

**ZEYNEP ZEREN ATAYURT**  
**ANKARA UNIVERSITY, TURKEY**  
**“CHARACTER ANALYSIS OF ALEX IN A *CLOCKWORK ORANGE* IN**  
**CONNECTION WITH T.S. ELIOT’S *THE HOLLOW MEN* AND HIS ROLE AS A**  
**TEEN ANTI-HERO ON SUBVERTING THE MANIPULATIONS OF THE**  
**GOVERNMENT”**

I heard the name of Anthony Burgess firstly nine years ago in 1993, when Stanley Kubrick made a movie of Anthony Burgess’ *A Clockwork Orange*. During those days, I was at high school and unfortunately I could not watch the movie since people under eighteen were not allowed to watch it. When I started studying English Literature, I was very much attracted by the depiction of the ‘human reality’ of the 20<sup>th</sup> century English novelists who are concerned with the issues of good and evil. Anthony Burgess is one of those writers who remains concerned with the conflict of good and evil. Burgess turned his searchlight on the systems and the socially acceptable acts which turn man into a mechanical being by robbing him of his free choice between right and wrong.

The structure of *A Clockwork Orange* is very intelligently based. In his introduction to *A Clockwork Orange*, Burgess utters these words:

The book is divided into three sections of seven chapters each. Take out your pocket calculator and you will find that these add up to a total twenty-one chapters. Twenty-one is the symbol of human maturity, or used to be since at twenty-one you got the vote and assumed adult responsibility. Whatever its symbology, the number twenty-one was the number I started out with. These twenty-one chapters were important to me. (Burgess, 1987: v-vi)

Burgess’ original version of *A Clockwork Orange* was inspired by the post-war youth cultures, as such the Teddy Boys and the groups of the 60’s, such as the Mods, Rockers and Skinheads. These groups were formed by working class British boys who sought entertainment and status despite their lower social standing and limited money. Their entertainment often took the form of ultra-violence which gave them the title of ‘folk devils.’

Burgess’ book is reflective of contemporary youth in his society. He seems to capture their lifestyles, their attitudes, even their values to some extent. He uses their language called

Nadsat, which is a combination of Russian, English and slang. Nadsat comes from the Russian ending for the numbers from eleven to nineteen approximately the numbers of the people who speak it. Below you will see a quotation from the first part of *A Clockwork Orange* which demonstrates clearly how Burgess used Nadsat to make the book less explicit. You will find the English translation of the words in brackets.

There was me, that is Alex, and my three **droogs** (friends), that is Pete, Georgie and Dim, Dim being really dim, and we sat in the Korova Milkbar making up our **rassodocks** (minds) what to do with the evening. [. . .] Our pockets were full of **deng** (money), so there was no real need from the point of view of **crasting** (stealing) any more, pretty **polly** (sexy) to **tolchcock** (hit) some old **veck** (guy) in an alley and **viddy** (see) him swim in his blood while we counted the takings and divided by four, nor to do the ultra-violent on some shivering starry grey-haired **ptitsa** (girl) in a shop and go **smecking** (laughing) off with the till's guts. But, as they say, money isn't everything. (Burgess, 1996: 5)

The title of the novel *A Clockwork Orange* refers to the mechanisation of human beings. The work 'clockwork' evokes the images of machines and 'oranges' of organic properties. The image is that of a robotic or programmed human being, not acting of its own free will.

Anthony Burgess gives the greatest importance to his characters. He himself argues that "there are certain things that the novel cannot do without, and the greatest of these is character" (Schellhorn 21).

The hero of the novel is a fifteen-year-old boy called Alex. The name Alex has several connotations: "Alex, as short form of Alexander, means defender of men, and Burgess offers other interpretations such as alex: a law; alex(is): a vocabulary of his own; a (Greek) lex: without a law" (Schellhorn 116). The use of names is to give a mythic dimension to the novel.

We may say that *A Clockwork Orange* is a bildungsroman. It is a novel of development or growth from childhood to adulthood; from ignorance to self-awareness and from immaturity to maturity. The book is divided into three parts, each dealing with a different stage in Alex's life.

