

Yin and yang



Black and white, morning and night: the world fills itself with conflicting forces that must coexist in order for it to run smoothly. Forces like diversity and the fear of terrorism or competition and the desire to peacefully live with one another must both be present in order for one to survive. Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange* also contains this idea, "Duality is the key to Burgess's view of reality; he believes the essence of reality is its double nature" (Kennard 87). Burgess believes there is an equilibrium that allows each force to live side by side. Harsh, foreign language and the characterization used throughout *A Clockwork Orange* create a novel filled with dualities and contribute to the message that opposite but coequal forces make up the composition of Burgess's world. Alex and his droogs, or friends, speak in Burgess's invented slang throughout the novel. This quirky language keeps the reader in the dark for much of the novel, until they begin to grasp it around the middle of the novel. Teenagers in *A Clockwork Orange*'s dystopia use Nadsat mainly when describing violent scenes, "Burgess relies principally on an odd language he has devised—a mixture of current English, archaic English, and anglicized Russian (today, yesterday, and the future)" (Aggeler 86). Only the youth utilize this composite language though, saying things like, "There was a bit of shuffling with nozhes and bike-chains and the like" (Burgess 43). This creates a striking difference in the way the teenagers and adults communicate in the novel. Some readers may get frustrated with the language, finding it hard to follow along, but "There is something about the novel so frightening that it demanded a new language, and something so immanent in the message of the novel that it refused to be separated from the language" (Petix 4). Once the reader pushes past the confusion, they begin to grasp onto it quickly; this allows the

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reader to see the humor Alex possesses but also allows a full understanding of the brutal violence of which Alex is capable. When Alex once again sees Pete, one of his old droogs, the difference in language between the youth and maturity clearly appears. When they recognize each other, Alex uses the old slang that was once familiar to both of them, only to have Pete's wife giggle, " He talks funny, doesn't he?" (Burgess 208). Now that Pete grew out of his reckless, teenage years he has shed the slang that marked him as a nuisance to society. He now speaks in normal, everyday language explaining to the shocked Alex of his marriage, " I'm nearly twenty. Old enough to be hitched, and it's been two months already" (Burgess 209). The meeting between the two old droogs leaves Alex feeling bored of his usual, violent life, " Alex at first seems predestined to do evil, but as he matures he is transformed into a complete opposite person." (Rabinovitz 15). When analyzing *A Clockwork Orange's* duality of youth versus maturity, the language in this meeting is a pivotal part. The language shows the reader how they are two distinct entities, but yet one age group is not more important than other. They need one another to exist. The thoroughly developed characters in *A Clockwork Orange* serve well in developing another duality in the novel: man versus government. Throughout the novel, the government progressively becomes more and more oppressive, in an attempt to stamp out any trace of in the individual. They are solely focused on the upkeep of the state, " Burgess dislikes the control the state has over individuals because it limits individual freedom" (Galens 10). By the time Alex has been released from prison after completing the Ludovico experimentation, the rozz were out in full force in order to keep the people suppressed. Dim, one of Alex's old friends that he bullied, and Billyboy, an <https://assignbuster.com/yin-and-yang/>

old enemy of Alex's, happened to be the policemen that were called when Alex was a part of a fight at the library. This was a corrupted time however, so the policemen took Alex out in the woods to beat him up, " It is not right, not always, for lewdies in the town to viddy to much of our summary punishment. Streets much be kept clean in more than one way" (Burgess 168). Dim and Billyboy were aggressive and unnecessarily cruel to Alex while reprimanding him. Despite the many crimes Alex has committed, the reader still feels sorry for him, " Without Alex's redeeming qualities, readers would simply see his as morally repulsive" (Rabinovitz16). They don't think of Alex as morally repulsive though, because they have gotten to know him throughout the novel; instead, they think the government and the rozz repulsive for what they did to Alex. Without these two characters and another, the Minister of the Interior, the government's encroachment on the individual would not be as evident. In the pursuit of a society focused on stability, the Minister of the Interior, a character who acquired his position during Alex's incarceration, implements two policies that can achieve his goals, both of which greatly affect Alex's life. When he steps into power, he decides to bring the government in full control of the prison sector. The Minister of Interior or Inferior, as Alex calls him, decides prisons should be used only for the politically nonconforming, meaning all criminals must be cleared out, " common criminals like this unsavoury crowd can best be dealt with on a purely curative basis" (Burgess 102). He puts into place a brainwashing experiment, called Ludovico's Technique, that can erase all criminal tendencies by making one associate violent actions with being physically ill. Not caring of the subsequent side effects that can come with this technique, the Minister of Interior or Inferior claims to have criminals

