* to Maurice Girodias of the Olympia Press. Though Girodias was not initially interested in the work, he did decide to print it after all in 1959. An American edition, based on a 1958 manuscript of the novel (currently part of the Allen Ginsberg Papers held by the RBML) was published by Grove Press in 1962.

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## Biographical / Historical

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Burroughs then moved to Paris where he continued writing and producing the episodic sketches that, combined with material from *The Naked Lunch* manuscripts, comprise *The Soft Machine*, *The Ticket that Exploded*, and *Nova Express*. While in Paris living in a guesthouse christened the Beat Hotel with Ginsberg, Orlovsky, Gergory Corso, and Harold Chapman, Burroughs first came into contact with Brion Gysin. Gysin, a painter, had a profound impact on Burroughs and Gysin's "cut-up technique" where strips of two different texts were aligned to create a new, composite text became a prominent feature of Burroughs's future writing.

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## Biographical / Historical

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In 1974 Burroughs returned to the United States. He accepted a teaching post at City College of New York that Allen Ginsberg had recommended him for and settled into an apartment nicknamed The Bunker on Manhattan's Lower East Side. During this time Burroughs became acquainted with James Grauerholz, a young beat devotee who became Burroughs's devoted manager, secretary, and companion.

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## Biographical / Historical

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Burroughs moved to Lawrence Kansas in 1981 and remained there until his death in 1997. During the later part of his life he wrote less and less, focusing on visual art and spoken word performances. He also appears in the Gus Van Sant movie Naked Cowboy.

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## Summary

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Author, artist, spoken word performer, and founding member of the Beat Generation. The William S. Burroughs Papers contain manuscripts and galley proofs of some of Burroughs's novels, as well as biographical material on Burroughs.

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## Summary

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The William S. Burroughs Papers contain manuscripts and galley proofs of some of Burroughs's novels, as well as experimental prose, including early examples of Burroughs's cut-up technique, and a small amount of correspondence. The collection also contains a series of biographical material on Burroughs collected by Victor Bockris.

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## Arrangement

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This collection is arranged in five series.

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## Administrative Information

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### Publication Statement

Rare Book and Manuscript Library

Butler Library, 6th Floor  
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535 W. 114th St.  
New York, NY 10027

Business Number: (212) 854-5153

Fax Number: (212) 854-1365

[rbml@libraries.cul.columbia.edu](mailto:rbml@libraries.cul.columbia.edu)

URL: <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/indiv/rbml/index.html>

### Revision Description

xml finding aid created by Carrie Hintz xml finding aid updated by Catherine C. Ricciardi  
EAD was imported spring 2019 as part of the ArchivesSpace Phase II migration. 2009-07-25  
2009-07-25 2019-05-20

### Restrictions on Access

This collection is located on-site.

### Restrictions on Access

This collection has no restrictions.

### Alternate Form Available

William Burroughs letters are on: microfilm.

## Terms Governing Use and Reproduction

Reproductions may be made for research purposes. The RBML maintains ownership of the physical material only. Copyright remains with the creator and his/her heirs. The responsibility to secure copyright permission rests with the patron.

## Immediate Source of Acquisition

Date of acquisition--1959. Accession number--M-59.

## Processing Information

Cataloged Christina Hilton Fenn 04/14/1989.

## Processing Information

Papers reprocessed Carrie Hintz 6/2009.

## Processing Information

Finding aid witten by Carrie Hintz, 2009.

## Accruals

Materials may have been added to the collection since this finding aid was prepared. Contact [rbml@columbia.edu](mailto:rbml@columbia.edu) for more information.

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## Related Materials

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### Selected Related Material

[Allen Ginsberg Papers, 1944-1991](#) Columbia University, Rare Book & Manuscript Library

### Selected Related Material

The Ginsberg Papers contain some correspondence, some additional experimental prose, and fractionary drafts of *The Exterminator*, *Queer*, and "The Hot Rod" as well as a full manuscript of *The Naked Lunch* (here referred to by the working title "Interzone.")



### **Selected Related Material**

[Jack Kerouac Correspondence, 1945-1965](#) Columbia University, Rare Book & Manuscript Library

### **Selected Related Material**

[Barry Miles Papers, 1958-1990](#) Columbia University, Rare Book & Manuscript Library

### **Selected Related Material**

[Ann Charters Photographs, 1966-1982](#) Columbia University, Rare Book & Manuscript Library

### **Selected Related Material**

[Naked Lunch: The First Fifty Years](#) online exhibit, Columbia University, Rare Book & Manuscript Library

### **Selected Related Material**

[William S. Burroughs Papers](#) New York Public Library, Berg Collection

### **Selected Related Material**

[William S. Burroughs Papers, WSB 97](#) Ohio State University, Rare Books and Manuscripts

### **Selected Related Material**

[William S. Burroughs Collection](#) Hayden Library Special Collections, Arizona State University

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## **Controlled Access Headings**

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- American literature
- Beats (Persons)
- Galley proofs
- Authors
- Burroughs, William S., 1914-1997
- Bockris, Victor, 1949-

## Collection Inventory

### Series I: Correspondence, 1953-1973

#### Scope and Contents

The Correspondence series contains a few select pieces of correspondence between Burroughs and his friends and collaborators. In this series are letters exchanged between Burroughs and Allen Ginsberg regarding their collaborative, epistolary book *The Yage Letters*. This series, though small, includes both letters later reprinted as part of the publication and correspondence related to the editing and process.

Title/Description	Instances	
Burroughs to Bill Berkson, June 4, 1962	box 1	folder 1
Burroughs to Allen Ginsberg		
January 25, 1953	box 1	folder 2
<b>Scope and Contents</b> (published as part of <i>The Yage Letters</i> )		
January 6, 1955	box 1	folder 3
<b>Scope and Contents</b> (regarding <i>The Yage Letters</i> )		
January 9, 1955	box 1	folder 4
<b>Scope and Contents</b> (regarding <i>The Yage Letters</i> )		
March 9, 1956	box 1	folder 5
<b>Scope and Contents</b> (regarding <i>The Yage Letters</i> )		
Allen Ginsberg to Burroughs, 1973	box 1	folder 6
Philip Whalen to Burroughs, 1957	box 1	folder 7

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### Series II: Writings, 1958-1969

#### Scope and Contents

The Writings series is the largest series in the collection and contains working drafts of 1961's Grove Press Edition of *The Soft Machine*, as well as annotated drafts and galley proofs of Burroughs's substantial 1965 revision of the novel published by Grove Press. There are also drafts and galleys of *Nova Express*; a corrected, signed galley proof of *The Naked Lunch*; and full typescript drafts of

*The Yage Letters* and *Junkie*. This series also contains a collection of prose experiments conducted by Burroughs utilizing the cut-up technique that he utilized in much of his longer fiction, as well as experiments in using a grid form to intersplice different texts together.

Title/Description	Instances	
"A Brief Statement on <i>The Naked Lunch</i> <i>The Soft Machine</i> and <i>The Nova Express</i> " circa, 1963	box 1	folder 8
<p><b>Scope and Contents</b></p> <p>(carbon copy in WSB's hand)</p>		
Dealer Catalogs and Book Reviews	box 1	folder 9
"Epic Prose Poem," circa, 1963	box 1	folder 10
Experimental Prose, circa, 1958-1965 <u>Physical Description:</u> (6 Folders)	box 1	folder 11-16
"Johnny 23" (with Editor's Corrections)	box 1	folder 17
<i>Junkie</i> -- Manuscript	box 5	
<i>The Naked Lunch</i>		
Signed Galley Proofs	box 1	folder 18
<p><b>Scope and Contents</b></p> <p>(original proof, 1964 Burroughs's signature, 1969)</p>		
Recording of Burroughs reading <i>Naked Lunch</i> , undated <u>Digital Object:</u> <a href="#">Recording of Burroughs reading Naked Lunch, undated</a>	box 1	folder 19
<p><b>Scope and Contents</b></p> <p>Please follow these links for digitized clips of the sections <a href="#">The Rube, Meeting of International Conference...</a>, and <a href="#">The Exterminator Does a Good Job</a></p>		
"New Comment" radio show episode <u>Digital Object:</u> <a href="#">"New Comment" radio show episode</a>	box 1	folder 19
<p><b>Scope and Contents</b></p> <p>This content is the remainder of the tape that also contains Burroughs reading <i>Naked Lunch</i>. The remainder of side 1 and all of side 2 are an episode of a British radio program called "New Comment," featuring various contemporary British poets reading their work.</p>		
A Distant Hand Lifted, 1961-1964	box 2	folder 1
<i>Nova Express</i>		

