# Enderby Upstairs

David Guaspari

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Anthony Burgess, like his master James Joyce, was an erudite, working class, polylingual, expatriate, lapsed Catholic. Unlike Joyce, he was staggeringly fecund. He published 50-odd books—fiction, criticism, memoir, translation—as well as screenplays, teleplays, libretti, and large quantities of literary journalism. And he started late, becoming a full-time writer at age 43, when mistaken medical opinion gave him just one year to live. He would have chucked it all to be a composer and throughout his life found time to practice, in every form from the comic song to the symphony, the vocation to which he wished he'd been called.

His best known work, thanks to the Stanley Kubrick film, is *A Clockwork Orange*. But Burgess produced novels in all known—and some unknown—forms, including satire, science fiction, a verse novel, a spy thriller, and several fictional biographies (that of Napoleon cast in a form that mimics the Eroica Symphony).

All display a passion for language that places Burgess, as he placed Joyce, with the writers for whom "it is important that the opacity of language be exploited, so that ambiguities, puns and centrifugal connotations are to be enjoyed rather than regretted." And all display an imagination deeply formed by the categories of Catholicism, its analogical metaphysics, the practiced habit of regarding everydayness *sub specie aeternatitis*.

Sympathetic readers often called Burgess a master without a masterpiece. The unsympathetic thought he was too extravagant, too tricky, too language-obsessed—and that of him there was much too damn much. His countrymen never offered him a top-shelf literary honor—though one book, *Earthly Powers*, did make the shortlist for the Booker Prize. It lost, a failure Burgess retrodicted thus: "It was hard reading for the jurors and it smelt of the wrong properties, one of which was Catholic Europe." Burgess had a chip on his shoulder and flaunted it, a Manchester shopkeeper's Rabelaisian son scorning genteel Oxbridge litterateurs. His autobiography cites little but hostile reviews of his work. When he exhibits Virginia Woolf's incomprehension of *Ulysses*—"the book" (she says) "of a self-taught working man … of a queasy undergraduate scratching his pimples"—one feels his satisfied contempt. One suspects that his work, too, will outlast its critics.

A good entry to that work is the sequence of four Enderby novels, a comic portrait of the artist as costive middle-aged minor poet. They treat Burgess' enduring subjects: freedom, God, sex, art—and, unsurprisingly for a man once reprieved from a capital sentence, time. *Inside Mr. Enderby* (1963) and *Enderby Outside* (1968) are full-scale novels—the 5-year gap attributable to the author's scheduled death. They were conceived as one and published that way in America. *The Clockwork Testament, or Enderby's End* (1974) and *Enderby's Dark*

*Lady, or No End to Enderby* (1984) are novellas in the comic/satiric tradition of "further adventures." In them the hero does not change. He just becomes more fixedly himself.

F. X. Enderby undermines sentimental clichés about art and its makers. His life is not, for example, charmingly dishevelled. It is sordid. He writes his poems in the lav, pants around the ankles, his art a middle term between the sexual and the cloacal. Dyspepsia begets artistic excitement. Distracting incitements to literal begetting are onanistically short-circuited. Enderby is not good copy. He is not larger than life. He is toothless and unwashed and grows bald on top as he furs out elsewhere. His bathtub, little used for its nominal purpose, archives poetic scraps (which also serve, in a pinch, as toilet paper). Mice scrabble among the pages. From these grotesque materials Enderby wants to make art. Why? The question returns again and again. A proper answer requires religious language—not the threadbare "Romantic" inflation of artist to priest or god, but the language of vocation, service, and duty, of keeping the faith. But faith in what?

For Burgess, the foundation of our humanity is freedom—not a mere absence of external restraint or a resolve to act "authentically," but the capacity to choose between good and evil. So runs the parable of *Clockwork Orange*: Alex willfully chooses evil; but the state commits a crime when it makes him an automaton incapable of that choice. It assaults his humanity. Genuine art serves freedom—not by instructing us how to act but by helping to resist the forces that threaten to strip us of moral agency altogether.

Burgess, and Enderby, circle repeatedly around an ancient dispute about freedom carried out in theological terms. The British monk Pelagius, a contemporary of St. Augustine, denied the existence of Original Sin and affirmed man's capacity to be good by his own efforts. Pelagius, said Augustine, was a saintly man but a heretic: though the fact of human freedom suffices for evil, man can be good only through God's grace. Burgess and Enderby acknowledge that evil is real; and if it is, Pelagius cannot be wholly right. But neither can Augustine, who threatens to make us mere puppets of God.

