

the international



Anthony Burgess  
foundation

END OF THE WORLD NEWSLETTER

July-August 2009

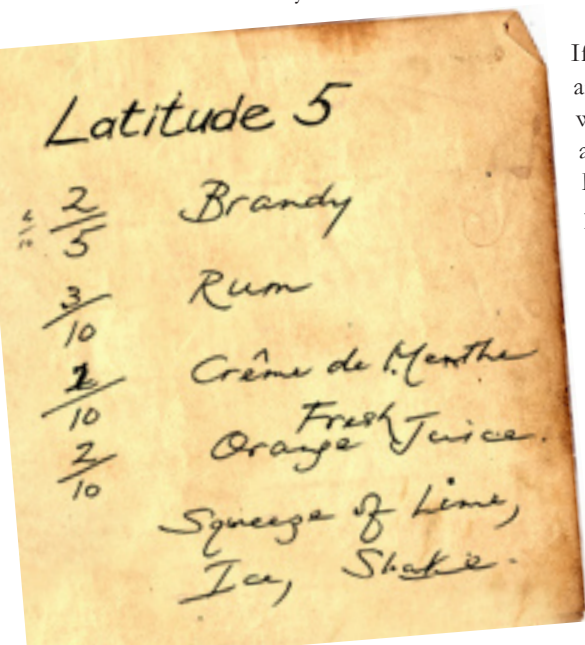
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Editor Dougie Milton  
Chief Editors Alan Roughley  
Nuria Belastegui

NEWS FROM THE HOUSE

## Dear Honorary Patrons, Trustees, members and anybody with an interest in Burgess visiting this website:

This edition of The End of the World Newsletter has been very capably put together and edited by that well-known Burgessian, Dougie Milton. Sadly, this will be the first edition of the Newsletter that Liana Burgess will not be reading. Liana passed away in December 2007. Mrs Burgess has provided funding for us to continue the development of the Foundation until we become financially self-sufficient.



If you know of anybody who may want to become a member of the Foundation, please pass on our details to them.

Since the last edition of the Newsletter the IABF has, with the wise guidance

of Gerry Docherty and the financial acumen of Gaëtan de Chezelles, purchased new premises to house its Burgess collection. The Engine House of a renovated cotton mill in central Manchester will provide space for readings and performances of Burgess's literary works and music, as well as offering an excellent performance space for writers and musicians from Manchester and from the wider national and international contexts.



The Engine House at Chorlton Mill, Manchester

The renovation of the Engine House at Chorlton Mill is being led by architect Aoife Donnelly. Completion date for the refurbishment of the premises will be late 2009 or very early 2010. We hope that you will all pencil those dates in your diaries, and come and help us celebrate the opening of the new IABF.

This edition of the Newsletter offers new and exciting perceptions of Burgess and his work. Contributors include: Matthew Asprey, Rob Spence, Martin Phipps, Bruce Parks, Yves

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Buelens, Andrew Biswell and Dougie Milton. Developments at the Foundation, which were somewhat stalled after Liana's sad passing, begin with the refurbishments at the new premises. Leslie Gardner, of Artellus, is continuing her sterling work in dealing with the licensing and copyright issues related to



**Dr A.I. Farkas at the Second International Anthony Burgess Symposium, Liverpool Hope, 2007**

the new productions of Burgess's work. This year, a Tokyo theatre group and a Greek theatre company are staging versions of *A Clockwork Orange*. Beckett Swede is working on an operatic realisation of Burgess's famous novella in San Francisco.

On 26th February of this year, Alan Roughley, the Foundation's Chief Executive, and concert pianist Dianne O'Hara performed a recital and reading of Burgess's music and writing at the Harry Ransom Research Centre at the University of Texas at Austin. Dianne O'Hara is one of the most experienced performers of Burgess's piano music.

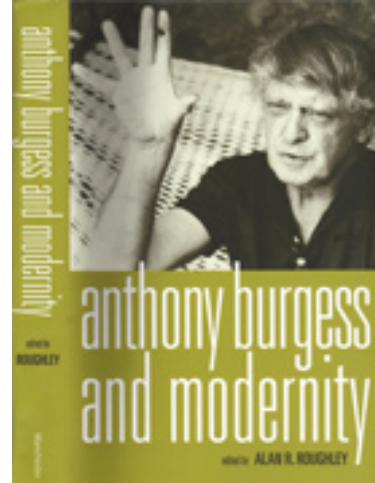
Andrew Biswell and Alan Roughley will soon begin work on a new synoptic edition of *A Clockwork Orange*. Leslie Gardner hopes to secure a publishing contract for this valuable contribution to Burgess scholarship shortly.

In July, the IABF's Third Biennial Symposium will be held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, where Burgess scholars from

Malaysia, China, Iran and India will join the line-up of usual suspects from Western countries in exploring Anthony's literature and music. Unfortunately, Dianne O'Hara will not be able to perform Burgess's music this year, as she will be examining for various conservatories in New Zealand. The large gap left by Dianne, however, will be more than adequately filled by the musicologist Dr Alan Shockley, who, even as we write, is busy practising the pieces that he will be performing at the conference. Alan's new book, *Music in the words: music form and counterpoint in the twentieth-century novel*, has just been published by Ashgate. Anybody with an interest in the relationship between music and literature should consult this text for further insights into Burgess's literary-musical works.

If you know of anybody who may be travelling in Malaysia during the period of July 27th-31st, please suggest that they come and join in the exciting discussions that will be going on. Further information is available from the Foundation's Secretary, Nuria Belastegui, at [info@anthonyburgess.org](mailto:info@anthonyburgess.org)

The current administrative staff of the IABF, Dr Alan Roughley, Nuria Belastegui, a post-graduate student completing a dissertation on Burgess's writing, and Paula Price, a post-graduate PhD student working on Burgess and linguistics, join together in thanking you for your continued interest in the Foundation, and for any suggestions that you may care to offer to help the Foundation grow and develop. They also join together in offering Dougie Milton many thanks for his sterling work in editing this edition of the Newsletter. ■



**Anthony Burgess and Modernity, published in 2008 by Manchester University Press**



## Introduction By Dougie Milton

Welcome one and all to the Summer 2009 issue of *The End of the World News*. It should have been the Spring issue really. It should even, perhaps, have been the Spring 2008 edition. But there have been upheavals – sad ones, like the death of Liana Burgess, and some more beneficent – at the International Anthony Burgess Foundation (see Alan Roughley’s report above) and for a while things were put rather on hold. However, we’re back and our contributors – several of them new names in these parts – are in fine form.

The theme for this issue was inspired by Matthew Asprey’s essay Peripatetic Burgess. His was the first piece submitted for this issue and it seemed to set the tone. I had originally intended to stick to Burgess and Rome, Rome, that is, firstly as a physical place where Burgess lived throughout much of the 1970s, then Rome the inspiration for his novels both historical and contemporary, and of course Rome the Church, viewed with so much ambivalence by Burgess throughout his nominally apostate life. That seemed to be enough to be going on with.

However, this perhaps rather narrow brief was promptly exceeded by all concerned, and so much the better for this issue. We have the above-mentioned Peripatetic Burgess by Matthew Asprey, which takes us on a trip to AB’s former homes in Malta and Rome, with accompanying photographs. We have a delightful memoir by Bruce Parks who was fortunate enough to have studied Joyce and Shakespeare and much more under Burgess at the City College of New York in the early 1970s and then to have spent nearly two weeks staying in Bracciano with Anthony, Liana and Paolo Andrea. Burgess and family leap back to life from Mr Parks’s pages, as indeed do his fellow students from CCNY, at least one of who became a character in *A Clockwork Testament* and *Enderby*’s worst tormentor.

The ever-ebullient Martin Phipps, asked for a piece about Rome as a theme in the work of Burgess fired back a dazzling essay, Noble Romans, so quickly that I felt a bit like the punchline in that joke of Steven Wright’s: “I tried making some instant coffee in the microwave and I traveled back in time”. I don’t know how he does it, but there’s nothing hasty or slapdash about his essay, which is crammed with the sort of gamey *aperçus* (not to mention jokes) that Burgess would have loved.

The jovial Yves Buelens in his Brussels fastness tears his attention away from

his multi-lingual library of Burgess collectibles, or perhaps a download of the latest terrifying slash-em-up gore-fest, for he sees no incompatibility between the two, to offer us a fresh look at *The Worm and the Ring*. We knew about the Wagnerian deep structure of that hard-to-find novel, but the Rilkean connection certainly

*‘Fama di loro il mondo esser non lassa’,  
‘The world will let no fame of theirs endure’*

escaped this reader. Well, now we have Yves’s Valhalla in Trieste to open our eyes. It is always a pleasure when somebody finds something fresh and unexpected to say about novels by Burgess one thought one knew well.

Rob Spence, who is both ebullient and jovial, doffs his Mancunian Psychogeographer’s hat for a change to give us an Awful Warning about just how badly compilers of literary guides and textbooks can get it wrong, even in Italy where one would have thought they were more familiar with the Burgess canon. Will said editors be named and shamed into amending their entry on AB? If not, ‘*Fama di loro il mondo esser non lassa*’, ‘The world will let no fame of theirs endure’. That’s yer actual Dante. Rob will be publishing a critical study of Burgess in 2010. It’s good to see the shelf load of secondary Burgess literature steadily growing.

Which brings us to Burgess’s biographer Andrew Biswell, who needs, as they say, no introduction here. For this issue he brings us what is surely the first or one of the first reviews of a new collection of interviews with Anthony Burgess, ranging over several decades and gathering together some extremely hard to find items as well as some more familiar. The book is obviously going to be an absolute must for Burgessophiles, and we are grateful to Andrew for giving us, as it were, first dibs. His review was also written under extreme pressure of work but the Pony Express came through on time. Many thanks, droogie.

I have appended a short memoir of an all-too-brief but lively friendship with the late Liana Macellari Burgess, a friendship that, I hasten to add, was conducted entirely

over the phone but was no less vivid and is none the less missed for all that. And finally, a curiosity. Readers of Burgess’s excellent first collection of journalism *Urgent Copy* (Cape, London 1968) may remember his review of the 4<sup>th</sup> edition of *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, edited by Sir Paul Harvey. Writing about the entries for modern novelists, he says ‘As for Anthony Burgess, I am reconciled now to seeing the name survive only as that of a seventeenth-century divine who wrote too many sermons on the one text from St John’. Oddly enough, not even that Anthony Burgess appears in Harvey. The sermons exist though, in one facsimile volume, which can be downloaded with a couple of mouse-

clicks from Google Books. Just type in Anthony Burgess The True Doctrine of Justification – entering the full title will either induce narcolepsy or give you RSI. I had hoped to reproduce the frontispiece below, but it’s a .pdf file and not amenable to cutting and pasting. At least, not by me. Plus the reproduced book carries the stamp of a university library and I feared copyright problems. But it’s well worth a look, if not a read. (I tried, dear Reader, on your behalf, oh how I tried). One feels a distinct frisson seeing the great name in crude seventeenth-century type on the first and last pages.

So, here you are then, *The End of the World News* June 2009. Putting it together may have involved a few headaches and arse-pains, literal as well as figurative, but it’s always a joy to have yet another contribution come in and to feel the issue starting to shape up nicely, and to see with one’s own eyes the evidence that Burgess’s work is loved by those who’ve been reading him for a long time, and even more importantly greeted with surprise and delight by new generations who haven’t. My thanks, as ever, go to our Executive Director Dr Alan Roughley for giving me yet another shot in the editorial chair and resisting the occasional temptation to execute me. Foundation Secretary Nuria Belastegui remained cool and collected no matter how many frantic exclamation marks besmirched my emails. I write this before I see what our graphics wizards do with it, but I’m sure if it’s up to the standard of previous issues it will be a treat for the eyes. Personal thanks and best wishes go to Sharon Black, Andrew Biswell, Tom Kasperkowicz, Mike and Mona Anderson, and Christine Lee Gengaro (*‘Excellior!’*). Until the next time.



