
From Villain to victim as highlighted in A clockwork Orange

Stanley Kubrick wrote the screenplay for and directed the film *A Clockwork Orange* based on the book by Anthony Burgess with the same title. The distinguishing feature of the book is the language the narrator, Alexander DeLarge, uses: Nadsat, a sort of invented Russian slang. In the novel, Nadsat exists to distance the reader from Alex's violence. While Kubrick also employs Nadsat in the film, it does not have the same effect as in the novel, as Alex's violence at the beginning of the movie is easily seen on the screen and clearly the worst in the film (McDougal). However, saying that the scenes at the beginning of Kubrick's film are the most violent, as McDougal points out, is very arbitrary and subjective. That definition of violence fits only into the context of our society's understanding of it rather than the film's portrayal of it. Kubrick positions the audience to see and understand the problems associated with defining violence.

Stanley Kubrick's first task as director of *A Clockwork Orange* is, as the author of this work, to distance the viewer from the violence as was done in the book. As Peter J. Rabinowitz points out, "The fact that the violence in the film is visual and hence more immediate, only puts further pressure on Kubrick to find some way of rebalancing our relation to Alex" (Rabinowitz). However, Kubrick is up to this task. One way he distances the audience from the horror of Alex's crimes is by changing the nature of his victims as they were depicted in the book (McDougal). Kubrick also uses clever directing, editing and background score to provide this necessary distance. For example, the scene with Billy-boy's gang, the attempted rape and ensuing fight looks more like a well-choreographed ballet showdown than unadulterated violence. Rossini's *Thieving Magpie* plays in the background, seemingly mirroring the highs of the fight with its crescendos. The effect is more amusing than horrifying. A great example of Kubrick's utilization of editing for a distancing effect is found in the scene where Alex beats up his own gang to ensure his supreme authority over the group. Alex and his "droogs" are walking next to a pier in slow motion when suddenly Alex hears some classical music from an open window. He turns and hits one of his droogs in the codpiece and then kicks him into the water. Alex then throws another one of his droogs into the water, also cutting his hand with a knife. Since we cannot hear anything but this sweet sounding music and we only see the violence in slow motion, the horror of the moment is almost completely eradicated.

The distance Kubrick creates between Alex's violence and the audience has the primary function to allow the director to endear Alex to us. This effect is clearly seen in an excerpt from a review of the film:

Despite what Alex does at the beginning, McDowell makes you root for his foxiness, for his crookedness. For most of the movie, we see him tortured and beaten and humiliated, so when

Need help with the assignment?

Our professionals are ready to assist with any writing!

GET HELP

his bold, aggressive punk's nature is restored to him it seems not a joke on all of us but, rather, a victory in which we share, and Kubrick takes an exultant tone (Kael).

Movie reviewers believed that it is in fact Kubrick's direction and intention to portray Alex through the film, or really the film through Alex, in such a way that endears him to us and makes us side with him (Staiger). The way Kubrick portrays the film through Alex adds to our emotional attachment to the narrator. Kubrick surrounds Alex with a very dull world and vision of the future. Alex is naturally and at his essence interesting and lively. He is human in a world of mostly rigid and usually boring characters and a society that only concerns itself with controlling crime. Alex is also youthful looking, innocent and exuberant at the same time. Kubrick films the movie through Alex's eyes so we can experience his world as he does. Naturally, the audience is endeared to Alex because he is king in his own world. However, once his life goes downhill after his arrest and incarceration, he is still able to maintain the same outlook as he did before, at least for a while. We feel that he is ultimately going to succeed in getting out of prison and reverting back to his old ways as evident in the prison fantasy scene in the library. However, his course to freedom meets a huge bump in the road: the Ludovico treatment. Even though he is freed from prison, his ability to act on his violent desires is entirely restricted. Since this is somewhat unexpected from the audience's perspective, as it is in our own nature to think things will "work out" in films, we begin to feel great sympathy for Alex.

The turning point in the film is when Alex undergoes the Ludovico treatment because it forces the audience to ask questions about its relationship to Alex's character. In comparison to all of the violence presented in *A Clockwork Orange*, the worst violence done in the film is what is done to Alex when he undergoes the Ludovico treatment and experiences the effects of it (McDougal). The harm done to Alex triggers the minds of the viewers to feel sympathy for him. This is to be expected, as Kubrick takes many measures to try to elicit this sense of sympathy. However, does this not seem horribly wrong? Is Alex not the embodiment of an evil, violent and corrupt youth? While the answers to these questions are yes and yes, it is more important to look at what Kubrick's intentions were, as he clearly tries to lead our emotions with a guiding hand.

