

# Anthony Burgess and France



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**Anthony Burgess and France**

*For A.B., to celebrate the centenary of his birth  
and his special relation with France*



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# INTRODUCTION

MARC JEANNIN

While he can be regarded as one of the true legitimate spiritual heirs of the Elizabethan period, as explored in the previous Anthony Burgess Centre's symposium "Marlowe, Shakespeare, Burgess: Anthony Burgess and his Elizabethan Affiliations" and the ensuing eponymous publication,<sup>1</sup> Anthony Burgess remains in view of his total production an unclassifiable artist whose work flourished from eclectic roots. Undoubtedly one of those roots is music; another is French culture.

When he discovered at the age of 12, after listening to French composer Claude Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, that his real passion was music, Anthony Burgess would probably hardly suspect that his way towards becoming a professional writer and an aspiring composer would lead him so frequently towards French literary and musical works. From the date of this 'auditory revelation' inspired by a French composer to the end of his life, Anthony Burgess never ceased to compose musical works – music always being close to his heart – in addition to his main lucrative activity devoted to writing literary and journalistic texts, many of which were directly or indirectly echoing French artists or artistic works.

Indeed, Anthony Burgess's inspiration owes a lot to French culture. His relationship with France, the French and all things French is much more extensive than it first appears. When working with other members of the Centre to translate his journalism about France – originally an idea of Ben Forkner's – Graham Woodroffe and I gradually discovered the huge impact of France on Burgess's output. Following the publication *La France et moi – Articles de presse d'Anthony Burgess*<sup>2</sup> that we edited in 2014, we pursued our research on the connection between Burgess and

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<sup>1</sup> Graham Woodroffe, *Marlowe, Shakespeare, Burgess: Anthony Burgess and his Elizabethan Affiliations* (Angers: Presses de l'Université d'Angers, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> Graham Woodroffe et Marc Jeannin, *La France et moi – Articles de presse d'Anthony Burgess* (Angers: Presses de l'Université d'Angers, 2014).

France. The seam turned out to be so rich it became the theme of next ABC's international symposium.

Many topics can be explored from this theme to reveal the importance of France and French culture in Anthony Burgess's life and work. Among those topics, one occupies a prominent place: Burgess's fascination with words and sounds. One of his true passions lay in the connections between words and music, as he explained in his book *This Man and Music* and the lectures he gave on that subject, notably his brilliant Eliot Memorial Lectures. When transferring musical structures to literary ones, Burgess saw that he had at his disposal a vast source of inspiration that could considerably extend his exploration of original literary constructions, as is well illustrated in works such as *A Clockwork Orange*, *Napoleon Symphony* or even "K. 550 (1788)" included in *Mozart and the Wolf Gang* to name but a few. He also used those connections to compose music from literary works or linguistic references, particularly *Man Who Has Come Through* or *Petite Symphonie pour Strasbourg*. Thus, the reader will not be surprised to see that a major part of this present book is dedicated to analyses of, as Burgess put it in the foreword of his book *This Man and Music*, "the art of words and the art of sound".<sup>3</sup> The focus, naturally, is on French writers and composers who played a major role in Burgess's creativity. In doing so we pursue our reflections on a subject initiated in a previous symposium and the ensuing book I edited in 2009 for Cambridge Scholars Publishing: *Anthony Burgess: Music in Literature and Literature in Music*.<sup>4</sup>

The ABC's fifth international symposium "Anthony Burgess and France" was held on 5-7 December 2014 at the University of Angers. Its objective was to examine Burgess's sources of inspiration in French arts and culture, and show how it influenced his work as a writer, critic, journalist, translator and composer. The guest of honour was Ben Forkner who founded the ABC in 1998 when part of Burgess's manuscripts, books and documents were donated to the University of Angers. Ben Forkner, who personally knew Anthony Burgess, gave a memorable lecture in which he related anecdotes about Burgess while in France as well as his private conversations with him, and answered questions from the audience on what Burgess thought on France and French people in general.

As none of the ABC's symposiums would be complete without a show illustrating Anthony Burgess's talent, a musical concert on the theme of

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<sup>3</sup> Anthony Burgess, *This Man and Music* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1982), 9.

<sup>4</sup> Marc Jeannin, *Anthony Burgess: Music in Literature and Literature in Music* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009).

the conference was given by the Vox Campus Orchestra of the University of Angers conducted by Olivier Villeret and American guest conductor Paul Phillips at the prestigious Grand Théâtre d'Angers. The musical programme of the special concert entitled "Anthony Burgess et la France" included French pieces by Bizet, Rameau and Charpentier, as well as two pieces by Anthony Burgess: *Petite Symphonie pour Strasbourg* and *Marche pour une révolution 1789-1989*, the compositions most closely fitting the symposium's theme, as advised by Paul Phillips. The concert also featured the European premiere of *A/B: A 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday Celebration of Anthony Burgess*, a musical work composed by Paul Phillips himself in honour of Anthony Burgess.

