CHAPTER IV

THE WANTING SEED
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THE WANTING SEED: FANTASY AND NIGHTMARE

Anthony Burgess considers The Wanting Seed\(^1\) as an evocation of "artificial war" and how homosexuality is fast becoming "very interesting and very glamorous"\(^2\). Geoffrey Aggeler discovers three phases in the novel: the pelagian, the inter and the Gus phase. He discovers in it "Augustian – Pelagian Conflict".\(^3\)

To my mind none of the critics has dealt with social satire in the novel. It becomes a thematic nexus of the novel around which the world of nightmare and fantasy are built. Tristram, the protagonist in the novel goes through three fantasy and nightmare incidents: First, during his imprisonment after his quarrel with Beatrice-Joanna; second, when he goes in search of his wife; and third, during his tenure in the army, and his consequent escape to join his family.

The novel has cyclical structure. It neatly divides people into good and bad. The Augustinian phase with its many salutary aspects conducive to proliferation of life is represented by Tristram, Beatrice-Joanna and Shonny, and the Pelagian phase is liked by Derek, Dr. Acheson, Miss Herchhorn, Joscelyne and Loosely. The pattern of the
novel follows three phases in sequence. The pelphase—
the Interphase and the Augustian phase. During the
Pelphase, the chapter arrangement alternates with the
people championing it with those opposing it. During
Interphase the voice of opposition is not heard. We come
to know its power through Capt. Loosely's attempts in
taking back Beatrice-Joanna and her twins to London to
humiliate Derek. The Gus-phase takes over with its
nightmarish account; and the rational voice pointing out its
madness is again of Tristram. He is the author's
consciousness from the beginning of the novel to its end
in this mad, mad world. The cult of homosexuality, chaos
of cannibalistic dining clubs, fertility rituals and war
without anger affect Tristram and ripen him with rich
experience of life. The Dog imagery pervades the novel.
The sea is symbolic of Beatrice-Joanna's fertility and
Tristram's repentance, reconciliation and freedom. My aim
in this chapter is to deal with fantasy and nightmare in
the novel and with the images arising out of it.

I

In The Wanting Seed the world is bursting with over
population. The pelphase is at its peak. All types of
life is mourned and death is celebrated. Sodomy flourishes.
It has its rewards in promotion and employment. Family
record is perused by the state to decide whom to promote,
and whom to demote and imprison. Birth in a family
entitles it to be imprisoned and executed. God has been
replaced by Dog. All the positive values of life are at a discount.

Significantly, *The Wanting Seed* begins with the death of Roger. His parents are Beatrice-Joanna and Tristram. They are Augustianians, therefore they mourn the death of the child. But the official attitude towards this death is callous and indifferent. Ironically, this makes a West Indian to burst out into a song:

"... He's so, so sweet,
From the crown of his head
To the soles of his feet.
He my meat" (3).

This song is symbolic of how the glorification of homo-sexuality is transferred into a chaos of cannibalistic dining clubs. In the world of homos, the doctor's abnormality comes through the description of his body:

"... a fat gelding of an Anglo-Saxon" (3). The Doctor considers the body of the child as "Another dollop of phosphorus pentoxide for dear old Mother Earth" (3-4). He voices the unnatural and the inhuman concern of the state: "... one mouth less to feed" (4). His Orwellian advice to Beatrice-Joanna is: "Leave motherhood to lower orders" (5).

Beatrice-Joanna and Tristram hate to look at the unnatural homo-sexuality flourishing in the world: "She
instructively shuddered now at the sight of two white-coated women kissing" (6), and observes with disgust two radiographers: "... smiling fondly at each other's eyes, fingers intertwined" (6). Tristram also notes with revulsion the police wearing "... black lipstick to match his tie" (41).

