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**MAIN IDEAS IN THE DYSTOPIAN NOVEL  
“THE WANTING SEED” BY ANTHONY BURGESS**

**ABSTRACT**

This paper explores Anthony Burgess's "The Wanting Seed" as a dynamic dystopian novel that critically engages with sociopolitical anxieties of its time, particularly the consequences of unchecked population growth. Through a satirical portrayal of British society, Burgess interrogates both governmental authority and civil irresponsibility, presenting a cyclical regime that shifts between ideological extremes. The novel envisions various radical solutions to overpopulation, ranging from reproductive restrictions to state-sanctioned extermination and cannibalism, while ultimately affirming the resilience of human nature and the importance of fundamental rights such as procreation and religious practice. By depicting characters who are simultaneously dignified and flawed, Burgess avoids simplistic moral binaries, offering a nuanced critique of both liberal-democratic inefficacy and authoritarian overreach. Although some of the novel's concerns have lost immediacy, its central themes remain relevant in contemporary discussions on biopolitics, state control, and the ethical limits of governance.

**Key words:** population growth, Malthusianism, fertility, human rights.

**INTRODUCTION**

Anthony Burgess, a well-known English writer, critic, composer and man of letters, is also famous for his dystopian novels, including "A Clockwork Orange" and "The Wanting Seed". Although similar in genre to "A Clockwork Orange", "The Wanting Seed" is, as frequently noted, a distinct and highly imaginative novel (2, p.268). The central theme of the work is the crisis arising from overpopulation. The author presents this issue through grotesque- that is, exaggerated and satirical- depictions, illustrating how societal norms and governmental perspectives may shift in response to such crises. To portray state control over the population, Burgess constructs a range of fictional governmental institutions, such as the Ministry of Infertility, the Population Police, and the Institute of Homosexuality. Moreover, by introducing a variety of characters alongside these institutions, he offers readers a broader socio-political landscape. From a research perspective, "The Wanting Seed" is a work that foregrounds issues of state and governance, and in this regard, it offers rich material for discussing the role and functions of government within the broader context of Burgess's oeuvre. While significant points concerning politics, religion, stereotypes, and related symbolic themes are addressed in the author's biography and in sections

devoted to “A Clockwork Orange”, “The Wanting Seed” possesses distinctive features, some of which have yet to be thoroughly explored. Although both novels were published in the same year, their origins, central ideas, and sources of inspiration differ markedly. (1, p.58) As for the origin of the novel’s title, it was inspired by a folk song. “The title was taken from a folk song; in its refrain, the phrases *wanton seed* and *wanting seed* were used interchangeably. Here, seed referred directly to semen, serving as a symbol of male fertility, and the song carried a subtly erotic undertone” (3, p.32). The title clearly resonates with one of the novel’s central themes: fertility. However, fertility in the novel is not confined to biological reproduction processes, the repressive policies aimed at curbing population growth, and the consequent loss of individual sovereignty over one’s own body. The word *wanting* itself carries a dual meaning: both “desiring” and “lacking”. This ambiguity aligns closely with the novel’s thematic essence, as characters exist in a paradoxical state- they are driven by the instinct to reproduce, yet this natural impulse is systematically suppressed. Society is thus rendered into a state of “wanting seed”, suggesting both diminished fertility and the criminalization or prohibition of childbirth. Moreover, in the novel’s dystopian world, concepts such as marriage, parenthood, and natural reproduction are transformed into processes that are regulated and controlled by the state. This allows the idea of fertility to be explored not only in a biological sense but also within broader social and political contexts. The erotic origin of the title, specifically, the subdued eroticism of the folk song, captures the tension between individual desire and biological need on the one hand, and societal repression on the other. Thus, the title “The Wanting Seed” is directly linked to the novel’s thematic vector of fertility and population control. It symbolically represents both the natural human impulses and the ways in which these impulses are stifled under a totalitarian regime. In this sense, the title is not merely an aesthetic or literary choice; it also functions as a symbolic expression that encapsulates the ideological foundation of the work. (1, p.60) According to Burgess, the central idea of the novel “The Wanting Seed” emerged from the Malthusian theory and his memories of Malaya related to the issue of “constantly increasing population density”. He writes: “*My book had to be devoted to a subject I had long been contemplating- population growth. I had lived in the East, where population density is prevalent, and had re-read Thomas Malthus. The day would come when there would be too many mouths to feed, but insufficient resources*”. (3, p. 33) Malthusianism, the notion that food production cannot keep pace with population growth, is explicitly depicted in the novel. Burgess conveys this idea particularly through the emergence of cannibalistic tendencies among people. These tendencies are presented as a reaction to persistent food shortages and the difficulties associated with a ration card system. This situation also recalls the food scarcity that occurred in the Soviet Union. Moreover, the theme of cannibalism is rooted in Burgess’s personal travel experiences. He recounts an incident during his time in Malaya when he traveled to New Guinea: “During my journey to New Guinea, I was offered a piece of roasted meat. These people had only recently abandoned the custom of feeding unwanted children to pigs. I only found out what I had eaten after I had consumed it”

