

ROBERT K. MORRIS

THE CONSOLATIONS
OF AMBIGUITY

AN ESSAY ON THE NOVELS
OF ANTHONY BURGESS

A LITERARY FRONTIERS EDITION
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A C K N O W L E D G M E N T S

Excerpts from *Tremor of Intent*, *Beds in the East*, *Devil of a State*, *The Right to an Answer*, *Honey for the Bears*, *The Wanting Seed*, *A Clockwork Orange*, and *Enderby Outside* have been quoted by permission of William Heinemann, Ltd., British publishers of the works, and of W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., publishers in the United States.

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FOR PENNY, AGAIN,
AND FOR TONY AND TEDDY

THE CONSOLATIONS OF AMBIGUITY

IN slightly under a score of productive and creative years, Anthony Burgess has published dozens of essays, reviews, and poems; an unmusty primer on linguistics; a jolly, scholarly introduction to James Joyce; a survey of Shakespeare; a critique of the contemporary British novel; and fourteen of his own novels. Like the protean author himself—soldier, composer, teacher, journalist, lecturer, lapsed Catholic, expatriate, and eternal exile—the books range from the mythopoetic-autobiographical *Vision of Battlements* through the tragicomic “Malayan trilogy” and the libidinous, metaphorically flashing pseudobiography of Shakespeare, to the ugly Gothicism and black humor of his most notorious book, *A Clockwork Orange*, and the pure and exuberant comedy of *Enderby*. With Burgess only in his early fifties, there is the grand promise of much more to come.

Burgess is a professional writer par excellence and, as some have it, a too prolific one; yet his art is in no way inferior to his scope. Language is the last on which he shapes his trim fictions, and with increased justification his craftsmanship has been compared to that of such as Shakespeare and Dickens, Joyce and Nabokov—all artists who made language, as much as people, the protagonist in their works. Indeed, the word is the beginning and the end for Burgess, the alpha and omega of his novels and of practically anything else he has a mind to write. His invention of a technico-Russo-Anglo slang in *A Clockwork Orange* and his Elizabethanizing of the modern idiom for *Nothing Like the Sun* are his most original and extravagant sorties into language. His knack for bringing off such holophrastic dazzlers as *apneumatic*,

plenilunar, bathycolpic, steatopygous, dyspneal is only slightly less extravagant, and even at times irritating. For the reader, Burgess' grasp of linguistics and philology (along with his wit and gusto in displaying it) seems evidence that the labor of joining rhetoric and syntax is more an open-air free-for-all through fields of morphology than a moody, lonely contest of man against typewriter. Yet Burgess has remarked more than once that writing is the most physically debilitating business he knows of. With him, mere surfaces can indeed delight. But the real test of substance is in seeing how the word becomes flesh.

I am aware of just having written a dangerous transition, for it has all the earmarks of introducing the "job" one has done on an author. I have, to be sure, written quite a few pages on all but a few of Burgess' books, but I am less sure they constitute the perennial "job," or, to quote Burgess himself in a less charitable vein, "the clumsy jabs of the . . . exegetist." My feeling about them is that while they draw upon the entire armory of techniques supplying the "armed vision"—a term for criticism that the late and great Stanley Edgar Hyman (after Coleridge) made his own—they primarily serve as self-clarification for Burgess' effect on me and my response to him and only secondarily as critical musings. Rather than taking him apart, I have tried putting him together, and that around a particular point of focus that has the most meaning for me.

The focal point is the title of the present section, and, alas! the phrase is not mine.* It leapt at me—in an almost unrelated context—from the many pages of reviews on Burgess and began shaping for me the theme I find most central and significant in his novels. I hope

* It is William F. Gavin who coined it in his review of *Honey for the Bears* (*America*, February 8, 1964).

that my initial annexation of another critic's well-honed words—Burgess' paronomastic title for his study of Joyce (*Re Joyce*) was one of the master's own favorite puns—will not upset the balance of my subsequent commentaries, which *are* mine and are meant as personal speculations of varying degrees of intensity.

As for the meaning of "The Consolations of Ambiguity"—or, rather, as to my meaning: I hope much of it is implicit, given the knowledge of the flux of life that batters us repeatedly and the need to change and endure in the face of it. Like all good writers, Burgess pictures the human condition as the immediate collision of private ideas and personal visions against a collective that is not always sympathetic, but potentially (when not actually) hostile. Under such circumstances, our survival depends upon playing roles we generally despise, are frequently incapable of sustaining, and are seldom empowered to master; to survive is about all we accomplish. But Burgess begins where many a contemporary novelist tends open-endedly to end. A hero encounters choices that, on the surface, can be met by his slipping into one familiar role or another or that he can avoid completely. But underneath, by slow degrees, the choice finally forces a naked confrontation with the self alone. No longer a matter of how one imagines himself, it is now only a question of what one is and can be. The moment when illusion is finally stripped away becomes the moment of "comic" truth wrested from the beautiful losses, deceptions, evasions, and lies that we, in folly, use to comfort ourselves. The comedy is no less than the comedy of life itself, and the truth is in taking it on its own terms. With few exceptions, Burgess' heroes choose to live—less securely, ideally, insulated, or feverishly than be-

fore, but, nevertheless, to live, accepting imperfections and divisions and consoling themselves with the ambiguities built into life and human nature.

Just as the stunning pyrotechnics of his language, his ability to tell a story, and his varied range have made Burgess perhaps the most interesting novelist to emerge in the past decade, so, I imagine, the type of hero he has chosen to shoulder life's viable ambiguities has swelled his growing presence as one of our leading "comedians." Essentially it is a type we know all too well, for Burgess' fictions are in many respects mirrors for our own reflections. Take us, individually, at any given moment in our lives and we will be preoccupied or overwhelmed with matters of love, sex, society, and personality. We will be reacting to pressures from family, society, friends, responding ethically and morally to our deficiencies, projecting our successes and anticipating our failures, making choices we can intellectually rationalize but that leave us emotionally drained. With a very few exceptions, life in Burgess' novels impinges not upon the strange or *outré* or absurd hero, but, as one especially sensitive reader of Burgess has put it, upon "the fallen man with the usual amount of ambition, irritation, guilt, decency and common sense."* For most of the time each life moves along at its petty pace when suddenly, wham! we are surrounded, overrun, engulfed by conflict from within and without, forced into tapping primal springs of talents and energies we never knew we possessed in order to stay healthy, sane, active, and in the broadest sense, creative.

On the other side lies desperation and futility, frontiers to which Burgess' novels take us only so we can understand that the resolution of the human con-

* William H. Pritchard, "The Novels of Anthony Burgess," *The Massachusetts Review* (Summer, 1966), 539.

flict lies in not passing over them. To watch other heroes torn or lacerated or driven mad by their ambiguous natures, making choice after choice until all choices but the ultimate have been excluded, is to founder in the "existential thing." And while the existential novel is undoubtedly the high-water mark of modern literature, its array of violence, flight, suicide, and murder renders life permissible only in terms of its tragic permutations. Burgess—for reasons that may be personal as well as artistic (he was diagnosed in 1959 for a brain tumor and told he had only a year to live)—is a life-affirmer. No comic novelist could be otherwise. Even the dark predictions of *A Clockwork Orange* and *The Wanting Seed*, the grim turn of events in *The Right to an Answer*, and the sadistic interludes of *Tremor of Intent* are ostensible foils to the feeling for health and comedy that override the tragedy and "sickness unto death." Burgess does not shy away from the philosophic alternatives of existentialism, but he resolves the "fear and trembling" that originates in the plethora of choices by having his heroes accept as many of them as they can. Truly in the tradition of the best comic writers, Burgess has the talent for turning what is imaginatively reasonable into what is humanly possible.

To move, then, from the implicit meaning of my title to its more explicit connotations involves little difficulty for readers who share even partially the comic view of life, a view that balances optimism and pessimism and can, at given moments, shift poles. One may focus on the swing of the Burgess pendulum at any point, yet its dizzying and sobering effect emerges only after several full oscillations. Burgess' novels are self-contained, but there is, as well, a continuity gained through the author's consistent and flexible comic outlook and through a musicianship that arranges the

rhythm of words and the motif of themes. In writing about Burgess I have tried to keep these considerations in mind and have selected the novels that, for me, express it best. I hope my partiality for Burgess' works and my increased susceptibility to his vision have not violated beyond recognition his meaning; but then, anyone writing about an author he admires is liable to put more of himself than he realizes into his comments. Of course, this essay reflects my own personal and literary prejudices, and I have not striven for objectivity. Ambiguities of one sort or another are bound to arise from my judgments, but in the end such ambiguities may prove sufficient consolation in themselves.

SOLDIER-SINNER, SPY-SAINT

We can no longer expect the one big book, the single achievement, to be an author's claim to posterity's regard. We shall be more inclined to assess the stature of a novelist by his ability to create what the French call an *oeuvre*, to present fragments of an individual vision in book after book, to build, if not a *War and Peace* or *Ulysses*, at least a shelf.*

BURGESS is a good instance of the contemporary author—no titan, but slated for posterity—who presents “fragments of an individual vision in book after book,” in the hope that something like totality will emerge when all are taken together. Someone has said of *The Magic Mountain* that it is all there all the time. I would say the same of *Hamlet* and *The Tempest*, of *Bleak House*, *Ulysses*, and *Pale Fire*. For out of the Shakespearean cosmos, the London of Dick-

* Anthony Burgess, *The Novel Now* (New York, 1967), 19.

ens, out of the Dublin of Joyce, the antiterras of Nabokov, come fragments of life so created and transformed into the total vision that the world within such works is made more permanent and real than that without.

It is not difficult to understand why these particular writers—all “word boys”—should have influenced Burgess, and it is easy enough to detect in his novels the marks of their influence. Apart from the singularity of their imaginative and technical genius, they share two features that hold the greatest attraction for Burgess: a fascination for order in the face of disintegration and their incorporation into their “poems” of a “world picture” inspired directly by the tempo of the times, held together by the architecture of myth, and designed to preserve the order.

I hope this obvious reflection may give way to one less obvious and that I may be excused from the customary detours into literary history in making it. Why the “big book” can no longer be expected is certainly not because of any decline in the modern pulse rate nor because myths have dried up at the source. It is because the “world picture” antecedent to the myth has become—thanks to media, psychiatry, government, peer group factions, and the remaining perdurable whipping boys—so fragmented that no single myth can contain it. The Shakespearean heroes, microcosms who angle to control the universal order of things, the Dickensian haunters of the labyrinthine city, the Joycean fishers in streams of dreams and consciousness, the Nabokovian *déracinés* who puzzle through acrostics of madness only to discover—like subjects of Steinberg cartoons—that they are drawing themselves, were each driven by an *idée fixe* become almost mythic in itself: Hamlet for revenge and death; Prospero for his kingdom and his daughter’s happiness; the assemblage at Bleak

House to penetrate their private mysteries; Bloom for a son, Stephen for a father, Molly for Bloom; Kinbote for his immortality. I have simplified shamefully only to make clear that, no matter how frustrated, confused, or insane each seemed, the world held a tragic or comic coherence; one fell easily into the myth because he was part of the myth.

The end of coherence—or, if one prefers, the beginning of alienation—accelerated after World War II with the younger writers who had seen the “world picture” conflagrant in the concentration camps and the myth atomized in all its grim brilliance over Hiroshima. The incoherence reached its zenith in the phenomenon of the rebel- or anti-hero. For him, it was no longer simply a case of wandering, as Matthew Arnold had put it, “between two worlds/One dead, the other powerless to be born.” Even that condition, uncertain as it was, presumed monolithic antagonisms and complexities between individual and society. Now the anti-hero was being trapped by the duality of both. Obsessed by a drive to escape the present at any cost, he looked toward the past that had betrayed him and a future he was ill-equipped to face. The quester after integration had become the seeker after ambivalence, the *idée fixe* become the *idée divise*. “We are all caught, are we not,” says WS (Burgess’ Shakespeare of *Nothing Like the Sun*) “between two worlds? Our sin and our sickness is not to choose one and turn our backs on the other but to hanker after both.”

The trapping worlds in Burgess may be as disparate as seedy Soho haunts, as wild reaches along the northern coast or upriver villages in Malaya, and the hankering manifests itself less in an Empedoclean world-weariness than in outright confusion and disillusion. The end results are pretty much the same: his heroes draw upon splits within, try like WS—who

himself is caught between town and country, monogamy and rampant bisexuality, medievalism and modernism, paganism and Christianity—to mobilize their dualisms rather than reconcile them, to court ambivalences, not eschew them. De-mythification, de-mystification, a whittling to the core, de-nudation (literally, all Burgess heroes are vulnerably naked at some time or other during their quest) are ways to get on with the “slow and cruel stripping-off of illusion” that Burgess makes central to his novels and the focus of his “individual vision.” If it is impossible to put together the fragments of the world no less than of the self, we can make more manageable the ambiguities with which we must live and console ourselves.

A Vision of Battlements is early but quintessential Burgess. It introduced his anti-hero (who even later with certain modifications was to muddle along much in the same grain) and most of the concerns that dominated his later books: the character of the “epicene” (as Christopher Ricks christened him); the entrapment between myth and history; the “interpenetrating opposites” of dialectical materialism; Pelagianism and sexual guilt; male inferiority masked by male supremacy; the artist as hermaphrodite; and the unqualified disenchantment for the superstates, Russia and America. Small book though it is, it is not slight, and despite the author’s sense of its limitations, the emergent ambiguities are as symptomatic of a generation as of a single individual who belongs very much to it. Had Burgess published the novel upon its completion in 1949, I am quite certain it might have antedated in influence such books as *Catcher in the Rye* and *Lucky Jim*. It was as perfectly matched to the *Zeitgeist* as they were, intelligently angry, and fiercely comic. Sgt. Richard Ennis—later to figure as a character in *The Worm and the Ring* and as a fleeting allusion in the

Malayan trilogy—is an army rebel whose passionate distaste for the military, colonialism, bourgeois smugness, Philistinism, bores, phonies, marriage, and much else could well have primed the independent and trans-Atlantic rebellions of Jim Dixon and Holden Caulfield. They were only inheritors of the troubles Ennis had experienced first hand, and the pounding they gave their respective Establishments would have had no more than the customary striking power of a second assault wave had Ennis been known.

One of the principal ambiguities of *A Vision of Battlements* is that Ennis wears the hair shirt of the penitent and sinner as readily as the armor of the rebel, for he is no iconoclast or nihilist. This, in part, is his problem no less than the problem of other of Burgess' heroes; out of step with their world (though very much of it), they are entangled by speculation and reflection rather than nerved to action, and they are made comically helpless and impotent because of involuted sensibilities and monkish heroics. Ennis, like all artists or quasi artists (his quality as composer is slightly dubious), is neurotic, but there is a bit of the paranoid about him as well. He is unhealthily nettled by the mundane persecutions all good artists overcome or learn to exploit early in life, a trifle self-pitying, and overeager at playing the martyr. A typical rumination:

Ennis, in his ecstasy of execration, could not tell who the enemies were, but a number of faces had coalesced into a single image—the destroyer, the anti-builder, a Proteus capable of being time, the sea, the state, war, or all at once. It wanted cities down, love broken, music scrambled. Ennis the builder cursed and wept in the ruins.*

One might take this pose for epic ranting or (worse) unsalable *fin-de-siècle* romanticism, were not the iro-

* *A Vision of Battlements* (New York, 1965), 17.

nies made expressly clear early on in the novel. Ennis is supposed to be an avatar who sees his own age come crashing down around him—sufficient reason alone for explaining why the book is loosely patterned after the *Aeneid* and a mock heroic that offers less laughs than grim and twisted smiles of empathy.

Can one build cities from the stones of holocaust and raise love and art from among the ruins? I think it fairly impressive that Burgess should be thus concerned at a time when most writers were still registering the tolls of war and seemed little inclined to deal with reconstruction or to anticipate the rebellion from both. (Probably Burgess' own isolation on Gibraltar toward the end of the war—if not above a sea of tranquillity then at least at considerable distance from the battle lines—prompted his reflection on the shape of things to come.)

As the *Iliad* was a poem of war and the *Odyssey* was one of wandering and fragmentation, homelessness and exile, so the *Aeneid*, completing the trilogy of the heroic age, incorporated both to go beyond them and to become a poem of unity, growth, reconstruction. In that way, *A Vision of Battlements* is more significantly parallel to the *Aeneid* than it is in parodies of characters and action, which are clever but not overly ingenious.