Enderby's story makes this dilemma urgent and wildly funny. The bare outline: Enderby, unhappy but content, inadvertently becomes the trophy husband of the cool beauty Vesta Bainbridge—women's magazine editor and widow of a famous race car driver (and hoping, Enderby will sourly conclude, to become the widow of a famous poet). He persuades himself that Vesta is the antitype of the grotesque and hated stepmother who had up to now, and probably forever, "spoiled women for him." But Vesta becomes that stepmother in another form. Worst of all, she tries to drag him back to the Catholic Church. Enderby flees, the marriage unconsummated, but too late. His jealous Muse deserts him. He must abandon his projected epic masterwork, *The Pet Beast*, a poem about Original Sin that fuses the stories of Christ and of the Minotaur. The shadowy Rawcliffe, a poetaster with one much-anthologized lyric, appropriates Enderby's themes for an Italian science fiction movie with the Dantesque title *L'Animal Binato*. In despair, Enderby attempts suicide (botched) and is locked in a

mental institution to be cured of poetry. *Inside Mr. Enderby* concludes with his reemergence as a useful citizen, healthy Mr. Hogg—rechristened with the maiden name of the mother who died at his birth.

*Enderby Outside* begins with Enderby launched on his new life, tending bar in London, and in danger of suffering a poetic relapse. He becomes wrongly suspected of shooting a noxious pop singer, whom Vesta has launched on a prize-winning literary career by plagiarizing Enderby's abandoned manuscript hoard. (The singer's consequent "death" will prove to be a publicity stunt.) Hogg flees by joining a package tour to Morocco—using, with accidental cunning, the passport of Enderby. For further disguise he initiates a sham flirtation with Miranda Boland, a scientific expert on the moon. A fiasco predictably ensues: Inspiration interrupts Enderby in mid-tryst and he rushes to the loo to ejaculate a sonnet. (Contrary to Gravesian mythology his Muse is a goddess of the Sun, not the Moon.) Learning that traitorous Rawcliffe owns a bar in Tangier, Enderby decides to kill him—what's another murder more or less? But Rawcliffe is gravely ill, and decent Enderby nurses him through a harrowing death. Enderby inherits Rawcliffe's passport along with the bar, where he is one day visited by a stunning young beauty with acute, and caustic, poetic insight. She seems to be the Muse in person (and seems also to confuse Enderby with Rawcliffe). She offers herself, sexually and artistically, but Enderby refuses the risk—guaranteeing that his art will always be minor. The Muse does promise an occasional visit. He should be thankful for what he has.

The conclusion of *Enderby Outside* is complex. Enderby's proclaimed ideal of freedom is freedom from attachments—but, says the presumptive Muse, "choos[ing] to live without love" has made his art small. Her departure fills Enderby with longing, rage, and regret, his detachment rather less than perfect. But it's too late, he tells himself. He has "reached haven"—a cozy substitute for heaven. Enderby clings to his limitations and failings: "Whatever the future was going to be about, things ought to be all right, namely not too good, with enough scope for guilt, creation's true dynamo." Has Enderby struck an awful and tragic bargain—paying for his quota of poems by living a loveless and unhappy life? Or is he simply deluded? Must the artist have self-knowledge or lack it?

Burgess has offered his own symbolic gloss, though "ready to be told that [it's] nonsense": art as a feeble male surrogate for the true creativity of child-bearing; women as a corresponding danger to male art; a Muse who plays the masculine role of impregnation. Burgess' novels invite such detective work: tracking down allusions to Hopkins, such as Enderby's subconscious bisection of "heaven-haven"; finding clues carefully planted to show that a poem the Muse quotes is not, as she seems to think, Enderby's but a lost work of Rawcliffe; etc.; etc. Despite this, Burgess is not an esoteric writer. Novels do not stay in print for decades on the strength of such exotic pleasures. A man who wrote for his supper needed readers. And there proved to be a market for more Enderby.