Galley Proofs, 1964	box 2	folder 2
<i>The Soft Machine</i>		
Typescript with autograph corrections, 1960	box 2	folder 3
<b>Scope and Contents</b>		
(for 1961 Olympia Press Edition)		
Typescript with autograph corrections, 1963	box 2	folder 4
<b>Scope and Contents</b>		
(This is dated 1963, but it is likely the 129 page manuscript, dating from November 1962, that Burroughs submitted to Olympia Press for their planned 1963 revised edition of the book which never appeared.)		
Galley Proofs- Grove Press Edition, 1965	box 2	folder 5
Related Correspondence, 1963-1966	box 2	folder 6
"The Strange Bed," circa, 1961-1962	box 2	folder 7
<b>Scope and Contents</b>		
(Part of <i>The Ticket that Exploded</i> )		
<i>The Yage Letters</i> - Draft, undated	box 3	folder 1

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### Series III: Photographs and Realia

#### Scope and Contents

The photographs in the collection are mostly snapshots of Burroughs and Herbert Huncke. Also included in this series is the Dreamachine, a device designed by Burroughs and Brion Gysin and constructed by Ian Sommerville, designed to help stimulate brain activity and bring about a hallucinatory state.

Title/Description	Instances	
Photographs	box 3	folder 7
Dreamachine	item Dreamachine	
<b>Scope and Contents</b>		
Image of the "Dreamachine" in an <a href="#">online Omeka exhibit</a>		

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### Series IV: Victor Bockris Files, 1965-1975

**Scope and Contents**

Victor Bockris, a friend and collaborator of Burroughs, Victor Bockris write several articles about Burroughs and edited both Burroughs's collection of essays, *The Adding Machine* and the interview-based book *With William Burroughs: A Report from the Bunker*. This series of material includes numerous drafts of and notes for *With William Burroughs*, as well as some of Burroughs's published writings collected by Bockris- including a small run of *Crawdaddy* Magazines featuring articles or columns by Burroughs and a copy of *The Paris Review* that includes both an interview with Burroughs and his essay "St. Louis Return."

Title/Description	Instances	
Correspondence and Ephemera	box 3	folder 2
With William Burroughs		
Draft-- Preface with Barry Miles Comments, 1975	box 3	folder 3
Drafts and Notes, undated <u>Physical Description:</u> (3 Folders)	box 3	folder 4 to 6
Drafts and Notes <u>Physical Description:</u> (2 Folders)	box 4	folder 1 to 2
Notes on Burroughs, undated	box 4	folder 3
Collected Burroughs Writings		
<i>Black Mask</i> , August, 1974	box 4	folder 4
<b>Scope and Contents</b>		
(contains Burroughs's "Coldspring News")		
<i>The Paris Review</i> Fall, 1965	box 4	folder 5
<b>Scope and Contents</b>		
(contains Burroughs's "St. Louis Return" and an interview with Burroughs)		
<i>Crawdaddy</i> , June-December, 1975	box 4	folder 6 to 7
<u>Physical Description:</u> (2 Folders)		
<i>New York Arts Journal</i> , undated	box 4	folder 8
<b>Scope and Contents</b>		
(includes Bockris interview with Burroughs)		
<i>The Drummer</i> , undated	box 4	folder 9

**Scope and Contents**

(includes Bockris interview with Burroughs)

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)**Series V: Addition to the Papers, 2017 & 2018****Scope and Contents**

