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# Dystopia or Satire? Reading Anthony Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange*

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And is not our modern history, my  
brothers, the story of brave  
malenky selves fighting this big  
machines?<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange*, London, Penguin Classics, 2000, p. 31.



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	9
<b>CHAPTER 1</b>	
Setting the Novel	15
1.1. Politics, Society and Youth Subcultures	15
1.2. Between Dystopia and Satire	18
1.3. Anthony Burgess: Coming Up with the Novel	21
<b>CHAPTER 2</b>	
Dystopian Features in <i>A Clockwork Orange</i>	25
2.1. Ludovico's Technique	25
2.2. Cyclic Society: Pelagianism vs Augustinianism	28
2.3. "Nadsat": the Teenage Language	32
<b>CHAPTER 3</b>	
Satirical Features in <i>A Clockwork Orange</i>	37
3.1. Drugs: Use and Abuse	37
3.2. Dressing in "the Height of Fashion"	40
3.3. Music: an Emotional Enhancement	42
CONCLUSION	47
BIBLIOGRAPHY & SITOGRAPHY	49
RASSUNTO IN ITALIANO (SUMMARY IN ITALIAN)	53





## INTRODUCTION

The focus of my dissertation are the dystopian and satirical features of Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange*, that I deem not only a dystopian novel, but also a satire. I have always had a personal curiosity towards the developing of youth subcultures related to music and style and I believe this is the best way to investigate a highly underestimated novel, usually only known as the inspiration for Stanley Kubrick's film adaptation with the same title, and also to dig into the cultural changes in the late 1950s and the early 1960s. To do so, I chose to analyze *A Clockwork Orange* from a literary and cultural perspective highlighting some of its elements that reflect the British society of those years.

In Chapter 1, I offer an overview of the novel. In 1.1, I explore the cultural, political and social events that developed in Britain from the end of World War 2 until the beginning of the 1950s. The political system of the Welfare State turned out to generate more problems than it actually solved.<sup>2</sup> In fact, due to the progressive disappearance of the class system ignited by the redistribution of wealth among the population, manual workers started to decrease headed instead for third sector jobs, and also there were growing racial problems involving Commonwealth citizens, who came into Britain to benefit their rights to the Welfare politics, accused by native citizens of stealing their jobs and therefore became an easy target for aggressive displays of racism. In such unstable context, youth subcultures started to take shape. The reason why they started to organize into gangs was to claim their freedom and rebel against the values and moral codes that they thought were ancient. The main subcultures that could be found in that period were the Teddy Boys, the Mods and the Rockers, each one with their own way of dressing and musical taste in order to show they belonged to their group<sup>3</sup>. In 1.2, I analyze the dystopian novel and satire as a mode, including also their similarities and their differences, since in those years made their comeback: Dystopia was used to convey the

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<sup>2</sup> See H. R. Harris, «The Legacy of the Welfare State», *Contemporary Review*, Vol. 274, No. 1596, 1999, pp. 24-27, p. 24.

<sup>3</sup> See James Vernon, *Modern Britain, 1750 to the Present*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2017, pp. 441-447.

anxieties and fears caused by the two World Wars and the Cold War by authors such as Huxley and Orwell, and Satire became the main literary genre of the Angry Young Men writers, a British subcultural form that openly despised and attacked the system they were living in. The main goal of the two genres is to make readers aware of the period they are living in, however they differ in a subtle way: Dystopia narrates the possible consequences in the future of something already happening in the present; Satire, instead, relates to the present and uses sarcasm or mockery to highlight its controversial issues.<sup>4</sup> By the end of the section, I present a specific novel that includes both dystopian and satirical aspects, that is *A Clockwork Orange* by Anthony Burgess. Finally, in 1.3, I introduce the said author in relation to the circumstances in which the story was created and how he got the inspiration for the tone and characters of the novel. *A Clockwork Orange* is the product of an intensive time of writing for the author started after he was (wrongly) diagnosed with a brain tumor<sup>5</sup>. Burgess first came up with the idea for the story from a personal episode that saw his wife savagely harassed by some teenagers, later he perfected it after a trip to the Soviet Union, and finally published the novel in 1962<sup>6</sup>.

In Chapter 2, I analyze in detail three of the novel's dystopian features which are Ludovico's Technique, the society Burgess depicts and finally the language used by Alex and his droogs, called Nadsat. In particular in 2.1, I explain what the treatment Alex is subjected to consists in and I point out the reasons why it fits the dystopian genre. As a matter of fact, Ludovico's Technique is a treatment that combines an injection of a serum and the vision of violent and disturbing films, causing the patient to associate the sickness induced by the serum to the violence present in the film he watches, with the goal of modifying his behavior from bad to good. The cure is rooted in Pavlov's behavioral conditioning theory according to which long situations of physical distress, brought to the limit of endurance, cause a person to change his/her behavior<sup>7</sup>. The reason why

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<sup>4</sup> See Carter Kaplan, «The Advent of Literary Dystopia», *Extrapolation*, Vol. 40, No. 3, 1999, pp. 200-212, p. 201.

<sup>5</sup> See Stefano Manferlotti, «Anthony Burgess», *Belfagor*, Vol. 42, No. 2, 1987, pp. 169-188, pp. 169-170.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>7</sup> See Milan D. Živković, «Society in the English Literary Dystopia», *British and American*

Ludovico's Technique can therefore be considered a dystopian feature is the fact that it appears to be a way for the political system to control and submit the people it rules.<sup>8</sup> And this trait is present in most dystopian texts. In 2.2, I focus on the society described in the novel, highlighting the aspects which connect it to the dystopian genre. To make it short, the society changes from a liberal system to a totalitarian one, and this shift is explained by Burgess' vision of cyclic historical eras, due to which every society is destined to be subjected to opposite political systems in a never-ending alternation of the two.<sup>9</sup> This cycle is divided by Burgess into three phases called Pelphase, Interphase and Gusphase, and can also be found in the novel: the Pelphase is located in the first part of the story until Alex's arrest, the Interphase is a small passage characterized by a deep disillusionment visible in Deltoid's reaction to Alex's final crime, and finally the Gusphase comprehends all the events from this last moment afterwards. This cyclic society can be seen as a dystopian society because even though it changes from one form to another, it is always dominated by violence, fear, control and chaos.<sup>10</sup> At the end of Chapter 2, in section 2.3, I deal with Nadsat and language as a dystopian element in *A Clockwork Orange*. Nadsat is the idiom spoken by Alex and his droogs, and it is a mixture of different languages: it comprehends Russian words, English dialects, cockney expressions and babytalk.<sup>11</sup> It can be considered a dystopian trait for two reasons: the first is the fact that the use of Russian words might signify a hypothetical future domination from the Soviet Union, responding to the anxieties caused by the Cold War, and the second one is the brainwashing effect teenage language causes in readers<sup>12</sup>. As a matter of fact, Burgess' aim was to bring the language used to the same wavelength of the brainwashing theme present in the novel.

Finally, in Chapter 3, I propose a personal interpretation of three features that could be considered satirical in the novel, based on the notion that 'if the work describes how bad

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*Studies*, Vol. 23, 2017, pp. 89-97, p. 92.

<sup>8</sup> See Milan D. Živković, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

<sup>9</sup> See Flavio Gregori, *Singin' in the Brain: il Mondo Distopico di A Clockwork Orange*, Torino, Lindau, 2004, pp. 19-21.

<sup>10</sup> See Milan D. Živković, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

<sup>11</sup> See Flavio Gregori, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>12</sup> See Roger Craik, «"Bog or God" in *A Clockwork Orange*», *ANQ*, Vol. 16, No. 4, 2003, pp. 51-54, p. 51.

things are, you have a satire on your hands<sup>13</sup> and on Burgess' contempt for the youth subcultures that were beginning to appear in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The author, in fact, strongly criticized their violent behavior<sup>14</sup> and their tasteless interest for the new kind of music that was circulating at the time<sup>15</sup>. In this last chapter, I point out the drugs, the peculiar way of dressing and the music present in the novel and among the youth subcultures in the 1950s. In section 3.1., I indicate the similarities between the drugs taken by Alex and his gang, namely 'vellocet', 'synthemesc', 'drencrom' and 'milk with knives'<sup>16</sup>, and the ones used by actual Teddy Boys and Mods. As I prove, the 'milk with knives' used by the droogs has such a stimulant effect that it caused them to act upon their violent impulses, and is thus relatable to the amphetamines taken by many youth of the time. In fact, it is documented that both Teddy Boys and Mods took amphetamines for recreational use<sup>17</sup>. In this way, it is possible to affirm that Burgess might have wanted to criticize their violent behavior enhanced by drugs. Then, in section 3.2., I point out the dress code worn by Alex and his gang, and the clothing of youth subcultures which was different for each one of them. The possible correlation between the two could be the fact that the subversion of social fashion standards is a feature strictly related to youth trying to impose their individuality and their own codes of conducts, and since that is something that both Alex and teenagers in the late 50s were trying to achieve, it can be said that they are similar in a rebellion through fashion style. Both have in common the bizarre choice of clothing items that drift far away from the social conventions: on the one hand, Alex and his droogs wear black tights, absurd shoulder pads and jockstraps<sup>18</sup>, on the other, Teds followed an Edwardian style, combined with bootlace ties and long-drape jackets<sup>19</sup>, Mods

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<sup>13</sup> Kaplan Carter, «The Advent of Literary Dystopia», *Extrapolation*, Vol. 40, No. 3, 1999, p. 200-212, p. 210.

<sup>14</sup> See Flavio Gregori, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

<sup>15</sup> See Stefano Manferlotti, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

<sup>16</sup> Anthony Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange*, London, Penguin Classics, 2000, p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> See Lorenzo Servitje, «Of Drugs and Droogs: Cultural Dynamics, Psychopharmacology, and Neuroscience in Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange*», *Literature and Medicine*, Vol. 36, No. 1, 2018, pp. 101-123, p. 109.

<sup>18</sup> See Anthony Burgess, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>19</sup> See Neil Nehring, «The Shifting Relations of Literature and Popular Music in Postwar England», *Discourse*, Vol. 12, No. 1, A Special Issue on Music, 1989-90, pp. 78-103, p. 86.

wore Italian-cut suits and Chelsea boots<sup>20</sup> while the Rockers were famous for their leather jackets<sup>21</sup> as distinctive sign. Consequently, it is arguable that through the depiction of an edgy dress code, the droogs might represent the youth subcultures of 1950s and 1960s. I conclude by investigating the presence of music in the novel. There are many examples of Alex's passion for classical music and the reason it could fit the satirical requirements lies in Burgess' praise for classical music and scorn for the newly-appeared forms of music in the 1950s.<sup>22</sup> Specifically, it is possible to offer a double analysis of the musical aspect in the novel: it could be read as the author's attempt to praise classical music and denigrate pop music, or it could be seen as a replacement of rock 'n' roll music with classical music in order to highlight the widely-believed idea according to which rock 'n' roll caused teenagers to act aggressively.

