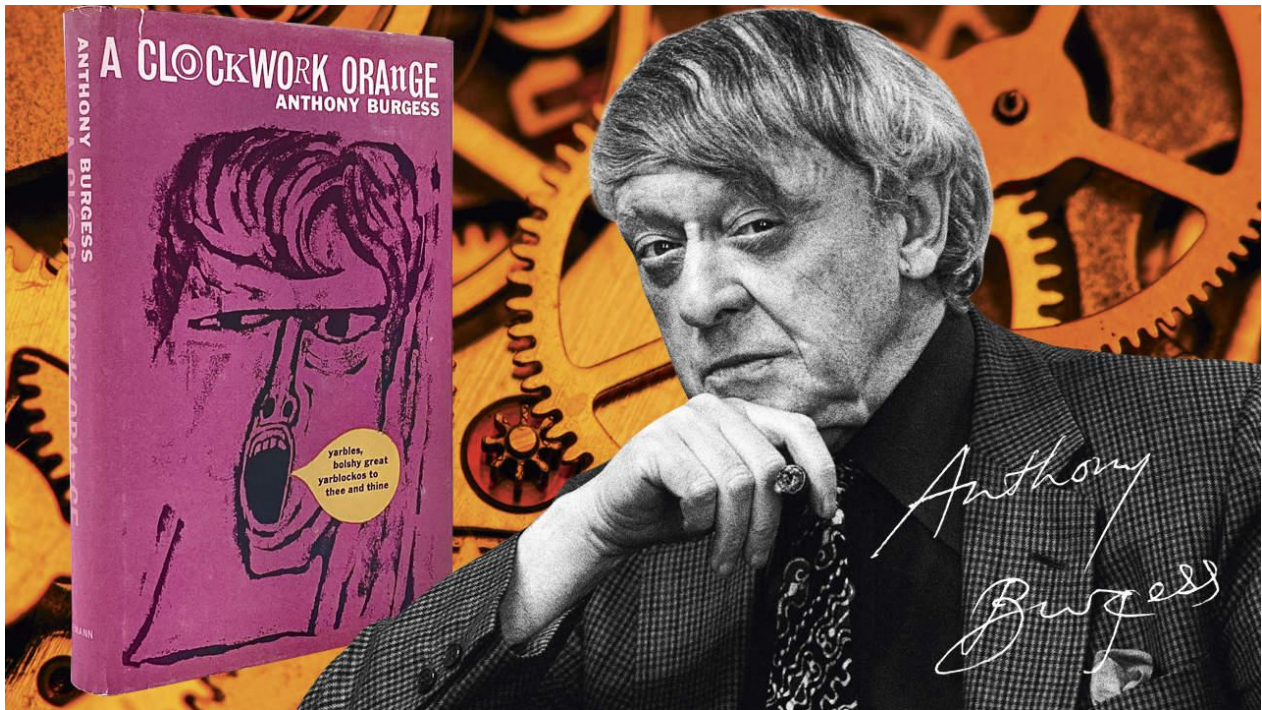


“A Clockwork Orange” by Anthony Burgess

[B2]

In questa distopia autoritaria con bande giovanili ultraviolente e un gergo inventato, Anthony Burgess crea un’opera trasgressiva e unica sia per l’originalità stilistica che per la messa in discussione della morale contemporanea. Un classico spesso frainteso e dal finale controverso.



This controversial 1960s black-comic novel by the English author Anthony Burgess examines society’s unsuccessful attempt to psychologically rehabilitate a violent teenage delinquent. Alex, the fifteen-year-old protagonist, and his gang of ultra-violent friends, live in a dystopian near-future where they speak Nadsat, a Russian-influenced **slang** invented by Burgess. Empathy is absent. The teenagers **engage indrug-fuelled** orgies (milk **spiked** with narcotics is the drug **of choice**), and random acts of brutality—particularly against **defenceless** people. How will the authorities deal with these young people and their amoral behaviour? Burgess explores what happens when the state tries to ‘correct’ people through coercion.

EXTREME VIOLENCE

Alex and his friends actively enjoy committing ultra-violent crimes, including rape and physical assault. After attacking and killing an elderly woman in her home during a robbery, Alex describes, in Nadsat [slang](#), how he hit the woman over the head with a statue in a chaotic scene surrounded by the woman's many angry cats (koshkas). "[...] a couple of koshkas got on to me and starting scratching like bezoomy. I got real bezoomny myself, brothers, and hit out at them, but this baboochka said: 'Toad, don't touch my kitties,' and like scratched my litso. So then I screeched: 'You filthy old soomka,' and upped with the little malenky like silver statue and cracked her a fine fair tolchock on the gulliver and that shut her up real horrorshow and lovely."