# PERIPATETIC BURGESS

By Matthew Asprey

**In the early pages of *Earthly Powers* (1980) Kenneth Toomey, seated at the bar of his Maltese home, imagines a wide-ranging travel memoir structured aleatorically, by a luckydip of souvenir matchbooks from a huge bowl. It is probable that Toomey's creator had his own collection of international matchbooks. Anthony Burgess was not only a chain-smoker of Schimmelpennincks; he was also a serious peripatetic. I was on his trail.**

Anthony Burgess is a daunting challenge for the literary pilgrim. A comprehensive tour would require stops in Manchester, London, Malaya, Brunei, Malta, Rome, Bracciano, Monaco and Lugano. In early 2008 I made do with visits to two former residences that have something more than biographical interest. Burgess often lent his homes wholesale to his fictional characters. In this case I would find the Maltese house given to Kenneth Toomey and the Roman apartment inhabited by characters in both *Beard's Roman Women* (1976) and *ABBA ABBA* (1977).

Burgess's first wife Lynne, with whom he lived and drank in Malaya and Borneo in the fifties, died of cirrhosis in London

in March 1968. In August Burgess was in Malta to prospect with his fiancé Liana, daughter of an Italian contessa. "We were impressed with several things in Malta," he recalled in his 1990 memoir or confession *You've Had Your Time*. "The Caravaggios, the baroque architecture, the blue clean waters, and the language." Malta was in the sterling zone but had an attractive tax rate of sixpence in the pound. The sunlight was ideal for a writer. The Mediterranean, he decided, was "where the great work will be done and has been done."

Essentially going into tax exile, Burgess typically couched the move in theological terms. Although a lapsed Catholic, he retained an obsessive Augustinian belief in free will and deplored the British welfare state for its supposed demand for conformity. It was particularly difficult for the non-subsidised Grub Street writer. "If you are a maverick," he told the *New York Times*, "then one is outlawed, one is not wanted, one is in effect feared. The state fears writers."

After a registry marriage in Hounslow the Burgesses, who already had a four-year-old son named Paolo-Andrea, departed England in their now famous Bedford Dormobile. It was "equipped for driving, cooking, eating, sleeping, living," he recalled

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in 1988. “By an ingenious adjustment of stout screens, the whole could be turned into two bedrooms which collapsed to form a dining room with a bar at one end.” They faced bureaucratic difficulties, border scuffles and anti-gypsy prejudice. The Dormobile was injured or sabotaged. But none of that prevented hard work. “Jolting through Italy,” he wrote, “I would type at the rear table, having made myself a pint of strong tea on the stove fed by nether gas tubes.” Novels would be written in the Dormobile for years to come: *Man of Nazareth* (1979) while “parked in an Alpine valley” and *Beard’s Roman Women* on a 1975 journey through Montalbuccio, Monte Carlo, Eze and Callian. Finally the vehicle was abandoned in a garage whose

Borg) displayed cracked plastic or dead neon signs at least fifty years old. One of the few establishments open to the public was a grubby porn cinema in a damp side street descending to Marsamxett Harbour.

Forty years earlier the Burgesses had first come to Valletta and done their own bit of literary pilgrimage. Liana had translated Thomas Pynchon’s *V* for Italian readers and wanted to see one of its settings, Strait Street, known to sailors as The Gut. This was Valletta’s red light district. Sadly, I guess, The Gut has been abandoned and left to decay. It is a narrow street of closed-up watering holes with evocative names like the Tico-Tico bar (with a *matador* and *toro* emblem), the New Life Music Hall, and the Malata Bar & Lounge. A mangy tomcat was pawing at a rotten fish on the pavement.

I found a guesthouse on Triq Sant’ Ursula looking across the Grand Harbour. A couple of soup-slurping nonagenarians lived in one room. In the common room I was introduced to Armando, a pious elderly Maltese man who took to calling me Secondo Matteo (i.e. “According to” as in “The Gospel...”). On the guesthouse television we had Berlusconi’s beaming down from Sicily: a variety show with long-legged dancers heaping sexual ridicule on Prime Minister Romano Prodi. It would not be long before Berlusconi once again ruled Italian parliament.

Burgess bought his Maltese home in 1968 for seventeen thousand pounds, and remembered it as:

“...a rather fine house built in 1798, the year of Napoleon’s invasion. It was floored in marble, had an impressive *piano nobile*, three bathrooms and four toilets, and a garden with its own artesian well and many lemon and orange trees. It had a bad reputation, so we heard in a local bar, because its former owner had hurled himself from the roof in a fit of depression.”

I boarded another yellow and orange bus for Lija, six or seven kilometres outside Valletta. After leaving the bus in the village, I walked along Triq il-Kbira (Street The Big, Burgess insistently translated, but known locally and sensibly as Main Street). The passage became very narrow. I’m astonished buses once scraped through. At the street’s narrowest point was Number 168, a palatial and well-preserved two-storey house with dark blue louvres and a gated front door. There was no plaque reading ANTHONY BURGESS, BRITISH NOVELIST, LIVED HERE UNTIL EVICTED BY THE GOVERNMENT OF MALTA IN APRIL 1974. Nevertheless, here Burgess had lived. And here Toomey had lived. This was and is the setting of one of literature’s most famous opening lines: “It was the afternoon of my eighty-first birthday, and I was in bed with my catamite when Ali announced that the archbishop had come to see me.” Eighty-one-year-old Kenneth Toomey described the view from the upper salon: “To the right were the housetops and gaudy washing of Lija, a



location Burgess decided to forget. This irritated the Monaco Department of Motor Vehicles, who wanted the licence plates.

I approached Malta from the east. A Burgessian debacle with Alitalia stranded me in a complimentary suite at the Athens Sofitel where I watched Sharapova play Ivanovic in the final of the Australian Open. At dawn I flew to Rome and then to tiny Luqa airport. I lugged my suitcase onto the first bus for Valletta. The buses in Malta are yellow and orange, usually ancient, and personalised by the drivers with tacked-up postcards, dangling rosaries, and loud music. The passenger door was tied open so hot wind could gust inside. Malta was arid, dusty, and bright under the winter sun.

I got out at the Valletta city gates and walked into Freedom Square amid rehearsals for a Chinese Spring Festival. Children were dancing. Teenagers stood outside the Burger King and McDonald’s. Adults read newspapers at the outdoor cafés. But beyond the Square and away from the Via Republica, which runs down the length of the peninsula, Valletta seemed almost a ghost town on the sabbath. There were few indications I was in the twenty-first century. The bolted shopfronts of the numerous jewellers and tailors (all seemingly named Camilleri or

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passing bus, quarreling children; to the left, beyond crystal and statuary and the upper terrace, the hiss and pump hum came up of the irrigation of my orange and lemon trees. In other words, I heard life going on, and it was a comfort.”

Nobody was home and there was no way to discover if the orange and lemon trees in the garden still bore fruit. But I spied the Three Villages Bar at the end of the street and, on a hunch, strolled over. The tiny shop was a combination of bar and corner grocery. The cloudy display windows were packed with bags of coffee and biscuits and bottles of wine. A few aged men drank at tables in the shadows. Had anything much changed since 1968? I doubt it.

The shopkeeper Connie was a dark-haired old woman with a limp. With an eager smile she remembered Mr Burgess, who drank often in her bar. I promptly ordered a glass of whisky. What’s good enough for Mr Burgess is good enough for me.

Connie seemed to mainly associate Burgess the writer with his later success as scenarist for the mini-series *Jesus of Nazareth*. She stood in the doorway of the bar and told me of the old days. The Lija police station used to be directly opposite number 168. (“I foresaw that they were not there for my protection,” Burgess remembered, “but for that of the staid British retired.”) The police station now seems to be a private residence.

I thanked Connie for the drink and left the bar. The chemist serving in the St Joseph Pharmacy, although not a resident of the area in the Burgess days, was aware of the neighbourhood’s depiction in the opening chapters of *Earthly Powers*. She said the late Paolo-Andrea or Andrew, as he became known, sometimes returned to the area as an adult.

On the other hand the clerk in the post office down the street in Balzan (with Lija and Attard collectively The Three Villages) was at first confused by my query; then he nodded impatiently and said, “Yes, yes. Burgess Garage. That is the family. Ask there.” I wandered back outside to find a car hire service named not Burgess but Percius – a word confusion Burgess may himself have enjoyed. And here it is in *Earthly Powers*: “Geoffrey and I escorted His Grace to his Daimler, which was parked by Percius’s Garage, the Triq Il-Kbira being narrow and my house possessing no forecourt, many visitors came running to kiss his ring [including] the two Borg sisters from the corner grocery...”

Burgess did not spend many years in Lija. Government censorship inhibited literary journalism. “Certain books were not allowed in,” he wrote. “At Luqa airport a team scrutinised the British newspapers and cut out or inked over underwear advertisements or bathing beauties which might inflame Maltese youth. One could sometimes buy a *Daily Mirror* that collapsed into scissored

tatters.” There was little consistency in the censorship; Legman’s *Rationale of the Dirty Joke* made it through as did the erotic poems of Thomas Campion, who was mistaken for the Catholic martyr Edmund. But on one occasion Burgess had to barge into the Valletta Censorship Office to demand his

confiscated copy of Doris Lessing’s *Landlocked* and, according to his memoir, sweep “their pile of putative dirt to the floor.”

Soon after Burgess gave a lecture to the Maltese Library Association

(MLA) on ‘Obscenity and the Arts.’ He recalled the event was attended by “not one layman or laywoman: there were nuns, monks, priests and bishops, though neither of the two archbishops (one for Malta, the other for Gozo). I threw my lecture, as I had thrown my books, into a large silence.” At the conclusion “there were no questions, but a fat Franciscan made a throat-cutting gesture.” This sounds like a moment of typical Burgessian comic hyperbole. A recent letter to the *Times of Malta* from Paul Xuereb, a member of the MLA committee, gives us a more likely version: “Mr Burgess’s lecture was heard by the vast majority to the end and was applauded. In fact, Mr Burgess was in good humour, and afterwards joined members of the MLA committee for drinks in a Sliema hotel.”

It wasn’t long before the Burgesses moved on to Italy despite potential legal problems: Liana’s divorce was not recognised in her native land. In April 1974 Burgess’s house on Triq il-Kbira was confiscated by the Maltese government. Burgess to the *New York Times*: “The Maltese claim I’ve abandoned the property and have ordered me to surrender possession and the keys. This is a totally vindictive act – a naked confrontation between the state and the individual.” According to Burgess in *You’ve Had Your Time*, due to the publicity his house was “speedily deconfiscated, but neither its sale nor its lease was permitted.” Kenneth Toomey suffered the same confiscation but without reprieve at the conclusion of *Earthly Powers*.

I spent my remaining days in Malta seeing Caravaggio’s *Beheading of Saint John the Baptist* at St. John’s Co Cathedral, visiting the Knight’s Armoury in the Palace of the Grand Masters, and hiking along the sea-pounded and over-developed coasts of Sliema and St Julians. It was time to leave. At his age Armando slept little and promised to bang on my door at 4:30am so I would make my departing flight (“Don’t you

worry the alarm clock, Secondo Matteo, battery dead anyway.”) I landed in Catania in Sicily, clobbered around the snowy peaks of Mt Etna, and then took an overnight train across the Straits of Messina and up to Rome.

My backpacker hostel on Via Urbana was run by beautiful young nuns. I walked to Keats’s house by the Spanish Steps. While I was in the Villa Borghese the clouds started to rumble.

## ANTHONY BURGESS, BRITISH NOVELIST, LIVED HERE UNTIL EVICTED BY THE GOVERNMENT OF MALTA IN APRIL 1974

“Certain books were not allowed in, at Luqa airport a team scrutinised the British newspapers and cut out or inked over underwear advertisements or bathing beauties which might inflame Maltese youth. One could sometimes buy a *Daily Mirror* that collapsed into scissored

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Heavy rain soon swept across the city, although it was not enough to stop the English tourists skating around an ice rink beside the Tiber. My socks were soaked inside my boots. It was as if I had wandered into David Robinson's photographs that accompanied the first edition of *Beard's Roman Women* (aka *Rome in the Rain*).