The state's unnatural mandate to scotch all types of life results in the death of cyclical season. T.S. Eliot shows April of Chaucer's season inverted into: "April is the cruelest month" in The Waste Land. Here also: "... But in this modern world, the circle had become an emblem of the static, the limited globe, the prison" (14). Significantly, Burgess's pelphase is T.S. Eliot's Burial of the Dead section of The Waste Land. Therefore, the casket of Roger's coffin merges into the narrow lift cabin which Beatrice-Joanna takes, and this in turn gives rise to "the limited globe, the prison". The suffocating place represents the psychic strangle-hold of people of this phase. In Beatrice-Joanna's desire for Roger's burial in sea "... gnawed by fish, rather than changed coldly to chemicals and silently fed to the earth" (15), we remember T.S. Eliot's card of the drowned phoenician sailor signifying life-in-death, and the song of Arial, describing to Ferdinand how his father was drowned, and how the water had turned his eyes into pearls and bones into carols. Beatrice-Joanna notices antithesis in the land and the sea. While the earth "... was dying the sea would soon be the
final repository of life" (15). For her the sea is "... a vision of sanity" (14), and "... if there were god, he inhabited the sea. The sea spelled life, whispered or shouted fertility" (15).

Beatrice-Joanna’s attitude to life is contrasted with the other mothers of pelphase. They are inhuman. They tell each other about the cause of death of their children:

"Scalded, mine was. Pulled the Kettle right on top of him. The speaker smiled with a sort of pride, as though the child had done something clever" (20).

While our century has for the family planning motto "we two, ours two", Beatrice-Joanna gets revolted to see the motto of the state: "Don’t have any more" (21). Because of such attitude to life, she feels "... desperately lonely" (21). Her life-in-death existence is externalised in the coffin-like living space that she occupies: "the box of a bedroom, kitchen-coffin" (26). When Derek makes love to her in her flat, she thinks of eloping with him: "to live for ever on coconuts and love among the banyans"(33). She is a bold woman representing the fecundity of life at the cost of morality and marital fidelity. Her desperate urge at creativity makes her sleep both with Derek and Tristram.
The people of pelphase have killed all aspects of life. Whatever they eat is either in tins or in pills. Beatrice-Joanna's world is without flowers, which have been rendered "esculent" (64). The vegetables that she buys represent dead life led by the people of this phase: "... two blocks of brown vegetable dehydrate (legumin), a large white tin of synthelac, compressed sheets of cereal, a blue bottle of 'nuts' or nutrition units" (85). She dreams of meat. During the struggle with her husband, "Her provisions went flying and Tristram himself staggered and fell" (87). She symbolically kicks away this death-in-life existence to escape to her sister's. Significantly, she is brought back to Derek only during Augustinian phase. Moreover, Tristram's fall is symbolic of his landing in jail.

Beatrice-Joanna's delivery of the twins' Derek and Tristram, removes the curse from the land. Hens start laying eggs. The dying pig gets well. When she is taken back to Derek, she yearns for Tristram. In this she changes from a faithless slut into one upholding the marital sacrosanctity. She reveals this through her letter to Tristram: "Looking out to sea I now pray daily that the sea will send you back to me" (223). It is not the cold sea that answers her prayer but: "It came from the warmer land behind her" (284). In the closeness of Tristram's embrace, "He became sea, sun, tower" (285). Her
Tiny Tristram lifts the curse from the land like T. S. Eliot's "Upanishadian thunder, 'Da da da'")(217).

II

Tristram is against pelphase. He is an authorial voice condemning its excesses. For him it is like W.B. Yeats's "Second Coming" - the brute force let loose on earth:

When the reason goes, the brute steps in
Brutality! ... Beatings up. Secret police.
Torture in brightly lighted cellars.
Condemnation without trial. Finger-nails pulled out with pincers. The rack. The cold water treatment. The gouging out of eyes. The firing squad in the cold dawn (19).

Tristram falls a victim to some of these methods during jail life. These tortures remind one of Nazi Germany concentration camps. Tristram, according to Beatrice- Joanna is "kind, honest, gentle, generous, considerate, calm, witty sometimes" (25). The brutalities of pelphase are evoked through what happens to Tristram. His agonies of life begin with his meeting the principal, Joscelyne. The principal has deserved the post because of his "blameless sexlessness" (27). In this mad and topsy-turvy world, neither degrees, nor being good at work gets a man a job, but his "... family background" (29). In this
world the "best people just don't. Just don't" (30), either produce children or have a large family. Tristram's father is to be blamed for "helping to increase the national food supply with one hand and getting four kids with the other" (31). Therefore, Tristram's is a family of fertility. Hence, it is cursed with hereditary criminality. And hence, he has to step down from headship unless his wife takes precaution to prevent fertility. Tristram cannot remain in job. The irony of the situation is: "The homos ... virtually run this country", and the principal adds: "My uncle, the High Commissioner, he's homo. I was nearly homo myself once" (30).

