

Lilies that Fester:

The Clockwork Testament as a Campus Novel

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This article endeavours to examine Burgess's mid-career novel, The Clockwork Testament, to establish whether the third instalment of the "Enderby Quartet" can, or indeed should, be reclassified as a piece of academic fiction. What is at stake here is not only a matter of generic taxonomy but also the question of how such a possible reclassification could impact our understanding of Burgess's thematic and stylistic preoccupations and how, in a broader sense, this particular novel of his fits into an important segment of twentieth-century English-language fiction highlighted by the names of Kingsley Amis, David Lodge, or Philip Roth. Informed by theoretical insights gained from the works of Michel Foucault, Elaine Showalter, and others, this piece could also make a notable contribution to what is known as the poetics of place on the one hand and our knowledge concerning the writer-environment nexus on the other. Taking a close look at the biographical and historical context in which The Clockwork Testament was written is meant to suggest the ethnic, cultural, and sociological tensions that beset the refurbishing of higher education in America at the time. All in all, the authors offer their answer to the question whether The Clockwork Testament is a campus novel in any meaningful sense of the word and, if so, what that tells us about Burgess and his fictional excursion into academia.

As must be obvious to most readers, the quote in the title above comes from Shakespeare, specifically his 94th sonnet, where it opens the closing line of the poem likely addressed to the poet's aristocratic patron conventionally

referred to as the Fair Youth. The sonnet endeavours to admonish its addressee to refrain from using his power to hurt and by exercising self-restraint to protect his own, personal, excellence from being corrupted by “base infection.” “For sweetest things turn sourest by their deeds; / Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds,” draws the conclusion the sonnet’s closing couplet (Shakespeare 569). If excellence is taken to refer to academic, rather than aristocratic, distinction, and the “deeds” in question constitute the behaviour of college instructors, students or, possibly, administrators, instead of the loyalty of a poet’s sponsor, friend or lover, then the relevance of the quotation in the title to a paper on academic fiction must also be self-evident. This would be the case even if one were to overlook the verbatim reference to Shakespeare’s festering lilies in a piece of free indirect discourse in Anthony Burgess’s work that comes closest to qualifying as a campus novel—*The Clockwork Testament; or, Enderby’s End* (1974) (44).

As argued below, the third instalment in the “Enderby Quartet” (1963–1984), a series of four novels whose overarching narrative revolves around the person of the monastically reclusive, misanthropic and misogynous poet F. X. Enderby,¹⁹ comes quite close to being a full-fledged campus novel without actually typifying the genre. However tentative, such a qualification needs some explaining in an article offering to reclassify *The Clockwork Testament* as a piece of academic fiction.

Although Burgess was very much aware of Malcolm Bradbury’s and David Lodge’s academic fiction, praising them in tandem as “Britain’s outstanding novelists of campus life” (*Ninety-Nine Novels* 124), he never mentioned the campus novel as an independent genre or sub-genre. And yet, his fiction and non-fiction address issues and contain characters or situations central to our understanding of what constitutes this particular branch of imaginative literature. Reminiscences of his own student days at Victoria University,

19 It is important not to attribute Enderby’s misanthropy and misogyny to Burgess himself. Andrew Biswell posits, correctly, that “Enderby is more than Burgess’s shadow: he is a demonic, monastic, spermatic worst-self, a brutal auto-caricature” (221). In an interview made shortly after the publication, in America, of *The Clockwork Testament*, he answered this to the imputation that “Enderby is pretty much” him: “Of course, you tend to use a lot of your own experiences. But he’s not like me in the deeper respects, you know. He’s sort of misogynous. He’s never married and I am very much a married man. He’s scared of women, he cooks badly, I cook rather well” (Interview 99).

Manchester, as well as descriptions of his professorial assignments at various Asian and American institutions of higher education, occur with great frequency in his two-volume autobiography, “Confessions.” More importantly, perhaps, he repeatedly gave voice to his views on the state of higher education in his occasional publications from open letters to manifesto-style essays such as the one headed “My Dear Students” in a 1972 issue of *The New York Times*, or the piece titled “The Writer Among Professors” in the *Times Literary Supplement* ten years later. Just as importantly, many of his novels, written between the early 1960s and the late 1980s revisit the university as a character-forming and destiny-shaping location. These novels include *The Doctor Is Sick* (1962), whose main character Dr Edwin Spindrift is a professor of linguistics and is affiliated with the (fictional) International Council for University Development, the structuralist incest-novel, *M/F* (1971), narrated in the first person by Miles Faber, a hippy-style dropout of an Ivy League college, and the narrator of *Any Old Iron* (1982), Harry Wolfson, is a philosophy student at the University of Manchester—Burgess’s own alma mater. None of these novels, however, keep their thematic focus as firmly on a particular university or on higher education in general as Burgess’s mid-career novel, *The Clockwork Testament*, the third part of the tetralogy known as the “Enderby Quartet.” The adventures and opinions of the novel’s protagonist F. X. Enderby, a character whose autobiographical traits have been variously contested and affirmed by Burgess as well as his critics, have so much to do with the perceived mission and supposed failures of university education that it is a minor miracle that the title fails to show up in any of the major monographic assessments of English-language academic fiction. Even more surprisingly, Burgess’s scholarly interpreters have also consistently overlooked the novel’s qualities that would legitimise its classification as a piece of academic fiction. To explain, and possibly to fill, these lacunae in genre theory and Burgess-criticism, it is needful to offer a brief overview of what has been established in the theory of academic fiction at large.