I am, on behalf of the Anthony Burgess Centre, particularly indebted to Olivier Villeret and his musicians and choir, Paul Phillips, as well as the soloists Peter Hudson (narrator), François Paraiso (pianist) and Bruno Rouillé (harmonicist) for their hard work and generous involvement in that project. Again, I also thank my colleague John Cassini for his precious help with the organization of those combined events, Graham Woodroffe for his support and advice, and Emmanuel Vernadakis for his trust. As for financial support towards the symposium and concert, I am grateful to the Région Pays de la Loire, the Ville d'Angers, the Comité Scientifique and the Service Culturel of the University of Angers, the Centre de Recherches Interdisciplinaires en Langue Anglaise, and the International Anthony Burgess Foundation.

The first paper, as Graham and I initially intended when we opened the conference with it, begins this collection so as to provide an overview of the relationship between Anthony Burgess and France. It is entitled "Anthony Burgess and France: A Lifetime of Entente?" This prefatory paper evokes the large influence of French culture on Burgess's literary and musical works, while reflecting on his somewhat controversial attitude towards French people and culture. Then, the following papers are classified according to three domains, namely (I) the influences of French music on Anthony Burgess's compositions, (II) French culture and Anthony Burgess, and (III) translations and Anthony Burgess.

The first section, which includes the majority of the contributions, focuses on the influences of French music on Anthony Burgess's compositions. Paul Phillips, who wrote an exhaustive book on Anthony Burgess's literature and music<sup>5</sup> and regularly conducts the Brown University Orchestra in performances of pieces by Anthony Burgess, opens this section with his article entitled "Musique pour la France

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<sup>5</sup> Paul Phillips, *A Clockwork Counterpoint: The Music and Literature of Anthony Burgess* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2010).

d'Antoine Bourgeois". In this article, Paul Phillips specifically deals with the genesis of two Burgess pieces *Petite Symphonie pour Strasbourg* and *Marche pour une révolution 1789-1989* that he personally conducted during the unique concert "Anthony Burgess et la France". Then, Christine Gengaro goes back to Anthony Burgess's early musical experiences and reflects upon the possible impacts they had on Anthony Burgess in an article entitled "French Influences in Manchester: Burgess and the Hallé Orchestra". Alan Shockley investigates the impressions of Debussy on Burgess in his article entitled "The 'Eternal Reality' of Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* in the works of Anthony Burgess". His paper reflects upon what effect Debussy's colourful, amorphous music has on Burgess's writing and his way of musicalizing language. Then, Vita Gruodyté-Guillot's article, which title is "The Debussy Mode according to Burgess", offers a musicological analysis of Burgess's short story "1889 and the Devil's Mode". This musical dimension is differently tackled by Nathalie Otto-Witwicky who provides an assessment of Anthony Burgess's musicological approach and education while taking account of Debussy's impact on Burgess's music, in her article entitled "Anthony Burgess, Musicology and Debussy". Finally, Carly Rowley provides an in-depth analysis of the figure of the faun and its representation. Her paper, "Burgess and Debussy: The Fall and the Faun", provides various examples which highlight the effect of Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* upon both Burgess's fiction and his musical compositions.

In the second section, dealing with French culture and Anthony Burgess, Jim Clarke explores the influence and impact of French philosopher and writer Claude Lévi-Strauss on Burgess. He argues that what Burgess owes to Lévi-Strauss is a pathway to expressing his own Apollonian mode of artistic creativity, which prior to *M/F* had lain at best latent and at worst merely implicit in his work. Rob Spence then relates Burgess's French peregrinations, amusingly drawing parallels with Tobias Smollett's French travels. As for Joseph Darlington, he proposes an original travel of his own as suggested by the title of his article: "Tea, Coca-Cola and Wine: Culinary Triangles in Anthony Burgess's *M/F*". His paper concentrates upon culinary signifiers and constructs a triangle – America-France-Britain – which, read through Burgess's own works, opinions and stereotyping of these nations in both a synchronic fashion and then diachronically, can be seen to reflect his changing attitudes to both national cultures and languages. Following on culinary themes, Will Carr's article evokes 'food and drink' as well as the 'French cuisine and café culture', which left Anthony Burgess far from indifferent. His analysis shows how 'food and drink' appears throughout Burgess's writing

while being strongly related to identity and memory, and is also used to characterize the particular texture of a place and its people. Finally, Christopher Thurley's article closes the second section by echoing the first one, in which Claude Debussy is often referred to. Entitled "French Harbingers and the Emergence of Modernity in Anthony Burgess's '1889 and the Devil's Mode'", his paper presents a fictional representation of how two French artists and the Eiffel Tower are the harbingers of modernism, and subsequently the forefathers of postmodernism.

The third section, devoted to translations and Anthony Burgess, opens with Jonathan Mann's article entitled: "'A Possible Transmigration': Anthony Burgess and the Modernist Translations of *Cyrano de Bergerac* and *L'Avare*". His paper explores how Burgess's linguistic method pivots on 'profitable mistranslation' which he ascribes to the modernist influences of W.H. Auden, Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot as well as Richard Wilbur. Then, Anna Bogic ponders on the difficulties and complexities of translating into French one of Burgess's masterpieces *A Clockwork Orange*. Her article "Anthony Burgess in French Translation: Still 'as Queer as a Clockwork Orange'" offers interesting insights about the process of successfully adapting a sophisticated novel into another language such as French.

