

Book Review

A Clockwork Orange - by Anthony Burgess. Ballantine Books. 191 pp. \$.95.

"That was everything. I'd done the lot, now. And me still only fifteen." - Alex

by mjj

This is a book of stunning power. It is a brutal and vicious tour de force, following the life and times of a young British hoodlum - gang leader in a futuristic society where criminals are 'reformed' into obedient, subservient, choiceless beings. Above all, A Clockwork Orange is, I think, one of the very few truly exciting and mesmerizing literary efforts produced in recent years.

Anthony Burgess is a British author, currently teaching Creative Writing at Princeton. His most significant ability (on the basis of this book) is his control of - and willingness to use - the language in an inventive and bold fashion. A Clockwork Orange would be an interesting, but unspectacular work, were it not for the way in which Burgess tells his tale.

Most so-called 'contemporary' authors (those who write about the 'real' issues of the day) are dreadfully pretentious when they attempt to capture the sense - the gut - of a particular life style. Matters such as language turn from realism to contrived, ludicrous garble, and we get a caricature - a poor one at that - of something once real and honest and even vital. (For the best example of what I mean, try reading any one of the many novels on the market today which portend to deal with the 'New Generation').

Burgess has avoided this. He places his characters in a (somewhat) futuristic setting and invents for them a slashing vocabulary comprised of Russian and English Cockney slang (and the implications there should tell you something about the political nature of the book.) In doing so, Burgess has created an atmosphere that grasps - at least symbolically - the sense of independence and thirst for revolution that seems to accompany all youth, while still remaining original and engaging.

Clockwork is not an easy book to read. Until you become familiar with the language patterns it's necessary to keep checking the glossary at the back. But understand, this isn't a contrivance, a gimmick, it's an intriguing and important aspect of the book.

For example, here's Alex (the gang leader) telling of his plans for the night:

And, viddying her lying there with her goodies on show, I wondered should I or not, but that was for later on in the evening. Then we cleaned the till, and

there was flip horrorshow takings that nochy, and we had a few packs of the very best cancers apiece, then off we went, O my brothers.

Clockwork is narrated by young Alex (Your O Humble Narrator, O My Brothers), who delights in smashing up people for a lark. Alex and the boys get behind violence for one simple reason: they dig it, it turns them on. It never really occurs to them that they are hurting people. They are motivated by pure instinct - the thrill of it all.

This may be hard for some readers to take. Parts of the book are extremely ugly and perverse. The beating scenes are described in proud detail and Alex spares us none of his enthusiasm. Still, the words flow with a kind of lyric poetry that locks you into the book:

So we cracked into him lovely, grinning all over our litos, but still he went on singing. Then we tripped him so he laid down flat and heavy and a bucketload of beer-vomit came whooshing out. That was disgusting so we gave him the boot, one each go, and then it was blood, not song or vomit, that came out of his filthy rot. Then we went our way.

Other scenes are striking in their communication of passion, however bizarre the circumstances may be. I doubt that many readers could ever forget the passages of Alex resting in his bed at night, listening full blast to Ludwig Van's Ninth, conjuring up incredible dreams of blood and face-kicking, having uncontrollable orgasms when the music - and the fantasized violence - climaxes. Burgess really turns in some breathtaking writing.

But A Clockwork Orange doesn't succeed on its stylistic merits alone. The story is a compelling one. We follow Alex as he commits one atrocity after another until he is finally caught and sent to prison. There he is 'rehabilitated' with shock treatments which alter him into a passive, complying individual. Released, he returns to the world he knew and finds it drastically changed and himself a betrayed outcast. Finally, Alex encounters one of his former victims and learns in full what a clockwork orange is (although Alex always knew.) Beneath the sado-violence, there runs a deep and disturbing social and political connotation.

This is a brilliant book, savagely written and as terse as anything I've read in the last decade. It is also a deadly (blackly) humorous book, one that at once satirizes and warns. It is not totally flawless, but the failures are hardly noticeable in the face of the total accomplishment. I recommend that you read A Clockwork Orange. But be advised: it is a masterfully violent book. Be prepared and pay attention.

(This isn't exactly "literary" in nature, folks, but we think it's important enough to include here and now).

The events of the last several days - the drugs arrests, tales of informers, and the ultimate accusations from both sides of the spectrum that students and-or administrators are in some sense "outlaws" or "villains" - has brought about the final realization, at least on our part, that some things should be said.