The sky was clear the day I went to the Trastevere. Just across the Ponte Garibaldi is a statue of Giuseppe Gioacchino Belli (1791-1863), the Roman dialect poet whose blasphemous Petrarchan sonnets appeared translated by Burgess in *ABBA ABBA* (1977). An example:

God, then, assumed the office of a cook  
And baked the Sodomites like salmon trout.  
Only the family of Lot got out,  
Though his wife suffered for that backward look.  
They camped near Zoar, in a stony nook.  
Lot's daughters, starved of love, began to pout,  
Seeing no sign of penises about,  
And, driven by a fleshy need, forsook

Propriety. Here at least was their father.  
They gave him wine with a well-salted pasty,  
When he was drunk they fucked him to a lather,  
Not finding this unnatural or nasty.  
No fire rained down. It seems that God is rather  
Inclined to incest but hates pederasty.

In 1971, while retaining their house in Bracciano, the Burgesses acquired a lease in the Trastevere's Piazza Santa Cecilia:

"The apartment was at Number 16A, on the third floor, and it had a salon, two bedrooms, a workroom, a bathroom, and a cold water kitchen...The untidy life of the *piazza* and of the narrow abutting lanes, car-honks, song, the labour of the makers of fake antiques, was answered by the baroque beauty of the *basilica* of Santa Cecilia, where the bones of the patroness of music were said to lie. We looked out on the flaking golden *putti* who guarded her church, some of whom made minute obscene gestures at such rulers of Rome as would pass or enter."

The novelist Michael Mewshaw visited the apartment in the autumn of 1971 and encountered Milton Hebdal's clay bust of Burgess (depicted on the UK dustjackets of *The Confessions*) as well as a viciously disobedient Paola-Andrea. Here Burgess seems to have written *Moses*, a television mini-series (broadcast 1974) and epic poem (published 1976), as well as the novels *Napoleon Symphony* (1974) and *The Clockwork Testament* (1974).

In the comic novel *Beard's Roman Women* the apartment is inhabited by Paolo Belli ("a version of my wife," Burgess admitted, transformed into a descendent of the poet). It is the setting of, as blurbed presumably by Burgess himself, "one of

the most extraordinary rape scenes in modern fiction" (Ronald Beard is the victim of four female assailants, though it is not so much extraordinary as extraordinarily silly). In *ABBA ABBA*, set in Keats's Rome of 1821, the apartment is the property of Giovanni Gulielmi, doctor of letters of the University of Bologna. Gulielmi's study is "very bare, with rugs on the marble, a massive English mahogany table that had been his maternal grandfather's." The piazza is full of "song and the noise of fish and vegetable vendors."

Today the ground floor of the building houses a chic art gallery/bookshop/café called 'b>gallery'. The B does not stand for Burgess. Nobody working there had heard of him. Nor had the elegant proprietress of an elegant bookshop down the lane.

If we are to believe Burgess's account, the area was rampant with crime in the early 1970s. He was robbed by motorcycling *scippatori* of the only copy of his manuscript *JoySprick* and had to write it again from scratch (Ronald Beard fared better in the same situation and retrieved *his* manuscript). Liana's passport and keys were stolen several times, but that may have owed more to her chronic bad luck than to Rome. The apartment at 16A was burgled of a Stellavox tape recorder and jewellery, while "the tenants of a lower floor had been not merely burgled but shot." In *Earthly Powers* Toomey is beaten by Clockwork Orange-style droogs and laid up in the Ospedale Fatebenefratelli on the Isola Tiberina.

The Trastevere did not seem so rampant with crime in 2008. The neighbourhood is completely gentrified. But if it has lost its traditional population of poor artists and violent criminals, it retains cobblestone lanes, warm *trattorie*, busking bass-saxophone duos, American students drinking coffee in the Piazza Santa Maria, and some of the most beautiful churches in Rome.

"I lived for a long time on the same busy square, and I would probably still be living there if the landlord had not thrown me out," Burgess wrote in 1979. I did not have time to follow his trail to Piazza Padella ('Frying-Pan Square') in nearby Bracciano, nor to Monaco, where the Burgesses moved in 1975 after hearing rumours that Paolo-Andrea was to be kidnapped by *mafiosi*. I left Rome unthreatened, with a few matchbooks to add to my bowl.

(*At the time of my European tour I was not aware of the recent death of Liana Burgess Macellari in San Remo, Italy.*) ■

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**Matthew Asprey's short stories have appeared in *Island*, *Total Cardboard*, *Extempore* and various little magazines. His story 'Gut Bucket Blues' was awarded second prize in the Australian National Jazz Writing Competition at the 2008 Melbourne Writers' Festival. He teaches creative writing at Macquarie University in Sydney and blogs at <http://matthewasprey.wordpress.com>**

# A TEXTBOOK CASE

By Rob Spence

Dr Johnson may well have thought, when he wrote “Nothing odd will do long- *Tristram Shandy* did not last” that he was uttering a truism about literary reputation. Of course, he was spectacularly wrong about Sterne, and about oddness. Quite often, oddity ensures literary longevity. From the *Tales of Hoffmann* to *The Good Soldier*, oddity has actually done pretty well in fiction. So it is not surprising that *A Clockwork Orange*, arguably Burgess’s oddest book, has been the one that has attracted all the attention.

Burgess’s despair that *A Clockwork Orange* was by far his most famous work was perhaps something to do with his sale of the film rights for a pittance. Nonetheless, it has been the key work in the establishment of his literary reputation, to the extent that, as most readers of this newsletter will know, anyone you meet who has actually heard of our man will usually know him only through that contentious work.

Literary reputation is a slippery thing. This year’s literary sensations are often next year’s remainders, but *A Clockwork Orange*, as Yves Buelens demonstrated so expertly at the 2007 symposium, has had an extraordinary and continuing afterlife. It is perhaps inevitable then, that when literary histories are written, Burgess is either airbrushed out, or mentioned solely as the author of this sensational text. Just how far Burgess is identified with this one text in certain circles was exemplified to me when I came across, by chance, an Italian textbook for university students of English. This hefty volume, published by Editore Bulgarini in Florence in 1990, is entitled *Reading Literary Texts: A Survey of English and American Literature*. It is nothing if not ambitious in its scope, beginning with Beowulf and concluding with some very contemporary figures, such as Ian McEwan. You might expect that its three authors (Bruno Conti, Olivia Holmes and Alfredo Menichelli) would locate Burgess’s work in a twentieth century modernist tradition, perhaps pointing out his affinity with Joyce, his exploration of the possibilities of genre fiction, his postmodern experimentalism, or his account of the end of empire. They may have reflected on his connection to Italy as the husband of an Italian, living partly in Italy. But no: the sole entry on Burgess reads, in its entirety, as follows:

Among other British novelists, a great success has been Anthony Burgess, whose works have often been made into popular films. Burgess (1917-) became popular in the early sixties with his *A Clockwork Orange* (1962), a satirical horror-story about teenage violence and teenage lack of concern, which

call for a similar response from society. The “cure” Burgess suggested was brain surgery. (p.807)

It’s quite an achievement to get so many errors into such a short space. Let’s examine this passage in detail. Burgess is “a great success”: well, readers of this publication will think so, and many discerning critics would agree, but popular success of the type enjoyed by some of his contemporaries largely eluded Burgess. It would also have been a surprise to Burgess to discover that his novels had “often” been made into films. That Burgess was interested in film, and that he actively sought to translate his novels to the screen is well-documented. But as a glance at the index of the autobiographies will show, the efforts he made were largely in vain, and his proposed film versions of the *Enderby* novels, *Honey for the Bears*, *The Wanting Seed* and two proposed film treatments of *Nothing Like the Sun* all came to naught. Even since his death, the record has not improved: the proposed Francis Ford Coppola version of *One Hand Clapping* failed to achieve the green light, too. So Italian students will search in vain for these “popular films”.

I suppose “a satirical horror-story” is a reasonably legitimate way to describe *A Clockwork Orange*. It’s certainly satirical, and certainly horrific in parts. But the second half of that sentence, with its clunky repetition, and overall vagueness, doesn’t begin to do justice to the novel. One wonders, darkly, whether the authors have actually read Burgess, or whether they have simply seen the film. The final sentence really gives the game away. Where, exactly, is the “brain surgery” in the novel? Clearly, they are referring to the Ludovico brainwashing technique, but the last time I looked, brain surgery and brain-washing were not synonymous. The NHS has not sunk that low yet. And of course, the phrase “I was cured all right” is deeply ironic, especially in the complete version of the novel, containing the final chapter omitted in the film version.

You might say, “Does this matter?” After all, this is a big textbook for Italian students of Eng Lit, and its brief mention of Burgess is neither here nor there. Much better sources exist for those seeking accurate information about Burgess, and little damage will ensue from this inaccurate fragment. Even so, that brief paragraph encapsulates the major problem that Burgess’s reputation has suffered from. The IABF and the Burgess Center at Angers are vital corrective forces, and it will be a measure of their success in future if Burgess ceases to suffer from this kind of misinformation.

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# NOBLE ROMANS: BRUNO, BELLI, BURGESS

By Martin Phipps

Catholic renegade Anthony Burgess, blessed and seconded in his apostasy by *James Joyce*, would seem at first glance to have shared some of Joyce's antipathy for Catholicism's capital city. Rome is rank, dank, crass, corrupt and collapsing in *Inside Mr Enderby*, *ABBA ABBA* and *Beard's Roman Women*. It's rife with life, but of a poxy, debauched species, thriving in gutters, ghettos, along foggy vias: a "foul and beautiful sewer,"<sup>1</sup> "the sewer of history, and it was an open sewer."<sup>2</sup> Burgess personally claimed a more complicated mix of "physical lust, loathing, possessive passion, affectionate exasperation, jealousy"<sup>3</sup> for the place, while Joyce, Richard Ellmann notes, "reacted to Rome violently," seeing the ancient districts as cemeteries, all "flowers of death, ruins, piles of bones, and skeletons.... 'Rome reminds me of a man who lives by exhibiting to travellers his grandmother's corpse.'" Ellmann previously states Joyce "probably did not expect Rome to please him, but to be dissatisfied by Rome is a grander destiny than to be dissatisfied by Trieste."<sup>4</sup> A curious remark. He who tires of London tires, famously, of life, but to be repelled by Rome—what would that imply? Something "grander"—something metaphysical perhaps? If, arguably, Rome resonated for Joyce as the haunted, funerary emblem of the faith he'd rejected, like the "ghoul" of a dead mother who hounds Stephen Daedalus in *Ulysses*, or the nightmare of history from which he wants to awake, what did Rome finally represent for Burgess? Nearing the Eternal City, *Enderby* "view[s] Rome in a sort of stepmother-context," its "bones of martyrs" and "old junk" equated with his hated parental nemesis, and yet in the same paragraph he associates it with Vesta, his desirable honeymoon bride: "she was, in a flash, identified with this new city, to be, all so legitimately, sacked and pillaged."<sup>5</sup> This close proximity of the vile and the inviting, of vitality and moribundity, is a frequent feature of Burgess's fictional depictions of Rome, a *coincidentia oppositorum* or coincidence of opposites as in the philosophy of Giordano Bruno, a figure repeatedly referenced in Burgess's Roman writings, almost like a friend or a countryman, a fellow citizen in some sense, even if that sense isn't immediately

clear. A look at one of the books set in *Urbs Lucis*, *ABBA ABBA*, should shed light.

Although Burgess the autobiographer apparently delights in Rome (the view from his Trastevere flat brings "happiness"; "the streets and piazzas of Rome are a joy"<sup>6</sup>; "Rome in most of us awakens an appetite for life"<sup>7</sup>), he complicates his impression by admitting Romans are "rogues" and his "violent emotions" for the place are "ambivalent."<sup>8</sup> The Rome of his fiction, however, is consistently darker, more often like Mann's Venice—ancient, septic, burdened by a violent and venal past. It is the scene of Keats's grisly, raving tubercular death, Kenneth Toomey's near-fatal beating, *Enderby's* marital break-up, Beard's breakdown and suicide attempt, where his marriage, despite his wife's death, somehow goes malingering on, like the old city itself: "when a civilization died, it became as evil as rotted meat."<sup>9</sup> For Giuseppe Belli in *ABBA ABBA* the typical Roman odours are "the stink of uncollected garbage,"<sup>10</sup> "flyblown meat and piss and shit"<sup>11</sup>; its citizens are "rats," "ignorant and damned,"<sup>12</sup> and the city itself "mouldy"<sup>13</sup>; to *Enderby* it's "a big maggotty cheese."<sup>14</sup> The consequence of all this unsavouriness is to create an undercurrent of irony—this is, after all, the Holy City, "the City of God," as one of its cardinals states, "all above the dirt and madness of the body,"<sup>15</sup> yet its squalor contradicts this. Nowhere is this irony more central than in *ABBA ABBA*, one of whose two poet protagonists, Belli, embodies it himself: he is simultaneously suppressive official and subversive celebrator of sin, servant of orthodoxy and rebellious creative spirit, attuned to the joyously wayward common people and their coarse speech. "I acknowledge myself to be a split man," he says, only to be told "we're all split."<sup>16</sup> Dual, self-contradictory Rome<sup>17</sup> is, indeed, linked throughout the book with dual, self-contradictory human nature, and "since human nature does not change," as Burgess insists in his essay on Rome,<sup>18</sup> Rome is an eternal city in a dual sense—seat of the Church eternally established by God as well as home to the exasperatingly, exuberantly "eternal Roman[s],"<sup>19</sup> "unchanging Roman[s]," for

"Rome doesn't change."<sup>20</sup> Keats sees this for himself in his vision of Marius-Mario, "always the same with his wine and bread and garlic, through two thousand years of the city's life."<sup>21</sup> Of these "strawberry-nippled slattern[s],"<sup>22</sup> "serving-lout[s],"<sup>23</sup> "workmen, carriers, barefoot child beggars skilled in adult obscenity"<sup>24</sup> and crones with "gummy garlick cackles,"<sup>25</sup> Belli clarifies: "To many Romans Rome is a tract only in space and not at all in time, so that the tyrannous Popes and Caesars share a kind of mythic contemporaneity. For that matter, Cain murdered Abel in an alley off the Piazza Navona, and Noah modelled his ark on the Porto de Ripetta ferry"<sup>26</sup>; "Rome must not be viewed temporally."<sup>27</sup> Rome as timeless, microcosmic stage on which universal, perennial human dramas play out against a backdrop of God's watchful presence, seems a congenial notion to Burgess, who says in "The Art of Liking Rome" that Romans "are aware of the scenic allure of their background broken pillars and baroque statues, fascist grandiloquence and eighteenth-century elegance—and they enact films without cameras or directors," an idea echoed in *The Confessions*.<sup>28</sup> One might add that the "mythic contemporaneity" (a very Joycean conceit; cf. *Finnegans Wake*) means that the same Romans who talk of saints scratching their balls and cunts as Keats dies among them in 1820<sup>29</sup>, are essentially the same as those who, as Ellmann relates, lengthily regale Joyce in 1906 with their testicular and anal ailments and make a hobby of "breaking...wind reward," an act which Joyce said he was "reserving for the day when I leave the eternal city as my farewell and adieu to it."<sup>30</sup> *Enderby* likewise farts his farewells to Rome.<sup>31</sup> "Mythic contemporaneity," of course, inevitably implies the idea of "mythic contemporaries," for whom time is no obstacle to aesthetic fraternity, and it is this idea that is likely behind the fictional genealogy in *ABBA ABBA* that links Belli, via his friend Gulielmi, with one Joseph John Wilson, his Manchester translator; it also probably informs Burgess's view expressed elsewhere that "I did not become a Roman: I already was one. My city of Manchester used to be Mancunium, a fort of the civilizing invader. Living in Rome was a mere

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confirmation of an ancient citizenship.”<sup>32</sup> Honorary citizenship in the same mythic locus is bestowed on Giordano Bruno in *Earthly Powers*: “Though a Neapolitan, he was a true patron saint of Rome, a president of discord.”<sup>33</sup> Bruno, Belli and Burgess make likely enough coevals, at any rate, when one considers more closely those irksome, ironic discordancies which in *ABBA ABBA* embarrass papal officials and drive “split” poets to try to transcend them.

“Even poets and intellectuals Roman-born have enough of the common Roman inside them,” confesses Belli. “I myself have. I try to keep it down, not always with success.”<sup>34</sup> But mere willpower won’t serve to recast or redeem the “lowness in myself”<sup>35</sup> any more than creating a central bureau of censorship will keep the “soiled language of the street”<sup>36</sup> from sullyng Rome’s image as *Civitas Dei*: people won’t, as Cardinal Fabiani tells Belli they must, “be led, nay forced, to identification with their higher selves.”<sup>37</sup> Human beings, made in the image of a Creator, are ultimately creators too, not credulous endorsers of imposed creeds, and poets trump priests when it comes to proposing solutions to eternal dilemmas, such as the fact that “meat is disgusting...but it’s also delicious,” sex “is bestial but also ecstatic,”<sup>38</sup> and everyone has a “dumpendebat self” clashing with a “stabat mater self.”<sup>39</sup> Keats proposes deliverance from all this inner conflict, all “the agony of thought,”<sup>40</sup> through art: “How else can a man save his soul save through art of some kind or other? A saint’s life, I suppose, is a kind of art, in which the material is not stone or words or paint but conduct.”<sup>41</sup> Of course, for a poet desirous to save his schizoid soul, like Belli or Keats, words are very much the material, and yet only words given a certain shape, so that they’re not mere profanities of the street or platitudes of priests and politicians, the “big bannered abstractions.”<sup>42</sup> Aesthetic *form*, specifically, is salvation for poets, a conclusion Roman and English sonneteer alike gropingly arrive at: Belli concludes that “behind

the thousands of sonnets in the world” lies “the essential shape” of “the one ultimate perfect sonnet,” which transcends differences of dialect, place, temperament, religion: “A Roman writes a sonnet on the divine beauty, and an Englishman writes a sonnet on an old tomcat, and neither understands the other’s language, but in the recognition of the common form they meet.”<sup>43</sup> Keats on his deathbed concurs: “two men of language mutually unintelligible might in a sense achieve communication through recognition of what a sonnet was.”<sup>44</sup> Here a sonnet as pure form functions in the same way as does Rome as pure symbol—as a timeless abstraction through which souls separated by differences of place or time can somehow connect, as a reconciler of the initially antagonistic Belli and Keats, just as Rome as mythic locus has symbolically united Burgess with likeminded Belli and Bruno, in a catholicity of outlook. It was one of the happier metaphors Burgess developed to express what I think is his essentially optimistic vision of the possibility of kinship and understanding surviving in spite of human differences, all the noisy discordancies arising from Eden and Babel.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti called a sonnet a moment’s monument<sup>45</sup>; for Belli, a sonnet-sequence was a whole city’s monument, commemorating the “dirty commodities of [God’s] creation,” for “God is in cabbages and beer-stains on a tavern table,”<sup>46</sup> in “things, appetites, feelings, odours, people.”<sup>47</sup> As such—ventures the unnamed compiler of the Belli translations—the sequence, “presenting realistically the demotic life of a great capital city, may be regarded as a kind of proto-*Ulysses*.”<sup>48</sup> But it wasn’t just as humanistic homage (“aromatic Roman speech haloed by a sonnet”<sup>49</sup>) that Belli’s verses functioned; each was also a means of reconciling “the claims of the physically transient and the spiritually permanent”<sup>50</sup> within himself, and hence was an expression of prayer as much as of praise, however heretical such an idea might appear to orthodox sense. His

last words in the novel see him coming to the defence of a deceased brother poet impugned by a priest, choosing the broader loyalty over the narrower one. The clergyman scolds him for it: “*You* will hear more of this,” he says. Belli balks: “*You* will hear more,”<sup>51</sup> he replies, and the implication is that this exchange is what finally overcomes his moral scruples about writing subversive verse; this identification with his brother in art, not in faith, impels him to start his marvellous, scurrilous epic, and earns him a place in Burgess’s mythic Rome of the likeminded. Giordano Bruno, Kenneth Toomey notes in *Earthly Powers*, was “chased all over Europe for teaching the heresy” of what Belli believed too, “that dissension and contradiction between the elements of the multifarious universe are to be welcomed and blessed since they justify the existence of God as the only reconciler and unifier.”<sup>52</sup> Joyce, Ellmann notes, found “Bruno’s theory of an ultimate unity and its terrestrial division into contraries” attractive, “because he saw his art as a reconciler of those opposites within his own mind which he would later personify as Shem and Shaun.”<sup>53</sup> Anthony Burgess, who spent book after book welcoming and blessing the dirty world like Byrne and like Bruno, exploiting all the pungent, poignant ironies arising from the clash of *Civitas Dei* with *Civitas Terrena*, produces an imagined Rome that is consistently a rich mix of high and low, holy and unholy, where sometimes indeed contrarities are reconciled through the power of his art; and he deserves a statue in his honour no less than Bruno and Belli. One, indeed, could, should, still be built. Maybe, IABF, in Mancunium...? ■

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1. *ABBA ABBA*, p 67  
 2. *Earthly Powers*, p 686  
 3. *One Man’s Chorus*, p 65  
 4. *James Joyce*, p 232  
 5. *Inside Mr Enderby*, p 111  
 6. *You’ve Had Your Time*, p 243  
 7. *One Man’s Chorus*, p 67  
 8. *ibid*, p65  
 9. *Beard’s Roman Women*, p  
 10. *ABBA ABBA*, p 66  
 11. *ibid*, p 68  
 12. *ibid*, p 67  
 13. *ibid*, p 64  
 14. *Inside Mr Enderby*, p 155  
 15. *ABBA ABBA*, p 65  
 16. *ibid*, p 78  
 17. cf. my essay “*Beard’s Roman Women*,” Anthony Burgess Newsletter, no.6 (December 2003) pp 14-17, for imagery of doubles, duality, doppelgangers.

18 “The Art of Liking Rome,” *One Man’s Chorus*, p 65  
 19. *ABBA ABBA*, p 51  
 20 *ibid*, p 79  
 21 *ibid*, p 36  
 22 *ibid*, p 47  
 23 *ibid*, p 50  
 24 *ibid*, p 40  
 25 *ibid*, p 31  
 26 *ibid*, p 67  
 27 *ibid*, p 79  
 28 *You’re Had Your Time*, 243  
 29. *ABBA ABBA*, p 80  
 30 *James Joyce*, p 237  
 31 *Inside Mr Enderby*, p 166  
 32 *One Man’s Chorus*, p 67  
 33 *Earthly Powers*, p 686  
 34. *ABBA ABBA*, p 68  
 35 *ibid*, p 21  
 36 *ibid*, p 22  
 37 *ibid*, p 69

38 *ibid*, p 78  
 39 *ibid*, p 50  
 40 *ibid*, p 18  
 41 *ibid*, p 50  
 42 *ibid*, p 78  
 43 *ibid*, p 68-69  
 44 *ibid*, p 82  
 45 cf. “The Sonnet,” Dante Gabriel Rossetti  
 46 *ibid*, p 79  
 47 *ibid*, p 78  
 48 *ibid*, p 86  
 49 *ibid*, p 80  
 50 *ibid*, p 23  
 51 *ibid*, p 84  
 52 *Earthly Powers*, 686  
 53 *James Joyce*, p