The reader will undoubtedly appreciate some of the strong ties between Anthony Burgess and France, some of which are directly linked to the production of his major works. Anthony Burgess – the self-exiled British writer and composer who humorously, sometimes perhaps ironically, maintained that the French way of life is the antithesis of the English one – certainly had a special relation with France, as the articles in this book show. The book includes numerous in-depth analyses of Anthony Burgess's works in reference to famous French writers – such as Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Lévi-Strauss, Molière, and Rostand – and French composers – such as Berlioz, Bizet, Boulez, Debussy, Ravel, and Saint-Saëns. These artists, indeed French culture in general, left a profound and indelible mark on Anthony Burgess, an influence on his own style that he acknowledges in "France and Myself" when referring to the enthusiasm of the British for French cuisine:

Unfortunately we need French chefs to cook these delicacies, just as we need Frenchmen to write the works of Baudelaire and Mallarmé and compose the music of Berlioz and Ravel. We can't do without the French. Meaning that I can't.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Anthony Burgess, "France and Myself", in *One Man's Chorus*, edited by Ben Forkner (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1998), 73.



**ANTHONY BURGESS AND FRANCE:**  
**AN OVERVIEW**



# ANTHONY BURGESS AND FRANCE: A LIFETIME OF ENTENTE?

GRAHAM WOODROFFE AND MARC JEANNIN

This article is intended to give an overview on the theme of “Anthony Burgess and France”. We aim to illustrate the relationship, special or otherwise, between Burgess and that country through a selection of quotations and original documents, some of which belong to the Fonds Anthony Burgess kept at the Library of the University of Angers. We also take on specific French topics tackled by Burgess and endeavour to comment impartially on his attitude towards France.

## 1. Burgess in France

### 1.1. Visits to France

Anthony Burgess owned a house on the *Côte d’Azur*, at Callian in the Var. However, this was not his main domicile, which – for the last twenty or so years of his life – was not in France but in the Principality of Monaco. The distinction between one and the other is something of a controversial subject for the French, though this did not seem to bother Burgess who, in an article entitled “That Sweet Enemy”, said: “I have been living in Monaco, which is as much as to say France.”<sup>1</sup>

He says he made his first visit to France (i.e. not Monaco) in the summer of 1939, a brief and rain-soaked one, in the chaste company of fiancée Lynne and her friend Margaret. They entered it through Belgium – as the German army would do the following year. Here is how he describes those first impressions in *Little Wilson and Big God*:

We did not go far into France. We slept in our bags under a bright moon near the Maginot Line and wondered about those fortifications stretching from Switzerland to Luxembourg. There had to be a profound statesman’s

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony Burgess, “That Sweet Enemy”, in *Homage to Qwert Yuiop* (London: Abacus, 1987), 78.

secret the common people were too stupid to share, in that sudden cessation at the Belgian border. Perhaps half of the schizoid German mind respected gentlemanly conventions and would consider outflanking not to be cricket. For some reason we slept uneasily. I heard tanks in my sleep and they turned out to be thunder. We woke soaked. We walked to soaked Montmédy and soaked Sedan and saw a France which has since disappeared – open drains that stank, a fuddled curé irritably hitting at flies as he took his tenth balloon of red. We ate a meal served with French pride – canned sardines, undergrilled horse-meat, a slice of dry cake. The rain poured, the gutters over-flowed, the flies buzzed. We were told that there was an *autobus* to get us to a train to get us back into Belgium, but we spent hours slapping flies that stung our bare legs and no autobus appeared. It turned out that the autobus had been coming and going regularly and we had been too Britishly stupid to notice: the autobus was a broken down Peugeot four-seater driven by a haughty lady. ‘*Vous vous êtes trompés, n’est-ce pas?*’ she haughtily said. The phrase has stuck in my brain like a bar of detestable music. It seemed to sum up the know-all France we would perhaps soon be fighting to deliver.<sup>2</sup>

There will be many instances of complaints about ‘know-all France’ in his future writings, particularly in the journalism. It is also the first in a series of occasions when La France lets Burgess down. An incident at the Air France desk of Nice airport recounted in his article, “Never Again Again”, is just one of many examples. Burgess generally did take somewhat of a masochistic pleasure in recounting how things went wrong for him, wherever he was.

In 1953, aged 36, he, Lynne and a couple of friends crossed the Channel and made a trip from Ambleteuse to Wimereux on the Northern French coast between Calais and Boulogne-sur-mer. In an album of photographs of the trip entitled ‘France!’ – the exclamation mark expressing the relief, presumably, of getting away from the austerity at home – one snapshot shows Burgess seated on the terrace of a restaurant near a sign saying: “*À L’INTÉRIEUR DÉGUSTATION DE MOULES*” (see Photo 1).

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<sup>2</sup> Anthony Burgess, *Little Wilson and Big God* (London: Random House, 1986), 219.



