

A Clockwork Orange

by Anthony Burgess

About the Author

1917 - John Anthony Burgess Wilson was born on the 25th of February in Manchester, England. After he had studied English Literature in the University of Manchester he joined the army in 1940.

1942 - Burgess marries Llewela Isherwood Jones, a Welsh student at Manchester University. Later that year, she is assaulted by American deserters, killing her unborn child.

1946 - 1954 -, Burgess teaches English Literature, phonetics, Spanish, music, and drama at several middle schools in England

1959 - Burgess is rushed to a neurological institute in London with a possible brain tumor and the doctors tell him that he only has one year to live. Burgess then decides to become a professional writer.

The medical diagnosis turns out to be wrong, and Burgess stays with his new career, writing over 35 novels and other books over the course of his lifetime (*Vision of Battlement* 1965, *The Wanting Seed* 1962, *Honey for the Bears* 1963, *Earthly Powers* 1980, etc.)

1962 - He publishes his most popular novel "A Clockwork Orange"

1968 - On March 20th, Llewela Wilson died. In October, Burgess marries Liliana Macellari, a linguist at Cambridge University. The couple leaves England for good and takes up residence in Malta.

1969 - He teaches creative writing at both Princeton and Columbia. In the same year the performance of his first symphony occurs at the Summer Festival of the Tyrone Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis.

1971 - Stanley Kubrick makes a film of "A Clockwork Orange" which becomes very popular

1993 - Anthony Burgess dies on the 22nd of November in London.

The story

The leading character and narrator of "A Clockwork Orange" is Alex; a very violent and cruel 15 year old boy and his droogs (friends) Dim, Pete and Georgie. After sitting in the Korova Milk bar, a place where one can order milk with LSD, Alex and his droogs decide to hit the town. Within the next few hours of night, he and his friends; assault an old man returning from a library, hold up a small shop, fight a rival gang, steal a car, drive it to a house called "Home", where they proceed to attack the writer that lives there and rape his wife in front of him. This describes just a regular night of Alex and his droogs.

As the book continues, Alex falls into bad standing with his droogs, who set him up to be arrested. The plan is to call the police when Alex breaks into a rich old lady's house. Alex quite accidentally kills the old lady and the police arrest him. He is found guilty for murder and should go to prison for fourteen years.

After almost two years in Prison, Alex hears of a new programme that can "reform" a prisoner and have him out of prison in a week's time. Alex has no idea of what the treatment really is and jumps to volunteer.

At first, the accommodations are much better than prison - Alex is given his own room and good food. Everything seems normal except for an injection he is given "to improve his appetite." The next day, the true treatment begins. Alex is brought into a movie screening room, and is bound in a straightjacket, tied to a chair which allows him only to look at the screen, and his eyelids are forced open. The doctors administering the "Reclamation Treatment" (or Ludovico Treatment) begin playing many films which contain brutal violence and rape and in one film you could also hear Beethoven's 9th symphony. Normally Alex wouldn't have minded these films, but the injection he was given makes him feeling intense pain all over his body. This treatment continues for several hours per day for a hole week. Now Alex can only associate a sickening pain with the violent lifestyle he once led.

At a press conference held upon his release (to prove the effectiveness of the treatment), he is confronted with situations to fight, but each time he feels sickness and pain and can't do anything. After Alex is released, he enters into a world that has changed drastically since his arrest. People who Alex has brutalised and taken advantage of in the past recognise him and naturally want revenge.

His old "droogs" are policemen now and they beat him too. Alex crawls to the home of the writer he and his droogs assaulted, seeking refuge and food. At first, the writer doesn't recognise that it is Alex but then the man realises who was in his house and calls some friends over to help him get revenge. The man had read about Alex's controversial treatment in the news and remembered something about Beethoven, so after locking Alex in an upstairs room, the writer plays the

9th Symphony very loud. Alex can't stand the pain and jumps out of the window.

His suicide attempt is made public, and the masses demand that his treatment is reversed.

After leaving the hospital Alex meets with the third of his original droogs, who now has a family and is living a socially acceptable life. Alex, who now has new droogs, realises something is missing in his life. A new found maturity and the overwhelming urge to settle down falls over him and he essentially grows up.

Main theme

The time and place of the story was not quite properly given, but the dark and despicable state of the society in which Alex lives suggests that it is set in a quite probable near future. The author, being from England, is thought to have set it in England, but the novel is written so that it could have happened anywhere.

The moral of the novel is centered on free will, specifically the difference of “being good” and the CHOICE of “being good.”

The "Ludovico Treatment" makes Alex step by step to "A Clockwork Orange" a mixture of machine and man.

The treatment of Alex in the novel can represent what society thinks should be done about a criminal population.

And in the last chapter, Alex's emptiness that he later realises to be a need for settling down, symbolises that most people grow and learn and change.

The style

Alex is the “Humble Narrator” of this novel, and speaks in a slang that was invented by Anthony Burgess throughout the story. Words such as “see” are replaced with “viddied”; “blood” with “krovvy”; “hit” with “tolchock”; smell with “vonny”, old woman with "baboochka" etc.

During his stay in Leningrad Burgess picked up most of this "nadsat" (his own creation of language).