The first section of the book discusses the crimes that Alex and his buddies commit. The first part covers the days of Alex's ultra-violence before he is put into jail.

Alex likes committing crime. He has a gang including his friends Georgie, Pete and Dim. Alex is aware of the fact that what he does is bad, but still he keeps on torturing people. We can say that Alex is a combination of good and evil. On one hand, he clearly confirms the fact that he commits crimes because he likes to do it. On the other hand, he has a great love for classical music. What distinguishes Alex from most teenagers is that his tastes in music are classical: Bach, Mozart, above all Beethoven, whose Ninth Symphony will become the novel's dominant motif. Alex is too brutal to be wholly sympathetic and too strong to be a victim; but like many a rebel-hero, he has got some diabolic charm.

One of the crimes that Alex and his friends commit plays an important role throughout the novel and it contributes to the theme of the novel. Alex and his gang break into a writer's house. They beat up the writer and rape his wife. The name of the writer is F. Alexander. Alex finds the writer's book and starts to read it. The title of the book - *A Clockwork Orange* - sounds quite strange and Alex makes fun of it. He reads it aloud:

*A Clockwork Orange*: The attempt to impose upon man, a creature of growth and capable of sweetness, to ooze juicily at the last round the bearded lips of God, to attempt to impose, I say, laws and conditions appropriate to a mechanical creation, against this, I raise my sword- pen. (Burgess, 1996: 21)

Alex tears the book into pieces and they leave the house. He cannot understand anything about the title of the book and what the writer suggests, but in the following chapters of the book, the reader will find out that F. Alexander's book is completely an attack on the system which turns man into a mechanical being.

Alex and his friends also beat up an old drunk. The drunkard's words are significant. The old drunk speaks for all the ordinary, innocent citizens who suffer at the hands of the brutal young. He says these words:

Go on, do me in, you bastard cowards, I don't want to live anyway in a world like this one. It is a stinking world because it lets the young get on to the old like you done, and there is no law nor order no more. It is no world

for any old man any longer, and that means that I'm not one bit scared of you, my boyos, because I'm too drunk to feel the pain if you hit me, and if you kill me, I'll be glad to be dead. What sort of a world is it at all? (Burgess, 1996: 14-15)

The old drunkard's voice is an attack on the system, on the government in office. Although it is the duty of the government to protect its citizens, it is unable to put laws into practice to secure the lives of its citizens.

The first part of the book is about the ultra-violence of Alex and his friends. They beat up an old drunkard, they break into a writer's house and rape his wife and cause her death. They also beat a professor who will take his revenge from Alex in the last part of the book. The first part ends when Alex is betrayed by his friends. They make a plan to break into an old woman's house whom they think is very rich. Alex enters the house through the window and his friends are supposed to be guarding him, but when Alex hears the police, his friends are already gone. He is put into jail, because the old woman is dead.

The second section describes Alex's imprisonment. In prison everybody has a number instead of their names. Alex has a number too. During his imprisonment, Alex assists the chaplain of the prison and discovers that he may be able to get out of prison earlier if he undergoes a new treatment. The prison chaplain says these words about the new treatment.

The question is whether such a technique can really make a man good. Goodness comes from within, 6655321. Goodness is something chosen. When a man cannot choose he ceases to be a man. (Burgess, 1996: 67)

All Alex knows about the treatment is that it gets one out of prison quickly and makes sure that he does not get in again. Alex accepts the treatment for he sees it as a means of getting out of that horrible prison. Before he leaves the prison, the prison chaplain wants to see Alex to say these words:

It may not be nice to be good, little 6655321. It may be horrible to be good. And when I say that to you I realise how self-contradictory that sounds. 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 on him? Deep and hard questions little 6655321, I shall like to think. (Burgess, 1996: 76)

Alex is unable to figure out what the prison chaplain has means. Meanwhile the Interior Minister pays a visit to Alex since Alex will be the first one to be experimented on the new treatment. Alex is taken to the hospital where he meets Doctor Brodsky and his assistant Doctor Branom. They talk about the treatment. The treatment aims at making Alex conditioned. Alex will be injected some vitamins and forced to see some ultra-violent films so that he will never commit a crime again, since he will be sick at the thought of ultra-violence. It is going to be a painful experience for Alex. After the first stage of the treatment, Alex reacts against the doctors because he feels terribly ill whenever he watches those films of ultra-violence.