(3, p.34). Based on this information, one can gain a clearer understanding of the plot of “The Wanting Seed” and how the author developed this central idea. Furthermore, these elements form a foundation for analyzing how the novel portrays concepts of government and governance. The plot of the novel unfolds around two central characters: history teacher Tristram Foxe and his wife Beatrice-Joanne. In the opening chapter, the reader is introduced to Beatrice-Johanna at the Ministry of Agriculture. She is mourning the loss of her beloved son, Roger, who passed away following a severe illness. Beatrice-Joanne struggles to reconcile herself with the state and its prevailing ideology, experiencing a profound sense of inner turmoil. She is engaged in a clandestine romantic relationship with Tristram’s brother, Derek. Derek who is employed at the Ministry, presents himself as homosexual in order to advance within the state apparatus. This is due to fact that the governmental system depicted in the novel actively promotes homosexuality, granting certain social privileges to citizens who identify as such. As a consequence of this affair, Beatrice-Joanne becomes pregnant, although she remains uncertain about the identity of the child’s father. At the beginning of the novel, Anthony Burgess presents the liberal order- that is, a state system aimed at safeguarding individual freedom and well-being- as a means to mitigate the problems caused by population growth. However, as the narrative progresses, this system transforms into a tyrannical regime. The newly established “Global Population Limitation Authority” and its affiliated institutions not only monitor the population but also begin to deliberately exterminate individuals. Tristram Foxe, who serves as the author’s mouthpiece, repeatedly expresses his concern over this situation. He emphasizes that the state has fabricated the image of a non-existent enemy and that sending people to their deaths is ultimately meaningless. These reflections highlight Burgess’s critique of the military and political structures. As Tristram states: *“There is no enemy over there. The whole thing is fake. Very shortly this trench will blow up and the blowing-up will be done by remote control, by some bloody big spider sitting at base. Don’t you see?”* (4, p. 248) Some researches argue that Anthony Burgess portrays the government as the sole authority capable of resolving issues related to “body politics” (the physical and biological condition of society), presenting state intervention as a more humane alternative in comparison to the hunger resulting from citizens’ irresponsibility. Kateb approaches the matter as follows: *“One of the things I meant is that in Burgess’s world, horrible as it is, government is a largely benign force. It is undemocratic in the name of efficiency, but it is also completely devoid of the lust for power and aggrandizement. When it acts it acts solely for the general good.”* (5, p.101). This perspective appears reasonable to some extent, as individual characters such as Beatrice-Joanne Foxe illustrate the inefficiency of liberal-democratic approaches in addressing emergencies related to population growth. The initial assumption that people would act responsibly leads to deep disappointment, resulting in increasing negligence and, eventually, the implementation of harsher punitive measures. For instance, the main female character Beatrice’s disregard for the policy recommending only one child per family (whether living or deceased) clearly highlights this issue and explains why the state later establishes institutions such as the