Photo 1. Burgess in France, 1953  
 Courtesy of Fonds Anthony Burgess

Another shows him with one of his companions on his way to Wimereux and is accompanied by the following caption: “*Après Avoir Beaucoup Bu à Ambleuse, On Reprend le Chemin – Tard pour le Déjeuner – Pour Wimereux*”. As well as being a heavy beer drinker, Burgess also liked wine, (he claims to have started with half a bottle of Médoc on the train from Manchester)<sup>3</sup> but also liked other typically French tipples, as indicated by another caption: “An August Week of Heat, Sea, Wine, Pernod, Cognac, etc.” Another shot (see Photo 2) shows him looking youthfully svelte on the beach of Wimereux in 1953 above the caption: “*Sur la Plage en Plein Soleil, Wimereux.*” In this album we see Burgess the *bon vivant*, lover of a French way of life in which, naturally, fine food and good wine feature prominently. In literature, as in life, there was definitely a streak of the Rabelaisian about him.

<sup>3</sup> “On the train from Manchester Central to Harwich I had taken, alone in the first-class dining-car, a dinner of hors d’oeuvres, oxtail soup, poached turbot, saddle of mutton, cabinet pudding and a half-bottle of Médoc, ending with a choice cigar. Damn it, I was on holiday.” (Burgess, *Little Wilson and Big God*, 216).



Photo 2. Burgess lying on the beach, Wimereux 1953  
 Courtesy of Fonds Anthony Burgess

## 1.2. French Affiliations

In his career as a writer, Burgess, born John Wilson Burgess, used several pseudonyms. Anthony Burgess was chosen to get round the Colonial Service veto on publishing his first novel under his own name. Joseph Kell was a nom de plume he adopted after writing six novels between 1959 and 1961 to hide “his prolificness from the critics.”<sup>4</sup> In France, when interviewers hesitated over how to pronounce the ‘g’ of Burgess, he would point out that it was a name of French origin, even rather pretentiously translating it for them as “Antoine Bourgeois”. However, his forwardness had the advantage of creating a persona that would appeal to a French audience, as the late Dougie Milton observed in “The strange case of Antoine Bourgeois”.<sup>5</sup> In 1979, the French interviewer Jacques Chancel understandably assumes his guest is referring to the common family name ‘Bourgeois’ not to the common noun ‘bourgeois’ which Burgess then, condescendingly – and misleadingly – explains is a word used to refer to those who are not ‘workers’.<sup>6</sup> It is one of the ways

<sup>4</sup> Jeutonne Brewer, *Anthony Burgess – A Bibliography* (London: The Scarecrow Press, 1980), x.

<sup>5</sup> Dougie Milton, “The Strange Case of Antoine Bourgeois”, in *The Anthony Burgess Centre’s Newsletter* 7 (December 2004).

<sup>6</sup> Jacques Chancel audio interview *Radioscopie d’Anthony Burgess* (INA, 1979).

Burgess liked to show he was siding with the French, or sometimes more generally with Catholic Europe, against the English. Here is what he says in an interview he gave to Bernard Pivot in 1973:

Il y a deux espèces d'Anglais : les Anglais du Sud et les Anglais du Nord, et je suis de Manchester, je suis Lancasterien, je suis de Lancashire. Et nous sommes tout à fait différents des Anglais de Londres, du sud parce que j'ai toujours pensé que ces Anglais, cette espèce d'Anglais était tout à fait incompréhensible. Un homme comme moi, j'ai pensé que ça valait mieux de retourner, revenir à mon premier endroit qui est l'Europe catholique et alors j'habite en Italie, pays plein de très mauvais catholiques, mais plus sympathiques, plus sympathiques que mes compatriotes. Non, je n'aime pas les Anglais, je n'aime pas les Anglais.<sup>7</sup>

There are two types of Englishmen: those from the South and those from the North. I'm from Manchester, I'm a Lancastrian, from Lancashire and we are quite different from the English from London or from the South. I have always thought *that* type of Englishman altogether incomprehensible. I, on the other hand, thought that it was better to return to the fold of Catholic Europe. So I live in Italy, a country full of very bad Catholics but who are more likeable than my own compatriots. No, I don't like the English, I don't like the English.<sup>8</sup>

## 2. Burgess and France

### 2.1. France and French People

In his literary and journalistic writings Burgess often indulges in scoffing at France and the French. His caricatures can be caustic, to say the least. On television, however, he tends to be complimentary and often succeeds in endearing himself to his French audience. Here, for example, is what he said when being interviewed by Bernard Pivot for the prime-time literary television programme *Apostrophes* in 1988:

Bernard Pivot : Vous racontez la manière dont la tradition britannique voit la France [Bernard Pivot lit un extrait de *Hommage à Qwert Yuiop*]: « La France, ennemie héréditaire, pays de mangeur de grenouilles et de maîtres à danser, de mœurs sexuelles dégoûtantes » – je me demande bien lesquelles – « alliée rapace et indigne de confiance, une nation qui trempe des sachets de thé dans de l'eau de tiède, ne mange rien au petit déjeuner et

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<sup>7</sup> Anthony Burgess in Bernard Pivot TV show *Apostrophes* (INA, 1973).

