

A critique of *A Clockwork Orange*'s shocking elements

Stanley Kubrick's film *A Clockwork Orange* is surrounded by controversy due to its suggestions of promoting a high level of violence and anti-social behavior. Then again perhaps this presentation of violence and sexual abuse is just the surface of a more disturbing underlying message.

The main character, Alex, is represented ambiguously who from the first close up shot, of him staring at the camera with his hat tilted down and those artistic black eyelashes, we feel threatened and see a sadistic side to him. He is the leader of the "droogs" and our narrative guide. He attacks the weaker characters for example the couple who live at the place called "home", and females who are alone like the cat lady. Therefore those who are shocked by this could be vulnerable themselves, meaning he represents danger to them. Then again I feel that the man who was attacked, who ended up in a wheelchair, does then appear stronger and a danger to Alex. The high angled shot of this man as he emits his frustration whilst Alex sings 'singing in the rain' in a bathtub creates a reverse of the situation before. We are positioned awkwardly as we are close to the man and imprisoned by him, where as before only shots of him far from the camera, on the ground were taken. This could be considered as shocking as even though, by itself, the scene where Alex is in the bath while the man becomes aggravated is disturbing, what is more shocking is that our feelings for Alex change as he is then portrayed as the victim, however we still question it.

The use of extreme violence is shocking though the film as we are thrown directly into Alex and the "droog's" fantasies at the start of the film. The use of clear choreography during the gang fight for example presents an ideology of violence and compares it to an art. The mise-en-scene for this fight is then chosen well as it is a theatre of some kind with a grand and old fashioned stage. During the fight the sharp lighting contrasts with the dark blue room. This is framed with the "droogs" beating the other gang members in similar positions across the room. This seems strange to present these vulgar acts of anti-social behavior in a seductive and fun way. However I think that by plunging us directly into this situation firstly, Kubrick manages to make the next part of the film (Once Alex is sent to prison) less disturbing and shocking in that way. Instead we focus on the sinister undertones of the film, which includes the way in which Alex was used as a pawn of the governments to gain votes. The display of 'ultra-violence' then could even make the viewer become unaffected by it therefore change from being physically shocked to being morally and intellectually shocked.

Sound is used to disturb and go against the tone of the film, as for instance the use of Beethoven's symphonies when they carry out their sexual or violent acts. This is comparable with the use of the song 'singing in the rain' when the Alex and his "droogs" invade the couple's house. The Beethoven music used are all in major keys and part of his classical collection, which seems surprising that Kubrick did not use his more dramatic and romantic pieces, but then again this would have become clichéd with the film and therefore the contrapuntal music offers a more eccentric and surreal feel.

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The references to the Bible when Alex is in prison of his fantasy could be construed as potential blasphemy, as he has a fantasy about being a roman guard whipping Christ. This would have been considered to be shocking and offensive to religious institutions, however this coincides with his ability to remember passages from the Bible and his great interest in the Bible. Consequently this could seem more outrageous as it could be connoting an immoral side to the religion. In the scene in where the prisoners are at the church, the camera cuts between Alex and other inmates who are making rude suggestions at him. This clearly presented act is taken place at the front of the stage of the church, and could be used to represent the fusion between sadistic fantasies and safe realities. This then taps into the fear of hooliganism in the safety of your own home.

Alex and his “droogs” are not the only characters who are displayed as disturbing, as some characters of higher authority overstep their mark. Alex’s truancy officer touches Alex inappropriately, and creates an uncomfortable scene to watch. In one shot Alex’s vulnerability is exposed as all he is wearing is his pants and he is framed by the doorway, which sets a claustrophobic tone with continues as the lie on the bed together. The scene is hard to watch as we know to expect the unexpected and the lack of sound in that scene creates more tension and uneasiness for the audience, unlike the earlier scenes of loud and prominent violent behavior. Therefore it stresses a more frightening reality where suggestions are more shocking than actions.

The ending of the film could be considered shocking, to film viewers who expect a resolved narrative at the end, as we are shown a return to form’ rape fantasy of Alex’s, showing he is not cured. However I did not find that to be shocking as through the film you find yourself identifying and sympathizing with Alex as he is released in his house and driven to attempt to commit suicide so it is resolved in a way that suggests criminals cannot be reformed, and defeats the objective of the main plotline. This is more shocking as it leaves the threat of what Alex is capable of alive, and plays with the idea of morality.

Overall *A Clockwork Orange* provides a disturbing insight into a sadistic criminal’s fantasies in an artistic way to detract from reality, which could be perceived as the second part of the film, and therefore emphasize the more shocking realities of our society.