"Un paio di ràttoli mi zomparono addosso e si misero a graffiare da imburianati. Così m'imburianai anch'io, fratelli, e cominciai a menare, ma questa babusca disse: - Mostro, guai se tocchi i miei gattini, - e giù un graffio sulla biffa. Allora io scricciai: - Lurida vecchia sportaccia, - e alzai la migna statuina tipo argento e le mollai un gran bel festone sul planetario e questo la zittì cinebrivido perbenino."

LANGUAGE

One of the most innovative aspects of A Clockwork Orange is the use of Nadsat. Burgess spoke ten languages, including Russian, and the [slang](#) he invented for the novel includes a lot of words [borrowed](#) directly from the language. For example, "devotchka" meaning 'young woman', and "chelloveck" meaning 'man'. There are also words adapted from Russian, such as "horrorshow" from 'хорошо' meaning 'good' or 'well'. Other words are variations of English: "appy polly loggies" means '[apologies](#)' and "baddiwad" means 'bad'. Although it's not easy to read Nadsat, it's always possible [to guess](#) the meaning of words from the context. By the end of the book, the reader has learnt enough Nadsat to understand lines as strange as this one: "I viddied that the devotchka at this table who was with this chelloveck was real horrorshow... with a horrorshow plott and litso and a smiling rot and very very fair voloss and all that cal." "Locchiai che questa quaglia seduta al tavolo con questo martino era proprio cinebrivido, non il genere che vorresti subito sbattere giù e fargli il vecchio vaeveni, ma con

delle macerie e una biffa cinebrivido e un truglio sorridente e un criname biondo biondo e quel genere di sguanate.”

A NEW START

Alex ends up in prison for murdering the elderly woman and, while there, becomes the subject of an experimental aversion-therapy called the “Ludovico technique”. He’s given drugs that make him [feel sick](#) and is then forced to watch films of ultra-violent acts. The idea is that he’ll be [brainwashed](#) into finding violence repugnant. And it does work. However, there is an unexpected consequence: the music of Beethoven, which Alex loves, had been used as a soundtrack during the therapy, so now he also feels sick when he listens to it. Devastated, Alex attempts to commit suicide — but survives. After this near-death experience, the Ludovico Technique stops working. But although Alex is now free to return to his violent lifestyle, he doesn’t. In the final chapter of the book, as Alex grows up, he decides, using his own [free will](#), to reject violence and instead dreams of having a son. “But first of all, brothers, there was this veshch of finding some devotchka or other who would be a mother to this son. I would have to start on that tomorrow, I kept thinking. That was something like new to do. That was something I would have to get started on, a new like chapter beginning. The first step.” “Ma prima di tutto, fratelli, c’era questa trucca di trovare qualche mammola che volesse fare da madre a questo figlio. Avrei dovuto cominciare a cercare da domani, pensavo. Era tipo aver qualcosa di nuovo da fare. Era qualcosa in cui dovevo mettermi subito, un nuovo capitolo che cominciava.”

FREE WILL

Interestingly, this [redemptive](#) ending was omitted by the American publishers. In an introduction to the 1986 edition of the novel, Burgess, a Catholic, asks whether taking away someone’s [free will](#) in this way also takes away their humanity. “[...] by definition, a human being is endowed with [free will](#). He can use this to choose between good and evil. If he can only perform good or only perform evil, then he is a clockwork orange, meaning

that he has the appearance of an organism lovely with colour and juice but is in fact only a clockwork toy to be wound up by God or the Devil or (since this is increasingly replacing both) the Almighty State.” “[...] per definizione, una creatura che può solo fare il bene o il male ha l'apparenza di un frutto amabile caratterizzato da colore e succo, ma in effetti internamente è solo un giocattolo a molla pronto a essere caricato da Dio, dal Diavolo o dallo Stato onnipotente, e a far scattare la propria violenza, appunto, come un mero e semplice congegno meccanico caricato a molla.”

MOVIE VERSION

In 1972, director Stanley Kubrick made a film version of *A Clockwork Orange*, which brought the book cult status and increased the controversy around it. But then, a year after the film was released, Kubrick asked for it not to be shown any more. Various violent crimes had been committed that some people [claimed](#) were [copycat crimes](#) inspired by the film. *A Clockwork Orange* has been widely referenced in popular culture in the six decades since it was first published: from Bart Simpson using the Nadsat word 'gulliver' meaning 'head', to the torture scene in Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs*. One of the most influential British novels of the 20th century, it still seems relevant today.

Glossary

- **slang** = gergo
- **borrowed** = prendere in prestito
- **to guess** = indovinare
- **redemptive** = redentore
- **engage in** = dedicarsi a
- **spiked** = correggere
- **brainwashed** = fare il lavaggio del cervello
- **claimed** = affermare
- **apologies** = scuse
- **feel sick** = sentirsi male
- **copycat crimes** = crimini di imitazione
- **drug-fuelled** = alimentate da droghe
- **of choice** = preferita
- **defenceless** = indifeso
- **free will** = libero arbitrio