Alex's experience as a lab-rat could be seen as a combination of classical and operant conditioning, two ways of modifying a person's behaviour.

Classical conditioning is what makes Alex feel ill whenever he sees scenes of ultra-violence. One of the first examples of classical conditioning is Ivan Pavlov's experiment with dogs and bells. Pavlov has observed that dogs salivate when they taste food. He calls the food, the unconditioned stimulus and the salivation, the unconditioned response, 'unconditioned' because the salivation is a natural response to the food. Then he starts ringing bell shortly before he brings out the food each time. Gradually, the dogs begin to associate the sound of a bell with food, that is when they heard the bell, they thought that it meant food was coming and they salivated accordingly. Pavlov called the bell, the conditioned stimulus and salivation at the bell even before the food appeared, the conditioned response. (See chart 1 on page 6)

Alex has a similar experience to that of the dogs. The treatment Alex receives is a combination of drugs and violent visuals. One could call the injected vitamins he received an unconditioned stimulus and the following sickness, an unconditioned response to the injection. Since the scientists made him watch the scenes of ultra-violence while the injection was working, he began to associate what he saw with what he felt. Finally, he began to feel sick when he saw any ultra-violence even without the injection. So the ultra-violence became the conditioned stimulus and Alex's sickness without the injection became the conditioned response. The government psychologist Dr Brodsky, who is uninterested in music, uses Beethoven in his reform programme; so that Alex thereafter can never hear Beethoven play

without feeling sick. The government's reform programme is called the Ludovico Treatment, which is a play on Beethoven's first name, Ludwig Van.

(See chart 2 on page 7)

IVAN PAVLOV'S CLASSICAL CONDITIONING

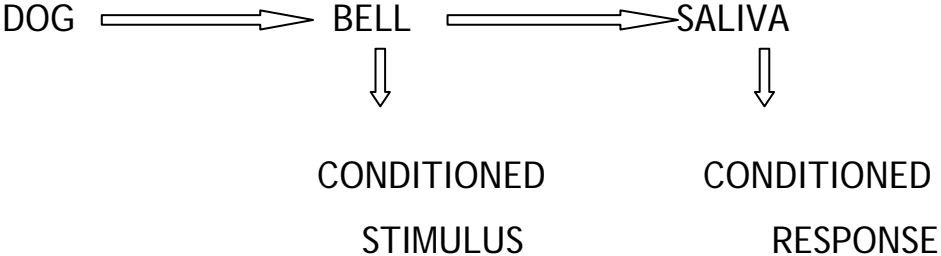
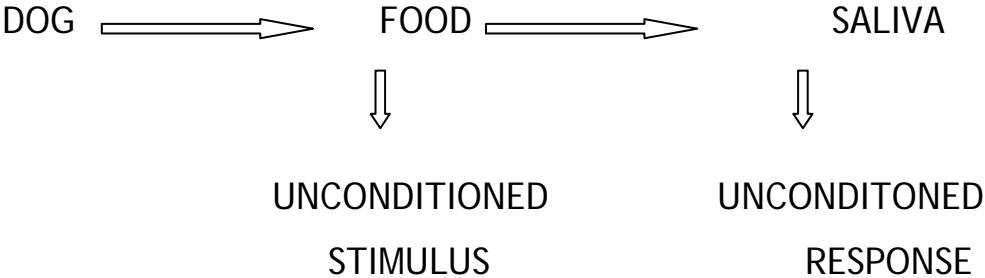


