

Encore

# Imperfect Man<sup>1</sup>

ANTHONY BURGESS

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*Introduction, by Andrew Biswell*

*Very little is known about the context of this late lecture, written by Anthony Burgess to be delivered before an audience. A photocopy of the typescript survives in the archive of the International Anthony Burgess Foundation. It was rediscovered in 2019 when a large collection of literary papers, mostly consisting of journalism and book reviews, was transferred to the Foundation from the offices of Burgess's former literary agent. It was unusual for Burgess to make such detailed notes for a lecture. He prepared less carefully when he delivered the T. S. Eliot Memorial Lectures at the University of Kent in 1980, apparently improvising most of his material in the lecture room and at the piano. It is possible that the lecture was delivered, with minor variations, on more than one occasion: there is a second typescript, titled "The Novel and Imperfect Man," among the Burgess papers at the Harry Ransom Centre in Austin, Texas.*

*"Imperfect Man" offers a rapid and well-informed tour of modern literature, with reference to many of the twentieth-century writers about whom Burgess was most enthusiastic. James Joyce and T. S. Eliot will be familiar reference points to those who know Burgess, but it is surprising to see him writing in such detail about Aldous Huxley, Franz Kafka, and Rex Warner. The approach is more personal, and more engaging, than readers might expect if they have waded through Burgess's more sober*

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<sup>1</sup> *The AnaChronisT* would like to express the editors' sincerest gratitude to the International Anthony Burgess Foundation in Manchester and director Prof. Andrew Biswell for giving us permission to publish this most valuable essay for the first time. The only changes made by the editors were some very minor corrections concerning a few obvious typographical errors and the standardisation of certain recurring expressions.

## IMPERFECT MAN

*works of literary history, such as English Literature: A Survey for Students (originally published under his real name, John Burgess Wilson) and They Wrote in English, a two-volume literary history and anthology, produced for the educational market.*

*The lecture was written in 1992, the year in which Burgess travelled to Italy to launch a translation of his novel, Any Old Iron. In October 1992, while on another book tour in the United States, he was diagnosed with inoperable lung cancer. Nevertheless, the final phase of his career was highly productive: he completed three more books, A Mouthful of Air, A Dead Man in Deptford, and the posthumously published novel in verse, Byrne. Burgess's translation of Griboyedov's stage play, Chatsky, was presented at the Almeida Theatre in London in March 1993. As his health declined over the following months, he continued to review books for the Observer, and to compose music for his son. His final composition, a sonata for piano and great bass recorder, was completed at the Hospital of St. John and St. Elizabeth in London on 12 November 1993. He died ten days later, with his wife by his side and a copy of Joyce's Ulysses in the room. (Andrew Biswell)*

Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to give you a little history. A history of the loss of faith and the search for a new faith. I will recount this history in terms of the medium in which I find it—the medium of literature. Specifically, the medium of Anglo-American literature.

As you know, this year we celebrate the five hundredth anniversary of the birth of an English king who built a new church. This was King Henry VIII of England, whose need for a divorce from a barren wife and marriage to a dark-haired girl who would give him a successor to the throne forced him to renounce the authority of the Pope in Rome and declare himself head of the Catholic Church of England. The Church was called Catholic because it maintained the doctrines of Rome while denying the supremacy of the power of Rome. As the years went on, these doctrines changed, but the British monarch maintained leadership of the Church. This still continues.

But in the nineteenth century, the Church of England began to lose its power and its authority. Other religious bodies—the Methodists, the Presbyterians, the Anabaptists, the Quakers—had fiery adherents. And in the middle of the nineteenth century two new forces—the theory of evolution, the doctrine of materialism—shook the foundations of the Church

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