It is perhaps risky, but I see Burgess' parallel to the *Aeneid* as a result of writing under the giant shadow of Joyce. Those who have read Burgess' engaging study of Joyce may perhaps better gauge the spiritual as well as literary influences and may feel as I do that Burgess has been both adroit and original in assimilating certain Joycean concerns and techniques. Like Joyce, Burgess is a prose-poet skilled in linguistic and verbal counterpoint, a persistently human novelist in pursuit of *l'homme moyen sensuel*, and a writer mov-

ing with the currents of history that beat against the river of myth. Like Joyce, Burgess, too, finds relevant ironies and meaningful comedy in simple reversals of epic character and tone. Thus, in *A Vision of Battlements* the magnificently regal Dido becomes the (twice) abandoned Concepción; *fidus* Achates the epicene dancer Julian Agate (fitting companion for a composer); Lavinia a castrating WREN; Turnus, the bullying strongboy, Sergeant Turner. Aeneas himself, that paragon of the triple virtues so revered by the Romans—devotion to family, loyalty to the state, piety—becomes Ennis: adulterous, rebellious, impious. But Burgess is mythicizing Joyce as well, making Ennis as much Stephen Dedalus as an anti-*pious* Aeneas: an artist *manqué* living an exile imposed from without and from within, a lapsed Catholic fixed in the guilt of his defection yet magnetized by the pull of paganism (Roman, this time, not Greek), tacking for the utopia of Christian eschatology, but steered by his own Manichean ambivalence toward a classic fate.

No less than it was for Burgess an “emblem of waste and loneliness,” the “Rock,” which *A Vision of Battlements* tries to tame by enclosing in myth, is Ennis’ nemesis—geologically and theologically. A poor soldier in the military establishment, he is an even poorer one in the church militant, flaunting sacraments and army manuals alike and seeking in art a substitute discipline that one or more of the seven deadlies repeatedly disrupts. If Gibraltar proves to be strategically more impregnable than Troy, then Ennis is more totally walled in by his defenses, weaknesses, and insufficiencies and more vulnerable in fleeing the past. Read “R. Ennis” backwards and you have *sinner*—an anagram that might be wild coincidence merely—but most of the sins are of omission rather than commission. Of the latter, adultery is the least, though most human,

and most fittingly epic. And as for the former, Burgess acknowledges their extent and worth, seeing in *A Vision of Battlements* "a little funeral of old ambitions": the good Catholic and soldier he never was and the great composer he failed to become.

But like other writers who frame the present by the past, Burgess recognizes that if history provides countless analogues for the great shattered myths, how fragile those we build of ourselves, and about ourselves, seem by comparison. As Ennis' façade is chipped away, his illusion stripped off, the Rock itself dwindles perceptibly, despite its force as metaphysical numen and physical symbol of place. Ennis may not finally be emancipated from his faith, but he ceases brooding about it, a pass Stephen Dedalus never comes to. Certainly the spate of lapsed Catholics about which Burgess subsequently wrote seems positively cheerful placed beside Ennis, and health personified compared to the similar seedy heroes who haunt the dark and sordid fissures of Graham Greenland. And, in retrospect, Gibraltar itself—the Rock to which Ennis, though no Promethean rebel or satanic sinner, is chained—becomes merely one more place-name when it finally sinks from Ennis' sight below the horizon. What, really, is this once great Pillar of Hercules, this incredible, mythic promontory? It is a complex of installations and fortifications, a heterogeneous mess of Portuguese, Spanish, Italian peoples afloat in the usual hodgepodge of customs and manners brewed under British hegemony, a place to drink and swear and fornicate, maybe love, maybe die; a place, if any, where myths die. It is a dead end of the glories and splendors of antiquity as sung by Vergil—its heroes, arts and sciences, adventures and discovery transformed into military martinets, cultural banality, and epic boredom.

The emphases in *mock heroic* and *comic epic* fall

generally (and too easily) on the first term, and to many preclude the possibility of the second. I find this evaluation, at least in the discussion of modern writers, slightly premature. However diminished, inverted, parodied, or permuted the myth becomes in their hands, one will find, *mutatis mutandis*, the major congruences retained. It is the reason, I think, that the writer bothers to use myth at all. Joyce proved this with Bloom and, to a lesser degree—only because the novel itself is admittedly lesser—Burgess with Ennis. Something positive must finally be claimed for *A Vision of Battlements* and for its hero whose quest—within the three or four square miles of Gibraltar—is as meaningful for him as for an Aeneas who ranged over much of the then known world (and below it) to found Rome.

A Vision of Battlements is not a great book, but it reminds us that one need not rewrite either an *Aeneid* or a *Ulysses* to show how man, circumscribing the myth by recognizing life, holds more ambiguities than any myth possibly could and enlarges and knows himself. "I must learn to grow up . . . I can't put it off much longer" are, if not exactly Ennis' final words, the final words of any substance spoken by him in the novel. I may be naïve to Burgess' intent here, but I think the claws of comedy and irony are at last sheathed in Ennis' remark. We needn't consult the sibyl to discover that most of life is a riddle and uncertain, or to learn that we cannot go far with introspection, illusion, and isolation before we reduce everything to solipsism. I am not suggesting that in embarking for England Ennis has left the regions of the damned for the isles of the blessed, that he has opened up fully to reality, or that he will ultimately "create cities in his music," but that even for a sinner, perhaps for a sinner especially, the furrow of the fu-

ture holds more in the way of hope and faith and love than the "wake [of] the dwindling past."

The riddle Richard Ennis is on the verge of disentangling and what Denis Hillier, the cloak-and-dagger fall guy of *Tremor of Intent* is finally to spy out amidst that pother of intrigues, impostures, tortures, and murders is that faith, hope, and love—and in this particular instance the greatest of these is love—cost dearly, very dearly, but never so dearly as losing any one of them. Because both heroes are comically anachronistic and professionally inept, abraded by their own ambivalence toward flesh and spirit, motivated by an almost childlike belief in free will, yet victimized at every turn (save the last) by fate, it is hard not to read one novel in light of the other. *A Vision of Battlements*, furthermore, ends with a sea voyage; *Tremor of Intent* largely is one—an outward-bound journey through some rough seas of morality, ethics, and politics and through some even rougher ones of theology. Burgess' "individual vision" still arranges itself in fragments, but the pieces are more complexly organized and the textures denser.

The mythic framework of *A Vision of Battlements* gives it an ostensible focus that *Tremor of Intent*—more artfully geared to readings on several levels—does not in the initial probing seem to have. *Tremor of Intent* is masterfully intact, but maddeningly illusive as well. Take it as a cracking good spy story in the vein of Buchan, Ambler, or Le Carré, a parody on such, or an ironic tale of initiation after Conrad's *Youth or Chance*, and for all its ballast you can spot the commercial list. See it as a morality play on the Seven Deadly Sins or an allegory on the Manichean rifts in all of us—spelled out in images of light and dark, black and white, and debates about and contests between good and evil—and you push its literary ante-

cedents back further still. Nor need the allegory stop there. The passengers on the *Polyolbion* comprise the usual—which is to say unusual—Burgess gallery, but they hint at something more: Hillier, the seedy secret agent of many identities and none; the double agents Wriste (bloodless, disguised as a steward) and Theodorescu (gourmandizing homosexual); his Indian secretary Miss Devi, a demon of incredible sexual sophistication; Clara Walters, an American teenager of none whatsoever; her brother Alan, a precocious quiz kid slated for a truly violent awakening; and a roster of peripheral originals. All are international representatives of cultural cross-purposes and, assembled, present a microcosm of human illusions and delusions. Clearly, we have first-class accommodations on the archetypal “ship of fools.”

Despite such an embarrassment of riches, I hope I shall not be thought refractory or hasty in not displaying them at any greater length. For me, they are ultimately witty and erudite pendants to a consideration much less adorned, but potentially more substantial. In writing the novel, Burgess set out, I suspect, to show (among other things) that he could beat the best-selling masters of intrigue at their own game, rap the knuckles of those who still might consider espionage only Hollywood’s romance with sex and sadism, reiterate our responsibility to history (mess though it be), pit humanist against scientist (damning the “two cultures” equally), and prove that blind dogma of one sort or another is equally as fallacious and fatal as rational heterodoxy. The latter here are “big” questions, but I further suspect Burgess regards them much as we tend to exploit them: as mere cover-ups, evasions, or substitutions for *the* big question we refuse to ask ourselves. No purpose outside us is of value if we lead our lives stupidly and at cross-purposes. And

however, wherever, they may start, error and ignorance become in the end pretty much matters of individual responsibility and choice. While I will not go so far as to say the novel has a "palpable design" upon us, it has a tremor of good old existential intent.

My own inclination is to reject none of these levels in the novel, but at the same time to find its weight and force thrown almost exclusively on the character of Hillier who links them all. His last assignment—a kind of orgy of impostures, vacillations, excesses, and sin—becomes the crystalline exaggeration of what Hopkins called a life "seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil." Hillier is the ace under-cover man whose life has hitherto been lived under cover of the supreme delusion that one can remain unaffected, detached, un-choosing, "neutral" in the great dialectical power play between good and evil, life and death, heaven and hell, and of the great lie that consoling oneself with ambiguity is identical with giving life meaning.

Having reached a middle age beset by the "two chronic diseases of gluttony and satyriasis which, anyway, continue to cancel each other out," being a "good technician, superb at languages, agile, light-fingered, cool . . . but a void, a dark sack crammed with skill," Hillier was ripe for Manicheanism from the start. At one of the best Catholic colleges he "sounded" Protestant; his faith in God was weakened by his adulation for his school chum Roper, the budding scientific genius; he dropped Modern History for modern languages only to discover later on that "words . . . were otiose." The war taught him "that if they'd been wrong we'd been wrong too . . . that killing babies was no way to kill Hitler"; the postwar resumption of "life," that if you saved the honor of your friend's wife you had every right to dishonor her yourself; and

life itself, that no matter how you spiritually yearn for immortality the body stinks of mortality.

The causes for Hillier's dualism are outlined in the opening fifty-page report to his anonymous bureau chief, a not-too-veiled parody of religious confession. The effects make up the rest of the novel. We are obviously watching the writhings of a sinner far down in the abyss, but it is clear that one purpose of Burgess' "eschatological spy novel" (so subtitled in the American edition) is to show that after the great truth—Death—it is the great faith in Judgment, Heaven, and Hell, soaring above the great lie, that becomes the metaphysical outcropping for the sinner to grasp in his struggle upward. Confronted by the Pyrrhonism and absurdities of life, trapped by the dualism that is "ultimate reality," but "too insignificant to be attacked by either the forces of light or the forces of darkness," Hillier settles for the ambiguities and plays the game like most of us, because in the choice between the rational and irrational few of us would fail to elect the former. This is the undoing of Roper, the man who gives up God for science and loses both; up to a point it is the undoing of Hillier, who has a "dream of life, but no ideology will realise it for [him] better than any other." The dream, consequently, becomes nightmare, yet it is the incubus, before the illusion, that draws him to the tremor of intent—the moment of truth—in which he finds salvation in the irrational. Like Augustine (the patron saint of Hillier's college) Hillier's existence pivots on *Credo quia impossibile*. Here is eschatology with a vengeance. The S branded in his flesh—sinner, satyriast, spy—becomes the emblem of sainthood. Hillier's life is a saint's life; and though Burgess has given us a tarnished golden legend, the soul progresses stage by stage from skepticism and torment through purgatory to final acceptance of God.

Yet Burgess' surest accomplishment in the novel is not simply the rehash of a saint archetype. He has created a new species of saint: the sensualist who escapes being martyred to paradox and ambiguity through a comic nudge, rather than through a tragic leap into faith. The leap—if it happens at all—is the fate of the heroes of Graham Greene, with whom Burgess bears comparison. There are, in fact, more than routine similarities between *Tremor of Intent* and *The Confidential Agent*. Both Hillier and Agent D. are undercover men of wavering faith; indeed, they might be said to be agnostics. Both writers have activated Christian myth to question Christian belief, Burgess using the paradigm of the saint's life for imparting a vision classically comic, Greene retelling the *Song of Roland* in support of a vision classically tragic. Yet, despite a possible debt to Greene, to current events—the notorious Profumo case and the career of Sean Lemass—to church history and to Augustine's *Confessions*, Burgess' Hillier is an original. (I, for one, find Burgess' erudition and stock of allusion no less integral to his art than they were for Joyce or Nabokov, his characters no less plausible or real—isn't all fiction artifice anyway?—for their creator's intellect and wit.)

In retrospect, we know Denis Hillier is marked for sainthood. There is, for example, the matter of his name. Saint Denis (the patron saint of France) was mistakenly identified with Dionysius the Areopagite (the mystical Neo-Platonist, supposedly converted by Paul, martyred in Paris); Hillier's Dionysian strain becomes the foundation of his conversion. Saint Hilary was exiled by Constantine to the East in order to heal the schism between semi-Arians and Catholics; Hillier goes to Yarylyuk to bring back Roper, whose defection is in part spurred by the erroneous belief that his ancestor was a Catholic martyr under the Protestant

Elizabeth, Protestantism equaling capitalism, etc. There is, again, the matter of Hillier's life and its parallel with Augustine's: first a Manicheist, then a skeptic, penultimately a Neo-Platonist, and in the end a Catholic. Like Augustine, Hillier quests for the eternal and screwable feminine—Brigitte (primitive and whore), Miss Devi (Black Goddess and demon), Clara (White Goddess, virgin, innocent)—and resolves the quest in his service to the Virgin Mary. And, finally, there is Hillier's taking priestly orders. Who better to perform the seven sacraments than one who has embraced and, perhaps, triumphed over the Seven Deadly Sins?

My objective in the above close reading has not been to demonstrate my own footwork, but to offer a possible clarification of the novel's final stand. With a good deal of intuition and with even greater art, Burgess shows how the very dualisms that shape exciting fiction may often be the least satisfactory, indeed the most insidious, in shaping life. For Hillier (and undoubtedly for Burgess as well), one may move between opposite poles of strength—good and evil, salvation and damnation, "God and Notgod"—but in the end must choose strongly between them. "Ultimate reality," so Hillier tells Alan, "[has] two sides to the coin," but to live on the edge is, literally, to live marginally, if at all. Unattachment is treacherous; ambiguity an imposture; accidie (which I choose to translate as ennui or indifference), the vilest of sins; and neutrality the most terrible of existences. Wriste and Theodorescu die because they are "bloody neutrals," and Roper ends mentally neutered in exile. Father Hillier endures, but only by accepting on faith that the impossible and uncertain is more real than the possible and certain and by choosing to give over the game of temporal imposture for what might be the grander one of "cosmic imposture." *Tremor of Intent* ends with an

"Amen" that could hardly be more providential. Burgess' "divine comedy" is a comedy of the divinity of life itself.

MALAISE IN MALAYA

NOTHING is quite so dated as history. I offer this hopefully valid paradox (my own) as a preamble to some further reflections on the strengths and weaknesses of Burgess' "Malayan trilogy," *The Long Day Wanes*.* Undoubtedly the book is one of the best contemporary pictures of the Götterdämmerung of British colonialism and a singular accomplishment for Burgess, who published the trilogy in his last three years as Education Officer in the Federation of Malaya. Burgess' fidelity in treating the problems of a nation that has often seemed about as fathomable as the gibber of apes opens new doors of perception on unpublicized reaches of empire and on the failed British mission. Less interested in exploring the hypersensitivity of Forster's "good" Indians and "bad" Englishmen (or vice versa), Conrad's metaphysics of evil, or Waugh's grotesque parodies of institutions and people of the darker continents, Burgess set out to take a fresh look at the political, religious, and cultural mess in the Far East he knew. His is a view dictated by past and current events, but shaped by his own personal and immediate reactions. It is a view, furthermore, not of an

* I have written about the trilogy at considerably greater length and from a much different perspective in an essay that appears in my book on the contemporary British novel sequence, *Continuance and Change*. The three novels comprising the trilogy are *Time for a Tiger*, *The Enemy in the Blanket*, and *Beds in the East*.

outsider—not even an outsider of sensitivity and feeling—but of an insider. “I saw myself,” Burgess says in *The Novel Now*, “as a Malayan writer entertaining Malayan readers, and, indeed, intended to become a Malayan citizen.”

Everything in the five hundred pages of *The Long Day Wanes* supports the idea that Burgess’ rapport with Malaya is unique. Compare his approach, for example, with those of Waugh and Orwell, two outsiders who dealt roughly with the same matter: a charting of the intellectual and ideological rift between pukka sahib and native to lead us into those cultural pockets of confusion now recognized as the cul-de-sacs of imperialism. Burgess seems close to Waugh in technique: outrageous comedy, bizarre turns in plot, sharply honed, counterpointing dialogue. But in sensibility they are poles apart. Burgess feels for Malaya in a way that Waugh seems to have inured himself against altogether. As poor an accounting as Waugh’s pathetic imperialists give of themselves in his novels, no one believes for a moment that the author doesn’t *know* that WASPs or WASACs (White Anglo-Saxon Anglo Catholics) or WASRCs (White Anglo-Saxon Roman Catholics)—in short, persons of the White Establishment—are, for all their patronization, snobbishness, and hypocrisy, infinitely better than the little mischievous black and yellow devils.