Chart 1

LUDOVICO TREATMENT

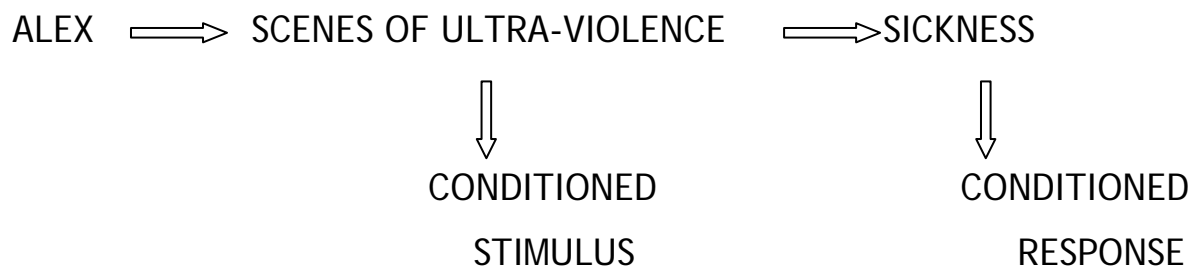
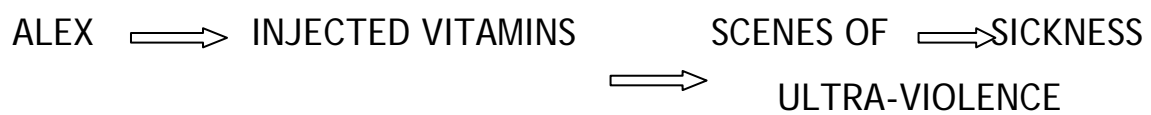
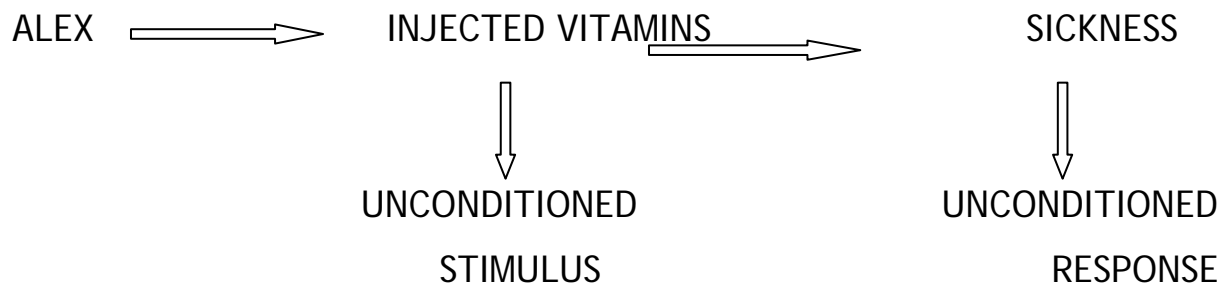


Chart 2

Operant conditioning is different from classical conditioning because it involves actual behaviour. Instead of reflex responses over which a person has no control, operant conditioning rewards or punishes him for actually doing something. In Alex's case, his behaviour was performing the old ultra-violence. It was beyond his control.

The third section of the book is about Alex's cure and its effects. Alex is cured to the point where he becomes sick at the thought of sex, violence and music. He cannot even stand listening to classical music. Beethoven's Ninth Symphony becomes the dominant motif throughout the novel. The government scientists play Beethoven's Ninth Symphony during the Ludovico Treatment and, because Alex is conditioned, he can never listen to Beethoven again as he associates it with his days of old ultra-violence and feels sick thereafter.

As Alex discovers that he becomes physically sick at the mere thought of violence, the prison chaplain's question 'if a person is incapable of choosing evil, is he necessarily good?' becomes more and more relevant. After the treatment, Alex feels helpless and he is unable to defend himself. All the people he abused in the first section of the novel come back to harm him. He has become a mechanical being after the Ludovico Treatment. He is like a puppet. He even cannot stand on the thought of violence any more. The doctors decide to release Alex since the treatment has worked successfully on him. But Alex is not content with his situation and he says: "How about me? Where do I come into all this? Am I like just animal or dog? Am I just to be like a clockwork orange?" (Burgess, 1996: 100).

A human being is endowed with free will. He can use this to choose between good and evil. If he can only perform good or only perform evil, then he is a clockwork orange meaning that he has the appearance of an organism lovely with colour and juice, but is in fact only a clockwork toy to be wound up by God or the Devil or the State. It is as inhuman to be totally good as it is to be totally evil. The important thing is moral choice. Evil has to exist along with good in order that moral choice may operate.

Alex soon discovers that he has no control over his own life, as people he abused in section one come back to hurt him one by one. When Alex leaves the hospital, he immediately goes home, but he faces a cold welcome because his parents have had a lodger during his absence and they have given Alex's room to the lodger. His parents are in need of money and they imply that they cannot dismiss the lodger. Alex leaves his house in despair and goes to a public library where he is beaten up by a man who becomes the professor that Alex and his friends had beaten up a long time ago. Since he is conditioned by the Ludovico Treatment he is unable to defend himself. He is beaten so badly that the police arrive, and one of the cops happens to be his old friend Dim, but instead of protecting him, they kick him in their car and then throw him as if he is a commodity. It is against the norms of

Christianity. Christianity promotes forgiveness, and revenge is considered to be one of the seven deadly sins. Although Alex says that he is cured, they do not listen to him and they continue beating him up. Alex, being so exhausted knocks the door of a house to ask for help. A man opens the door and he decides to put Alex up in his house. Alex recognises the owner of the house. He is F. Alexander, the fictional writer of *A Clockwork Orange*, and the writer whose wife Alex and his friends raped. On seeing Alex in a miserable state, F. Alexander says:

You have sinned, I suppose, but your punishment has been out of all proportion. They turned you into something other than a human being. You have no power of choice any longer. You are committed to socially acceptable acts, a little machine capable of only good. And I see that clearly-that business about the marginal conditionings. Music and the sexual act, literature and art, all must be a source now not of pleasure but of pain. (Burgess, 1996: 122)

Burgess had originally meant the book *A Clockwork Orange* to be an allegory of Christian free will. The scientists Doctor Branom, Doctor Brodsky and the rest of the government experimenters presented the idea that people who are conditioned to behave correctly would be beneficial to the human society. F. Alexander, the fictional author of *A Clockwork Orange*, was one character who believed the opposite. He was of the opinion that human beings ceased to be human beings when they were robbed of their free choice between right and wrong. But even F. Alexander is going to use Alex for his own political interests. F. Alexander is selfishly thinking of his own political party. In order to win the forth-coming election, he will use Alex as the outcome of the government's new method of treatment to edify criminals. It will be a reaction against the government in office.

The opposition liberals - F. Alexander and his friends - tortured Alex with the Ninth Symphony driving him to attempt suicide. When locked in a room, while the music which he associates with his former life of ultra-violence plays, Alex attempts to commit suicide. He is not dead. He is taken to hospital. Alex is de-conditioned in the hospital and he has turned to his former state. He is again thinking of acts of ultra-violence. The interior Minister visits Alex in the hospital. Even in the hospital these political leaders are trying to turn the situation to their own side. It is the Interior Minister who has encouraged Alex for the treatment, because if it works, he will win the forth-coming election for he will have put into practice a new way of treatment to edify criminals, so instead of a criminal's being sentenced to prison,

he will be taken to hospital to be treated by the Ludovico Method. Liberals like F. Alexander have also abused Alex for their political interests. They are against the government and the suffering scene of Alex after the treatment would be a very good opportunity for them to react against the government. Instead of protecting the individual, the government robs one of the basic rights of an individual to exist as a human being. This is completely against the principles of the utilitarian philosophy which dictates the greatest happiness for the greatest numbers.

The twenty-first chapter, which is the final chapter of the novel, opens with Alex in a milk-bar with his three friends. The first hint of change comes when Alex refuses to meet the women at the bar. He also carries a picture of a baby in his wallet. When he meets his old friend Pete and is introduced to his wife, he envies Pete and dreams of a family which he would like for himself. As for Anthony Burgess, the twenty-first chapter in the book is the most important chapter. The events in this chapter symbolise human maturity and give Alex the chance of redemption. The chapter number is the age of symbolic adulthood, at the time of the writing that was when people first gained the right to vote and assumes adult responsibility. There are two versions of the novel. This extra chapter is the rehabilitation of Alex. The twenty-first chapter is very significant in the course of Alex's mental development. Alex gets tired of violence and sees it as a characteristic of immaturity. Burgess opposes the socialistic attitude which denies original sin and doubts the need of divine grace to achieve salvation, and which thought that man could attain some kind of perfection by his own efforts. Malcolm Bradbury comments on this as follows:

*A Clockwork Orange* has an Orwellian theme, in a dulled socialist society where language has declined into slang, violent teenage gangs rule, requiring 'rehabilitation', a moral concept Burgess questions from his Catholic faith. [. . .] Many of Burgess' chief themes were now in place: a Catholic sense of sin and a social sense of disaster. (Bradbury 375)

Alex is a type of representative man. Burgess sees man as being guilty of sin from the moment of his birth onwards. Martina Schellhorn comments on this as follows:

Burgess' deliberate humiliation and consequently dehumanisation of the protagonist because of his conviction of man's inherently evil nature is a fairly common attitude towards Burgess' characterisation. (Schellhorn 17)

According to Burgess, man can only be saved by God's grace and not through his own efforts. Burgess thinks of evil as the direct result of man being born with the taint of Original Sin on him. In his fallen state, the only God-given gift to man is his own free will by which he can choose either salvation or damnation. This idea of choice as the only way left to man of using his gift of free will is very much a phenomenon of the twentieth century. Therefore a clockwork man, someone programmed to behave in a certain way is no longer a man. What distinguishes man from animals is our ability to think, our ability to act on reasons other than instinct and our ability to define what is right and wrong. Once we lose these abilities, we become subhuman.

In *A Clockwork Orange*, Burgess also focuses on the government control. The novel is a warning against the manipulations of the government. *A Clockwork Orange* can be considered as an anti-utopia portraying a youth culture in revolt, a corrupt police force, a government unable to govern. There is a moral dilemma which underlies the novel: is it better for a man to choose to be bad than to be conditioned to be good? *A Clockwork Orange* is an affirmation of individual choice, including the choice to murder and rape. Burgess highlights the importance of choice. According to him, to act evil is better than to have good imposed. After the treatment, Alex loses his power of choice, he is committed to socially acceptable acts, he is like a little machine capable of only doing good. He has become a pawn in a political struggle between government and opposition: the Augustinians in power, in other words, the Interior Minister and the scientists use him as a lab rat for their experiment in human conditioning, and the seemingly liberal, but not less ruthless Pelagians in other words, F. Alexander and his friends, who want to show Alex as a victim of government tyranny. The distinction here was one Burgess often made himself: St. Augustine thought that man was born in original sin, the monk Pelagius denied the doctrine. The scientists and the government represent the Augustinians whereas F. Alexander and his group of liberals represent the Pelagians. Randall Stevenson states:

The uniqueness of *A Clockwork Orange* however results not so much from its moral lesson as the means used to convey it. To make acceptable its main suggestion—that its teenage narrator and hero Alex's free choice of evil is preferable to robotic, brainwashed good behaviour later imposed on him—the novel requires a certain distancing and stylisation of 'ultra-violence' through which he demonstrates and celebrates his free will. (Stevenson 120)

According to Burgess, there is potentially more good in a man who deliberately chooses evil than in one who is forced to be good. Alex's free choice of evil is preferable to the robotic brainwashed good behaviour imposed on him. Carol M. Dix comments on this as follows:

It is this suspicion of our contemporary liberal humanism of our willingness to reform rather than punish to educate rather than discipline that is seen in *A Clockwork Orange*, as a traditionalist's fear of future. [. . .] Men are what they are, and are not forced into being so by any social conditioning or pressures. (Dix 15)

*A Clockwork Orange* may be regarded as a clear echo of T.S. Eliot's famous poem "The Hollow Men" in which Eliot attacks the modern men and the modern age which he associates with sterility and lifelessness. According to Eliot, the modern age is the vast panorama of futility and anarchy which can be attributed to the condition of England when the novel was written. "The Hollow Men" is a rather long poem, but we will only talk about the first part of the poem.