Taking everything into account, my goal is to give a different reading of Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange* showing that, even though it is mainly viewed as a dystopian novel, it also has features that make it fit for the satirical genre. In some way, it is possible to consider the novel as a story intertwined with both dystopian and satirical traits.

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<sup>20</sup> *Idem*, p. 93.

<sup>21</sup> See Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, C. 1958-C.1974*, Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 70.

<sup>22</sup> See Stefano Manferlotti, *op. cit.*, p. 183.



# CHAPTER 1

## Setting the Novel

### 1.1. Politics, Society and Youth Subcultures

In this section I depict the political, social and cultural situation in Britain from the end of World War 2 to the beginning of the 1960s focusing at the end on the new youth subcultures that began to appear in order to grasp the relevant information to later analyze certain aspects of the novel *A Clockwork Orange* by Anthony Burgess.

Right after World War 2, Britain, as well as other western countries, experienced a wave of changes that consequently brought to the revolutions of the late 1960s. The period of time between 1950s and 1960s was characterized by Cold War anxiety and the fear of a possible nuclear exchange between the United States and the Soviet Union, cultural and political transformations, growing racism, nationalism, appearance of youth subcultures with their own music and dress code, and social movements by different groups of people claiming their rights.

By the end of 1945 and the end of WW2, in Britain the Welfare State was established, a social democracy that was thought to help people in need and extend wealth to all the population. In fact, unemployed people were given a benefit that guaranteed their survival until they found a job, people who needed medical care were treated freely thanks to the new establishment of a National Health Service, and homeless people were located in council houses. But that is not all: the Labor party also introduced monetary subsidies for families with children which, by consequence, encouraged people to have more children<sup>23</sup>, and this gave rise to natality explosion in the postwar period. However, this reformation turned out to be unequal since children, elderly people and people of color were excluded from the privileges.

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<sup>23</sup> H. R. Harris, «The Legacy of the Welfare State», *Contemporary Review*, London, Vol. 274, No. 1596, 1999, pp. 24-27, p. 24.

Social democracy, for better or for worse, had a significant impact on the class system. That is to say that, since benefits and wealth were being redistributed through the population regardless of class, the working class started to gradually disappear. As a matter of fact, work itself suffered of this change in that manual workers decreased in favor of the service sector, especially education, health, finance and business sectors. Women benefited of this growth and the number of working women increased, even though it was extremely uneven: their work was considered more of a part-time job than a real career, they were less protected by trade unions and of course paid less.

Linked to the reformation of class and the unequal redistribution of wealth, there was the problem of a growing racism towards citizens from Commonwealth countries. In 1948 the *British Nationality Act* was established allowing citizens from the Commonwealth to come to Britain and giving them the chance to get a job and welfare services. Consequently, although migrants were very few, people started to feel like they were being robbed of their rights and their jobs, therefore the hostility towards migrants became growingly frequent. Pubs, shops, housing and clubs were all ultimately divided by race. Also gangs started to form to face the "immigrant problem", among them there were the Teddy Boys, or shortly Teds, who took to themselves the responsibility of attacking immigrant communities. Teddy Boys were

Smartly dressed, young, working-class, men with a penchant for rock and roll, Teddy Boys were Britain's self-identified 'youth' subculture forged in rebellion from the austerity and dreams of their parents' lives. Despite the strong influences of African American music and dress upon their style, they went on 'nigger hunt' in immigrant communities.<sup>24</sup>

However, Teddy Boys were not the only youth subculture. In fact, as the new youth generation was emerging, many different groups of young people appeared. There were the Angry Young Men who

emerged from the work of a cadre of young, male, writers who appeared to capture the spirit of their generation. The angry young man was a composite figure that expressed the frustrations of a generation either stuck in the white working class or dislocated by upward social mobility. They were either angered by the confines imposed upon them by their traditional working-class parents, families and

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<sup>24</sup>James Vernon, *Modern Britain, 1750 to the Present*, Cambridge University Press, 2017, p. 441.



communities, or resentful that while affluence or education had helped them escape those communities, they remained excluded from the social world of the privileged. Socially disaffected, they felt alienated from a political system that did not appear to speak to them.<sup>25</sup>

What all the youth subcultures had in common was hostility towards the ancient values and moral codes, but also music as a sign of rebellion. For example, The Rockers, who used to dress in leather, comb their hair in a French Alain Delon-looking style and rode heavy motorbikes, listened to rock and roll, whereas the Mods, who rode Vespa scooters, cut their hair short and dressed in neat Italian cut suits with pointed shirts, listened to soul, ska and beat music. These new juvenile revolutions had a strong impact on the following groups of young people, in fact they set the path for the feminist protests, the gay and lesbian request for rights and the Black Power movement which will take on by the end of the 1960s.

The rebellion of the young against the government, parents, religion, and society in general can be summarized in one word, Counterculture. Teenagers were trying to define their own way of life, in other words,

the counter culture is the embryonic cultural base of New Left politics, the effort to discover new types of community, new family patterns, new sexual mores, new kinds of livelihood, new aesthetic forms, new personal identities on the far side of power politics, the bourgeois home, and the Protestant work ethic.<sup>26</sup>

In this way, society appeared to be divided into two factions: on one side the so-called dominant culture, the silent majority of people who strongly supported the 1950s lifestyle, and on the other side the counterculture, the rebellious youth that brought on its rights and ideas.

In such a social and political context, surfaced two main literary modes Dystopia and Satire. In the next section, I introduce the main features of both, and *A Clockwork Orange* as both a dystopian and satiric novel. This will be necessary for my further analysis of

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<sup>25</sup> James Vernon, *op. cit.*, p. 447.

<sup>26</sup> Theodore Roszak, «Youth and the Great Refusal», *The Nation*, 25 March 1987, quoted in Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties. Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy and the United States, C. 1958-C.1974*, Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 10.

dystopian and satiric features in the story.

## 1.2 Between Dystopia and Satire

Dystopia and Satire are two literary genres that might seem intertwined, almost synonymous since they both give a twisted picture of an historical period in order to make the reader think about the time he's living in. Nevertheless, the two present different features. On one side of the coin, we find dystopia which is "a modern term invented as the opposite of Utopia and applied to any alarmingly unpleasant imaginary world, usually of the projected future"<sup>27</sup>. In other words, dystopian fiction depicts a pessimistic and dark world that represents a warning on the possible outcome in the future of a given situation. Dystopian worlds are usually inhabited by dystopian societies based on repression of social and individual freedom, oppression and control by the state, coercive methods to submit people and force them to obey an authoritarian regime, general sense of fear, and propaganda. Somehow, these societies can be considered totalitarian because in both the political system controls the lives of citizens, propaganda and the media are used to support the regime and brainwash people's minds, and the most basic freedoms are lacking. To be even more specific, dystopian societies are

Appalling in their similarity they describe nightmare states where men are conditioned to obedience, freedom is eliminated, and individuality crushed; where the past is systematically destroyed and men are isolated from nature; where science and technology are employed not to enrich human life, but to maintain the state's surveillance and control of its slave citizens.<sup>28</sup>

The term 'dystopia' was first used by John Stuart Mill in 1868 during a parliamentary debate meaning 'bad place', and in the following decades became more and more

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<sup>27</sup> Chris Baldick, «Dystopia», in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 74.

<sup>28</sup> Mark Hillegas, *The Future as a Nightmare: H. G. Wells and the Anti-Utopians*, Southern Illinois University Press, 1974, quoted in Milan D. Živković, «Society in the English Literary Dystopia», *British and American Studies*, Vol. 23, 2017, p. 90.

commonly used, in particular referring to the literary genre. That's because there was a raising consciousness towards the destructive powers of men and writers became involved in warning people of the dangers of that. Therefore, they drifted away from depicting harmonious and balanced societies to societies governed by evil and fear, in order to make people aware of the possible outcomes of a dysfunctional political system<sup>29</sup>. Some examples are *The Time Machine* by H. G. Wells first published in 1895, *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley published in 1932 and *1984* by George Orwell published in 1949. These last two, in particular, were conceived when mass culture was starting to spread in Western countries. In fact, both stories attack the power of the media in conditioning people, *Brave New World* concentrates on advertisement and *1984* on information<sup>30</sup>.

As previously stated, dystopian fiction proliferated in Britain also during the Cold War as an "inevitable response to modern history"<sup>31</sup>. With the atrocities in mind of WW2, the US hegemony bringing along its consumerism and mass culture looming on the horizon and the Soviet totalitarian system, there has been a general crisis of faith that made dystopia a top genre to report these anxieties.

On the other side of the coin, there is satire:

A genre defined primarily, but not exclusively, in terms of its inner form. In it, the author attacks some object, using as his means wit or humour that is either fantastic or absurd. Denunciation itself is not satire, nor, of course, is grotesque humour, but the genre allows for a considerable preponderance of either one or the other. What distinguishes satire from comedy is its lack of tolerance for folly or human imperfection. Its attempt to juxtapose the actual with the ideal lifts it above mere invective. From this need to project a double vision of the world satire derives most of its formal characteristics. IRONY, which exploits the relation between appearance and reality, is its chief device.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> See Gregory Claeys, *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*, Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 107-108.

<sup>30</sup> See Gianfranco Marrone, *La Cura Ludovico. Sofferenze e beatitudini di un corpo sociale*, Torino, Einaudi, 2005, p. 81.

<sup>31</sup> Andrew Hammond, «The Twilight of Utopia': British Dystopian Fiction and the Cold War» *Modern Language Review*, Vol. 106, No. 3, 2011, p. 664.

<sup>32</sup> Peter Childs, Roger Fowler, *The Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms*, Routledge, London, 2006, p. 211.

Satire has existed for a long time and it can be divided into three kinds: Horatian, Menippean, and Juvenalian. The first one is a, "low-norm satire, [which] takes for granted a world full of anomalies, follies and crimes, and employs a plain, common sense, conventional *eiron* to stand against the various *alazons* who represent aspects of the unjust, ruling society<sup>33</sup>", the second one "employs Menippean cynicism to attack systems of reasoning and their social effects<sup>34</sup>", and finally the last one "abandons common sense pragmatism itself, and by a slight shift of vision and perspective, presents the world, stripped of its social conventions, as a locus of 'filth and ferocity'<sup>35</sup>". In the 1950s, Satire had a comeback, becoming the main genre of the Angry Young Men novelists. In fact, Angry writers felt a strong rejection of social elitism and the ancient class system, therefore they used Satire to distance them from the expected literary forms<sup>36</sup>. In other words, satire makes fun of the actual with the goal of causing a reaction and a reflection about it. A few examples that can be placed under the column of satiric literature are Jules Verne's *From the Earth to the Moon* published in 1865, H. G. Wells' *The First Men in the Moon* published in 1901 and George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, published in 1945<sup>37</sup>.