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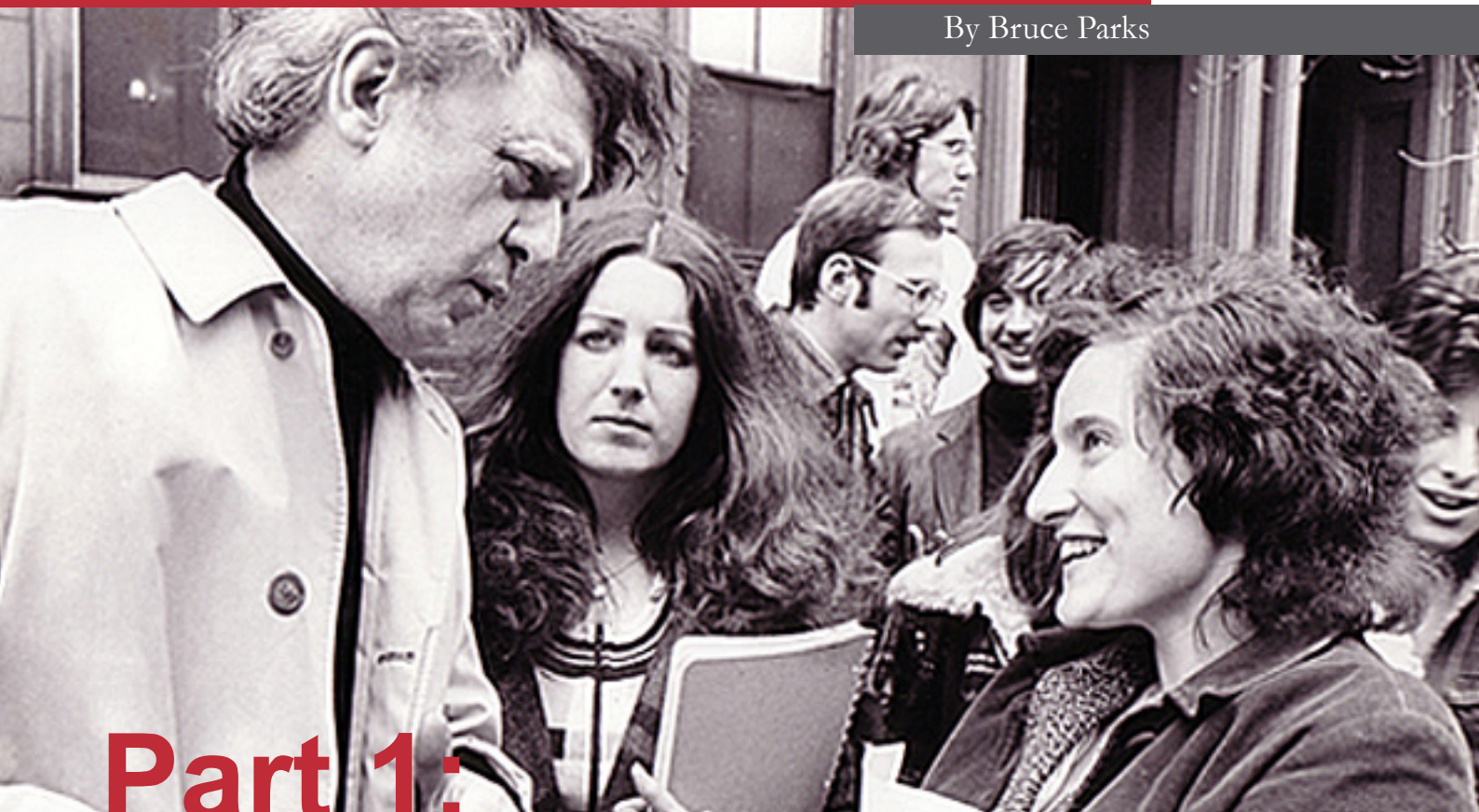
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# MY TIME WITH AB

RECOLLECTIONS OF PROFESSOR BURGESS AT CITY COLLEGE  
AND A VISIT TO BRACCIANO

By Bruce Parks



## Part 1:

### 873 8611 Being His Phone Number in New York

He wasn't exactly what we expected. No, my brothers. He was not like Alex, nor even like one of his three droogs.

“Stately, plump Buck Mulligan came from the stairhead, bearing a bowl of lather on which a mirror and a razor lay crossed,”<sup>1</sup> he began reading to us.

Flashbulbs popped. The *New York Times*. *Newsweek*. Reporters, photographers in the classroom, filling the first row, between us and him. Say something and you might be quoted. I was. (“I don't know how he could write like that and be like that,” or something equally vague.) In any case, it was clear this wasn't going to be your typical English class.

AB had accepted the position of Distinguished Professor of English at the City College of the City University of New York (CCNY). This was 1972, just a year or so after the film version of *A Clockwork Orange* had been released and propelled to the top of our counter cultural icons, right up there, in our minds, with the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. I was then an aspiring filmmaker, but after I read *A Clockwork Orange*, I wasn't so sure. The book, I told the examining board of the new CCNY school of film studies, to which I was applying for admission, was better than the film. What? They hadn't heard me right. Book better than film? The book could

do things more than the film, I think I said. Like the violence, which seemed to me more artfully described in the book than it was depicted in the film. I was doomed, of course, rejected by the examining board. I decided to try writing and signed up for the Burgess class. So here I was amongst a small group of students in Professor Burgess's class on *James Joyce* in the fall of 1972.

*Enderby's association, however small, with a great demotic medium led to his being considered worthy by the University of Manhattan of being invited to come as a visiting professor for an academic year. The man who sent the invitation, the Chairman of English Department, Alvin Kosciusko, said that Enderby's poems were not unknown there in the United States. Whatever anybody thought of them, there was no doubt that they were genuine Creative Writing. Enderby was therefore cordially invited to come and pass on some of his Creative Writing skills to Creative Writing students.*<sup>2</sup>

His plan for the class was to read out loud to us *Ulysses* in its entirety, chapter by chapter, with his commentary interspersed. Our job was to read a chapter ahead and get as much out of each chapter as we could. Then just listen. He brought it all alive. A one-man show, with a variety of voices, voices we also would get to know if we were lucky enough to catch his occasional afternoon readings from *Enderby* or *Nothing Like the Sun* in the City College library.

Had we really expected Alex? Perhaps not. The papers wrote much about AB that preceding summer. The “rip-off,” they quoted him as saying, was the central motif of the times. We had read about the mugging of his wife, his near miss with

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death, his late start at writing, his first love of composing. So we knew a little about him, but very little. Not many had read anything by him, except perhaps *A Clockwork Orange*. So how would you describe Anthony Burgess, as the professor?

*There was a doddering starry schoolmaster type neck, glasses on and his rot open to the cold nochy air. He had books under his arm and a crappy umbrella and was coming round the corner from the Public Biblio, which not many lewdies used those days.*<sup>3</sup>

The reporters and photographers had left and now it was just us. A small class of perhaps fifteen New York City kids, all fairly typical looking, one with a yarmulke. City kids who took the subway to school and hiked through the streets of Harlem to get to class.

*There were Chinese, skullcapped Hebrews, a girl from the coast who piquantly combined both black and Japanese, a beer-fat Irishman with red thatch, an exquisite Latin nymph, a cunning know-all of the kickapoo nation.*<sup>4</sup>

He stood before us holding the text of *Ulysses*, the thick black book precariously balanced on the lectern of his left hand, while with the fingers of his other hand he repeatedly stroked his hair back into position, so that the long length was swept across and over his bald spot. He read rapidly, his jaw undulating, propelling out mouthful after mouthful of sound, musical text, modulated vowels, diphthongs, and consonants, read with the agility of an impresario performing a recital or a piano player in a saloon.

My copy of that “chaffering allincluding most farraginous chronicle” is marked with notes taken during that class, as he guided us through, marking the route like signposts.

*One rapped on a door, one tapped with a knock, did he knock Paul de Kock, with a loud proud knocker, with a cock carracarracarra cock. Cockcock. Tap.*<sup>5</sup>

Then he would tell us that Paul de Kock is Boylan, and shortly, that the key Ben Dollard plays in, F sharp major, is all black notes.

In my copy of *Ulysses*, the Oxen of the Sun chapter (embryological) is marked for the passing literary pastiches: “Latin, Anglo-Saxon, 15<sup>th</sup> century, Sir Thomas Malory, 16<sup>th</sup> century, John Lyly, Sir Thomas Browne, the King James Bible, Bunyan, 18<sup>th</sup> century, Swift’s Tale of the Tub, Lawrence Sterne, Smollet, mid 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Letters of Junius, model of killing letter, Edward Gibbon, Walpole, 19<sup>th</sup> century, Charles Lamb, Sir Thomas de Quincy, Sir William Burroughs (Did I hear this right?), W.S. Landor,

Macaulay, Dickens, Ruskin, Thomas Carlyle, afterbirth, all the slang of the world, style-less.”

By the end of the semester, most of us had not only read *Ulysses* with AB, but also *Dubliners* and *A Portrait of an Artist*. We had come into his world philistines perhaps, and left at least somewhat enriched. The one young man with the yarmulke, the Talmudist, had taken off his yarmulke, now prepared to venture beyond the realms of his strict upbringing to explore new horizons.

There was a second class, in the spring semester, on Shakespeare.

*His feet led him through a half hearted student demonstration against or for the dismissal of somebody, a brave girl stripping in protest, giving back blue breasts to the February post-meridian chill, to the long low building which was the English Department.*<sup>6</sup>

**One rapped on a door, one tapped with a knock, did he knock Paul de Kock, with a loud proud knocker, with a cock carracarracarra cock. Cockcock. Tap.**

The class was held in a large lecture hall usually reserved for film classes. It started at eight, which was too early for college students, especially those making an hour

or more commute into the city to get to class. The result was unfortunate. AB mainly lectured to sleepy students. At one point, frustrated with the lack of response, he asked: “Any questions? Any questions at all on anything?” No one said a word.

*He looked at them all, incurious lot of young bastards. “Any questions?” There were no questions.*<sup>7</sup>

Much of the material from these lectures he captured in his book on Shakespeare.

“French Peckes, syphilis, swine fever. Francastorius, Dr. of Verona, wrote a poem using syphilis as a character. Needs a good translation. . . .The erotic element is a representation of pure love and is principally found in Romeo & Juliet in the love-performing act itself and in Anthony & Cleopatra in the food. They banquet on, mocking the midnight bell. . . . As the asp is concealed in the basket of figs, so is the eroticism concealed in the food image. The drinking of poison, or the bite of an asp, is erotic.”

He introduced us to the Jacobean playwrights: John Webster, Ben Jonson, John Ford, Thomas Middleton, Cyril Tourneur, Beaumont & Fletcher, Thomas Hayword, but not, that I remember, Gervase Whitelady, as he described in *Clockwork Testament*:

*We come to---But who the hell did they come to? They waited, be waited. He went to the blackboard and wiped off some elementary English grammar. The chalk in his grip trembled, broke in two. He wrote to his astonishment the name Gervase Whitelady. He added, in greater surprise and fear, the dates 1559-1591. He turned shaking to see that many of the students were taking the data down on bits of paper. He was committed now: this bloody man, not yet brought into existence, had to have existed.*<sup>8</sup>

At this time AB was having trouble with U.S. Immigration, and I remember mentioning to him that John Lennon was also finding it difficult to stay in the country. AB was empathetic. John Lennon, not a bad man, he said. A consolation the former Beatle may have found comforting, considering the harsh treatment AB gave the band in *Enderby*.

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*Hell, Enderby was thinking as he sat in one of the IRT coaches going uptownwards.*<sup>9</sup>

We knew he would sometimes get off the IRT train a stop or two early and walk through the streets of Harlem to the college. He carried with him a walking stick which actually was a sword stick, having concealed within it two lethal large knives. When he showed it to me, pulling it apart in one violent movement, I glimpsed Alex in him then. However, one day he didn't arrive at class. Had he been mugged? No, it turned out he had a bout of his recurring malaria, which he had picked up many years earlier (in Malay perhaps?). By the next class he was fine.

I had also signed up for his creative writing class, which was held in the evenings in his apartment on 93rd Street. We sat in the living room around the coffee table, freshly provisioned for each class with large bottles of red and white wine. Often his wife Liana was occupied with the phone in the kitchen, speaking in Italian, dealing with the competing forces of the literary and film worlds, the publicists, the agents, the producers, the artists, the friends, while we sat in the calm of it all, in the eye of the hurricane, reading out loud our fledging work, whilst AB smoked his small black cigars.

The students in the writing class were an eclectic mix. There was a young poet, Lydia, and another woman working, I believe, on a novel. There was an Irishman who was writing a thousand page tome ("Put everything into it," AB advised). Two of the students may not actually have been students at the college. One was an exquisite, beautiful young woman, some kind of heiress, with lots of money, old money, and full of manners, grace being alien to us New York kids. She was driven to the class by limousine and picked up afterwards. She was writing a romance novel, for adolescents. She dressed alluringly, and moved around the room like Salome dancing for King Herod. She always sat near AB. AB said to her once, after a particularly close encounter, "I love my wife very much." Then he said it again. "I love my wife very much." I wasn't sure whether he repeated it to make certain she had heard him, or whether he was reciting it to convince himself.

The second suspect student was an impeccably mannered, brilliant young African American (called "black" back then). The perfect gentleman to all of the women in the class, to Mrs. Burgess, to Francesca (their housekeeper/governess), but transformed into a Mr. Hyde when it was his turn to read. He

wrote the most alarming prose, full of racial hate and murder and gore. It went on and on, week to week.