The existing body of scholarly writing on the topic is multitudinous and diverse, the latest research turning its attention from a more traditional Anglo-American academic fiction to specimens of the genre produced in Eastern and Western Europe, Canada, and South Africa (Fuchs and Klepuszewski). However, despite the general interest in this genre, some earlier researchers

considered it necessary to mention its supposedly dubious significance and inferior quality. On the last pages of his book, *The College Novel in America*, John O. Lyons comments unfavourably on “the lack of distinction in the novels about academic life,” noting that worthy examples of the genre “are few indeed” (186). Almost half a century later, Elaine Showalter, on the first pages of her book devoted to the topic, makes an apologetic remark about the “ultimate narcissism” of her being interested in a subject that, by definition, should be of interest to a very narrow circle of people having a stake in the state of higher education (3). Over the last few decades, scholarship on academic fiction has been animated by a debate on the future of the genre. Even a quick glance at the titles, ranging from Adam Begley’s “The Decline of Campus Novel” to Jeffrey J. Williams’s “The Rise of the Academic Novel,” speaks volumes of the scale of discrepancy. Nevertheless, the very existence of incessant academic debate, an inexhaustible number of new campus novels published each year together with unchanging readerly interest suggest that the genre deserves serious scholarly attention.

One divisive issue seems to be a certain controversy among critics over the question of the central character or characters in the campus novel. Ian Carter notes that there is a tendency to exclude student-focused novels from the genre, “restricting this term to novels treating university teachers’ joys and troubles” (54). Williams goes as far as to set up a binary opposition contrasting “campus novel” with “academic novel,” traditionally used interchangeably, arguing that the former centres on students and their campus life while the latter primarily features academics (561). Although the authors of this study do not insist on such rigid terminological distinctions, they are convinced that *The Clockwork Testament* would neatly fit into Carter’s restrictive definition of the campus novel, as it is centred on the character of a university professor or, more precisely, a writer in residence doubling as visiting professor. The post-war democratisation of higher education involved, among other things, the introduction of creative writing courses in Anglo-American universities (McGurl 24). Writers of campus novels responded by introducing “visiting writers among their characters” and “interspers[ing] [their novels] with pieces of other fictional texts” (Ant  ne 8). Burgess’s novel features both the character-type and fragments of his literary work, which “Professor” Enderby himself considers his real work as opposed

to such “pseudo-work” as giving classes, marking papers, and seeing his students. He is generally not very impressed with what he sees as “teen-age garbage treated as art,”²⁰ and is appalled by the university programme, which he regards as “progressive intellectual abdication” (*The Clockwork Testament* 44). Regardless of the extent to which Enderby’s views coincide with those held by Burgess, Enderby’s very strong opinions concerning the state of affairs at the University of Manhattan—a fictional institution modelled on Burgess’s City College New York—where he teaches creative writing and literary history are characteristic, in their satirical tone and campus-related subject, of academic fiction in general. And, even more saliently, the setting of most of the novel’s plot, lecture halls and seminar rooms on campus, Enderby’s apartment turned into the site of informal tutorials, and even his subway rides to and from work, add up to what can be seen as a genre-defining feature of academic fiction.

The location, of course, is of prime importance here. The former British academic and prominent master of the genre, David Lodge, describes the campus as “a unified, self-contained site in a pastoral or park-like setting,” which had been more typical for American universities until the late 1950s when new universities started to be built in Britain on the American model (“Nabokov”). Showalter goes beyond that, describing the university as “the site of pastoral, or the fantasy of pastoral—the refuge, the ivory tower” (Showalter 3). Bruce Robbins modifies such romanticising conceptions by noting that pastoral idealisation was subtly subverted by “a threat that the outside world will penetrate and destroy the idyllic space it has fenced off” (251).

