CHAPTER III

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In this Chapter, I try to examine *The Doctor is Sick* as a comic novel. Dr Edwin Spindrift's nightmare journey from the hospital to the world outside and back, is a metaphor for sickness of Europe.

While the hospital deals with Edwin as a child and treats him like a thing, the world outside treats him with indifference and uses him for its selfish ends. His employer's callous attitude leads to his moral fall. He gets knowledge of shrove-ha'penny under Les's tutelage. Leo and Harrystone make him go through the trauma of bald-head competition. His "kinkiness" lands him in Bob's grip, and his escape and recapture account for many interesting comic incidents which bring him in the company of his college mate, Aristotle, and this in turn, exposes him to the chilling sight of his wife in bed with a stranger.

These incidents take place in a deliberately vague setting of bleak passages and corridors where characters confront one another and themselves in a parable of pain and suffering, to emerge in some kind of moral perception. The traumatic incidents that Edwin goes through are a metaphor for the post-war depression-reared generation.
Edwin's and his associates' anxieties, dilemmas and corruption parallel those of the modern Europeans. We may laugh at Edwin, but in the final analysis we are one with him in his tragic-comic search for identity and reality in a world that seems devoid of both.

Edwin's search for his wife creates a comic complexity, which in turn, becomes a quest motif for self experience and for a new life. His journey begins in innocence and ends in experience and tragic self-knowledge. His knowledge of the world equals his knowledge of the self. Edwin progresses from the fossilized world of linguistics to the initiation of an alien world. Ultimately, his knowledge of the world outside makes him an alien among his own people. He goes into the world with the old self made new by rejection of its degraded standards and his moral grandeur of love for his wife.

Edwin's comic continuity is weighted down by satiric design. Just as Tristram's nose in *Tristram Shandy* is mutilated, giving rise to satiric implications so Edwin's journey is full of satiric connotations. Thus the novel is intent on comedy and resigned to satire. Therefore, the comic in the novel arises out of the situations and from the linguistic technique.
Dr Edwin Spindrift's diagnostic tests are conducted by Dr Railton. The test carried out is olfactory. He smells ink as peppermint. His loss of the sense of smell is linked up with his loss of libido, and this in turn, intensifies his domestic agony culminating in his wife's fornication and her decision to sever marital alliance with her husband. Towards the close of the novel, Edwin's sense of smell is restored, but that is another fact of his personality. Dr Railton conducts his test at the beginning of the novel as well as, he is a party to Edwin's humiliation at bald-head competition. If the incident is considered as a climax of his humiliation Dr Railton is there to celebrate it as a leading trumpeter (196). Thus Dr Edwin and Dr Railton make up a rare pair with identical obsessions:

"'... I always enjoy playing the trump', said Dr Railton. 'The trump to me is possibly like the study of words to you'"(220).

The parallel between Edwin and Dr Railton is further extended by the one for the loss of his libido, and the other by his feminine features. Dr Railton has "the gentle voice". While he sits on Edwin's bed, the narrator hints at his feminine qualities: "Gently Dr Railton sat on the edge of the bed. Gently, with womanish brown eyes, long-lashed, he looked down at Edwin"(7).
Edwin's suffering from cold and the cold outside, and "the dying English year" presage the death of his libido. This is strengthened by his loss of the pyjama cord. All this is further reinforced by the design of the dressing gown with dragons. Possibly, Edwin has to face the dragons waiting for him in the world outside. His to and fro walk to the bed of the "tense patient" and the patient's involvement with Edwin, prefigure his future tortures awaiting him: "He had a red fifty-year old face and hair much disordered, as if his hospital stay had really been a strenuous cruise in a trawler" (11). This neatly links up with Edwin's figure towards the close of the novel: "'My God', he said, 'What have they done to you? Who got hold of you, tell me that? You're so changed, Spindrift'" (209). This affinity is extended as they are admitted to hospital as a result of their fall; one from the ladder, the other on the lecture-room floor.

Edwin's treatment as a child starts with the Slav. She scolds him for reading the thermometer. After that, she throws away his wrist as if it were a thing. Similarly, Mr. Beagbie, the neurologist considers Edwin's face as "just another limb" (38). Dr. Wildbloode admires Edwin's skin. When the fluid from Edwin's spinal cord is extracted, he feels like his "core of being slowly being extracted" (40). He feels "Disintegrated" and becomes a mere thing. Here, Burgess comes down
heavily on the medical system through Edwin: "I don't think you really believe we're human beings at all. A couple of X-ray plates, ..." (43). He rightly says, "you forget that I'm a human being" (44). He receives a child's scolding by the nurse while answering about his bowels: "To say yes is enough" (17).