fixed in just over two weeks. The individual people are at the whim of the government when this experiment occurs; the government has an agenda and the people can not stand in their way. Always trying to spin any situation into the government's favor, the Minister of Interior or Inferior still uses Alex when the experiment goes wrong. After he was driven to kill himself due to a side effect from Ludovico's Technique, the minister ordered his scientists to set Alex back to his normal state, saying " I and the Government of which I am a member of want you to regard us as friends" (Burgess 197). Then he brought in cameras and newspapers that would see Alex shake his hand so all knew that the government was still Alex's friend, despite the fact that " Alex's treatment turned him into a perpetual victim" (Rabinovitz 15). In *A Clockwork Orange*, the government always manages to weasel its way back into having a good image largely because of the many impressionable citizens who trust fully in it. The major duality in *A Clockwork Orange* is free will versus suppression. The Minister of the Interior's Ludovico Technique represents much of the suppression in the novel. It deletes the choice for criminals; their only option is to be good citizens, that is unless that can take the pain of feeling horribly sick, " Alex's ' good behavior' after his treatment will only be an illusionary good for society" (" *A Clockwork Orange*" 2). Alex and the Prison Chaplain form a strong bond while Alex is in the state jail because the chaplain allowed Alex to listen to his beloved classical music and read the Old Testament, an activity he loved because of all the violence it contains. When Alex goes to inform the Chaplain that he will be undergoing the conditioning, the " Charlie" as Alex calls him becomes very emotional. The Charlie doesn't agree with the technique, " I know I shall have many sleepless nights about this. What does God want? Does God want goodness

or the choice of goodness? Is a man who chooses the bad perhaps in some way better than a man who has the good imposed upon him? Deep and hard questions, little 6655321" (Burgess 106). The Charlie's tearful talk with Alex provides major questioning to the government taking away free will from criminals, " Burgess asserts that the freely chosen life, even the evil freely chosen life, is superior to the passive existence of the automaton" (" A Clockwork Orange" 2). He would rather a world in which the people choose how to act, and a government in which they don't take the easy way out by brainwashing its citizens to do only good. In the end, the government does allow Alex to have his free will back. They are only saving their image though, they would much rather have citizens that are conditioned to get sick at the thought of violence than violent citizens that fill up their jail space. Alex at first reverts back to his old ways of bullying with a new gang, but eventually he chooses to change his life. His makes this choice with his own, clearly thinking mind, " I felt this bolshy big hollow inside my plott, feeling very surprised too at myself. I knew what was happening. I was growing up" (Burgess 211). It is much more fulfilling to the reader for Alex to desire to be good than when Alex was forced by the government to be good, " Finally grown up and fully prepared to accept the difficult challenges of self hood, Alex no longer chose the easier road to ultra-violence, opting instead to embark upon a lifetime of familial commitment and human renewal" (Davis 9). Though seemingly necessary to the novel, the final chapter in which Alex makes the choice to turn away from violence was not present in the American version of the novel at first. Later it was added because, " Burgess has said the he wrote the twenty-first chapter partly to symbolize the age of reason toward which Alex is moving; he is only eighteen at the

