

A Clockwork Orange: The Art of Moral Panic?

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Moral Panic and the Press

ON 2 APRIL 1981 THE HEADLINE of Peter Grieg's *Daily Mail* editorial asked us to consider, 'Is it any wonder John Hinckley tried to kill the President?'¹ Rhetorically the sentiment is clear: one does not need to wonder at all, for 'allowing Hollywood and its imitators to capitalise on brutality is as perilous as handing open razors to potential suicides [or] pressing loaded guns into the hands of people swaying on the margin of murder'.² The power of cinema to corrupt morals and promote violent behaviour is beyond doubt, and worse, 'all this is known ... Hitler and Goebbels knew all about it'. The list of art forms that have been considered socially destructive in the modern era is a long one: from 'video nasties' to 'porn rock' to the *Grand Theft Auto* franchise. Yet the film perhaps most closely associated with moral panic – a film so deadly it was still said to be inspiring presidential assassination attempts ten years after its release – must surely be *A Clockwork Orange*. Defenders of the film will often attempt to distance the work from this aspect of its reception on the grounds that it is misrepresentative of the actual content. Defenders of the book have been known to distance it from the film on the same grounds. But what if, perhaps, some aspect of moral panic as a phenomenon, some guiding structural principle, lies at the core of *A Clockwork Orange* itself? By investigating the many ways in which moral panics intersect with the work, both as novel and as film, it may be that we can find a new appreciation of the role such social hysteria has played in the history of the novel's reception.

¹ Peter Grieg, "Is it any wonder John Hinckley tried to kill the President?" *Daily Mail*, 2 Apr. 1981, p. 3.

² *Ibid.*, p. 3.

As a book, Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange* received very little condemnation from critics on moral grounds. The only foreshadowing of moral panics to come appears as part of a very positive review in the *Eastern Daily Press*, which worried that 'when make-believe is as whole-hearted as this, it can easily become a cult overnight'.³ In fact, when the novel was re-released by Penguin in 1972 it received even higher praise. Many literary reviewers took the opportunity of the film tie-in re-release to state categorically the supremacy of the written version. Jon Greally wrote in *The Western Mail* that the 'cashing in on the notoriety of the film can be forgiven if it also promotes Mr Burgess' original, genuine article'.⁴ For reviewers in certain nations, however, international distribution meant that the Penguin novel was released a number of weeks before the film. As a result, Philip Gordon of *The Jerusalem Post*, for example, reviews the novel as if it were a written preview of the film: 'one of the zaniest and wittiest books I have read in a long time ... [When the film is released] I hope it is funny as well as shocking'.⁵ The effectiveness of this Penguin edition in the simultaneous promotion of book and film would suggest that, although critical response to *A Clockwork Orange* in the early 1960s was cordial, it would be in bad faith simply to exclude the novel from discussions of the film's reception. Legitimately or not, the novel is equally bound to the phenomenon of *A Clockwork Orange* as it appears through the filter of press hysteria.

It is also important to distinguish 'critical' response to the film and the tabloid press phenomenon which was in many ways tangential to that response. Like the novel, the film was generally very warmly received; William Wolf of *Cue* described it as the 'hands-down choice for best film of the year, without another even breathing close',⁶ and the New York Film Critic's Awards agreed, awarding it Best Film and Kubrick Best Director in 1971. The work's satirical targets and moral arguments were widely reported in reviews and the theatrical nature of the violence generally praised for its unflinching approach. In describing the film's visceral qualities Lewis Archibald of *Show* wrote that 'the film is more than just important: it's a necessity. If, as Kubrick's film often hints, only the premonition of disaster can swerve us from an accustomed rut, then this vision should be shown free of charge.'⁷ In London, the tabloid press held a screening of the film in order to gauge public reaction, and the majority verdict was that of

³ Anon. 'Reviews'. *Eastern Daily Press*, 15 May, 1962, p. 23.

⁴ Jon Greally, 'Sycophants, Nannies and a Tough Old Millionaire', *The Western Mail*, (Nov. 1972) p. 261.

⁵ Philip Gordon, 'Reviews', *The Jerusalem Post* (Nov. 1972) p. 12.

⁶ William Wolf, 'Wolf on Films', *Cue*, 15 Dec. 1971, p. 7.