There is grim humour in the novel arising out of Edwin's failure to see the word beyond its linguistic entity. This is paralleled by the attitude of the staff in the hospital:

She hummed as tunelessly as the machine has hummed while she took off Edwin's hair-net and detached the damp salt gobbets of cotton-wool (45).

Burgess equates Edwin's attitude to the world with the hospital staff's treatment of the patients. Born out of this attitude, the one patient appears, figure of fun to Edwin: "... like a walking toy, stiff in one leg, his right arm busy as an egg-whisk"; while "R. Dickie sat placidly like a king on a bed pan" (51). Too many visitors of R. Dicke make Edwin remark that "his bed looked like the bed of the dying Socrates" (52). Edwin is shockingly amused to see the colourful low life characters sent by Sheila to cheer his solitude. Through Les and Carman, Burgess expresses his antiracial attitude in a humorous way: "This is England, not North Africa. We're civilized here" (53). Edwin thinks:
"... the bed itself had become, appropriately, the battlefield. Carmen tried to bite" (54). Carmen is half-mad. After seeing Samson and Delilah, Les, after a bit of a row "... woke up in the middle of the night to find her standing with the scissors over the bed"(66).

Edwin gets a jolt to his honorifics by Dr Railton. It is a comic reality in life that the medical doctors do not consider the Ph.D.'s as doctors. And Edwin is incensed for this:

"Yes, I was awarded the degree of Doctor of Philosophy by the University of Pasadena. For a thesis on the semantic implications of the consonant - group "shm" in colloquial American speech"(20).

Edwin's comic realism arises out of words. His eyes get a gush of tears when the window cleaner, the first lower of his wife, Charlie, tells him that it is too late to learn linguistics. When he leafs Charlie's gifts, he thinks on "Nude and Naked" (17). The narrator goes into the cause of the failure of libido in Edwin: "It worried him that he could grow more excited over the connotatory differences between the two words than he could over the nude, or naked, flesh itself, in reality or in representation"(17). There is a shifting relationship between the narrator and the protagonist in this novel as in Hardy's Jude the Obscure. If Edwin is
attracted towards a particular thing, such as "A Nigerian nurse, her head an exquisite ebony carving...", the narrator is. The narrator is aware of his obligation to Edwin - a patient left to fend for himself. There is a dialectic of feeling between the narrator and the protagonist giving rise to comedy:

With the departure of the visitors a sigh of quiet satisfaction seemed to be exhaled through the wards; the bell had rung out what were, after all, aliens. They were, with their bright voices and natty clothes, the frivolous world. The near neighbour of Edwin... now spoke to Edwin: "Your wife's a real smasher, "...(16).

In a similar vein, the tension between the narrator and the protagonist takes on a comic dimension. For Dr Mustafa, Edwin's loss of libido is "very sad" (18). Edwin is not concerned so much with his physical loss and his wife's fornication resulting from it. What concerns him most is the appropriate use of the words. According to him Dr Mustafa should have felt "Vicariously sad". The comedy arises out of Edwin's equation of "voluntary loss" of libido with someone abstaining from smoking. It is a matter of congratulating the one who gives up smoking, as his loss, on that analogy deserves commendation rather than commiseration. Thus Edwin is occupied in proving how it is vicariously sad.
He is like Shandy in *Tristram Shandy* looking into the book to find out what was wrong with his son's male organ after the fall of the window sash.

Edwin's logic, like Tristram's, gives rise to comedy. As he is reluctant to equate his wife with nicotine, so he is eager to equate, for his advantage, sharing his wife with others as one shares with somebody a drink or a cigarette. Hence, Sheila's infidelity to him is no cause for concern but a social adjustment—a matter of give and take.

For Burgess, the depiction of a society and its social mores are intended as a calculated criticism of society. Its moral fall and its attempts to come to terms with the degraded life, are depicted in Sheila's distinction between real infidelity and false adultery: "To prefer just to be with somebody else, to engage of one's own free will in spiritual intimacy with another, that was true adultery" (18).

Edwin's view of his wife is based on feminine nature in general. According to him women are "Irrational". This leads him to think about his wife's desire for a new base to conduct her forays. His sexlessness has taken away the choice from her life. Thus, Edwin's mind is preoccupied with the thought of Sheila. It haunts him even in the latrine. He decides to go in search of
the pub called "Anchor". His dress equates his demanted self: "... his crumpled trousers, his sports-jacket, his tie and a shirt" (24), and bedroom slippers" (26). Thus, "... he was not quite normal" (19). Much later when he goes in search of his wife, his motley dress defines his funny position: his nightcap, a tie and pyjamas. In a typically cheap London Hotel a child comes to the window and begins to cry for his cap (83). His dress makes him an awkward figure in the brightest May fair (86).

