
A preview of the last chapter in A Clockwork Orange

In many ways, the controversial last chapter of Anthony Burgess' A Clockwork Orange undermines the novel's fundamental premise. Alex's unforeseen transformation from a sadistic criminal into a consciously reformed and mature individual is not only poorly explained, but also completely absurd. Therefore, the work as a whole is undoubtedly better without the twenty-first chapter.

From the start, Alex's character fascinates as a cruel, corrupted youth with a thirst for "the old ultra-violence." As the first seven chapters of the novel chronicle his twisted acts of the "nochy," it becomes clear that violence is Alex's art form. He is passionate about his work and sets to perform every piece of it with meticulous care, saying, "you should never look as though you have been" in a fight. This passion is essential throughout the novel, because it keeps the reader empathetic to Alex: No matter how atrocious his crimes are, everyone can identify with a man's burning desire to express himself. Thus, the reader shares Alex's anxiety when the State strips him of his ability to commit violence by brainwashing him through Ludovico's Technique, forcing him to "be just like a clockwork orange." Following his release from the State as a "free man," Alex's struggles to regain his freedom pull the audience further to his side. Therefore, when the twentieth chapter ends with Alex finally being able to "slooshy the lovely music" without the "pain and the sickness...and going oh oh oh," it seems like a triumphant end. The reader is free to imagine what acts Alex will commit upon the "creeching world with [his] cut-throat britva," and is proud and pleased that Alex has come out from all of his suffering victorious and unchanged.

Yet the last chapter takes this glory away, as it immediately reveals an Alex whose passion for violence has dimmed. This reformed Alex is "very bored and a bit hopeless" in his nighttime routine, as he chooses to quickly punch a victim in the stomach rather than toy with him first or "carve his litso." In many ways, it is a disappointment to watch Alex decide to conform to the adult world after having fought so hard to be free from its laws.

Aside from this irony, the last chapter's depiction of Alex's maturity is preposterous. Although it can be assumed that some time has passed since his release from the hospital, Alex's transformation still seems very sudden and hard to believe. It is discomfiting to think that Alex is now ready to settle down and not only find a mate but also father a child when he has spent the last several years mocking and inflicting pain upon such households, like that of F. Alexander and his wife. Alex's sudden desire to fill his "bolshy big hollow" by "coming home from work to a good hot plate of dinner and... a ptitsa all welcoming and greeting like loving" seemingly comes out of nowhere, rendering him someone who is average and uninteresting. Furthermore, the

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fact that much of this desire is sparked by an unexpected run-in with his old "droog" Pete is clichéd and sad. The old Alex would have made his ex-droogs "yowl and creech" for being traitors; he would have laughed in Pete's face instead of being awed and inspired by his reformed lifestyle. However, this new Alex is instead inclined to cut out a picture of a "baby gurgling goo goo goo with all like moloko dribbling from its rot," a sight impossible to imagine after seeing Alex gleefully beat, rape and torture countless innocent victims. Even if Alex was to eventually grow out of the "ultra-violence and crasting," maturity takes a considerable amount of time. Condensing it all into one chapter does show particularly well that Alex is growing up, especially after the reader has become so used to and even fond of the Alex who once spoke of his love for unnecessary violence.

The last chapter's attempt to illustrate Alex's maturation is both unrealistic and disappointing. Alex's new quest to create a family and be a good citizen completely removes the victory of Alex having regained his free will. As he embarks on his transformed life, the reader is left both disheartened by his quieted passion for violence and confused as to exactly how and why Alex has grown up. Most importantly, the audience does want to simply "remember sometimes thy little Alex that was"--they want to see him and know that he still exists.

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