*The Clockwork Testament* chronicles the last day of Enderby's life, a decade after settling in Tangier. He's a visiting professor at "Manhattan University" on the strength of his credit for a film version of Hopkins' *Wreck of the Deutschland*. The farrago that actually reached the screen bears little relation either to the poem or to Enderby's absurd script. The movie includes Hopkins copulating with his protagonist, storm troopers raping nuns, and an obscene misreading of the invocation "Christ, oh Christ come quickly." Enderby spends his day having heart attacks (the fourth of which kills him), laboring unsuccessfully on an epic poem about Augustine and Pelagius, and defending the autonomy of art: against sullen students who would prostitute it to politics, on a talk-show where "his" movie is blamed for a wave of nun-raping copycat crimes, against a madwoman who wants to murder him. His final hallucinatory flash of consciousness transforms a silly musical (on late night TV) into a movie about Augustine and Pelagius. Enderby is free at last: no need to write that poem after all.

*Enderby's Dark Lady* presents an alternative future in which Enderby has given up poetry. His *Collected Poems* has just appeared to condescending reviews. He has nothing more to say, so turns down the fatal invitation to Manhattan and accepts one to Indianapolis, as librettist for a ridiculous musical about the life of Shakespeare. Enderby is uneasy about his commission and haunted by portents that the blasphemous project has incurred Shakespeare's displeasure. He falls madly in love with April Elgar, a gorgeous black nightclub singer cast as the Dark Lady, and avows both his devotion to her and his desire to cherish that devotion at a safe distance. The climax, of a kind, is occasioned by an accident to the male lead that forces Enderby to play Shakespeare on opening night. In a love scene with the Dark Lady, Enderby becomes possessed by Shakespeare's spirit and begins to perform in erotic earnest—*interruptus*, when police halt the show for violating union rules. (Enderby is not an Equity actor.) This is the closest Enderby will come to literal procreation, though it's he who has been impregnated—a new poem is gestating and he will return to Tangier to write it.

Enderby's travails can, if one likes, be blamed on the usual suspects: Oedipality, anality, sublimation, etc. But the typical Burgess hero faces obstacles less psychological than metaphysical—how to live out one's vocation, what to do with freedom. In this case, what is a word man to do, especially one with a vexed relation to the Word?

To begin at the beginning, consider what Burgess himself does with words. He insisted first of all that language is fundamentally speech and the literality of words derived; and he relished found poems turning on that fact. Thus, Enderby barters with a Manchester man whose amorous plans require "a nice loove-letter or a bitter poetry." A crank combining Marxism with low-church religiosity and an autodidact's pronunciation rails against Enderby for being "boor Joyce" and claims to have resolved the contradictions between Marx and religion by means of a grand all-explaining "sin thesis." As usual, the comedy embellishes larger patterns: Enderby, though hardly bourgeois, is a kind of boor Joyce and "sin thesis" is a précis of *The Pet Beast*.

Words also have magical functions, and naming is principal among them. Vesta Bainbridge is ironically Vestal. The Muse is elusive and ungovernable in part because she has no name. Enderby suffers whenever his name is wrong: Vesta calls him "Harry"; as Hogg he gives up poetry altogether; the Muse confuses him with Rawcliffe. Enderby's surname, Burgess has said, was taken from the name of a remote Antarctic region, to suggest a life cold and lonely. (His given names we're never told, but the initials *F.X.* no doubt stand for *Francis Xavier*, the missionary and mystic.) Vesta's pop singer calls himself Yod Crewsy and his group The Fixers—or, The Crewsy Fixers. Enderby notes the blasphemous words, which prefigure blasphemous deeds, such as the staged "resurrection" from his shooting. *Yod* onomatopoetically suggests an ignorant lout (and suggests the back-slang *yob*, which means just that). Enderby knows that yod is a Hebrew letter, but doesn't register its full significance as the first letter of the tetragrammaton. Yod blasphemes simultaneously against God, music, poetry, speech.

Burgess habitually coins compound words and makes new parts of speech from old. Joyce, as he has noted, does the same, and to the same technical end—compressing syntax by eliminating auxiliary words and subordinate clauses. Here, for example, is what Enderby sees on arriving in Tangier:

> Up the cobbled street tottered the saint-eyed donkeys, most cruelly panniered, driven by bare-legged Moors in clouts, ponchos, and immense straw sombreros.

Saint-eyed. Panniered. Compression is a source of energy and the invented words give their referents that surcharge of reality accruing to anything for which there is a name. Saint-eyedness becomes part of the furniture of the universe. What Enderby hears on that street needn't be mentioned because the sentence supplies it. The plosive consonants and open back vowels—*cobbled*, *tottered*, *donkey*—make a hollow clacking that mimes hoofs on stones.