As it has been already remarked that the places Edwin comes across in his search for his wife parallel the state of his mind. Instead of Sheila, he sees Charlie gorging food with his friend Spaghetti in a "mean restaurant" (25) which stands for the psychic states of the people he meets. Significantly, Charlie points "to the end of the grey street" to search for Sheila in a disreputable club. The "grey" colour is an obvious pointer to Edwin's frustrated mind as also to his hope of finding Sheila. He goes through a deliberately vague setting of Kafkesque type:

"... a shop of no name, its single shop-window opaque with blue paint... its door... ajar - The passage floor, ... littered with bits of old racing editions, fag packets, a doll's torso, ... dirt. Two doors on
the left were padlocked. Another led to buried noise and music... Unsafe precipitous stairs led to the ultimate door. Should he knock? No, said the door, opening violently ..." (26).

Edwin meets Sheila in the bar. Her green dress is emblematic of the fine time that she has over there. Burgess as a moralist has implied satirical dig at her merry-making:

"'... A Greek tailor's just asked me how much for the afternoon, that dark man there pinched my bottom, and there's a sort of Englishman who dances in the most peculiar way'" (28).

While Edwin can tolerate this nonsense from his wife, she can't even satisfy his demand for "small whisky". She reminds him that he has to "lay off drink for two years" and is served with "a golden water tasting of soap and onions" (28).

His gentleness is a disqualification in the world of barbarians. He is whisked away by a woman like Medusa with her "Snake-hairs waving", and in the jigging crowd he loses his slippers and dances in stocking-feet with her. His wife aptly remarks: "You want your head seeing to" (30). Similarly, Edwin gets the impression that Sheila "made a quick face to the stone
brothers, a face indicating that her husband was not quite normal, that he mustn't be encouraged to start talking" (31).

Edwin's dream after his "sculpture was completed" prefigures his funny descent from the hospital into the world outside. The world outside is a jungle. The three big dogs crouching stand for Leo, Harry stone and Bob. His escape from the hospital under the moonlight madness state of mind corroborates Sheila's idea of Edwin's "from the shoulders up he looked, to say the least, eccentric" (74).

The moonlit night and the narrow passages that he goes through indicate that he is a head-case (74-75). Therefore, he reasonably fears that if he were to telephone his wife, she would "fetch not a taxi but an ambulance with strong men?"(77). He is equally eager to find out what commotion his escape has created in the hospital: "... there's a man here in Hounslow who says he's escaped, so if ye're wanting the spalpeen at all, ye'll know where to find him"(79). He wonders whether the American sister who had given him permission to go to latrin, which according to him was rather a long job might be thinking that he was still straining away there and think it possible that the British tempo of evacuation was different from that of the states? When he discovers that the hospital was not humming with
panic,... "He himself hummed a little tune, ..." (79).

Thus Burgess creates comedy as much from the situations that Edwin is in as from his thoughts about his wife's whereabouts, her friends and his journey through the streets of London and the people he meets in Farnworth Hotel. The funny part about his encounter with the woman in the Hotel is that she is attracted by his name - "'Yes, A good name for a washing-machine'"(84). When Edwin tries to see Mr. Chasper, the Secretary of the International Council for University Development is ashamed of talking with him: His predicament is posed to Chasper in the most humiliating way; "... my wife gone off for a little holiday and taken all the money with her, and I can't get in touch with her very easily" (89). His bid to justify his wife's conduct reminds us of his attempt to steal Chasper's hat: "But it was all Chasper's fault. The mean bastard" (90). Here, Burgess's satirical voice is heard: "Edwin came to with a shock. Stealing, eh? Real degeneracy"(90). Such self commenting process is missing when he justifies his wife's adultery. Edwin's attempt to recover his watch from Ippo, and Ippo's justification that he was an innocent, and the crowd sympathizing with him on religious ground for his merely carrying boards on which Biblical words were written is Burgess's way of holding up to ridicule the false sentiments and the foolish belief of the crowd. Edwin's
lecture on philology to prostitutes and his attempt to confuse the police is full of fun. His audience consists of "... the warded smiling Carmen, a loose-mouthed tow-headed girl who looked like a whore, a bemused lout or so, various carious mouths... an Alsastian dog" (107). Edwin threatens the police for interrupting his lecture. Leo stone also creates humour by asking the police: "Are you, referring to me or the dog" (108). Edwin's answers to the police are amusing: The sergeant asks - "what's his racket, I'd like to know". Edwin replies: "Linguistics is my rocket". The sergeant does not believe either in his words or his certificate by looking at his pyjamas on and that cap thing" on your head " - "He's got no socks on, neither" (109). It is through Leo Stone that Burgess has a dig at the degree holders: "'Being a man of learning, he has to be eccentric'"(109).

