

**A CLOCK WORK ORANGE: AN UNAUTHENTIC
NARRATION, DEPICTING THE TWISTED FACETS OF
A CONDITIONAL SOCIETY**

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Abstract

Stanley Kubrick's A Clock Work Orange introduces us to an absurd man who does not have faith in the self-presumed righteous organizations nor in moral values or in order. Since the film adopts a very brave narration style to depict the abnormal facets of a so-called modern decent society this paper argues that A Clock Work Orange resonates the paradox that binds the two highly contradictory poles- human rights and social justice while making the comparison of the film with Dostoevsky's profoundly thought provoking novel Crime and Punishment in order to elaborate the juxtaposition between crime and redemption.

Key Words: Stanley Kubrick, A Clock Work Orange, Dionysian principles, Dystopian Society, Crime and Punishment, Free Will Vs Behavioural conditioning

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The idea of narration is born out of an urge to explain a thought which tends to expose a new dimension. But human society has not been so kind to new inventions, new ventures, and new discoveries, thanks to the sceptical as well as the conservative mindsets of all the times. Even someone like Plato strongly believed in banishing the poets for he was totally convinced that poets would bring a new idea which in return corrupts the conditioned psyche of the society. We all know how Galileo was tortured for trying to find out the unknown. Here the society was not provoked by what Galileo discovered but it was afraid that his discovery would topple down the age-old beliefs it managed to instil in the minds of those very people who took shelter in it. In the twentieth century, Albert Camus' profoundly disturbing work *The Stranger* went further and defined the human world as an entity devoid of any meaning attached to it. Therefore the absurdist literature placed a sensible man in this meaningless world and he would confront the absurd while struggling to find significance in the chaotic atmosphere.

Stanley Kubrick, the absurdist of visual world, is an American director who has defined the ambiguous nature of the modern disorganized life styles in all of his films. My paper would revolve around his film *A Clockwork Orange* and defines the film as a milestone in formulating a new wave of narration in the world films. Here we have Alex, an absurd minded psychopath who absolutely has no faith in order. He indulges in the antisocial activities as well in the hedonist pleasure. The entire film is narrated by Alex alone, though he is a criminal he has faith in what he does. On the other hand the government totally conditions his mind forcibly when it attempts to reform him. The narrator, however, offers a fresh point of view which confirms that contemporary society often has a twisted idea of morality and righteousness. It does not even hesitate to attack on individual's freewill in order to establish the rigid moral values upon his personality, even if it is by means of force. Thus in this paper I would argue that Kubrick's *A Clock Work Orange* introduces us to the assaults of the righteous system upon an absurd man who does not have faith in the organizations, moral values and in order. Since the film adopts a very brave narration style to depict the abnormal facets of a modern decent society I would elaborate my argument by comparing this work of art

to another profoundly disturbing epic of great Russian writer Fyodor Dostoevskyⁱⁱ's *Crime and Punishment*. Both of these works tend to disclose the nasty face of an autocratic society while emphasizing greatly on the individual experiences of the desperate protagonists who cannot accept this face of the society. Therefore this comparison aims to strengthen my argument.

Apollo and Dionysian, the two Greek Gods represent diverse ideologies. Apollo symbolises the rational order, logical reasoning powers and wise as well as judicious ideas. On the other hand, Dionysian stands for chaos, irrational actions and deeds that would chiefly cater to the human instinctive desires. To put it symbolically Apollonian ideas designate clarity, light and coherent individuality, as the necessary characteristics of human nature. On the contrary Dionysian ideologies directly correspondent to the primordial drives such as ecstasy, intoxication and celebration of pure joys available in nature, thus emphasizing on the exact opposite ideas, proposed in the Apollonian theory. Friedrich Nietzsche, the great German Philosopher puts forth an argument that the tension between these two ideals would cause the tragedy in the Greek Plays. Nietzsche argues that the contradictory perspectives of the two deities act as fundamental forces within the protagonists of the Greek tragedy and lead them to towards their ultimate demise.

A closure look at the Russian Classic *Crime and Punishment*, composed by the most profound writer of the early 19th century Fyodor Dostoevsky, introduces the reader to the sublime blend of the both the apollonian and the Dionysian concepts. The protagonist Raskolnikov is a catalyst of such a mixture. He commits the murder of an old but rich pawn broker and robs her shop, while doing so he kills her poor humble sister, accidentally. Thereafter he is constantly stung by two extremely opposite feeling. He is guilty of his action but at the same time he cannot help but find pleasure in it. He assumes that he is capable of great deeds and therefore he has the special privilege to kill when it is inevitable to get what he deserves. He has looked up to Napoleon the Great and with a great reverence towards him, Raskolnikov acts in accordance to his own free will. Later, near the end of the first part of the novel he literally slashes the old pawn broker to death with an axe, but what comes next is his unquenchable urge to find redemption for the horrible sin that he has committed out of his free will. Here we observe the tendency where a man is torn between remorse and his ecstatic joy of liberty, which clearly reflect the combination of apollonian and the Dionysian principles.

