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Paratexts and their influence on interpretation

On the importance of the final chapter of Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange*

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1. Abstract

Anthony Burgess's novel *A Clockwork Orange* has been a source of controversy ever since its publication in 1962. Whereas much has been written about the artificial slang language 'nadsat' that Burgess invented for this novel, and even more about the novel's didactic purposes, one area has remained scarcely addressed: the omission of the final chapter of the novel by Burgess's American publisher, its paratextual values and its consequences for the reception of the novel. Starting from Burgess's own opinion on how the exclusion of the twenty-first and final chapter prevents protagonist Alex from undergoing the character development that he lacks in the rest of the novel, which to Burgess reduces the fictionality and credibility of his story, I aim to investigate to which extent this is really the case for the interpretation of this novel. For clarity's sake I will first briefly recapitulate how Alex's character development is achieved in this chapter. Secondly I will juxtapose the opinions of on one side Anthony Burgess and Todd F. Davis and Kenneth Womack, who claim that the change Alex accomplishes in this chapter is crucial for one's understanding of the protagonist and of the plot, and on the other side those of Geoffrey Sharpless, who argues that the final chapter's elimination is only of limited importance as far as this plot is concerned, as Alex does not undergo any character changes, but who also recognizes its significance in terms of Alex's step towards maturity. Applying some of David C. Greetham's observations in *Textual Scholarship: An Introduction*, I will then argue that the paratextual decisions by the editor may indeed influence the reception of a novel, but that they must not be overestimated and that both versions of *A Clockwork Orange* can be equally interesting, because they must be evaluated and interpreted separately. Based on Gérard Genette's definition in *Paratexts. Thresholds of Interpretation*, I subsequently delimit the notion of paratext before elaborating further on some of the most prominent paratexts that serve as "thresholds" (Genette 2) for this novel, including Stanley Kubrick's 1972 film adaptation. Finally, I will verify the

assumptions I have made about the influence of the editor's choices based on dissertations on and reviews of both versions of the novel, as well as Stanley Kubrick's screenplay and a recent stage adaptation of *A Clockwork Orange*, before finally concluding that there is no significant link between the opinions of the reviewers and the version of the novel they review as far as plot is concerned, but that the omission of the final chapter affects their impression of Alex all the more.

2. Introduction

"Let me put the situation baldly. *A Clockwork Orange* has never been published entire in America" (Burgess introduction v).

A Clockwork Orange was first published in the United Kingdom in 1962. The following year, Burgess took his novel to the United States, where publishing house W.W. Norton agreed to publish it, on the condition that the final chapter be excluded from the book. Burgess reluctantly agreed, mostly for financial reasons:

> I could, of course, have demurred at this and taken my book elsewhere, but it was considered that he was being charitable in accepting the work at all [...]. I needed money [...] and if the condition of the book's acceptance was also its truncation - well, so be it. (introduction vi)

Over a timespan of twenty-three years, until 1986 when the novel was finally published in the United States in full, *A Clockwork Orange* appeared without its final chapter in many countries worldwide, such as Australia, the Netherlands, Sweden and Japan. Most publishers in countries where the novel was only published after 1986 included the twenty-first chapter in the original edition, with the exception of the first edition of the Israeli version, which, interestingly, was only published in 1996. It seems clear that the decision of Burgess's New York publisher influenced the further development of the novel around the world more than is

generally assumed, and perhaps even more than either of them considered at the time. Before getting into the specifics about how this influences the novel contentwise, a short summary of the twenty-first chapter appears to be in order. In the twenty-first chapter, the young protagonist of the novel, Alex, who all through his imprisonment and the subsequent conditioning treatment maintains his lust for so-called 'ultra-violence', finally comes to the insight that his destructive way of living brings him little fulfillment. "My young hoodlum comes to the revelation of the need to get something done in life - to marry, to beget children, to keep the orange of the world turning in the Rookers of Bog, or hands of God [...]" (Burgess introduction vii). In short, Alex symbolically (twenty-one was and in many countries still is the age at which one legally comes of age) and literally reaches maturity in the twenty-first chapter. He is finally allowed the conscious decision to choose good over evil, which is of course the main theme of the novel. Before, Alex willingly submitted himself to a treatment which consisted of the injection of a nausea-inducing medicine that physically prevented him from acting upon his violent and sexual desires. The main question the novel appears to pose, and that serves as the basis for many of the studies and essays written on this topic, is whether brainwashing and mental conditioning can be justified in the grand scheme of things, or if a man's right of free choice must be preserved above all, because, as Alex proves, goodness will out if only it is given the opportunity to do so.