Neither the sergeant nor Leo Stone understands Edwin's speech on "'Is Cockney a dialect?'" (107). While the sergeant wants him not to bring slang into it, Leo Stone can't understand the appropriateness of the example of the word "arse". It is doubly laughable as it becomes a word of arrogance to the sergeant's "'It won't be so easy next time'"; and Leo Stone's ignorance about the example: "'you shouldn't 've said vat abahnt arse. Verre are limits, as vat copper said" (110). Moreover, the jollity arises out of Leo Stone's "undress you" for "address you" (106). For all this fun and
frolic, Edwin realizes that he is: "A thing, ... used, that's all I am, something used and there discarded" (111). As a comic pair to Edwin's quest, Leo and Harry Stone are Jack-of-all-trade-and-master-of-none. Leo "had been a Comic's feed" (111).

While Edwin's failure of libido and his love for Sheila provide a general framework for the thematic structure of the novel, Leo twins and Bob episodes form the inner circle of the theme of the novel. It has a wheel within a wheel structure. The comic arises out of Edwin's encounter with the alien, unknowable, unreasonable and mad world from "hermetically sealed academic atmosphere" of the protagonist. Such a world is Bob's. Edwin is pushed into Bob's company accidentally. He makes various Charlie Chaplin runs to save himself from Bob. I have tried to examine the comic in these episodes.

II

The comic in the Edwin - Bob episode arises out of Edwin's innocence. After his clean shave of the head he appears: "Edwin in his pram" (71). Only after an encounter with the world of a crook like Bob, he realizes that it is questionable that his life-long obsession with words as archetypal reality and what they reflect is merely a shadow. Now he is aware of
what he has missed in his life. The awareness comes to Edwin when he is imprisoned in Bob's flat. In despair to get out of it, as there is no clock in his room: "Edwin, very much faster than time began to look at things" (Italics mine) (139). Thus he looks at..." the flakes of paper on the floor, watching with satisfaction the spindrift of odd isolated words..." (139). Moreover, Bob's whips instil in him a desire for violence. As a result of this, he manhandles the old couch and armchair, rips them open and scatters the stuffing. Laughter arises because he treats the inanimate things as having life. Therefore, "The sideboards, already much bruised, Edwin had pity on"(139). Moreover, the ridiculous is because of Edwin's child-like identification with the lifeless things: "He shattered the television screen without mercy, ... and tried to hurt, though with little success, the refrigerator"(139). Like Charlie Chaplin finding the unexpected things, Edwin too "was surprised but pleased to find wads of five-pound notes" after ripping open a pillow. For the first time, he recognizes the objects that the words stand for. If he were to whip Bob after his coming back home on "the face, he thought, eyes, mouth. And then he paused, shocked beyond measure at his rapid degeneration. What on earth had got into him?"(139). The entire comic episode invites "not emotional response, but insight".² Born out of such an insight, Edwin apprehends;
Words, he realized words, words, words. He had lived too much with words and not what words stood for, ... Love, for instance. 'Edwin loves Sheila'. And Edwin realized that he didn't find it fascinating. Let him loose in the world, where words are glued to things, and see what he did; Stole, swore, lied, committed acts of violence on things and people. He had never been sufficiently interested in words, that was the trouble. And then all that business about resenting being treated as a thing. That was very much the pot calling the kettle black-arise, wasn't it? (140).

Bob's insight into Edwin's madness creates comic strands because of Bob's "kinkiness". Conversely, Edwin understands the basis of Bob's madness: "a masochistic passion for flagellation". Edwin's attempt to escape from Bob's flat creates a great fun as a result of his surprised sighting Charlie and his great attempt at sending message for his rescue and its comic unexpected happenings. Edwin is happy to see Charlie, the window - cleaner, as his prospective rescuer. But his frustration arises out of Charlie's kinkiness in not realizing the life and death problem in which Edwin is involved. Edwin wants the lock to be blown open, to which Charlie nonchalantly remarks:
"Yes, all right, but who's going to do it?" 'Any of the lot round there, said Charlie vaguely. 'I haven't got time myself', he said" (145). Similar disappointment attends Edwin's attempt to attract the attention of the boys with a message on a toilet-paper tied to a five-pound note: "They ignored the toilet-paper,

"They ignored the toilet-paper, letting it fall again in their excitement at handling a five-pound note. They looked up at the window, waved to Edwin and danced off" (143).