Traditional private universities used to be regarded as elitist, closed, all-male communities, characterised by class-based admission policies, thereby excluding those who had neither class nor gender, nor ethnic privilege (Findeisen 286). However, the expansion of higher education in the post-war period, university transformation, and the institution’s changing social role found their way into the campus novel. Commenting on the liberalisation of higher education, Showalter observes that the university “is no longer

20 While categorically rejecting that he should be identical with Enderby, in the interview cited above, Burgess admits to being somewhat similar to his creation in terms of some general “attitudes to art and life,” adding that the two of them do in fact “share a very intransigent attitude to art” as reflected in Enderby’s impatience with his students’ lack of creative discipline (Interview 99).

a sanctuary or a refuge,” as it turns into “a fragile institution rather than a fortress” (60). Therefore, the university campus is not perceived any more as a sacred space, even though it remains a—more or less—secluded place. Although one might think that a closed community based on the limited grounds of a university campus is principally preoccupied with their own very specific problems, Lodge argues that the university “provides ... a ‘small world’ which is a kind of microcosm of the larger world” (“Nabokov”), thereby reflecting typical human behaviours and characters.

It could be argued that the idyllic campus with its specific mode of being, seemingly isolated from the outer world, bears the marks of what Michel Foucault called a heterotopia and defined as a counter-space where “the real sites are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted” (24). In other words, a heterotopia is both material and mythic; it is physically present in our world, yet exists concurrently. Indeed, the university is a real-world place albeit separated from it and inaccessible for an outsider, suggesting that one has to be initiated to be let in. Even an urban university, like the one where Burgess’s novel is set for the most part, despite the absence of campus walls and the presence of an open admission policy pursued by its administrators, still remains a place for initiates only, namely students and teachers. Another mark of the Foucauldian heterotopia is its ability to overturn time traditionally understood, which is easily applicable to academic time. The latter is more circular than linear, flowing smoothly past recurrent milestones—the start of the term, the midterms, the vacations, the final exams—and returning to the same point each September. Every academic year “has its boundaries, its rhythms, its predictable points of crisis” (Moseley 17). In this regard, the university bears the traits of a heterochronia, a temporal anomaly, “organising a kind of perpetual and indefinite accumulation of time in a place that will not move” (Foucault 182).

Such a mythical and in a way illusory character of the heterotopia is especially keenly sensed by Enderby, who is not a career academic but a visiting professor and, to a certain extent, an outsider. Once inside the university, he cannot avoid the experience of otherness and displacement (a situation exacerbated by his status as a foreigner—a British national in America—and a co-creator of a scandalous film, the sex- and violence-ridden adaptation of the poet G. M. Hopkins’s religious ode, *The Wreck of the Deutschland*).

Unbeknownst to himself, he is exposed to the heterotopic reality of the university. When he suddenly realises that all his knowledge of the subject he is supposed to teach has inexplicably evaporated from his head, the professor gives a talk on the life and works of a fictitious Elizabethan author he calls Gervase Whitelady, enthusiastically making up details of the imaginary dramatist's biography and reciting his non-existent texts. Enderby even creates, in passing, a new, counterfactual, subject facetiously named by himself Creative Literary History, and he briefly muses over a feasibility of learned articles written on this unique teaching technique. Having left the classroom, he is still haunted by the experience of transgressing reality: "lose sensation, he kept thinking, and I become a fictional character" (54).

One might argue, however, that the boundaries of the University of Manhattan are not at all impenetrable. After all, it has an open-admission policy in play, similar to the regime in place at City College New York, where Burgess himself occupied a teaching position as a Visiting Professor of English Literature and Creative Writing. In fact, the University of Manhattan draws directly on City College, just as Enderby's lodging at 670 West End Avenue is the apartment where the Burgess family resided during the writer-professor's stay in New York (Biswell 351). The apartment belonged to Adrienne Rich, an American poet and university professor, who was on the permanent staff in City College. The university had opened its gates to underprivileged racial and gender groups of young people. Adrienne Rich, whose previous experience in education was limited to elitist institutions, such as Harvard, Radcliffe, Swarthmore, and Columbia University, undertook the job of teaching Creative Writing to the "disadvantaged" students here. She observed that compared to the "quadrangle of gray stone dormitories, marble steps, flowered borders, wide spaces" of the traditional universities, City College was a sore sight:

... overcrowded campus where in winter there [was] often no place to sit between classes, with two inadequate bookstores largely filled with required texts, two cafeterias and a snack bar that [were] overpriced, dreary, and uncondusive to lingering, with the incessant pressure of time and money driving at [the students] to rush, to get through, to amass

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the needed credits somehow, to drop out, to stay on with gritted teeth. (Rich 60)

The picture was completed by the immediate environment surrounding the college in the Upper West Side with its uncollected garbage, street muggers, policemen, who “had become a threatening figure to many whites as he had long been to blacks” (53), and “all its historic, overcrowded, and sweated poverty” (54). Enderby’s way to work lies through the same “foul streets, that, like pustular bandages [wrap] the running sore of his university” (*The Clockwork Testament* 43).

As he enters the building, this “officially desecrated chapel” (47), and walks along overcrowded corridors and into “a hot room with a long, disfigured conference table” (57), he encounters his students, eating and drinking in the classrooms, smoking marijuana, stripping in protest in the halls, listening to loud music outside his office and showing no respect for him as a teacher. It seems that in the new democratised system of higher education, the borders between the university and the city dissolve, letting the street inside the college walls. All those “potential black and brown devils ready to rob, slice, and rape” (46), against whom Enderby carries about a weapon hidden in his cane, have now entered the academe and cannot be ignored. Despite the occasional pang of sympathy that he feels for “the poor orphans, manipulated by brutal statesmen and the markets of tooth-eroding sweet poisonous drinks” (52), Enderby generally demonstrates very little tolerance for the “incurious lot of young bastards” (48) that he sees in his charges. It is important to note that, unlike his character, Burgess was much more tolerant and sympathetic towards his own students in City College. One of his colleagues, the novelist Joseph Heller, best known for his satirical war novel *Catch-22* praised by Burgess for its “mythopoeic power” (*Ninety-Nine* 79), remembered that Burgess demonstrated enormous generosity and kindness when it came to his students, however rude or ignorant they were:

He made himself available to them, and the students made enormous demands on his time, excessively so, but then wasted his time because they had only come to him for another

anti-establishment raving session. I admired the way Burgess could take even the most hostile of these students seriously. He knew and remembered their names. He gave serious thought to even their most absurd statements. He wanted to know their backgrounds. (qtd. in Biswell 350–351)

Enderby demonstrates the exact opposite of such a benevolent attitude, forgetting his students' names (even such memorable ones as Running Deer), engaging in heated disputes and even calling them names, which can often be regarded as ethnic slurs. His bitterness about the new type of "pseudo"-university spreads further on to the city of New York and the whole "hypocritical" America (43), which he would like to escape but cannot, at least not until the next salary cheque arrives (64).

Enderby's professional life extends beyond the lecture halls and campus corridors of the university, but this by no means disqualifies *The Clockwork Testament* as a campus novel. While Enderby's movements seem to be more related to his role as a poet than as a teacher, the academe is deeply embedded in his life. His day begins with a phone call invitation to a television talk show. When the caller addresses Enderby as "professor," he remarks with feigned modesty that this title is "a lot of nonsense" (24). However, at the end of the day, when his unexpected visitor calls him "Mr Enderby," he corrects her: "Or Professor" (99), therefore accepting his "fancy dress" (24). The morning continues with a visit from one of his students, supposedly wishing to interview him for a college magazine. Annoyed with such a violation of his privacy, Enderby nonetheless reminds himself that welcoming his visitor in his private apartment is part of his professional responsibilities: "Still, his duty. One of his students. He was being paid" (34). Later, at the talk show, where he is asked to comment on the increased cases of violence in connection with the release of his ill-fated film, *The Wreck of the Deutschland*, he gets involved in a heated debate with another academic. Their dispute about the nature of violence and evil, free will and an individual's autonomy, in which Enderby's philosophical views collide with those of a professor of psychology, behaviourist Dr Balaglas, could well have taken place within the walls of the university. Another meeting with a late-night visitor posturing as a fellow academic awaits the professor at home. After answering

two late and rather unpleasant calls from students, Enderby experiences another breach of privacy, this time by a woman who introduces herself as Professor Greaving of Goldengrove College. His final meeting of the day, however humiliating and dangerous it turns out to be for him, involves him in yet another intellectual dispute. It can easily be argued, therefore, that while Enderby goes out of his way to emphasize that his status as a professor is “absurd” (27), he is nonetheless constantly involved in interactions with colleagues, students, and academic debates of all kinds, even if these educational or intellectual encounters occur outside of the campus walls. And even if that were not the case, it is not uncommon, as Robert Scott observes, for a campus novel to actually depict the main characters doing anything but teaching: “in the vast majority of academic novels, the overriding implication seems to be that teaching is not an essential component of higher education” (84).