3. The paratext

3.1. The twenty-first chapter as a step towards Alex's adulthood

The answer to the question above is seemingly already provided in the novel itself by the prison chaplain, who at the demonstration of the medicine's effectiveness, where Alex licks the boots of his aggressor, fervently argues against the impedement of Alex's ability to choose for himself:

> ‘Choice,’ rumbled a rich deep goloss. [...] ‘He has no real choice, has he? Self-interest, fear of physical pain, is what drove him to that grotesque act of self-abasement. Its insincerity was clearly to be seen. He ceases to be a wrongdoer. He ceases also to be a creature capable of moral choice.’ (Burgess 94)

The novel is as such to be understood as a defence of freedom of choice against forced submission to the law, in which Alex becomes a vehicle to verify this argument and where objections against this submission are continually voiced by the character of the prison chaplain. When at the very end of the unabridged version of the novel, Alex finally decides to dedicate his energy to the creation of a family of his own, it appears that the chaplain’s vision is at last proved correct: Alex eventually chooses good over evil consciously and full-heartedly, where before he only appeared to be ‘good’ because he had no other option. The novel’s central argument of personal freedom and choice thus seems to lie in this very chapter, which would logically result in the novel losing its essence when it is deleted. In the following part I will further investigate the importance of this chapter for the plot’s interpretation, aided by Gérard Genette’s *Paratexts. Thresholds of Interpretation.*

3.2. The paratext as an important, though not to be overestimated influence on the novel

To estimate the importance of the final chapter for the novel’s interpretation, a clear denomination of the phenomenon that is its omission must be provided. From here onwards I will consider the twenty-first chapter of Burgess’s novel to be a paratext, and I will use this chapter as a starting point for an extended investigation into several different paratexts that feature in *A Clockwork Orange* and that, to my opinion, might affect the interpretation of the novel’s protagonist at least to some extent.

As defined by Genette, a paratext is “what enables a text to become a book and to be offered as such to its readers and, more generally, to the public” (1). It is “a *threshold*, or [...]

a “vestibule” that offers the world at large the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back [...], “a fringe of the printed text which in reality controls one’s whole reading of the text”” (2). Although it is difficult to discover which texts classify as paratexts and which do not, because the definition provided by Genette leaves room for ambiguity, it can be very generally stated that paratexts consist of the totality of the mechanisms that are used to turn an idea as it was conceived in the mind of the author into a book. Often the author himself may already add a certain amount of paratextual elements under the form of, for example, the division of his story into chapters or parts which may or may not carry titles. Given that the paratext is at the “threshold” (Genette 2) of interpretation, and taking into account the alleged moral value of this particular paratext as mentioned in 3.1., it seems almost necessary to discuss first and foremost the missing chapter in the American version of *A Clockwork Orange* in terms of its possible consequences for the story. Starting from Genette’s definition, the omission of the chapter can be interpreted as a paratext, as it consists of a piece of text which was edited out of the original in order for it to become a book. Thus, looking at Anthony Burgess’s explanatory note at the beginning of the revised American version of the novel, the most intriguing question to be answered about this paratext is whether or not it is really only at the “threshold” (Genette 2) for the novel’s interpretation.

As argued by Burgess, a reading of the novel without its final chapter supposedly gives rise to an entirely different interpretation of the novel, because the chapter is essential in understanding the major moral argument the novel makes. His New York publisher, however, found the unabridged version to be unconvincing; “[i]t showed a Pelagian unwillingness to accept a human being could be a model for unregenerable evil” (introduction viii). Burgess remonstrates this by arguing that the twenty-first chapter enables the crucial change in Alex that eventually leads to the affirmation of the chaplain’s claim that one must be free to choose to be good:

> [t]he twenty-first chapter gives the novel the quality of genuine fiction, an art founded on the principle that human beings change. There is, in fact, not much point in writing a novel unless you can show the possibility of moral transformation, or an increase in wisdom, operating in your chief character or characters. (introduction viii)

Without this change, Alex remains a flat character that never undergoes any evolution, which to Burgess transforms the novel into a fable: "[w]hen a fictional work fails to show change, when it merely indicates that human character is set, stony, unregenerable, then you are out of the field of the novel and into that of the fable or the allegory" (introduction viii). Hence the first important contribution the final chapter makes to the novel is that it gives depth to its young protagonist. Burgess further argues that the omission of the final chapter elicits a change in genre. Where *A Clockwork Orange* was originally a didactic story about the value of the right to moral freedom, it now becomes a dystopia in the same line as Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, in which the Ludovico treatment, although eventually rejected, is the closest thing to a solution to the so-called 'ultra-violence' that is roaming the streets of future England. A second and crucial asset of the twenty-first chapter is its confidence in the inherent good of mankind, which will surface when it is given a chance. Alex can be a good person, if only he is allowed the time and space to outgrow his juvenile lust for violence.

