

A Clockwork Orange

Stanley Kubrick's "A Clockwork Orange" has been the focus of much controversy since its theatrical release in 1971. In this essay I will analyse the film and discuss the elements which could be considered shocking and whether or not I feel that the film deserves the amount of controversy it has attracted over the years.

One possible reason for the negative reaction some people have to "A Clockwork Orange" is that the protagonist who the audience follows throughout the duration of the film, Alex, is a very morally defective character. However there are times during the film where the viewer feels sympathy for him. An example of this is the scene after Alex has been "rehabilitated" by the aversion therapy and has been released and is picked up by his old "droogs", who are now police officers, and is tortured by them and is unable to defend himself due to his aversion therapy. In this scene Kubrick holds shots where Alex is held underwater for a long time without cutting away. This editing technique makes the audience empathise with Alex and feel sympathy for him. This makes viewers feel uncomfortable as earlier in the film the audience see Alex commit violent crimes against mostly innocent people and it is established that he isn't someone you shouldn't empathise with.

Another reason why viewers may be shocked by the film is the violence within it. In "A Clockwork Orange" the violence is made to seem fun and enjoyable. A good example of this is in the scene by the river side when Alex punishes his "droogs" for challenging his power within the gang. The scene is shot entirely in slow-motion which makes the violence seem graceful. Also during this scene is the diegetic sound of classical music playing, this adds to the feeling of gracefulness and allows the viewer to enter the mind of Alex and see how he feels about violence. However, perhaps the most infamous scene in the film is the rape of the writer's wife. During the scene the diegetic sound of Alex singing "Singing In The Rain" is shocking as it creates a juxtaposition between the light hearted sound and the violent humiliation being performed in the scene. These two scenes show the mental state of Alex and his gang and make the audience feel like part of the gang which makes viewers feel uncomfortable as hopefully most people wouldn't like being around these kind of people.

One more aspect of the film that could be considered shocking could be the potential blasphemy that takes place in a scene where Alex is in prison. Whilst in prison Alex starts reading the bible and the audience assumes that he has become a Christian. However, the audience enters the mind of Alex and we see that he is imagining himself as one of the Roman whipping Jesus. This scene could be very offensive to Christians as it shows Alex fantasizing about beating Jesus and enjoying it.

Also, an aspect of the film that could shock audiences is the ending of the narrative. Since undergoing the aversion therapy and being released from prison Alex is kidnapped by the writer whose wife he raped and who later died. Alex is tortured by the writer by being forced to listen to a song by Beethoven which triggers the same sickness and pain as violent and sexual thoughts due to the treatment. This causes Alex to try to commit suicide which he does by jumping out of the window of the room he's being held in. In the next scene Alex wakes up in hospital and the audience finds out that there has been a big controversy over the treatment following Alex's attempted suicide. Because of this the Minister visits Alex to apologise for the treatment, and the audience discovers that the effects of the treatment have been reversed and Alex is a free man. This ending is shocking as Alex seems to get away with his crimes and is still the same character as at the beginning of the film as the film ends in his head as he fantasizes about rape. The ending

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suggests that the prison system didn't work, Alex isn't rehabilitated and the government is releasing a violent criminal for publicity.

In conclusion, there are many elements of Stanley Kubrick's "A Clockwork Orange" that could be considered shocking and some scenes that I personally found uncomfortable to watch. I feel that the amount of controversy the film has received is undeserved and that most people who complain about the film are missing the point of the film, which is that it's a commentary on crime and punishment. However, I can understand why people would be offended by the content of the film especially in 1971 when violence and nudity was less commonly seen in films and certainly not how it was handled in "A Clockwork Orange".