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end, so his insight is clearly only a first halting step toward maturity” (Cullinan 2). Twenty-one is the age when children are to become adults, when they are to have the full responsibilities that mark them as capable in the world. Without the twenty-first chapter in which Alex chooses maturity out of his own free will, the novel could not have been complete. A fourth duality, the battle between good and evil, rages on in Burgess’s novel. A Clockwork Orange, “explores the ideas of good and evil by asking what it means to be human” (Galens 6). The character he creates named F. Alexander shows how thin the line is between the two sides. When Alex first shows up beaten and weary on F. Alexander’s doorstep, he warmly takes him in saying, “God help you, you poor victim, come in and let’s have a look at you” (Burgess 171). We learn that F. Alexander has long been fighting the government and strongly opposes the Ludovico Technique that they performed on Alex. F. Alexander provides a room for Alex, he cooks for him, and he talks openly to him. One would think that he was a very good, caring man, until F. Alexander suspects Alex of brutally raping his wife a few years ago, “For, by Christ, if he were I’d tear him. I’d split him, by God, yes yes, So I would” (Burgess 184). Because of Alex and his droogs, F. Alexander now lives alone. F. Alexander’s suspicions are enough to turn him from a man caring for Alex’s well being to a man who could kill him without regret. F. Alexander and his friends take Alex and lock him up inside an apartment in which classical music is blaring through the walls. Alex can not stand this music, because a side effect to his conditioning included classical music also making him feel sick along with violence. There is nothing Alex can do to stop the music but kill himself, “Then I got on the sill, the music blasting away to my left, and I shut my glazzies and felt the cold wind on my litso,

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then I jumped” (Burgess 188). F. Alexander no longer cared about Alex, his love for his wife overcame his good character. He decided to hurt Alex in order to prove a point about the government’s conditioning technique instead of proving his point in a less shocking way than Alex’s death. The duality between Alex and F. Alexander is easy to discover, since they both have the same name. Though the similarities between the two characters end there. Alex is both impulsive and desires to always be the dominant force with his droogs, though “ Alex becomes a character readers sympathize with, due to his artistic consciousness” (Semansky 12). F. Alexander is far more introverted. He secludes himself in his house on the outskirts of town and finds joy in quiet activities, like writing. Burgess created these characters to balance each other, “ Many of the characteristics of Alex and Alexander may be resolved into examples of extremes that follow the pattern of polar antithesis, predator and victim; uncontrolled libido (rape) and controlled libido (husband); youth and adults; man of action and man of ideas; destroyer and creator; conservative and liberal; alienated man and integrated man” (Semansky 14). The two characters, despite their polar opposite behaviors, are deeply connected however. One of Alex’s many victims of his brutal rapings includes F. Alexander’s late wife. Alex and his droogs broke into his house one night and forced him to watch the boys rape his wife while also savagely beating the couple. F. Alexander’s wife took her own life after this incident. When Alex later is drawn to the same home after being beaten by the rozz, they soon both realize that they have met before under very bad circumstances. Alex and F. Alexander have a yin and yang relationship. Burgess sets forth the idea that “ there is a cycle of recurring phases in which each young man undergoes a period of existence as a

violent, mechanical man; then he matures, gets greater freedom of choice, and his violence subsides" (Rabinovitz 18), so perhaps F. Alexander was once a violent teenager like Alex, but now he has matured. Alex and F. Alexander are on complete opposite sides of the spectrum, but they still must interact with one another because they have a deep connection that draws the two together. Through Alex's violent, yet funny narrative Burgess conveys to the reader that the world composes itself of polarities. These polarities help to balance each other, creating room for choice and room for individualism. The novel has so many different parts and ideas being explored, but yet they are able to all come together as one to tell Alex's unbelievable story, "A Clockwork Orange is meant to serve as an example of the sort of work that can truly reconcile opposing values" (Rabinovitz 19). The work Burgess creates bridges the gap between the incredibly immoral Alex and the mostly moral readers that soak in Alex's story, but that is not all. Burgess bridges the gap between many different entities in order to create a novel that can speak universally. With the use of Nadsat and extreme characters, Burgess shows us that opposite views can exist without one always dominating the other. Burgess's point has been proved time and time again throughout history—we are always told that opposites attract. In beginner science classes, we learn this with magnets, and later, in relationships, we learn it again. Without an opposing force, nothing could exist. To have free will, a necessity for suppression exists; to have good, we sadly need evil. Works Cited "A Clockwork Orange." Facts on File 2. 102 (29 Oct. 2007): 1-2. Aggeler, Geoffrey. Incest and the Artist: Anthony Burgess's MF as Summation. Indiana: Purdue Research Foundation, 1973. Rpt. in Contemporary Literary Criticism. Ed. Carolyn Riley and Barbara Harte. Vol. 2. <https://assignbuster.com/yin-and-yang/>

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