*It will be your balls next, Whitey,  
A loving snipping of the scrotum  
With rather rusty nail scissors,  
And they tumble out then to be  
Crunched underfoot crunch crunch.*<sup>10</sup>

In general, I often wondered whether AB was right to encourage us in our endeavors to be writers. Somerset Maugham in "Summing Up" warned young writers not to devote themselves to an art for which they only had a youthful exuberance. AB seemed to have no cautions in this regard and always encouraged us, always found something good in our work to point out. Sometimes he would read a student's work out loud himself, adding to it a new dimension brought by his dramatic voicing and diction, and it made everyone's writing sound pretty good. Were we at risk of throwing our lives away for a dream we never would have the talent to achieve? I think AB considered this, and he concluded that we would be better people for the pursuit, even if we didn't succeed, than we would be if he were to discourage us.

AB extolled the benefits of studying other languages, especially of reading authors in their original tongues. Starting in the spring semester of '73 I took courses in Latin, which led me to reading Catullus, Ovid, Seneca, Virgil, and Horace, among many others, in Latin. I followed this a few years later with courses in classical Greek, and read a good deal of Homer's *Odyssey* in the original Greek. A new world had opened up for me. When, at the end of the spring semester it was time for AB to go, I handed him a note of thanks:

*Tibi gratias ago.  
Tibi gratias ago.  
Tibi gratias ago.*

AB actually mentioned this note in an article he wrote shortly upon leaving New York, saying that it was a sort of gift to him, and adding: "*Et tu Brutus?*"

In *You've Had Your Time*, he also mentioned it, shortening my note to "*Gratias ago. J. Breslow.*"<sup>11</sup>

## Part 2: A Visit with Burgess at Lake Bracciano

I embarked on a trip to Europe in the fall of '73, three months or so after graduating. I traveled to England, staying first in London and then, at the invitation of an English girl I met there, went north to Newcastle. In Newcastle, coal country, D.H. Lawrence country, ("Right in the lap of it," AB said). I met her father, who was very gracious and allowed me to stay, but disappointedly, had me share his bed, to keep an eye on me no doubt. The house was attached to a row of houses, each with small backyard with

an outhouse and coal keep. We lit a coal fire in the morning in the grate in the living room to warm up, and drank milk fresh and cold from being kept outside, since there was no refrigerator. I learned to understand "Geordie," a clipped concoction of English and Scottish. One night I went with my friend to drink in the working man's bars, where the mixed drinks were cheap and there was lots of singing and dancing. However, a gang of teenage toughs was there as well, and they looked me over with menacing smiles,

so I left my friend there (she deciding to stay) with her girlfriends and made my way back to the house. Later that night I found that my friend had been walked home by, and was sitting in her kitchen now with, the lead gang member of the gang, though he was now very friendly and polite. I was so indignant that the next morning I left.

From London I went to Paris. I arrived by bus in Paris late at night, and it was raining. Everything was closed. I found a dry doorway and stood there, resigning



myself to wait there until morning. But then I heard English being spoken by two young women walking by, laughing and giggling. I presented myself to them and asked for help. They took me back to their hotel, where the night clerk found a room for me. The next day I hooked up with two Americans with a car. They drove me part of the way south, toward Marseilles. I had them drop me off at a train station and I boarded a train to Rome.

I was delivered by the bus from Rome in the center of Bracciano, a little town with steep streets, red roofs, a castle, and a broad view of a lake. I went looking for the house. No one spoke English, and the old women and kids on the street only pointed to one of the hills in answer to my inquiries. I walked on, becoming increasingly concerned that I might have miscalculated entirely my chances of finding him, and beginning to plan my return to Rome. Suddenly I heard distinctly in the distance the clack clack clack of a typewriter. I knocked at the door. AB opened the door, peered myopically at me.

*'... I'm one of your students'  
'Oh, are you?' said Enderby. 'I didn't quite—  
Yes,' peering at her, 'I suppose you could be.  
We'd better go into the sitting room or whatever  
they call it.'*<sup>12</sup>

He was unperturbed, friendly, and pleased to see me. This had happened before, he told me, students coming to visit, but they had come in large groups, with their girlfriends. I had come at least alone. When he and Liana heard I had only \$150 left, they offered to let me stay for a while. Liana arranged a futon as a bed

for me on the lower floor. The house had three floors, with a dungeon in the basement (where the furnace was) full of scorpions. On the roof was a parapet with a commanding view of the lake and the town in all directions. AB took me up there to show it all to me. He explained some of the history, telling me about

## The house was full of beetles, noisily gnawing through the ceiling rafters and dropping sawdust into precise piles on the floor.

Orsini from Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, and that Bracciano was the place of Claudius's exile.

The house was full of beetles, noisily gnawing through the ceiling rafters and dropping sawdust into precise piles on the floor. (When I asked why he didn't get rid of them before they destroyed the house, he said that they had been there before him.) The day I arrived there was a fish swimming in the bathtub—Liana had bought it for dinner and didn't have the heart to kill it.

On the middle floor, the main room had two desks, close together, one against one wall, the other against the opposite wall, so that AB and Liana worked back to back, though Liana didn't have much time for her work, AB said. The room also held a harpsichord. AB would at times play a brief musical phrase on it, then abruptly stop and return to his work. AB did the cooking. He showed me how to make English stew, adding to the pot beer instead of water. Fruit flies hovered over anything liquid, often falling in and drowning in our wine. We drank it anyway.

One evening we went out to dinner. We ordered a local specialty, the fish from the lake. (Not the one Liana had released I hoped.) As we sat in the restaurant waiting to eat, about a dozen men came in and sat down together at a long table by the wall. They were the male members of a large family, brothers, cousins,

uncles, and among them, seated in the middle of the table and completely surrounded, was the most astonishingly beautiful woman I had ever seen. So beautiful, in fact, that the entire family felt the need to escort her whenever she went out in public.

One night Liana pointed out through the window overlooking the lake. "Look," she said, "look at the moon on the water." There I saw the image of the full moon reflected on the rippling waves of Lake Bracciano. "Isn't it beautiful?" she asked. It was more than beautiful—this apparition, a phenomenon of light and dark, a shimmering presence, appearing exactly as it might have appeared long ago to a Claudius or to the inhabitants of the Orsini Odescalchi Castle.

Andrea, their eight-year-old son, took me around town, often disappearing and leaving me lost, and then reappearing mysteriously. Once, alluding to a holy fount by the Church, he asked: "How could water be holy?" He shook his head. Andrea wanted me to make a raft with him. He showed me from his Italian comic books a raft made with logs

Cont...▶

and rope, saying he wanted to make one to take on the lake. I hesitated, not wanting to say no, but having no idea how to build a real raft. Convincing him that we needed to carefully plan this, I stalled. He continued planning, calculating how many logs he would need, how much rope, where we would build it, how we would get it down to the lake.

We went shopping one evening to a modern-Italian, super furniture store. While they looked around, I found a large round meeting room table, with chairs on rollers that fit together under



the table like slices of a pizza pie. The padded triangular seats, very awkward if you tried to cross your legs, seemed very ‘cool’ to me, a twenty-two year old in the era of bell bottoms and paisley ties. The Burgess’s liked it too. In fact they bought it and the next day it was delivered, an interesting conversation piece for the times Burt Lancaster or Federico Fellini might visit. It was my little contribution to the ambience.

One day we went into Rome, to their flat and while AB and Liana did what they needed to do, Andrea took me sightseeing. We went, on AB’s recommendation, to the Spanish Steps—not to see the hippies (this being November already, they had long gone away), but to see Byron’s apartment where Keats had died, which was next to the Steps. Keats had stayed there only a short time. We visited the apartment, saw Keats’s death mask, and looked at the books, none of which had belonged to Keats or Byron. Andrea and I bought roasted chestnuts from a street vendor down at the foot of the Steps, by the fountain. Keats must have listened to the sounds of this fountain as he lay nearby.

The street vendor told me in broken English that Andrea was remarkable. An eight-year-old boy who could speak Italian and English fluently. Andrea paid no attention to the compliment. As in Bracciano, when he told me to ignore the people who called to us on the streets, because he said, they were very stupid. He did not place a high value on mixing with the locals. Liana took my visit as an occasion to go to the Etruscan museum near Tarquinia. We took the autostrada north. Along

the way, we stopped to check directions and discovered, under a eucalyptus tree, a plaque commemorating Napoleon. He had passed this way during his Italian campaign, which was of interest to the author of *Napoleon Symphony*. The Museo Archeologico is in the Palazzo Vitelleschi in Piazza Cavour, Tarquinia’s main square and the entrance to the town. Among the exhibits were black vases with carved and painted bucolic scenes. On one vase a bull was charging toward two men engaging in a homosexual act, and on the reverse side of the

vase, the bull sat docilely while a man and a woman engaged in heterosexual relations. AB told me that no one knew exactly what had happened to the Etruscans, why they died out. He also told me that D.H. Lawrence, who spent his life in exile, like Burgess, thought he had might have found in the Etruscans the civilization that held his spiritual roots.

After about ten days it was time to leave. During the trip to Tarquinia, AB had said that there was nothing really to see and was impatient. I felt that I was becoming a nuisance and getting in the way of his work. So I decided to head back to France. But before I left AB offered me job, chauffeur, to drive him around in their Fiat. Unfortunately, I couldn’t drive a shift, so I declined. I have often wondered what might have happened if I had taken that job.

Later when I was back home in the States, I sent Andrea a present: a set of leather crafter tools. I thought this might be a safer hobby for him than raft building. I received a typed letter from Andrea, with an official translation by an anonymous hand.

*“Grazie del regalo Brus sono molto contento e ho intenzioni di fare una cintura e poi, di fare una borsa ma prima devo comprare dell’altro cuoio. Ma forse non devo pensare alla borsa e soltanto alla cintura? dopo forse pensero se faccio o se non faccio u’naltra cosa.”*

(Official translation)—“Thank you, Bruce, very much for the present. I’m very pleased with it & have the intention of making a belt and then a purse or bag, but first I’ll have to buy more leather. But perhaps I’d better not think of the bag & only of the belt. Afterwards perhaps I’ll get down to thinking of something else.

(Love from the family) And from Andrea”

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1. James Joyce, *Ulysses* (New York, Vintage Books, 1961) pp. 2-3

2. Anthony Burgess, *The Clockwork Testament or Enderby’s End* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1975) p. 17

3. Idem, *A Clockwork Orange* (New York, Ballantine Books, 1972) p. 12

4. Idem, *The Clockwork Testament or Enderby’s End*, p. 57

5. Op. Cit., Joyce, p. 282

6. Op. Cit., Burgess, *The Clockwork Testament*, p. 67

7. Ibid., p. 58

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid., p. 56

10. Ibid., p. 71

11. Idem., *You’ve Had Your Time* (New York, Grove Weidenfeld, 1990) p. 275

12. Op. Cit., Burgess, *The Clockwork Testament*, p. 31

In the mid 1950's, when Anthony Burgess decided that his next novel (technically his second but actually the first one to be published<sup>1</sup>) would be set in a grammar school, he had already set his mind to summon up his experience as a teacher, both in England as in Malaya.

Published in 1961, *The Worm and the Ring* holds a special place in Burgess's literary oeuvre. It is "the" book collectors desperately try to find. It is "the" book, which, in itself, caused more uproar than even *A Clockwork Orange* (1962) would. It is "the" book which was banned and recalled from bookstores. Only re-issued once in the early 1970's, in a somewhat different form, it makes the original first edition even more valuable.

Burgess had used Virgil's Aeneid as a backbone to his preceding novel, *A Vision of Battlements*. In *The Worm and the Ring* he would use Richard Wagner's gigantic, Teutonic, pompous *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. Burgess's interest in Wagner is well documented - in his essay *Ring* and in *This Man and Music* among others<sup>2</sup>. Wagner's Ring cycle consists of 4 operas : *Das Rheingold*, *Die Walküre*, *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung*. "I chose the fourfold matrix of Wagner's *Ring of the Nibelungs*. This was not altogether arbitrary. The hierarchy of gods, heroes and dwarfs found a parallel in a grammar school."<sup>3</sup>

The purpose of this paper is not to decrypt the allusions and symbolism drawn from Wagner in Anthony Burgess's text, but to draw the attention to an astute literary allusion. But first some info about Wagner's *Ring*. It would be too long to summarize the 14 operatic hours into a couple of lines, so only a few threads to illustrate the purpose of what will follow. Wotan, the Chief of the Gods, has commissioned two giants to build a castle, called Valhalla, where his daughters, the Valkyries, will take the fallen soldiers' souls. In the meantime, a dwarf steals the gold from the Rhinemaidens and has a Ring forged for him. Wotan's daughter, Brunhilde, and a mortal man have children who will two generations later constitute "a new breed of heroes"<sup>4</sup>

Among the gods/heroes we find the main character of the novel, Christopher Howarth. He is unhappily married to Veronica and they have one son, Peter. His wife and son are Catholics but he is not, which would become an epitome of the Burgessian character in his novels to come. He is a German teacher in a secondary school, which is a pitiful state but everybody is about to move to the new premises. The Headmaster, Mr Woolton is a Classics scholar who used to teach for many years.