The Ludovico scene also questions the audience's own nature and inclination towards evil, as it juxtaposes the reactions we have to two different types of violence and what they represent. As one scholar notes, "The film is an ambiguity in itself and a provocation to the viewer to understand how 'evil' may be understood or misunderstood" (Kolker). The really critical element in comprehending "evil's" understanding is the audience's reaction to Alex's experiences in the Ludovico theatre as he undergoes the treatment. Alex sees images of violence on the screen mirroring the crimes we see him partake in at the beginning of the film. However, unlike us, who are desensitized and distanced from this violence that we see on the screen, he is horrified by it. What is the significance that he, and not we, is horrified by a comparable violence? Are we

Need help with the assignment?

Our professionals are ready to assist with any writing!

[GET HELP](#)

just as bad if not more evil than Alex? Not only do we not react to such violence with Alex's horror, but we also would rather see Alex engaging in his violent behavior than see him suffer punishment for his evil acts.

The paradox Kubrick attempts to create within the audience's reactions to violence done by Alex and done to Alex demonstrates that society's views of evil are arbitrary. It is unrealistic to say that Kubrick suggests that the viewer of this movie is intrinsically evil and violent, even though he seems to imply that we have the same propensity toward violence and evil as Alex. In fact, this idea could be dispelled immediately because Kubrick clearly must desensitize the viewer to Alex's actions. Kubrick constructs a paradox within the audience's reactions: on one hand, the audience is naturally drawn to Alex, and we do not react to his violence with horror; on the other hand, Kubrick has to shield us from Alex's violence because we identify his actions with evil. The significance of this is that Kubrick is trying to show that definitions of violence and evil are entirely subjective. Just as Kubrick constructs our sympathy towards Alex, our society constructs and construes for us notions of evil and violence.

The government's use of the Ludovico treatment to curb crime by eradicating evil in criminals is seen as corrupt and inhumane because it demonstrates the problems of the government's attempts to define violence. The government Kubrick creates pledges to provide "law and order" to society by any means necessary. The minister of the interior handpicks Alex to undergo the Ludovico treatment because, "He's enterprising, aggressive, outgoing. Young. Bold. Vicious." Here, the government defines Alex as the quintessential embodiment of evil, as he is in the eyes of the minister of the interior the perfect trial candidate for the Ludovico treatment. However, in the eyes of the audience the pain and wrongs Alex endures as a result of the treatment are entirely inhumane and immoral. The viewer places all of the blame for the pain of our "friend and humble narrator" upon the government. For the audience, the horror Alex experiences is worse than the violence the treatment seeks to eradicate. Since the government defines evil, yet creates a greater violence than it prevents, Kubrick demonstrates that it is impossible to define evil and morality, respectively.

In the film *A Clockwork Orange*, Kubrick deconstructs the concept that there exists a universal definition of evil. He also challenges the idea of a uniform moral code, as evil is morally wrong. Some philosophers and theologians may call the concept of a uniform moral code "natural law." If such a thing as natural law exists, surely there would exist a somewhat intrinsic feeling that unifies the viewers of *A Clockwork Orange* to immediately identify the violence on the screen as terribly wrong. Clearly, no such emotion exists. The only emotion that does exist is a common identification with Alex that Kubrick constructs for the audience. However, Kubrick must first shield the audience from the horrors of Alex's actions before he can endear Alex to us. Just as Kubrick guides the audience in its reaction towards different types of violence and thus defines violence for the viewer, so does the government construct society's definition of evil in the film.

Need help with the assignment?

Our professionals are ready to assist with any writing!

[GET HELP](#)

The government treats Alex, whom it defines as evil, inhumanely, and the horror and pain the Ludovico treatment causes him are comparably worse than the crimes he commits. This proves that violence is only relative to society's views of it and that there is no way to truly define the concept of evil. The function of this in the film is to show why the Ludovico treatment was not humane, even though it was practiced on the lowest of humans: criminals. The movie shows that violence and morality are relative and the principle of protecting the rest of society from a criminal at the expense of denying him the ability to function as a man with choice is truly immoral.

gradesfixer.com

Need help with the assignment?

Our professionals are ready to assist with any writing!

GET HELP