The seven students involved in the busts are not notorious criminals, are not wayward degenerates, and any notion that they are should be and must be immediately dispelled. If anything, these people were victims. What is most important, however, is that it seems that a great lesson has been learned, a truth recognized, not only by some of the students involved, but by this community at large. That, we feel, is of the

utmost importance.

But there are other things which must be made known.

A lot of people have been condemning, both publicly and privately, the President of this institution, Robert Ward. Since the special convocation of Friday, April 23, many people have expressed the feeling that they think Robert Ward was in some way "responsible" for the drug arrests. It was intimated that he worked hand in hand with the SBI, even that he in some way assisted in the process of busting. This has occurred largely because of a statement Ward made during that convocation concerning a list of names and room numbers (and off-campus addresses) of students at the school.

Since then, Ward has been under extreme pressure from the student body who feel that they have been in some way betrayed.

However, there is another side to this story which should

Rocknroll

Randy Burns and Band have been around, off and on, for several years - a bunch of Yale dropouts playing coffeeshouses and the whole folk circuit around New Haven, trying to get an album together. Now, finally, Randy Burns and the Sky Dog Band have an album (their second) out on Mercury.

The sound is elite country-western, a little more sophisticated than Nashville music, though still clinging to the simplicity of that style. The music is very controlled, very rehearsed, with polished harmonies and immaculate instrumentation, but still manages to sound relaxed and easy. Burns is basically a solo musician, relying on the strength of his voice and acoustic guitar to get his songs out; his band is merely added support. The background vocals (done chiefly by A.J. Mulhern) stay well in the background, enhancing rather than contending with the leads. Piano reinforces lead guitar with hammered out major chord sequences, now and then indulging in a flashy glissando. On one cut, "Blue Line", the piano gets into some jumping ragtime bar music - this credited to an anonymous entity

by Tony Angevine

called Oz. The other keyboard work is done by Matt Kastner, who also does electric guitar, dashing off tight rock 'n roll riffs, or intricate fast-finger flamenco picking, or a shrill country whine while Burns' acoustic guitar takes care of the rhythm and introductory passages. Bruce Samuels' bass is delightfully precocious, carrying the melody line often, other times getting down the beat with lithe jumps and slides, especially in "Waiting For An Old Friend" in which drums are omitted altogether. David Bromberg pops up on two cuts with dobro and the inevitable bottleneck guitar - a competent musician. And drummer John O'Leary sounds like he could back just about anybody - maintaining the country-folk feeling with a rock 'n roll flair, similar to that of B.J. Wilson of Procol Harum - expressing the music more than merely backing it up with a beat.

The songs themselves are simple and uncluttered in the country-western tradition. Burns is a skillful songwriter, sticking with melodic, singable tunes, and lyrics that, for the most part, reflect a good natured disillusionment with the great

romantic myth. "August Woman" begins: "Oh, I love my August woman- Sometimes she treats me well- She gives me lots of lovin'- Times she even gives me hell." The there's "To The Women of My Life" where he lays it on the line for the chicks who have been a little too selfish for his easy loving ways. And "Seventeen Years on The River" about the burden of maintaining a relationship.

Probably the best cut on the album is "Livin' in the Country", one of two not written by Burns; it's fast-paced country music that puts you in the sunshine away from city gripes. Really enthusiastic stuff..

The Sky Dog people make refreshing music. In spite of the control and obvious concentration on the music as a whole rather than individual performances, it still sounds loose and you can tell the band is digging what it's doing. But because they are less outstanding than simply very good, they are likely to have a rough time making an impression on the rock world. They deserve attention. Give them a listen and see what you think.

First Debate

As I glanced across the arena toward our opponents, I thought, "Gee, they look as nervous as I hope we don't!"

We were sitting in room 20 of the Babcock Memorial Hall: By we, I mean Margaret Harris, Mrs. Corson, Mrs. Young, Mr. Frohn and myself. Margaret and I made up the affirmative team of the newly formed NCSA debate team. The others were our fan club and moral support.

We were waiting for the three judges to finish writing out the preliminary information on their ballots. Never being one to waste time, I sat there trying my hardest to psych out my opponents, while at the same time reading through my speech. Everytime I looked at it, it had changed and this was the first time I had read this version out loud.

