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Reviewed by

[Download PDF](#)**[Carly Eloise Rowley \(bio\)](#)**Paul Phillips (2010) *A Clockwork Counterpoint: The Music and Literature of Anthony Burgess*  
Manchester: Manchester University Press, 512pp.

Anthony Burgess's relationship with film music began at an early age. His father, Joseph Wilson, would play piano accompaniment for the silent films and newsreels at the Palace Cinema in Manchester. It was located next door to the Golden Eagle pub, which was the Burgess family home at this time ([Biswell 2005](#): 13–15). Furthermore, it was cinema that provided a particularly fond early memory for Burgess. In 1927, he saw Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, remarking that it was 'one of the major artistic experiences of my life' ([Burgess 1998](#): 74). Lang's film stirred an interest in science fiction and dystopia, an influence readily seen in Burgess's novels of the 1960s, such as *A Clockwork Orange* and *The Wanting Seed* (both published in 1962). *A Clockwork Orange* is probably his most successful novel and much about both the book and Kubrick's filmic adaptation of 1971 is illuminated through Paul Phillips's study. Burgess's fame may partly be attributed to Kubrick's adaptation, which has created a synonymous relationship between the two versions of the story. However, readers might be far less familiar with the many musical works that Burgess composed throughout his life, which form the principal focus of *A Clockwork Counterpoint*. Ranging from larger works such as symphonies and concerti, to chamber music and songs, Burgess's musical output is highly varied in both style and genre. In his approach to film, Burgess was a man who whole-heartedly immersed himself in the project at hand, often producing scores (usually not requested) to accompany scripts that had been commissioned from him. Amongst the plethora of musical material discussed in Phillips's text are nine instances of composition for film and television. These include projects such as *A.D.*, a five-part mini-series on the birth of Christianity, for which Burgess composed forty minutes of substantial score (155); proposed filmic adaptations of the novels *Beard's Roman Women* and the *Enderby* series (125, 229); and the TV mini-series *Moses the Lawgiver*, for which his score was rejected, with Ennio Morricone replacing him for the final version (151). Such activity demonstrates Burgess's persistent desire to control the reception of a work: unfortunately, he seems to have had rather bad luck when it came to scoring music for film and television.

Nothing of the scope of Phillips's *A Clockwork Counterpoint* has been seen within the area of Burgess Studies. However, this text is largely a series [[End Page 95](#)] of observations, as opposed to an analytical or academic tract. Rather than presenting a central argument at its heart, Phillips instead shows us the depth of Burgess's output through 'snapshots': themed chapters in a loosely biographical structure. This structure widens the appeal of the text, for one can view it as many things: a biography; an interdisciplinary study of music; an introduction to Burgess as polymath, etc. Therefore it is possible either to 'dip in' or read the book from one end to the other and still gain something valuable.<sup>1</sup>

Phillips states his aim for the text as follows:

As long as Burgess's musical side has remained largely unknown, understanding of his twin accomplishments has been incomplete ... This book's primary aim is thus to examine this heretofore disregarded aspect of his creative life and, by doing so, reveal both halves of this remarkable dual artist.

(6)

In other words, Phillips's aim is to place Burgess's music at the forefront of the discussion of his creative work, an area that has received notably less critical attention in comparison with his novels. Phillips's own observations predominate within this text,

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with references to other scholars where applicable often being contained in the endnotes to a chapter. It would have been useful to observe Phillips's engagement with the ideas of scholars such as Christine Lee Gengaro, for her work has directly approached the music of the book, film and play versions of *A Clockwork Orange*.<sup>2</sup> This would demonstrate a more direct engagement with the new musical criticism surfacing within Burgess Studies. Nevertheless, Phillips fulfils his initial aim, in covering a vast amount of material and continually traversing all avenues of Burgess's work.