From Burgess's views it could be inferred that the editor who created this paratext has played a major role in the novel's interpretation. Where D.C. Greetham defines the editor as "often being thought of as simply the person responsible for preparing a text for publication" (348), it appears that he is in truth assigned the role of architect of the novel's further development. However, this point of view must be nuanced; the paratext, after all, is only at the "threshold" (Genette 2) of the novel's interpretation, and its influence must not be exaggerated. Paratexts normally do not change the plot of a novel under any circumstance,

they only provide different ways to approach it. Geoffrey Sharpless even takes this idea that the paratext does not provoke alterations to the plot one step further by arguing that the influence of the twenty-first chapter hardly changes the novel's interpretation at all, because both versions still give a very bleak representation of future England in which hard measures against ultra-violence are needed:

> each ending poses a conundrum [...]. In neither ending is evil punished, nor is Alex shown to repent or regret his atrocities. [...] Neither ending reveals if conditioning is better or worse that makes us peaceable or allows us to be violent, or if we can ever be more than merely clockwork. Both endings are thoroughly and equally ambivalent [...] about moral choice. (n. pag.)

Indeed, in spite of Alex's 'change of mind' that Burgess found so important, his young protagonist does not choose good out of moral consideration, but simply because he has grown out of the boy that used to steal, murder and rape. In fact, Alex does not undergo a change in the strict sense of the word, but only a development towards a more mature version of himself. Burgess perhaps allots too much significance to the redemption of Alex, while this redemption is not necessary for the moral message to be understood: since Alex never really chooses good over evil in either version, the ethical question of whether mental conditioning is acceptable for the greater good remains unresolved; even if Alex eventually does come round, characters like Dim and Georgie boy do not. The dystopic complexity of the novel exists in its supposed inevitability; while ruthless conditioning of the mind may not be morally justifiable, it appears to be the only option to stop blind ultra-violence. What the twenty-first chapter really does is confirm the rest of the novel, in that if gangs roaming the streets of Britain, harassing and destroying as they went were really part of the near future, there would be no morally acceptable solution to stop this kind of violence. "Thus", says

Sharpless, "the true shock of the novel is its demonstration that a new man is already here; [...] we have met the enemy and he is us" (n. pag.).

A second argument against the overestimation of the final chapter is deduced from *Textual Scholarship: An Introduction*, in which David Greetham has determined that modern textual criticism indeed tends to be far less occupied with the editor's role:

> Taking on the traditional preoccupation with authorial intention, Jerome J. McGann has proposed an alternative view of composition, in which the entire history of the work is a fit subject for textual scholarship, and even posthumous changes by editors, publishers, friends and relations, are to be considered a perfectly valid part of the text read as a social construct. (337)

Thus it appears that Burgess focuses too much on what McGann calls "an intentionalist privilege given to a Romantic concept of the solitary author creating a work in an 'originary moment' of composition" (337); to McGann, what happens to a text after its composition is as important as the original text itself. This of course touches upon Roland Barthes' structuralist ideas in which the author's intention must not be taken into account in the interpretation of a literary work. Without getting involved in that particular debate, I feel that in this case one might argue that it is not so much the author's intention that is at stake, but his entire work. Regardless of Burgess's intentions as far as the plot's interpretation goes, he wrote *A Clockwork Orange* with a clear story in mind, one that included the events of the final chapter. The final chapter then should be valued as much as any other chapter in the novel, because it is not, as Stanley Kubrick believes (cf. infra), an "extra chapter" (Ciment 157) that was only included as an afterthought. The fact remains, however, that Burgess was the one who eventually agreed to the chapter's omission, which may allude to an exaggeration of the importance he attributes to the chapter, especially when considering that he thought of *A Clockwork Orange* as one of his lesser works. This brings me back to the assertion that the

deletion of the twenty-first chapter does not imply a change in the novel's plot. Where Burgess makes a strong argument as far as character development goes, because the final chapter indeed contains Alex's maturation process, he perceives the paratext as influencing the novel in an overall negative way, while in fact this particular paratext, and any paratext for that matter, does not fundamentally alter the novel in any way. Instead, it forms part of the history of the novel as it is known today, which to McGann bears an equal significance to the text itself. The paratext owes its importance to the fact that it is part of the entirety of the elements that make up a book; it provides access to interpretation, but it does not alter it. In the following section I will further explore how the exclusion of the final chapter may affect the reader's impression of Alex.

3.3. Paratexts and their influence on the reader's impression of the protagonist

Even though the paratext cannot be held responsible for the alteration of the novel's plot, it does provoke differing interpretations of Alex, because, as already mentioned, the final chapter depicts his evolution of an adolescent into an adult. While I have argued that Alex does not voluntarily give up his old ways out of guilt or remorse, but simply because he has grown bored of his beloved 'ultra-violence', the character development that takes place in the final chapter must not be overlooked. Burgess correctly allocated a lot of importance to Alex's maturation, though perhaps for different reasons than those I will put forward. The final chapter, as Davis and Womack have commented, marks the difference between an Alex who is struggling to discover what his goals are in life and one who is confident towards the future. While many critics and scholars who have written on the subject tend to clearly prefer one version over another, for several reasons, both versions of the novel and especially of Alex can be equally interesting. As Greetham observes,

> [r]ather than taking refuge in another form of bibliographical surety (the best text), such critics as Pasquali and George Kane and E. Talbot Donaldson have emphasized the necessarily subjective element of textual decisions, and particularly the requirement that each variation be judged on its own merits. (Greetham 325)

The abridged version of the novel must not be regarded as being 'impoverished' or a 'lesser version' of the original for its lack of character development, because each version must be judged individually, that is to say, based on its own specific qualities. The original version has its own value because of the maturation process of Alex, which, as stated above, gives the novel the quality of a bildungsroman, with Alex taking the role of the picaresque protagonist who is not as essentially different from a Lazarillo de Tormes or a Tom Jones as one might think. Geoffrey Sharpless takes this insight to another level by comparing Alex to a typical schoolboy in the Arnoldian public school:

> both *A Clockwork Orange* and *Tom Brown's School-days* relate the importance of resisting adulthood, and retaining the pleasures of remaining in a timeless, childish perversity. [...] Both texts are deeply - almost furiously - nostalgic for a moment of health and wholeness that never existed. (n. pag.)

Alex's final achievement then is his eventual insight that submission to adulthood is the missing link in his search for "a moment of wealth and wholeness" (Sharpless n. pag.). "Alex like groweth up, oh yes" (Burgess 141). Closely linked to this are the insights of Todd F. Davis and Kenneth Womack, who assert that Alex continually searches for a true "HOME" (Davis and Womack 20). Having grown up in what Davis and Womack consider to be a dysfunctional family, Alex is never at peace and is incessantly attempting to quieten his unease by converting it into violence. Since "family structures [act] as catalysts for interpersonal development and [...] [as] ethical foundations for individual change" (20), the

absence of such a system, in which he would be taught how to interpret the new emotions and desires that come with puberty, prevents him from channeling these feelings into a constructive act of personal development. Without the twenty-first chapter, Alex is forever stuck in this state of constant destruction. The value of the chapter lies in the way he eventually finds a different way to fulfill his need for a constructive act, which is "his hopeful vision of a healthy, functional family" (23).

The abridged version, on the other hand, is what Burgess rather derogatorily calls "sensational" (introduction viii). It certainly makes a strong point as far as the nature of mankind is concerned; it has the audacity to assume that goodness is not inherent and to shock the reader by pointing out to him his own primitive desires, because Alex, rather than stealing and raping seemingly arbitrarily, actually simply gives in to all his lusts. "If you need an auto you pluck it from the trees. If you need pretty polly you take it, yes?" (Burgess 40). The abridged version leaves the reader to think about how only a thin cultural layer prevents him from doing the same. As Sharpless says, "we have met the enemy and he is us" (n. pag.). Thus, both versions of *A Clockwork Orange* and of Alex should be judged individually and based on their own values, and to adequately do so one must be aware of all the paratexts that have influenced the novel throughout the years, for they have made the book to what it is today.

The very first of these paratexts that is presented to the reader is the front cover of the book, which in this case already gives the reader a first impression of Alex and which sets off his or her interpretation of him. This theory can easily be applied to *A Clockwork Orange*: the earliest front cover of Burgess's novel was designed by Barry Trengrove and presumably shows a portrait of Alex uttering a few nadsat words – "yarbles, bloshy great yarblockos to thee and thine" (Burgess cover). By directly addressing the reader, this Alex immediately establishes a relation with this reader, which makes it easier for him to step inside and

overcome the first "threshold" (Genette 2). This, says Genette, is a reasonably new way of inviting the reader into the story:

> [t]he printed cover – a cover made of paper or board – is a fairly recent phenomenon and seems to date from the early nineteenth century. [...] [Before this], the title page was the main site of the publisher's paratext, but once the possibilities of the cover were discovered, they seem to have been exploited very rapidly. (23)

Additionally, it is assumed that most readers are still unacquainted with nadsat at the first reading; they will as such not realize that they are at that point being called names by the Alex on the cover, on the contrary: they may even consider Alex's vulgarities to be inviting, as they are directed to them personally, which creates a feeling of a more direct involvement in the novel. The reader establishes a relationship with Alex from the very start because of the book's front cover, which may influence his approach towards the novel and especially his impression of its protagonist.

Another interesting aspect of *A Clockwork Orange*'s front cover history is the fact that its cover has often been changed throughout its many publications. Whereas the original boards were black, the same image of Alex uttering obscenities has appeared in purple, green and orange, amongst others. While its effect appears to be limited for more recent novels such as *A Clockwork Orange*, Genette points out that the colour of the front cover can be of some importance to a novel: "[s]imply the color of the paper chosen for the cover can strongly indicate a type of book. At the beginning of the twentieth century, yellow covers were synonymous with licentious French books" (24). Where for Burgess's novel the choice of colours for the cover seem to be rather arbitrary, the novel's very first appearance in black may already indicate its dystopic content. Indeed, a book covered in black is usually not expected to contain a very happy story. With an orange cover, for example, the link to the

novel's title is easily made. Finally, the cover's colour may affect the reader's behaviour in selecting a book: a nice cover is more likely to draw attention, and its colour can be a decisive factor in whether or not the reader considers it to be inviting.

A final aspect of the novel's different covers is the use of Stanley Kubrick's movie poster as a front cover. One of the earliest, if not the earliest, versions to carry this image was the original Australian edition of the novel, published in 1972 by Penguin. Aside from the obvious link this version makes to Kubrick's film adaptation, which will be discussed later on, the appearance of actor Malcolm McDowell as Alex touches upon the reader's interpretation of Burgess's protagonist: while Alex is only fifteen in the novel, the movie-based cover featured McDowell, who at the time was in his late twenties, as Alex. Burgess's Alex is a young boy; even though he behaves much older, he is in fact little more than a child who, despite the many cruel things he does, is eventually used and abused for political propaganda, which leads him to the final act of desperation that eventually becomes his rescue from the Ludovico method. The sympathy felt for the protagonist, which becomes almost inevitable due to the narrative style of the novel, is increased because of Alex's young age. Additionally, the point of Alex's maturation is lost when he is already a grown man. Of course, this argument is easily refuted considering that the film version does not include the twenty-first chapter and as such has no need for an Alex who evolves from a young criminal to a responsible adult; however, if a reader were to read the unabridged novel with McDowell on the cover, and this reader would not have seen the film, his image of Alex might be influenced all the same, and thus his interpretation of the protagonist would be affected.

Yet another paratext that may be and probably is of great influence for the reader's interpretation of the character of Alex is Stanley Kubrick's movie adaptation, whose stills have often served as images for the aforementioned front covers of the novel. As Genette comments,

> [t]he ways and means of the paratext change continually, depending on period, culture, genre, author, work, and edition, with varying degrees of pressure, sometimes widely varying: it is an acknowledged fact that our media age has seen the proliferation of a type of discourse around texts that was unknown in the classical world [...]. (3)

Even though film adaptations of books are not literally mentioned in Genette's definition of the paratext, I will consider Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* to be one, based on the notion of "epitext" (Genette 5); "any paratextual element not materially appended to the text within the same volume but circulating, as it were, freely, in a virtually limitless physical and social space. The location of the epitext is therefore anywhere outside the book [...]" (Genette 344). Together with the "peritext" (Genette 5), which covers all text inside the volume, the epitext makes up the paratext. Indeed, the movie is a reworking of the original text and becomes an entity on its own that influences the interpretation of the text. Starting from the paratext as a "threshold" (Genette 2), the paratextual value of Kubrick's film becomes even more noticeable: a movie, by being more accessible and less time-consuming than a book, can be regarded as one large paratext which convinces a viewer to read the novel. The movie itself contains its own epitextual elements under the form of, for example, interviews with the director and the rest of the crew, but also with the actors. All these factors influence the interpretation of the film in particular, but also indirectly of the novel, and especially of its characters. Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange*, which was released in 1971, long before the final chapter was reincluded in the American version of the novel, is based on the version of the novel that does not describe Alex's decision to quit his old life and start building a future. Being American, Kubrick has commented in a series of interviews with French film critic Michel Ciment that he had no knowledge of a 'missing chapter' until he had "virtually

finished the screenplay" (Ciment 157). When the British version finally did come into his possession, he quite ironically commented:

> [t]here are two different versions of the novel. One has an extra chapter. I had not read this version until I had virtually finished the screenplay. This extra chapter depicts the rehabilitation of Alex. But it is, as far as I am concerned, unconvincing and inconsistent with the style and intent of the book. I wouldn't be surprised to learn that the publisher had somehow prevailed upon Burgess to take on the extra chapter against his better judgment, so the book would end on a more positive note. I certainly never gave any serious consideration to using it. (Ciment 157)

Kubrick's decision not to include the final chapter even when he possibly could have is perhaps the most influencial paratext of all for the character of Alex. Like the front cover that is based on it, the movie features Malcolm McDowell as Alex; the image McDowell creates of Alex is, as tends to be the case with films, one that sticks with the audience much more clearly than their own visual image of Alex ever could. As Anderson postulates in Bart Keunen's *Verhaal en verbeelding. Chronotopen in de westerse verhaalcultuur*, the visual image is in fact never more than a schematic representation of ideas:

> [a]lthough many people report experience of visualizing objects in imagery tasks, an image does not seem to be a mental picture in the head. It differs from a picture in that it is not tied to the visual modality, it is not precise and can be distorted, and it is segmented into meaningful pieces. (Anderson in Keunen 21)

Hence, when reading Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange*, the reader may form a vague image of Alex based on the description provided in the novel. However, if a person were to first watch the film and only later read the novel, his image of Alex as portrayed by McDowell probably would not change much whilst reading the novel, even if Alex's outward appearence in both

versions could not be more different. Aside from the age difference, other factors such as dress and accessories also influence the way Alex is given visual shape. For example, in the novel Alex is dressed fashionably according to the standards of the futuristic British metropole:

> [t]he four of us were dressed in the height of fashion, which in those days was a pair of black very tight tights with the old jelly mould, as we called it, fitting on the crotch underneath the tights, this being to protect and also a sort of a design you could viddy clear enough in a certain light, so that I had one in the shape of a spider. [...] Then we wore waisty jackets without lapels but with these very big built-up shoulders [...] which were a kind of a mockery of having real shoulders like that. Then, my brothers, we had these off-white cravats which looked like whipped-up kartoffel or spud with a sort of a design made on it with a fork. We wore our hair not too long and we had flip horrorshow boots for kicking. (Burgess 4)

In the film, however, each of the four "droogs" (Burgess 3) is dressed up entirely in white, save for a black hat or cap, depending on the character, and black boots. They are wearing trousers instead of tights, and a pair of suspenders over a plain white shirt, to hold up an equally plain crotch protector, which is worn on top of the trousers. Additionally, their hair reaches well over their ears. Because language, however detailed, can never evoke as precise an image in the reader's mind as an actual image which is visually perceived, it is not surprising that the image of Alex as impersonated by McDowell should be the one that remains imprinted in the reader's mind. Alex has become McDowell. As a result of this, the novel and its protagonist can never again be approached in the same way as when before the film was released, unless one were to read it without ever having seen the film or anything vaguely related to it. The importance of the film as a "threshold" (Genette 2) lies in the way it

already shapes one's way of interpreting the story before he or she has even opened the book, and as such the film appears to be a paratext of major importance to a novel, and, given its publication history, especially to *A Clockwork Orange.*

4. From theory to practice: the paratexts' consequences for the novel's reception

Where up until now I have based my study on the theoretical expositions of Genette and Greetham and hypotheses by Sharpless and Davis and Womack, I now aim to investigate whether and how these theories are affirmed in reality. The novel's critical reception appears to be the most adequate medium for this, because reviews are based directly on reflections by readers who presumably have not indulged in elaborate study of the subject before giving their own opinions. In the previous paragraph I have elaborated on how the film functions as an important paratext to the novel, as it frames the latter's interpretation in a very specific way. This is affirmed in the many reviews the film has received since it was first released. While opinions on the film's quality vary greatly, the reviewers more or less agree when it comes to the protagonist: Alex is often regarded as a vehicle to bring across the point Kubrick is trying to make, without further interpretation of his underlying motives. Jackson Burgess even went as far as reducing the character of Alex as portrayed in Kubrick's film to a comic figure:

> [t]he means by which Alex is celebrated are simple enough: he is not made into a morally significant figure but into a comic hero. He is comic because he is so completely and maniacally what he is [...] The only gesture toward "significance" lies in giving Alex a deep and poetical sensitivity to music [...] (33)

Jackson Burgess interprets Alex as being a character with no psychological profundity whatsoever; he states that Kubrick's Alex is reduced, quite literally, to a flat character, which is of course exactly what Anthony Burgess also proclaims and condemns. The only credit

Alex is given as a character is that he is able to enjoy music, which the reviewer analyzes as Kubrick's only effort to give Alex some depth. This stands in stark contrast to the opinions of the author of the novel and Davis and Womack, but also those of Geoffrey Sharpless. An entirely different approach is that of Samuel McCracken, who argues that the film actually shows a more genteel version of Alex than the novel does:

> [e]ven when sticking to the [novel], Kubrick goes easy on Alex. Violence done by him to others we see only through a tasteful veil of technique: it is shadowed, choreographed, speeded up, slowed down. But violence done by others to Alex is handled quite clinically, even emphasized [...] (435)

Based on elaborate comparisons of book and novel, McCracken concludes that Kubrick downplays Alex's evil disposition, and that the Alex from the novel is in fact a much more inherently bad character than the one in the movie. The way he backs up his arguments, however, have more to do with cinematographic decisions than with character development; had Kubrick integrated into his film the rape scene of two young girls as it is described in the novel, it would probably have caused an even greater controversy at its release. A more plausible theory for the somewhat less graphic approach Kubrick has taken is that, rather than attempting to create a more sympathetic Alex, he simply wanted the film to fulfill an aesthetic purpose. Additionally, where Burgess had a first-person narration at his advantage, softening Alex's persona was probably the only way in which Kubrick could make the character of Alex more likeable; while as a reader it is not difficult to empathize with Alex's many hardships, Kubrick had to draw on other strategies to create the same effect. Be as it may, the question of character likeability has little to do with development. As such, the general tendency of film critics is to describe Kubrick's Alex as one that is objectified to serve the issues addressed in the film; it is a story about how governmental domination is to be prevented, not one about Alex, and as a result there is no need for the latter's personality to be

deepened further. Still, in critical reception this is often evaluated as one of the film's weaker points.

Reviews of the American version of the novel show a comparable want for a more interesting protagonist:

> it didn't have much dimension for character, or rather a lot of the character was obviously mechanistic [...] Alex the droog as narrative agent posed some problems which were far from neatly solved, and in general one felt the presence of more raw energy than the author could gracefully control. (Adems n. pag.)

Adems too blames Alex's lack of development on the fact that he serves only as an object which is used to make a statement, while Burgess leaves no room for a more in-depth exploration of his personality. Adems's accusation that Burgess would not have been able to control the energy of the novel and its protagonist again suggests that the novel's plot goes at the expense of its characters. John Gardner, on the other hand, appears to be of the opinion that if Burgess wanted to create a character with no consciousness or any form of humane emotion at all, he should have taken it to a more extreme level:

> Anthony Burgess is a good writer, as everyone knows, but not a great one. One reason for this is that Burgess's characters do not fight toward the impossible with the same demonic intensity as those of, say, [Pär] Lagerkvist, and they are not as cruelly broken when they fall. (239)

Like Jackson Burgess's evaluation of Kubrick's Alex, Gardner's impression of the novel-version Alex is that he is not much of any type of character: he cannot be called a tormented hero, because he feels no remorse or has no reason to act the way he does, but neither is he much of an antagonistic brute, since he lacks both the poise and the disposition to fight towards evil purposefully. The main problem appears to lie in Alex's total deficiency of

motive. A character that commits the cruelties that Alex does simply for the sake of it is apparently considered to be less interesting than one that is evil because of obscure personal reasons.

Another example of this need for a more profound understanding of Alex can be found in Jon Davis's review of a recent theatre production by the Kensington Theatre Company, an amateur theatre group whose latest play was an adaptation of Burgess's novel. Davis remarks that "Alex's ultra-violent nature is pitch perfect, he smiles maniacally and shrieks like he's suffering from Tourette's, but it's a performance lacking the subtly [sic] needed to explore the character's journey" (n. pag.). Notably, the play does include Alex's final insight and his desire to start a family, hinting at the passing nature of juvenile lusts and the evolution the protagonist has undergone, when at the end of the play Alex states that "[t]o be young is to be an animal" (n. pag.). Nevertheless, Davis's sentiment that the character of Alex requires a more in-depth analysis affirms the earlier made point that the twenty-first chapter is quite essential in forming a more detailed and complex image of the novel's protagonist and that, as Davis appears to believe, it deserves more attention than it is given in this particular play in order to be successful.

Other authors of articles and reviews that include the twenty-first chapter in their evaluation do not necessarily hold Alex in a higher regard than those who review the abridged version. However, it is clear that the final chapter leaves more room for a deeper reflection on Alex's personality and the omitted chapter's role in it. As Sharpless already pointed out, Alex's redemption is not, in fact, much of a redemption to begin with, because he feels no remorse over the damage he has caused. Still, says Rubin Rabinovitz, the final chapter is important in his development because it "removes [him] from the cyclical process[1] and

[1] This process is linked to opposing visions of Pelagius and Augustinus, who respectively condemned and advocated the idea of original sin and predestination. The cycle exists of Alex, who as a youth was predestined

prevents [his] transition into a mature phase" (47). Earl Ingerson also comments on the omission of the final chapter: "[t]he effect [...]", he writes, "of this truncation is clear: not only are we robbed of any hope that Alex can be saved, but we miss the opportunity to affirm a further association between himself and his "I" in the novel" (62). Although opinions on how the final chapter affects Alex's character development vary greatly, the contrast between the abridged version's interpretation and that of the original edition stands out, which leads to the following prudent observation: without overgeneralizing, it is fair to say that those cases in which Alex does not undergo the maturation that is presented in the final chapter of *A Clockwork Orange* tend to be criticized for their lack of depth. While Alex's growth to adulthood is interpreted very differently in responses to the original version, the latter present more reflection on underlying causes for the protagonists's behaviour, as well as a greater interest in exploring his character. The American version of the novel thus leaves less room for this kind of consideration, because the final chapter is a key element in understanding the true depth of Alex, which affirms earlier observations made on the subject.

5. Conclusion

In this paper I have attempted to address some of the issues that exist around the omission of the final chapter of Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange* in the American edition of the novel. By applying Gérard Genette's terminology on this novel, I have contrasted the opinions of on the one hand Anthony Burgess and Todd F. Davis and Kenneth Womack and on the other hand Geoffrey Sharpless to demonstrate that paratexts such as the deletion of the twenty-first chapter offer a "threshold" (Genette 2) to the interpretation of a novel, but that they do not alter the central themes and problems of said novel as fundamentally as the author

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for evil, growing out of this phase and into freedom, which is maturity, and is as such a Pelagian model of Christian freedom (Rabinovitz 1979:43).

himself claims. The final chapter does, however, influence the reader's impression and understanding of the novel's protagonist Alex, because of the complex maturation processes that are exposed in this chapter. Nevertheless, as seen in David Greetham's book on textual scholarship, this does not necessarily impoverish the story, since modern textual criticism tends towards taking into account all versions that exist of one text and evaluating them individually. The combination of all the interpretations they produce, then, enriches the text as a whole. I have also argued that, while the abridgement of the novel does not deprive it of its moral message, since the argument against an authoritarian society is already made clear in the preceding chapters, the final chapter does allow Alex to grow up. Neither does the chapter's omission evoke a character shift in Alex, because in truth he does not consciously or willingly better his life out of remorse for his previous actions. This is affirmed by Geoffrey Sharpless's hypothesis that Alex evolves from a picaresque character into a fully grown man who aspires to start a family of his own. This idea is shared by Davis and Womack, who label this evolution in Alex his "single creative act" (23), which before he was unable to accomplish because of the lack of a healthy family in which he would be taught how to channel his energy into constructive actions rather than destructive ones. The dream of a family of his own finally allows him to leave behind his teenage self and reach full adulthood. Following this I have elaborated on some of this novel's paratexts, with Stanley Kubrick's film adaptation as the most important and influential one. Finally, by comparing articles and reviews of both versions of the novel, of the movie and of a recent theatre performance of *A Clockwork Orange*, I have investigated how the previous observations are effected in reality by exploring the different impressions Alex has left on these authors, in order to eventually come to the cautious conclusion that the novel's abridgement and other paratexts, particularly Kubrick's film, indeed affect how the character of Alex is understood and interpreted. Those reviewers of the original version generally tend to reflect more on Alex's development, and

subsequently allot more importance to his character before the twenty-first chapter as well, while those who write about the American edition often complain about Alex's lack of depth, reducing him to a means that is used both by Burgess and by Kubrick to bring across a statement, without caring much for the character himself. This proves that the paratexts surrounding this text do not directly influence its plot, but only the way the novel is approached. Nevertheless, paratexts do guide one's interpretation in a certain direction even before he or she has started reading, which, as the above observations confirm, affect the reader's impression of Burgess's protagonist. The paratext, as Genette rightly proclaims, is positioned at the "threshold" (Genette 2) of interpretation, never intruding, but always present, guiding the reader through the story he or she is reading.

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