Population Police: “ *I mean, people have been having children in excess of the ration and nothing much has happened to them. I’m entitled to a child...*” (4, p.71). Based on the aforementioned arguments, it can be said that Burgess’s critique is not directed at the state itself but rather at the initial course of action it chooses. Consequently, in “The Wanting Seed”, the portrayal of the state is presented as contradictory and multifaced. In conclusion, in “The Wanting Seed”, Burgess constructs a dynamic dystopian narrative in which the regime undergoes cyclical transformations, using the novel as a vehicle to express a range of anxieties pertinent to the period in which it was written, while satirically critiquing certain aspects of British society. Although some of these concerns may no longer be relevant today, the novel’s central theme, population growth and its consequences, remains strikingly current. Throughout the narrative, Burgess proposes not one but several potential “solutions” to the problem, ranging from the restriction of reproduction to extermination sessions, and even cannibalism. As bleak as this vision of humanity’s future may be, the novel continues to underscore the innate life force of the human race. In this context, Burgess emerges as a defender of “human nature” and of fundamental human rights such as the right to reproduce and to practice religion. He exposes the flaws of both civil society and government, substantiating this stance by portraying his characters as both dignified and culpable, thus reflecting the complex moral ambiguity that defines his critique.

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#### ENTONİ BERCESSİN “ARZULANAN TOXUM” ADLI ANTIÜTOPIK ROMANINDA ƏSAS İDEYALAR XÜLASƏ

Məqalədə Entoni Bercessin “Arzulanan Toxum” romanı dinamik antiutopik bir əsər kimi təhlil edilir və onun yazıldığı dövrün ictimai-siyasi narahatlıqlarına xüsusilə də nəzarətsiz əhali artımının nəticələrinə münasibəti araşdırılır. Bercess Britaniya cəmiyyətini satirik şəkildə təsvir edərək həm hökumət hakimiyyətini, həm də vətəndaş məsuliyyətsizliyini tənqid edir və ideoloji ifratlara meyli olan dövrü rejim modelini təqdim edir. Romanda əhali artımına qarşı müxtəlif radikal “həll yolları” təklif olunur, çoxalmanın məhdudlaşdırılmasından tutmuş dövlət tərəfindən həyata keçirilən exterminasiya və kannibalizmə qədər. Lakin bu bədbin düşüncəyə baxmayaraq, əsər insan təbiətinin dirənişini və çoxalma, dini icra kimi fundamental hüquqların əhəmiyyətini vurğulamaqda davam edir. Bercess həm liberal-demokratik

sistemlərin səmərəsizliyini, həm də avtoritar nəzarətin etik sərhədlərini tənqid edərək, obrazlarını eyni anda həm ləyaqətli, həm də qüsurlu şəkildə təqdim edir və bu yolla sadələşdirilmiş mənəvi dualizmdən yayınır. Romanın bəzi narahatlıqları müasir dövrdə aktuallığını itirsə də, onun əsas mövzuları olan biopolitika, dövlət nəzarəti və idarəçiliyin etik sərhədləri bu gün də aktual olaraq qalmaqdadır.

**Açar sözlər:** əhali artımı, maltusçuluq, doğum, insan haqqları.

**АЙСЕЛЬ МАМЕДОВА**

**ОСНОВНЫЕ ИДЕИ АНТИУТОПИЧЕСКОГО РОМАНА  
«ЖАЖДА СЕМЕНИ» ЭНТОНИ БЁРДЖЕССА  
АННОТАЦИЯ**

В данной статье рассматривается роман Энтони Бёрджесса Желанное семя как динамичное антиутопическое произведение, в котором отражаются социально-политические тревоги эпохи, особенно связанные с неконтролируемым ростом населения. Посредством сатирического изображения британского общества Бёрджесс критикует как государственную власть, так и гражданскую безответственность, представляя модель циклически изменяющегося режима, склонного к идеологическим крайностям. В романе предлагаются различные радикальные «решения» проблемы перенаселения — от ограничения рождаемости до санкционированных государством сессий истребления и даже каннибализма. Несмотря на мрачный взгляд на будущее человечества, произведение подчёркивает жизнеспособность человеческой природы и важность фундаментальных прав, таких как право на воспроизведение и свободу вероисповедания. Бёрджесс выявляет недостатки как гражданского общества, так и государственного аппарата, изображая своих персонажей одновременно достойными и порочными, тем самым избегая упрощённого морального дуализма. Хотя некоторые из поднятых в романе проблем утратили актуальность, его ключевые темы — биополитика, государственный контроль и этические границы власти — остаются важными и в современном контексте.

**Ключевые слова:** рост населения, мальтузианство, рождаемость, права человека.

**Rəyçi:** prof. Qorxmaz Həsi oğlu Quliyev