Decentralisation of the university, its position within the urban community had occasioned multiple transformations in the genre of academic fiction, which is no longer enclosed within the campus walls. Showalter, reflecting on this tendency, sees it as troubling: “the university fully merges with the rest of society. ... [A]cademia is only one of many quirky institutions, comparable to Wall Street, haute cuisine, medicine, big business, cruise liners, or families” (142). Jeffrey Williams, however, argues that relocation of the action outside the university is a positive sign of genre transformation:

... academe is no longer a marginal place and academic fiction is no longer strange or quirky but common, effortlessly merging with mainstream culture. This evolution also indicates the tendency of contemporary literary fiction to absorb formerly low or coterie genres, such as science fiction or noir as well as academic fiction, knitting them into the fabric of the literary. (573)

In view of this, *The Clockwork Testament* does not only fit in the category of academic fiction but even follows the trend of fusing the campus novel with other genres—most consistently and deliberately exemplified by David Lodge’s *Nice Work*, where town and gown, academia and industry, feature equally large. As Williams remarks, by doing this, “the academic novel has

taken a more significant position because it has become a major vehicle for middle class, adult experience” (569). In that regard, *The Clockwork Testament* is not an exception but a relatively early instance of the rule.

If that is so, why is it then that all the major critics of *The Clockwork Testament* as well as theorists of the campus novel have so far consistently ignored the third instalment of the “Enderby Quartet” as a significant addition to the genre? One reason could be the fact that Burgess’s reputation both as an innovator of the novel form and his even greater fame as a major dystopian writer immensely popular with scholars as well as successive generations of young readers (and movie-goers) have deflected critical attention from the equally important part he played in raising the campus novel above the lowly status of “genre” fiction. Burgess as a somewhat subversive follower of Joyce and Orwell as witnessed by his “musicalising” fiction in his *Napoleon Symphony* and *Mozart and the Wolf Gang* here and his contribution to dark dystopian fiction with *The Wanting Seed* and *1985* there is far more interesting a phenomenon than as yet another Kingsley Amis, Malcolm Bradbury, David Lodge, John Barth, or Philip Roth—to mention but the best-known practitioners of academic fiction on the two sides of the Atlantic.

If all the foregoing were insufficient to explain the absence of *The Clockwork Testament* both from the major studies of the campus novel and of the entry “academic fiction” from the indexes of the monographs devoted to Burgess’s life and work, then there is yet another important reason for this dual blind spot of literary criticism. This additional factor is the place this short novel occupies within the “Enderby Quartet,” a novel sequence whose multiplicity of characters, multifarious locations, and complex themes do not add up to anything that could be regarded as a drawn-out but straightforward exercise in academic fiction. If anything, the tetralogy named after its protagonist can be seen as an extended *Bildungsroman* or *Künstlerroman*—an idea argued for by one of the co-authors of this article elsewhere (see Farkas 76). Within that, *The Clockwork Testament* represents but one of the four major stages of Enderby’s lengthy journey of the self. This long psychic as well as physical journey of Enderby’s involves his engagement with a mostly hostile world in his successive roles of reclusive and alienated poet, colonial expatriate, visiting professor, and playwright-actor, in the instalments respectively titled *Inside Mr Enderby*, *Enderby Outside*, *The Clockwork Testament*, and, finally,

Enderby's Dark Lady. Taken separately, these interrelated novels could each be tagged with its own generic label: the first, set in the Britain of the sixties, could well be called period-fiction, the second, located in Morocco, colonial fiction, and the last, putting Enderby on the stage of a theatre in the American Midwest, might be termed a showbiz-novel of sorts. It is questionable, though, whether such rather haphazard categorisation would make quite as much sense as assigning *The Clockwork Testament* to what is possibly the most fascinating developments in the recent history of the satirical novel in the English language: the campus novel.

What animates *The Clockwork Testament* and secures it a place in the academic fiction of its time among such prominent masters of the genre as Kingsley Amis' *Lucky Jim*, John Barth's *Giles Goat-Boy*, Malcolm Bradbury's *The History Man*, David Lodge's "campus trilogy," or, somewhat more recently, Philip Roth's *The Human Stain* is the intrinsic interest of its narrative set in the heterotopic space of "the groves of academe" where such great power-conflicts of our-times are acted out as the science wars, also known as the clash of the two cultures, the ethnic conflicts periodically erupting in America and the western world at large, or the radical restructuring of gender relations. If academic fiction can no longer be dismissed as a collection of "readerly" novels of marginal, if exotic, interest, neither can *The Clockwork Testament* be overlooked as an important representative of the genre. To conclude, Burgess was, somewhat like Dickens, Tolstoy, or Joyce, all things for all readers—including the author of at least one important campus novel: *The Clockwork Testament*.

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