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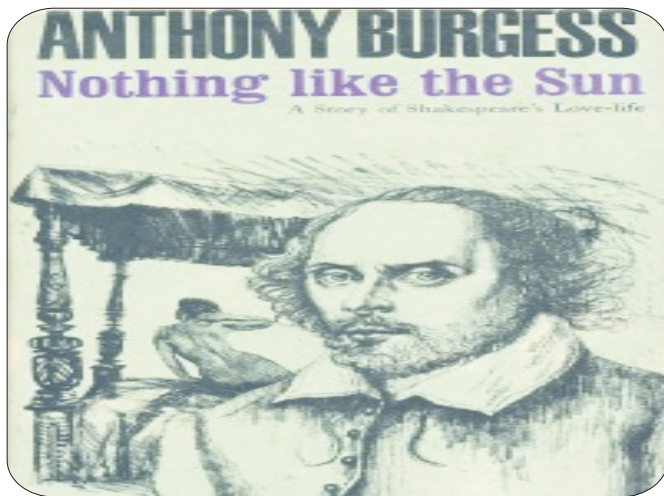


## LANGUAGE EXPERIMENT IN ANTHONY BURGESS'S A CLOCKWORK ORANGE



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### ABSTRACT

The most innovative aspect of *A Clockwork Orange* is the language Burgess's protagonists employ. Nadsat, Russian for 'teen', is the invented slang in which Alex narrates the novel, his experiences described in raucous and unfamiliar prose. Burgess undertook a new and difficult task. It was quite a new undertaking and he turned out to be successful in this venture. This paper will show that how this language experiment enriches the readers' vocabulary and gives them a sense of pleasure. It also broadens the area of English fiction.

**KEYWORDS** : Nadsat, Raucous, Slang, Unfamiliar.

### INTRODUCTION

Before going straight into the heart of the matter, let us make some observation about language. Language is a "system of sounds, words, patterns, etc. used by humans to communicate thoughts and feelings" (Hornby 700). It is clear from the above definition that language is a system. It has three elements; sounds, words and structures. One has to learn the sound system and to produce them. A pattern or structure is a model for sentences. Words are arranged in certain order to convey meaning according to the requirement of the situation.

Many poets and critics had different views about the nature of language that ought to be used. Pope talked of a kind of training before writing poetry. Wordsworth had opposite views and favored "a language really used by men." (167). According to him "there should be essentially no difference between the language of prose and the metrical composition" (168). T.S. Eliot talks of using complex and allusive language.

*A Clockwork Orange* gained mixed reviews on its publication in 1962. Most of the reviews praised the inventiveness of the language, while at the same time stressing unease at the violent subject matter. While The Spectator praised Burgess's extraordinary technical feat' it also was

uncomfortable with a certain arbitrariness about the plot which is slightly irritating' was more critical, accusing Burgess of being content to use a serious social Challenge for frivolous purposes, but himself to stay neutral.

The novel impressed other writers, with Kingsley Amis writing that Mr. Burgess has written a fine farrago of outrageousness, one which incidentally suggests a view to juvenile violence I can't remember having met before.

Malcolm Bradbury reviewed the novel in a more measured fashion, writing all of Mr. Burgess's powers as a comic writer, which are considerable, have gone into the rich language of his inverted Utopia. If you can stomach the horrors, you'll enjoy the manner.

When it was first published, the novel was not an instant hit with audiences. The book sold poorly despite the praise other authors had given it. However, as time passed, the notoriety of the book increased, partly fuelled by Stanley Kubrick's film adaptation. Burgess became 'a major spokesman on violence' and was constantly defend his book, Kubrick's film, and to talk about violence in the media. Burgess had a complicated relationship with his most famous novel. He writes, "I do not like the book as much as others I have written: I have kept it, till recently, in unopened jar marmalade, a preserve on a shelf, rather than an orange on a dish'. Yet it would be overstating it to claim that Burgess actively disliked the book. His attitudes changed at various different points in his life, but he did repeatedly return to *A Clockwork Orange*, turning into a stage play, writing articles about it, and even writing a novel based on the production of the film, *A Clockwork Testament, or Ender by's End*. The latter calls on Burgess's eponymous poet to deal with the unwanted fame afforded to him by an adaptation of his screenplay that 'makes *A Clockwork Orange* look like *Old Yeller*'.

In *A Clockwork Orange*, Burgess repudiates the traditional and stereo-typed words to convey the message. He makes use of Nadsat words or slang. Nadsat is a fictional register or argot used by teenagers in this novel. Burgess was a linguist and he used this background to depict his characters as speaking a form of Russian-influenced English. The name itself comes from the Russian suffix equivalent of '-teen' as in 'thirteen'. Nadsat was also used in Stanley Kubrick's film adaptation of the book.

Nadsat is basically English with some borrowed words from Russian. It also contains influence from Cockney rhyming slang, *the King James Bible*, the German language, some words of unclear origin, and some that Burgess invented.

