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Review Paper

"Singin' in the Rain": A Comparative Study of Anthony Burgess' Novel, *A Clockwork Orange,* and Its Motion Picture Adaptation

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ABSTRACT

Anthony Burgess's potent and violence-filled novel, *A Clockwork Orange,* garnered more controversy than critical acclaim. Moreover, the number of people who saw the movie far outweighs the number of people who read the book. The motion picture adaptation was so disturbing that Warner Brothers, the production company, withdrew the film from British release in 1973. Some of the allegations levied against the novel and subsequently the movie too was that it had influenced a teenager to murder his classmate, a murder of a vagrant by another teenager, and that it also led to a rape of a woman, with the song "Singin' in the Rain" playing in the background. Despite the notoriety of the movie, it did win its share of success. The reason behind the present study is to comprehend Anthony Burgess's ideology as well as that of Stanley Kubrick and to analyse the inherent criminality of the period during which both the novel and movie were set. This work of literary art traces the protagonist's burgeoning antisocial behaviour and the development of his sociopathic tendencies. The protagonist's innate failure to understand morality and ethics is stressed in both the novel and the film.

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INTRODUCTION

John Anthony Burgess Wilson, in a 1973 interview for *The Paris Review,* categorically states his opinion on books that have led to motion picture adaptations and remarks on the advantages and disadvantages of such an endeavour.

Films help the novels they're based on, which I both resent and am grateful for. My Clockwork Orange paperback has sold over a million in America, thanks to dear Stanley. But I don't like being beholden to a mere filmmaker. I want to prevail through pure literature. Impossible, of course. (Cullinan)

Before A Clockwork Orange hit the markets, Burgess was primarily known for his take on comedy writing. However, most critics agree that Burgess was creative enough not adhere solely to comic writing and tried his hand at biography, autobiography, satire, horror, dystopia, history, espionage, and travel-related literary works.

Burgess's works were so widely acclaimed that he was made a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. Burgess also received several honorary degrees from universities such as Birmingham, Manchester, and St. Andrews for his contribution to the world of letters. Some of his highly acclaimed novels include *The Doctor is Sick* (1960), *The Wanting Seed* (1962), *Nothing Like the Sun* (1964), and *Man of Nazareth* (1979), to mention just a handful.

Burgess was versatile enough to provide the screenplay for motion pictures such as *Moses the Lawgiver* (1974), *Jesus of Nazareth* (1977), and *A.D.* (1985), and critical enough to pen works such as *English Literature, A Survey for Students* (1958), and *The Novel Today* (1963). His critical works on James Joyce, such as *Here Comes Everybody: An Introduction to James Joyce for the Ordinary Reader* (1965) and *Joysprick: An Introduction to the Language of James Joyce* (1973), survey English literature in its entirety.

The mere fact that he learned Persian to translate Eliot's *Wasteland* shows Burgess's literary integrity and the sincerity with which he viewed his craft.

Coming back to Burgess's first fictional work, *The Malayan Trilogy,* or *The Long Day Wanes*, encompasses novels such as *Time for a Tiger* (1956), *The Enemy in the Blanket* (1958), and *Beds in the East* (1959). This trilogy showcases Burgess's literary genius and places him on the same platform as that of colonial writers such as Rudyard Kipling and George Orwell.

Though the present work under scrutiny was seen by most critics as a notoriously aggressive example of literary work, this notoriety was the product of Kubrick's adaptation rather than Burgess's ideology. Blake Morrison, in the introduction to *The Clockwork Orange,* cites Burgess's strident plea that his novel exemplified "a style of aggression" rather than aggression itself. (xxiv)

In order to deliberate upon the book and the subsequent film, one needs to peruse through Kubrick's philosophy regarding his professional perspective.

Robert P. Kolker, in his essay entitled "*A CLOCKWORK ORANGE . . .* Ticking," deliberating on the milieu that Anthony Burgess's book *A Clockwork Orange* (1962) and its motion picture adaptation were set in, commented that:

In A Clockwork Orange, doomsday has come and gone; the world remains physically intact, but the body politic has gone awry—though only slightly more awry than it is in "the real world." Student rebellion, the movement that had catalysed the "law and order" rhetoric in the United States in the late 1960s (and the Mod and Rocker riots that had marked the most recent manifestation of class struggle in England, where Kubrick lived and worked), has here metamorphosed into rampant teenage thuggery. (28)

The motion picture adaptation hit the British theatres on February 2, 1972, and was directed and produced by Stanley Kubrick, whose repertoire includes films such as *Lolita* (1962), *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999), and *A.I.: Artificial Intelligence* (2001), to name just a few. However, not all the aforementioned films have been credited to him, and the role he played in the making of these movies is questionable. Kubrick won an Oscar Award for Best Special Visual Effects in the film *2001: A Space Odyssey* in the year 1969. It was his work in *A Clockwork Orange* that led to his nomination for a BAFTA (British Academy of Film and Television Arts) Award for Best Screenplay as well as Best Film in the year 1973. Though Kubrick was nominated for the above-mentioned award, he never did win a BAFTA Award. Kubrick also won a Golden Globe Award for the Best Motion Picture—Drama category for his film Spartacus in the year 1961. Kubrick was the three-time recipient of the Hugo Awards for his works, *Dr Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964), *2001: A Space Odyssey,* and *A Clockwork Orange,* under the Best Dramatic Presentation category for the years 1965, 1969, and 1972, respectively. Though the novel was written by the British writer Burgess, Kubrick used the U.S. version while directing the film. This is probably one of the primary reasons why Burgess spent the last of his days criticising the motion picture version of his novel or novella, according to some of the critics.

A Clockwork Orange represents the inherent cruelty that is firmly embedded in one's psyche and the various manifestations of such cruelty. Concepts such as moral and amoral behaviour are explored in a futuristic English society that has a totalitarian approach. Burgess, being a Catholic, managed to instil the same tenets that he had grown up with in his novel. It was Burgess's religious tenets that made him see human beings as tainted by the concept of Original Sin.

A Clockwork Orange was conceived by Burgess after a trip to Leningrad during which he saw communism the way most outsiders could not. It is probably this visit that influenced Burgess into seeing totalitarianism as both repressive and oppressive.

This novel begins with a society that is run by a superstate, a state that is inundated with grown-ups who are too passive to control the radical youth. The protagonist is a fifteen-year-old thug in the making, Alex DeLarge, and his band of buddies whose violent tendencies wreak havoc on unassuming and complacent adults in society. Two of the many differences between Burgess's novel and Kubrick's adaptation can be observed here. Alex's last name is never mentioned in the motion picture adaptation, whereas in the novel, the reader does get to know that his last name is DeLarge. Alex's age is another such difference. In the novel, Alex is fifteen years old, but in the adaptation, he is shown to be in his late teens.

A passive society's inability to control the violence-prone younger generation is flawlessly depicted by Burgess. Alex's speech contains elements of both Russian and Cockney-accented language that Burgess calls *Nadsat*. Alex and his gang members, Dim, Pete, and Georgie, spend their time in milk bars such as the Duke of New York and Korova Milkbar, where they are served milk that is spiked with drugs. The narrative begins with Alex and his gang pillaging on the street after leaving the Korova. They go on in a drug-addled state and end up mugging, fighting, robbing, and ultimately raping two ten-year-old girls and a woman. However, in Kubrick's adaptation, the girls are shown to be adults who engage in sexual acts with Alex.

It is after stealing a car and wandering into a cottage that they proceed with raping a woman right in front of her husband. The heinous nature of their crime does not seem to bother any of the gang members, and Burgess stresses their nonchalant attitude in the face of such a grievous act. The beating that they give to the man is something that they hardly think of, and as Alex says, "The writer veck and his zheena were not really there, bloody and torn and making noises. But they'd live." (20)

After leaving the cottage, the gang goes back to Korova, where a fight erupts between Alex and Dim over Alex's love for classical music. The gang's disintegration begins from this point on in the narrative, especially since the gang now begins to see Alex in a new light for punching Dim over their classical music fight. The gang's disapproval of Alex's supercilious manner can be seen in the way Dim hits Alex in the eye while robbing an old woman, thereby leading to Alex's apprehension by the police. The first part ends with Alex getting to know that the woman that he and his gang had beaten and raped earlier had died because of her injuries.

The old ptitsa who had all the kots and koshkas had passed on to a better world in one of the city hospitals. I'd cracked her a bit too hard, like. Well, well, that was everything. I thought of all those kots and koshkas mewing for moloko and getting none, not anymore from their starry forella of a mistress. That was everything. I'd done the lot now. And me still only fifteen. (56)

The lack of remorse that can be noticed in the manner in which Alex sees the woman's death shows the absence of a moral fibre in his character.

The second part of *A Clockwork Orange* begins with Alex serving his fourteen-year sentence in a state jail. Prison life hits Alex hard initially, with several inmates attempting to rape him and the prison guard's merciless attitude. However, he later becomes more adept at handling his affairs and manages to befriend the prison chaplain, who allows him to sit in the chapel and read the Bible. What the chaplain does not realise is that Alex is getting his daily dose of violence through the sex and killing that is described in the Old Testament.

Alex's life in prison is also not without incident. In the course of a fight, Alex kills an inmate and is chosen to participate in a new and psychological trial for what is called a Ludovico's Technique. This technique is used to control and modify the natural viciousness of a person's character, which would then lead to a total abhorrence towards violence. The doctors choose Alex because of his youth and his general propensity towards violence and satisfy themselves with the thought that "This vicious young hoodlum will be transformed out of all recognition." (69)

In Kubrick's adaptation, the murder of the inmate was left out, and the only reason why Alex is chosen for the trial is because of his cheeky answers to the authorities.

It is from this part on that Alex's conditioning begins, and this technique is implemented under the supervision of Dr Brodsky, a sadistic psychiatrist who specialises in behaviourism. Alex is given a shot of a substance that makes him violently sick, after which he is made to watch disturbing movies that are filled with violence. By conditioning Alex in such a way, the doctors make sure that whenever he thinks of violence, his mind feels nothing but revulsion, and it is this revulsion that makes him physically sick. However, Alex's response is mental rather than sickness, and this becomes amply clear by his intense need to be sick even when his body refuses to do so. Alex's need can be noticed by his cries for relief after watching a particularly gruesome act of violence perpetrated against an old woman.

I want to be sick. Please let me be sick. Please bring something for me to be sick in.' But this Dr Brodsky called back:

Imagination only. You've nothing to worry about. Next film coming up.' (79)

The violence that Alex is forced to watch is another reason why the film adaptation was so embroiled in controversy. Most movie critics believed that more than the violence that the adaptation had focused on, it was the exploitation that was harder to watch. The adaptation did not limit itself to violence but to an eerie amalgamation of sexual content and violence, and it was this combination that put off many moviegoers in England.

Alex's conditioning takes two weeks to complete, and by the end of the second week, he realises that violence in any form whatsoever can make him sick to the stomach. Moreover, he also realises that he is unable to tolerate or listen to classical music, too, since music now seems to remind him of the violence that his mind so completely abhors. Kubrick again bypasses the book by showing that the music that Alex is made to listen to as a part of his conditioning is Beethoven's 9th Symphony and not all music in its entirety.

However, this unfortunate side effect does not seem to bother any of the team of behaviourists or the members of the state jail in which Alex is incarcerated, and they consider the project to be an enormous success.

Alex leaves the prison after two years and realises that since he can no longer harm others, he becomes the victim that all the people whom he had wronged can avenge upon. Dim and Billyboy, Alex's rivals, are now police officers, and in a bid to take revenge upon Alex, they beat him senseless and leave him bleeding in the rain. Alex then ventures into a cottage and receives food and a place to sleep from the same man whose wife he had raped; however, the man, Alexander F., fails to recognise him. Moreover, it is here that Alexander gets to know that it was Alex who had raped his wife by the many references that Alex keeps on mentioning. However, in the adaptation, Alexander gets to know the truth because Alex hums "Singin' in the Rain," a song he had hummed while he was raping Alexander's wife.

Once Alexander comes to know about Alex's tale, he sees it as an opportunity to bring the State down by showing the general public that the State was using prison inmates as lab mice to test untested experimental medical procedures. Alexander also gets to know that it was, in fact, Alex who had raped his wife. Alexander and three of his anti-state companions lock him in a room and make him listen to classical music in an attempt to drive Alex to suicide by jumping from a window. They succeed in their plan; however, even after jumping from the room, Alex does not die.

It is at this juncture that there occurs a coup occurs; however, the State manages to take control back and promises Alex that they might help him in deconditioning him in exchange for his public approval. Having agreed to help Alex's deconditioning, the State turns him back into his original violent self, after which he assembles a new gang. However, Alex soon becomes disenchanted with his life, especially after seeing his old friend,

Pete, who by this time is happily married. The novel ends with Alex's hope for a new life and a new beginning that might have a place for his son.

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