This text provides an important introduction to Burgess's musical accomplishments, whilst allowing space for others to approach Burgess's musical work and to present their own research perspectives upon it. Furthermore, due to the variety of the author/composer's output, one can investigate his music from many angles, including those of film and television, chamber music and larger musical forms, amongst others. In undertaking the task of addressing both the music and literature, Phillips provides a more complete picture of the man behind the multitude of works. With the assistance of the International Anthony Burgess Foundation (IABF) in Manchester and the Anthony Burgess Centre – located within the University of Angers, France, the subject of Burgess Studies is a burgeoning area. The cataloguing of archival material at the IABF is currently still in progress, with new works continually being discovered. However, despite this increasing interest, many will not be fully aware of the integral connections between music, literature, film, [End Page 96] journalism, etc., which manifest themselves throughout Burgess's creative output. Furthermore, the extent of his engagement with other writers in his musical settings – including Shakespeare and Joyce – might also be little known. In *A Clockwork Counterpoint*, Phillips opens up these important issues and provides the reader with a path through Burgess's musical oeuvre.

Throughout the text, Phillips inserts excerpts from scores, ranging from a single line to a full page. By including this material, he conveys the breadth of Burgess's compositional talents and the inclusion of a CD might further improve this text, allowing us to hear what these examples from Burgess's scores are meant to sound like. In recent years, publications by the Anthony Burgess Centre under the auspices of the Presses de l'université d'Angers have included CDs with their critical volumes, an indispensable resource to those with an interest in hearing this music.<sup>3</sup>

As previously stated, the discussion of *A Clockwork Orange* in all forms provides the starting point for a consideration of Burgess's creative output. Phillips himself recognises this appeal and the 'Clockwork Counterpoint' title also resonates with the orange of the dust cover. Phillips considers the novella within three chapters, 'Nasty Little Shockers', 'Kubrick the Sinny Veck' and 'Alex in Eden', as well as charting Burgess's relationship with Stanley Kubrick and through Burgess's own 1986 theatrical adaptation entitled *A Clockwork Orange: A Play with Music*. The story of Burgess and Kubrick is complex, but it nevertheless has resulted in both the novella and the film acquiring cult status. Furthermore, whilst Kubrick never completed his film about Napoleon, he did encourage Burgess to write a novel based on the life of Napoleon, completed in 1974 and entitled *Napoleon Symphony*. In this text, Burgess utilised Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony as an integral element of its structure. In addition, Kubrick's prevailing usage of Beethoven in his filmic adaptation of *A Clockwork Orange* was seen to influence Burgess greatly in the 1986 adaptation of his own novella into a musical play. (Gengaro 2006: 157). Phillips describes the stage version as 'a satirical black comedy closer to Monty Python than Harold Pinter' (302) and proceeds to discuss the importance of music within this adaptation, arguing that the musical finale was a method of repaying Kubrick for the unwanted attention that Burgess received from this highly controversial piece of cinema based on his own novella. Phillips highlights that Burgess wrote his own screenplay for Kubrick's consideration, but that the screenplay was not used. Angered by Kubrick's decision to produce a book to accompany his film adaptation – entitled *Stanley Kubrick's A Clockwork Orange* – and seemingly tired of discussing a novel that he felt was less than his best, Burgess inserts a character who is 'bearded' and meant to resemble Kubrick, to enter the play's [End Page 97] finale and recite 'Singin' in the Rain' on trumpet.<sup>4</sup> This melody is played in counterpoint with Beethoven's 'Ode to Joy', before 'Kubrick' is booted off the stage. Phillips's discussion of Burgess's own Prelude to his 'Play with Music' is of particular note: through his analysis, with accompanying score examples, we gain a greater understanding of how, through dissonance, Burgess achieved a distortion of harmony akin to Wendy Carlos Williams's score for Kubrick's film (308–9). Whilst we receive a thorough introduction to a number of representative

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works, the issues concerning the significance of Burgess using Beethoven, for example, are underdeveloped. Such omissions are understandable in part, due to the large amount of music covered within the text. Nevertheless, it would have been desirable to see more critical analysis of the significance, intention and impact of Burgess's compositional choices demonstrated here.