Howarth is said to be "having difficulty with the *Duino Elegies*, great difficulty. It was only a pastime, of course, as his wife kept reminding him."<sup>5</sup>

This might appear as anecdotal for a German teacher who spends his pastime trying to translate Rilke's series of ten elegies, but Anthony Burgess does not use this haphazardly.

Rainer Maria Rilke started composing his Elegies on January 20<sup>th</sup> or 21<sup>st</sup> 1912 when he was visiting Princess Marie von Thurn und Taxis-Hohenlohe at the Castle of Duino, just outside Trieste. Rilke finished his cycle of Elegies in February 1922 in another castle, Château de Muzot. It is no wonder that Burgess in his cunning allusive way used the following ploys to illustrate his purpose :

- Rilke, although being born in Prague, is widely recognized as one of the most important poets in German literature. This Germanic allusion of course recalls Wagner's nationality but also the fact that he wrote the librettos to the four operas in his Ring-cycle. Wagner always wanted his "music dramas" as he called them, to be a combination of theatre, literature and music. What he called *Gesamtkunstwerken*.
- The Duino Castle (built in approx 1400) is a parallel to, on the one hand, the old school in the novel which is said to be in a very sorry state ("It's finished," he said. "The school's finished. Space, light, air, shining laboratories, rational chairs and tables. But, above all, space. We've been working in incestuous rat-holes."<sup>6</sup>), and the new premises ("But the new school would mean, perhaps, a new life. The importance of the environment."<sup>7</sup>) In Wagner's first opera in his Ring-cycle, *Das Rheingold* (1869), Wotan is having a new Castle built. This castle, Valhalla, will hold the souls of worthy warriors. The parallel is easy to grasp with the new building containing the souls of writers. Woolton even reflects on the busts of all the Classics he imagines on the walls. Burgess quotes the name Valhalla for the first and only time on page 271 of his novel, i.e. three pages before the end of the novel.
- The fact that Rilke wrote Elegies seems also important. Their mournful tone matches the general atmosphere in which Burgess puts his characters. The novel takes place in England in 1951 and starts during a rainy February day. The future is being exhibited in the Festival of Britain but this future seems very far away for the protagonists caught in personal troubles. Religion is a major stumbling block in Howarth's life; his wife suffers from a psychological ailment and a major sexual frustration. Burgess communicates this somber feeling of ending of a period in time and the possibility of a new dawn, what Wagner called in his fourth opera in his Ring-cycle *Götterdämmerung* (Twilight of the Gods). The fact that Woolton, the Headmaster cum liberal humanist who yearns "to be alone again, to be free of women, a celibate scholar"<sup>8</sup> hands in his resignation from his position because of his disagreement with the way schools are being run and his own detachment from the cruel reality, which he fills in with daydreaming about his own ideal private school, is also an indication of the end of a period. He quotes from Plato's *Apologia* in his resignation letter to the Board of Governors: "[...] condemned on the charges of corrupting youth and substituting false gods for the gods of the borough." This seems so important to Burgess that the same quotation is even mentioned just after the title page of the novel. His position is taken over by Dr Gardner, who has



less moral scruples than he has. The first allusion to Rilke's *Elegies* in the novel is the literal quotation from verse 1 from Elegy 1 "Cry. If I were to cry, who among the angelic orders would hear me?"<sup>9</sup> Howarth is asking himself this existential question which also reflects his own hesitations in life but at the same time Burgess very ironically uses this cry for help at the very beginning of the novel when Christopher stops Albert Rich, a pupil, from mugging Linda Hardy and stealing her diary. Wagner's *Rhinegold* begins with the Nibelung dwarf, Alberich, stealing the gold from the Rhinemaidens.

- Rilke's *Duino Elegies* are a series of very religious poems about, among many other things, the fact that God cannot be reached and about the transient state of Angels (between mortals and God). Religion, just as in many later Burgess novels, is often seen as an obstacle towards self-affirmation and happiness. *The Worm and the Ring* is imbued with religious innuendoes, from the main character's name, Christopher and his son's name, Peter, to the numerous discussions with his wife Veronica about her strictly devout Catholic faith, her lack of sexual interest, his sense of guilt for the affair he has with a colleague of his, Mrs Connor, her Catholicism, his C.o.E. The last chapter ends with "Still he said, heartburn in his throat like a dirty word, 'Amen', meaning it."<sup>10</sup> A couple of years later, Burgess would also end another of his novels, *A Clockwork Orange*, with "Amen. And all that cal."<sup>11</sup> Both could be connected thematically, the second being a representation of Plato's quotation and the negative evolution of the pupils of the first in this new future.

Burgess' use of Wagnerian elements in the novel fits his subject-matter. The mythical elements are more playfully used here than in his other novel *A Vision of Battlements* where he used Virgil's *Aeneid*.

Brussels, April 4th 2009

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1. Anthony Burgess, *Little Wilson and Big God*, Heinemann, London, 1987, p 367
2. See Andrew Biswell, "The Real Life of Anthony Burgess", footnote on p 135
3. *Little Wilson and Big God*, p 368
4. Anthony Burgess, "Ring", in *One Man's Chorus*, Carroll & Graf, New York, 1998, p 182
5. Anthony Burgess, *The Worm and the Ring*, Heinemann, 1961, p 9
6. *Ibid*, p 25
7. *Ibid*, p 26
8. *Worm and the Ring*, p 31
9. *Worm and the Ring*, p 9
10. *Worm and the Ring*, p 266
11. Anthony Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange*, Heinemann, London, 1962, p 196

**Review of *Conversations with Anthony Burgess*, edited by Earl G. Ingersoll and Mary C. Ingersoll. University Press of Mississippi, 224 pp. ISBN 978-1604730968.**

There is little doubt that Burgess scholars and other interested readers will be heartened by the appearance of this new book. It is not exactly a third volume of autobiography and, although veering broadly in that direction, not quite a work of criticism. What Earl G. Ingersoll and Mary C. Ingersoll have compiled is a modest selection of twelve published and broadcast interviews, along with an eight-page introduction, a bibliography, a five-page chronology and a helpful index. While such an undertaking is unlikely to have involved long years of editorial labour, there is much to love between its covers. *Conversations with Anthony Burgess* adds a number of useful items to the storehouse of available information about Burgess and his practice as a novelist, and for this the Ingersolls must be congratulated.

It is worth saying a few words about the principles of selection. Most of the interviews have been chosen on the grounds of length and detail, and most take the form of straightforward questions-and-answers without narrative interventions from the interviewer. The sole exception to this rule is the interview about religion and evil with Rosemary Hartill from BBC radio's *Writers Revealed* series, broadcast in 1989. The resulting series of dialogues, ranging from 1968 to 1989, allow us to eavesdrop on what sound like private conversations, although the editors rightly draw attention in their introduction to the strong elements of performance and self-invention that are present in many of Burgess's public utterances.

One of the fascinations of this collection is that it allows us to see how Burgess's opinions, on matters such as music and the film version of *A Clockwork Orange*, modified over time. Many readers have been inclined to take at face value the statement, in *Little Wilson and Big God*, that Burgess intended to renounce writing in favour of composing, and that he regarded the novel as somehow inferior to music. Yet several of the interviews collected here call this into doubt. In 1973 Lemuel Riley challenged the idea that 'you would rather be thought of as a musician who writes novels than a novelist who writes music.' Burgess replied: 'I'm composing a fair amount, but not enough to render me a genuine musician. The fact of the matter is I make the sort of statement you asked about just to upset people.' Speaking to Pierre Assouline in 1988 (the year after *Little Wilson* had been published), he said that he would never abandon novel-writing: 'I am fundamentally a writer [...] Literature will always be superior to music, because it is not just a structure. It has a semantic force that gives it meaning.' And he told Charles Bunting: 'I've never yet written a novel whose appreciation depends on the knowledge of musical notation or harmony or orchestration.' This important interview material might cause us to re-examine some of the grand statements put forward in Burgess's memoirs (and elsewhere) about the relationship between literature and music.

He is characteristically spiky on the subject of Stanley Kubrick's cinematic adaptation of *A Clockwork Orange*. 'It's all right, I suppose. It's nothing to do with me. It's rather embarrassing to see your own characters parading on the screen [...] It was a very slow and dull film; very beautiful, but very dull and slow. But, of course, this is typical of Kubrick' (p. 97). When Burgess said these words he was already at work on *The Clockwork Testament*, an oblique piece of vengeance-taking on the world of films and film-directors.

There are some genuine illuminations and surprises. Burgess's auto-interpretation of *Nothing Like the Sun* reveals that the character of Shakespeare's Muse is not a real muse at all, but 'only syphilis'. Speaking to Charles Bunting when he was in the middle of writing *Napoleon Symphony* (parts one and two had been completed in Rome in 1972), Burgess describes some of the novel's technical innovations: 'a battle is set out in the form of a poem [with] notes, so the poem represents the terrain, and the position of the figures referring to footnotes is not numerical; it varies according to position so that you can tell by reading the poem, by moving around, exactly where they are and when they're conducting the battle'. This refers to the poem 'The Carolingian ghosts attend him now', which appears on page 123 of the 1974 Jonathan Cape edition of *Napoleon Symphony*.

The value of a gathering of interviews such as this will be as a primary source for the general reader who does not have access to the more obscure journals (such as the *Delaware Literary Review* and the *National Elementary Principal*) in which the conversations were originally published. On the other hand, the complete text of Burgess's *Paris Review* interview with John Cullinan is legitimately available on the internet as a free download, and it is hard to imagine that there will be any readers who do not already possess an electronic copy. The Cullinan interview takes the form of a tape-recorded conversation supplemented by a subsequent exchange of letters, but the resulting text is so consistent in terms of tone and register that it is almost impossible to see the joins. The notion of Burgess's writing as an extension of speech would bear further examination, particularly in relation to his belief that literature should be written primarily for the ear. Most literary writers do not habitually speak in cogent and publishable paragraphs, as Burgess appears to have done.

There is also the fascination of listening to Burgess talk about the books which remained unwritten. He returns at several points to the idea of writing a novel about a composer ('Use letters in it as well as straightforward *récit* [...] Make it a panorama of European life. Because music does lend itself to the international approach, you see'), loosely based on Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus*, but informed by his own practice as a

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writer of orchestral music. On page 67 he tells us that ‘the next four novels will be set, respectively, in medieval England, modern New Jersey, Italy in the last fifty years, Jane Austen’s England.’ The Italian novel is presumably *Earthly Powers*, and the unwritten Princeton novel is outlined in *You’ve Had Your Time*. The Jane Austen project was realised on a much smaller scale than Burgess had intended: it forms the ‘pattern in the carpet’ chapter of *Mozart and the Wolf Gang*. What became of the medieval English novel is anyone’s guess, but he may be referring to his abandoned fiction about a theatrical family ‘All the Men and Women’, of which approximately 20 pages were written in 1984. Or he may be thinking of his film-script about the Black Prince from the early 1970s. Burgess’s early thoughts on *A Dead Man in Deptford* may be found in his 1978 conversation with Samuel Coale (page 117).