The Burgess sentence, like the Joyce sentence, results from native extravagance under severe discipline, a lyricism of exactness: economy of syntax, lexical precision, and careful orchestration of verbal music. Lyrical intensity is typically used for comic effect, as in this partial survey of Enderby's kitchen:

> In the food-cupboard were pellets of rocky cheddar, greasily wrapped. A lone midget cauliflower swam like a doll's brain in dense pickle. There was half a tin of sardines, soft plump knives in golden oil.

This is comedy of inflation—not by tedious mock pomposity but by loving attention to ludicrous detail. "Pellets" is apt for crumbs of stale cheese, but also has a poetic multiplicity

of meaning, suggesting both pet food (which makes Enderby himself a pet beast) and mouse droppings. “Soft plump knives” is a miniature poem—the glittering dagger shapes that, paradoxically, cannot cut; the pillowy sound of “soft plump.”

Burgess also has a Joycean flair for parody and pastiche, and a fascination with languages of all kinds. We get pop lyrics, scientific articles, trendy journalism—and poetic styles for Enderby, Rawcliffe, Yod Crewsy, the folk bard of an imaginary dialect, an incarcerated lunatic, an imaginary Elizabethan dramatist, and self-indulgent surrealists. We have Enderby poems, of course, as well as an Enderby film script, a libretto, two short stories, and a sermon he delivers at April’s mother’s revivalist church. We hear the regional speech of Manchester, New York City, midwest America, and stage Ireland. Foreigners mangle English. English-speakers mangle Italian, Spanish, French, and Arabic—and also spout the jargons of business, medicine, psychiatry, television, movies, theatre, bartending, the academy, and radical politics. A capstone of sorts is the bizarre idiolect of Easy Walker, an uprooted adventurer given to strange oaths like “Feel his uncle, O bastard daughters of Jerusalem.”

Enderby’s story unfolds as a series of set pieces that elaborate a standard comic premisse: Enderby at the mercy of the world’s invincible ignorance. Thus, after Enderby loses his door key and innocently spends the night on a neighbor’s couch, her jealous boyfriend Jack comes banging at his door. “Open that door and let me bash you, you bastard.” The facts Enderby offers are beside the point. “ ‘I’ll believe what I want to believe,’ said Jack with great candour.” Enderby asks the girlfriend to explain, but “That won’t make no difference to Jack. … You’ve got to get done by Jack. Jack’s like that, you see.” When attacked, Enderby yanks the toilet seat off its pins and with it manages, by lucky accident, to horsecollar his opponent —to crown Jack with Enderby’s true wreath of laurels and end the fight with a rare, if inglorious, victory. Jack is unfazed. “You got what was coming to you,” he says, Invincibly.

This formula demands that the hero compound his disadvantage by foolishly and stubbornly being himself—which, after all, is precisely what the world holds against him. The world has a one-track mind, the track of self-interest, and resents the derailing openness of art, the metaphors and paradoxes that multiply possibilities. Enderby the word man is regularly led astray by whiffs of these possibilities and thus betrayed by words. A world in need of the (lower case) word rejects it.

His students at Manhattan University resent Enderby’s ingenious exegeses of their fatuous poems. He brings them to the edge of violence by his disinterested professional discussion of a race-baiting rant from his lone black student: After whitey’s prick has been “chopp[ed] segmentally,” Enderby points out, it can’t really be compared to a dog turd. It will have neither the unity of a turd nor its shape. He then proposes, for their slack-jawed consideration, attention to the prosodic difference between *nigger-whipper* and *nigger-killer*, and the effect

of systematically replacing *whitey* by *nigger* or *bohunk*—not *kike*, of course, because that's not a trochee.

His sermon at the black revivalist church sabotages itself by wild swings of free association. When Enderby seems at last to have found a safe topic, blacks' history of oppression, he promptly veers off course by noting that Christ himself is "on the side of intolerance, saying I come to bring not peace but a sword, and of hatred, as of the Pharisees." Christians have long been oppressors. Of course, they have also been oppressed. And, on the third hand, "Some call slavery and oppression modes of cultural transmission, meaning that if you had not been enslaved and oppressed you would still be worshiping sticks and stones and sucking jujus in the heart of darkness, well not quite, most of you coming from West Africa … don't bother to learn Swahili, that is an East Coast *lingua franca*." This debacle prompts the sole act of charity Enderby ever receives: The parishioners, concluding that the "minister" must be terribly overworked, take up a collection on his behalf. After Enderby has been cheated by the musical's promoters, that money will buy his ticket home.

