From Anthony Burgess's continuous use of different linguistic systems in his novels, one can gather that the author is deeply fascinated by language. The author does not limit himself to existing and widely used systems; he even creates his own languages.¹ The language of the violent youngsters in A Clockwork Orange is perhaps the best known example of Burgessian linguistic creation. Not less interesting is the Castilian language in MF.

Where does this language derive from? Burgess himself highlights the origins of the Castilian language: "This was the old language of the Castites, derived from the Romance dialect spoken by the first settlers, who themselves had gone to settle on the Cantabrian coast from some nameless place in the Mediterranean".² The language spoken in Castita, as in any other Central or South American state, is of romance origin. However, it is neither French nor Spanish nor Portuguese. Burgess has conveniently chosen a geographical point on the map where nothing exists: at "Latitude 15, south of Hispaniola. Three hundred miles west of the Leewards", (MF, p. 13) the author can let his fantasy roam wild and free, thus creating his own island with its own language.³

The island of Castita and its language, however, are not totally the fruit of Burgess's fantasy. This widely travelled author is a real master in the art of blending fact and fiction; and Castita, its people, customs and language are really a product of this art. When MF was published in 1971, Burgess had been living in the mediterranean island of Malta for some time. Many of the historically accurate features of Castita are actually part and parcel of the Maltese environment. The historical background of the two islands is 'surprisingly' very similar: "[The first settlers of Castita] had been enslavers, but that curious wave of British Muslims, that had colonized Ojeda also, had freed the slaves and, becoming lax in their faith under this sun, had been absorbed by the Christianity of the island, though not before they had iglooed the frozen honey of the local stone into mosques. It was to the Dwumu, or great mosque-cathedral, in Fortescue Square that the procession now moved. And who had Fortescue been? A British governor of the time of the British raj or rigi, now ended. That rule had left, I discovered, a public works department, the English language, a thicket of laws, but no democracy" (MF, pp. 67–68).

Allowing for a certain elasticity in the chronological sequence, it turns out that Malta has passed through nearly the same historical phases as Castita: in the 16th–17th century the Knights of St John used to thrive on the looting of Turkish vessels and on the wealth forthcoming from the ensuing slave trade; in 870 A.D. Malta was conquered by the Arabs, who ruled over the archipelago until 1090; the moslems were eventually absorbed "by the Christianity of the island" (today 95% of the Maltese are catholic); the principal features of North African house building (mainly the flat roofs) prevail unto this day and the honey coloured Maltese stone dominates the landscape; the island fell under British domination in 1800; British
rule ended in 1964, but it has left on the island "a public works department, the English language, a thicket of laws, [. . . ]". As for the presence of democracy on the island, the issue has been debated ever since the attainment of independence in 1964 and [. . .] is a very 'hot' topic today.14

The close resemblance between Castita and Malta is not limited to a common historical background; it is further emphasized through the description of contemporary events on the two islands. The "Senta Euphorbia fista, all stated processions, fireworks, candyliss, miracles and drinking" (MF, p. 58) is none other than one of the innumerable village festi held in Malta in honour of the local patron saint! The description of the procession on the day of the Senta Euphorbia feast at the beginning of Chapter six (MF, p. 66) could easily find place in any guide-book to the Maltese islands, without hardly any alteration.5

The Maltese-Castitan connection is also rendered through the portrayal of minor details such as[, for example, the entrance to Dr Matta's house (MF, p. 164):]"I watched her mount the steps outside the big oak door of Dr Matta, whose name was engrossed in copperplate cursive on a brass plate. She rapped the brass dolphin knocker [. . . ]". Brass dolphin knockers are a typical feature of Maltese houses, especially of the old imposing houses, with "steps outside", which are still to be found in the three nobleman and villager [ ]

The Maltese-Castitan link is further highlighted from a structural point of view. The whole plot of MF is triggered off by Miles Faber's general interest in literature and, in particular, by his knowledge of the Maltese language: the resemblance of the English proper noun Fenwick to the Maltese noun and surname Fenech ('rabbit'), and the complex interconnection between Maltese jw (or), French or ('gold') and English Jew lead Miles to the solution of Professor Keteki's riddle concerning Fenwick's "Gold and even so". By solving this riddle Miles not only earns twenty dollars but also Professor Keteki's friendship and respect: "Professor Keteki got [Miles] interested in a man called Sib Legeru, a Castitan poet and painter" (MF, p. 13). Basically, Miles' interest in Castita could be represented through the following scheme:

Keteki Miles Malta Miles Keteki Miles Castita

The hero's initial interest in Castita and Sib Legeru coincides with the solution of a 'Maltese' riddle; the solution of the Sib Legeru Castitan mystery definitely decrees the end of his Maltese interests. Therefore, the whole plot of MF, which starts off and finishes off with the Maltese language, is based on language and on linguistic interpretation: the erroneous interpretation of a Maltese word (jew) sets Miles on the right track towards the revelation of the Sib Legeru enigma.1

The linguistic situations in Malta and Castita are absolutely identical; in both countries the people are bi-lingual. The 1964 Independence Constitution decrees that the national language of the Maltese islands is Maltese while the official languages are both English and Maltese. To put it in Burgess's words, Maltese, like Castitan, is "the first, or alternative, language of the island", (MF, p. 70) depending on the social status of the speaker and his interlocutor as well as on the degree of formality that governs their conversation.

Taking into consideration the almost parallel historical, religious, environmental and linguistic backgrounds of the two countries, one would expect the Castitan language to have a lot in common with the Maltese language. Surprisingly enough, apart from a few exceptions, this is not so! The Castitan language is more closely related to the Italian language and to its Sicilian variants rather than to Maltese. Actually, Burgess has been extremely consistent when 'creating' this new language: since the framework of Maltese is essentially Sicilian, it does not fit the Castitan language, which is "derived from [a] romance dialect" (MF, p. 67). Italian, and Sicilian, are more suited to the case.

The vocalic system of the Castitan language is modelled on Sicilian (and Maltese; the Maltese vocalic system derives from Sicilian) rather than on standard Italian. Italian, i.e. the language spoken in Tuscany, has the following vocalic system, with three velar and three palatal vowels (apart from a):

i u e o e o a

The Sicilian vocalic system reduces the total number of vowel sounds from seven to five, thus giving:

i u e o a

In the Castitan vocalic system, Burgess extends the Sicilian tendency of further closing certain vocalic sounds (i.e., e > i; i > u) to all the vowels. Practically, each vowel moves one step up the scale. Thus a > e (e.g., it. santa > senta), e > i (i. festa > fista), i > ij (it. spina > spjina), o > u (it. rosa > ruza), u > uw (it. pubblico > puwbliju). Naturally, there are a few notable exceptions but, as the saying goes, these exceptions only confirm the rule.9

The accepted vowels at the end of Italian oxtony words also seem to follow a consistent pattern in the Castitanian language: it. final à > e while it. final i > it. Thus, the Italian oxtony common nouns santià, ospitility, pipi change respectively into santiët, uspijelijet, pipit. What would seem to be an exception to this rule (it. castîà > Castità; it. gran ciita > Gretcità) is really a different case altogether. These two Italian common nouns are upgraded to proper nouns in the novel; in MF they are actually toponyms which indicate, respectively, the Caribbean island and its capital town. Therefore, they are to be classified in a category of their own.

As regards diphthongs, while there are a few examples of Italian uo in the Castitanian language, ie hardly appears at all. In fact, the Castitan word icspličari owes its origin to the Latin verb explicare + Sicilian ending -ari rather than to its Italian equivalent spiegare. As for the rendering of uo, Dwumu <it. duomo and Dwunmirketo <it. buon mercato point to the diphthong wu. However, muuviwm <muoviamo indicates that the variant uw is also possible.
Vis-à-vis Italian, consonants seem to be more stable than vowels in the Castilian language. However, in a few isolated cases certain consonant sounds depart from the standard transcription. Normally, the voiced Italian dental consonant d is transcribed in the same way in Castilian, both in initial and in intervocalic position (e.g. Dwump <it. duomo; idijuta <it. idiota). Strècta <it. strada constitutes an exception to this rule.

The unvoiced Italian sibilant s undergoes much the same treatment as d. In fact, the transcription of this sound remains unvaried in Castilian (e.g. fista <it. fista; spina <it. spina). The only transgression to this rule is Ruza <it. rosa. On closer examination, however, it turns out that in the Italian word rosa the s is actually pronounced as a voiced fricative [z], and therefore Burgess is transcribing the consonant as i is actually pronounced in Italian. It is interesting to note that the Maltese word for 'pink' is roza (ż is the Maltese letter for the voiced fricative [ʒ]).

