

A Clockwork Orange (1971)

Stanley Kubrick directed movies as diverse as Lolita (1962), Spartacus (1960), 2001: A Space Odyssey (1968), The Shining (1980), and Full Metal Jacket (1987). He, reputedly, “perfected every genre movie he realized.” He maintained “absolute artistic control” over all aspects of his movies. He customarily used a narrator, as in this film, and often strongly emphasized music, usually classical, again, as he does in this film. The ability of an individual to make choices in a morally ambiguous world is a recurring motif in his films. Another motif in Kubrick movies is human fallibility when driven by desires and fears. In A Clockwork Orange, Kubrick cut the last chapter of Burgess’s original novel from the film. The novel ends when Alex grows up and develops a conscience.

**Utilitarian Philosophy:** Bentham and Mill believed that only pleasure and pain motivate human actions; Mill saw that motivation as a basis for the argument that, since happiness is the sole end of human action, the promotion of happiness is the test by which to judge all human conduct. British utilitarianism also tried to answer a practical question: “What ought a person do?” Its answer was that one ought to act so as to produce the best consequences possible. A Utilitarian includes all the good and bad consequences produced by an act, whether after it has been performed or during its performance. If the difference in consequences of alternative acts is small, some Utilitarians did not regard the choice between them as a moral issue. Acts should be classified as morally right or wrong only if the consequences are such that a person would wish to see the agent compelled, not merely persuaded and exhorted, to act in the preferred manner. (excerpted from <http://www.utilitarianism.com/utilitarianism.html>)

1. How does the **apparatus** work to position viewers perception of Alex’s acts? Consider camera shots, lens focus, lighting, and the rest of the mise en scène. Consider issues of viewer pleasure: what scenes present erotic images or situations? Does the apparatus assume a male viewer in its presentation of erotic situations? Whose sexual understanding of the erotic seems privileged? (Keep in mind maturity as well as gender and sexual preference.)
2. Briefly describe furniture, wall decorations, rugs, curtains, sculpture, wall colors, and so forth that decorate the following spaces. What do the props **signify** about the theme of fall and redemption?
  - a. The milk bar.
  - b. Alex’s bedroom.
  - c. The theater where Alex’s gang fights other gang. Is the woman here a “prop” or not?
  - d. “HOME” (scene of home invasion). Do the disguises signify anything?
  - e. The cat lady’s house (scene of murder).
  - f. Alex’s prison cell.
  - g. Alex’s hospital room(s).
3. What role does music play in **signifying** character and theme? Beethoven was a genius-composer, so what might Alex’s love of Beethoven signify about Alex’s own genius? When the doctors use Beethoven’s Fifth, does that **signify** anything about their own genius or lack of imagination?
4. Critics argue Alex is a Christ figure. Much of the mise en scène gestures at this. Consider the structure of Alex’s ministry of violence, his fall into prison, his descent into the hell of brainwashing, and his subsequent resurrection to “normal” life. Does the myth of resurrection signify a connection between morality and choice?
5. Does Kubrick’s auteurship affect this film’s presentation of motifs and themes? Explain.