To summarize: "If the work describes how bad things are, you have a satire on your hands. If the work describes how bad things could be, you are tangling with a dystopia"<sup>38</sup>. With this difference in mind, however, there seems to be a novel that contains both dystopian and satiric features: *A Clockwork Orange* by Anthony Burgess. From a dystopian point of view, the story presents a society of a close future in which during the day people work, terrorized by a suppressive state, and during the night gangs of teenagers, like the one belonging to the main character Alex, terrorize said population by beating, raping and vandalizing them and their properties. What is more, art and culture are lacking and the government force people to support it by controlling news on television, using coercive behavioral modification methods, such as Ludovico's

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<sup>33</sup> Peter Childs, Roger Fowler, *op. cit.*, p. 211.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>36</sup> John J. Stinson, «Anthony Burgess: Novelist on the Margin», *Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 1973, pp. 137-151, p. 140.

<sup>37</sup> Kaplan Carter, «The Advent of Literary Dystopia», *Extrapolation*, Vol. 40, No. 3, 1999, p. 200-212, p. 210.

<sup>38</sup> *Idem*, p. 201.

Technique, and sending political opponents to jail. Nevertheless, *A Clockwork Orange* cannot be described as a well-rounded dystopia since it ends well and happy endings are unacceptable in traditional dystopia<sup>39</sup>. From the satiric point of view, the novel shows certain features that refer to Burgess' critical views on mass culture and youth subcultures. In fact, the author was extremely disappointed in the growing teenage violence of the time and also disliked the new-found music of the period, that he considered highly distasteful and pointless. The novel does not adhere to the classical definition of dystopia, nor does *A Clockwork Orange* fully fit the convention of satirical literature. In fact, even though Burgess satirizes his contemporary society, he does it in a thoughtful and merciful way without stopping at mere judgment.

In the next section, I introduce the author Anthony Burgess and the way in which he came up with the story.

### 1.3. Anthony Burgess: Coming Up with the Novel

John Anthony Burgess Wilson, later known only as Anthony Burgess, was an English writer. He was born on February 25, 1917 in Manchester and was taught a very strict Catholicism since he was young. His mother was a singer and his father a pianist, who taught Burgess how to play the piano, too. After failing his admission exam to a school of music, he decided to head towards Literary studies, graduating in 1940 in English Language and Literature.

When World War Two broke, he joined the army in the role of teacher and during the following years he continued teaching in different cities and also countries. It was while he was living and working in Burma that something unexpected happened and was the turning point in his literary career: during a class he suddenly collapsed to the ground. Therefore, he was rushed back to Britain and was hospitalized at the National Hospital for Nervous Diseases. Here, terrible news came: he was diagnosed with an incurable brain tumor which inevitably forced him to give up teaching. However, the verdict was wrong

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<sup>39</sup> Milan D. Živković, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

but Burgess did not know that, and since he thought he had very little time left, he decided to dedicate himself to writing full-time.<sup>40</sup> The main reason was to provide for his wife thanks to the income of the novels he would write while still alive. During this period, he was extremely prolific. He wrote *The Doctor Is Sick* (1960), *Inside Mr. Enderby* (1963), *The Worm and the Ring* (1961), *One Hand Clapping* (1961), *The Eve of Saint Venus* (1964), *The Wanting Seed* (1962) and *A Clockwork Orange* (1962). For this last novel, Burgess had the first inspiration from an unfortunate event happened to his wife, Llewela Isherwood Jones: while he was working abroad, she was staying in London. One night, when she was getting home, a group of American soldiers attacked and beat her up so mercilessly that she had a miscarriage. She survived, but only to die a few years later due to the physical and psychological injuries caused by the event. Burgess wrote *A Clockwork Orange* after the accident, but it was only published in 1962. That is because the novel was frequently subjected to different revisions and comments from Burgess himself even years after its publication and that is because through the years he kept on changing his mind about what the novel should be telling.

What kept him from publishing the novel the first time was his dissatisfaction with the setting and the language used which appeared to him to be too modern and contemporary for a story that was supposed to be timeless and actual in similar possible future situations. Burgess finally came up with the version of the novel later to be published while he was spending some time traveling in the Soviet Union in the summer of 1961. While he was there, he had the chance to witness violent acts by Russian teenagers and that made him think that perhaps violence is the same everywhere and it requires rituals of its own. Therefore, he managed to create a story in which the main character belongs to no specific country, but to all of them, and who speaks a language that blends together, politically speaking, the two most important idioms of the time: English and Russian.<sup>41</sup> The result was the character of Alex, a 14-year-old teenager who, together with his *droogs*, speaks an invented language called *Nadsat* and takes pleasure in acting violently, beating and

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<sup>40</sup>See Stefano Manferlotti «Anthony Burgess», Belfagor, Vol. 42, No. 2, 1987, pp. 169-188, pp. 169-170.

<sup>41</sup>See Flavio Gregori, *Singin' in the Brain: il Mondo Distopico di A Clockwork Orange*, Lindau, 2004, pp 7-9.

killing people.

In Chapter 2, I select three examples from the book that show why the novel can be considered a Dystopian fiction.





## CHAPTER 2

### Dystopian Features in *A Clockwork Orange*

#### 2.1. Ludovico's Technique

The first and more intuitive feature that shows how *A Clockwork Orange* is a dystopian fiction is Ludovico's Technique. In the second part of the story, the protagonist Alex has just been imprisoned for the murder of a woman, has been sentenced to spend 14 years in jail and is known as "Staja Number 84F"<sup>42</sup> in the State Jail. He spends his time reading the Bible picturing the episodes in his head and taking pleasure in it and being the designated chaplain's assistant who takes care of music during services. After a couple of years, a new inmate arrives and is put in the cell occupied by Alex and other prisoners. One night, while trying to defend himself from the sexual advance of the new prisoner, Alex fights him and eventually ends up killing him helped by the other convicts. However, when the guards arrive, the only one blamed for the event is Alex. The following day, the prison receives the visit of the Governor who is alarmed with the worsening situation of prisons and criminals<sup>43</sup>. In his words,

The Government cannot be concerned any longer with outmoded penological theories. Cram criminals together and see what happens. You get concentrated criminality, crime in the midst of punishment. Soon we may be needing all our prison space for political offenders. [...] Common criminals like this unsavoury crowd [...] can be best dealt with on a purely curative basis. Kill the criminal reflex, that's all. Full implementation in a year's time. Punishment means nothing to them, you can see that. They enjoy their so-called punishment. They start murdering each other.<sup>44</sup>

The cure which he is referring to is Ludovico's Technique and Alex knows it because he heard about it from prisoners and guards, and he had asked the chaplain for more information about it. Believing it to be an easy way out of prison, he steps forward and

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<sup>42</sup> Anthony Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange*, London, Penguin Classics, 2000, p. 57.

<sup>43</sup> See *Idem*, pp. 57-69.

<sup>44</sup> *Idem*, p. 69.

finds a way to be chosen for the experimentation. In the following days, he is released from prison and sent to a hospital where he receives the cure, unaware of the consequences of it.

Basically, Ludovico's Technique consists in injecting a serum into his veins, taking him to a room where he is tied to a chair with electrodes attached all over his body, while his eyes are kept wide open to prevent him from closing them. The doctors then project different violent films on a screen which Alex is forced to watch. Combined with the effect of the serum, this will make him feel extremely nauseated and thirsty. In this way, he will progressively learn to associate sickness with violence: once his body has learned the mechanism, Alex will be able to feel it even without the hypodermics. Clearly, the treatment is deeply rooted into Pavlov's principle of behavior conditioning consisting in "long and intensive stress to a man (long enough to lead to a nervous breakdown) so that new forms of behaviour may be easily adopted."<sup>45</sup> Pavlov's theory had already been used in other dystopian novels like Huxley's *Brave New World*. In this novel, for example, children are subjected to behavioral conditioning which prevents them from enjoying nature or books by a treatment that includes deafening noises and electric shocks whenever they touch a book or a flower<sup>46</sup>. Like in Ludovico's Technique, the result of the treatment is a manipulated individual unable to act on his or her instincts. As a matter of fact, behavioral conditioning is the key feature in dystopian literature because it allows totalitarian societies to remove individual freedom and personal characteristics from people with the goal of making them obey the system without questioning it<sup>47</sup>.

In *A Clockwork Orange*, what the government tries to do with Alex is deprive him of his violent instincts so that he eventually conforms to the rest of the society and is more easily controllable. In other words, they are trying to turn him into a "clockwork orange". This expression comes from a cockney saying used after WW2 in Britain in clauses such as "queer as a clockwork orange" to indicate a bizarre or weird person<sup>48</sup>. "Clockwork"

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<sup>45</sup> See Milan D. Živković, «Society in the English Literary Dystopia», *British and American Studies*, Vol. 23, 2017, pp. 89-97, p. 92.

<sup>46</sup> See Gianfranco Marrone, *La Cura Ludovico. Sofferenze e Beatitudini di un Corpo Sociale*, G. Einaudi, 2005, p.82.

<sup>47</sup> See Milan D. Živković, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

<sup>48</sup> See Gianfranco Marrone, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

and "orange" are two words with opposite meanings since the first one refers to something cold, mechanical, inhuman, whereas the second one has biological connotations given the fact that it is a fruit. Burgess takes this expression and uses it to describe how the doctors and the state converted Alex, a living human being, into a machine. Physically, he remains an "orange" but psychologically he is turned into a "clockwork"<sup>49</sup>, which means they make him conform under the pretense of curing him,

What is happening to you now is what should happen to any normal healthy human organism contemplating the actions of the forces of evil, the workings of the principle of destruction. You are being made sane, you are being made healthy.<sup>50</sup>

Like every self-respecting dystopia, in *A Clockwork Orange* the main character is being deprived of his freedom of choice. A more superficial reading of the novel might lead the reader to believe that Alex has been robbed of his free will because he is destined to be unable to choose bad over good. However, a careful insight of the story shows that what Alex is really deprived of is the ability to choose to act on his impulses. Alex has not changed his way of thinking or his desire for violence, he is simply coerced by physical pain into not acting on them. In fact, if he did not feel the sickness, he would keep on doing what he had always done<sup>51</sup>. An example of this can be found when Alex is publicly displayed to show people that the treatment works, and forced to face two different situations, a man beating and humiliating him, and a naked young woman offering herself to him. This last one is to be taken into special consideration:

And then the lights went down and the spotlights came on again, one on your poor and suffering Friend and Narrator, and into the other there like rolled or sidled the most lovely young devotchka you could ever hope in all your jeezny, O my brothers, to viddy. [...] She grace and all that cal coming with her, and the first thing that flashed into my gulliver was that I would like to have her right down there on the floor with the old in-out real savage, but skorry as a shot came the sickness, like a detective that had been watching round a corner and now followed to make his grahzny arrest.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> See Gianfranco Marrone, *op. cit.*, pp. 52-53.

<sup>50</sup> Anthony Burgess, *op. cit.*, 2000, p. 81.

<sup>51</sup> See David Palmer, «Freedom is *A Clockwork Orange*», *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 11, No. 4, 1973, pp. 299-308, p. 303.