Tristram notices that fruits are extinct in the world, as a result he has to drink only alc with a "smack and a sigh" (39). Music in the world is only "Remote, cold, abstract, the concrete..." (40). In these times out of joints, betrayal by Tristram's wife makes him realize that: "The whole crowded street, the sky, had become his own betrayed home, a cell of suffering" (86). Soon after he quarrels with his wife, he is virtually put into a cell for no fault of his. He is carbine butted fairly in the gut: "He was prodded to a black lorry, his nasopharynx smarting with the taste of the brief vomit - " (90).

Through his brother instead of getting release from the prison, he is indefinitely put into the cell. Therefore,
Tristram's world is a blighted one like T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*.

"... It was a blight never known before, ... it was not only rice, maize, barley, oats and wheat that were affected; fruit fell off the trees and the hedges, stricken with a sort of gangrene; potatoes and other roots became messes of black and blue mud. And then there was the animal world: worms coccidiosis, scaly leg, marble bone disease, fowl cholera, prolapse of the oviduct, vent gleet, curled toe paralysis, slipped hock disease — ... struck the hen batteries and turned them into feathery morgues. Shoals of rotting fish corpses were washed ashore ... the rivers stank (109).

People of pelphase keep out life, inturn, life keeps them out. Burgess evokes global famine owing to this curse. He talks of highly coloured famine in Gulbarga, Bangalore, and Rajura (110). The blight outside spoken by the Prime Minister with his servant, Abdul Wahab, parallels Tristram's degradation in prison. Burgess is a moralist attributing the curse on the land emanating out of inhumanity of man to man:

"Tristram was much thinner and he had a beard... growing there with his beard — daily more truculent, frequently gorillashaking the bars of his cage, ... a changed man" (115).
With this the pelphase changes into Interphase.
Tristram is told about it by his new cell-mate, a monk:
"... everybody is coming back to God. You will see, we shall see" (119). When Tristram comes to know that the state is praying to the powers of evil, he assures the monk that it is the end of the Interphase. During this, Capt. Loosely comes to Tristram to assist him to bring Derek to book for violating the states mandate of producing babies. When a chocolate bar is held out to Tristram as a temptation to get answer from him, the plight of Tristram and of his cell-mate is brought through darting "like a ray and snatched the bar... Tristram was on to him, and the two snarled, clawed, tore" (127).

This act of Tristram introduces cannibalistic chaos:
Thomas Wharton was knifed... "basted him, carved him, served him" (130). The cannibalistic orgy and a vast communal nocturnal gorge of manflesh has been followed by a heterosexual act. This inhuman act lifts the curse from the land. For the first time "... the root known as salsify was seen sprouting from the pressed earth" (131).

Burgess shows this as the beginning of Augustinian phase. Significantly, Tristram yearns for union with his wife, forgiving her all her sins: "He did not now particularly want revenge" (163). Tristram escapes from prison and goes in search of his wife. During his journey,
he enjoys the hospitality of cannibalistic dining-clubs. For the first time, spring returns to the world: "It seemed to be a fine spring morning" (168). The curse on the land is linked up with man's refusal to breed. Now, the motto of the latter part of Interphase is; "... petticoats up and trousers down" (174). Tristram on his way to his wife sees the fantastic fertility rituals: "... middle-aged women solidly eager, young lusty boys, girls shy but ready..." (180). He sees everywhere "... seed busy above seed busy below" (183). During this phase, for the first time, as if it were god's grace on people: "sunlight was merry on the sea, on the coloured dresses of the women and children, on the crab suits of the men" (191). All this changes Ministry of Infertility into Fertility. The fertility of gods of The Waste Land are reborn with the birth of Christ - "the eternal life giver" (201) who will hear "Himself addressed in joy and worship as Thammuz or Adonis or Attis or Balder or Hiawatha" (201).