The word betrays Enderby but he persists. Why? Why does the world need the word? What good are poems? Enderby doggedly reminds himself not to bother with what his poems mean. Does this align him with the surrealist hacks he meets in Tangier? Their poems are trivial—sequences of images juxtaposed arbitrarily. Their words have nothing to do with the world. But when Enderby struggles with a poem that refers cryptically to "the widow," he feels compelled to wonder who the widow might be. That wonder betrays a belief that the world has meanings that can be spoken and can be discovered in achieved art.

The "widow" poem proves to be prophetic, in both the vulgar sense of predicting the future (Vesta's imminent arrival onstage) and in the proper sense of seeing radically into the present —in this case, by discerning a "widow" theme in Enderby's life. (His stepmother was a widow, too.) A similarly prophetic poem, and a similar struggle to grasp its meaning, marks his return from Hogg to Enderby. That poem will not be complete until the Muse, in person, gives him its final line with a warm farewell kiss and a touch of her hand. It's a love poem. Coming from loveless Enderby, it is in one sense a lie, but he also knows that "it would not be a lie to anybody who could use it, somebody young and in love …. Poets, even minor ones, donated the right words …."

It seems that Enderby's world, like that of the theology he rejects, is made of signs. Its natural literary expression is a musical or "symbolist" structure of overlapping images and themes. Joyce again.

And, in the Joycean manner, no subject matter is too low to be significant and to be cherished. The first "word" of Enderby's story is a phonetically rendered fart, like the statement of an opening musical theme. That noise returns often, especially at cruxes—such as Enderby's wedding night, when the almost-perfect Vesta erupts with intestinal troubles that

eliminate whatever (small) chance there may have been of consummation. And a fart is Enderby's parting shot when he finally sneaks off in the middle of the night.

The opening trombone is also an invocation of the Muse, visceral afflatus calling to afflatus divine—and an echo of the divine rumbling thunder words of *Finnegans Wake*. (Burgess published exegeses of *Finnegans Wake*, and an abridgement of it, and once embarked on the wild project of translating it into Italian.) It seems no accident that Vesta and Enderby's stepmother—anti-Muses both—are terrified of thunder.

Enderby is asleep when the story begins, and his invocation is audible only to the participants in an Educational Time Trip, a delegation of school children from the future who have reverently returned to study him. Their escort speaks in the tones of the tour guide unctuously dispensing received opinion. She displays Enderby in all his sordor—which includes a stack of embarassing postcards ("Fellation, if you must know, is the technical term"). But strands of hair are collected, like relics from a saint, and on exit the guide pauses to regard the town spread out below and the stars above: "he gives it all meaning." Enderby, it would seem, is a poet for the ages.

Enderby often tells himself—and tells the Muse—that he writes for posterity. Can that belief, or boast, justify a life? The Muse mocks it. And posterity proves itself ignorant and fickle. The coda to *Enderby Outside* narrates another Time Trip, whose guide describes Tangier's artists' colony thus: "They have sinned, but they have talent." Yet, "[t]hey are small artists all. … They are nothing." Enderby, supposed poet for the ages, is among them. The future, it seems, is no place to look for immortality.

Enderby reflects on literary immortality in the two short stories about Shakespeare that make bookends to *Enderby's Dark Lady*. The first imagines an ill-regarded and insecure Shakespeare, ready at age 46 to retire to Stratford. Tossed a bone, some editorial work on the King James Bible, he tries to immortalize his name by weaving it into the 46th Psalm—changing its 46th word from "tremble" to "shake" and changing the 46th-from-last word from "sword" to "spear." The second story is a SciFi nightmare in which Shakespeare steals his works from, and then murders, scholars who visit him from the quasi-future. Neither is encouraging.

What does Enderby see if he lowers his gaze from the unreliable future to the present? Only time marching on. *Clockwork Testament*, the story of a life's last day, begins with Enderby lying on a circular bed, his trunk and legs seen as the hands of a clock. The Enderby saga itself begins on New Year's Eve, which might suggest hope and renewal—but Enderby, who will that year turn the significant age of 46, spends New Year's morning at a pub patronized by the aged and dying. Rawcliffe, even before he falls ill, is a *memento mori*, constantly bemoaning the brief life-span of the poetic gift. His very presence reminds never-anthologized Enderby that there is no justice on this side of the grave.