<sup>8</sup> Idem [trans. Graham Woodroffe].

trop à midi, qui boit beaucoup mais n'est jamais franchement saoule ». [rires du public]

Anthony Burgess : Oui, c'est très bien écrit. [rires du public] En général ce n'est pas mon opinion. J'adore les Français naturellement, surtout ici. Mais je crois que les Français ont un ..., sont différents des Anglais

Bernard Pivot : Oh ben oui! Heureusement! Heureusement! [rires du public]

Anthony Burgess : Les Français sont rationnels, intellectuels. L'intellectualité n'existe pas en Angleterre.

Bernard Pivot : Vous insistez là-dessus.

Anthony Burgess : J'ai vu à Paris un club des intellectuels. Pas possible à Londres. Voilà cette arrogance intellectuelle qu'on ne trouve pas chez nous.

Bernard Pivot : Donc ça c'est un bon point pour les Français.

Anthony Burgess : Très bon, très bon. C'est très bon.<sup>9</sup>

Bernard Pivot: You write about how the British traditionally view the French [Pivot quotes from *Homage to Qwert Yuiop*]: “France the traditional enemy,<sup>10</sup> land of frog-eaters and dancing masters, of dirty sexual habits” – I’m curious to know which – “rapacious and untrustworthy even as an ally, given to dipping teabags in tepid water, eating nothing for breakfast and too much for lunch, heavy-drinking but never honestly drunk” [audience laughter].

Anthony Burgess: Yes, very well written that [audience laughter]. As a rule, I am not of the same opinion. I adore the French, naturally, here especially. But I do think that the French have a ... are different from the English.

Bernard Pivot: Well yes! Thank goodness for that! [audience laughter].

Anthony Burgess: The French are rational, intellectual. Intellectuality does not exist in England.

Bernard Pivot: You are quite categorical about that.

Anthony Burgess: I see there are such things as clubs for intellectuals in Paris. Not possible in London. It's a sign of intellectual arrogance that is not to be found *chez nous*.

Bernard Pivot: That's a point in the favour of the French, then?

Anthony Burgess: Yes indeed; very much so.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Excerpt from Bernard Pivot TV show *Apostrophes* (INA, 1988).

<sup>10</sup> Sir Philip Sidney called her ‘that sweet enemy’ – which is where Burgess got the title of one of his articles

<sup>11</sup> Excerpt from Bernard Pivot TV show *Apostrophes* (INA, 1988) [trans. Graham Woodroffe]. Pivot is being ironic. Not so Burgess it seems.

Later on in the interview, Pivot returns to the subject:

Bernard Pivot : Il y a deux chapitres [dans votre livre] sur les Français. Qu'est-ce qu'on prend ! Ce mot, cet adjectif qui revient très souvent sous votre plume : « les Français sont arrogants. »

Anthony Burgess : Oui, euh oui. C'est pas l'arrogance, c'est une espèce de fierté surtout de leur langue. Ce n'est pas possible pour un étranger comme moi, parler français parce qu'on est toujours corrigé. En conséquence on n'a jamais envie de parler français.

Bernard Pivot : Comment ?

Anthony Burgess : Vous savez bien les Italiens acceptent un étranger qui parle, euh qui parle italien mal, euh qui parle mal italien parce que c'est un tribut à leur culture, à la langue. Mais les Français en ce sens oui sont arrogants ... même les prostituées. [...] Je vous donne un petit exemple. Je crois que j'étais très jeune, je suis entré dans un restaurant et j'ai vu au menu « Fruits » et j'ai dit « Fruits, s'il vous plaît. » « DES fruits, monsieur ! »<sup>12</sup>

Bernard Pivot: There are two chapters [in your book] about the French. We come in for a lot of stick. You very often describe us thus, "The French are arrogant."

Anthony Burgess: Yes, um, yes. It's not arrogance, it's a kind of pride – above all about their language. It's not possible for foreigners like me to speak French because we're always being corrected. So we never like to speak the language.

Bernard Pivot: How's that?

Anthony Burgess: You know how the Italians accept a foreigner who, um, who speaks Italian bad, I mean speaks Italian badly, because it's a tribute to their culture and their language. But in similar circumstances the French are, yes, arrogant ... even the prostitutes [...]. Let me give you a little example. I think it was when I was very young, I went to a restaurant and pointed to the menu where it said, "Fruits" and I said "Fruits, s'il vous plaît". I was corrected. "DES fruits, monsieur."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Excerpt from Bernard Pivot TV show *Apostrophes* (INA, 1988). Anthony Burgess here refers to the same anecdote he wrote in "Morbus Gallicus": "Whereas most nations are delighted that foreigners should speak languages not theirs, however haltingly, the French don't take kindly to foreign garbling of the speech of Corneille and Racine. I remember in a restaurant pointing to the menu, where it said *Fruits*, and saying '*Fruits, s'il vous plaît*,' and the waitress instinctively correcting: '*DES fruits, monsieur.*' Though I live in French-speaking territory, I use French as little as I can. I don't like, even in a tobacconist's, putting myself *in statu pupillari*." (Anthony Burgess, "Morbus Gallicus", in *Homage to Qwert Yuiop* (London: Abacus, 1987), 93).

<sup>13</sup> Excerpt from Bernard Pivot TV show *Apostrophes* (INA, 1988) [trans. Graham Woodroffe].