In Castilian, while the Italian palatal combination ca can either remain unvaried (as in Castità <it. castità and bucca <it. bocca) or else change into ke (as in Bwnimirket <it. Buon mercato), the palatal combination ga changes to ghe, as in Pepeghelju <it. pappagallo). On the other hand, the Italian velar combinations co and go always change in the Castilian language, giving respectively gu and cu. Thus we have, for example, migregulu <it. miracolo; puwbiligu <it. pubblico; suwceu <it. sugo.

The most unstable combinations involving consonants are those comprising double letters. Actually, in most cases Burgess treats Italian geminated letters according to a set pattern: the double letters are reduced to a single one, and the semi-vowel j substitutes the missing letter. Thus, Italian stella becomes Stejla, gran città > Grcenjita, messa > mijsa, pappagallo > pepeghelju. However, exceptions to this rule are not lacking! Bueca <it. bocca is an example of conservation of the Italian spelling; Pepeghelju <it. pappagallo and Puwbiligu <it. pubblico respect the set pattern only in part since the semi-vowel j does not substitute the missing letter; finally, in todj <it. tutti the unvoiced double consonants tt are reduced to the voiced single consonant d.

In his analysis of MF, G. Azzopardi considers the Maltese/Castilian surname Gonzi tangible proof of the Maltese background to the Caribbean island: “The abundant references to things Maltese and bits of “Castilian” history point strongly to that island. One might mention in particular the name “Gonzi”, which the archbishop of Malta shares with the riddling, lionlike character who attempts to trap and kill Faber”. Actually, there are other surnames which Burgess has picked up in Malta. The author might have chosen the name Guzman for the shady character wanted by Paradeeves’s henchman (MF, pp. 45–46) because of its clear roman origin. However, the surname Guzman – though not a very common one in Malta – was very much in the news during Burgess’s stay there since one of the most popular singers on the island at that time was called Enzo Guzman. Gonzi was the surname of the Maltese archbishop of that time, that same archbishop who was to have an important role in Earthly Powers. The archbishop’s chapsman in Earthly Powers, Fr. Azzopardi, borrows his surname from the Castilian producer of a particular brand of rum, “Azzopardi’s Cane Rum” (MF, p. 116). Azzopardi is a very common Maltese surname.

Malta provides Burgess with fertile pastures where not only can he pick up ready made Castilian onomastics but also get ideas for the coinage of other proper nouns. The most important street in Grcenjita is called “Main Street, or the Strèta Rijal” (MF, p. 66). Main Street is the English name for the principal street in many Maltese villages. Such is the case with Lija, the author’s village of residence in Malta. Strèta Rijal, instead, was the Maltese name for the main street in the capital, Valletta. Strèta Rijal is obviously derived from it.

One recurrent characteristic of Burgesian proper nouns, be they of Maltese origin or not, is that they are very often oblique, superficially similar in their untranscribed form to the principal street in Castilian. A Castilian common noun originates from Italian. However, zabb and pipit, synonyms which stand for ‘the outer sex organ of male animals’ or ‘penis’, certainly owe more to the Maltese language rather than to Italian. The Maltese word for ‘penis’ is tobb (hence zab). Both in Italian and Maltese pipi stands for ‘urine’, moreover, in both languages the word is also etymologically used to indicate a child’s penis. However, this metonymical use is more widespread in Maltese than in Italian. By attributing pipit the same meaning as zab, and by closely associating the two words, Burgess clearly betrays the Maltese metonymical meaning of the Castilian word rather than the Italian literal one.

Of the Castilian verbal forms reproduced in MF all but one happen to be imperative. Iespliccare, the odd verb out, is an infinitive which most probably derives from Latin explicare [‘to explain’], with a Sicilian loan ending, -ari. As for the imperatives, the consonants do not differ at all from those in the corresponding Italian words while the vowels and diphthongs are subjected to the already mentioned transformations. The only peripety is caused by Tacića <it. taci [‘be quiet’]; the final -a is difficult to explain. Perhaps, since this imperative is closely associated with the noun idijuta <it. idiota, the final -a is an analogical one. In Italian, the majority of nouns ending in -a are of female gender. Although idiota happens to be an exceptional case, it would not seem unreasonable to suggest that Burgess added the -a to taci for the sake of uniformity. Again, it is interesting to note that in Maltese one way of forming the feminine is by adding -ja to the masculine noun (e.g. m. barrani > f. barranja [‘stranger’]; m. rahi > f. rahija [‘villager’]).