<sup>52</sup> Anthony Burgess, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

As readers acknowledge, he feels the desire of raping her, in fact he thinks how lovely it would be, but he has to stop feeling that pleasure because nausea and sickness start to possess him. Therefore, he still feels his violent impulses, but if he wants pain to stop, he cannot act on them.

All things considered, Alex has clearly been deprived of one of the most basic freedoms, the ability to act on one's desires, whether good or bad. Therefore, since lack of freedom is the main feature of dystopian societies, Ludovico's Technique is a key element to place *A Clockwork Orange* into the genre.

## 2.2. Cyclic Society: Pelagianism vs Augustinianism

The second element typical of the dystopian genre in *A Clockwork Orange* is the way society works and is depicted. In the novel, readers are presented with a society drowned in violence, fear, repression, and brutality, all typical dystopian topics<sup>53</sup>. However, it does not stay the same but changes from one form into another together with the political system. Burgess, in fact, as he suggests in another novel, *The Wanting Seed*, believes that the world is dominated either by a Pelagianist or by an Augustinianist ideology<sup>54</sup>. Both ideologies are rooted in one of the most violent and controversial debates at the beginning of Christian religion between the English monk Pelagius and Augustin of Hippo, that ended in 418 A.C. with the condemnation of Pelagius' theory for heresy<sup>55</sup>. Pelagius' theory explains that men are not corrupted by original sin and therefore are not condemned to sin themselves. The society and the environment they live in cause them to be bad: they are free to choose how to behave and salvation is in their hands, not in God's. On the other hand, St. Augustine instead claimed that men are corrupted by original sin, therefore they are weak and sinful, and only God can save them. According to Burgess, these two opposite visions are destined to keep cyclically alternating in history taking the shape of

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<sup>53</sup> See Milan D. Živković, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

<sup>54</sup> See Flavio Gregori, *Singin' in the Brain: il Mondo Distopico di A Clockwork Orange*, Torino, Lindau, 2004, pp. 19-21.

<sup>55</sup> *Idem*, p. 19.

three different phases: Pelphase, Interphase and Gusphase<sup>56</sup>. The Pelphase, called after Pelagius' name, reflects the monk's ideas and represents a society and political system dominated by liberalism and laissez-faire in which people, unconditioned by the original sin, are able to improve and become better versions of themselves. In other words, there is an optimistic vision. However, this optimism is doomed to be subverted by an inevitable period of disillusionment, the Interphase ('Inter' to clarify the fact that it is a transitional phase between the other two), caused by a decreasing faith in human progress due to the wrong belief that men are exclusively good. Consequently, the political system has no other choice than forcing people to be good by introducing strict laws, rules, and punishments. This period, as Burgess called it, is the Gusphase, from Augustin's name, and is influenced by the idea that men are evil and mean. Nevertheless, governments will later reconsider its assumption believing, then, that probably people are actually better than what it might seem to be to a pessimistic vision, and therefore a new optimistic conception of men begins giving birth to the Pelphase again<sup>57</sup>.

In *A Clockwork Orange*, it is possible to find this vision of cyclic history and its related features of society. The Pelphase can be detected in the first part of the novel, from the very first scene to Alex's arrest. In those pages, the society presented is characterized by looseness and lack of rules and in this context young people are able to act the way they want: they organize themselves into gangs and at night they steal, vandalize places, beat people and destroy anything they can put their hands on. An example of that can be found in the scene where they beat a poor man who is singing out loud and drinking. In his words,

It's a stinky world because it lets the young get on the old like you done, and there's no law nor order no more.[...] What sort of a world is it at all? Men on the moon and men spinning round the earth like it might be midges round a lamp, and there's not no attention paid to earthly law nor order no more. So your worst you may do, you filthy cowardly hooligans.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> See Anthony Burgess, *The Wanting Seed*, Arrow Books, London 1985, pp. 17-23, quoted in Flavio Gregori, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>57</sup> See Anthony Burgess, *The Wanting Seed*, Arrow Books, London 1985, pp. 17-23, quoted in Flavio Gregori, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>58</sup> Anthony Burgess, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-13.

Another scene in which it is possible to see the lack of restrictions can be found a few pages later, where Alex, after spending the night with his *droogs*, walks home at the break of dawn and enter his block of apartments, namely "Municipal Flatblock 18A between Kingsley Avenue and Wilsonways"<sup>59</sup>. Here, he starts describing his surroundings and we can understand that everything is in total chaos: there are paintings on the walls mocking the original art work that was supposed to praise labor and the elevator has been destroyed by young men. He says:

In the hallway was the good, old municipal painting on the walls - vecks and ptitsas very well-developed, stern in the dignity of labour, at workbench and machine with not one stitch of platties on their well-developed plotts. But of course some of the malchicks living in 18A had, as was to be expected, embellished and decorated the said painting with handy pencils and ballpoint, adding hair and stiff rods and dirty ballooning slovos out of the dignified rots of these nagoy (bare, that is) cheenas and vecks. I went to the lift, but there was no need to press the electric knopka to see if it was working or not, because it had been tolchoked real horrorshow this night, the metal doors all buckled, some feat of rare strenght indeed, so I had to walk the then floors up.<sup>60</sup>

This first phase of *laissez-faire* is put to rest when Alex gets arrested for murdering the cat lady. In fact, now there is what can be referred to as Interphase. After getting caught, Alex is brought to the police station where he is going to be interrogated about the murder. Here, the shift from the unconcerned system into a stricter one takes place. In fact, as soon as Alex arrives there and is put into a room, the police officers start to insult and beat him very hard, until P. R. Deltoid arrives. Deltoid is the inspector charged of making sure that Alex does not put himself into trouble again after being paroled from reformatory. It is very clear in his words and his behavior that he is extremely disappointed in Alex and in the end turns his back on him,

'So it's happened, Alex boy, yes? Just as I thought it would. Dear dear dear, yes.'[...] 'End of the line, yes,' said P.R. Deltoid again. He looked at me with very cold glazzies like I had become a thing and there was no more a bleeding very tired battered chelloveck. [...] P.R. Deltoid then did something I never thought any man like him who was supposed to turn us baddiwads into real horrorshow malchicks would do, especially with all those rozzes around. He came a bit nearer and he spat.

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<sup>59</sup> *Idem*, p. 25.

<sup>60</sup> Anthony Burgess, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

He spat. He spat full in my litso and then wiped his wet spitty rot with the back of his rooker.<sup>61</sup>

The act of spitting speaks volumes on his final rejection of Alex and hides the deep disillusionment the system has been experiencing about the wickedness and evilness of society.<sup>62</sup> From this moment on, arguably both the extreme sign of disillusionment and the beginning of pessimism, the Gusphase begins. It is clear, in fact, that the government has turned into a totalitarian regime: coercive methods to change criminals' behaviour, police brutality, and the elimination of political opponents. The first feature named is the already known Ludovico's Technique.

Another aspect of the coercive system is the increased police force that Alex experiences when he is released from the hospital. In fact, he unfortunately meets two of his acquaintances, his old droog Dim, and his old enemy, Billyboy, who are now police officers. The reason for that is perhaps the fact that since policemen have become stricter, the only way for people like them to keep on acting violently without risking to go to prison is to become police officers. When he meets them, they mock him enjoying the powerful position they are in and decide to take him out in the country. There, they start beating him up very badly and then abandon him injured and hurt.

A further example can be found in the last pages of the novel when the Minister of Interior visits Alex in hospital and reassures him about F. Alexander:

'There is a man,' said the Intinfmin, 'called F. Alexander, a writer of subversive literature, who has been howling for your blood. He has been mad with desire to stick a knife in you. But you're safe from him now. We put him away'.<sup>63</sup>

These last four words are very important since putting away and eliminating opponents is one of the main features of totalitarian systems. F. Alexander has been recruiting people and writing about the evils of the government, therefore he has been taken care of so that he will not spread information that might endanger the government.

The last passage I want to go through to show the change in the political system is the one referring to the homecoming of Alex after his release. As he walks into the block of

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<sup>61</sup> *Idem*, p. 53.

<sup>62</sup> See Flavio Gregori, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-28.

<sup>63</sup> Anthony Burgess, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

apartments, he immediately notices that,

[...] into the vestibule of the flatblock there was no veck about, only the nagoy vecks and cheenas of the Dignity of Labour. What surprised me, brothers, was the way that had been cleaned up, there being no longer any dirty ballooning slovos from the rots of the Dignity Labourers, not any dirty parts of the body added to their naked plotts by dirty-minded pencilling malchicks. And what also surprised me was that the lift was working. It came purring down when I pressed the electric knopka, and when I got in I was surprised again to viddy all was clean inside the like cage.<sup>64</sup>

Readers thus understand there has been a shift from an initial liberal government to an authoritarian one, that took the task of restoring order and security.<sup>65</sup> As the quotation clarifies, the hallway and the walls that were once vandalized are now clean and the elevator which was all broken up is now perfectly working<sup>66</sup>, therefore it is possible to infer that a stricter and controlling government has been established.

All things considered, it is clear that the society Burgess depicts is a dystopian one both in the Pelphase and the later Gusphase, and how the cycle is destined to repeat itself. On one side, lies liberalism, on the other totalitarianism, however the sense of chaos, violence, and fear is present in the entire novel and in both political systems.

In the last section of this chapter I analyze the peculiar language invented by Burgess to write the novel, Nadsat, and how language is a feature of the dystopian genre.

## 2. 3 "Nadsat": the Teenage Language

In *A Clockwork Orange*, what catches the reader's eye most is the language used. In fact, it is not the traditional English language but an invented version, called Nadsat. Nadsat is made of two hundred words, more or less, and it is

an idiom built on Russian terms transported into English language, on the spoiling of cockney expressions and Manchester and Lancashire dialects, on Elizabethan locutions, childish babytalk and teenage slang.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Anthony Burgess, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

<sup>65</sup> See Flavio Gregori, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>67</sup> «un idioletto genialmente costruito sull'anglicizzazione di termini russi, sulla storpiatura di frasi *cockney*, del dialetto di Manchester e del Lancashire, di locuzioni elizabettime, di *babytalk*



Nadsat is used not only by the main character Alex and his droogs, Pete, Dim and Georgie, but also by other teenage gangs like the one of Alex's nemesis Billyboy. The term Nadsat, in fact, comes from a Russian word meaning 'teen', so this may be a language spoken by the younger generation, whereas the adults in the novel use English language. It could be argued, then, that Burgess introduced this idiom also to highlight the difference between adulthood and youth. This can be evinced when Alex is in hospital and talks to Dr. Brodsky and Dr. Branom:

'These grahzny sodding veshches that come out of my gulliver and my plott,' I said, 'that's what it is'.  
'Quaint,' said Dr. Brodsky, like smiling, 'the dialect of the tribe. Do you know anything of its provenance, Branom?'  
'Odd bits of old rhyming slang,' said Dr. Branom, who did not look quite so much like a friend any more. 'A bit of gipsy talk, too. But most of the roots are Slav. Propaganda. Subliminal penetration.'<sup>68</sup>

They refer to Nadsat as a 'dialect' spoken by Alex's 'tribe' and they can hardly understand what he is saying because it is a language used only by young people in order to state their own individuality and uniqueness.