## 2.2. Burgess and the French Language

The incident recounted above should not make us forget that Anthony Burgess was a polyglot who spoke several European languages well and could pass muster in a variety of non-European tongues. However, as far as French is concerned, even after moving to Monaco in 1974, he admits to a reluctance to use the language:

French is my daily intercourse with shopkeepers and bureaucrats and police but I avoid the language and hence the intercourse as much as I can. I huddle over my typewriter, which, though German, disgorges only English, as I would over a Sussex fire of pearwood or a gasfire in Camberwell. And yet French is my second language; I have known it for forty-five years. I try to explain to myself my seemingly volitional rejection of part of my culture and communication equipment, a rejection expressed not only in avoiding its use but also in refusing to understand it when others speak it. I watch French television and reduce its voices to an intelligible nasal babble. Why? It may have something to do with the nature of the language itself, which seems to me morbid.<sup>14</sup>

Years later, in *You've Had Your Time*, he wrote that, after English, Italian was his second language – French having been relegated to third place, presumably. While his articles on France indicate that he was well acquainted with French idioms, actually speaking the language he found difficult. Indeed he considered French a very difficult language for the British to master. Having an extensive knowledge of phonetics, he was annoyed by his mistakes and the sometimes absurd construction of French words. According to him, French tends to reduce Latin roots to a syllable or even a single phoneme, something he does not appreciate. In his autobiography *Little Wilson and Big God* he explains:

At the end of the academic year I passed my English papers but failed in French and Modern European History at the intermediate level. I could take these again in September, but I had a conviction that I would never pass in history so long as A.J.P. Taylor was there. Fortunately he left, beginning his long elevation, and a man named Bolsover took his place. He accepted the bright ideas and lack of knowledge of my second attempt at the examination, and I passed. I passed in French too, probably because Colin Smith, who was in charge of the oral part, was an amateur violoncellist and found my knowledge of French musical terms adequate. I was glad to be rid of French. It has never been my preferred foreign language.

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<sup>14</sup> Burgess, "That Sweet Enemy", 78.

Rid of it? I have spent the last twelve years living on French-speaking territory, but I have constantly resisted trying to speak it well or, indeed, speaking it at all. I occasionally give lectures in French and appear on French television, but always as though masochistically probing a sore tooth. I know how the French phonemic system operates, and I can phonate the perverse front rounded vowels adequately, but I will not learn the patterns of intonation. To speak French well one has to convert oneself into a temporary Frenchman, and this I refuse to do. I deploy a large and sometimes arcane vocabulary in the service of a display of John Bullishness. This happens especially when I have to appear on radio or television with French writers. I resent their exquisiteness, their proclaimed friability, their writhing at the agonies of producing art. I resent their incestuousness, their assumption that only the Parisian audience counts, their devotion to ephemeral literary theories and doubtful masters like Barthes and Derrida. The language itself I can accept and even revere in its written form, but I am aware that it is tainted with disease. It calls itself the major form of post-imperial Latin, but spoken French is trying to turn itself into an agglutinative lingo like Eskimo. I object to Christ being turned into Chri. There is something profoundly wrong with a language that changes *aqua* into *eau*. I sympathise with the Robert Graves of *Goodbye to All That*, who found his good French a discardable frippery and his bad German a part of his flesh and bone. My own German is atrocious, but I taste ancestral roots and fungi in the language. I married a Latin but I could never become one myself. In exile I sustain a Nordic patriotism.<sup>15</sup>

### 2.3. French Topics

Anthony Burgess wrote many articles dealing with the French and France as well as critical essays on French authors. We have counted at least twenty-eight articles tackling French topics (see Figure 1). Seventeen of these, translated into French for the first time, we selected for *La France et moi – Articles de presse d’Anthony Burgess*.<sup>16</sup> Those articles show that Burgess’s stance towards France and French people is somewhat contrasted and thus difficult to assess, his feelings alternating between admiration and exasperation.

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<sup>15</sup> Burgess, *Little Wilson and Big God*, 202-3.

<sup>16</sup> See Woodroffe et Jeannin, *La France et moi – Articles de presse d’Anthony Burgess*.

- ◆ *A \$200 Million Erector Set*
- ◆ *Camus at his Exercise*
- ◆ *Déjà vu*
- ◆ *Fleurs du mal*
- ◆ *France and Myself*
- ◆ *Francophonia*
- ◆ *Frenglish*
- ◆ *Here Parla Man Marcommunish*
- ◆ *Hic and Ubique*
- ◆ *If Oedipus had Read his Lévi-Strauss*
- ◆ *Letters from Europe*
- ◆ *Master Beckett*
- ◆ *Morbus Gallicus*
- ◆ *Never Again Again*
- ◆ *Our Bedfellow The Marquis de Sade*
- ◆ *Praising Stendhal*
- ◆ *Simone Weil, la vita come sacrificio*
- ◆ *Strega in do Maggiore*
- ◆ *That Sweet Enemy*
- ◆ *The Ball is Free to Roll*
- ◆ *The First Madame Bovary*
- ◆ *The Language of Food*
- ◆ *The Significance of Sade*
- ◆ *Understanding the French*
- ◆ *Unravelling Ravel*
- ◆ *Victor Hugo, hélas*
- ◆ *Vieux Chapeau*
- ◆ *Yves and Eve*