I would say Burgess is closer to Orwell in his sensibility. Both understand the tempers of peoples pitted against the Western brand of progress, self-consciously and nationalistically dedicated to their own emergence. But unlike Orwell, who views Burma as a force of homogeneous wills (and consequently *one* will) bent upon undermining and overturning white power, Burgess sees Malaya in all its heterogeneity; sees its timeless conflicts arising as much from indigenous human

nature as from abstractions like the "brutality and jingoism" (to quote Orwell on Kipling) of imperialism; sees its people given to the same vices, vanities, corruptions, frustrations, desires, and excesses, be they English, Chinese, Eurasian, Malayan, or Indian, Christian, Moslem, Buddhist, or Hindu.

Lopping the limbs off colonialism, Burgess is able to reconstruct simultaneously the heart of Malaya before submitting it to the same sort of anatomical analysis. Tough-minded, at bottom an ironist and comedian rather than a satirist, Burgess is more involved, more an insider than perhaps he should be. The opening line of the trilogy—"East? They wouldn't know the bloody East if they saw it."—suggests a certain truculence of one who sees *and* knows. It is a pose and a conditioning, a barrier that the reader, for all his feeling he can break through, never cracks. Burgess pins us down; we are obviously outsiders. It is a line that plunges us headlong into Burgess' central theme: distrust, both intellectual and humanistic, of the historic process, a process made more futile than risky owing to pretense, turpitude, and (most often) simple ignorance. Soft-pedaling the philosophic or emotional implications of British decline and Malayan ascendancy, Burgess sets out to prove that only empirically must the setting of one sun necessarily mean the rising of another, and to prove (as Robert Penn Warren has written of *Nostromo*) that the "moral regeneration of society depends not upon shifts in mechanisms, but upon the moral regeneration of men."

History is chapter and verse of the trilogy, and Victor Crabbe, quondam teacher of history, its hero. Crabbe—liberal, sensual, dry, superior in intellect, conscience, and guilt—displays a comically bungling dexterity in the sure-footed descent that marks his own literal death and the symbolic death of the British

Empire in Malaya. Somehow boosted higher and higher up the tottering ladder of administrative school posts, but for all of it grown less effectual because of his mere ability to "only connect" all around, Crabbe suffers corresponding personal defeats, deteriorates in his physical and social habits, withdraws into a shell of cynicism, and at last scuttles randomly—as befits his name—over the flotsam and jetsam of his life. It is a life of failures without successes, nadirs without heights, battles without victor-ease. Crabbe's move from disillusionment and disaffection to alienation, from dissipation to revulsion, from sordidness and impotence to an absurd death counterpoints the rise of Malaya and contrasts ironically the sudden agony of individual change with the impersonal, maddeningly leisured forward march of events.

Throughout the trilogy history and hero interpenetrate. Both are extremely viable, history being for Burgess not "memory" but the "living pattern" that Crabbe the agent, reflector, commentator, and pawn experiences. By living in the present, Crabbe hopes to escape, or at least to blot out a past that he dreads; by identifying with Malaya, he hopes to lose his identification as an Englishman, though he thinks, walks, breathes, talks, even makes love like an Englishman. It is to this history-less way of life that Crabbe looks to console himself with his shattering ambiguities. Burgess is underplaying the sense of the past, which in the timeless East doesn't exist or at most exists so uniformly as to lack immediacy—"Malaya . . . warm, slummy comfort as permanent as the surrounding mountain-jungle." He is focusing on what is immediate and palpable and thus impels into cycle the dead past, the fluctuating present, the unpredictable (but certain) future of the country. He thereby shows us Crabbe trying to pit his own waning life-force against

forces he refuses to concede as historic and implacable.

Via Joyce has come, I find, Burgess' concern with Vico and cyclical theories of history. He is less attracted by Vico's general laws of growth, decay, and regrowth through which all civilizations must pass than by his analogy of civilizations' evolution paralleling children's development—their acquiring knowledge, that is, through growing experience. Thus with Crabbe and thus with Malaya. Hegelian thought, too, sifts through *The Long Day Wanes*. Hegel, as interpreter of Vico for the post-Renaissance world and the intellectual antecedent of Spengler and Toynbee, placed the keystone, if not the foundations of the arch through which all modern students of history must pass. Cold, precise, deterministic in its metaphysics, the Hegelian dialectic is both logical and phenomenological, but it is ultimately antihumanistic and ethically deplorable to anyone who sees the historical process continually renewing itself at the expense of human beings, to anyone who views as hopeless and nihilistic a process by which the ends not only justify the means, but are sacrificed to them.

Thesis, antithesis, synthesis: the unholy trinity of materialism! And the synthesis that becomes a new thesis in this eternal process of organization and reorganization may be stronger, though not necessarily better, as Burgess suggests at the opening of the trilogy's second volume, *Beds in the East*:

Dawn of freedom for yet another nation, freedom and all the rest of the abstractions. Dawn, dawn, dawn, and people waking up with various kinds of mouths and carried-forwards of the night or day before. Dawn, anyway.*

This, the irresistible force of modern history, defeats anti-hero Crabbe who also happens to be, by

* *Beds in the East* (London, 1964), 333.

example, anti-Hegelian. He is, though part of the historical flux, at odds with it, undermined by his romanticism, and hopelessly lashing against the impenetrable will, the immovable spirit, the unfathomable mind of the East. Like Stephen Dedalus—another teacher of history—Crabbe is trying to awake from its nightmarish provisos: not the “cry in the streets” of Dublin, but the slow-motion antics of Malayan life that too easily draw one into forgetfulness, the somnolence of the East that Crabbe desires and does not desire to shake off. “Good, too, Logic, of course; in itself, but not in fine weather” runs an epigraph to the sequence. Ambivalence, not speciousness, gnaws at Crabbe, for Malaya, the East are of themselves ambivalent: on the surface the daily comedy of quarrels, flurries, peccadilloes, *laissez faire*, innocent trespass upon ingrained but *passé* taboos; below, the whirring, demonic dynamo. The East, as Burgess sees it, is both active and passive, containing the principles of yin-yang, humming at both poles of the dialectic at once. It is a phenomenon alien to the West, which, nurtured on Hegelian propositions, submits to the certainty of either cyclical or lineal progression. “Change” and “no change,” “history” and “no history,” are the paradoxes crabbing Crabbe.

I have dwelt at some length on the prevailing tempi and directions of the trilogy, hoping to emphasize how the curious Oriental ethos, as well as the logic and design of history, proves more viable for the novel's argument than for Crabbe's existence. Crabbe's growing alienation from the Establishment and his depressing rejection by the Malays place him in the double jeopardy of losing his hold on reality and his touch with idealism. He has been cut off from both West and East, and his further retreat into a shell of abstractions makes more indecipherable the ambiguo-

ities and less possible their resolution. Crabbe, no exception from other Burgess heroes trapped by a fatal dualism, is an exception in being denied the option to choose between alternate exits. Much worse than being the outsider who has never gotten in is being the insider who is shoved out. Burgess banishes Crabbe to limbo—burdens him with an almost mythic exile to show his impotence in resisting the march of history or in remaking it in his own images. Crabbe's identification with such mythohistorical characters as Hamlet, Aeneas, Theseus, Don Quixote, Ulysses (the title of the trilogy comes from the Tennyson poem), and Caesar is pure parody and comic inversion. In his mind Crabbe can become all the conquerors, questers, and idealists he can never possibly be, and, like Joyce's Bloom and Earwicker, become "allmen," great and small. But he can never "tame the bluster of history" as Bloom and Earwicker can, for they are integrated with their times rather than at odds with them. Crabbe is victimized by myth rather than apotheosized by it.

My last statement should not be taken as a conclusion on Crabbe's function in *The Long Day Wanes*, but as a premise. It is precisely because of his victimization that the focus of the trilogy becomes blurred in a way that its tidy action, climax, and denouement would not make one initially suspect. There is, I feel, a major equivocation at the center of Crabbe's character, too easily overlooked in the peripheral crises, which are much clearer and more direct. I am not suggesting that he should be other than his creator intended him, nor that he may not even be the roundest and fullest—my own preference for Enderby apart—of Burgess' creations. Certainly Crabbe's relationships with his wife Fenella, Rosemary Michael, Robert Loo, and Nabby Adams (whose stories are intertwined and interrelated with his) figure in his growth and press

the ambiguities that mount with Crabbe's increased complexity. But if Crabbe's flaw is truly idealism and love for Malaya, if his paralysis, impotence, and effete-ness stem from these, if we believe him victimized by self-propagated myth as much as by objectified history—if, that is, he is a figure of myth rather than of history—to what extent can his ambiguous posture clarify those profounder ambiguities the trilogy compounds? Burgess, I think, tried to write a novel in which the tragic patterns of his hero's life run counter to the comic patterns of the ethos. It is the converse of what Conrad did in *Nostromo*, Waugh in *Handful of Dust*, Orwell in *Burmese Days*, and I am not so certain it succeeds.

For one thing, we are likely to feel that a certain literary principle has been violated along with the hero's ideals. Burgess has not totally convinced us that Malaya—for all its pulsating life, babble of languages, and "collocation of cultures"—is, or ever was, the fitting "objective correlative" for Crabbe's love and idealism. The appeal to Eliot is not gratuitous. Here, for example, is one of Crabbe's reflections toward the beginning of *Beds in the East*:

Crabbe looked at himself [in the mirror]: hair now riding back from his forehead, the beginning of a jowl. He looked down at his paunch, pulled it in, flinched at the effort, let it out again. He thought it was perhaps better to be middle-aged, less trouble. That growing old was a matter of volition was a discovery he had only recently made, and it pleased him. It was infantile, of course, like the pleasure of controlling excretion, but transitional periods in history had always appealed to him most—Silver Ages, Hamlet phases, when past and future were equally palpable, and opposing, could produce current. (P. 347)

Here lies the incipient tragedy or comedy of *The Long Day Wanes*. There is of course the possibility that

Crabbe is meant to be the dupe of his own recognized ambivalences and introspections—a Prufrockian, in other words. But the satiric treatment scarcely jells, considering the sympathy extended for his trampled sensibilities, shattered illusions, and broken dreams. Within the guidelines established for contemporary heroes, Burgess would like Crabbe to be one, to be, at least, a life-affirming Bloom before a death-desiring Prufrock. There is, too, the further possibility that Crabbe's death by drowning is symbolic or archetypic or whatever, in the sense that English power dies with Malayan independence. But since Crabbe expresses little affection for or affinity with Britain—his commitment to Malaya is in fact a negative response to the colonial Establishment—this reading does not wash very well either.

Insofar as Crabbe is concerned, we are left, I fear, with a futile course pursued with unrelieved futility. Crabbe is removed from the mainstream of humanity, then from the backwaters, to become a sacrificial pawn in the contest between history and myth. The game hardly seems worth the candle. To defeat the better nature of man without the glimmerings of earthly redemption—unless Malayan independence serves as such—is too harsh an irony even for a satirist to perpetrate. And there is the nagging doubt that Burgess is, in this case, not writing satire. *The Long Day Wanes* is consequently something of an anomaly, the only substantial novel in which Burgess actually crucifies his hero. While only a pollyanna would wish the "good guys" to win out all the time, much can be made of an author playing with his characters fairly. Crabbe, to be sure, loses the past, mismanages the present, misjudges the future. But in all that teeming world of Malaya he is the human center—no worse than some and better than most—and can we empathize with the

balance of the masses so long as our empathy for the individual is numbed? I, for one, feel cut off. Crabbe's death—an expedient, if not potentially meretricious *coup de théâtre*—becomes an evasion for deciding a reasonable response to the ambiguities that assail him. Obviously, Crabbe would not have fitted in to the “new” Malaya any more than he fitted in to the “old.” But who *would* fit in? And, if I may sound a reactionary note, who would care to?

Probably no writer today can distinguish better than Burgess the line between life and literature as it is set down in fiction. Yet in rethinking through *The Long Day Wanes* I find here precisely a thinning of effect. Crabbe, for much of the trilogy the author's reflector, is the immediate link to the riddle of Malaya, but in losing touch with the life about him he progressively becomes the outsider who frustrates our solving it. He is more and more the epitome of a literary creation rather than a person whom literature illuminates for us. I press this objection with the full knowledge that all literature is fabulation, and that what we think of as truth in a novel is as valid (or no more valid) than what we consider artifice. Still, art demands even more consistency than life, and the chief difficulty in the trilogy is in knowing when Burgess is practicing one or writing about the other. I suspect part of the difficulty is lodged in the historic tempo and framework of the novels and in our tendency to fall back on history to support judgments that literature should clarify without it. If our best hope of understanding Crabbe and Malaya comes from realizing that, like Crabbe, we really cannot understand things at all, then we are left with the uncomfortable realities of life winning out over the more comfortable ambiguities of literature. It is to history, not art, that we must look for any answers, a consideration that returns

us to my opening paradox and places upon the reader the burden of penetrating where Burgess has so easily begun—inside.

The Long Day Wanes is therefore a personal statement, not prediction or prophecy, and in the end we should adhere to its spirit before its letter. Burgess wrote it as an insider for other insiders who may or may not have shared his views or feelings, but who could in any event fathom what he was talking about without undue analysis. He intended the trilogy as a comic ordering of a world primed on confusion and disorder and staggering toward unification. But revealing Malaya never meant explaining it—either to us or to his hero. The major irony of *The Long Day Wanes* is that what we may have admitted to comedy fifteen years ago is now open only to tragic implications and conclusions. It will take years more of history until the grim misunderstandings in and about the Far East prove stuff for the comic novelist; indeed, some muffled note of prophecy might yet sound through Burgess' triumph of comedy and pathos. Crabbe's personality, devastated by unconsolable ambiguities perhaps less private and personal than we care to believe, may be but a further step toward a finer and more complete devastation that is no longer ambiguous and for which, unfortunately, there will be no consolation at all.

STATE AND STATEMENT

THE sights, sounds, language, and tempo of the "Malayan trilogy" portray a country, a people, a historic moment, a world, but the novels never move

far from Burgess' own involvements and allegiances. The trilogy (as private a narration in its own way as *A Vision of Battlements* and *Enderby* are in theirs) is crowded with the ambivalences of a hero caught between exuberant hope and demoralizing disillusion, experiencing simultaneously the birth pangs of his adopted country and the death throes of his mother land. Victor Crabbe increasingly suffers (as Burgess put it in a later book and undoubtedly suffered himself) the "alcoholic twinge of exile's self-pity," a reflex, I take it, severely unphysical and tied to the synapse of discovering the truth about oneself.

But for one concerned with change and history and with the cycles of growth and decay, the long day was waning in more than one small pocket of the Far East. A comprehensive charting of the often un-navigable passage from stability to freedom or an anatomizing to its last muscular twitch the complexity of the expatriate mind are tasks beyond even a series of novels. Yet Burgess returns to the questions periodically with fresher insights, generally fiercer criticisms, and a wider vision. What he learned from reading Joyce and confirmed in his late discovery of Nabokov—that the writer must get outside life and view it detachedly and indifferently—caused the shifts in tone and perspective evident in the three subsequent novels dealing with the transition of states and the accompanying states of transition.

As Burgess became more involved with the insides of professional writing, he became less involved with the inside of *life*. The disruption of values and the sense of uprootedness in the "Malayan trilogy" are also present in *Devil of a State*, *The Right to an Answer*, and *Honey for the Bears*, but in those novels they function as bitter glosses to already harsher readings of country and character. In moving to the outside

of things, Burgess never quite recaptured the note of passion and acceptance he had caught so perfectly in the trilogy. It was nothing if not apparent that Crabbe loved Malaya, for all his reversals in, confusion about, and disgust and weariness with the country. The series, in fact, was his love affair with Malaya, for he could scarcely or seldom love anything else. Something humane, sympathetic, and hopeful clung to Crabbe, even though it finally went under in Burgess' general distrust of history. I find little of this feeling in the three later books. They come down heavily on what is negative, perishable, spurious, and unsalutary in both the individual and the state. In every sense the comedian had turned satirist.

The change is reflected clearly in the modification of the Burgess hero. While he is still subject to naked exposure and pressed in the vise of history, he is frequently immune to the self-irony, self-abuse, and self-revelation that elicit our compassion for Crabbe. The new heroes are less seedy, empathetic, frank, saturated with guilt—a bit more sophisticated, truculent, *déagagé*, and reactionary. They find it harder to reach Crabbe's insight, to shatter the "distorted vision" of themselves reflected in mirrors of their own devising. Francis Lydgate is fatigued, disenchanted, drained; Denham is cautious, cool, aloof; Paul Hussey, puerile, hedonistic, shady. Where Crabbe at least had been victimized by history, a universal ideal (freedom, brotherhood, peace), and hope for Malayan independence, the new breed lack even the rudiments of a sustaining belief. They generate egocentricity without self-assurance and end, some in mordantly comic ways, as enemies of their passions and agents of their suspicions.