Another example of the teenage use of Nadsat can be found at the end of the novel, in the very last chapter, when Alex casually meets one of his old friends, Pete. The latter is with his wife and looks older, he has grown a moustache and wears a suit and a hat. Alex is very surprised by his outfit. When they start talking and Alex still uses Nadsat, Pete's wife starts giggling and refers to his way of speaking by saying 'He talks funny, doesn't he?'<sup>69</sup>. A few lines after, she asks Pete, 'Did you used to talk like that too?'<sup>70</sup>. From this we understand that Pete has changed, has grown up, he is an adult now, therefore he gave up speaking Nadsat.

However, the most important aspect of Nadsat is the fact that it comes from Russian: since Burgess was writing the novel in the midst of the Cold War, it could be argued that

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infantile e di gergo giovanile», Flavio Gregori, *op. cit.*, p. 9, my translation.

<sup>68</sup> Anthony Burgess, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

<sup>69</sup> *Idem*, p. 138.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibidem*.

Burgess was trying to convey the fear of the Soviet threat looming on the horizon: that is the reason why Nadsat makes *A Clockwork Orange* a dystopian fiction.<sup>71</sup> In the conversation between Brodsky and Branom, the latter explicitly says: 'most of the roots are Slav. Propaganda. Subliminal penetration'.<sup>72</sup> That is a clear reference to the dangers of a possible incumbent Soviet domination present at the time.

In the opening paragraph of the novel, the general structure and grammar still belong to the English language, therefore readers can grasp the meaning of these sentences:

There was me, that is Alex, and my three droogs, that is Pete, Georgie, and Dim, Dim being really dim, and we sat in the Korova Milkbar making up our rassodocks what to do with the evening, a flip dark chill winter bastard though dry. The Korova Milkbar was a milk-plus mesto, and you may, O my brothers, have forgotten what these mestos were like, things changing so skorry these days and everybody very quick to forget, newspapers not being read much neither.<sup>73</sup>

However, 'Korova', 'rassodocks', 'mesto' and 'skorry' are less clear. They are all direct borrowings from Russian: 'Korova' comes from 'korova' and means 'cow'<sup>74</sup>; 'rassodocks' comes from 'rassudok' and means 'mind'<sup>75</sup>; the third word, 'mesto', comes from the Russian word 'mesto' and means 'place'<sup>76</sup>, the last one, 'skorry' is the English version of 'skoryj' and means 'quick' or 'quickly'<sup>77</sup>. At first sight, it is hard to follow the narration due to all these new and unknown words. However, one later finds out that it is less difficult than at the beginning, and by the end of the novel readers understand everything. The reason for that is the progressive acclimation to the language at the point of almost 'being brainwashed'. In other words, term by term that new vocabulary enters one's brain and is absorbed by it. The author himself, in fact, insisted of the brainwashing feature of language:

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<sup>71</sup> See Andrew Hammond, «The Twilight of Utopia': British Dystopian Fiction and the Cold War», *Modern Language Review*, Vol. 106, No. 3, 2011, pp. 662-681, p. 673.

<sup>72</sup> Anthony Burgess, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

<sup>73</sup> Anthony Burgess, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>74</sup> *Appendix:A Clockwork Orange*, [https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Appendix:A\\_Clockwork\\_Orange](https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Appendix:A_Clockwork_Orange), 27 July 2023.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibidem*.

As the book was supposed to be about brainwashing, it was appropriate that the text itself should be a brainwashing device. The reader will be brainwashed into learning minimal Russian. The novel was to be an exercise in linguistic programming, with the exoticisms gradually clarified by context: I would resist to the limit any publisher's demand that a glossary provided.<sup>78</sup>

To summarize, Nadsat can be considered a dystopian feature in *A Clockwork Orange* because it both warns about a possible Soviet dominance but also because as the novel itself is about brainwashing and behavioral conditioning, the language it invents and uses reflects those topics and readers may have a taste of what it means, linguistically speaking, to be brainwashed.

Having analyzed the dystopian features in the story, in the following chapter I investigate three aspects that could locate *A Clockwork Orange* into the satirical genre with the goal of demonstrating that the novel, not only is a Dystopia, but also a Satire.

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<sup>78</sup> Anthony Burgess, *You've Had Your Time*, New York, Grove, 1990, quoted in Roger Craik, «"Bog or God" in *A Clockwork Orange*», *ANQ*, Vol. 16, No. 4, 2003, pp. 51-54, p. 51.



## CHAPTER 3

### Satirical Features in *A Clockwork Orange*

In this chapter, I deal with the links between the youth subcultures present in the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s, and the youth subculture in the novel. I analyze the use of drugs, the way of dressing and the musical features in that it could be argued that those are the main aspects that Burgess tries to satirize in the story. The author, in fact, was very critical of the new youth culture of his time, therefore the features I present could be considered satirical in the sense that, as stated in chapter 1, satire has a direct connection with the events of the time of writing and it describes them with a sarcastic tone.

#### 3.1. Drugs: Use and Abuse

In this section, I compare the use of drugs present in the novel and the use of drugs in the youth subcultures in the 1950s to show that Burgess might have wanted to criticize this teenage habit. In the very first page of the novel, the main character Alex starts his narration with a description of his droogs (of course, the relation between 'droog' and 'drug' seems to be a pun), their way of spending time and enjoying themselves, and, in particular, the place they usually go to and the drugs they use. In his words,

The Korova Milkbar was a milk-plus mesto, [...]. Well, what they sold there was milk plus something else. They had no license for selling liquor, but there was no law yet against prodding some of the new veshches which they used to put into the old moloko, so you could peet it with vellocet or synthemesc or drenchrom or one or two other veshches which would give you a nice quite horrorshow fifteen minutes admiring Bog And His Holy Angels and Saints in your left shoe with lights bursting all over your mozg. Or you could peet milk with knives in it, as we used to say, and this would sharpen you up and make you ready for a bit of dirty twenty-to-one, and that was what we were peeting this evening I'm starting off the story with.<sup>79</sup>

As one can clearly see, Alex mentions different types of drugs which are vellocet,

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<sup>79</sup> Anthony Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange*, cit., p. 3.

synthemesc, drencrom and 'milk with knives in it'<sup>80</sup>. Two critics, Robert Evans and Andrew Biswell<sup>81</sup>, have expressed their ideas about the possible correlation of those drugs with actual existing drugs. According to Evans, vellocet, synthemesc and drencrom could be 'LSD-type hallucinogens'<sup>82</sup>: in fact, as Alex himself states, these drugs 'would give you a nice quite horrorshow fifteen minutes admiring Bog And His Holy Angels and Saints in your left shoe with lights bursting all over your mozg'<sup>83</sup>, therefore one might understand that they cause hallucinations, a known effect of drugs such as LSD. On the other hand, according to Biswell, vellocet could be identified with amphetamine and synthemesc with mescaline.<sup>84</sup> However, if we take a closer look at the names, we might be able to find their meaning and effects already hinted at:

Considering *vellocet's* homonimic proximity to *velocity*, it makes sense that it refers to amphetamines, or "speed". *Sythemesc*, on the other hand, has a less poetic etymology.[...] It is important to pay attention to the *synth* morpheme, which suggests that the drug is not naturally occurring alkaloid found in peyote but rather a synthetic derivative made in a lab.[...] Like *synthemesc*, *drencrom* also connotes a hallucinogen -adrenochrome- that originated within the biomedical establishment. Adrenochrome was discovered to be a mood-altering chemical during neuropsychiatric research into the neurochemistry of schizophrenia in 1952.<sup>85</sup>

However, the main drug used by Alex and his droogs is 'milk with knives in it'<sup>86</sup>. To go along its name and hidden meaning, it would seem that they are drinking milk with the addiction of some sort of stimulant<sup>87</sup>. In fact, the effect sorted by this drug is getting them ready for a night of fight and violence, as Alex says, it 'would sharpen you up and make

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<sup>80</sup> Anthony Burgess, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>81</sup> Andrew Biwell, «Introduction», in *The Real Life of Anthony Burgess*, London, Picador, 2005; Robert O. Evans, «Nadsat: The Argot and Its Implications in Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange*», *Journal of Modern Literature* 1, no. 3, 1971, pp. 406-10, p. 408; both quoted in Lorenzo Servitje, «Of Drugs and Droogs: Cultural Dynamics, Psychopharmacology, and Neuroscience in Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange*», *Literature and Medicine*, Vol. 36, No. 1, 2018, pp. 101-123, p. 107.

<sup>82</sup> Lorenzo Servitje, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

<sup>83</sup> Anthony Burgess, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>85</sup> *Idem*, p. 108.

<sup>86</sup> *Idem.*, p. 3.

<sup>87</sup> Lorenzo Servitje, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

you ready for a bit of dirty twenty-to-one'.<sup>88</sup>

It is therefore possible to find some similarities between the drugs used by the droogs and the ones used by the youth subcultures in Britain in the 1950s. At the time, as stated also in chapter 1, new gangs of teenagers were emerging, in particular the Teddy Boys, or simply Teds, and the Mods. These two were known for making large use of drugs, especially amphetamines and speed. The Mods, for example, enjoyed a demanding partying lifestyle and, to sustain this constant activity, they used amphetamines, 'Purple Hearts, French Blues, Black Bombers'<sup>89</sup>. These kinds of drugs allowed one 'to keep [you] going most of the night, but the only dodgy night was Sunday night because you were really tired, so we'd take a handful and we'd be OK'<sup>90</sup>. The Mods were not the only ones to enjoy the stimulant effects of amphetamines. The Teddy Boys, in fact, are known for their violent ways that often took the form of riots against citizens from the British colonies<sup>91</sup>. This aggressive behavior was enhanced by heavy use of amphetamines<sup>92</sup>, therefore it is possible to find similarities between the Teds and the droogs in Burgess' novel. All commit acts of aggression and crime and make use of drugs to sustain their activities again, in some way 'the droogs were some version of the Teddy Boys or greasers or hipsters projected into the future'<sup>93</sup>.

If we combine this analysis of droogs and youth subcultures' use of drugs with Burgess' belief that 'nonsensical violence is something that belongs to youth because young people have a lot of energy to waste'<sup>94</sup>, it appears very clearly that, through the depiction of Alex

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<sup>88</sup> Anthony Burgess, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>89</sup> Arthur Marwick *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, C. 1958-C.1974*, Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 71.

<sup>90</sup> Mark Weatherall, *From Our Cambridge Correspondent: Cambridge Student Life 1945-95 as Seen in the pages of 'Varsity'*, Cambridge, 1995, pp. 35-7, quoted in Arthur Marwick, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

<sup>91</sup> See James Vernon, *Modern Britain, 1750 to the Present*, Cambridge University Press, 2017, p. 443.