Figure 1. List Anthony Burgess's articles on French topics

In his notebooks of the early 1960s – some of which are in our Anthony Burgess archives – we find many notes on France or French topics. Burgess made those notes while watching television programmes such as *Tonight*, *Monitor* and *Panorama* to help him with the articles he wrote as TV reviewer of *The Listener*. Here are some examples. In 1964, having tuned in to the *Tonight* programme, which inspired him to draw a cartoon, then, never one to miss an opportunity to write something for an anniversary, he noted that the Eiffel tower was 75 years old. He also took notes on the Concord, placing a slash between the 'd' and the final 'e' (Concord/e) to represent the difference between the English and French

names of the supersonic aircraft<sup>17</sup> as well as punning on ‘entente cordiale’ by writing ‘entente concordiale’ and asking “when will USSST [United States Super Sonic Transport] be ready?” The notes about the Concorde were used for the article “Déjà Vu”, published in *The Listener*.<sup>18</sup> In “Never Again Again”, world-weary traveller Burgess would write about a flight on Concorde: manhandled onto the aircraft at Charles de Gaulle, gargantuanly wined and dined on board, poured out of it onto the tarmac with the other passengers at JFK.

Burgess also took notes about *Les Halles*, the old food market in the heart of Paris that, in 1964, was due to be demolished. He notes from the *Tonight* report on it that the French spend half of their income on food. The notes were used for articles in *The Listener* and *The New York Times*, respectively entitled “Hic and Ubique” and “A \$200 Million Erector Set”.<sup>19</sup>

Under his transcription of the score of the signature tune of the current affairs programme *Monitor*, Burgess recorded his observations about Camus’s *Caligula*, a character not entirely dissimilar from his own Alex, the main character of his dystopian novel *A Clockwork Orange*.

### 3. Burgess’s French Influences

#### 3.1. French Inspiration

France was a great source of inspiration for Anthony Burgess. There are a large number of books by French authors in his libraries. Most are in translation and these include, in the Anthony Burgess collection in Angers,

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<sup>17</sup> According to British politician Tony Benn: “The original plan was that both the French and English Concordes would be spelled thus, with an ‘e’. But Macmillan had been insulted by De Gaulle on one visit; De Gaulle had said he had a cold and couldn’t see him. So Macmillan came back and removed the ‘e’ from the end. When I went to Toulouse for the [French] roll-out in 1969, I decided to put it back again. We had to have the same name for the same aircraft, and besides, it was reversing an insult to the French, which I wasn’t in favour of. I didn’t tell anybody I was planning to do it, but once I had announced it in Toulouse, they couldn’t do anything about it. I said: ‘E stands for excellence, for England, for Europe and for the entente cordiale.’ I might have added ‘E stands for escalation,’ because, of course, it was very expensive, but I didn’t say that at the time.” (Tony Benn, “Sonic booms and that ‘e’ on the end”, in *The Guardian* (17 October 2003), <<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2003/oct/17/theairlineindustry.g21>>).

<sup>18</sup> Anthony Burgess, “Déjà Vu”, in *The Listener* (7 September 1967), 315-6.

<sup>19</sup> Anthony Burgess, “Hic and Ubique”, in *The Listener* (23 April 1964), 694-5. Anthony Burgess, “A \$200 Million Erector Set”, in *The New York Times* (1977).

a whole set of Nobel prize winner Romain Rolland's fictional biography of a composer called Jean-Christophe.<sup>20</sup> This life of a composer from humble and unpromising beginnings may have inspired his novel about Mozart. We could also mention his debt to structuralism and in particular to Lévi-Strauss whose work provided inspiration for the novel *M/F*.

If Anthony Burgess's life was destined to emulate anyone's, it was none other than that of Albion's arch enemy – at least, according to his father who, in *Little Wilson and Big God*, is described beerily breathing above the cot in which he lay and proclaiming: “He may be the new Napoleon.”<sup>21</sup>

### 3.2. Burgess on Literature and France

His writings started to receive critical acclaim in France in the late 1960s. The French took him seriously, seeing him as a European writer, not simply a British one. At one time, his novels sold better in France than in the UK. The French made him ‘Commandeur des arts et lettres’ in 1986. The accolades he received in the UK were rather trifling in comparison.

In 1973, in an interview with *L'Express*, he identifies with French writers of a Catholic tradition going back to Rabelais:

J'ai toujours pensé que si je devais avoir un public, il serait français. La littérature anglaise a toujours eu tendance à être un peu sentimentale. Nous vivons encore à l'ombre de Dickens. La France, elle, a une tradition de dureté, qui, pour moi, remonte à Rabelais. C'est la tradition dans laquelle j'aime me placer : dure avec ce côté intensément physique et satirique, et aussi cette vigueur néologique. Cette perpétuelle invention de mots pour rendre de nouveaux modes d'expérience, de nouvelles façons de sentir est pour moi un besoin impératif. Rabelais représente la tradition européenne catholique. Le protestantisme conduit éventuellement à la sentimentalité. Le catholicisme a toujours été inflexible, il a toujours eu en lui ce noyau de dureté intellectuelle.<sup>22</sup>

I have always thought that my ideal reader would be French. English literature has always tended to be rather sentimental; we are still living in the shadow of Dickens. France has a tradition of hardness which, for me, goes back to Rabelais. It is a tradition I like to see myself as part of: hard, intensely physical and satirical as well as being neologically vigorous. This perpetual invention of words so as to be able to describe new modes of

<sup>20</sup> Romain Rolland, *Jean-Christophe* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1905).