The editors have decided to reproduce the texts of published interviews without emendation or annotation, but this gives rise to a few confusions. Burgess’s stepmother is referred to as ‘Margaret Byrne Dwyer’ in the chronology, but (incorrectly) as ‘Maggie Byrnes’ on p. 115. The meaningless ‘It was a mistake in priority’ on p. 127 should read ‘It was a mistake in proof-reading’. Other errors have crept in from mistranscriptions of radio and television interviews. ‘Solzenitzen’ on p. 148 should be ‘Solzhenitsyn’ (as in *The Novel Now*, 2nd edition, pp. 177-8). And ‘the Mancurian response’ on p. 183 is a mistranscription of ‘the Mancunian response’. Perhaps it is a minor quibble, but the decision to use US spelling throughout gives Burgess an awkward-sounding American accent. He would never have written ‘favor’ or ‘labor’, and to see these words in his voice on the page looks very odd to the non-American reader.

A few gems are missing. Burgess’s earliest radio interview with Patricia Brent, broadcast on 9 May 1959, is available from the BBC Written Archive but overlooked here, as is his dialogue with V.S. Naipaul on ‘The High Noon of Empire’ from 1965. Dick Adler’s profile from the *Sunday Times Magazine* (2 April

1967) would have been another worthy addition, along with Alice Thomas Ellis’s joint interview with Burgess and Liana, published in the *Sunday Telegraph Magazine* on 22 February 1987. The writer Duncan Fallowell, author of *Twentieth-Century Characters*, is unusual in having published two long interviews with Burgess (in *Penthouse* in 1981, and *Woman’s Journal* in 1989), but neither of these excellent pieces has found a place in this collection.

There are other obvious mistakes in the chronology and bibliography. *The Worm and the Ring* was published in 1961 (not 1954, as stated here). *A Vision of Battlements* was written in 1952, not 1949. Burgess enrolled at Manchester University in 1937, not 1935. *They Wrote in English* was published by Tramontana in Milan in 1979, not by Hutchinson in London in 1988. The Hutchinson edition was announced as ‘forthcoming’, but it has never in fact appeared.

I wish that we could also have a further volume of interviews with some of the other people (such as publishers, friends and fellow writers) who knew Burgess, along the lines of *Orwell Remembered* (1984), edited by Audrey Coppard and Bernard Crick, in which a wide range of George Orwell’s associates shared their memories of him. Such a project would allow us to get beyond the sometimes overbearing voice of the author-figure in order to find out more about how he was perceived by those around him. A ‘critical heritage’ volume on Burgess, in which some of the longer articles and reviews of his work would be reprinted, is also many years overdue. Is it possible that a willing editor and publisher may be found among the readers of this *Newsletter*? Let us hope so.

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The first call came early one morning in October 2002. A weekday, I know, because my poor girlfriend had left at six am, bundled up against the cold and dark, in order to avoid the commuter crush on the Paris-bound train. *Enderby*-like, I was pottering round the flat in my dressing gown enjoying a leisurely if guilty breakfast, and defiantly spurning France Inter in favour of BBC Radio 4 when the phone rang. I knew absolutely no one who would even be up at seven let alone call me so I assumed it was my other half with some forgotten instructions about buying food or cooking food or cleaning something or taking something back to a shop. I even said, as I picked up the phone, “Hi Sweet Pea, what’s up?” Which was rather embarrassing as it wasn’t Sweet Pea at all.

I heard a slightly puzzled intake of breath at the other end and then, very loud, “It’s Liana. Liana Burgess. Is that Douglas?” Just to get this out of the way, I won’t attempt to reproduce Liana’s accent phonetically. One, it would be lacking in respect, secondly most people reading this will have seen her in *The Burgess Variations*. She talked like that. It would be otiose to say that her English was perfect, but what may not have come across in the documentary was the amount she laughed. I was to hear Liana laugh a lot over the next couple of months. I stammered some sort of reply, what a surprise, lovely to hear from you, and Liana heard me out for a second or two before getting down to business. She was phoning to thank me for a review I’d written of Roger Lewis’s vile hatchet job on Anthony’s life and work for the *Angers Anthony Burgess Newsletter*. This had gone online a few days before and it was not so much a review as a reckless attempt at a self-induced coronary or embolism. It

wasn’t well written although I did like the smart-aleck title – *Wind, Ham, Lewis* – but into it I had, by God, put my little all. I’d loathed the book with a passion and said so in as many ways as the vocabulary of abuse and the libel laws permitted. And now here was Liana Burgess – my hero’s

## “Hi Sweet Pea, what’s up?” Which was rather embarrassing as it wasn’t Sweet Pea after all.

widow! – phoning me up to thank me. Even as I was replying no, no, only too glad etc, my mind was frantically scrolling through the text to see if I’d let slip any particularly gross examples of what Kingsley Amis referred to as ‘alcoholic language’. After all, she was the Contessa Pasi della Pergola.

I needn’t have worried. Over the next minute and a half Liana passed judgement on the hapless Lewis with such anatomical exactitude and quite unfounded speculation about his ancestry that it was, well, rather frightening. It sounded as if she were laying down a curse. To keep my end up I mumbled about RL’s poor scholarship, non-existent research, insane jealousy and so on but I didn’t get the impression Liana was listening until I added, “And Andrew Biswell and I call him Loopiss!” That rather puerile epithet (*mea culpa*) turned out to be the magic word, because suddenly down the line I heard peal after peal of delighted and delightful laughter. Liana *gurgled*. Laughing like a drain wasn’t just an expression, then. And that bubbling laugh seemed to blow away any residual hurt she must have been feeling about Lewis’s truly savage and cowardly attack on her late husband, because she never mentioned the man again. “Of course I will never read his book”, she said, and that was that.

I could hear what sounded like the ingestion of croissants and coffee down the line, also seagulls. Liana confirmed she was having breakfast, and I asked permission to go downstairs to the kitchen for mine. A moment later we were both chomping and slurping away. Just to get into full Burgess mode I sparked up a fag or *clope*. Now that Liana had disposed of Lewis to her satisfaction, she moved on to the next topic, which was Graham Greene. Did I, she asked, think much of Graham Greene? Answering her own question, she said firmly, “He is a writer for boys. His books are just adventure stories for boys. Don’t

you think so?” I ummed and aahed a bit at this. Nabokov had dismissed Conrad in just those terms, and I privately thought it was equally sweeping to write off Greene like that. But of course I knew all about the famous falling-out over what seemed like some very trivial indiscretions on Burgess’s part. I wasn’t really being asked to pass a literary judgement on Monsieur Grim Grin, more to show that I was inside. I was catechised about other writers – Kingsley Amis, William Golding – and was suitably disparaging. Of course perhaps, awful thought, Liana just wanted to know how much of a toady I was.

But no matter, because we, or she, had already moved on. Liana wanted to know about me. What was my accent? Glaswegian tempered by a childhood move to Bristol. Liana knew both places well. Where did I live in France? St Germain-en-Laye, to the west of Paris. St Germain she knew very well, presumably from her Sorbonne days, and she gave a brisk recap of its attractions (*château, park, forest, long terrasse* designed by Le Nôtre on bluff above river, wonderful views) as if counting them off on her fingers. I was impressed. I mentioned that I’d lived in Brighton for eight years before moving to France and she pounced on that. Ah, said Liana, so you are gay! Um, no, I replied. You are sure you are not gay, coming from Brighton? I stuck to my story. There was a brief, I thought disappointed, pause. And then that infectious gurgling laugh again. “They like to go *cottaging*”, Liana chortled. The word ‘ribald’ comes from an old Germanic root meaning ‘to pursue licentious pleasures’ and that gives a fair picture of at least part of Liana’s sense of humour. It was ribald to the max.

I was then probed, as it were, about my private life, my girlfriend, her age relative to mine (twelve years younger) and then, somewhat to my relief, she dropped me as a topic as a



bored dog might drop a sufficiently chewed toy and we moved on to Burgess's next biographer-to-be, Andrew Biswell. What was he like, was he any good, would he too prove to be a false friend? I had only known Andrew for a year or so but I was able to assure her most emphatically that I couldn't think of a better person to write his life, being as he was a dedicated Burgess expert, moreover an unashamed fan, a tireless hunter of previously unearthed treasures in the archives of Angers and Austin, Texas, in short a scholar and a gentleman and what's

a nice boy who would do a good job. That Stanley Kubrick had done rather well out of Anthony and had never shown sufficient gratitude. That someone, perhaps Liana Burgess, ought to translate Anthony's Italian journalism and bring out a selection in English. (I agreed fervently and still do – any takers?). That she extended a vague invitation to come and stay in Monaco. This invitation became less vague a couple of weeks later when she sent me the programme for a series of concerts to be given in Monaco in Anthony's memory. I was

invited to stay in their former flat, Liana having moved to a separate apartment across the road. I have that programme by me as I type. 'Sous le Haut Patronage de S.A.S. le Prince Rainier 111, FESTIVAL DE MUSIC SACREE, Cathédrale de Monaco, 12, 14 et 16 Décembre 2002. The music was by Pergolesi, Monteverdi and Berlioz – *L'enfance du Christ*, whose libretto Burgess had, with much agony, translated into English for the BBC in 1967. Because of work commitments I was unable to accept Liana's kind invitation and to this day I kick myself for not having begged, borrowed or stolen whatever it would have taken to get me down there. Some opportunities come but once.



more the possessor of an excellent sense of humour and a burning desire to set the record straight. And if that wasn't enough, I had been privileged, on a train to Angers, to read one of the chapters of his forthcoming book, dealing with the Malayan years, and had found it to be first-rate. I did such a good job of selling Andrew that I almost considered invoicing him.

Liana remained oddly unconvinced. She had, she said, met Andrew and thought he was 'too puritanical'. This was so much at odds with the Biswell I knew that I could only assume she had, in fact, been introduced to someone like Andrew 'A.N.' Wilson and got them muddled up. She worried away at the topic of Andrew's entirely notional puritanism for another few minutes and then got in with a sucker punch by asking me, in Italian, how well I knew Italian. As it happens I do have a smattering of that beautiful language, having lived in Venice for six months many years before, but I wasn't expecting to be quizzed on my knowledge of the subjunctive or indeed the Venetian dialect (my pronunciation of 'Veneto' was, shamefully, wrongly stressed) and I freely admit I made a complete arsewit of myself. It was something of a relief when Liana suddenly said, I must go now but I will call again soon. If the reader thinks I have devoted an inordinate amount of words to a brief phone call, let me assure him or her that when I checked my watch I saw to my surprise that we'd been on the phone for nearly an hour. It had flown by. It was one of the least boring phone calls I'd ever had and I'd been completely star-struck. As I've said, I'd been talking to the widow or relict (a favourite Burgess word) of my favourite writer. Nicer than Frieda Lawrence (which, admittedly, wouldn't have been hard), better educated than Nora Joyce, less frightening than Vera Nabokov... it had been a joy and I hoped she'd meant it when she said she'd call again.

She did, the very next morning in fact, at the same time, with the same or similar seagulls screeching in the background. How I wish I'd written it all down. All I can remember is laughing a lot, and Liana laughing a lot too. I do recall that she seemed to have accepted the fact that Andrew Biswell was probably

Liana called me every few days from October to December 2002. Then the calls stopped. At first I assumed this was

**I mentioned that I'd lived in Brighton for eight years before moving to France and she pounced on that. Ah, said Liana, so you are gay!**

because I'd somehow let the side down by not attending the memorial concerts. Then I began to hear rumours of illness. I emailed her a few times. Liana had told me she was all thumbs when it came to computers but Burgess had been full of praise for her omni-competence. I think she simply didn't like the impersonality of the new technology. Her admirable and kind secretary Caroline answered the emails. Out of the blue I received a text message giving me her mobile phone number. I called it and got nothing. And that was that.

The news of her passing was not a shock. I had made a point of not mentioning the premature death of her son, but Liana brought it up herself once and sounded uncharacteristically though understandably weary. I don't know the details of all that she did for the International Anthony Burgess Centre in the years leading up to her demise – Alan Roughley will, perhaps, write about that one day – but I'm sure she was tireless and dedicated to the end. I miss her. From time to time I meet someone involved in the world of Burgess studies who talks about her as being difficult or obstreperous. I would say defensive rather, of the reputation of the man she loved as a husband and a writer. Burgess was lucky to have met her, and knew it. And I feel lucky too, that one Monaco morning she decided to pick up the phone and call me. Liana, I never asked if you liked the poetry of Montale, although I think you must have. So... *'Se t'hanno assomigliato/ alla volpe sarà per la falcata/ prodigiosa... per l'astuzia dei tuoi pronti stupori...'* RIP.

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