Stanley Kubrick, the greatest director from America, has created the films with universal appeals. His visually striking as well as thought provoking film *A Clock Work Orange* revolves around the idea of 'crime' and 'punishment'. Here the young protagonist Alex is obsessed with anti social and ultra violent deeds. The impact of Dionysian

doctrine is clear on the protagonist since he has a terrible desire to explore the natural but darkest instincts of human personality. He, along with a bunch of rampant young men, goes on breaking the norms and commits greater crimes at nights in the town. He brutally rapes the young wife of an old man who happens to be a writer and nearly kills him by beating the paralysed old man harshly. The next night he violently bashes the face of a lonely woman with a high aesthetic sense for modern painting. The police arrests Alex, the government of the states conducts the behavioural conditioning therapy on Alex. After the therapy, Alex is not in a condition to make decision on his own; he cannot even act violently as his mind is totally conditioned against such violent outburst nor is his mind in favour of any sort of natural or healthy sexual desires. He almost resembles a lifeless robot, devoid of independent decision making power.

The point we need to analyse here is the protagonists from the both of the fictions are struggling to break free from the conventional structures of an autocratic society. Raskolnikov has a problem with the discrimination in the society which is originated in the fundamental structure of the civilization. He wants to justify his violent action through the vicious examples of the history. He often argues with himself that if Napoleon can kill thousands of innocents, then as a poor but extraordinary young man with high knowledge like Raskolnikov himself can definitely break the laws and can act according to his will. There is a pattern in his ideology. Raskolnikov wishes to fly away from the ordinary pleasures of life. He has a great career of a teacher ahead of him, yet he prefers lock himself inside his small suffocative room, a symbolic reflection of a woman's womb, and plans for his most ambitious work, killing the old pawnbroker. Therefore we can claim that the protagonist has completely rejected the possibility of leading a comfortable life with all the materialistic joys. He takes up the path of pain and affliction even when he always has had an alternative chance to lead a secure life. It is his voluntary decision to reject the joys of utilitarian society. Thus Raskolnikov proves to be a rebel within the system who is helplessly struggling to create order through generating chaos in the very structure to which he belongs to. He transcends the reign of physical necessities of human beings, and steps ahead with the hope of transforming himself as a super human. Alex, the protagonist of *A Clock Work Orange* shares similar features with Raskolnikov. He ruptures the rules of the society only to express his disgust towards it. Violence is natural to Alex as the assumption of being a superman is natural to Raskolnikov. But Alex has no desire or ambition to be a messiah and to introduce fundamental changes in the structure of the system. On the contrary, he believes in celebrating the natural violent instincts existing in every human being. There are several scenes to justify the above mentioned argument. Alex and a bunch of brutes wander late at nights while thrashing the helpless beggars in addition to that they rape the young wife of an elderly disabled writer by intruding into his house in the middle of the night.

They also drive the car in a ravaging speed, causing greater damage to the peaceful surroundings of the urban outskirts. Alex's passionate love for violence is very pristine, as he never intends to make profit from his rampages. In other words, Alex's furious behaviour is derived from his intense psychological urges but his purpose is not to earn any materialistic benefits through his ultra violent actions.

Ironically, the members of his group share the opposite point of view. They show great interest in worldly pleasures. Alex responds to this in his own style. 'If you want a car, go and pluck it from the tree.' This statement clearly tells us that Alex is still like the first man who perceives the world as a tiger observes the forest. He is more primitive. Alex sees the world as though it is devoid of moral or social order. In that context he can be taken as a symbolic reflection of Raskolnikov from *Crime and Punishment*. Raskolnikov has defined himself as a super man who cannot be controlled from the normal laws. In Alex's paradoxical vision, the world itself is stripped of all the moral and ethical laws which are the necessary tools to restore the order in the society.

Conflicts of Redemption as seen in both of the dystopian works.

After killing the pawnbroker and her poor humble sister Raskolnikov slides into a frenzy state of mind where he receives many visions of nightmarish landscapes. In one of his dream he sees Petrovich, a police man, beating an old woman and the lady is screaming while the police man blows her face with the smashes of his fist. Never in his life has Raskolnikov heard that kind of howling, or the cursing voices. This dream is a clear indication that the gloom of remorse is beginning to deepen within his conscience. Raskolnikov judges the old pawnbroker Alyona as a futile parasite whose mere existence would obstruct the poor folks from elevating their positions. Since he is so convinced that he is an extraordinary man without any limitation, he assumes himself as a man capable of committing as atrocious act as murder, without the feelings of guilt or remorse, and is able to get away from the crime hence no human laws can be applied to this super human. Yet, the painful howling of the old woman in the dream, reflect the inner turmoil of Raskolnikov. The more human sides of Raskolnikov is insidiously punishing him for the crime he has committed in cold blood. He realises gradually that he does not have the power to restore order in the society by killing people. The ear-splitting laughter sounds of the old woman in the dream is representative of his own conscience's howling cry for justice.

Ironically, Raskolnikov's own conscience would not allow him to escape the regulations of the social order. The ethical voice inside him keeps getting stronger every time he tries to hold it back As a consequence Raskolnikov ends up in the prison after confessing his crime. His mind itself is subjected to all the culturally constructed

principles such as righteousness, honesty, moral codes; for that reason he has to abide those dogmas whether he truly accepts them or not. In other words, Raskolnikov's tragedy lies in failing to alter his mind set which is totally accustomed to the civilized models. Dostoevsky's intention is not to show the crime and the redemption as reflexive tendencies. He has an intensive vision of a society which completely conditions the mind of an individual so subtly that he would not even know the course of that process.

Raskolnikov indeed is gifted with high potential to be a superhuman, but unfortunately his mind or conscience itself has not come to his aid. The reason for this failure is lying deep beneath the structure which can be defined as the evolutionary influence of the social norms over human mind. Therefore Dostoevsky's aim has been to expose the autocratic elements, rooted in the deeper layers of the society, which remove all the unique as well as creative features from a human being and reduces him to social animal that cannot make an independent decision on his own, without thinking of its effects on the society as a whole.

Alex, the protagonist of the film *A Clockwork orange* is a modernised version of Raskolnikov. However his stances and stand point on the social doctrines are totally different from that of the former. First of all Alex unlike Raskolnikov never shows any symptoms of guilt towards his anti social activity, on the other hand he finds a great pleasure in it. He perceives all of his immoral actions as an artistic form of expression. The tendency to find joy in others' pain makes Alex, a typical sociopath with zero empathy. The director Stanley Kubrick was a voracious reader and must have been influenced greatly by the Dostoevsky's doctrines. He draws much of the ideological arguments from the novel *Crime and Punishment* and offers us a regenerated point of view through the character of Alex. Although the movie *A Clock Work Orange* is based upon Anthony Burgess' novel yet the film clearly deviates from its source material.

In the first part of the film Alex is depicted as a young man with total freedom from the moral and ethical insistence of the autocratic society. He indulges in the aesthetically violent actions, but never does he feel even a penchant of guilt or remorse for his deeds. Kubrick seems to have been presenting a superior version of man who cannot be bound nor be suppressed by the characteristics of a civilized society. His free will is so powerful that he remains faithful to his natural instincts. Once the dictatorial Government runs an experiment of behavioural conditioning therapy on him he loses all his natural capacities to act according to his free will. He becomes a perfect example for a law abiding citizen, but this socially acceptable behaviour has occurred in Alex only after forcibly -as well as artificially- erasing his innate ability to operate freely.

Near the climax Alex tries to commits suicide since he cannot bear the burden of his own artificial life, devoid of free will. However he survives after receiving few

bruises, owing to the fall. But now he is fully recovered from the effects of the therapy. He has regained his natural powers to feel exotic in ultraviolet activities. The film ends when Alex violently smiles and says, "I was cured alright!"

One can find a clear implication here which asserts the need to rescue free will of every human being from the dangerous hands of a civilized but autocratic society. In *Crime and Punishment* Raskolnikov makes an honest attempt but ends up succumbing to the civilized norms of the society and gives up his rebellion and fails to discharge his persona from the layers of the social structure. On the other hand Alex goes a step further hence he finds that absolute freedom as he breaks away from the constructed standard of the civilization. The desire to deconstruct the cultured social order and to establish a Dionysian system is first introduced in the Russian novel *Crime and Punishment* nevertheless the same doctrine is much more boldly elaborated in the English film *A Clockwork Orange*. This tendency can be viewed as the cultural reflections.

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ⁱ He is an American Director who redefined the concept of film making as his films represent the exhausted psyche of the modern America, which was torn apart from Second World War as well as the Vietnam War.

ⁱⁱ A great Russian writer whose work anticipates the arrival of Existentialism in the modern Europe