<sup>21</sup> Anthony Burgess, *Little Wilson and Big God*, 17.

<sup>22</sup> Anthony Burgess interviewed by Sophie Lannes in *L'Express* (1973).

experience and new ways of feeling is, for me, absolutely essential. Rabelais represents the European Catholic tradition. Catholicism has always been rigorous, always with intellectual hardness at its heart. Protestantism, on the other hand, ultimately courts sentimentality.<sup>23</sup>

Anthony Burgess particularly admired French authors such as Rabelais, Baudelaire, Flaubert, Camus, Sartre, and Céline. But he was very critical of others, including for example Victor Hugo, Stendhal and Simone de Beauvoir who are the subjects of articles included in *La France et moi – Articles de presse d'Anthony Burgess*. Furthermore, interviewed by the Ingersolls, he strongly criticized the exponents of the nouveau roman, notably Nathalie Sarraute and Michel Butor.<sup>24</sup> Here is what he said about George Perec when interviewed on television by Antonia Byatt in 1988:

Antonia Byatt: “We were talking about George Perec just before we came in here and you said “oh that is not a novel [*La Vie mode d'emploi*] because there are no people in it”.

[...]

Anthony Burgess: It's a French book and in consequence it's been infected by this phenomenology of Husserl which of course Nathalie Sarraute brought up in her first novel, *Le Planétarium*, in which she said in effect that human personalities don't exist. Human personalities have to be viewed anatomically, not in terms of a unity, and that was the beginning of the anti-novel in which there are no human characters. I think this book of Perec's is the ultimate anti-novel in that it's about places where people live but you don't see the people. And I feel the French are not very good at creating characters these days; they've sort of lost the knack, there are no Flauberts around in France.<sup>25</sup>

### 3.3. Translations/Adaptations of French Works

Anthony Burgess made a number of adaptations of French works, such as:

- *Miser! Miser!* an English adaptation of *L'Avare* de Molière (still unpublished).
- *Cyrano de Bergerac* (Burgess made two versions, one in 1971, another in 1985). This was followed in 1990 by a film version

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<sup>23</sup> Idem [trans. Graham Woodroffe].

<sup>24</sup> Earl Ingersoll and Mary Ingersoll, *Conversations with Anthony Burgess* (University Press of Mississippi, 2008), 84 and 135-6.

<sup>25</sup> TV show *Writers Talk: Anthony Burgess with A.S. Byatt* (Fonds Anthony Burgess, 1988).

directed by Jean-Paul Rappeneau and with English subtitles written in sprung rhythm by Burgess. It starred Gérard Depardieu who won the best actor award at the Cannes Film Festival and was also nominated for an Academy Award.

- *Carmen* (he wrote the English libretto of this opera by Bizet for a new production at the English National Opera in 1986).
- *The Eve of Saint Venus* (one of the sources for this story is Prosper Mérimée's *La Vénus d'Ille*)

In the early 1960s he also translated three contemporary novels from the French in collaboration with his wife Lynne:

- *The Man Who Robbed Poor Boxes* [original title: *Deo Gratias*], by Jean Servin, London: Gollancz, 1965.
- *The New Aristocrats* [original title: *Les Nouveaux Aristocrates*], by Michel de Saint-Pierre, London: Gollancz, 1962.
- *The Olive Trees of Justice* [original title: *Les Oliviers de la justice*], by Jean Pelegri, London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1962.

Burgess also collaborated with the French film director Jean-Jacques Annaud who had asked him to create a language that might have been spoken by prehistoric man for his film *La Guerre du feu* (*Quest for Fire*).

France and French music were also a source of inspiration for him when he composed. Here are some musical works (see Figure 2) that are directly linked to France.

- ◆ *An Afternoon on the Phone* [arrangement for six-piece dance orchestra of Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*]
- ◆ *The Eve of Saint Venus* (opera libretto and music by Burgess) [piano/vocal score]
- ◆ *Cyrano de Bergerac* (Rostand, trans. Burgess) [incidental music for chamber ensemble]
- ◆ *Petite Symphonie pour Strasbourg* [orchestra]
- ◆ *Marche pour une révolution 1789-1989* [orchestra]
- ◆ *Quatre Préludes* (in homage to Debussy) [orchestral arrangement]
- ◆ *Feux d'Artifice* (in homage to Debussy) [orchestral arrangement]
- ◆ *Quatuor en Hommage à Maurice Ravel (numéro 1) pour Guitares*
- ◆ *Concerto de Piano en Hommage à Maurice Ravel*

Figure 2. List of some Burgess's musical compositions linked to France