Enderby finds communion only in the past. Dante, Hopkins, Joyce, and the Elizabethans—Shakespeare especially—are perpetually present, summoned explicitly or alluded to in glancing jokes. Vesta's warning that the dumbed-down poems Enderby contributes to *Fem* magazine must not contain words like "oriflamme" or "ineluctable" is plausible and comic in its own terms; but that choice of words is overdetermined, as they belong conspicuously to the language of Stephen Dedalus. (*Ineluctable* is the first word of his famous interior monologue on Sandymount Strand; and *oriflamme* is brandished in his set piece disquisition on Dante.)

So Enderby lives in a kind of hole in time, with encyclopedic knowledge of poetic ancestors, near-total ignorance of contemporaries, and sporadic anxious hopes to be redeemed by posterity. The present is a place of exile, in which he must resign himself to a modest calling, to be a better poet than the contemporaries he actually encounters—frauds, hacks, and sellouts all. Enderby's struggles to live that calling play out as struggles with mother, mothers, women, Woman, Muse.

Of mothers Enderby has both a shortage—his mother died at his birth—and a surfeit. His childhood was as dominated by his now dead stepmother as his middle-age is plagued by her memory—a woman gross, ignorant, stupid, and superstitious who once, terrified by a thunder storm, climbed into his bed. He feels compelled to live beside the mothering sea (which is both *La Belle Mer*—the name with which he rechristens Rawcliffe's bar—and *la belle-mère*, or "stepmother"). Photogenic, hygienic Vesta might seem the stepmother's antitype but, as he bitterly writes in a one-line poem flushed soon after composition, "Every woman is a stepmother." She begins to nag and natter and burp, won't let him work in the loo, and (unforgivably) wants him to embrace Our Holy Mother the Church.

Wanting a mother, Enderby believes, made him a poet. He had to invent one—and what he made, "became slimmer, younger, more like a mistress; … the Muse." So what does art require? The comforting mother or the dangerous mistress?

With a mistress, of course, there's the business of consummation. Professionally, he's all for it: Enderby gladly barters love poems in exchange for the loan of an acquaintance's business suit. The hottest of these, missent to Vesta, becomes the proximate cause of Enderby's marriage. (Its counterfeit signature is why Vesta miscalls him "Harry.")

The one documented consummated lust of Enderby's life occurs with a twisted Muse who is, if not death, one of its elves—the madwoman who assaults Enderby on the evening of his final heart attack. Unlike the Muse in Tangier she knows his poems very well—and thinks them immoral. (She is the negation of a misprint in one of Enderby's early books that changed "immoral" to "immortal.") She would have him desecrate his books before she shoots him. Enderby disarms her and then, finding himself tumescent, takes her to the circular

bed. A few hours before his mortal demise, Enderby at last dies in the Elizabethan sense. The next morning, Time Trip visitors find Enderby sprawled where his heart attack overtook him and a "skeletal" woman asleep on the circular bed, arrayed as the hands of a clock. If her head and feet were reversed she would tell the same time that Enderby told when the story began—an image of yin and yang, and also of circular time, an image of eternity. As the tour guide says, Enderby is not "well out of it" because "we are all and always in it."

All Enderby ever wanted was his freedom, which is poetry. And that, he tells Vesta, is a job for anarchs. "Poets don't need religion. … Poets don't need anybody but themselves." The view that freedom consists of complete and insular autonomy is doubtful philosophy. But the forces of unfreedom are so massively arrayed—not least by the stepmother state—that it has some claims as a first draft.

The world at large merely loathes poetry but Dr. Wapenshaw, the Circe who changes Enderby into Hogg, wants to liquidate the poet, to reorientate his personality toward useful citizenship. Poetry, like masturbation, is an adolescent practice that must be outgrown. Wapenshaw has a counterpart in *The Clockwork Testament*. Professor Balaglas, one of Enderby's talk-show opponents, thinks it past time to abolish "autonomous man—the inner man …, the man defended by the literatures of freedom and dignity."

Balaglas and Wapenshaw are backed by the power of the state. But language itself, a domain of boundless possibility, helps resist them. Balaglas's evasive jargon comes to us refracted through an accidental poem: the talk-show's transcript, full of guesswork errors. "Positive reenforcement" is surrealized to "positive rain forcemeat." Enderby, as transcribed, attacks Balaglas for being "teetotal Aryan" (sensual Catholic Europe offering a thumb in the eye to ascetic Protestantism). Subliterary language, a scurrilous quatrain scrawled on a lavatory wall, is Enderby's only weapon against Wapenshaw. These lines are Wapenshaw's true immortality and also help provoke his nervous breakdown.