<sup>92</sup> See Lorenzo Servitje, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

<sup>93</sup> Donald P. Costello, «From Counterculture to Anticulture», *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 34, No. 4, 1972, pp. 187-93, p. 187; quoted in Lorenzo Servitje, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

<sup>94</sup> «La violenza insensata è una prerogativa dei giovani che hanno molta energia ma poco talento per costruire». Anthony Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange Resucked*, in *A Clockwork Orange*, Norton, New York, 1987; quoted in Flavio Gregori, *Singin' in the Brain: il Mondo Distopico di A Clockwork Orange*, Lindau, 2004, p. 31. ; my translation.

and his droogs in *A Clockwork Orange*, the author's goal was to openly criticize the youth subcultures' aggressive behavior enhanced by drugs.

In the following section, I want to demonstrate how Burgess might have wanted to mock the teenagers' way of dressing of his time by pointing out the similarities between the droogs' clothing and that of the young in the late 1950s.

### 3.2. Dressing in "the Height of Fashion"

It is generally acknowledged that in the 1950s and 1960s the new wave of teenagers started to dress in their own personal and unconventional way. The reason for that was the fact that they wanted to make a statement through their dressing, they wanted to claim their individuality and freedom and separate themselves from, and eventually oppose, the society they were living in. As already stated, the three main youth subcultures in Britain were the Teddy Boys, the Mods and the Rockers and each of them had a particular dress code to show their belonging. The Teds based their clothes on an 'Edwardian-revival fashion, [the] long drape-jacket, and the attire of the Western Gambler in Hollywood films, including satin lapels, shocking colors and bootlace ties'.<sup>95</sup> The Mods, on the other hand, 'represented an indirectly coded workingclassness in its feverish consumption of high-fashion Italian suits, Chelsea boots, motor-scooters'.<sup>96</sup> The reason behind that was the celebration of 'the fact that no one controlled them, opposing traditional frugality with conspicuous consumption, but with an implicit, traditional working-class awareness of domination and control in labor'<sup>97</sup>. And finally, the Rockers, who appeared in reaction against the Mods, wore 'leather jackets, not smart suits'<sup>98</sup> and rode 'powerful motorbikes not scooters'<sup>99</sup> and danced to 'rock 'n' roll and the twist'<sup>100</sup>.

If clothing, then, could be considered as a trait that distinguished the youth subcultures,

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<sup>95</sup> Neil Nehring, «The Shifting Relations of Literature and Popular Music in Postwar England», *Discourse*, Vol. 12, No. 1, A Special Issue on Music, 1989-90, pp. 78-103, p. 86.

<sup>96</sup> *Idem*, p. 93.

<sup>97</sup> *Idem*, p. 94.

<sup>98</sup> Anthony Marwick, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibidem*.



the teenagers that Anthony Burgess depicts in *A Clockwork Orange* are not any different from others. In fact, in the novel Alex and his droogs have their own style and the protagonist proudly describes it as

the height of fashion, which in those days was a pair of black very tight tights with the old jelly mould, as we called it, fitting on the crotch underneath the tights, this being to protect and also a sort of design you could viddy clear enough in a certain light, so that I had one in the shape of a spider. Pete had a rooker (a hand, that is), Georgie had a very fancy one of a flower, and poor old Dim had a very hound-and-horny one of a clown's litso (face, that is). [...] Then we wore waisty jackets without lapels but with these very big built-up shoulders ('pletchoes' we called them) which were a kind of a mockery of having real shoulders like that. Then, my brothers, we had these off-white cravats which looked like whipped-up kartoffel or spud with a sort of a design made on it with a fork. We wore our hair not too long and we had flip horrorshow boots for kicking.<sup>101</sup>

As the novel proceeds, and the main character grows older, fashion changes among teenage gangs and in the very last chapter we see Alex with his new band of droogs still sitting in the Korova Milkbar, taking drugs, but dressed differently from the beginning (and different is also the spelling of the word 'height' in the first part from 'heighth' in the last part, perhaps to highlight the change of fashion even more),

We were dressed in the heighth of fashion, which in those days was the very wide trousers and a very loose shiny leather like jerkin over an open-necked shirt with a little scarf tucked in. At this time too it was the heighth of fashion to use the old britva on the gulliver, so the most of the gulliver was like bald and there was hair only on the sides. But it was always the same on the old nogas - real horrorshow bolshy big boots for kicking litsos in.<sup>102</sup>

Even though times change, style remains a distinctive sign of youth subcultures. In fact, both in the first part and in the last one, teenagers are always wearing clothing that has nothing to do with the standard adult dress code. An example of that can be found again in the last chapter when Alex meets Pete and his wife Georgina. In this scene, it is clear that the way Alex and the other teenagers dress belongs to youth cultures, while once they become adults the dress code will be completely different. As a matter of fact, Pete, who

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<sup>101</sup> Anthony Burgess, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>102</sup> *Idem*, p. 133.

has grown up, is settling down and has a wife, is now an adult and his clothing consists in 'an ordinary day-suit and [this] hat on'<sup>103</sup>

What we understand from this, then, is the fact that both in the 1950s and in Burgess' novel, youth subcultures define their identity also through a personal fashion style which in some way might recall a uniform in order to show their belonging to a specific gang<sup>104</sup>. What makes this comparison a satiric aspect of the novel could be the fact that Alex frequently refers to his style as 'the heighth of fashion', as we can read in the previous quotes. To be dressed in 'the heighth of fashion' means to wear something fashionable and stylish, but Alex and his droogs' way of dressing can be considered definitely absurd, due to the weird association of items they make: shaped jockstraps, big shoulder pads, fork-designed ties, etc. What is more, the intentional misspelling of the word 'height' in 'heighth' could be read as a sarcastic way of pointing out the ridicule of their dressing habits. Therefore, knowing the Burgess' critical vein towards teenage gangs in the 1950s, it could be stated that through the weird and ridiculous depiction of the droogs dress style, he might have wanted to attack the youth fashions of his time.

In the following and last section, I examine the final satirical feature in *A Clockwork Orange* which is music, and how it is relatable with new-found musical tendencies of the 1950s.

### 3.3. Music: an Emotional Enhancement

In the 1950s and early 1960s, for youth subcultures music was another distinctive and significant trait of self-identification as well as for Alex's gang of droogs. It is no secret that music, in fact, could be considered as an emotional enhancement in the sense that it can make you feel a wide range of emotions and can also influence one's mood in different ways. and for the main character of Burgess' novel, it is no exception. As a matter of fact, Alex takes great pleasure in listening to music, specifically classical music and his

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<sup>103</sup> *Idem*, p. 138.

<sup>104</sup> See Jennifer Kirby, «A New Gang in Town: Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* as Adaptation and Subversion of the 1950's Juvenile Delinquent Cycle», *Literature/Film Quarterly*, Salisbury, Vol. 43, No. 4, 2015, pp. 291-303, p. 294.

beloved 'Ludwig van'. Through the pages, there are plenty of scenes in which he describes the joy and bliss he gets from listening to it. For example, in the first part, after arriving home from the night of ultra-violence, he puts 'a violin concerto by the American Geoffrey Plautus, played by Odysseus Choerilos with the Macon (Georgia) Philharmonic'<sup>105</sup> on the stereo and, lying in bed, he says,

Then, brothers, it came. Oh, bliss, bliss and heaven. I lay all nagoy to the ceiling, my gulliver on my rookers on the pillow, glazzies closed, rot open in bliss, slooshying the sluice of lovely sounds. Oh, it was gorgeousness and gorgeosity made flesh. [...] Oh, it was wonder of wonders. [...] I was in such bliss, my brothers. As I slooshied, my glazzies tight shut to shut in the bliss, that was better than any synthemesc Bog or God, I knew such lovely pictures. There were vecks and ptitsas, both young and starry, lying on the ground screaming for mercy, and I was smecking all over my rot and grinding my boot in their litsos. And there were devotchkas ripped and creeching against walls and I plunging like a shlaga into them, and indeed when the music, [...] rose to the top of its big highest tower, [...] I broke and spattered and cried aaaaaaah with the bliss of it.<sup>106</sup>

Another scene that describes the ecstatic feeling he gets while listening to music can be found some pages later when he meets two girls, Marty and Sonietta, in a music store and convinces them to go home with him. There, he has them get drunk and rapes them. Everything is accompanied by *The Ninth* by Beethoven,

What was actually done that afternoon there is no need to describe, brothers, as you may easily guess all. Those two were unplattied and smecking fit to crack in no time at all, and they thought it the bolshiest fun to viddy Uncle Alex standing there all nagoy and pan-handled, [...] Then I pulled the lovely Ninth out of its sleeve, so that Ludvig van was now nagoy too, and I set the needle hissing on to the last movement, which was all bliss. There it was then, the bass strings like govoreeting away from under my bed at the rest of the orchestra, and then the male human goloss coming in and telling them all to be joyful, and then the lovely blissful tune all about Joy being a glorious spark like of heaven, and then I felt the old tigers leap in me and then I leapt on these two young ptitsas.<sup>107</sup>

As we can learn from these two examples, the effect that music sorts on Alex is far from positive. In fact, it is true that it causes him delight and satisfaction, but it also makes him become violent. In the first quotation, while listening to music, he has dreams about

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<sup>105</sup> Anthony Burgess, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

<sup>106</sup> Anthony Burgess, *op cit*, pp. 26-27.

<sup>107</sup> Anthony Burgess, *op cit*, pp. 35-36.

beating people and raping girls (as he does every time he listens to classical music), and in the second excerpt from the novel, after hearing the first notes of *The Ninth*, he becomes aggressive and forces the two girls to have a sexual intercourse with him. In some way, it is possible to find similarities between the effect of 'milk with knives' and 'music' since both of them set him in the mood for any kind of violence. In his words, 'music always sort of sharpened me up, O my brothers, and made me feel like old Bod himself, ready to make with the old donner and blitzen and have vecks and ptitsas creeding away in my ha ha power'.<sup>108</sup> It is very clear from this, then, that music lights him up and prepares him to fight, the same way that the 'milk with knives' quoted in Chapter 2 does.

In this context, one must point out Burgess' critique against the newly-appeared music of the 1950s and 1960s,

I would like to make a simple statement about today's music. As weird and stupid subspecies of art, as sedative for teenagers, it is fully blooming. As form of art capable of tugging the heartstrings or unveiling celestial and divine visions, it ceased to live more or less with the death of Mozart.<sup>109</sup>

What is more, he 'despised the youth culture he perceived in the so-called castrato-rock of the late fifties and early sixties, and has since excoriated all youth culture'.<sup>110</sup> As a matter of fact, in the fifties, new musical genres appeared, and one of them was rock 'n' roll. This has always generated controversial opinions since it was believed to cause in teenagers aggressive behavior, as the example of the Teddy Boys seemed to prove. Rock 'seemed to be spontaneously generated, an immediate expression of youthful energies'<sup>111</sup> and the Teds identified themselves with this genre. In fact, they 'preferred rock and roll - Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis, Eddie Cochran, and Buddy Holly - a harder music than

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<sup>108</sup> Anthony Burgess, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

<sup>109</sup> «Vorrei fare un'affermazione molto semplice riguardo alla condizione della musica al giorno d'oggi. Come demenziale sottospecie d'arte, come sedativo per adolescenti, essa sopravvive, anzi è in pieno rigoglio. Come arte capace di sondare le profondità dell'animo umano o, il che è lo stesso, di svelare visioni celesti, la musica ha cessato di esistere più o meno in coincidenza con la morte di Mozart», Anthony Burgess, «The Day the Music Died» *The Times*, 1981, quoted in Stefano Manferlotti, «Anthony Burgess», *Belfagor*, Vol. 42, No. 2, 1987, pp. 169-188, p. 183; my translation.