Finally the judges finished writing down the team names and other information and we were ready to start. One of the judges looked in my direction and nodded. How had she known I was the first speaker? I was nervous but I hoped it didn't show. I guess it did, because as I started to go, Margaret squeezed my arm and smiled.... something in her smile said "Don't worry." (But I did anyway.) I turned and nodded to the others and started down the three short steps into the well.

They say a man's life passes before his eyes as he is about to

A Narrative

die. Well my whole life did not pass before my eyes, but in those few steps down to the non-existent podium, at least the two weeks in which I had known about this foolish venture did!

Let's see, it was just about three weeks ago when my mother came popping through the front door and said, "Guess what Gary Burke is doing!" (I was talking on the phone at the time.)

"What?" I said, as I hung up the phone.

"He's starting a debate team." I wandered into the living room and began to read the Sunday comics for about the third time.

"You see there is this program that is being sponsored by the Wake Forest debaters." (By now she was in the kitchen opening a can of cream of celery soup. I turn another page of the comics.) "All the area high schools are invited to participate. They are debating the topic, Resolved: There should be an all volunteer army. Why don't you join Gary's team?"

I put down the comics, because it had caught my interest in spite of myself. "How do you know?"

"Gary dropped by the Essay office today and wanted to put a notice in the paper."

Well that was that until about a week later when the paper came out. I saw the notice and decided to contact Gary Burke. When I called, I found that I had missed the first meeting. The others who had signed up were Margaret

by Kevin Dreyer

Harris, John Sherrill, and Carrie Jones.

That afternoon I called the American Friends Service Committee and Wilmer Mizell's Winston-Salem office and asked for any information they could send on an all-volunteer army. Four days later I received a copy of the Presidential Commission report and a book called, "Why the Draft?"

That weekend we had another meeting and divided ourselves into affirmative and negative: Margaret and I on the affirmative and Carrie and John on the negative.

I began a week of half-hearted work. I only actually read the first two chapters of the Gates Commission report and didn't even begin to write my speech until Friday night. So the weekend before the debate was really hectic.

Saturday afternoon I met with one of our Wake Forest coaches and found out that he wanted my speech done on Sunday rather than on Monday. I also found out that I was to have a totally new one ready for a rehearsal debate to be held Sunday evening.

"But don't worry," he said, "You can probably make it up."

Sunday afternoon we had another meeting and I finished writing my speech just as Gary walked through the door. We went through my speech and everyone agreed that there were

Continued On Page 8

be made public.

Almost simultaneously with the drug arrests, three NCSA high-school students "ran away," took off from school without anyone knowing it. Naturally, such an occurrence has to cause concern. Ward and the administration were working with the police in this matter. They were concerned. And, officers from the local Juvenile Dept. were on campus during this time, trying to find the whereabouts of the missing persons. They were having a great deal of difficulty finding any information. Because of this, Ward was asked to furnish the head of the Juvenile Dept. with a list of names and room numbers of students at NCSA. Mr. Ward, did so, as I assume most of us would have under the circumstances. It would thus seem that he did not know that a bust was imminent and that he gave names, etc. only in the aftermath of the problems finding the missing

students.

It may well be that the Juvenile Division and the SBI were working together and that this was a device on their part to get names, but apparently Ward did not knowingly assist in the busting of students.

Why didn't he say this at the convocation?

This whole event has been a harrowing one. It has caused a lot of irrational thinking and speaking, it has caused a lot of people to lose their usual sense of perspective. Busts can do that to you, whoever you are.

But the point is that we, who are so insistent that the axiom of "innocent until proven guilty" be upheld, have not done so ourselves. We have jumped at this chance and criticize and condemn someone who was apparently innocent in what he was doing.

This is not to say that Ward has acted with absolute clarity in this situation or that his actions have matched the

concern he expresses. We feel that he has been at times unreasonable and that his whole stylistic approach to the job of administrator has been less than convincing. However, it is wrong to condemn him and fight him for something he did not do, at least not knowingly. A reappraisal of the situation is in order and perhaps a reconsideration about what we have felt and said about the man. We do not agree with all of his words and stands on the matter, but we do strongly feel that he should not be blamed for something he may have had no part in.

At the very least, we think we should all inspect this very closely before making random accusations. Just as other people should think before declaring the seven busted students "villains." Really people, we're never going to get anywhere that way. - mjj