The evil of this phase is satirized by Burgess through the driver's talk about war to Tristram: "Armies is for wars and wars is for armies. That's only plain common sense" (196).

Frustrated for not meeting his wife, Tristram starts seeing the good in Pelphase; "just enough food, stability,
a sufficiency of money, stereoscopic television on the bedroom ceiling" (208), now there was no money on him. He thinks of himself as a rootless person. But in the communal feeding centre, he is inadvertently conscripted.

This again pushes him into the fantastic world of babies and bullets. He is trained to fight war without anger: "It was slaughter, it was mutual massacre it was impossible to miss" (259). When the shooting begins, he is in a nighmarish world: "he was howling with despair and horror, seeing, as if the darkness were a mirror..." (260).

Finally, Tristram is united with his wife. In the union, he discerns the return of the Pelphase: "... man's ability to organize the good life, his lack of need for grace, the godhead implicit in him. Pelagius, Morgan, Old Man of the Sea" (283-284).

III

Derek likes Pelphase. He is described by Beatrice as "satyr" behind the "epicene exterior" (21). He thinks that it is good that god has been thrown out and livedog has taken his place. For him, "God is a tragic conception" (42). Therefore, he swears by dognose, instead of god knows. The Bible for him is: "... a book full of smut"(43).
While slipping away from Tristram's flat after sex with Beatrice-Joanna, Derek finds no one in the corridor, therefore, "Thank dog for that", he says (46). By his time serving instinct he gets promotion as Metropolitan Commissioner of Population Police. Burgess satirizes not only the negative system of life through Derek but the villains of the piece. Tristram always considers him as brother - betrayer: "The swine Derek" (81). True to his name, Derek sees to it that Tristram remains in prison indefinitely. He gets promotion even in Fertility Ministry. As a ruthless man, he asks Beatrice-Joanna: "... the most charitable thing is to think of Tristram long dead and long eaten... Now it's you and me. The future" (219). Burgess comes very heavily by creating Derek and his like. While "The War Department is a bit like prostitution: it cleanses the community", Dereks are its leeches who suck its marrow to make it sound hollow and empty of importance.

IV

Only two of the four characters in the novel have personality. While Tristram and Beatrice-Joanna change and develop - Derek, Shonny remain static like the remaining group of characters that are introduced, the principal, Jocelyne and Loosely, because the main interest of Burgess is the exposure of the shortcomings in Pelphase, Interphase and Gusphase. Therefore, Burgess adopts a
satiric mode in the novel whereas in the conception of Tristram and Beatrice-Joanna he is poetic and creative. They are a creation of his imagination rather than of pure reason.

The sea is a basic symbol of union for Tristram and Joanna. Whereas, in the evocation of others, animal imagery predominates. For instance, Miss Herschhorn has "dog's eyes", Dr Acheson could "Dognose" the disease (4-5) Derek's attempt to raise himself is described in terms of a worm going up: "literally crawling up the..." (30). The principal, Jocelyne is "too foxily modest" (27). It brings out his cunning move in life. Like Derek, he too maintains his post from beginning till the end of the novel. He is a dog in checking out people like Tristram, and maintaining his position. Significantly, the light falls on him as on a dog's face and the afternoon sealight "shone on a long nose, a blue muzzle" (28). Like Derek, Loosely is also "the little swine" (28). Both of them prosper on the obvious. Derek's lusty life is expressed through description: "a satyr with epicene exterior" (21). He is a snake to his brother, as Claudius is to the senior Hamlet. Therefore, he "had shed his public skin of dandified epicene" (33). When Derek goes away after meeting Tristram accidentally on the evening of Roger's death, Tristram sees his "bottom wagging" (48). Ironically, he had enjoyed sex with Beatrice-Joanna.
The imagery used in the novel is not situational but is used to portray the psychic traits of the people in the novel.
REFERENCES


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CHAPTER V

A CLOCKWORK ORANGE