⁷ Lewis Archibald, 'A Clockwork Orange', *Show* (Mar. 1972) p. 50.

the industry critics: “‘Brilliant’, they decided, ‘But Sickening’”.⁸ The only dissenting voice at this stage came from an audience member of questionable authenticity. Although identical audience interviews appeared in the *Sun*, the *Mirror*, and the *Daily Mail*, the *Mail* also managed to find an extra member of the public whose opinion of the film curiously echoed the paper’s editorial line during the coming moral panic:

The film could start off an ‘Orange’ cult that would eventually lead to Fascism. So, although the film is very well made, it’s a very dangerous bit of work. The sex and violence can be seen in the wrong light and the next thing you know people are off on a new crusade that makes rapes and beatings an acceptable part of everyday living.⁹

The benefit to the *Daily Mail* in finding a ‘member of the public’ with an opinion identical to its own can perhaps be seen in terms of the half-page it wrung from the article, as opposed to the *Sun*’s much smaller contribution. The handful of column inches the *Sun* devoted to audience response on 14 January 1972 can also be compared to the double-page spread appearing on 6 January, before the film’s release, under the title ‘The Film Shocker to End Them All’. Across the side of a page filled with stills showing breasts and violence, the paper asks, ‘Do we now accept rape, murder and beatings as screen fare? Is violence such a part of our daily lives that we take it for granted? Tomorrow *The Sun* takes an in-depth look.’¹⁰

The main obstacle to the press wishing to incite moral panic upon the film’s release in 1972 was that its arguments appeared very difficult to sustain once people had actually watched the film or read the book. Peregrine Worsthorne’s article ‘Garbage Disguised as Art is Still Garbage’ in the *Sunday Telegraph* made an attempt at maintaining the vitriol of the ‘respectable man-on-the-street’¹¹ by framing the overwhelmingly positive critical response as the work of decadent liberal elites. William Hall similarly took an interview with Anthony Burgess as he was ‘riding the crest of the shockwaves of controversy’ and added sinister description between his comments:

⁸ ‘Your Verdict on the Most Controversial Film of the Year’, *Sun*, 14 Jan. 1972, p. 5.

⁹ Leo Clancy, ‘Clockwork Orange – What They Think’, *The Daily Mail*, 14 Jan. 1972, p. 5.

¹⁰ ‘The Film Shocker to End Them All’, *The Sun*, 6 Jan. 1972, p. 17.

¹¹ Peregrine Worsthorne, ‘Garbage Disguised as Art is Still Garbage’, *Sunday Telegraph*, 20 Jan. 1972, p. 17.

'It's better to do wrong of your own free will than to do right because the state ordains it,' [said Burgess]. His dark eyes vanished behind their lids in a mixture of wrath and amusement. He'd seen the film and liked it.¹²

Such a technique proved particularly unsustainable, as Hall's main gambit (making it appear as if Burgess wrote *A Clockwork Orange* to celebrate the gang who attacked his wife during the war) resulted in a full-page apology being printed by the *Evening News* the very next day. The only unsolicited letter from an actual member of the public to appear in the press which approached the level of discourse favoured by the tabloids was the provocatively titled 'Aversion Therapy For Burgess' which appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*. The letter began, 'I have not read Anthony Burgess' "A Clockwork Orange", nor have I seen the motion picture but ...',¹³ before suggesting that Burgess supported Hitler. A panicking UK home secretary ordered a private screening on 17 January of which, according to Andrew Biswell, nothing seemed to come after the film was actually viewed.¹⁴ The film itself, it appears, rendered the press's desired moral panic unworkable.

As Peter Krämer describes in his book on the film, the full-blown moral panic only reached its height a year after the film's release in 'the spring and summer of 1973' with a string of so-called 'copycat crimes' in the UK.¹⁵ That the phenomenon only occurred in Britain, home of tabloid culture, highlights the difference between moral panic and critical response: drawing upon the same source material, the two discourses are nevertheless geared towards entirely different functions. After the murder of a homeless man in April 1973, 'the most serious incident associated with the film', the lawyer for the prosecution suggested that the crime 'may have been carried out for excitement as a result of the film'.¹⁶ So began the trend of connecting crimes to *A Clockwork Orange* in a phenomenon which would essentially transcend the film and the book, becoming shorthand for the dangers of unrestricted popular culture. By the time Burgess himself responded in August, the *Daily Mirror*'s coverage of his statement – "'Bloody Judges": What Angry Clockwork Orange Author Calls His Sternest Critics' – had already compiled a list of potential *Clockwork Orange*-inspired crimes and

¹² William Hall, 'Clockwork Orange Gang Killed My Wife', *Evening News*, 29 Jan. 1972, p. 10.

¹³ Joseph Conway, 'Aversion Therapy for Burgess', *Los Angeles Times*, 20 Feb. 1972, p. 29.

¹⁴ Andrew Biswell, *The Real Life of Anthony Burgess* (London 2005) p. 358.

¹⁵ Peter Krämer, *A Clockwork Orange* (London 2011) p. 101.

¹⁶ Biswell, *The Real Life*, p. 365.

rewritten the history of the film's reception, suggesting that 'from the moment the film ... appeared it stood condemned by some critics as sickeningly violent – an invitation to commit real-life crimes of rape and thug-gery'.¹⁷ *The Sun* could even employ the technique of out-of-context quotation without being required to apologise. In 'Author Slams Gentle "Orange" Film', Burgess's words about the media's written attacks are made to appear as if they refer to violent activity: 'I feel bitter because of attacks in my absence. The attacks have been coming for a year now but this is the first murder we had in England.'¹⁸ Media feedback loops, commentary about commentary, sufficiently distances the *Clockwork Orange* moral panic from its primary material. Once this had occurred, 'A Clockwork Orange' became a free-floating signifier to be applied when editorially desired, up to and including presidential assassination attempts.

The impact of the moral panic was such that, although the film was never officially banned, or even censored, by the British Board of Film Censors as a centralised body, it did raise a sufficient stir for local councils to become active in using their powers to revoke the licences of local theatres who threatened to show the film. Before this could come to fruition, however, Kubrick himself stepped in to convince Warner Bros. to withdraw the film from UK cinemas after his family received a series of death threats. Due to the slow-burning nature of the moral panic, this act of self-censorship took place two years after the initial release and arguably after the majority of income from the film would have been made. Nevertheless, this action served to for ever gain *A Clockwork Orange* its notorious reputation as a 'banned film', and it didn't return to UK cinema screens until 1999, after Kubrick's death.

Yet moral panics are themselves cultural productions. They have their own forms and typical narratives and, importantly, are experienced with the same level of subjectivity as films, novels, and political speeches. Returning to the film as it was watched before this moral panic began, we can see that its reception differs considerably even amongst its core audience. Peter Krämer notes how 'an audience survey revealed that the most important segment of the film's audience was male youth [of which, in the US at least,] the large majority were current or former college students' – an audience one might assume to be attracted by the tabloid-friendly sexual and violent content of the film.¹⁹ However, when one goes through the Burgess holdings at the Harry Ransom Centre in Austin, the diversity of responses

¹⁷ Anthony Burgess, "'Bloody Judges": What Angry Clockwork Orange Author Calls His Sternest Critics', *The Daily Mirror*, 6 Aug. 1973, p. 16.

¹⁸ Anon. 'Author Slams Gentle "Orange" Film', *The Sun*, 6 Aug. 1973, p. 18.

¹⁹ Krämer, *A Clockwork Orange*, p. 100.

from people in this age group that one finds is considerable, unexpected, and largely rooted in their own experiences and worries – especially those of morality. ‘Fran’, a student Burgess had taught at Buffalo, wrote on 22 April 1976:

You asked why I was depressed and I really couldn’t explain it at the time. Much of it has to do with the thing I saw in the *Clockwork Orange* film. The scene with Patrick McGee offering Alex wine between clenched teeth, reminded me of my relatives attitude towards me after I had spent two irresponsible years abroad. The way his parents acted when he came home reminded me of how their feelings towards me have changed.²⁰

Another letter, from Michael Brisco dated 18 May 1977, is also concerned with how to act in a manner considered responsible by society. Writing from Northern Ireland at the height of the Troubles, Brisco describes his worry after he tells his teachers about enjoying Burgess’s books and is told in response that they are ‘dirty’. He remains convinced that they are morally corrective, however, writing;

My edition is the Penguin one, but I read and copied the last chapter from a hardback edition in Larne library after watching the interview you did with the book programme. ... Did Alex finally settle down with a wife? I’m curious to know what has happened in the 15 years since he resolved to give up his life of violence.²¹

Larne, stronghold of the Ulster Defence Force paramilitary group, would provide a considerably different context in which to experience *A Clockwork Orange* from the cinemas of London and the newspaper offices of Fleet Street. Rather than promising an imagined future of violence, the twenty-first chapter of the novel seems to promise Brisco the opposite: a future beyond the violence of conflict. It is important insights into readers’ responses like these that demonstrate how little moral panics actually alter people’s reading experiences in all their variety. In looking at moral panics we are looking at something different – something not connected with any individual text but rather the manufactured evocation of a primordial gut-reaction based on some perceived social threat.

²⁰ ‘Fran’, Letter to Anthony Burgess, 22 Apr. 1976, Held at Harry Ransom Centre, Box 67, Folder 3.

²¹ Michael Brisco, Letter to Anthony Burgess, 18 May 1977. Held at Harry Ransom Centre, Box 67, Folder 3.

The Structural Framework of Moral Panic and the Novel

Notably, the term ‘moral panic’ entered sociological discourse in the same year that the film of *A Clockwork Orange* was first seen by the majority of British audiences: 1972. Stanley Cohen’s *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* not only unpacks the mid-1960s ‘Mods and Rockers’ panic but, in doing so, establishes the framework by which moral panics as a media phenomenon are structured. According to Cohen, the pattern of media response to non-specific and routine vandalism in Brighton during Whitsun 1964 gave shape to a lingering fear of newly prosperous youth in the largely imaginary figures of the Mods and Rockers. The subsequent rival trends, either Mod or Rocker, were as much a response to the press phenomenon as the authoritarian police response. In Cohen’s own words,

at the beginning of the decade, the term ‘Modernist’ referred simply to a style of dress; the term ‘Rocker’ was hardly known outside the small groups which identified themselves this way. Five years later, a newspaper editor was to refer to the Mods and Rockers incidents as ‘without parallel in English history’ and troop reinforcements were rumoured to have been sent to quell possible widespread disturbances.²²

Post-war youth, benefiting from high wages and full employment, could for the first time afford to form group identities *en masse* beyond the direct connections of their local communities. Long-established forms of community were threatened by such changes, as well as the social problems suspected to be connected with them. Both adults and young people could find elements of their experience embodied in the caricatures of press myth and the cultural phenomenon of the Mods and Rockers that developed as a result. Individuals’ fears and self-expression similarly developed into a network of common signifiers in symbiosis with the tabloid fearmongering.

The process by which moral panics are formed is labelled ‘distortion’ by Cohen, and operates through the ‘mode and style of presentation’ used by newspapers. ‘The regular use of phrases such as “riot”, “orgy of destruction”, “battle”, “attack”, “siege”, “beat up the town”, and “screaming mob” left an image of a besieged town from which innocent holidaymakers were fleeing to escape a marauding mob’, he writes. ‘During Whitsun 1964 even the local papers in Brighton referred to “deserted beaches” and “elderly holidaymakers trying to escape the screaming teenagers”’. As with many of these stories, however, anyone present on the day – or even just inquisitive

²² Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (London, 2011) p. 3. The reference to troop reinforcements is to *The Listener*, 17 Feb. 1972, p. 198.

enough to check the same newspaper's weather reporting – would know that 'on the day referred to ... the beaches were deserted because the weather was particularly bad' and, in fact, 'the only "holidaymakers" present were there to watch the Mods and Rockers'.²³

In fact, considering the public image presented of the Mods and Rockers as a sociopathic, scooter-riding tidal wave of destruction, there are a surprising number of reports of crowds gathering for the sole purpose of observing them. Cohen describes these 'crowds of adults ... always conspicuous at each stage of an event' who, in spite of their disapproval of what they considered 'disgusting' behaviour, were palpably 'subject to the same hope and expectancy as the boys and girls themselves'.²⁴ At many incidents these disapproving crowds greatly outnumbered the young people present. They would cheer on the police on the numerous occasions when they lapsed into brutality and would turn any minor argument into an imagined beach battle by arbitrarily labelling one group of youths as 'Mods' and the other 'Rockers'. Arguably, without this voyeuristic public ritual the Mods and Rockers phenomenon might never have occurred at all.

First published in 1961, Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange* pre-dates the 'Mods and Rockers' moral panic. In order for moral panic itself to occur, however, there must be a pre-existing non-specific set of tensions which the 'folk devil' of Cohen's title can come to signify. In an interview with Jonathan Owen in 2012, Andrew Biswell describes how the publication of *A Clockwork Orange* came at a time of caution for its publishers and, following a damning reader's report, the book came close to being rejected:

Heinemann had recently been prosecuted for publishing an 'obscene' novel on a homosexual theme by Walter Baxter, *The Image and The Search*. In 1959 they had rejected *Lolita*, having published all of Nabokov's earlier novels. Two of Burgess' earlier books had attracted expensive libel actions, and one of them had been recalled and pulped.²⁵

Alluding to a certain climate of tension in a 1972 piece 'Clockwork Marmalade', Burgess appeared to recognise that 'the problems of growing criminality' were associated with the 'restless and naughty, dissatisfied' youth largely because they were 'more conspicuous than old-time crooks and hoods ... [young people] were what many people meant when they

²³ Cohen, *Folk Devils*, p. 26.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 180.

²⁵ Jonathan Owen, 'How Burgess' Classic *A Clockwork Orange* was tagged "Enormous Flop"', *The Independent*, 3 Sep. 2012, p. 8.

talked about growing criminality'.²⁶ One of the strengths of *A Clockwork Orange* lies in this non-specificity regarding any particular real-life youth trend and may be why, fashioned through *nadsat* and set in the future, the novel emerges positively received.

Reviewers of *A Clockwork Orange* in the early 1960s emphasised the figure of the 'delinquent youth'. Geoffrey Bullock wrote that 'the story is about Teddy Boys in a not-so-far distant state'²⁷ and Kenneth Young that Burgess comes 'to grips with the rising tide of violence which we know in 1962 and which he has carried only a few stages further';²⁸ and Peter Green of the *Telegraph* took the opportunity presented by his review to launch into an extended rant about youth: 'like so many saboteurs operating behind enemy lines. Their ethics are those of the mercenary: if it moves, rape it; if you can't rape it, sell it; if you can't sell it, set it on fire'. Each of these reviews commends Burgess for his realism and commitment to identifying a social evil as yet unlabelled.²⁹

Writing in his 1990 memoir *You've Had Your Time*, the specific social evil Burgess considers himself to be identifying is phrased in terms of the 'Mods and Rockers'. 'Lynne and I had come home to a new British phenomenon – the violence of teenage gangs', he wrote, suggesting that they later 'saw Mods and Rockers knocking hell out of each other when [they] made a trip to Hastings'.³⁰ This is probably an instance of Burgess's habit of never allowing the truth to get in the way of a good story (the Mods and Rockers moral panic occurred four years after Burgess wrote *A Clockwork Orange*), yet it also demonstrates how the moral panic-derived signifiers hover retrospectively over events. In an interview with David Arkell, Burgess posits the inspiration for Alex and his droogs in relation to a trip 'to Leningrad in the summer of 1961 [when] we were rather surprised to find that Russia had its

²⁶ Anthony Burgess, 'Clockwork Marmalade', *The Listener*, 87 (1972), 197–9, repr. in Burgess, *You've Had Your Time* (London 1990), quotation p. 26. The 1972 re-release of the novel also came with its share of contextual pressures in the form of the *Oz* trial, the longest obscenity trial in British history, in which the magazine's editors were eventually sent to prison for pasting Rupert the Bear's head on a Robert Crumb cartoon. Deborah Rogers, agent for both Burgess and Richard Neville (one of the accused), wrote to Burgess in 1971 apologising for her lack of response; the trial was leaving her 'very preoccupied at the moment ... evidently the Prosecution are out for blood and will settle for nothing less'. For Deborah Rogers, the Clockwork Orange moral panic of 1973 would be a re-run of similar experiences two years earlier.

²⁷ Geoffrey Bullock, 'Review', *Birmingham Post*, 15 May 1962, p. 14.

²⁸ Kenneth Young, 'Review', *Yorkshire Post*, 15 May 1962, p. 20.

²⁹ Peter Green, 'Reviews', *Daily Telegraph*, 18 May 1962, p. 14.

³⁰ Burgess, *You've Had Your Time*, p. 26.

own delinquents – stilyagi or style-boys'.³¹ The 'style-boys' and the ritualised nature of their tussles with a local club owner can be found in 1963's *Honey for the Bears*. Sharp-suited, knife-carrying youth characters appear even as early as *The Malayan Trilogy* (1956–9), suggesting that the 'new British phenomenon' to which Burgess returned in 1960 already had its imaginative progenitors, and those notably from an international context.

Burgess's creation of an internationalised figure of youth delinquency, the droog, may have its roots in his first-hand experiences, yet it also intersects with his Catholic philosophy. *A Clockwork Orange*, like *The Wanting Seed* published in the same year, is framed by Burgess's sense of two opposing theological positions through which the problem of evil can be understood. Pelagianism – from the fifth-century heretic monk Pelagius – considers all humans capable of being perfected, while Augustinianism – from St Augustine – considers all humans bound by original sin. From these two positions, Burgess extrapolates the political positions of Pelagian liberalism and Augustinian authoritarianism, but also Pelagian utopianism and Augustinian pessimism. As for the youths he encounters in *You've Had Your Time*, they are seen to 'love aggression for its own sake. They were expressing the Manichean principle of the universe, opposition as an end in itself'.³² This is essentially the manner in which *A Clockwork Orange* is understood by Burgess. His own reading of the novel is that of a conflict between 'youthful free will having the choice of good and evil although generally choosing evil' versus 'the artificial extirpation of free will through scientific conditioning' which is 'potentially a greater evil than the free choice of evil'.³³ The Augustinian notion of evil as a 'natural' state in a world encumbered with free will and original sin lies at the core of Burgess's own conceptual framework for the novel and can be seen to dictate its narrative structure.

The importance of Burgess's use of St Augustine's theology in framing *A Clockwork Orange*, especially when considered in relation to moral panics, is the pre-modern core that informs Augustine's world-view. Looking at his *Confessions*, arguments for free will are often posed with an Aristotelian concern for logical reasoning:

When I chose to do something or not to do it, I was quite certain that it was my own self, and not some other person, who made this act of will, so that I was on the point of understanding that herein lay the cause of my sin.³⁴

³¹ David Arkell, 'Oh my Brothers, He's a Clever Malchick', Draft piece held in International Anthony Burgess Foundation archive, Manchester, UK.

³² Burgess, *You've Had Your Time*, p. 22

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

However, the majority of the work consists of a prurient, self-loathing biographical description in which 'original sin' directs human action at all times away from God and, implicitly, towards the Devil. The impulse towards evil exists almost from the moment of conception: 'If babies are innocent,' writes Augustine, 'it is not for lack of will to do harm, but for lack of strength'.³⁴ A page in one of Burgess's notebooks is filled with ruminations upon evil's supernatural power – 'no compromise with evil', 'evil cannot be punished'. Evil is, in a Nietzschean sense, beyond the moral categories of good and bad, being an absolute force for which there is no possible corrective. When we think of Alex it has to be in these pre-Enlightenment terms: not as an 'individual' but as a living embodiment of evil as a force.

Narratologically, the role that Burgess assigns Alex is one not limited to Catholicism; it can be seen to appear across cultures in the form of the Trickster Spirit. Described by Jung: 'In his clearest manifestations he is a faithful reflection of an absolutely undifferentiated human consciousness, corresponding to a psyche that has hardly left the animal level'. He 'often plays malicious jokes on people, only to fall victim in his turn to the vengeance of those whom he has injured', and although 'this collective figure gradually breaks up under the impact of civilisation ... the main part of him gets personalised and is made an object of personal responsibility'.³⁶ The character that Jung identifies is readily available throughout ancient writings – from the Norse God Loki, to the Chinese myth of Monkey, the Greek Mercurius and Dionysus, carnivalesque characters such as Rabelais's Panurge, and even the Devil himself in his medieval guise as *simia dei* or the Ape of God. It is a character of shocking violence and cruelty but lacking in any adult sense of conscience and motivated purely by a malicious sense of humour – a sort of monstrous Harpo Marx, to give a modern example. Alex, a figure inspiring and inspired by a series of moral panics, is a 'folk devil' in a far more literal sense than perhaps even Cohen meant the phrase to be used. Consciously or not, Burgess's Augustinian framework puts Alex in the position of the Devil in human form, a living embodiment of immortal chaos.

The narrative of *A Clockwork Orange* and the role that Alex plays in it directly relate to the concerns mobilised by a moral panic. Evil (disorder) is embodied as living figure, whether that be the Devil, the Mods and Rockers, or Alex, and the implicit question then presented to the forces of

³⁴ Augustine, *Confessions of a Sinner*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (London 2004) p. 58.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

³⁶ Carl Gustav Jung, 'On the Psychology of the Trickster-Figure', in *Four Archetypes*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (London 2003) pp. 165, 160, 168.

order is how this figure should be responded to. Following Todorov's model of narrative structure, the equilibrium opening *A Clockwork Orange* is Alex at his most devilish and potent; the disequilibrium occurs with his capture and reprogramming; and a new equilibrium can only be restored with Alex once more turned loose. The character who serves as the principal antagonist and counterpoint to Alex can be seen in the writer figure. This character is a living embodiment of order as a fragile and passive state. When introduced he is engaged in abstract moralising, composing the ethical treatise 'A Clockwork Orange' within the secure confines of a private bourgeois household, called simply 'Home'. When the engines of the state engage in their programme of rehabilitating Alex it is on behalf of this figure – the representative of the ordered society that Alex disrupts – that they act. That state intervention does not resolve either character's state of disequilibrium underlines Burgess's key message: that such actions are undertaken in bad faith.

It is for this reason that I consider the three most crucial scenes of *A Clockwork Orange* to be those that form a kind of dialectical thesis/antithesis/synthesis as regards the evil present within the narrative. When Alex invades Home and, along with his droogs, rapes the writer's wife, it is described in these terms: 'I could slooshy cries of agony and this writer bleeding veck that Georgie and Pete held on to nearly got loose' (p. 20).³⁷ It is the writer who is concentrated on within Burgess's prose, held down and made to watch as his wife and home are violated. This disgusted voyeurism is later reversed back upon Alex. Just as he forced the writer to watch, he himself is now forced, in the form of the Ludovico technique: 'I did not think it was possible for any veck to even think of making films of what I was forced to viddy, all tied to this chair and my glazzies made to be wide open' (p. 79). Like the droogs in the bourgeois Home, these images are forced upon Alex from an alien space – somewhere he 'did not think it was possible for any veck to even think of'. The embodiment of evil in both of these scenes is made monstrous as an invasion from the unconscious. The unrecognisable qualities of the horror are such that the victim cannot but succumb to the traumatic vision, an overabundance of illicit, sadistic desires masochistically inverted upon the abject body. The impulse is the same in the disgusted crowds gathering on the beach to watch Mods and Rockers fighting, or even the cathartic, purgative experience that Burgess's intended reader goes through when reading *A Clockwork Orange* itself – moral panic as the cipher of libidinal excess.

³⁷ Anthony Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange*. (Penguin, London 2011).

Following this reasoning, it can be seen that the really important ending of the novel is neither the final American chapter nor the final British chapter, but the moment between chapters 5 and 6 in section 3, where Alex jumps from the writer's window, driven out by the torturous responses drilled into him. This climax brings together both of these disgusted voyeurs in an act of mutually assured destruction and, miraculously, it is in this destruction that both are restored. The writer gets his vengeance, while Alex is 'cured alright' (p. 132) and the story can then conclude. The new equilibrium is established in relation to a primal sense of vengeance that the state's benign intentions cannot fulfil. The writer, made immobile and symbolically castrated by the attack, only gets his revenge by reversing the situation and using Alex's own psychological immobility and castration to destroy him. In this moment, both characters are restored to a new state of equilibrium through the satisfaction of their desire for vengeance.

The deep structures of moral panic notably refuse any sense of rational, egalitarian, post-Enlightenment morality. For both Alex and the writer the status of the writer's wife is essentially reduced to that of another element of private property. Equally, the resolution of the writer's development equates the stability of (equilibrium) Home with that of (new equilibrium) prison, while the privileging of personal agency embodied in Alex's narrative development takes no account of the social contract as a basis for ethics. Considered as a triumph of the will, Alex is free to engage in further crimes or, as in the twenty-first chapter of the British edition, can choose to return to society on his own terms. It is, however, also a stringently anti-authoritarian text. Political subjects are adamantly defended for their stubborn agency; the state is denied the role of the foundation of universal judgement that it too often seeks for itself. The burden of individual agency may be theorised through different discourses in contemporary political philosophy, but the figure of the 'folk devil' remains its most potent and challenging symbol. Alex stalks the pages of *A Clockwork Orange* revelling in the contradictions of contemporary morality and raising Panic in the original, divine sense of the word.

A Clockwork Orange and the Benefits of Moral Panic

In a piece reprinted in the *New Yorker* in 2012, Anthony Burgess described the timely coincidence by which 'B. F. Skinner's book *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* came out at the very same time that *A Clockwork Orange* first appeared on screen.' Skinner's book, one of the most outspoken of the behavioural psychiatry movement, argued for a form of social conditioning based around positive reinforcement. 'We must, so the argument goes, not fear conditioning', Burgess paraphrased: 'We need to be conditioned in order to

save the environment and the [human] race. But it must be conditioning of the right sort.³⁸ Skinner's argument concerns the practice of 'positive reinforcement', the 'tremendous power' of which, according to his writings, is that the controlled subjects 'feel free' while remaining firmly under control and as such 'the question of freedom never arises'.³⁹ For Anthony Burgess and his belief in free will at all costs, Skinner's unabashed celebration of behavioural conditioning and the benevolent, utopian tones in which it is delivered must have appeared the moral antithesis of his own work. Against *A Clockwork Orange*, Skinner's utopian novel, *Walden Two* (1948) seems an insidious counterpoint.

However, it is worth positioning B. F. Skinner in relation to the academic climate within which he published. A number of early successes, no doubt bolstered by a 1960s culture enamoured of scientific possibility, was leading many behavioural psychiatrists into a hubristic confidence in the capabilities of their new methods. A characteristic piece by James V. McConnell appearing in *Psychiatry Today* in 1970, is entitled 'Criminals Can Be Brainwashed Now'. McConnell has a far less rose-tinted view than Skinner, suggesting that 'somehow we've got to learn how to *force* people to love one another, to *force* them to want to behave properly. I speak of psychological force'.⁴⁰ Addressing the hand-wringing liberal reader, McConnell makes clear that 'the techniques of behavioural control make even the hydrogen bomb look like a child's toy, and, of course, they can be used for good or evil'. The implication was that, while the Free West moralised over the good, the Soviets were no doubt working tirelessly towards an evil variation. Another important aspect is the economic context. As Alan M. Dershowitz wrote in the *New York Times* in April 1971, 'Today in America, more than twice as many citizens are confined on the basis of a *prediction* that they may commit a crime in the future than on the basis of a *conviction* for having committed a crime in the past'.⁴¹ In contrast to today's 1.57 million prisoners, the American prison population then sat at only around 300,000 – half the number of those in mental hospitals.⁴² Before prisoners had become a valuable commodity for private enterprise in America it was in the national

³⁸ Anthony Burgess, 'The Clockwork Condition', *The New Yorker*, 4 Jun. 2012, p. 71.

³⁹ B. F. Skinner, *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* (Hackett Publishing, London 2002) p. 183.

⁴⁰ James V. McConnell, 'Criminals Can Be Brainwashed Now', *Psychiatry Today* (Apr. 1970) p. 14.

⁴¹ Alan M. Dershowitz, 'If in Doubt, Don't Let Them Out', *New York Times*, 25 Apr. 1971, p. 8.

⁴² Rory Carroll, 'California Prison Hunger Strike Leader: "If Necessary We'll Resume. This is War"', *The Guardian*, 18 Sept. 2013.

interest to reduce the number of incarcerations, both criminal and psychological, to ensure a healthy workforce. The grandiose predictions of the behavioural psychiatry movement at the height of its confidence promised a means by which both diseases, anti-social behaviour and mental health problems, could be eradicated in a single stroke.

In the midst of the excitement over the possibilities of behavioural psychiatry, the California prison system in collaboration with UCLA and the American Medical Association undertook a series of experiments upon their 'criminally insane' prisoners. Reported in a matter-of-fact manner in *Medical World News* in October 1970, under the title of 'Scaring the Devil Out', these experiments were said to consist of both the use of succinylcholine, a muscle relaxant, 'as an aversion tool to make incorrigibles think they're going to die', and, on three occasions, amygdalotomies of which 'more are planned'.⁴³ The effects of succinylcholine – a 'treatment' administered to over 150 people – were described to Burgess a year later in November 1971, during an interview for the *Chicago Tribune*:

The drug acts slowly. First, the prisoner feels a growing numbness in his fingers. Soon, he can't move his hands or feet. The deadness creeps up his limbs, and he can feel himself losing control. His arms and legs begin to feel like dead flesh around him. Then his chest sinks to numbness, and his head lolls uncontrollably. He is paralysed, and his mind swims alone, without a body. Then, for about two minutes, he can't breathe. [It is then that the doctor] tells the terrified man what he must and what he must not do in the future to keep from getting a jab of this drug again.⁴⁴

In essence, the treatment had none of the finesse of the Burgess original or the Kubrick adaptation, but it was the methodology of the Ludovico treatment nonetheless. When behavioural psychiatry was given government sanction it reverted immediately from the painless utopian path of Skinner and directly onto to the road assigned to it by Burgess ten years earlier.

But *A Clockwork Orange* did not only predict the excesses of behavioural psychiatry. In this case, it can also be seen to have helped end them. The title of the *Chicago Tribune* interview quoted above, 'The Nightmare of the Clockwork Orange', was one of many to include the words 'Clockwork Orange' in relation to succinylcholine, most appearing without the context of the author at all. 'Clockwork Orange at UCLA?', asked one title from

⁴³ 'Scaring the Devil Out', *Medical World News* (Oct. 1970) p. 29.

⁴⁴ Philip J Hils, 'The Nightmare of the Clockwork Orange', *Chicago Tribune*, 7 Nov. 1971, p. 62.

February 1973, describing the 'program of mentally crippling brain surgery ... narrowly averted last year when news of the plan leaked to the public'.⁴⁵ Jessica Mitford, in her study *Kind and Usual Punishments in California*, takes the title of 'Clockwork Orange'⁴⁶ for her chapter on the experiments, and her research files held at the Harry Ransom Centre⁴⁷ in Austin are bursting with examples of this particular moral panic and the 'real-life Clockwork Orange' label by which it was unfailingly identified. In 1970 such treatments were described in *Medical World News* quite openly without objection being raised,⁴⁸ but at the end of 1971 the American press was suddenly scandalised at such barbarity and was well on its way to fermenting a successful moral panic. Between the two, Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* was released and with it, albeit unknowingly, the perfect imaginative shorthand by which the press could harness their readers' moral outrage was coined.

As has been said, moral panics around cultural artefacts are not connected to those artefacts in the manner of academic or journalistic criticism. Moral panics are distinct phenomena – conceived for a different purpose, promulgated through different channels, and achieving far different effects. True, *A Clockwork Orange* is structured in such a manner that it engages directly with the psychology of moral panics, giving voice to the 'folk devil'. But if we are to claim that it is this strength in Burgess's writing that saved countless mentally ill people from the torture of succinylcholine, then we must equally see in it a justification for the excesses of the British press and the infamous associations which surround the text to this day. Writing in 'The Clockwork Condition', Burgess says of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* that it is 'a nightmare vision which may conceivably have prevented a nightmare fact from being realised: no one expects the real 1984 to be like Orwell's'.⁴⁹ Yet a week barely passes in which a political commentator does not equate some new government policy to *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The excesses of early 1970s behavioural psychiatry have long been kept in check. Perhaps popular infamy was the price *A Clockwork Orange* had to pay in order to achieve this objective? If that is the case, it could be said rather fittingly that Burgess was the subject of a Devil's bargain.

⁴⁵ Edward M Opton and Fay Stender. 'Clockwork Orange at UCLA?' *Future of Treatment*, 14 Feb. 1973, p. 8.

⁴⁶ Jessica Mitford, *Kind and Usual Punishments in California* (Alfred A. Knopf, London 1974) p. 68.

⁴⁷ Jessica Mitford archive. Harry Ransom Centre. Boxes 24 to 60.

⁴⁸ 'Scaring the Devil Out', p.37.

⁴⁹ Burgess, 'The Clockwork Condition', p. 74.