Enderby's Hove

by Dougie Milton

Ask any of my peers which was the first Burgess book they read, and the answer is inevitably *A Clockwork Orange*. I may be setting some sort of record when I say that my first encounter with AB, aged 11, was through *Inside Mr Enderby*. I was lucky in my upbringing. My parents were teachers, and avid readers, and the red sandstone Victorian villa in Bristol where I grew up was crammed with books from top to bottom – a true *dom knigi*. First editions of Waugh, Greene and Isherwood were packed indiscriminately next to battered Boots Library copies of *The Long Goodbye,* *Night Of the Hunter*, and *The Man In The Grey Flannel Suit*. There was no censorship in our household. I was encouraged to read, and reading meant picking up whatever took my fancy. Before I'd even found *Enderby* I was already familiar with *Decline &* *Fall, Mr Norris Changes Trains, Down & Out In Paris & London*, *Afternoon Men* …all rather more interesting than the worthy but predictable texts (*Lord Of The Flies, To* *Kill A Mockingbird*) we were being offered at school.

One evening I pulled out *Inside Mr Enderby* from beneath a pile of old Lilliput magazines. It was the original Joseph Kell edition whose dustcover illustration (wooden loo-seat entwined with ivy or laurel leaves) looked amusing. I took it upstairs to bed but did little sleeping that night. I was entranced, and as soon as I'd finished it I wanted to start it again. My mother, spotting the book next to the bowl of cornflakes I was listlessly spooning in the next morning, told me the true identity of the author and the story of his reviewing his own novel and the subsequent scandal. This Anthony Burgess was obviously someone out of the ordinary, and over the next few weeks I dug out everything else by him in my parents' collection –
Time For A Tiger
,
The Right To An Answer
,
The Worm And The Ring
,
Tremor Of Intent
and others (though not
A
Clockwork Orange
for some reason). When Kubrick's film came out a year or so later, many of Burgess's books were reissued by Penguin with those delightful cover designs by Peter Bentley. (It was his unique graphic style that later led me to buy Pynchon's
Crying of Lot 49
but that's another story.) To use a Burgessian locution, I got the lot, by God.

But it was always that first Enderby novel that drew me back, two or three times a year, and has done ever since. Readers with far more elevated tastes than mine, such as Frank Kermode and Harold Bloom, have said the same thing. However this is not the place to launch into an essay on that novel's appeal. I'm supposed to be writing about Enderby's Hove.

And it's a real place. The pubs Enderby haunted, the shabby esplanade shelters with their peeling grey paint, the sloping walk up Goldstone Villas to the station (still tricky in winter snow)…they're all still here. I should remind readers at this stage that Hove is never actually mentioned by name in the novel, although it's immediately recognisable to anyone who's been there and Burgess later confirmed the setting in his autobiography. Living as I did in Bristol, I vaguely imagined some of the South Coast towns, inhabited by the living dead, that I knew only by name and reputation – Eastbourne, say, or Worthing. I wasn't that far out.

My girlfriend and I moved to Hove about eight years ago, and on my very second day wandering along the seafront I came across The Neptune, a pleasant, quietly idiosyncratic little pub with an odd bow-windowed doorway on Kingsway. Here's how Enderby saw it:

The Neptune was the sort of pub in which any of the three parts – saloon, public, outdoor – is visible from any other.

Still true, although the Jug and Bottle, ie, the off-licence department, no longer exists. There is no Gilbey's Port mirror on the wall, although the large plain one in its place could offer an even more vivid and hence more frightening image of Enderby's stepmother. The clientele are less uniformly ancient than in Enderby's day (this is also true of Hove as a whole, where an influx of celebrities like Fatboy Slim, Julie Burchill and Chris Eubank have made it a hip place to live), although they are still interestingly varied, and on my last visit I listened to one fruity-voiced old boy reminiscing about his army days who could well have been the son of that major-general who evinced such scepticism about Enderby's rank in the war. Inevitably, there has been some modernisation – a TV, piped music, and no white-jacketed waiter – but there's still an old joannah in the corner to which Burgess would no doubt have made a beeline (or an AB-line). Faded old carpets, polished wooden floors. Photos of 40s film stars on the walls, interspersed rather puzzlingly with some artists – The Beatles, Jimi Hendrix – whose identities would have had to be explained to Enderby by Vesta Bainbridge. It's a nice, old-style pub, and worth visiting in its own right even if you're not on the Enderby trail.

Next stop is the Freemason's Arms on Western Rd, a striking building with Art-Nouveauesque tiling on the façade. It is no longer the 'haunt of all the local lesbians over fifty' (they're all round the corner at The Gro…no, better not), and until recently was a bit of a dump inside, with a distinctly unwelcoming atmosphere. But a tactful revamp has turned it into a very pleasant place to while away the afternoon with a book, or *the* book. Arry, head cook at the Conway, might have baulked at the lunchtime menu – not *vol-au-vent de dindon*

or jugged hare with redcurrant jelly, but goat's cheese salad with honey and mustard dressing – and Enderby's reaction to the cocktail list – Chocolatini, Bad Habit, The Ultimate Slammer – would undoubtedly have been expressed with maximum flatulent accompaniment. (Although AB might have permitted himself a Tuscan Mule – Tuaca, dry ginger, fresh lime juice.) But you can still get brown ale and bitter mixed in a pint glass – my request provoked interest rather than derision. And a final innovation of which Enderby surely would have approved – spirits come in measures of 35ml rather than the standard 25. The very pretty and petite red-haired barmaid turned out to be a Burgess fan – who could ask for anything more?

I'd originally assumed that The Conway where Arry worked was based on either the Grand or Metropolitan hotels, both ten minutes' walk away, but there he'd probably have been a head chef rather than head cook. Now, my money's on The Dudley, still an impressive enough Edwardian establishment with a marble-pillared entrance just around the corner on Lansdowne Place but not quite so intimidating.

The astute reader will by now be asking, "Yes, this is all very well, but where did Enderby actually *live*?" Here we have a problem. There is no Fitzherbert Avenue in Hove. The closest match, Fitzherbert Drive, is in far-off Kemp Town. Burgess usually lists his previous addresses in full – in fact, at the end of *You've Had Your Time* he gives such precise directions for finding his house in Ticino, near Lugano, that one wonders if perhaps he'd decided towards the end of his life that he'd actually welcome a few visitors. But although he states unequivocally that Enderby's flat was based on his own, right down to the pictures on the walls and the landlady's trashy ornaments, no address is given. And I'm assured by experts such as Andrew Biswell that, to date, none of Burgess's correspondence from the period seems to have survived. The microfiched voters' registers for 1959/60 are mysteriously missing from Hove Library. So one has to hazard a guess. Ten minutes walk from the station, close to the Town Hall, (not the modern concrete monstrosity but the redbrick gothic pile which burned down sometime in the late 60s), which he passes on his way to the seafront, a more or less straight walk down to The Neptune…Enderby/Burgess must have lived pretty close to my own address in Hova Villas, which fits all these criteria. Or perhaps slightly to the west, where there is an area of Hove known as Poet's Corner, with streets named after Shelley, Byron and Wordsworth. Now *that* would be fitting. And one in the eye for Rawcliffe.

Dougie Milton is a writer and musician living in Hove. He is currently working on a short electronic piece based on a theme from Burgess's 3rd Symphony. His novel-in-progress Bright

Helm Stone is still preventing him from earning a decent living doing anything else.