The humour arises out of the children's excitement for money and Edwin's eagerness to bait their attention through money. Even though they see him and wave at him, yet he fails to communicate his message. The episode creates a tragic-comic situation: the playful attitude of the children stands in opposition to the life and death situation of Edwin. Edwin's attempts at conveying the message for his rescue to Ippo ends on an equally funny note: "At last he saw waving Edwin and cheerfully waved back. He lived in a world of phatic gestures. Satisfied, he trudged on" (143-144). The laughter arises out of human concerns. Man is like an egg full of himself. We are enclosed in our petty selves and cannot share the problems and predicaments of other individuals.

Edwin's attempts at escaping from Bob spring from the latter's obsession for whips. Bob is unable
to resist the temptation to see those whips. Edwin, taking advantage of this, escapes from Bob and dashes towards a public lavatory, using as a shield a fat walking couple. The fun arises because of Edwins various "Charlie Chapline runs" (203). We laugh at Edwin's success at entering into the latrin along with a man in a lounge suit a homburg, within a twinkling of an eye with the words: "'Will explain'"(204). He pushes the man in the cabinet and clicks the bolt of the door. The embarrassing situation in the latrin is doubly humorous. For one thing, the latrin is not roomy. Consequently, they stand as close as lovers. Secondly, it is the most unfortunate and unexpected that happens in the latrin. He is with his boss, Mr Chasper. Mr Chasper misunderstands Edwin that he has approached him for (Edwin's) personal work. Therefore, he remonstrates with Edwin,

"'Couldn't it have waited till tomorrow morning at the office? I mean, there are certain places where a man has a right to be alone'"(204).

What Edwin hears when Chasper empties his bowels is equally amusing:

"Then he heard the thunder of a descent" (204).

Equally funny is the reply that Bob gets from an occupant:
"'You wait your turn', came the next door voice, adding the bourdon of a blast of healthy excretion" (205).

III

Edwin at the bald-head competition is amusing because of Harry Stone's style of pronunciation. His "Fink" for think (151), and "Fursday, night" for Thursday 'night' (99) is very amusing. Edwin, in the latter part of the novel comes in their company after his symbolic change of clothes at the Opera. He steals from the dressing room of the Opera - a very good white shirt and a pair of nylon socks. His loss of the woolen cap (126) and the surreptitious possession of the whig is a symbolical change in his position from a thing to an individual, with an individuality and an identity of his own. Though the old woman offers him the whig, the remarks about his head as "'An awkward sort of shape of a head'" (129), yet he appears to himself in the mirror; "Quite the little poet" (129).

With this change, his encounter with Leo and Harry Stone is not as despicable as it is with Bob. Yet, every encounter of Edwin with the characters of the underworld is Burgess's indictment on the degenerated culture of the British. Therefore, I agree with Geoffrey Aggeler's view on the novel; "... it is from America that the
British have chosen to import much that is cheap, vulgar, silly, brutish, and nasty. It is not America's fault... nor is it bald actor's fault that the British chose to corrupt themselves, ... It is symptomatic of the times that he should be an inspiration... to abandon themselves to cruel and worthless forms of entertainment".3

The corrupt times are reflected in the scant respect Edwin gets from the hooligans. For Harry Stone, Edwin is "only a poor bleedin' perfesser" (151). The amusing thing about the twins is that they want to grant him the empty bubble reputation of becoming "internationally known" film artist (151) and claiming the monetary gain under abominably distracting name: "... a mere trivial bundle of greasy notes" (151). Thirdly, Edwin is painted as more obliged than obliging: "... what great favour they were really doing him, the tone, the trouble, the worry, and he wasn't helping much..." (151). As wordly wise men, they have engineered the baldhead competition, and the judges are in their favour and consequently, Edwin would win it. He is not allowed even to go out for a walk with Carmen. He is considered by Les as an ungrateful wretch: "biting the hand that feeds you" (153). His escape from Harry Stone's flat in search of his wife before the baldhead competition makes him "a sham". He feels "a sort of kinship with the sham pleasures of Tottenham Court Road and Oxford Street..." (156-157). The dusty, cheap pair of sun glasses of Carmen and his
counterfeit notes and "money to match" make him pass off for what he is not. Thus the comic arises out of his pretence. For the first time, he feels in the club mature and gangsterish. His sighting Sheila in the club, the push and the counter-push to get at Sheila, and the Singer's insistence to hear him - Edwin's obsession not to miss Sheila in the crowd, and "a brassy woman's" insistence on her indulgence with Edwin and her depreciation of Sheila as "no artist; a tradeswoman merely" and the Singer's annoyance at deserting him to get at Sheila with the words: "Bad manners are something I can't stand. I can stand deliberate insults even less!" create immense fun (163). The marvelously funny thing is that the Singer does not know the gravity of the situation that Edwin is in, he is absurdly occupied with his own sense of respect. Therefore, there follows a fight between Edwin and the Singer:

Edwin tugged his coat loose and tried to get away. The Singer went for Edwin's collar. Edwin grew angry and hit out. The Singer made a grab for Edwin's hair. To his horror it came away sweetly in his hand (164).

Thus Edwin becomes a figure of ridicule. No one understands him. His whig travels as in a forfeit game - "every body fearing that the music will suddenly stop" (164). Edwin's chasing it, and the others enjoying
the show makes him a ridiculous figure. Edwin and the Singer are quite innocent of the incongruous figures they are cutting, and are absolutely serious about themselves.

The romantic advances of the brassy woman with the words: "'The night is young and you're so beautiful'" (165), seen against his failure of libido, makes the whole situation laughable and pathetic. In these episodes Edwin goes under a quise and a pseudonym: Sometimes he is R. Dickie (161) at other times, Eddie Failton or Bob Courage (166). The Brassy Woman Coral, does not mind his failure of libido but hardly stands kinkiness in others. When he admits his inability with "I can't", she fails to understand the implication. Significantly, she says "something shot of in the war or something?" (168). It reminds us of uncle Toby's predicament with widow Wadman in Tristram Shandy. It is without the shyness and embarrassment of both, as it is rendered in modern terms. Therefore, she says, "... I strip off and lie down on that bed or in front of that fire and all you can do is say you're not interested. And you with that bald head as well!" to which, born out of his own predicament, Edwin observes in remorse:

"'Is that honestly all that you people sell?'
said Edwin. 'Passivity? Just becoming a thing, a temporary receptacle for dirty water?" (169).
(We cannot miss the term "ditch water" used in Tristram Shandy).

Their dialogue provides an accurate insight into the minds of people who have concern for others, in spite of its fun, it is full of warmth and human understanding. Therefore, it has a humorous strain about it as compassion is its ultimate purpose. The brassy girl robs him of his money, yet leaves behind him a "proof that rehabilitation was possible" and this is substantiated by his bodily transformation: "... something was growing there, (i.e., on the bald scalp) too" (171). Tilting with delight at his transformation, he composes a litany to himself. It is amazingly comic: "Ineffectual fornicator", "cheater of Chasper" "Furniture-fracturer" "Counterfeit - Cashman", "Free meal filcher" (172). Thus, Edwin is a self-commenting comic figure. As a free meal filcher, he masquerades as a sweeper; He goes to the Gents. "There he took off his wig and his tie... He limped out, gormless and aged, carrying a lavatory brush" (173). We are amused by his "pausing to throw glances of hungry censure at the breakfasters" (173). Edwin qualifies as a comic character. Feste like, he is neither worried about the past nor has any thought for the future. For him, "living for the day was most stimulating and remarkably easy, ..." (173). His stealing the library book smacks of Burgess's inability to introduce other comic incidents apart from stealing. Introduced as they are one after
the other, the second incident fails to click.

It seems Burgess too must have realized this. Hence, he introduces Edwin at the baldhead competition. Edwin is in the grip of Stone twins. When he hears about his wife being mentioned, he struggles to get free—asking them as to where "they had seen her?" (177). They frighten him with his wife's plan for setting the police after him by proving that he was dangerous and should be confined to the hospital. This selfish trick to retain him is comic when seen against their anxiety to make money out of him. For this Edwin is administered as smooth a shave as an egg. The trio advance toward the theatre planning their future earnings. Like Swift in *Gulliver's Travels*, Burgess satirizes through this, the deceitful mentality of the dissembling lot:

"... old bedsprings sold as radio aerials; face cream made out of horse fat, ... dust sold as snuff; (a refrigerator with a back door, double-headed matches to save wood, a tickling machine, ...)" (186).