THE HOLLOW MEN  
Mistah Kurtz - he dead  
A penny for the Old Guy  
.  
.  
.  
We are the hollow men  
We are the stuffed men  
Leaning together  
Headpiece filled with straw. Alas!  
Our dried voices, when  
We whisper together  
Are quiet and meaningless  
As wind in dry grass  
Or rats' feet over broken glass  
In our dry cellar  
.  
.  
.  
(Scotfield 139-140)

The epigraph "Mistah Kurtz - he dead" will remind us of Conrad's story and Conrad's hollow man, the idealist with no substance within. In Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* this is the phrase used by the black cabin boy announcing Mr Kurtz's death. Mr Kurtz, a European trader, had gone into 'the heart of darkness' - the mysterious primitive life of the African jungle - with high intentions, but soon was turned barbarous by it. He is described as a

hollow man, empty of faith, empty of personality, moral strength and humanity. Despite hollowness, however, as Marlow, the narrator of the story insists, Mr Kurtz had been a 'remarkable man' (Conrad 27). His dying whisper, "The horror! The Horror!" (Conrad 106) showed at least some sort of belief. Conrad's affirmation is that all men are hollow, all men are doomed to endure the condition that Eliot figures in "The Hollow Men." Kurtz himself is one who is able to understand and face this horrifying truth in the end. The 'We' in the opening lines refers to all mankind. In "The Hollow Men," Eliot makes modern men think that they are inferior. He debases mankind by saying that their heads are filled with straw, and that they have no feelings and that their voice is meaningless. He even compares human beings to rats. We can establish a connection between Eliot's poem and *A Clockwork Orange* as far as the condition of modern man is concerned. The hollow men that are attacked by Eliot can be attributed to the government in office and to the scientists who try to turn man into a mechanical being for their own interests.

*A Clockwork Orange* is about a young man whose simplest right to make a choice between good and evil is robbed of him. When a life changing experiment attempting to change the ways of a murderous young man leaves him defenseless, whom can he turn to? Unfortunately, no one. The government and the scientists exist during the process of the treatment, but when it is over, Alex is left alone. He tries to turn to his parents, but he is rejected. He tries to turn to the government, but when they understand that Alex will not be able to meet the demands and conditions of either party, they do not take care of Alex. He is helpless. He tries to turn to his old friends, but he is rejected again. The search for love is an important feature in Alex's general characterisation. Yet, he is unable to find the love that he looks for. Alex says at the beginning of each chapter, "What is it going to be then, eh?"; unfortunately there is nothing to be done. Alex has chosen the treatment without thinking of its consequences. And the consequences result in his attempt to commit suicide when he is at a state of misery, horror and loneliness. However, the novel ends with an optimistic note. Alex is de-conditioned and he is finally matured. He even thinks of getting married and settling down. At the end of the novel Alex is twenty-one years old. He is grown up and he is hopeful about the future. He attains self-consciousness. Malcolm Bradbury states:

There could be no doubt that British fiction in the Sixties was going through a period of rising self-consciousness. The remarkable quality of the mainstream British novel in the Sixties was its rising self-consciousness. (Bradbury 374-376).

To conclude, we can say that the main focus of *A Clockwork Orange* is on man's free will. Free will plays an important role in one's life, in fact, it is one of the greatest human faculties, as well as rights. If it is taken from man, just as we have seen in Alex, he will turn into a puppet, or a pawn, or a slave, in other words he will be A CLOCKWORK ORANGE.

### Works Cited

Bradbury, Malcolm. *The Modern British Novel*. London: Penguin, 1993.

Burgess, Anthony. *A Clockwork Orange*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1987.

---. *A Clockwork Orange*. London: Penguin, 1996.

Conrad, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness*. London: Penguin, 1994.

Dix, Carol M. *Anthony Burgess*. London: Longman, 1971.

Schellhorn, Martina. *Anthony Burgess: A Study in Character*. New York: Peter Lang, 1986.

Scofield, Martin. *T. S. Eliot: The Poems*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988.

Stevenson, Randall. *A Reader's Guide to the Twentieth Century Novel in Britain*. Hertfordshire: Simon & Schuster International Group, 1993.