But Enderby the self-proclaimed poetic anarch cannot truly find his freedom in mere autonomy. He subscribes, without the God part, to something like the orthodox theological view that freedom lies in submission to God's will. He has no choice but to live the vocation of poetry, afraid not of death but of losing his Muse. Enderby's shabby life is a leap of faith parodied by the pen name, Faith Fortitude, under which Vesta publishes his hack-work contributions to *Fem*.

Instead of resolving his internal contradictions, a poet exploits them. Consider Enderby's outline for *The Pet Beast*: The enemies of King Minos await the Minotaur as a Messiah, but Minos defeats them and installs the beast at the center of the labyrinth, whose outer corridors he stocks with a "treasury of human achievement." Though Minos sees in the Minotaur's eyes "twin worlds of love," he proclaims the beast a horror, an eater of human flesh. The labyrinth thus becomes "beauty and knowledge built around a core of sin, the human

condition." But a "Pelagian liberator" arrives to kill guilt and free the gentle and forgiving monster—which humanity promptly crucifies, at which point the labyrinth collapses and civilization comes to an end.

Enderby explains his theme to Rawcliffe: without Original Sin there is no civilization. (Guilt, creation's true dynamo.) But Enderby's gloss, if pursued, results in paradoxical reversals. The Pelagian, after all, is *correct* to claim that the beast's wickedness is an illusion, and that suggests that Original Sin is at best an expedient lie. Yet the mob's spontaneous desire to crucify the beast reverses that reversal by exhibiting a profound horror in the human heart.

An unwritten poem by a fictional character can withstand only so much interpretation. But, one level up, Burgess embraces the same dilemma. *The Clockwork Testament,* for example, identifies Enderby with both Augustine and Pelagius: with Augustine when Enderby deplores the folly of expecting mankind to be rational, when he stands up for "civilization" against the barbarism of students, television, and thugs in the streets; with the Pelagius who, like Enderby, is "innocent Englishman."

Burgess acknowledged parallels between Enderby and himself. They share biographical details (parentage and step-parentage, former religion, visiting professorship, notorious movie, misbegotten musical). Burgess mines Enderby's oeuvre from his own youthful poems. Enderby's given names associate the two by a private joke, since Burgess was a pupil of the Xaverian Brothers and resided for years in the East where Xavier preached. But Burgess dismissed the suggestion that he "is" Enderby in any *important* way. That dismissal, I think, misleads.

Enderby wins our appalled sympathy by his struggle, by acting on a conviction that he must write poems and that, to do so, he must cut himself off from the ordinary blessings of life—with no expectation of reward and no guarantee that his sacrifice will bear fruit.

What's at stake for Enderby was also at stake for John Anthony Burgess Wilson—nothing less than the Socratic question, "How is one to live?" Burgess, too, was and made himself an outsider. When he had a religion it was, socially speaking, the wrong one. He became an expatriate in order to write, lovingly, a language that he rarely spoke. For Burgess, too, things were perhaps best when they were not too good (creation's true dynamo). Though his religion had decayed to "a nostalgic culture …, a stick for trouncing Anglicans, a stand to be taken somewhat hypocritically in articles on evil for the *Daily Mail*," Burgess was, late in life, "still capable of moaning and breast-beating at my defection from, as I recognise, the only system that makes spiritual and intellectual sense." He and Enderby, it seems, accepted the conclusions of their former religion even while rejecting its premisses. We are exiles and pilgrims. We live outside the gates of Eden, but we are significant: the fate of a single soul is a drama of cosmic importance.

Burgess responded to his dilemma with morally serious comedy. Our freedom, a fact and a puzzle, makes us human, but it does not make us happy. It is threatened from within and without, and subject to a kind of entropic decay, so that we must struggle merely to avoid losing ground. Enderby the visiting professor could only offer his students a confused apocalyptic warning. They will not “prevail against the big bastards of computerised organisations that are kindly letting you enjoy the illusion of freedom. The people who write poems, even bad ones, are not the people who are going to rule. Sooner or later you’re all going to go to jail. You have to learn to be alone … All you’ll have is language, the great conserver, and poetry, the great isolate shaper.” But the students cannot possibly understand. They can regard this outburst only “with pity and wonder.”