There are, however, some pluses in the post-sequence "state" novels. In getting outside of things, Burgess tried to synthesize the elements of confusion

and chaos that had more or less functioned earlier without synthesis as the churning foreground for an overview and the background for Crabbe's decline and fall. The trilogy showed the stupid infatuation for power and paternalism of the British overlords, pinpointed the misalliance between control and intelligence (finding them, of course, incompatible), and unveiled the overeagerness and unreadiness of the Malays. It bore down as severely on native capriciousness, nationalism, and naïveté as on the faineance, insouciance, at times madness of impotent administrators turned *soidisant* empire builders. But any solid conclusion was scuttled in the wake of flux, and the trilogy ended with quiet irony.

Burgess was fed up with the modern state even in 1959, but on and off for the next five years or so he still pondered and argued what could be done about it. *Devil of a State* levies the blame for the waste and futility that presage the birth of Dunia—a country fated for extinction almost at inception—on the wrongheadedness of the English, the pride and pretensions of the Caliph, and, through no fault of their own, the ignorance of the Dunians. The literal and symbolic "key" to the novel unlocks the vicious cycle of eternal return. Not only do things remain more the same the more they change, but the way in which they change makes them even worse. Though the outcome gets a bit muzzy, owing to the enveloping black comedy, Burgess lobbies forcefully for a strict hands-off policy by foreigners insofar as emergent, backward countries are concerned. Whether the voice here is that of an isolationist, a rightist masquerading as a liberal, or a weary progressive is beside the point. Fundamentally, *Devil of a State* shows the attendant disasters of a previous firm and intractable line of diplomacy suddenly giving way to flabbiness of aim and purpose. Result: the im-

possibility of striking a sane *rapprochement* with the insanity of a fierce, increasingly violent chauvinism. *Devil of a State* may be remembered for its many very funny scenes, but it could well be an exemplary tract from Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*.

The shift in locale in *The Right to an Answer* amplifies the resonances, both political and social, by sounding the rotten core that has already infected the peripheries. Denham and Raj are two expatriates who meet and finally clash on the neutered no man's land of the welfare state. The novel shows how the re-orientation of one and the dis-orientation of the other lead to identically debilitating and "tragic" ends. Cankered and contemporary, England slowly killed what was good, noble, and permanent in its tradition and offered in replacement what is newfangled, hopped up, jaded, artificial, and stupefying. Where a country is smug, indolent, self-satisfied, insular, and stagnant, its missionaries scarcely dare put great faith in the gospel they spread, and its prophets are without honor anywhere.

Devil of a State probes the festering wounds of a dying empire; *The Right to an Answer* goes further and explores conditions of life at home that have undermined the English spirit abroad; and *Honey for the Bears* goes beyond both of them in emphasizing the necessity for a radical transvaluation before the entire world mess—not limited to tyro states like Dunia nor to decadent countries like England—can be cleared up. *Honey for the Bears* rejects out of hand prevailing theories of politics based on expediency and necessity that justify, explain, or condone existing class structures and argues instead for a dialectic able to reconcile extremes.

What Burgess has in mind is a synthesis, a third world force emerging from the dualism of capitalism

and communism, in which political and economic ideologies will no longer be at loggerheads. Like sexual ambiguity—the explicit theme of the novel—political hermaphroditism may tap new resources within us. It may expose new identities and purposes and unite the virile but hitherto unreconcilable mono-superstates presently vying for world power. Lacking such revision, Burgess suggests, the human spirit is fated for suppression and annihilation, and we may look forward only to the worlds of *A Clockwork Orange* and *The Wanting Seed*. For, like the hydra, political entities temporarily thrive on the mutilation of their own parts until—becoming overblown monstrosities and parodies of what they once were—they destroy themselves or are destroyed by another of their kind. Whether one commits suicide or is murdered, he is, of course, dead.

Understanding the cumulative effect of these three novels is rather important, I think, in assessing their individual scope and impact and the aptness of their satire. In the sense of pitting individual against state, all are political novels. But Burgess' heroes are not Aristotelian; they are biological and social animals before they are political. Increasingly so, it turns out, since Burgess makes it quite clear that if politics and its theories create ties among men, they are most tenuous, and something more durable must be substituted.

After racial and religious prejudices, political prejudice has historically run a villainous third in emphasizing the differences among men rather than the similarities. If the course has proved disastrous in the past—few of us not being touched in some way by Buchenwald or Hiroshima or My Lai—its potential can now be only catastrophic. The cultural, moral, and social shock of one nation's foisting its fiats on another is appalling, but, given human limitations and aspi-

rations, completely understandable. To see Dunia through the bleary eyes of Lydgate, England through the jaundiced eyes of Denham or through those of a deluded Raj, to see Russia as the partisan and very confused Hussey sees it is to realize how a comparatively isolated, harmless, and private ignorance can become enlarged into a terrifying, universal error: that of militantly imposing, rather than circumspectly superimposing, one entrenched set of values upon another. The widening gulf between the thought and feeling of nations, between feeling and action, can never be bridged by intransigent or moribund political credos. Heeling to party lines, employing strong-arm and brainwashing techniques, stirring up hate and fear and alienation—these widen the rift between nations. These accentuate the differences among men. Biologically identical and, if the ideal could be realized, socially similar man must emphasize, as Burgess has it, the similarities.

The ideal, fragile at best, is too easily shattered by simple reality, as Burgess makes clear in *Devil of a State*. Perhaps better classified as an "entertainment" (incidentally, dedicated to Graham Greene), it invokes shades of Waugh (Dunia is the Waugh-tered-down Ishamelia of *Black Mischief*), and one line seems an actual transcription from that book. There is a cute, direct allusion to Waugh himself, and Lydgate's entrapment uncomfortably recalls Tony Last's in *Handful of Dust*. The novel is scarcely one of Burgess' more profound and may be one of his most derivative. Nevertheless, it goes a long way in sounding the divisions and depths of human beings, and it compounds some of the already unsettling ambiguities of personality and relationships.

"Reality" is at the heart of the novel, and by that I mean that Burgess has given none of his characters

a grasp on it. Anyone attuned to Burgess' ironies will not be surprised to discover the greatest fraud in the novel, Smetana, the con man and painter, speaking the greatest truth about the most serious problem. "What is this about reality? *Wirklichkeit*? *Realität*? Is an Englishman asking about reality?"

Fifty years ago, in one of his rare outcries of panic, Yeats shrilled in *The Second Coming* that things were falling apart because the center could not hold. The source of the trouble as well as the center is more difficult to locate today, and they are not necessarily even the same thing. Burgess, leveling his fire at the confusion and disorder of prototypical countries like Dunia and the befuddlement of practically everyone in them questions just where that center—bulwark, vantage point, sense of proportion, the place from where one must begin to order chaos, and the way into reality—is. Is it to be found, in *Devil of a State*, with the collapsing Lydgate? With the effete U.N. adviser Tomlin? The foppish, slightly sinister Caliph? The outrageous and ludicrous Tascas? In Africa's oppressive past and Dunia's fluctuating present? With all or with none? And how, Burgess asks further, can the ideal possibly be approached without first mastering the reality behind it? How can we prevent those myths—created to preserve truths—from destroying them and replacing the truths themselves? Must we scrap substance, center, and reality, to live only in a world of expanding avatars?

I have not meant to bury so volatile a satire as *Devil of a State* under a landslide of interrogatives, but if any Englishman *is* asking about reality, it is Burgess, and he produces some trenchant answers—though where one might go from that point is as much a matter of political expedience as political science. Two, perhaps three, perspectives on reality are artic-

ulated in the course of the novel by Lydgate, Tomlin, and the Caliph; oddly enough, they are not alternative suggestions but mutually inclusive ones. To put it baldly from the start, reality—however nasty, vicious, horrible, and destructive—is always the present, but an escapable present. Aided by intelligence, humanity, and a sense of history, the institution of a new, more desirable reality that may clear the way for the ideal, or may even be the ideal itself, is theoretically possible. But why things seldom get better in the world, why history not only repeats itself but seems to be carrying on private vendettas with us, why change has become one of the many exercises in futility, are similar strains of the disease known as modernity. Because the times move so quickly it is impossible to interpret and chart change until long after it has become fact. We can, in short, never catch up with history, and when it catches up with us it is too late. We can seldom effectively realize our visions because they have suddenly become delusions larger than either the real or ideal, subject to superrational ordering that borders on monomania and defended by precipitous or, often worse, studied force.

I have, in this last summation, ranged somewhat further than the frontiers of *Dunia*, though the reader will recognize that the hardy and fertile seeds of Burgess' subsequent discontent with the modern state are sown in this vastly unfertile country. Into the life and character of Francis Lydgate—indeed, given Burgess' delight in allusion, into his very name—are acidulously etched the partial outlines of Burgess' argument. Like Tertius Lydgate of *Middlemarch*, Francis Lydgate loses the ideal in the real, though his particular Rosamond Vincy is not one woman, but at least four. One epigraph to *Devil of a State* comes from I Corinthians (for some reason incorrectly cited

by Burgess) and notes that it is better to marry than to burn, but for Lydgate comparatives are merely academic. His own "devil of a state" is marriage—more accurately, marriages—and bigamy is not only the legal approximation of Pauline sin, but a symbol of Lydgate's clashing ambiguities: an Establishment man violently anti-Establishment; a white man (and Englishman!) more down-and-out than the natives; an agnostic who ends in bondage to a religious fanatic (*n.b.*, his first and legal wife); and one privileged to glimpse a future he will have no chance to escape:

Lydgate remembered the old days, visiting from Kenya only a few years before—wooden buildings, mud streets, the Caliph carried in a kind of litter, only a few European traders. It was frightening, the speed with which you could build a modern state. You could run the film back as quickly, but you didn't revert to the simple dignity of shacks on stilts with grass roofs. Instead you got peeling stucco, a rusting telephone exchange, carious stone, unexpected craters in the main roads. Five more years of uranium. After that what? An abdicating Caliph, perhaps, well able to pay for his suite at Claridge's. Emigration of the Chosen People to other parts of the continent. Fishing and a little maize, the days of Cadillacs and Cinemascope stirred into the pudding of myth. But, by then, he himself would have long moved on.*

Apart from using it to set up the hero's ironic fate, I suspect that Burgess has incorporated this vision in an attempt to update that of the fifteenth-century poet John Lydgate, whose *Fall of Princes* knocked the moral stuffing out of monarchs and played fast and loose with the idea of fate and fortune. Today, unfortunately, such falls are hardly exemplary of anything. After exploiting their countries, letting factions wrangle over conference tables as prelude to "ironing out

* *Devil of a State* (London, 1961), 202.

differences" in eternal wars, the unluckiest of the mandarins will suffer imprisonment or assassination. The luckiest, timely abdicating, will find refuge in "civilized" countries, capitalize on guest appearances to hymn gratulations to their own arrogance and egotism, and end their days quietly in cosmopolitan comfort. Perhaps the Caliph—whom Burgess clearly dislikes but avoids caricaturing—spies at least one additional truth in his opaque magisterial mirror. Man's scope *has* narrowed; the day of the visionary *is* dead. The world is run by "competent little men" doing what they consider their competent best, but the burning vision has guttered to the flicker of utilitarian mediocrity.

Place beside those slants of Lydgate and the Caliph the outburst of Tomlin, and the whole sad statement on reality emerges:

"You're only able to indulge in your beautiful Islamic dream because we do the dirty work. Who found uranium? Was it you? No, it was a handful of engineers and geologists, men with adequate salaries but never destined to become millionaires. It's you who've made the real money. And, while you become rich and your lazy Chosen People watch the coconuts fall, people like me and young Rowlandson . . . try to give you government, try to show you how to build a modern state. . . . Young Rowlandson's dead, and he hasn't even died for an ideal which you, some day, may grow up to appreciate. You've no interest in the aborigines of this State. You're a pirate king, ruling retired pirates, intruders just as much as we are." (P. 231)

This isn't the rant of a disappointed office seeker, a Colonel Blimp, or an apologist. Though the shoe pinches on the other foot, Tomlin is sincere in his desire to stay on and help sort out the confusion he in part feels responsible for. ("The British are supposed to have a bad time," he says elsewhere, "That is their

destiny.") On the contrary, the speech, one of the finest turns of character in the novel (Tomlin has been a diplomatic Milquetoast up to then), lashes out against the blindness of both colonialism and nationalism. Burgess does not advocate that the dark ignorance of aboriginal nobility is perhaps preferable to the illuminated ignorance of the modern jerry-built state (as Lydgate does), that the British bogeymen should tacitly suffer exploitation and expulsion as a type of poetic justice and retribution for their sin of empire (as the Caliph does), nor that gratitude and sense of responsibility should override the pride of self-mandate (as Tomlin does). He is saying that the evils of colonialism are in degree, if not in kind, on a par with those of nationalism. The rewards of European civilization are as dubious as the debits of civilization elsewhere.

You looked forward to leave and Piccadilly Circus and the shows whose tunes your daughter played on the Residency gramophone [Tomlin muses], and at home you were called "mate" by jostling workmen and your wife was insulted by teddy-boys, and you wanted to be back out here again, sweating and longing for Regent Street and the shows whose tunes your daughter played on the Residency gramophone. . . . "Reality." (Pp. 82-83)

In *The Right to an Answer*, reality becomes omnipresent and uglier because England is in more of a mess than Dunia. England has had, after all, greater opportunities and longer time to get that way, and her drive toward utter chaos is seemingly accelerating beyond hope. Reality, too, becomes more insidious because the majority is happy with what it has and resists slight change as vehemently as it does major change. "I'm all right, Jack" and "I like it here" and "I want it now" are the pat responses of "the good little people, who, with their television, strikes, foot-

ball pools and *Daily Mirror*, have everything they want except death." These words are spoken by Denham, the expatriate businessman who smells the "putridity of the mess" in which England wallows—the stained and smudged present of her once clear and bright myth, an England now besotted, stupefied, insular, desiccated, and joyless because she will settle for what she has rather than try for something spiritually more. Burgess has less hope of finding the ideal in England than in *Dunia* and so settles (uneasily) into the role of observer. Or rather into that of two surrogate observers: the misanthropic, cynical narrator Denham, who professes to lack "the mental equipment and the training and the terminology to say whether the mess is social or religious or moral," but knows that it is "in England, and probably in the Celtic fringe and all over Europe and the Americas too"; and the charitable Ceylonese student of human nature and love, Raj, who believes there is no mess at all until he catalyzes the mounting and multiple catastrophes that are its results.

Constructing this "double" expatriate view is an ingenious way of going about things, and the twin vision provides about the only "passage to the Midlands" I know that aims at more than flogging the English with a "wog"; it aims at something as high as a universal statement. *The Right to an Answer* seems an attempt at revaluating the mysticism and fey optimism of Forster's "passage" forty years previous, not simply by reversing cause and effect, but by more muscularly working out the older writer's theme of "only [connecting] the prose with the passion." Ironically, it is with Denham—a kind of Vergilian guide through the suburban inferno of grotesques and xenophobes or, rather, not through a "necropolis" at all, but through "something that had never lived"—that

Raj strikes the greatest rapport, seeking answers from one who hates England as fervently as Raj is prepared to love it. Denham, who at first seems as impartial and controlled and balanced a narrator as Nabokov's Humbert Humbert, confirms his mounting disgust and short-circuits the connection. Raj becomes victimized by intuition and quasi mysticism, but no less than by his curiosity and rhetoric.

As messy as things were in 1924 when Forster published *A Passage to India*, and as intimately as the enigmatic fate of India seemed to be entwined with the riddle of British colonialism, the novel even then registered as strangely antiquated and isolated from the world forces seething about it. Mrs. Moore gives over her poetic dream of Islam and one world for the Hindu double principle of creation and destruction. Yet the passion remains without the prose, for what more was there to give? In Mrs. Moore's apotheosis in the mind of Aziz, Forster himself surrendered to the vague myth of universal love. That it *must* succeed some day was far more significant than why it failed. Burgess hammers at harsher realities, tells us that if none of us has the answer, but each of us the "right to an answer," we must not settle for sham—or worse, for virulence—by wrapping ourselves in a cloud of unknowing.

Virulence is naturally enough built into *The Right to an Answer* through racism and xenophobia and admits, as always, of few variations. But sham—the age-old whipping boy of satirists—is punished with some new knots in the lash. From his vantage of expatriate and from superior feelings his aloofness gives him, Denham uncovers in little ways, then big ones, the pretense that infects not only the provincials but, he later learns to his sorrow, his own cozy corner of the world. Pretense, as if Denham did not know it,

is as epidemic as economic aid. Burgess, however, would be writing satire in water if he had only that to say; he has more.