<sup>110</sup> Neil Nehring, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

<sup>111</sup> Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, London, Routledge, 2002, p. 50.

anything available in England'.<sup>112</sup> Knowing the rioting behavior of Teddy Boys, especially towards black citizens, it was easy for people to associate their bad temper and aggression with the music they listened to.

It is possible to trace down two plausible explanations of the role of music as a satirical feature in *A Clockwork Orange*. The first one contemplates the fact that Burgess might have wanted to elevate and praise classical music, disregarding and criticizing instead the new musical wave of 1950s. An example of this can be found in the pages in which Alex goes to the 'disc-bootick'<sup>113</sup> and meets the two girls (presented above). He looks at the discs that Marty and Sonietta are 'shuffling through'<sup>114</sup> and refers to them as 'pop-discs - Johnny Burnaway, Stash Kroh, The Mixers, Lay Quiet Awhile With Ed And Id Molotov, and all the rest of that cal',<sup>115</sup> He uses the word 'cal' which in Nadsat means 'crap'<sup>116</sup> to convey his disregard for this genre of music, exactly like Burgess does. A further instance can be found in the section when Alex takes the girls to his house, and plays 'their pathetic malenky discs'<sup>117</sup> on the stereo. In this case, he calls their discs 'pathetic', which functions like 'crap' to convey Alex'/Burgess' scornful opinion towards that music.

The second possible reading of music as satirical could be Burgess' replacement of rock 'n' roll music with classical music to criticize the aggressive and violent behavior associated with rock. What could lead us to believe that Burgess, through the classical music that Alex listens, is instead referring to rock music lies in the protagonist's shift in behavior. In fact, as previously stated, whenever Alex listens to his beloved music, he begins either picturing violent scenes in his mind, as happens in the two scenes mentioned before, and again for example when he discovers that he has been 'cured' and can now have violent thoughts without feeling sick. *The Ninth* is playing on the stereo and with his eyes closed,

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<sup>112</sup> Neil Nehring, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

<sup>113</sup> Anthony Burgess, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>115</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>116</sup> *Appendix: A Clockwork Orange*,

[https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Appendix:A\\_Clockwork\\_Orange](https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Appendix:A_Clockwork_Orange), 27 July 2023.

<sup>117</sup> Anthony Burgess, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

Oh, it was gorgeosity and yumyummy. When it came to the Scherzo I could viddy myself very clear running and running on like very light and mysterious nogas, carving the whole litso of the creeching world with my cut-throat britva. [...] I was cured all right.<sup>118</sup>

Or he begins actually acting aggressively as in the scene of the raping of the two girls. Music for Alex is an emotional enhancement, which, instead of making him feel sad or happy or festive or depressed, causes him to feel the urge for and desire of violence. Dr. Brodsky says it too: 'Music [...] It's a useful emotional heightener'.<sup>119</sup> It is possible to argue that rock music was regarded the same way by people in the 1950s as far as Teddy Boys were concerned.

To conclude, whether Burgess used classical music in the novel as a way to glorify its prestige over the new genres of teenage music in his time, or to hide rock 'n' roll genre behind it in order to expose the popular belief that rock music caused teenagers to be violent, is uncertain. However, it is clear that his aim was to criticize the music listened to by youth subcultures in the 1950s.

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<sup>118</sup> *Idem*, p. 132.

<sup>119</sup> *Idem*, p. 85.

## CONCLUSION

The aim of my analysis was to show the different features that allow Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange* to be considered both a dystopian and also satirical novel. In fact, at first sight, it might seem to belong to the dystopian genre, since there are examples of a totalitarian society dominated by chaos, corruption, violence and extreme behavioral conditioning methods imposed by the state. As I showed in Chapter 2, the key features that fit the dystopian category are the widely-known Ludovico's Technique, the disrupted society which, according to Burgess, is destined to follow the cyclic nature of historical eras led by opposing political systems, and finally the language used by Alex and his droogs, Nadsat. The reason why these aspects of the novel belong to Dystopia is the fact that they reflect the fears and anxieties of a world, heavily damaged by two World Wars, that finds itself in the middle of a contention between the two major powers of the time, the USA and the Soviet Union, and that is subjected to new waves of changes that involve the political and cultural spheres. More specifically, the 'world' I am referring to is Britain in the 1950s and the early 1960s. At the time, in fact, the Welfare State was meant to improve the social conditions of all; yet, as I discuss in Chapter 1, it turned out to cause more problems than benefits. It was in this context that new groups of teenagers started to manifest their desire for individuality and self-identification through a heavy use of drugs, a peculiar dress code and their own music genres. And it is exactly on the youth subcultures scene of the time that I focus for a study of the satirical features of *A Clockwork Orange*. As a matter of fact, in the novel there are many references that may lead one to believe that Burgess might have wanted to criticize and mock the new gangs of young people present in those years. As I stated in Chapter 3, the possible connections between fiction and reality teenagers are traceable in the mutual use of certain drugs, namely amphetamines, in the bizarre way of dressing, and the aggressive behavior possibly enhanced by music.

Having brought examples to the reader's attention, I conclude that Burgess' novel is a Satire, too. Knowing, in fact, that Burgess despised the aggressive and irresponsible ways of youth subcultures, in addition to the newly-appeared forms of music, of his time, it is

easy to find in the novel similarities between Alex and his gang, and Teddy Boys, Mods and Rockers.

Overall, I argue that, even though they can both serve to make readers think differently about the society they are living in, there is a subtle difference between Dystopia and Satire. The first refers to something that is likely to happen, a warning about the possible outcomes in the future of a situation in the present time. The second one relates to something that is actually already happening in the present. And it is in this difference that lies the blending of both genres of *A Clockwork Orange*: on one hand, it warns about the dangers of any totalitarian system, and, on the other, it gives a depiction of youth subcultures present in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The main character Alex makes an emblematic statement that, in my personal opinion, could summarize the point I tried to make, which is the double reading of Burgess' novel from a dystopian and satirical perspective: 'And is not our modern history, my brothers, the story of brave malenky selves fighting this big machines?'<sup>120</sup>. This can be read either from the dystopian point of view of the novel's society, meaning that Alex and the rest of the youth in the story act the way they do in order to fight against the corrupted and rotten political system, or from a satirical point of view hiding in it the 1950s youth subcultures' ideal of contrasting the society they were living in in order to make a change. The sense of youth rebellion is the same in both genres but it gives the idea that the author might have wanted to mask the satirical criticism towards the subcultures present at his time with a quote that is actually referring to the dystopian setting of the novel. Whether or not Burgess intentionally meant to write a novel with this goal is uncertain, however I maintain that it is possible to look at *A Clockwork Orange* under a different light.

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<sup>120</sup> Anthony Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange*, cit., p. 31.



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(27 July 2023)



## RIASSUNTO IN ITALIANO (SUMMARY IN ITALIAN)

### Distopia o Satira? Una lettura di *Arancia Meccanica* di Anthony Burgess

*Arancia Meccanica* è un testo dell'autore inglese Anthony Burgess pubblicato nel 1962. Nel racconto viene ritratta una società dominata dalla violenza, perpetrata sia da Alex e i suoi 'drugh', e dal resto delle gang giovanili presenti nel romanzo, ma anche dallo stesso Stato con l'intento di eliminare gli oppositori politici e correggere il comportamento dei criminali. Ad una prima lettura, dunque, lo scenario rappresentato dall'autore può sembrare distopico a tutti gli effetti, tuttavia il mio intento è di dimostrare come l'opera sia sì correttamente associata al genere letterario della Distopia, ma anche apportare una lettura differente che andrebbe a collocarla nell'ambito della Satira.

Nel Capitolo 1, fornisco delle informazioni generali che sono utili per meglio comprendere l'analisi dell'opera di Burgess. Innanzitutto, il contesto storico in cui *Arancia Meccanica* viene concepita è quello dell'Inghilterra nel periodo di tempo che va dalla fine della Seconda Guerra Mondiale ai primi anni degli anni '60. All'epoca, venne instaurato il Welfare State, una politica sociale per diminuire alcuni problemi interni quali la povertà e la disoccupazione, accentuati dalla guerra. Questa nuova visione prevedeva la distribuzione di beni monetari a famiglie con più di un figlio, la sistemazione temporanea di cittadini senza lavoro in luoghi idonei ad un modesto stile di vita, e il trattamento medico gratuito per persone in difficoltà. A prima vista sembrerebbe un'ottima soluzione, tuttavia le problematiche ad essa non tardarono ad arrivare. Infatti, l'aiuto monetario alle famiglie fu utile da un lato, ma dall'altro fu visto come un incentivo da parte dello Stato alle famiglie per procreare copiosamente, causando di conseguenza un boom di nascite difficile da sostenere. Inoltre, con la progressiva uguaglianza dovuta alla redistribuzione delle ricchezze, la società cominciò ad uniformarsi andando via via a smantellare il tradizionale sistema basato sulle classi. A causa di ciò, l'ambito lavorativo ne risentì in quanto anche la classe operaia iniziò a scomparire, preferendo impieghi appartenenti al settore terziario a quelli manuali. Ma non è tutto, la democrazia sociale portò ad un progressivo aumento di casi di razzismo rivolti a cittadini del Commonwealth che si recavano in Inghilterra per beneficiare della politica del Welfare State garantita

dall'accordo British Nationality Act stipulato nel 1948. I fenomeni di razzismo aumentarono coinvolgendo anche giovani gang come ad esempio i Teddy Boys che lottarono in prima linea attraverso attacchi diretti ai cittadini esterni. I Teddy Boys, comunque, non erano l'unica sottocultura giovanile al tempo, infatti andò a svilupparsi una vera e propria Controcultura formata da giovani che si ribellavano alle norme e valori imposti dalla società. Tra questi gruppi di giovani ricordiamo gli Angry Young Men, i già citati Teddy Boys, i Mods e i Rockers, ognuno con un proprio stile e le proprie caratteristiche.