Accession 2017.2018.M020

Title/Description	Instances	
Cut-Up Typescript Materials for <i>The Nova Trilogy</i> :		
<b>Scope and Contents</b>		
In 1959, Brion Gysin cut newspaper articles into sections and rearranged the cuttings at random. The results of this radical literary collage technique was published as <i>Minutes To Goby</i> Two Cities Editions/ Jean Fanchette, Paris (1960) containing works by Sinclair Beiles, William Burroughs, Gregory Corso and Brion Gysin		
Typescript cut-up of about 60 pieces (ranging from one sentence to 45 lines)	box 6	folder 1
<b>Scope and Contents</b>		
Most are of some length and all deal with Burroughs' most notable themes and his revolutionary method of writing		
Typescript cut-up (blue ribbon copy) of 82 pieces, average measurement 4 x 3 inches, amounting to about 18 pages mss	box 6	folder 2 & 3
<b>Scope and Contents</b>		
Most pieces contains from 75 to 150 words		
125-130 pieces [of] news fragments," mostly from New York daily newspapers c. 1965. These are mostly cut up newspaper stories (many very small and fragile) and photos rather than whole clippings.	box 6	folder 4
<b>Scope and Contents</b>		
A few pages of his cut ups are extracts from his own publications		
"Intersection pictures and texts":		
118 news clippings, some with comments typed in red by WSB, including passages identified from <i>Nova Express</i>	box 6	folder 5-8

### Scope and Contents

Mostly from NY daily newspapers 1964-65. Photos of car crashes, gangland killings, narcotics addicts, cops, political scandals, warfare, color cartoons, homoerotic pictures, space exploration; paperback cover and printed review slip *The Dutch Schultz Story*, with a chapter extracted which was his research material for his own book, *The Last Words of Dutch Schultz* (1969). With some of his own writings excised from his publications.

### Scope and Contents

Many of the individual pieces in these folders fit together, suggesting a late draft of at least one of those early novels on which his reputation rests may have been finalized from the larger of these fragments. Many primary themes and characters in the Nova series (the Old Man of the Mountain, Doctor Benway, Towers-Open Fire, junkies and narcs, the Lexington Kentucky Narcotics Farm, childhood memories, orgasms, Martian and science-fiction landscapes. dead star fading, the recurring date September 17, 1899 that appears in these works, etc.) are found in these cut-up texts.

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"This Is the Time of the Assassins":

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"This Is the Time of the Assassins." Carbon typescript, 4 pages, with a half dozen ink corrections, including three words inserted in ink and the pages numbered in the author's hand	box 6	folder 9
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### Scope and Contents

One of Burroughs' most iconic texts, the title from Rimbaud, and likely the first appearance in the author's work of Hassan-i-Sabbah, the Old Man of the Mountain, segueing to "Tanger present tense." First published in *Metronome*, Aug. 1961, and later incorporated in the novel, *Nova Express* (1964). From all appearances this is the author's retained copy of the original sent to *Metronome*.

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Brion Gysin *A Quick Trip to Alamut*:

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"A Quick Trip to Alamut: The Celebrated Castle of the Hash-Head Assassins." [1973]. 27pp contemporary photocopy of the original typescript, heavily corrected and revised in the photocopy by the author	box 6	folder 10
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### Scope and Contents

This is basically the third draft of the text, incorporating the first 22 pages of the second draft and the final five pages of the first draft.

**Scope and Contents**

Although not having anything in the recipient's hand, this was the copy sent by Gysin to his close friend and collaborator, William S. Burroughs, as it came from a sale of the latter's personal archival materials.

**Scope and Contents**

Burroughs, who did not go on the trip, nonetheless has a significant part in Gysin's narrative (there is reference to Timothy Leary as well, and the idea of LSD in the water supply), an account of Gysin's trip to the famous castle at Alamut of Hassan + Sabbah, leader of the late 11th century assassin cult made famous by Marco Polo, the first European to visit him. Hassan-i-Sabbah was a major influence on both writers going back to the early '60s.

**Scope and Contents**

This corrected typescript is the basis of the first published edition by Ink Blot in a collection of Gysin's short works, "Who Runs May Read" (2000), more than 25 years after it was written in 1973.

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*Who Runs May Read*. Oakland: Inkblot, 2000

box 6

folder 11

**Scope and Contents**

1st edition. 99 copies printed. Bookplate of The Psychedelic Library--Michael and Cynthia Horowitz.

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Six loose, now empty, folders which at one time contained the material described above. The folder for "Intersection pictures and texts" is so labeled by Burroughs

box 6

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Assorted bills and receipts from hotels in Portugal, Morocco, and Spain, 1964 & 1965

box 6

folder 12

**Scope and Contents**

Accession 2018.2019.M013

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