Fraud, phoniness, hypocrisy, sham, pretense—call it what you will—is possibly the nadir of morality, but it is possibly also the most substantial cornerstone of order in the world. Sin against pretense and, as Denham puts it several times, you “sin against stability.” As if this paradox were not devilish enough (just how so Burgess spells out in *A Clockwork Orange* and *The Wanting Seed*), it is given double-edged complications by Raj’s sinning against both pretense *and* stability through love. There is little need to become academic about just what Burgess and Raj have in mind when they speak of love; it is far more sufficient and satisfactory a force in its protean guise. It is vaguely spiritual; it has something to do with truth, justice, and brotherhood; it may be *agape* or some Eastern equivalent; but it is also more than concerned with refined sexuality. It is, in short, everything that the slovenly, coarse, unfeeling, loveless, and unloving provincials despise, for it is a love that presages the freedom antithetical to stability. Raj, it should be understood, is not merely bucking a smug, suburban Midlands but a Hobbesian materialism and rationalism that got a strangle hold on Western civilization over three hundred years ago and shows few signs of weakening its grip. It was Hobbes who first made the point that you can’t have freedom and stability; and whatever metaphysicians or existentialists were subsequently to make of this, and however they were to construe or revamp or translate Hobbes’s essential terms, people, fearful of freedom, chose stability.

Given Hobbesian man, then—no less “mean, nasty, brutish and short” now than in the archetypal

state of nature—love, being a kind of freedom, will produce devastation equal to hate; love can, in Raj's last words, "increase capacity for hate." Love, as Raj dreams of it, may be as dead as innocence. The killing corrosion of marriage, prostitution, rape, adultery: These are the preponderant manifestations of "love" in *The Right to an Answer*. Beyond this, no Byzantine perfection, Moslem poetry, Platonic purity! Love, like everything else, is manufactured from pretense. This is what Raj discovers, and this is why his paradise of joyousness, eagerness, wonder, and affirmation is perverted into postlapsarian violence, destruction, murder, and suicide.

Raj's reversion to something like the Hobbesian primitive is shocking, but, withal, only a shade beyond the pathetic. Burgess is too expertly the satirist to commit us absolutely to Raj's ideal or to show him as much a victim of the ludicrous as of the tragic. In the end, Raj himself generates his own devolution. He is outrightly foolish in his infatuation for Alice Winterbottom (rustic and Eastern chivalry being not simply dead in the Midlands but pickled in alcohol); fantastic in extracting, at gunpoint, honest opinions on race relations from layabouts in lavatories; and absurd in thinking it possible to bludgeon everyone with "love." Though the world might be better for love, it is not, Burgess insists, the panacea. It does not provide the answer for the poet and Shakespeare idolator Everett to "all the questions that ultimately become one question, and that question is not easy to define, though we all know what it is"; nor does it satisfy the racketeer Len, who thinks of most full-time occupations as a "substitute for getting nearer to the real thing." If Everett and Len are shooting for the impossible, Raj overshoots the possible. His crucial oversight is failure

to realize that one must first learn to love on an individual basis before preaching it collectively.

Raj's *hamartia* is love. Yet, while a case may be made for *The Right to an Answer* being Burgess' closest approach to tragedy (*pace* to those who find it one of his funniest books), my own inclination is to see it as his problem novel, a "winter's tale" frosted over with ambiguities. The problem is Denham, whose classical balance and restraint—the affinities with the seventeenth-century poet John Denham seem inescapable—are upset by Raj. Denham, probably for the first time, begins viewing such things as love, England, poetry, and marriage in a new light; the mess, in fact, becomes more of a mess for Denham because he has changed without wanting to.

Denham is a study in contradictions, isolated in involvement, grimly aware, coolly sensitive, maddeningly inert. He inveighs against freedom, yet upsets stability by helping Winterbottom and Imogen; he becomes Raj's trusted confidant (and alter ego), yet drives him to suicide; he despises England's insular morality, yet can tell us (the irony of the passage notwithstanding) that perhaps, in the long run, the best thing is

that rewards come to those who never sin against stability, who don't play around with the fire of marriage, whose life and marriage are both solidly secure and not without excitement and interest, chiefly because their work means something to the community and to themselves.*

Whether Denham believes all this is as irrelevant as what he says is undoubtedly false. His "love song," like Prufrock's, is incised into the psyche with the scalpel of truth; but opening the wound is one thing,

* *The Right to an Answer* (New York, 1966), 211.

healing it another. The "good little people" of the world may indeed be slated for rewards, but the idea is more fascinating as a rationalization for those who lack the strength to make anything of their lives beyond the conventional. Denham is given the potential insight—denied everyone else in the novel—of reconciling the good and evil in his experiences—for becoming a Blakean, that is, rather than a Prufrockian. But he suffers the inevitable failure of nerve. He settles for less, for a niche below even the values and persons he originally despised, but now considers, in a moment of truth and appalling reversal, as having connected with something approaching the "real thing," the "answer":

I looked at myself in the mirror before bed. Going bald and jowlish, teeth stained with tobacco-tar, belly big with self-indulgence, chest narrow, legs stumpy, disgustingly hirsute everywhere. . . . I went, naked, into the small study next to my bedroom, where I had been working on this story, and read, naked, scratching, through the nineteen clipped fascicles. Had I really clarified anything for myself? Of course not. The mess was there, the instability, but I wondered now if that sin against stability was really the big sin. What I did realise quite clearly was the little I'd helped . . . surely that sneered-at suburban life was more stable than this shadow life of buying and selling in a country where no involvement was possible . . . and adultery implied marriage and was perhaps a nobler word than fornication or masturbation. . . . If poor bloody innocent little Winterbottom had died, and striving Mr Raj . . . surely it was something that they invoked the word Love? Even the word was better than this emptiness, this standing on the periphery and sneering. (P. 216)

Following his final analysis—which is as much self-analysis—Denham plans to retire to the Midlands, ask Imogen to marry him, enlist in the ranks of the suburbanites, and become, un-sneering and un-

smug, a champion of the English way of life. But is Denham's living among philosophers of the pub any more Burgess' "answer" than Gulliver's enstabling himself with horses Swift's? I think not. Fitting in can prove as satisfactory, for some, as copping out; but either course has the risk of being a substitute for the "real thing" (whatever we are to make of that), and a poor substitute at best. Denham is left with pretense more socially permissible, but perhaps more personally destructive, than any pretense he has encountered before: the pretense that he is not pretending.

Though Denham's decision comes nearest to free choice than anything Burgess has previously permitted, *The Right to an Answer* goes the furthest in consoling the hero (and perhaps the reader) with the unanswerable ambiguities of life. That novel is not, however, offered as Burgess' final statement. Breaking through the sham comes as the antithesis of breaking through the reality, the thesis of *Devil of a State*. Some sort of synthesis might be expected from it all, and this is what Burgess goes after in *Honey for the Bears*.

The book, in part, belongs to that rather vast category of novels of transplantation (as I would call them) in which the hero, whether tourist, expatriate, fugitive, or first cousin once removed, experiences a kind of culture shock at being set down amidst unfamiliar norms and values. The bulk of such novels—written, incidentally, by so heterogeneous an anthology of novelists as Mann, Forster, Lawrence, Waugh, and Fitzgerald—are, broadly, quests for identity wound about a major premise that implies that foreign, alien, even hostile forces quicken self-discovery. The transplantation novel spirals toward one of several conclusions: that catastrophe and disillusion are inevitable; that a violent disorientation in focus gives

way most quickly to clarity and insight; that stability will eventually emerge from instability. Impose upon this almost classic structure the invigorated form of the modern picaresque—which permits ambiguities arising from disillusion and malfocus and leeway for the fantastic, and belies by its very nature the validity of stability—and you have some of the revitalized effects Kafka gained in *Amerika*, Thomas in *Adventures in the Skin Trade*, Collier in *Defy the Foul Fiend*, Nabokov in *Lolita*, and Burgess in *Honey for the Bears*.

What is most impressive and original about *Honey for the Bears* is the analogy Burgess strikes between sex and class. In England particularly, contemporary writers have patently accepted one (sex) as a natural reflection or outgrowth of the other (class) and have used sexual inhibition or deviation to anatomize or satirize cracks in the societal structure. Burgess' innovation is in showing how certain ambiguities that underlie both sex and class neglect obvious similarities and render incomplete the sincere as well as the glib distinctions.

I do not mean to be misleading in speaking of Burgess' innovations. The conceit for *Honey for the Bears* comes from the basic tenets of dialectical materialism, which state that everything is material and that change takes place through the "struggle of opposites." Because everything contains different elements that are in opposition, "self-movement" occurs automatically; the conflict of opposing forces leads to growth, change, and development. Sex like politics for Burgess, admits of its own dialectics, is moved by interpenetrating opposites, and can be changed, not in the great eschatological beyond, but in the very real present. The search for an identity, in other words, must operate on many levels at once: We are sexual, political, social, moral, even verbal in all parts and at

all times—that is, if we are whole—and undergo continual synthesizing. “Subtle Marx, inheritor of Europe’s tragic dualisms” (as Burgess tags him), not Freud, is the guiding genius of *Honey for the Bears*.

This observation is not to contradict an earlier statement of mine that Burgess’ heroes are “biological and social animals before they are political.” Generally ordinary enough men, their sensitivity raises them a notch above those whose immutable and inbred political chauvinism becomes more than blind prejudice and the major blockade to all other avenues of awareness. Paul Hussey, landing on the ripe and volatile political ground of Mother Russia, begins with an aversion for communism and an avid, upon occasions outspoken, partisanship for capitalism, only soon to realize that both systems have miserably failed the individual. But if there is a political implication in the revelation (there is), it is not through his ruminating on politics that the revelation comes. It is through personal crises: an incipiently innocent and finally (literally) naked confrontation with himself as that biological and social being.

Hussey’s self-discovery proceeds through small shocks of recognition that Burgess plays for comedy and pathos. Each is lit by sudden flashes of grotesque humor and glimmerings of violence; each incident is charged to enforce the reappraisal and make it stick. Burgess remains faithful throughout to the politico-sexual analogy by showing how Hussey’s increased, almost nightmarish political involvement (smuggling consumer goods into Russia is a political, not civil, crime) reveals his sexual nature—that is, brings it further under scrutiny and into question. His failure at “raping” Anna, his fascination for Alex, the interlocutory interludes with the vaudeville duo of police inspectors Karamzin and Zverkov, his complicity in the

wisely sinister Dr. Tiresias' plan, and his wild flight with the phony Opiskin *films*, are progressively calculated to unravel his identity.

The final discovery, however, is not that his heterosexuality has been weighed and found wanting, nor even that he and his wife (who bolts with Dr. Sonya Lazurkina) may be happier as homosexuals (a point left purposively ambiguous), but that the façade has been chipped away and may eventually be broken down entirely. "We are what we are," Dr. Lazurkina tells him, preparatory to seducing his wife. "Your own fault has been in pretending to be something you are not. The only real crime is to be unwilling to face reality." Though Zverkov and Karamzin may differ radically from Dr. Lazurkina in their assessment of Hussey's "real crime," Burgess is most persuasive in showing how monolithic systems, be they political or biological, amount to much the same thing. Communism behind the iron curtain, capitalism in front of it, homo- and hetero-sexuality anywhere, necessarily create divisions, hew out those restraining value judgments which chain personalities, distort goals, inhibit enlargement of the self, and (with due recognition of Burgess' own ambivalence on the matter) quash freedom. As Hussey sums it up: "The West wanted sex and avatars; Russia the opium of progress. Ah, nonsense. The State was a twisted wire coronal a child would wear on its head. People were people."

I find this reflection the second most significant in the novel. It comes to Hussey as he watches people queue up at a bookstall—can the sale of literature teach more than literature itself?—and, despite the breadth of the generalization and the inevitable tautology, the idea strikes me as one of those hot flashes that could sustain the thaw in the Cold War. One may, insofar as the observation on the West, detect Spenglerian

overtone: the intellectual's whine of disgust that gave way to the historian's growl of "Decadence!" But the test of the statement must be taken individually rather than historically. In many ways, Hussey, no "ugly" Englishman, is typical of Western man. Sex: He craves true sexual liberation and knowledge, but either compromises his deeper nature and attitudes in marriage and (later) adultery and/or finds substitutes in "pornography" and manuals. Avatars: He is enslaved by the past, drunk on tradition and convention that is really none other than new wine in old bottles. His past friendship with Robert—there is the sexual thing here as well—turns him into a near criminal; he thinks of Russia as "really everybody's past. Not everybody's future but everybody's past."; he is not only a dealer in antiques, but an antique man—in other words, a Western man—until experience sloughs off the epithet and makes him, simply, a man.

Burgess has used myth and history enough in his novels to indicate that he is scarcely a foe of the past, only of those who treat it unwisely and unjustly. But just as it is nonsense to be drugged by whatever mystique the past offers, it is greater folly still to be hypnotized by the charismatic future. The danger of complete commitment to one to the exclusion (or expense) of the other is—as Burgess points out repeatedly—in the possibility of losing both. What so appalls Hussey about the young Russian "rebels" is that they prefer jazz to their "own glorious tradition of . . . Tchaikovsky and Mussourgsky and Borodin," as though there were not place for both. If the West sanctifies the past, waxes romantic over it (Hussey's choice of composers is somewhat limited), rationalizes its value beyond logic, and if Russia persists in its pipe dream of progress, there may be little hope for the ultimate interpenetration of the great opposites who defend these

temporal and cultural traditions: The great opposites may just be, as the slightly drunken and desperate Hussey exclaims, one and the same thing:

"I don't know . . . I don't know what anything means. But don't start telling me about Western decadence. We're not dead yet, not by a long chalk. In Europe, I mean. In Great Britain, that is. As for America, that's just the same as Russia. You're no different. America and Russia would make a very nice marriage."*

I am fairly certain few would disagree with what Hussey says about America and Russia, and more certain still few would agree about Europe and Great Britain. The quibble, though, is with history, not with idiosyncracies or ideologies—it is in no way, I mean, a personal matter at all. We are adrift once again with leaky alternatives. If there is to be a "third force" in the world, if such a thing is desirable and possible, it is probably not to be found somewhere *between* the antipodes of communism and capitalism—socialism and the welfare state have both produced their unique catastrophes in a quieter way—but in a fusion *outside* them. Dr. Tiresias, mystic, charlatan, homosexual, *agent provocateur*, who may see further than anyone beyond the frontiers of the two political wastelands, tells Hussey:

"I am tired of categories, of divisions, of opposites. Good, evil; male, female; positive, negative. That they interpenetrate is no real palliative, no ointment for the cut. What I seek is the *continuum*, the merging. Europe is all Manichees; Russia has become the most European of them all." (P. 176)

Burgess had Richard Ennis of *A Vision of Battlements* think the same thing some thirteen years earlier, but the idea is no less forceful in repetition. I find it,

* *Honey for the Bears* (London, 1963), 126.

as one who has grown as weary as Burgess and his characters of the eternal dialectic, the most singular and the most important idea to come out of *Honey for the Bears* and out of the other two novels. It leans a bit toward *Weltschmerz* and is not without the taint of theosophy. But whether it strikes us as vague, inscrutable, wise, out-and-out balderdash, or (considering that the East first propounded the principle of yin and yang) a great joke, it is as reasonable—or as unreasonable—as any other answer we have been given so far. Theories, of course, evaporate in the face of practice, and statements of this dimension put the test to the past and the future. In a way it is Burgess' most outrageous and inconclusive statement yet on how we can save the state, but it is nevertheless a hopeful one and, in light of what he goes on to show in *A Clockwork Orange* and *The Wanting Seed*, positively utopian.

THE BITTER FRUITS OF FREEDOM

WHAT followed from Burgess' preoccupation with the transition and ultimate death rattle of colonialism abroad and the atrophy of "self-indulgent" England at home were his two dark visions of dystopia—*A Clockwork Orange* and *The Wanting Seed*. Even the parboiled paternalism of the Empire and the synthetic socialism of the welfare state had still apparently left room—though not much—for a dialogue between the individual and society and had kept alive discussions as to what was right and what was wrong with England (*The Right to an Answer*, for example, presumed some sort of question to begin with). The sub-

sequent stasis—or worse, stagnation—setting in after reconstruction placed the mystery of understanding, as well as the burden of existence, on the individual alone. No longer of import were the questions of how to view, contain, serve, survive, or possibly love a state that clothed, fed, housed, and medicated. Now what had been the issue was exacted from the sensibilities of those who, glutted physically and socially, lived under what amounted to a deadening hedonism. It must have seemed only logical to Burgess, after exploring the dialectics of the single and collective mind, that the problem of the novelist was to probe its metaphysics—to see how the naked needs of his rebel anti-heroes (no longer even privileged to suffer the “consolation of ambiguity”) could be met in a mad, lost, loveless, brutal, sterile world.