The endings of Castilian adjectives respect the following pattern: the Italian masculine ending -o becomes -u (e.g. pubblico > puwbiligu), the feminine ending -a remains unvaried (e.g. spinata > ispinjata) while the final -e in Italian adjectives of neuter gender just drops (e.g. reale > rjal). The ending in todj <it. tutti) seems to indicate that the masc. pl. ending also follows the general vowel transformation rule. However, this is not exactly so: the Castilian expression todj ewstjoni derives from it. tutte questioni; questioni is a femin. pl. noun in Italian, but the ‘masculine’ ending -a has induced Burgess to treat the word as a masc. pl. one. Thus it is actually the fem. pl. Italian adjective tutte that changes into the masc. pl. Castilian equivalent todj. Therefore, what we have here is e > i.
The Castitan pronouns nuij <it. noi and mijo <it. mi, the prepositions pir <it. per and d' <it. di and the interjection Selvi <it. Salve do not present any notable deviation from the rules, apart from the case of d' in front of consonant (e.g. d'Gencija; d'entiet). In Italian, the assimilation of -l only occurs when the preposition di is followed by a word starting with a vowel (e.g. d'oro for di oro; d'argento for di argento etc.). The assimilation of the vowel in front of a consonant is characteristic only of the Castitan language, and is therefore to be considered a Burgesian innovation.

The island of Castita, with its language and customs, would not have been what it actually is in MF without the Siculo-Maltese influence. The intermingling of such diverse features, characteristic of the Mediterranean and Caribbean cultures, is totally acceptable within the framework of a novel based on the theme of incest: where blood relatives of the first degree are allowed to defy the rules of nature, it comes as no surprise if two antithetical cultures defy the rules of space and... logic.

1 To put it in Carol M. Dix's words, "[... ] Burgess is one of the few authors writing today in England who makes the fullest use of the raw materials of writing, that is the words themselves. His linguistic explorations or experiments make him at once one of our most adventurous writers; [... ]", C.M. Dix, Anthony Burgess, London, Longman, 1971, p. 21.
2 A. Burgess, MF, London, Jonathan Cape Ltd., 1971, p. 67. All quotations from MF are from this edition, and subsequent references will be given in the text with page numbers and abbreviation.
3 At the beginning of the novel, Burgess cites S. Potter: "In his Linguistic Atlas of the United States and Canada Hans Kurath recognizes no isogloss coincident with the political border along Latitude 49°N"! Was it Burgess’s intention to prove that language cannot be constrained within fixed boundaries?
4 The striking resemblance between Malta and Castita has already been noticed by Geoffrey Aggeler in his Anthony Burgess, The artist as novelist, Alabama, The University of Alabama Press, 1979. Cfr., for example, p. 16: "During his brief, unhappy residence on the island [Malta], he managed to produce two books: a biography of Shakespeare and his novel MF, which is set in the United States and a tyrannically ruled Carribean island called "Castita". The striking resemblance this supposedly chaste little island bears to Malta would appear to be more than coincidental!". See also pp. 53; 144; 206.
5 Obviously, this description has also a lot in common with the village feasts in Southern Italy, especially in Calabria and in Sicily.
6 One must bear in mind that during his stay in Malta Burgess lived in one of these imposing houses, in Lija.
7 "— What do you know about the Maltese Language?
   — Dear me, you do durt about. Nothing, except that it's a Northern Arabic dialect with Italian loanwords and that it's had a written form for a little over a century.
   — So I'd give the wrong answer. Plausible, but wrong. [... ]". (MF, p. 210).
9 The major one is, Italian final -s. It remains unchanged in Castitan (e.g. santa > senta; stella > stejja), Other exceptions are: a > a (aria > arija); e > i (salve > selvi); i > l (diosta > kiijata); o > o (polizia > politja); u > w (sangue > sengwu). As can be gathered from the above list, the exceptions to the rule in the Castitan vocalic system usually occur either at the beginning or at the end of a word but hardly ever in the middle of it.
10 The j in Gencija and mija is probably part of the digraph ij. However, the examples stejja and pepegejjia prove that Burgess does actually combine a j with the other letter.
13 "Tria il-Kibra, meaning Street the Big or Main Street, [... ]". Cfr. A. Burgess, Earthly Powers, cit., p. 8.
14 Kingway was the corresponding English name. In 1974 the street's name was changed to Triq ir-Repubblika/Republic Street.