Thus a satirical vein is introduced in the comic frame-work of the novel. Burgess initiates farcical element arising out of misunderstanding. Edwin and Stone twins and the dog, Nigger, reach a cockpit of racial dissension. The dog gets panicky at this stage
and runs ahead of them, with Leo Stone shouting after it "Nigger; Nigger" (188). The people of the locality misunderstand it to be referring to them. The Africans having had enough of white derision, think it to be dangerous to ignore it. When the Niggers prepare to attack him, he tells that it was the dog that he was calling, and he did not mean any offence to them. The hilarious fun arises out of his attempt to stop his dog by wildly calling the hated name again, and the dog failing to respond to it. For Burgess, this comic episode takes on the colour of slaves and masters down the ages: "Dogs persecuted, dogs kept down, dogs chained in Kennels" (190).

As a preamble to the big comic event, the baldhead competition - Edwin's stealing at the opera, the comic twin's worldly wise method of showing themselves as obliging people, his dissembling and escape from the Stone twins' in search of his wife, the comic episode of the club arising out of Edwin's encounter with the Singer and the brassy woman, Edwin as an ineffectual fornicator, counterfeit cashman, a free meal filcher, his stealing at the library, the episode with the dog, Nigger, at the the Blacks' strong hold are significant.

At the competition Edwin "found himself a member of a suspicious-eyed male herd" (192). Moreover, his dress is as much comic as the young Singer's sexual act.
While his trousers "were too sort; a lot of sock was visible" (193), the young singer "treated the microphone as a very thin teenage girl, he threw it to the ground and lay on the long rod of the stand, kiss-singing into the mouth-piece... his body made perceptible rutting movements" (193). This obscenity raises grudging smile in us. The youth's act is a measure of the moral fall of the British. It may be paralleled with MF's copulation in public. This becomes explicit with the girl's screams becoming orgiastic and orgasmatic. The second teenager introduced by the fat man, who does a monologue called "Laugh And The World Laughs With You" (164), defines the comic vision of the novelist. His song reminds us of Shakespeare's clowns and defines the comic motif of the novel; "Life's a funny thing, my friends" (194). And funnily Nigger comes on the stage. Ironically Leo Stone accepts him as his friend: "... a man's best friend is his dog" (195). Sarcastically, the word, twister, used by the brassy woman for Edwin - is applied to the Stone twins. The bald head competition march is filled with the glee and giggles. The competitors are slaves, zombies and clots. The flop-tied man, as it is fitting to the occasion races round as if ready to expire with excitement. Matching his joy is that of the audience ready to die in delight. The man creates so much fun as to make the audience micturate in mirth. When Edwin wins the competition, Harry Stone
cannot contain his happiness, he runs on to the stage and into the camera sights, trouserless. To top it all, the band plays, "'Why was he born so beautiful?'" (197).

Burgess, through Edwin, comes down heavily on the British for importing much that is cheap, vulgar, silly, brutish and nasty. When asked by Rayne Waters whether it was a very big moment for Edwin, he replies:

'Not really', said Edwin. 'I've known bigger moments, much bigger... I feel somewhat ashamed at having been a party to all this. So typical, isn't it, of what passes for entertainment nowadays? Vulgarity with a streak of cruelty and perhaps a faint tinge of the perversely erotic. Shop girls blown up into Helen of Troy. Silly little men trying to be funny. Stupid screaming kids. Adults who ought to know better... my message to the great viewing public'. He leaned forward and spat full into the microphone a vulgar, cruel erotic word (198).

Edwin's jump from the stage and his final scrambling for escape and the cry of the voice: 'Stop him. A danger to the public... May run berserk at any time. Don't let him get away' (199) and his desperate bid to escape make us recollect one of Charlie Chaplin's movies, with Harry
Stone running after him shouting: "Give me vem bleedin' trousers back first" (198).

An outstanding critic of Burgess appropriately remarks: "... Burgess's descriptions are irresistibly comic. So it is throughout Spindrift's odyssey." The funniest incident in the novel is when Edwin is caught in snake and rabbit hypnosis by the sight of his wife having sex with a stranger. When Edwin says 'Sheila', her sex partner who had reached the orgasm bursts out: "'wait', panted the man... Let me finish, blast you" (215). These incidents show how Burgess tries to correct man's folly, and return man to himself and society.

