

The character of alex
in a clockwork
orange: what's he
going to be then, eh?



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As both the protagonist and narrator of Anthony Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange*, the character of Alex is an intriguing study from start to finish. Specifically, in comparing part one and part three of the novel, Alex's world, internally and externally, his characterization and travails are shown to be mirror images of each other, both identical and reversed. Where Alex was the soulless victimizer in part one, he finds himself repeatedly a victim in part three. Where he was once welcome at the story's start, he is cast out at the close. What gives him pleasure at the beginning, in part three gives him pain. This neat symmetrical structure clearly and symbolically portrays how much Alex has changed and what Ludovico's Technique has done to him. In Part I, Alex, as the extremely vicious leader of a gang, is a 15-year-old arrogant hooligan without a grain of sympathy for his victims. He doesn't appear to rape, rob, beat or murder for money, valuables, sexual satisfaction or other tangible things. As we see early on in the Korova Milkbar, he is willing to spend every penny he has on drinks and snacks for old women, just so we'd have more of an incentive for some shop-crasting [thieving] (8). Alex is depicted as being violent and sadistically evil simply for the experience of it, for the joy of it and not as a means to an end. He seems to gain some measure of aesthetic satisfaction out of involving himself in evil for evil's sake. He even sees his violence as a kind of art, which we see through his description of a favorite weapon. "I for my own part had a fine starry horrorshow cut-throat britva [razor] which, at that time, I could flash and shine artistic" (16). Overall, there is nothing in his background that can explain why he is so cruel and nasty, why his penchant for violence is so high. As his state-appointed guidance councilor, P. R. Deltoid, says to him, "You've got a good home here, good loving parents, you've got not too bad

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of a brain. Is it some devil that crawls inside you? (39). While leaving that question unanswered, we do see that Alex's commitment to evil is so pure that he fantasizes about nailing Jesus to a cross. Along with his violent tendencies in part one, Alex is also portrayed as immature and irresponsible. He holds down no job and seems to have no responsibilities of any kind. He stays out all night, without letting his parents know, sleeps all day and still expects to be fed, clothed and taken care of. At the Korova Milkbar, Alex and his buddies communicate in a teenage lingo that sounds distinctly like baby talk. They use words such as 'appy polly loggies' for apologies, 'eggiwegs' for eggs, 'skolliwoll' for school, 'boohooed' for cried and 'fistie' for fist. These language choices hint at their infantilism and, in light of their lawlessness, their perverse childish nature. Furthermore, in part one Alex is described as very arrogant, self-absorbed, autocratic and too firmly convinced of his superiority over everyone he encounters. His haughty attitude toward his fellow gang members ultimately causes them to betray him. After losing some measure of standing in his group, Alex vainly assumes that taking on a robbery job alone will prove once and for all his dominance over them. 'I thought that I would show these fickle and worthless droogs of mine that I was worth the whole three of them and more. I would do all on my oddy knocky [alone]' (61). He consistently underestimates everyone, characteristically seeing any attempt to counter him as 'real lovely innocence, and laughable, because he sees himself as so clever that any such attempt is doomed from the beginning. This characteristic is also evident in how he acts toward the old woman he attempts to rob. When she calls the police, he relates that all he hears is a batty old woman, who is no match for him, talking to her many cats. 'I could hear the like muffled goloss

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[voice] of this old ptitsa down below saying: 'Yes yes yes, that's it,' but she would be govoreeting [talking] to these mewling sidlers going maaaaaaah for more moloko (60-61). His consistent underestimation of those around him, of his droogs and of the old lady, leads his gang to mutiny and leads to his imprisonment and ultimate transformation at the book's end. As a mirror image of the first part, part three in *A Clockwork Orange* shows Alex as almost exactly opposite of his old self. He is humbled where he once was arrogant, victimized where he once was the perpetrator of violence and where he once acted childish there is evidence of a newfound maturity. Ludovicio's Technique has also taken away, for the most part, Alex's proclivity for random acts of violence. Even as leader of a new gang, he rarely engages himself in any untoward activity, instead sending his underlings to carry out the tasks. He encounters many of the same characters he faced and consorted with at the beginning of the novel, but is now bullied and beaten by the same people he once roughed up himself. Most notably, in part one, Alex and his droogs had humiliated, beaten and mugged a helpless old man who'd ventured into the hooligans' territory. In part three, Alex runs into this same gentleman and is, humiliatingly, beaten up by him and his elderly cronies in the old man's territory, the reading room at the public library. The exactness of this reversal makes the scene absurd and biting and shows how completely opposite Alex and his life have become. Alex has also matured and toned down his arrogance a great deal in the last part of the novel. He feels himself changed, though he's not quite sure why. He relates to himself that, 'It was like something soft getting into me' (186). A few years removed from his initial lawlessness, an older, seemingly wiser Alex is now able to reflect on what made him tick. Being <https://assignbuster.com/the-character-of-alex-in-a-clockwork-orange-whats-he-going-to-be-then-eh/>

young, he explains, was like being a tiny wind-up toy that litters [goes] in a straight line and bangs straight into things bang bang and it cannot help what it is doing (190). Self-awareness is a critical step in the maturation process and Alex's newfound ability to travel outside himself, and provide an accurate assessment of what he was like, speaks volumes about his inner attempts to stabilize his life and become a decent citizen. Where in part one, he saw his violent outbursts as a kind of affirmation of his individuality, he now begins to realize how truly impulsive and irresponsible they were. At the close of the novel, Alex has unequivocally decided it is time to grow up, to end his violent, thieving ways and settle down. Instead of the teenage hangout Korova, he wanders into a little café, filled with very harmless, boring people, and drinks tea instead of drug-laced milk. He is shocked and envious to find an old friend, Pete, settled down, married and speaking without the childish slang Alex had always employed. Alex later has a strange vision of himself as an old man, in a comfortable armchair, drinking a nice cup of tea. He also pictures himself with a wife, even holding a newspaper picture of a baby in his pocket as an outward sign of his hopes for a family. Overall, Alex ends the book as the complete opposite of the character portrayed in part one. He is mature, calm, law-abiding and eager to begin living a normal life, all of his own free will.