At first blush, *A Clockwork Orange* and *The Wanting Seed* may appear—one because of stylistic shockers, the other for its Gothicism and *grand guignol*—more like bizarre and fantastic companions to the Burgess canon than parts of it. Like the majority of sci-fi trading on metarealities, the novels risk having the parts dissolve in the whole, the vantage point become lost in the vision. Unless, that is, one grasps from the outset that they are actually extensions of present conditions rather than forecasts of future ones. Such terrors as perpetrated by teenage werewolves like Alex in *A Clockwork Orange* and the domination of gangs like Hell’s Angels are near-mild “happenings” placed cheek by jowl with current youth revolutions. And if the prime target of *The Wanting Seed*—overpopulation—is not yet, technically, a *fait accompli*, its proliferating literature, written not by hysterical Cassandras but by sound demographers, attests less to its imminence than, failing a cracking good holocaust, its inevitability.

One, then, must zero in on the contemporaneity of Burgess' issues—something that the ingenious superstructures and novelistic devices often impede. Take as an example the style of both novels. The ferocious and coarse, partly archaic, partly mod, neologic "nadsat" of *A Clockwork Orange* captures perfectly the violence and pace of incidents, breaking down into standard English only when the hero is being brainwashed and stripped of individuality. Clearly, it is always an amazing feat to have the language of a novel not simply *match* the action, but *be* the action. Clearly, too, one quickly wearies of the innovative, especially in matters of an *outré* style that so dazzles readers as to its form that they are almost eager to overlook its content. The brevity of *A Clockwork Orange* probably accounts for the success of its linguistic excess. Burgess, at any rate, has more luck in overplaying his hand in language than in standing pat. Though he was undoubtedly after a much different effect in *The Wanting Seed*, the contrast between the scrupulous impersonality of a Defoe-like, third-person narrator and the nightmarish, surrealistic scenes never quite catches the tone of savagery that the satire seems to be striving for.

Again, there is the matter of structure. The triunal division of *A Clockwork Orange*—Alex damned, Alex purged, Alex resurrected—can be taken, depending on one's predilections at the start, as the falling-rising pattern of comedy or the rising-falling pattern of tragedy. That one may have it either way means, of course, there is a danger in having it neither. If the mode of a novel should say something about its meaning, or at least carry us forward so we may debate it, then we might have wished for a less open-ended conclusion, one that defined as well as disturbed. I find a similar falling off into diffuseness or blurriness in

The Wanting Seed, in which Burgess, alternating the lives of Tristram and Beatrice-Joanna Foxe, attempts to match the "Pelagian-Augustinian" phases of ebb and flow that symbolize the arbitrary movement of historic cycles. Yet while the reunion of Tristram and Beatrice has been logically anticipated throughout, the pat, almost cliché ending of husband and wife re-joined, coerced no more by the forces of man and nature but rising above them—transfixed, as it were, in the still point of the ineluctable cycle—strikes me as an allogical apotheosis of the human spirit.

Yet both books conclude on notes of "joy": Alex fondling his "britva" as he anticipates the chorale of Beethoven's Ninth and more throat cutting; the Foxes (Adam and Eve and twin offspring?) standing in their Valéry-like "graveyard by the sea," facing the ocean out of which new life will come (*il faut tenter vivre*). The individual is thus endowed with regenerative powers never clearly woven into the fabric of the fiction, and Burgess barter even tentative answers for impressive technique. I feel, in short, that his adroit shock tactics with plot and language, expertise with satire, and partiality to apocalypse—all enviable attributes and potential pluses normally—come dangerously close here to outflanking the substantive ideas. Done as these novels are, with immense energy and cleverness, their sheer "physicalness" all but crushes their metaphysics.

That is a loss, for Burgess has much to tell us. However arbitrary the premises of these novels, however suspect their "political science," their speculations on freedom and free will are frighteningly pertinent. Violently opposing the sterile, mechanical life under totalitarianism, they point no less to the degeneration under anarchy and, further, offer no viable alternative. Freedom stifled is no less opprobrious than freedom

unlicensed, but the middle ground—what every liberal imagines is the just and workable compromise—is accounted equally suspect. Burgess has given us in the earlier set of novels a smug, self-satisfied, socialized England that has run down. Too much freedom creates the mess only stability can correct; of course, stability involves the surrender of freedom. Like those of Orwell and Huxley, Burgess' exaggerated portraits of the confrontation between individual and state will ever mystify—until too late—the addled sensibilities who, drugged by the present moment, will neither care about nor comprehend the moment beyond. Even more frightening, we have since Orwell and Huxley moved closer to the impasse where the problems at last overwhelm the solutions, and what we are left with for solution is perhaps only continual re-examination of the problem. Is it not, therefore, a trifle absurd to ponder tortuous issues of mind and soul when daily it grows impossible to cope with external realities like pollution, famine, and overpopulation? Can we even talk of freedom or free will to states that have written them off as mere philosophical aberrations? Yet what meaning can existence have without the continuing quest to define it?

On the one hand, Burgess answers these paradoxes through the nineteenth-century existentialism of writers like Dostoyevsky, Nietzsche, and Kierkegaard who dealt with freedom and free will, not in historic, but in metaphysical contexts. If revolution and the state initiated a new order of debate on freedom versus authority—from which arose the issue of free will—then the problems were quickly desocialized thereafter. Libertarianism became as much the immovable force as necessitarianism the impenetrable object. Indeed, the best synthesis of the weird symbiosis between free will and freedom is still to be found in Ivan



Karamazov's proem on the Grand Inquisitor, which, wrenched from its place in the novel, can satisfy radical and reactionary alike. Man, weak and imperfect as he is, can never bear the loneliness of living absolutely by free will and so surrenders the ideal of freedom to the *Realpolitik* of society. As Dostoyevsky realized all too sadly and well, most of us, lacking the superhuman inner strength necessary to do otherwise, submit our wills to Pilates and Inquisitors, rather than exercise them in an imitation of Christ.

Burgess' approach within this convention explains some of the broader outlines of both novels—especially since his hypothetical states dog the heels of totalitarian regimes. But clearly the Europe of a hundred years ago is not the “global village” of today. The revolutionary spirit abroad in the nineteenth century may have accounted in great part for its philosophy, but the trend of states toward a finer and fiercer repression (with no exit in sight) created an entirely new metaphysics on the older issues. Today, though man has more freedom to discuss his powers of freedom, the ugly fact is that the opportunities for demonstrating it have become more and more narrow. Striking out in acts of violence against the state that usurps freedom only binds our wills more rigorously to the state. Enigmatically, violence is not a display of free will at all, but an echo of historic determinism. For whether we like it or not, we cannot exercise free will in a vacuum; and though we like it less and less, the state is still the “objective correlative” for the freedom we seek. The true problem, in other words, is no longer how one learns to love Big Brother, nor what happens when one does not, but what results from not caring one way or the other about him.

What is chilling about *A Clockwork Orange* and *The Wanting Seed* is not so much Burgess' awareness

of these philosophic questions, but the dead ends to which the empiricism of his answers leads. He achieves a partial perspective in *The Wanting Seed* in pirating from the Pelagian-Augustinian tussle over free will in order to superimpose metaphysics on history. His ENSPUN, a future conglomerate of English states, moves by fits and starts according to "theologico-mythical concepts" of two historic cycles that alternately place man in one phase or the other.

"Pelagius [as Tristram Foxe tells his history class] denied the doctrine of Original Sin and said that man was capable of working out his own salvation. . . . All this suggests human perfectibility. Pelagianism was thus seen to be at the heart of liberalism and its derived doctrines, especially Socialism and Communism. . . . Augustine, on the other hand, had insisted on man's inherent sinfulness and the need for his redemption through divine grace. This was seen to be at the bottom of Conservatism and other *laissez-faire* and non-progressive political beliefs. . . . The opposed thesis, you see. . . . The whole thing is quite simple, really."*

This exposition comes early on and is "quite simple"—that is, if one contents himself with surfaces. I mentioned above that this philosophic rationale provides the structure for the novel. It also supplies the several antipodal outlooks (the optimistic and pessimistic, borne respectively by Beatrice-Joanna and Tristram) and accounts for the crucial rationalistic and voluntaristic arguments over the individual and the state (the Pelagian would allow man freedom of choice to populate himself out of existence; the Augustinian would stifle his natural instincts and freedom in order to preserve the state). Finally, in the most clever of ways, the rationale parallels the lineal development of the protagonists as their lives crisscross in the alternating historic cycles.

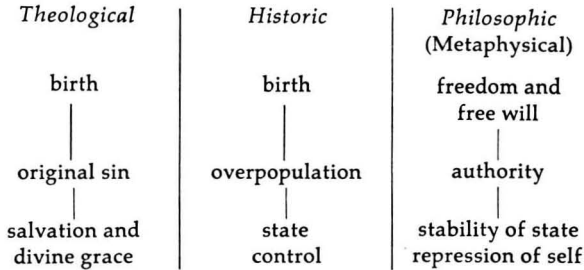
* *The Wanting Seed* (New York, 1964), 11-12.

But what is also "quite simple" to ignore are the modern ironies Burgess twists into the debate between the venerable bishop-saint and the heretic monk. Augustine and Pelagius clashed, one may remember, over the most fundamental issues relating to free will: original sin and divine grace. Augustine developed the theory that Adam's sin is transmitted from parents to children throughout all generations through the sexual act (which, inevitably accompanied by lust, is sinful), while Pelagius taught that sin originates in man's following the bad example of Adam and that it is continued in mankind by force of habit. Consequently, Augustine concluded that man's ultimate salvation resided in the divine grace of God alone; Pelagius argued—with something approaching psychological insight—that divine grace is bestowed according to merit and that man, in the exercise of his free and morally responsible will, will take the determining initiative in matters of salvation.

This is very solemn stuff, and I hope the reader will not lose patience with me when I say that much of it is beside Burgess' main point, though very ingeniously tangential to it. As Tristram pendentally remarks, "The theology subsisting in our opposed doctrines of Pelagianism and Augustinianism has no longer any validity. We use these mythical symbols because they are peculiarly suited to our age, an age relying more and more on the perceptual, the pictorial, the pictographic." But translated into modern historic terminology, the theology has an added force, albeit an inverted one. The concept of original sin, the theory, is positively silly and insignificant when placed beside the desperate reality of overpopulation accruing from lust, fornication, and marriage. Birth is accountable for both the theological and historical problem as well as for the metaphysical bind of the protagonists. And, by

the same token, one cannot even quixotically imagine that God's grace will clear up the population explosion; it is to God's modern counterpart, the state, that one looks for salvation.

A diagram of these three operative levels in *The Wanting Seed* might look something like this:



It would be absurd to suggest that the novel reduces to so pat a ratio, but I hope the schematic illustrates fairly how Burgess empirically handles the abstractions such a book raises. The fact is that *The Wanting Seed*, exposing the Pelagian and Augustinian views of man, carries us through both sieges of the historic cycle: one, when man lives unnaturally (sterilized, controlled, advanced for homosexuality and abstinence, a utilitarian being stabilized by the state); the other, in which he has degenerated to almost "total depravity"—blood lust, cannibalism, pagan fertility rites—an-archic but free.

The Wanting Seed, an anabasis of two protagonists bent on quite different quests into the "interior," clearly expostulates the choice between salvation through stability and control or damnation through unlimited freedom—with little hope left for the human race no matter what the chosen alternative. To believe in preserving at all costs our birthright, despite the inevitable disaster of its course, is to see the "changeling" Beatrice-Joanna (adrift in the madhouse of a world) as

a heroine of natural functions. Yet, to uncover with Tristram—seeking his betrayed Isolde—the cruelty and savagery and desperation behind biological urges and primitive instincts is to negate whatever sanctified mystique may once have attended parturition among civilized man. Eight years ago when Burgess wrote the novel he seemed something of an alarmist; today, I fear, the book appears in some ways almost a conservative document. Prophetic though it be, and as strongly as the impact of its dilemmas and paradoxes are felt, there is a slight aura of approbation hovering about that eternal, instinctual, animal act we so vacantly ennoble. Probably not until the very word *birth*—sentimental, charismatic—is purged from the language and *breeding* substituted will our sensibilities become attuned to how mindless and automatic the beginning of life is, yet how complex and hopeless the conditions when too many beginnings may truly mean our end.

I have not meant in all of this to sound canting. One cannot really improve on *The Wanting Seed* as Burgess wrote it. It is harsh, terrifying, exciting in its thorough pointing up of man's potential for total depravity as either slave or rebel and of the depravity of the state as well. Like all good satirists, Burgess lashes out with savage indignation at stupidity and blind error and lacerates our disastrous pretensions at solving human problems at the expense of human beings. For that reason I feel a certain exasperation at his consigning everything to the crucible of time. I am appalled at the final close-up of a heroine who has brought gurgling twins into an overpopulated world. I am not comforted—however confident the thalassographers—at the thought of reaping gifts from the sea after we have raised hell with the rest of the earth. (That Beatrice-Joanna and Tristram are finally united

near the sea is perhaps a bit too mechanical, in view of "Pelagius" and the English equivalent of his name, "Morgan," meaning "man of the sea.") And I positively reject Burgess' notion of our starting anew the cycle of human perfectibility (the "Pelphase") when so little in the novel has demonstrated our capabilities for it. I balk, in short, at being led to the threshold of some revelation and not being taken across.

In a way, the novel reminds me of the fairy tale in which a dedicated and decidedly indefatigable sister knits shirts for her brothers who have been transformed into swans. She must, one may remember, complete her work by an appointed time, and in the few moments during the day when her brothers revert to human form throw the garments over them. When the deadline arrives she has all but the sleeve of one shirt ready, and the youngest brother, on whom it falls, lives encumbered thereafter with a wing.

In *The Wanting Seed* Burgess smothers us in the mantle of Augustinian guilt, leaving the smallest of rents through which the Pelagian ideal must intrude itself. It is something like hope, but equally a thing with feathers. Though one sympathizes with the practical difficulties of a writer who is working himself out of metaphysical corners, one remains conscious that hope, such as we have come to understand it in the novel, is illusive, impractical, unsound, and insubstantial. We cannot, of course, stop hoping; it is one of the few things left us. But once the state, bent exclusively on its own survival, has defected from any humanistic response to psychological needs and substitutes instead order, stability, materialism, and technocracy, even the hypothetical chances for hope seem not only tenuous but nil.

I seriously doubt whether governmental structure and strictures as we now know them can further the

rapprochement between the political and human ideal—so long, that is, as “polidicy” is everywhere evoked to justify the ways of the state to man the justification is built on self-perpetuating mutual suspicion and propped by foundering abstractions. Philosophically, I think, the issue—perhaps the only issue—still remains that of freedom and free will. The state distrusts man because he leaves everything to choice; man, the state, because it leaves nothing to it. The seed truly wanting in both is the seed of goodness from which, possibly, the “golden age” will germinate. But when the genesis of “good” people like Beatrice-Joanna and Tristram are aborted, when man is no longer allowed to choose between goodness and its necessary correspondent evil, when the seed withers on those drier, ethical grounds of right and wrong, then human perfectibility has not the remotest chance of being realized.

Much of this becomes explicit in *A Clockwork Orange*, though the *raison d'être* of Burgess' rawest, grimmest, most famous novel can be found toward the end of *The Wanting Seed* when Tristram hopefully asks the War Office major: “Do you think people are fundamentally good?” And the officer replies: “Well . . . they now have a chance to be good.” Those skeptical of the chances governments afford us will find *A Clockwork Orange* sustaining to such skepticism. It is a book focusing on “the chance to be good” and proceeding from a single, significant existential dilemma: Is an evil human being with free choice preferable to a good zombie without it? Indeed, at two points in the novel Burgess spells out the dilemma for us. On one occasion, Alex, about to submit to conditioning, is admonished by the prison chaplain:

“It may not be nice to be good, little 6655321. It may be horrible to be good. . . . Does God want goodness or

the choice of goodness? Is a man who chooses the bad perhaps in some ways better than a man who has the good imposed upon him? . . . A terrible terrible thing to consider. And yet, in a sense, in choosing to be deprived of the ability to make an ethical choice, you have in a sense really chosen the good."*

And on the other, the unwitting F. Alexander, with whom Alex finds sanctuary temporarily, similarly remarks:

"You've sinned, I suppose, but your punishment has been out of all proportion. They have turned you into something other than a human being. You have no power of choice any longer. You are committed to socially acceptable acts, a little machine capable only of good. . . . But the essential intention is the real sin. A man who cannot choose ceases to be a man." (Pp. 153-54)

Yet, were this all Burgess had to say on the matter, the impetus of the dilemma would lose substantially in force. Society at large has never troubled itself with the existential agony (unless to repress some manifestation of it), and judging from the preponderance of sentiment abroad today, it would undoubtedly applaud the conditioning process that champions stability over freedom. But Burgess has found inhering in the central dilemma considerations even more immediate. What distinctions between good and evil are possible in the contemporary world? As absolutes, have such distinctions not been totally perverted or obliterated? And as relative terms, depending for definition on what each negates or excludes, have they not become purely subjective? In a technically perfect society that has sapped our vitality for constructive choice, we are, whether choosing good or evil, zombies of one sort or another: Each of us is a little clockwork orange making up the whole of one great clockwork orange.

* *A Clockwork Orange* (New York, 1965), 96.

I am not suggesting that this spare masterpiece necessarily answers the questions it raises. Even a philosophic novel is fiction before philosophy, a fact too easily lost sight of in the heat of critical exuberance. If anything, Burgess sharpens our sensibilities, shapes our awareness of his main argument, by letting us see the extent to which the human quotient dwindles in the face of philosophic divisions. One must, therefore, reject equally any monistic or dualistic readings of the novel, not because the book, per se, is complex, but because the issues are. It is obviously impossible to resolve syllogistically which is the greater evil perpetrated in *A Clockwork Orange*: Alex's rape and murder or the state's conditioning of his mind and, as some would have it, soul. Passive goodness and dynamic evil are choices that in themselves may or may not be acceptable or unacceptable, but that in terms of the novel are neither. My own preference is to view the book pluralistically, to see it as a kind of varieties of existential experience, involving at every turn mixtures of both good and evil that move outward through widening concentric circles of choice from the esthetic (ugliness, beauty) to the moral (sin, redemption). And, as with *The Wanting Seed*, the experiences are empirically stated.

Let me start with the esthetic that is oddly integral to the novel—its language. *Vesch* and *tolchock* and *smeck* and about 250 other nadsat neologisms characterize Alex's era as distinctively as *phony* and *crap* do Holden Caulfield's. Whatever sources Burgess drew upon ("Odd bits of old rhyming slang. . . . A bit of gypsy talk, too. But most of the roots are Slav. Propaganda. Subliminal penetration."), it has generally been the brutality, harshness, distortion, artificiality, and synthetic quality of the coinages that have

fascinated those (myself included) who make the direct connection between the way Alex speaks and how he acts. The language is all of this—an “objective correlative” with a vengeance—but it is something more. Burgess is also a musician, and any passage of sustained nadsat reflects certain rhythms and textures and syncopations. As the following:

Oh, it was gorgeosity and yumyumyum. When it came to the Scherzo I could viddy myself very clear running and running on like very light and mysterious nogas, carving the whole litso of the creeching world with my cutthroat britva. And there was the slow movement and the lovely last singing movement still to come. I was cured all right. (P. 175)

In its simplicity and naturalness as well as its wholeness and continuity, this final paragraph of *A Clockwork Orange* sings to me much as those free-wheeling lapses in Molly Bloom's soliloquy. It is hardly coincidental that Alex's favorite piece of music is Beethoven's Ninth, rich in dissonances that only the professional ear can detect, but filled also with as many untapped, infinite (so it seems) harmonies. In a way it is easy to understand why musical conservatives of Beethoven's time could find the Ninth “ugly” by the then rigorous harmonic standards and why, as a matter of fact, more than one critic fled from the concert hall at the beginning of the “lovely last singing movement.” Alex's language is, in its way, ugly, too; but place it alongside the bland and vapid professional or everyday language of the doctors and warders and chaplains and hear how hollow their language rings. Burgess was out to show how sterile and devitalized language could become without a continuing dynamics behind it; how, in fact, the juice had been squeezed from it; and how, contrarily, Alex emerges as some-

thing of a poet, singing dithyrambs to violence, but revealing through the terrifying beauty of his speech the naked beauty of an uninhibited psyche.

The choice of an esthetic substantiates the several existential modes without explaining how the maladjustment—itsself an indication of social, psychological, and biological “evils”—came about. The causes are naturally grounded in current events, and Burgess has spelled them out in earlier writings. Alex, the gross product of welfare state overkill, is not “depraved because he is deprived” but because he is indulged. “Myself,” he notes rather pathetically at the beginning of *A Clockwork Orange*, “I couldn’t help a bit of disappointment at things as they were those days. Nothing to fight against really. Everything as easy as kiss-my-sharries.” Alex’s utopia is more than the result of suprapermisiveness and self-gratification; it is the consequence of the “original sin” inborn with every offspring of modern organizational leviathans. Having discovered that existence has always meant freedom, but never having been taught “goodness,” Alex responds predictably and inevitably to the killing burden of choice.

Socially, he and his “droogs” parody the formless, shadowy, omnipotent political entity that sports with them as they with “lewdies.” This Kafkaesque infinite regression is frightening enough, though I find even more so Burgess’ repeated inferences that we are all, in some way or another, products of conditioning: tools to be manipulated and clockwork oranges whether we will or no. Alex, not unlike Meursault or K. or—as Burgess more slyly than reasonably lets us imagine—Christ, is the mere scapegoat. He is the one called upon to expiate for the existence of others because he has dared question—or (in this case) has been forced to question—his own.

I don't know that Burgess offers any clear-cut expansion of the psychological and biological evils of modern life, but he does dramatize with vitality the theory that we are by now—depending on our luck—either neurotic or paranoid. Alex's particular routine sado-masochism—nightly orgies of "tolchocking" and the old "in-out in-out," alternating between sabbaticals at the all-too-Freudian Korova Milkbar and withdrawals (onanistic and otherwise) into his multi-speakered stereo womb—may be the healthy neurosis standing between Alex and the paranoia of the populace, though it proves something of a disaster for those elected as outlets for his self-expression. Yet more insidious is the growing feeling one gets in reading *A Clockwork Orange* of governments encouraging violence in order to whip up and feed the paranoia that will ultimately engender allegiance through fear. Ironically, Alex, on the surface at least, is less psychologically distorted and biologically frustrated in his career of violence than those he terrorizes or those who seek to condition him. And, in a more significant way, his small-scale brutalities reflect no deeper abnormality than those of larger scale perfected by the engineers of power politics.

Alex, of course, does not intellectualize his *Non serviam*. For one thing, he wouldn't know how to; for another, there is no need to. The evils of intellect—ignorance and error—have brought the state to a point at which only the fruits of escalated intellectual achievement can check and contain (if that is now the sole function left the state!) the robots it has brought into being. Nothing is mystifying about our present disenchantment with intellectuals who, however motivated or why, have skillfully and near totally excised with their finely honed organizations, systems, and machines the last vestiges of our intuition. Bur-

gess makes a case for the Alex-breed being one of the last, though obviously not impregnable, strongholds of intuition. Yet Alex is neither a purely feeling (if ignoble) savage nor a crusader warring against thought. He is a prototype of those who, muddling means and ends by lumping them together, rebel out of a studied defiance to intellect, rather than out of any untutored intuitive urge. Intellect having failed to show them the "truth that shall make men free," intuition alone must sustain the illusion of freedom and itself become accepted as the creative act or be confused with it. Such intuitional virtues seem to account for Alex's successful "dratsing" with Georgie and Dim:

. . . when we got into the street I viddied that thinking is for the gloopy ones and that the oomny ones use like inspiration and what Bog sends. For now it was lovely music that came to my aid. There was an auto ittying by and it had its radio on, and I could just slooshy a bar or so of Ludwig van (it was the Violin Concerto, last movement), and I viddied right at once what to do. (P. 54)

What Alex does is carve up both of them a bit with his "britva," yet the episode is more significant in retrospect than in context. Alex's *natural* reflex of elation in the face of violence—inspired here by Beethoven—later becomes a *conditioned* reflex against violence after his bout with the "Ludovico technique," a name, I imagine, not chosen at random by Burgess. The distortion of intellect and intuition leads to an unresolvable Manicheanism: What are we, where are we when we can be programmed into calling evil what is so clearly the "good and beautiful?" In a clockwork-orange society we may as well surrender any pretense for distinguishing between good and evil; when we call them by the identical name we know we have been brainwashed past hope. In this respect, *A Clockwork*

Orange shows refinements even beyond 1984. Winston Smith, having undergone physical tortures on a par with primitive atrocities and unrelenting mental cruelties predicated on external fears, quite naturally betrays the woman he loves and learns to love Big Brother. But Alex, robbed of his will, reduced to an automaton, taught to be sickened by violence, is made "good" only by killing in him what was already *the good*.

Both Winston and Alex "die" when they can no longer love. Yet, if 1984 is grimly conclusive in showing the death of a mind and heart at the hands of the state, *A Clockwork Orange* is equally effective in questioning the finality of the death. Burgess brings in (not for shock tactics alone) one of the original archetypes through which Alex finds salvation: the fall, or in this case, the jump. His attempted suicide is, according to Christian dogma, a transgression against God's will, grace, and judgment, and, existentially, the inexcusable surrender of human freedom. Alex, in other words, has been half-dragged, half-propelled down paths of problematical and actual evil to arrive at the lethal nadir of moral evil: sin. And having plumbed the depths, he can only rise. He is a slave to fate rather than choice (the things that happen to him in the last third of the book recapitulate those he initiated in the first third), a victim (no longer victimizer) without refuge, unsuited for Christ-like martyrdom ("If that veck had stayed I might even have like presented the other cheek"), physically coming apart at the seams and mentally wracked. From this condition, his try at "snuffing it" becomes the last desperate exertion of a murdered will and, paradoxically, the means to its resurrection.

Despite the unanswerable paradoxes and dilemmas of *A Clockwork Orange*, which remain unaltered

in the ambiguity of its conclusion, my own notions as to the book's ultimate intent are perhaps slightly more irreverent than ambivalent. I cannot escape the idea that Burgess has intended Alex's sickness—the *nausée* lodged in nonchoice—to symbolize a new concept of *Angst* neatly antithetical to Kierkegaard's "sickness unto death," the "fear and trembling" accruing from the infinite possibilities of choice. And, further, I suspect Alex's jump, the fall by which he is redeemed (the resulting concussion undoes his conditioning), in some way approximates the Kierkegaardian "leap into faith": the intuitive passage from doubt to faith after the cold logic of intellect fails. Alex has done wrong, been evil, sinned, but all as preparation for his redemption. The faith he finds is a specimen of love, joy, freedom. Ironically, he must leave HOME in order to reach it in the same way a man must "lose his life [before] he save it." And his cure is both of the body and soul. "It was," says Alex, "like as though to get better I had to get worse!" Burgess seems to be saying that, in a brutal, resigned, mechanical world—a world turned clockwork—love must come from hate, good from evil, peace from violence, and redemption from sin.

How? Unfortunately there are no panaceas for metaphysical or existential ills, and Burgess is not a prescriptive writer anyway. Human problems are inexhaustible so long as there are human beings; eradicate one and you eradicate the other. Short of that, one might find the answer to *A Clockwork Orange* in *The Wanting Seed*—and vice versa, but I very much doubt that either solution would serve for long. Give man unlimited choice? He will make a botch of it. Deprive him of all but the "right" choice? He is no longer a man. The seeds and fruits of freedom, both

novels tell us, are bitter, but man is now harvesting only what he has sown.

INDERBY, OUTERBY, ENDERBY

BURGESS not only writes about what he knows best, but what has affected him most. It isn't a surprise then to find him sharing much with his minimal and marginal heroes caught in the "bluster of history." Crabbe (civil servant), Hillier (lapsed Catholic), How-erth (schoolmaster), Spindrifft (linguist), Ennis (soldier), Denham (unrepatriated Englishman)—each presents one face or another of Burgess' interests and multifaceted career. F. X. Enderby, hero of a brace of novels (published first independently and later back-to-back), is his most recent, palpable, and comically ideal incarnation—a portrait of the middle-aged man as a young artist—with avatars possibly manifest in so disparate a trio as Prospero, Pnin, and Shem the Penman.

I do not introduce these heavy guns in order to blitz the sensibilities with the virtues of *Enderby*, even though it is probably Burgess' major achievement to date. What, indeed, an impotent, indigent, flatulent minor poet of forty-five might have in common with a magus, *émigré* Russian professor, and a punning figment of the unconscious is at best moot and at worst an outrageous provocation for exegetical assault. Little of the pristine magic of *The Tempest* wafts through the seedy rooming houses of London or Tangiers; less of the calm ironies surrounding an ivory-tower retreat on a benign college campus connects with Enderby's

repeated harassment, flight, and penury; and only some fine stretches of imagination would link the free-wheeling fantasias of the wakeful *Wake* with the realities clamoring for release in Enderby's brain.

Nevertheless, parallels pared to a minimum, Burgess infuses into *Enderby* the maximum spirit of his three acknowledged masters. His hero, like theirs, is obsessed with transformations, but even more than they with the ability of words to work them: to forge from feeble, desiccated, banal, empty, or dark surroundings new, vital life. To any writer, the charisma of the word can change the Caliban-created world into something wondrous. Metaphorical magic can turn the monstrous into the human and the commonplace into the heroic—but not without certain sacrifices. In *Enderby* Burgess is out to make a case for the toll exacted in the creative act, even the act that has comedy as its ultimate end.

The chapter and verse of which *Enderby* is a partial text may be found in the succinct epigraph to the novel ("—*Allons, dernier des poètes, / Toujours enfermé tu te rendras malade . . .*") as well as in one of Burgess' many confessional asides scattered throughout his journalism. "Book-writing," he writes unbookishly in *Urgent Copy*, "is hard on the brain and excruciating on the body; it engenders tobacco-addiction, an over-reliance on caffeine and dexedrine, piles, dyspepsia, chronic anxiety, sexual impotence." Readers of *Enderby* will detect the connection at once, the consistent motif that runs throughout the four-hundred-plus pages of the novel. Spun with sympathy and insight, given the necessary twists and variations, *Enderby*, while managing to be a kind of metabiological text on the often agonizing, frequently debilitating process of the creative act, is additionally a wildly funny and enlightened commentary on the

writer and the modern world, an unquenchable satire on the follies of contemporary Calibans, and a personal biography that may incorporate much autobiography. Without any doubt, however, it is a biography done mostly from the inside out. A book that opens quite graphically with an anal emission ("Pfffrrrummp") and turns potentially ill wind into Inspiration's breath could scarcely be anything else!

This device, at any rate, promotes some of the complexities that underlie Burgess' compendium of humors on the act of creation. One is aware from the outset that Enderby's gaseousness, like "Johnson's scrofula, Swift's scatophobia, or Keats's gallop of death-warrant blood," is a mark of poetic malaise, but very much his own thing. *Enderby*, not unlike *Ulysses*, is an odyssey—in this case the poet in search of his muse—and its hero, no matter how comic the inversion, acquires the perquisite tag that serves both as leitmotif and the "wound" peculiar to all artists.

The marriage between indigestion and inspiration is based on more than mere literary whimsy, however; as one might expect from Burgess, it has a linguistic sanction as well. *Flare* (to blow) is at the root of both *flatus* and *afflatus*, one a function of the earthly, the other of the divine, and both fundamental to relieving the uneasiness in body and mind. The logic and magic of language connect what might otherwise be a labored witticism. In a serious way it is somehow fitting that a word-man like Burgess endows a word-man like Enderby with so radical an annoyance, rooted in the vitals of language that does not profane the sacred but glorifies the homely and commonplace.

I feel on less steady ground in finding the psychological precedent for Enderby's flatulence, though it emerges in a particular way from those precedents, literary or linguistic. Word-hoarders until letting go,

poets are by nature anal, a fixation (and Enderby devotes as much attention to his bottom and his insides as he does to his poetry) that Burgess treats comically, but with more affection than irony. Such quasi scatology for art's sake is not, of course, new, though it perhaps has never before been given such persistent prominence. I am uncertain of Burgess' familiarity with Norman Brown's provocative essay on Swift, which is undoubtedly the first *and* last word on the interrelationship of scatology and esthetics, but he certainly knows Joyce, who repeatedly connected the sacerdotal and scatological. Mulligan, one remembers, makes a chalice of a shaving bowl to celebrate a black mass for paralyzed Ireland; Bloom ("There is something of the artist in old Bloom") sits in the outhouse musing on the pulp novels he will write; Stephen Dedalus excavates his nose; both urinate together in happy communion. To turn something dead into something living—at least to recognize that what is dead may be animated—seems to be what art is all about. The poet's sacramental vocation is lodged in his "excremental vision."

