

Music and a clockwork orange: applications in novel and film



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Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange* is a novel pervaded by a multifaceted and intrinsic musical presence. Protagonist Alex's fondness for classical music imbues his character with interesting dimensions, and resonates well thematically — the music in the novel can be characterized as a synecdoche for high culture, as offset by Alex's violent and antisocial behavior. Some of the most violent scenes of the novel are carried out to the music of various Classical- and Romantic-era composers, creating especially jarring moments in the narrative, complete with a wealth of interesting hermeneutic possibilities. Stanley Kubrick's infamous 1971 adaptation, a film notorious for its depictions of violence and remarkable for its faithfulness to its source material, accordingly features a score reflective of the novel's musical disposition, though it chooses a particular work — Beethoven's Ninth Symphony — to act as a sort of narrative catalyst. Examining both Burgess's novel and Kubrick's cinematic adaptation, I will outline how music is used in the works in both similar and contrasting ways, bringing into focus aspects of the relationship between the mediums of film, music, and literature.

Considering the connection between his two arts, Burgess states in an article entitled "Music and Literature": "Music might have pretended, with Berlioz and Strauss, to absorb literature, but in fact it had turned itself into an adjunct of literature — critical, illustrative." Throughout *A Clockwork Orange*, it may be argued that music is presented accordingly as both a critical and illustrative force; Burgess draws on his musical influences and proficiency to enrich this exploration of morality. Alex's first-person narration is accompanied by music in various contexts at various vital points in the narrative. It is playing when he is found in states of rumination. For example,

early in the novel he listens to Bach whilst considering the actions of himself and his “ droogs” during the preceding day: