There were four of us to six of them [...] So there we were dratsing away in the dark, [...] the stars stabbing away as it might be knives anxious to join in the dratsing. [...] Of the four of us Dim, as usual, came out the worst in point of looks, that is to say his litso was all bloodied and his platties a dirty mess, but the others of us were still cool and whole. It was stinking fatty Billyboy I wanted now, and there I was dancing about with my britva like I might be a barber on board a ship of a very rough sea, trying to get in at him with a few fair slashes on his unclean oily litso. Billyboy had a nozh, a long flick-type, but he was a malenky bit too slow and heavy in his movements to vred anyone really bad. And, my brothers, it was real satisfaction to me to waltz—left two three, right two three—and carve left cheeky and right cheeky, so that like two curtains of blood seemed to pour out at the same time, one on either side of his fat filthy oily snout in the winter starlight. (Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange* 14-15)

When Alex begins his nighttime adventure, he tells us that “[y]ou were not put on this earth just to get in touch with God” (5). In this passage, Alex shows just the sort of activity he believes constitutes living life to its fullest. He delights in recounting how he used his physical fitness and artistic finesse to ensure his own gang—outnumbered, as he twice tells us, six to four—masters Billyboy’s. He thinks his mastery of the dangerous but eventful world of the night qualifies him as a man-god, as an “Alexander the Large” (36), and, given how often others single him out, the evident pleasure he has in recounting his exploits, and our own possible admiration for those who would rather live than not-live, he may well be right.

This dramatic fight is framed by the night sky, by stars Alex imagines as “anxious to join in.” And, indeed, Alex’s dash with a rival gang *is* such a tantalizing drama it is easy to imagine the backdrop wanting in. The wonderment of seeing a combatant using his opponent as a canvas for artistically delivered razor strokes is such that we likely do not let Alex’s abundant use of similes distract or transport us from the action: the activity of this warrior of the night—this knight—is much more interesting to us than is a barber on rough seas. This is Alex at his best; this is Alex most convincingly proving (“my brothers”) that “what [he] [...] do [he] [...] do
because [he] [. . .] like to do” (31). And he is certainly more compelling here than the restrained ordinary people, the “not-selves” (31), we imagine populating the day-world of *A Clockwork Orange*. So unlike them, Alex lives a risky, daring, and exhilarating life. So, too, do Dim and Billyboy; but unlike these brutes, Alex is so competent a fighter, has such an appreciation of and capacity for artistic expression and for play, that he orchestrates his tactical movements into a waltz, and ensures he leaves battles both “cool and whole.”

What Alex demonstrates in this fight is the synthesis of force and grace once thought to constitute the ideal knight. But Alex serves no one, and his jubilant egoism makes him seem more an example of Friedrich Nietzsche’s man-god, a superman. Alex only assumes the pose of a (self-abnegating) Christian knight to avoid experiencing crippling pain. And, amidst this later scene, where Dr. Brodsky demonstrates the success of his experiment, we remember Alex’s previous mastery. When Alex licks the actor’s boots, when he “throw[s] [his] [. . .] heart [at the actress’s feet] for [her] [. . .] to [. . .] trample [. . .] over” (95), we know that without the treatment Alex would have forced the actor into less palatable positions.

But this later scene, which resembles the gang fight in that it is also “staged” as a dramatic event, is one where Dr. Brodsky “controls the curtains,” inflicts the pain, and thus directs the show. However, it is still one where Alex plays the starring role, and we might wonder, considering that his own sense of himself as special is supported by his wide-spread public notoriety (the police tell him that “everyone knows [. . .] [him]” [50], and later his face is all over the papers) and by being singled out for important roles (i.e., he is the first person “reformed” and the instrument for toppling the government and its opposition) throughout the novel, if he fascinates, if he is special to Burgess, too.

Considering that Burgess’s own wife was once raped, it would be crass to argue that he might want to be Alex. But given the novel’s setting of a homogenized, socialist dystopia, Alex’s youthful exuberance and playfulness, his manly competence and physical prowess shines that much brighter than it otherwise might. The result of the contrast between Alex and the suppressing, tyrannical world about him, is that we, Burgess, the press, as much as the stars, might all find ourselves as irresistibly drawn as we are repelled by the nighttime dramas of Alexander the Large.

**Work Cited**