Burgess' preoccupation here with waste, then, is scarcely a mere excuse for protracted or vulgar *mauvaises plaisanteries*; it is a legitimate justification of Enderby's vatic role—and a necessary one (Enderby's name itself may harbor a related pun). The body, underwriting much of the novel's imagery—Enderby composes while defecating, often on bits of toilet paper or on greasy scraps of food wrappers that are then filed in the bathtub; is nauseated by eating; disgusted by sex when not antipathetic to it—metasthesizes into a metaphor; while the body's simple, over-all, continual function of conversion and reconversion is turned into the more complex processes of growth for the ordinary man and creation for the poet.

As in the other novels, one detects in *Enderby* Burgess' unique device—so unique, in fact, as to skim dangerously close to the obsessional—of apprehending the illusive, multifarious involvements of the mind through palpable impairments of the body. Someone is scarred; someone else suffers from the heat; another has a possible brain tumor; still another is sexually unappeasable. To a man, the Burgess hero must master or come to peace with his body before resting easily in the sanctuary of his mind. The act generally involves a kind of deterioration prior to regeneration; thus, sleeping peacefully, flatulating gently, Enderby, in order to become a "ghost" (that is to say, immortal with Johnson, Swift, Keats), must die before being reborn.

Image into metaphor, function into process. Such changes from smaller to greater (applying no less to life than to art) are worked out in *Enderby* on several levels at once, symbolically when relevant, but always without losing sight of the human. The art of transformation is always viewed within the contexts of the transformation of the artist.

Enderby, on the most apprehensible level, is about the ins-and-outs of the life of Enderby. After intimately acquainting us with his insides, Part One develops through a series of rapid conversions: private Enderby (poet in retreat) into public Enderby (poet in society); single Enderby into married Enderby, trapped by Vesta Bainbridge, (a kind of insistent and designing vestal nonvirgin) who then proceeds to exploit in him other changes. He surrenders his very self-sufficient body to love-making, prostitutes his talent (writing sloppy verses for the *Cosmopolitan*-type mod mag on which she is an editor), integrates his personality so that he loses both integrity and identity, and attempts to reconvert his freethinking into Catholicism. Mild Enderby is also turned into militant Ender-

by, after Rawcliffe (like WS, Enderby has his own rival poet) steals his idea for a long narrative poem on original sin and turns *it* into a scenario for a horror-film spectacular. And, in the most crushing reversal, inspired Enderby becomes dried-up Enderby. The pivotal double forte to the rising crescendo of conversions comes when Enderby-inside becomes Enderby-outside—when, more precisely, he is shrunk by the shrink Wapenshaw to the swinish proportions of Piggy Hogg, bartender and useful citizen.

In Part Two Hogg changes back into Enderby, the veneers of his reconstructed personality gradually peel away as they had been layered on Enderby. The second spate of conversions develops partly as mirror images of the first and partly as concentric circles that, this time, move from the outside toward the center; for, like Joyce, Burgess is fond of counterparts. Hogg's troubles begin (as Enderby's before him) at a literary luncheon, from which he crazily bolts after being falsely accused of shooting a pop-singer. John the Spaniard is Hogg's antagonist, much as Rawcliffe is Enderby's. Miranda Boland is Hogg's Vesta, left at crises during coitus as inspiration in a rush revisits Hogg-turning-Enderby, who chooses to satisfy his muse before—"O brave new world"—Miranda. Hogg in Tangiers in pursuit of Rawcliffe is Enderby in Rome pursued by him; Rawcliffe's death (brilliantly recounted with Swiftian disgust and Johnsonian fear of bodily decay, and with something reminiscent of Quilty's piecemeal dispatch in *Lolita*) is the rebirth of Hogg-now-fully-Enderby. The novel, quietly decrescendos (as the quest ends) to the final, fleeting interlude with an anonymous sibylline sylph—the embodied muse at last?—and Enderby's resolve to live, as he had wished from the beginning, without love, alone, free, a poet.

I hope this brief outline will again suggest to readers of the novel how satisfying—if conventional in the classic sense of comic—its plot is. The gay skeleton, however neatly articulated by the rich and wild action, becomes far weightier when fleshed out with several peripheral themes, related in *Enderby* to the primary one of transformation, but equally revealing of Burgess' thought in general.

For one thing, Burgess actually distinguishes between two kinds of transforming acts: the one effected from within by the individual, the other imposed from without by society. Neither *Enderby*, nor any Burgess hero for that matter, is a lost, damned, grotesque, estranged soul in the existential sense, but (with one or two exceptions) *un homme moyen sensuel*. To be sure, he is often alienated in some way from society, but usually a victim of his own impulses, weaknesses, blindness. The problem of the Burgess outsider is not how to rebel effectively against the collective, but, at his most passive, how to manage to be left alone by it, or, if *engagé*, how to maintain his individuality and sanity amidst the continuing and baffling stupidities that made him an outsider to begin with. This central paradox in Burgess is one of the more frightening dilemmas of our times. If, as anyone of sensibility is aware, society perverts, corrupts, confounds, what logic goads it to persecute further the individual who *becomes* perverted, corrupted, confused? Society forces upon us certain acceptable patterns of behavior that are antipathetic or unnatural, expects our accord in following them, changes us into antisocial beings, and then chastises us for being antisocial. The logical adjunct to the madness developing from such enforced conversion can be, as in *A Clockwork Orange* and *The Wanting Seed*, grim indeed. But the real point is in understanding the impossibility of society's wrenching

changes from a "normal" evolutionary development without in some way shutting out the individual who, driven at last to extremes, frustrates the very changes society would bring about.

This paradox, corollary with Burgess' own ambivalent feelings about history—as a cycle both futile and hopeful—is less momentous in *Enderby*. No new seeds of catastrophe are scattered here, nor are those already sown germinated. Yet *Enderby* admits of one further (and to me perhaps most frightening) complexity: To a society like ours, grown increasingly paranoid, an outsider is an outsider, and in dealing with him society no longer cares or chooses to discriminate between the act of rebellion that is dangerous and destructive and that which is harmless or creative. Communist, black, hippy, freak, bohemian, liberal, student, are stewed collectively and cannibalized. Menenius' fable of the belly and members of the body is clearly not a fable at all, perhaps less today than ever before, since it is not only the very body of society that is fast deteriorating, but its spirit as well—all for the sake of preserving a transient, present, hedonistic feeling of well-being. Burgess offers a vision of the day when personal freedom may be subsumed, if not obliterated, by a corporate happiness that is false, mechanical, dead.

In my earlier observations on other Burgess novels I spoke of freedom (and its consequent problems) as something political or philosophical or sexual. Here, I would like to relate it to original sin, the doctrinal base out of which it developed. For I think that *Enderby* itself, like Enderby's mythopoetic narrative that never gets published, is about a particular kind of sin conflicting with a general sense of freedom. That Burgess, an ex-Catholic, should write about these things is scarcely strange—even less strange when we recall

how comparatively explicable the question is, despite the strangling morass of theological debate grown up around it. Those with faith answer it one way, those without, another. And, while several of Burgess' heroes are Catholics of uncertain hues, there is not, strictly speaking, a Catholic orientation to his novels; nothing, that is, of the protective, optimistic elitism of being Catholic one finds in Waugh, or the cracks and faults in the tortured landscapes of Graham Greene. Something like the Manicheanism in *Tremor of Intent* is more pertinently a matter of psychological duality than religion, while the Pelagian-Augustinian phases that set off *The Wanting Seed* are centered on their own synthetic accommodations to the processes of cyclical history. Burgess, a brooder on historical cycles, has little patience with eschatology.

My own feeling is that Burgess—a defector from Catholicism rather than a convert to it—follows something of the line set by the English school of religious psychologists that grew up after World War I. The “New Psychology” as it was called (best explained in J. A. Hadfield's *Psychology and Morals* [1923]) applied Freudian theory to Christian morals in an attempt to show how man's nonmoral drives (those instincts and emotions forming the very bases of human behavior) were fundamentally at odds with the social order. Guilt arose primarily from maladjustment to collective norms. Consequently, when it came to psychologizing sin, translating it into modern terms, the metaphysics of “original sin” were severed from the moral disease of “actual sin,” the refusal to moralize inherited drives that derive from somatic disorders.

In standard Freudian fashion Enderby's obsession with freedom (his mundane preoccupation) and with sin (translated into much of his poetry) stems from the desire to escape guilt rooted in his early boyhood

fascination and loathing for his stepmother, a slovenly, highly sexual woman who recurs in his thoughts and in the persons of Vesta and Miranda. This situation may seem more ponderously sober in the telling than it actually is. Enderby's "visceral dysfunctions," the somatizing impetus for his freedom and the sanction for his poetry, are worked into a witty, satirical antithesis: Dirty, odd-ball, flatulating, onanistic Enderby, always true to himself, is the foil for a bogus, bourgeois, sanitary, normal, and sane society, by far more stupidly sinful and morally diseased than himself. In his poetry—pristine, tidy, lucid—he purges sin and guilt, exorcises the Freudian ghosts of the past. I think this is made transparent in *Eden*, the final of several poems included in an appendix to the novel, whose concluding quatrains are a notorious valedictory on the motifs of sin, freedom, poetry—and dirt:

One looks for Eden in history, best left unvisited,
For the primal sin is always a present sin,
The thin hand held in the river which can never
Clean off the blood, and so remains bloodless.

And this very moment, this very word will be Eden,
As that boy* was already, or is already, in Eden,
While the delicate filthy hand dabbles and dabbles
But leaves the river clean, heartbreakingly clean.†

It is clear by now that, according to Burgess, personal conversion is a "good" thing, in that it follows the natural patterns of change. Any sort of enforced conversion, in interrupting individual development, is unnatural and a "bad" thing. For the artist in particular, conversion to conformity is, *prima facie*, as primal and deadly a sin as any, a Circean castration (more than a happy afterthought ordains Enderby's metamorphosis into Hogg) generally fatal if no Odysseus

* The poem is a remembrance of things past.

† *Enderby* (New York, 1968), 412.

is about to effect the reversal. Conformity, at the antipodes of creativity and freedom, is death. And Burgess is sensitively aware of the way society devises destructive and adventitious forces to stifle Enderby's creative drive, to squeeze him into conformity, to entropy him into a nonentity.

No reader of the novel will fail to follow Burgess' on-target shots at these forces. The satire is just, obvious, funny; but though never heavy-handed, I find it, however integral to a very original novel, the least original feature of the work. By now, I imagine, one realizes that humanity's vices and delusions have increased more in degree than in kind. Fortunately, Burgess packs more substance into *Enderby* than bellyfuls of warmed-over satire, and specifying his attacks at any great length would be something of a misguided labor. I don't think anyone can move very far into the novel without noting the barbs directed generally at obvious targets: mass culture, mass media, mass apathy, mass hypocrisy, and others, out of which grow the particular evils perpetrated by such selected agents as the foolish, pompous Wapenshaw (psychiatry), the cloying Vesta (religion and "romantic" love), the nauseous Miranda (raw sex), or the besotted Rawcliffe (the artist who has "sold out"). This list does not cover all of society's attempts to convert Enderby (and us) on its own terms; not subtle attempts, but devastating enough if one happens to be the object upon which they fasten.

Whatever the personal transformations that succeed and the societal that fail, *Enderby* is most interesting by far for its sustained attempts at rendering the moment of creation. When Enderby converts into poetry the raw, undisciplined images that bombard him continually, he is no theorizer, only a practitioner, the tool of his mastering drive. Over a moment so

fragile and illusive and "eternal," over an act so imperative and durable, Burgess does not set about rivaling such formidably opaque disquisitions on the psychology or esthetics of creativity as voiced by the artist-heroes of Gide or Huxley or Joyce. *Enderby*, not geared to the heavy torque of either, would creak under such undue weight. Rather, Burgess is interested in "showing," not "telling." In the novel, poetry is alive and well and living in the hero's brain, awaiting only the occasion for the tap and clank of the hammer of inspiration to work on the anvil of phenomena. This perception is what gives *Enderby* its real thrust forward as well as its intimate momentum inward. The *élan vital* of the novel stems directly from the lean vitals of the poet. Despite the "poetry-loathing world," despite all attempts to "end Enderby," the drive to write poetry remains as basic as sex, hunger, excretion, living. "Man," says Enderby, "is a tree. He bears fruit. When he stops bearing fruit life cuts him down." Enderby bears a superabundance of fruit, continually becoming the life about him, continually converting it into poetry—all engineered by Burgess so that the sacred moments of creation, the acts, simultaneously work into the fabric of the fiction and yet maintain their own comic force.

Let me cite a single, representative instance, which, for the sake of brevity, must limp on ellipsis. Enderby is drinking ale and bitters in a lesbian hangout where he normally ventures to procure freshly killed hare from a cook friend of his. "A fierce-looking thin woman" crashes into the bar and greets another "long and glulily."

"Prudence, my duck," she said. Prudence seemed to be a popular girl. The peculiar charm of strabismus. And then the fragments of a new poem came swimming with a familiar confidence into Enderby's head. He saw

the shape, he heard the words, he felt the rhythm. Three stanzas, each beginning with birds. *Prudence, prudence, the pigeons call*. And, of course, that's what they did call, that's what they'd always called. *Act, act the ducks give voice*. And that was true, too. What were the other birds? They weren't sea-gulls. The dyed-blond Jewess, Gladys, suddenly, raucously, laughed. It was a bird like that. *Caution, caution*. Rooks, that was it. . . . He wrote the lines he had heard. Also other fragments that he could hear dimly. . . . *The widow in the shadow. The widow in the meadow*. A voice, very clear and thin, spoke as though pressed to his ear: *Drain the sacrament of choice*. . . .

Walking home . . . he tried to call back the rhythm, but it had gone. The fragments ceased to be live limbs of some mystical body that promised to reveal itself wholly. Dead as the hare, meaningless onomatopoeia; a silly jingle: *widow, shadow, meadow*. . . .

He entered the kitchen and began to skin the hare. . . . The water flowing from the faucet cast a faint shadow, a still shadow, on the splashboard. The line came, a refrain: *The running tap casts a static shadow*. That was it, he recognised, his excitement mounting again. The widow, the meadow. A whole stanza blurred itself out. . . . (Pp. 28-30)

I have said nothing about Enderby's concurrent difficulty with the hare during all of this, nor about the comedy that ensues when he rushes about, madly inspired, brandishing the skinning knife, nor about the desperate knocking at the bathroom door as he, seated, writes out the whole poem, nor have I noted the subtle shifts between the thoughts of Enderby and Burgess. As in Joycean internal monologue, narrator and character often coalesce indiscernibly. Burgess learns much from Joyce, but the comedy and ideas are strictly his own. Whether or not poetry is really conceived or written this way is beside the point: The point being, I feel, that the reader remains throughout this long sequence aware to the last of the outside world continually playing on the poet's sensibilities

and being transformed by them. It is the way poets *should* compose. Burgess achieves in these marvelous sequences (and there are at least a dozen others, similar but notable for their own quirky surprises) not merely a marriage between thought and action, but a happier sort of incest—one writer intimately fluoroscoping his hero who happens to be a writer, too, and whom he happens to admire.

It is easy to admire Enderby as a man as well as a poet, to go beyond admiration to sympathy, and beyond that to empathy. If it is no longer possible for poets—especially minor poets—to be the “unacknowledged legislators of the world,” they can at least maintain the Shelleyan spirit of freedom and optimism, tenaciously guard their identities, break from Philistinism and from the middle-class claptrap that equates “normality and sanity” with useful citizenship, contract out of “church, family, society”—the identical “snares,” incidentally, from which Stephen Dedalus escapes—and, if need be, “opt to live without love.” Even Shelley seldom put poetry above the latter, but that Enderby does might suggest (with little obliqueness in the symbolism of the act) how inviolate the Muse still is.

Enderby makes the strongest, yet most human case possible for whatever self-possession and indivisibility the artist might yet have in a world doing its damndest to usurp them. But the challenge—going the whole hog in scaling those inimical, ubiquitous, “raw, rock-cliffs” of life—is as important as the victory. In the closest Burgess ever skirts to laying down the novel’s “message” Enderby tells Vesta:

“Poetry. . . . Don’t you start telling me about poetry. I know all about poetry, thank you very much. . . . But let me tell you this. There’s no obligation to accept society or women or religion or anything else, not for

anyone there isn't. And as for poetry, that's a job for anarchists. Poetry's made by rebels and exiles and outsiders, it's made by people on their own, not by sheep baaing bravo to the Pope. Poets don't need religion and they don't need bloody little cocktail-party gossip either; it's they who make language and make myths. Poets don't need anybody except themselves." (P. 158)

Here—with little satire or irony—is the motivating premise for jealous, serious devotion to art, and the motivating reasons for Enderby's troubles. Taken together they are the stuff out of which Burgess makes of his poet-hero's life a comic poem filled with life and poetry. Beyond the little paradise in which Enderby at last finds himself and *finds* himself, a "paradise within" as well as without where, perhaps, he need be a rebel no longer, one catches privileged glimpses of the potential Eden within all men.

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