A tale contesto si aggiunsero anche le crescenti tensioni tra Stati Uniti e Unione Sovietica, che portarono poi allo scoppio della Guerra Fredda. Il clima era tutt'altro che tranquillo, e in una situazione simile riemersero due generi letterari: la Distopia e la Satira. Se entrambe hanno l'obiettivo comune di far riflettere il lettore e renderlo consapevole, esse presentano però una sottile differenza. Da un lato, la Distopia è un genere che per definizione rappresenta un mondo, in un possibile futuro, alterato, buio e pessimista dal quale non c'è via di scampo. Gli individui e le popolazioni sono assoggettati da un sistema politico che cerca di reprimere le loro libertà attraverso metodi coercitivi con lo scopo di ottenere la loro completa ubbidienza. La Satira invece è un genere che utilizza il sarcasmo o la presa in giro per criticare un contesto sociale, culturale o politico situato nel presente, senza alludere a futuri distorti. Fondamentalmente, la Distopia tratta qualcosa che *potrebbe* accadere, la Satira tratta qualcosa che *sta* accadendo.

Tra questi due generi letterari si colloca *Arancia Meccanica* di Anthony Burgess in quanto, tramite l'analisi che ho deciso di portare, si possono trovare riferimenti sia alla Distopia che alla Satira. L'ispirazione per l'opera venne all'autore in una tragica circostanza: una sera sua moglie stava tornando a casa quando venne violentemente picchiata da un gruppo di ragazzi, causandole la perdita del figlio che aveva in grembo e gravi problematiche psicologiche e fisiche. Burgess decise dunque di scrivere una storia che parlasse della violenza insensata dei giovani. Tuttavia, non lo diede immediatamente alla stampa in quanto la sua idea era di creare un linguaggio e dei personaggi che potessero adattarsi a qualsiasi periodo storico, atemporali, e al tempo la stesura non lo convinceva. L'intuizione lo colse all'improvviso durante un viaggio in Unione Sovietica dove ebbe modo di assistere ad atti di vandalismo da parte di alcuni giovani locali. Lì, realizzò che la violenza è la stessa in qualunque luogo e segue delle regole ben precise. A quel punto

concluse e pubblicò definitivamente l'opera nel 1962.

Successivamente nel Capitolo 2, analizzo nello specifico tre caratteristiche del romanzo *Arancia Meccanica* che vengono considerate distopiche. In ordine sono, La Cura Ludovico, la società rappresentata da Burgess, e infine il linguaggio inventato chiamato Nadsat utilizzato da Alex e i suoi drughì.

La Cura Ludovico è forse il più evidente esempio di tema distopico in quanto si tratta di un trattamento finalizzato al condizionamento comportamentale tramite il quale viene controllato l'impulso di Alex a commettere atti violenti. La cura, come si può cogliere dal libro, funziona attraverso l'effetto combinato di un siero e la visione forzata di film disturbanti con lo scopo di far associare al paziente il potente senso di nausea (causato dal siero) con la violenza, in modo tale che si arrivi autonomamente a respingere qualsiasi impulso di aggressività e crimine. Essendo dunque che la caratteristica fondamentale di ogni Distopia è la privazione della libertà personale, la Cura Ludovico può considerarsi aderente al genere in quanto il trattamento va ad annullare la libertà di Alex di agire secondo i propri impulsi, per paura di sentire la nausea.

La seconda caratteristica distopica nella storia è la società. Burgess infatti, attraverso tutto il racconto, dipinge una società dominata dal caos, dalla paura e dalla violenza, attribuibile sia alla gang di Alex sia allo Stato. Nella prima parte del libro prevale un sistema politico di tipo liberale, dove in assenza di restrizioni Alex e i suoi drughì, ma anche altre gang giovanili, si cimentano indisturbati in atti di vandalismo e violenza durante la notte. Verso la terza parte del libro invece si può notare che il sistema politico è cambiato, prendendo le sembianze di un totalitarismo in cui la popolazione è assoggettata a un rigido controllo e una brutale forza di polizia. Questo ribaltamento si basa sulla concezione di Burgess per cui la storia è destinata a vivere un alternarsi di periodi di *laissez-faire* e periodi di ristrettezze in un eterno ciclo diviso in tre fasi: la Pelfase, l'Interfase e la Gusfase. La Pelfase è un momento di grande fiducia nell'umanità secondo la quale l'uomo da solo può assicurarsi la salvezza divina grazie alla sua volontà e i suoi sforzi. Tuttavia, nella cosiddetta Interfase, questo ottimismo è destinato a finire in quanto si verifica una generale disillusione causata dall'incapacità dell'uomo di comportarsi sempre e solo bene. Dunque, essendo l'uomo incapace di migliorarsi da solo, è necessario l'ausilio dello Stato il quale andrà ad instaurare regole e ristrettezze per guidarlo. Quest'ultima fase è fondata sul pessimismo Agostiniano, chiamata Gusfase, per

cui l'uomo, senza l'aiuto di Dio, è condannato a vivere una vita di corruzione.

Infine, la terza caratteristica distopica che va sottolineata nell'opera di Burgess è il linguaggio utilizzato, chiamato Nadsat. Il termine deriva dalla parola russa 'Nadsat' che significa 'teenager' e infatti è parlato da Alex e i suoi drughi. L'idioletto inventato dall'autore presenta un totale di circa 200 parole che derivano dalla lingua russa, da alcuni dialetti inglesi, espressioni cockney e linguaggio infantile. Il motivo per cui il Nadsat può essere considerato un aspetto distopico in *Arancia Meccanica* deriva proprio dal fatto che è composto da prestiti di russo. Si può ipotizzare infatti che, dal momento che al tempo di Burgess c'era la Guerra Fredda, l'utilizzo di una lingua composta da termini provenienti dal blocco orientale lascia intravedere la paura di una possibile invasione Sovietica presente all'epoca. Un'altra possibile lettura, tuttavia, potrebbe associarsi al tema del 'lavaggio del cervello', in quanto Burgess stesso ha affermato di voler adeguare il linguaggio al contenuto principale dell'opera, ossia quello della Cura Ludovico. Infatti, se da un lato il trattamento ha l'obiettivo di trasformare il protagonista, cambiandone le caratteristiche individuali, dall'altro il Nadsat compie la stessa funzione sul lettore, andandone a modificare le capacità di lettura partendo da una situazione di estrema difficoltà di comprensione ad un totale adattamento, tramite azione subliminale, alla nuova lingua.

Proseguendo, poi, al terzo e ultimo capitolo, il mio intento è quello di esaminare tre possibili caratteristiche del romanzo che possano essere definite satiriche. L'analisi verte sulla nozione secondo cui la satira fa riferimento a ciò che avviene nel presente, e nel caso di *Arancia Meccanica*, si tratta del periodo che va dalla fine degli anni '50 all'inizio dei '60.

In primo luogo, affronto il tema dell'abuso di droghe da parte sia dei drughi di Burgess, sia dalle sottoculture giovanili di metà secolo. Nel libro vengono presentate una serie di droghe, quali il synthemesc, drencrom, vellocet e il 'milk with knives' (o 'latte coi coltelli' nella versione italiana) e ognuna di esse ha il proprio effetto. Come suggerisce Alex nelle prime pagine di presentazione, le prime tre droghe sembrerebbero causare allucinazioni, perciò, grazie anche all'interpretazione di due critici, siamo indotti a pensare che si tratti di droghe simili all'LSD. Il più utilizzato dai drughi 'milk with knives' invece, a sostegno del fatto che sembrerebbe sortire un effetto stimolante e che permette loro di entrare nel mood per una notte di violenza, potrebbe essere associato alle anfetamine. Queste ultime,



è documentato, che fossero una droga ampiamente usata da alcune sottoculture giovanili come ad esempio i Teddy Boys e i Mods. Partendo dunque dalla critica dell'autore contro la violenza insensata e ingiustificata da parte dei giovani, sembrerebbe naturale associare la descrizione delle sostanze stupefacenti assunte dai drughì a quelle delle gang di fine anni '50 dal momento che entrambe venivano usate per caricarsi di energia, un'energia che più spesso che no veniva trasformata in violenza e vandalismo.

Il secondo tratto satirico che propongo è l'abbigliamento, dei drughì e delle nuove bande di teenager, entrambi assurdi e spinti all'estremo, tanto da far credere che forse l'autore abbia preso ispirazione dallo stile irriverente dei giovani dell'epoca. Da un lato, Alex e i drughì indossavano una calzamaglia nera con sospensorio al di sotto di essa, degli stivali, spalline esageratamente grandi e una giacca corta senza colletto. Dall'altro i Teddy Boys vestivano secondo uno stile edoardiano, con giacche lunghe dai colletti di raso, colori eccentrici e cravattini di cuoio. I Mods invece avevano un codice d'abbigliamento più pulito e lineare ma non per questo meno significativo: essi vestivano di completi dal taglio Italiano e stivaletti, con lo scopo di prendere in giro l'opulenza che circolava a quei tempi. Infine, i Rockers avevano il loro caratteristico giubbotto di pelle e il look un po' trasandato. Ciò che potrebbe dunque far pensare ad una somiglianza tra i personaggi del libro e i giovani ribelli tanto da considerarla un tratto satirico è l'assurdità e la bizzarria che accomuna i codici d'abbigliamento, arrivando a pensare che Burgess possa aver voluto prendere in giro e ridicolizzare lo stile giovanile che cominciò ad apparire.

Infine, l'ultimo aspetto che analizzo in chiave satirica è la musica, ma prima di tutto si deve aver ben chiaro il fatto che Burgess affermò con convinzione che la musica vera, quella che tocca l'animo, scomparve quando morì Mozart, e che tutto il resto della musica che prese piede negli anni '50 e successivi era banale, insapore e indegna. Detto questo, come si osserva nel romanzo, il protagonista è un grande estimatore di musica classica, quasi fosse un elemento vitale per lui. Tuttavia, l'effetto che l'ascolto di tale musica sortisce in Alex è quello di violenza e aggressività, un po' come l'effetto sortito dal 'milk with knives'. Quindi, sapendo che uno dei generi musicali appena comparsi negli anni '50 era il rock 'n' roll e che veniva ascoltato da gang belligeranti come i Teddy Boys, il collegamento sorge spontaneo: è possibile considerare il fatto che Burgess, attraverso la sostituzione del rock con la musica classica, abbia voluto criticare l'effetto violento che quel genere causava nei giovani. Ciononostante, un'ulteriore lettura dell'inserimento della

musica nell'opera potrebbe consistere nell'obiettivo dell'autore di elogiare la musica classica a discapito della musica pop, anche questa tra i generi che fecero capolino in quegli anni. Nel romanzo infatti è presente un chiaro esempio dello scherno provato da Alex/Burgess nei confronti della musica pop, ossia quando Alex incontra le due ragazzine nel negozio di dischi e denigra i dischi da loro scelti considerandoli patetici.

Per concludere la mia analisi, dunque, è possibile constatare come l'opera faccia parte del genere distopico tuttavia, attraverso una lettura più approfondita e informata, sia da considerare anche una Satira rispetto alle culture giovanili comparse tra la fine degli anni '50 e l'inizio degli anni '60.