Burgess, a polyglot who loved language in all its forms, was aware that linguistic slang was of a constantly changing nature. Burgess knew that if he used modes of speech that were contemporarily in use, the novel would very quickly become dated. His use of Nadsat was essentially pragmatic; he needed his narrator to have a unique voice that would remain ageless while reinforcing Alex's indifference to his society's norms, and to suggest that youth subculture existed independently of the rest of society. In *A Clockwork Orange*, Alex's interrogators describe the source of his argot as "subliminal Penetration."

Russian influence play the biggest role in Nadsat. Most of those Russian-influenced words are slightly anglicized loan-words often maintaining the original Russian pronunciation. In addition to the Russian influence, Nadsat derives from a number of other sources. Romany, Cockney rhyming slang; the language of the criminal underworld; the English of Shakespeare and the Elizabethans; armed forces slang; and the Malay language familiar to Burgess.

Within this patchwork of language, Burgess is careful to allow context to offer definitions. When we hear Alex talking of his intention to 'tolchock some old veck in an alley and viddy him swim in his blood'(), it is clear what is being said, yet often Nadsat is used as a language of opposition, something

that establishes the droogs as an isolated counter-cultural group, even before their brutal behaviour is described.

Much like George Orwell with his 'Newspeak' in *Nineteen-Eighty Four* (1949), Burgess aimed to create a timeless language to depict his dystopian future, the reason why the novel has had such longevity. The language also removes the action of the novel from geographical location.

Burgess viewed his use of Nadsat as a 'brain washing device', something he writes about in *You've Had Your Time* (1990): '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 be provided. A glossary would disrupt the programme and nullify the brainwashing'. This editorial suggestion led to revisions in the first part of the novel, and is shown when Alex helps the reader through some of the tougher language. For example: 'rooker (a hand: that is)', litso (Face, that is) and 'my three droogs, that is Pete, Georgie, and Dim'.

Despite Burgess's insistence that there should be no glossary, there have now been many editions of the novel that include a glossary, including the exhaustive and meticulous one contained in *A Clockwork Orange: the Restored Edition*, published on the fiftieth anniversary of the novel in 2012.

The reader who reads the novel first time finds many words quite unfamiliar. The reader first tries to confirm their meaning in the dictionary but does not find them there. But as one proceeds with a little patience, one begins to take interest in the language and words.

By using the slang, it seems that he wants to create something new, fresh and authentic. One requires great dexterity and imaginative power to create freshness and originality. The use of slang clearly indicates his imaginative daring. The use of unusual words is very sharp and precise.

Burgess uses all kinds of meaning of a word i.e. lexical meaning, syntactical meaning, and morphological meaning and into national meaning. When Alex and dim fisted on the old drunkard's rot, he cried:

"Go on, do we in, you bastard cowards, I don't want to live any way, not in a stinking world like this one." (P. 14)

Next, the slang words increase the suggestive meaning. The range of suggestiveness of meaning is enhanced. The very pronunciation of the words seems to suggest their meaning. The line from Wordsworth's poem '*Immortality Ode*' is quite remarkable where he writes: "The cataracts blow their trumpets from the sleep (243). The very music of the line suggests its meaning. In case of words it is called morphological meaning. Burgess uses 'britva' for knife or razor, sound in the pronunciation of 'britva' is sharper and more dangerous than that of knife's.

The word 'horror show' shows natural propensity for violence. Besides, by making use of the slang Burgess is able to do away the horror and disgust from the cruel scenes. It seems that he is avoiding the unsavoury or savage effects by putting this slang before the reader. Reader's disgust is put-off. It doesn't shock the readers beyond a permissible limit. Moreover, it fills the reader with a feeling of detachment. Burgess tries to spare the reader's disgust. To a large extent it saves the story from becoming horror story. The reader revels in finding new words and subsequently their meaning. In this way the story loses its real colour and the real murky and macabre atmosphere is made appear less horrible. Time and again, the reader becomes forgetful about the story and its horrible dimension. He or she is fascinated, sometime irritated, by the use of strange and haphazard words.

Language, specifically Nadsat, has an important several important functions in this work. First, it works as a literary device that seeks to temporarily alienate the reader from the world of the protagonist-narrator. We are initially barred from making more judgments of Alex and com. because we aren't sure of what they are doing, we are shielded and removed from some of Alex's brutality against

others. As well as toil for the first several chapters learning to decipher the language, however, we build rapport with the violent teens, and even fancy that we understand them (because we have learned their language). Second, since Nadsat draws its inspirations from Russian and Cockney English, it tells us about the author's political message. In Burgess's time, Russia was a seriously repressed totalitarian state, and Alex's fictional British world is not much different. Third, as we discuss in the "Characterization" section, an individual's use of language tells us a good deal about his place, function, and role in society.

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