In addition to the sections concerning *A Clockwork Orange*, Phillips's observations regarding Burgess and Joyce are also revealing. There are two chapters in which Joyce is mentioned with particular emphasis, the latter of these being 'Odes to Joyce', which discusses the musical *Blooms of Dublin*, performed on BBC/RTÉ Radio in 1982. This musical version of Joyce's novel *Ulysses* includes over twenty songs, as well as several choral and orchestral pieces. An issue that becomes apparent within the discussion of this work is its genre, for it is not clear if it is a musical, operetta or opera, or a combination of various genres. Its placement on radio – as opposed to the stage – further problematises this discussion.

Whilst listening to the BBC/RTÉ Radio production, one is struck by the operatic delivery of Burgess's musical numbers. Indeed, Burgess employed separate individuals for both the speaking and musical roles of each character. In relation to the voice at certain 'dramatic moments', Phillips compares Burgess's aria 'Melonfields' to Gian Carlo Menotti's *The Medium*, premiered in 1946 (271). I would like to have read more observations such as these, for this comment throws further light on the issues surrounding the genre of work that Burgess had created here, particularly as *The Medium* was converted into a film in 1951. In addition, Phillips states that Burgess's instrumental section, 'Music for Nighttown', is reminiscent of Prokofiev's *The Love for Three Oranges*, a work that originates from the same period as Joyce's *Ulysses* (273). Once again, for Phillips to highlight a comparison – this time with Prokofiev – further problematises the genre of *Blooms of Dublin*, as *The Love for Three Oranges* is a satirical opera. It is only once we reach the end of Phillips's summary of *Blooms* that he begins to critique directly the work, albeit rather briefly.

This chapter illustrates the book's strength: it provides a well-reasoned introduction that one could use as a springboard into the next level of analysis. Integral to the appeal of this text is Phillips's ability to point the [End Page 98] reader to moments of quotation-as-reprisal or self-quotation from Burgess. This latter is witnessed throughout Burgess's oeuvre and Phillips is adept at spotting it. Furthermore, his ability to recognise such self-quotation/borrowing throughout this body of work demonstrates Phillips's deep regard for, and knowledge of, the music. For example, he notes that, undeterred by the failure of the film projects previously mentioned, Burgess would insert themes from these projects into his other compositions. Indeed, one of the themes for the television project *Moses the Lawgiver* was later inserted into his 3rd Symphony, the 'Symphony in C' (151).

To conclude, this text is indispensable for its groundwork. Whilst it could benefit from more instances of detailed critical discussion, this might detract from the accessibility of the text. Phillips's book will enable readers to absorb a full introduction the author/composer's work and select their own areas for further investigation. At the beginning of my research into Burgess's musical adaptations, I was extremely grateful to Phillips for providing such a considered introduction to all areas of Burgess's musical achievements.

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Genaro, Christine Lee (2006) 'Using Ludwig van Like That: The Shift of Autobiographical Presence and Perspective in the Novel and Stage Versions of *A Clockwork Orange*', in Woodroffe, Graham (ed.) *Anthony Burgess: Autobiographer*. Angers: Presses de l'université d'Angers, pp. 153–68. [End Page 99]

#### Footnotes

**1.** Due to the immense task that Phillips has set himself in providing a study that addresses each area of Burgess's musical work in

under 500 pages, it has been necessary for him to be selective as to the pieces and other elements of Burgess' output that he discusses. Notably, Phillips writes about the larger works (concerti, symphonies, the ballet, etc.) at greater length than some of the more obscure smaller works.

**2.** See Christine Lee Gengaro (2013) *Listening to Stanley Kubrick: The Music in His Films*, Maryland: Scarecrow Press. She discusses the music of *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *A Clockwork Orange*, *Barry Lyndon*, *The Shining* and *Eyes Wide Shut*.

**3.** See Woodroffe, Graham and Paul Vernadakis (ed.) (2003) *Portraits of the Artist in A Clockwork Orange*: Angers: Press de l'Université d'Angers; Woodroffe, Graham (ed.) (2005) *Anthony Burgess: Autobiographer*; Jeannin, Marc (ed.) (2010) *Anthony Burgess: Selected Songs*, etc.

**4.** This song, written by Nacio Herb Brown and adopted in Kubrick's filmic adaptation of *A Clockwork Orange* to underpin a rape scene, does not feature in Burgess's original novella.

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