IV

Geoffrey Aggeler, speaking about Burgess's use of language observes: "Burgess has exhibited an incomparable wit and verbal wizardry in creating a fictional experience that is at times quite disturbing and provocative but always marvelously entertaining". The verbal wizardry arises out of Edwin's obsession with words. The failure of his libido gives him a chance to exercise his wit. As a man of thirty eight, it was too early for him "to pack all those instruments away" (19). One needn't expatriate that he refers to his essentials. Edwin's obsession with the language makes him miss the story
told by Dr Railton as a diagnostic test. Edwin could capture only the word referring to the name of the gentlemen, Mr Hardcastle. Therefore, he says, "Nottingham has a castle, so that gives the gentleman his name'...
'A castle is a rook, so that explains the name of the street'"(20). And again, Edwin exhibits his linguistic bent of mind, when Dr Railton asks the difference between "gay" and "melancholy"(20). Edwin's answer is: "'one is monosyllabic, the other tetrasyllabic. One is of French, the other of Greek derivation. Both can be used as qualifiers, but one can also be used as a noun'"(21).

In the hospital, Edwin's thoughts hover over the wonder of the word "apricot". About the word he does a loud thinking "'Apricock' in Shakespeare, the later version due to confusion of stop consonants. 'Apricock' led back to an Arabic-form, 'al' the article glued to the loan word 'praecox', early, an early-ripe fruit. How charming is divine philology--"(41-42).

After his head was given a clean shave by the Negro, Edwin uses for his dome "the sculpture" (70). It is a provocative word. Similarly, Edwin thinks about the appropriate use of the word in the telephone booth. Whether it should be 'incumbent' or 'instant'. According to him "instant" was more correct. Thus like Stephen in A Portrait of the Artist Edwin regards words as his
final reality. For Edwin the world exists to manifest the power of language. Dr Railton says that Edwin is obsessed with words. To which Edwin adds: "It's not an obsession, it's a preoccupation. It's my job." (21).

While Sheila is a full-blooded human being, Edwin is a "sexless pedantic machine". Therefore, his wife attempts to bring him back to the reality of existence. Like Plato, he is in the world of archetypal reality of the words. For him the things that the words stand for are merely unreal. It is ironical that when Edwin is won back from the Shadows of words into the reality for which they stand. His wife decides to divorce him with the words: "You only really care about bilabial fricatives and semi-vowels and all that rubbish... I also like the prospect of not having to be unfaithful any more. Sleeping with a bilabial fricitive isn't all that rewarding, you know." (232). She traces her deteriorating relationship with her husband in terms of his obsession with the words: "Until the bilabial fricatives got in the way. Sorry, the semi-vowels, then. The fausal plosives. The retroflex what-have-you's. Life governed by Verner's Law and Grimm's Law" (233). Like Candida in Bernard Shaw's play by that name, she holds out a brief for her own case: "but when a person ceases to be a person what do you do then? I don't regard myself as having any obligation of love to a bundle of phonemes or whatever you call them. A bundle of bilabial fricatives is just
a thing, isn't it? You can't love a thing'" (233). Sheila calls him an x-ray machine and does not want "to live with and go to bed with" a machine like Edwin.

This is Burgess's hatred for the modern scientific tendency to develop man into a machine.

With Edwin, Burgess provides not only the words and his bewilderment with his environment but also the characters, thoughts and consciousness to create his "substance". By this Burgess draws the reader into uniquely close relationship with the characters. Edwin is startled by the hospital world and the experience of the underworld closing in upon him. Like T.S. Eliot's Prufrock he is a man disabled in face of direct experience. His transformation and the comic experience can find no communication with his wife, and finally, despite his love for her, he remains a lonely man.

Though I accept Elinor Baumbach's view about the comic vision in the novel: "... horrific comic vision which Burgess handles with consummate skill" yet I don't accept that "the vision ultimately fails". Neither do I accept his view that "It is black enough to suit our time". On the contrary, it is appropriate to the modern pop music and the freakish experiences that are scattered for our entertainment. However, I accept his view that "Spindrift does not have sufficient weight" and not the observation that "His predicament behind
the comic situation is not serious enough. In my opinion, Edwin's search for his flirtatious wife from his hospital bed is quite serious enough so as to generate countless comic situations. Though I admit that Burgess's invention flags sometimes, as it has been already pointed out during the course of the discussion. Each of the character pairs in the novel are obsessed with their own interest which generate antithetical pull. Edwin is given many instances of infidelity by his wife yet he persists in remaining in that faulty paradise often assuming its defense. Sheila, on the contrary, is deeply interested in sexual satisfaction. She remembers her lovers not as haunting reminders of waywardness but as playful tidbits from a sweet past. For her sex is life. It is nourished by unfailing youth, charm, impertinence, irresponsibility, and exorbitant gaiety. Thus both are propelled by their accentricity. In the final analysis they find behind their irrational behaviour the simple decency of the uncorrupted human heart. This is true even with Leo and Harrystone. Even Bob is full of his own interest. Thus every one rides his own hobby horse giving rise to comedy.

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REFERENCES


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