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The Uniqueness of Stanley Kubrick's Adaptations and its Subsequent Effects

Bachelor's project in Engelsk bachelor

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June 2020

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Bachelor thesis

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02.06.20

Abstract:

Stanley Kubrick created *A Clockwork Orange* in 1971. This film is an adaptation of Anthony Burgess' novel of the same name. It seems paradoxical to create something unique while recreating something already well-established in pop culture. This essay will illustrate how Kubrick's unique approach to films creates these phenomena and why he deserves to be recognized as an auteur. Author's views on how their novels are interpreted will then be presented. Further, the validity of fidelity as a criterion will be discussed, before Kubrick's adaptations will be compared to their respective source material to illustrate how analysis of these are valuable, yet fruitless. The aim of this essay is to demonstrate that Stanley Kubrick's adaptations conjures a stature which renders comparisons to the source material futile.

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Antony Burgess published *A Clockwork Orange* in 1962. The novel was adapted nine years later, by Stanley Kubrick, in 1971. This adaptation has been the target of frequent criticism from Burgess and major controversy. Kubrick is an eccentric man surrounded by myths and debates. While his films are highly profitable and popular, they are equally controversial and criticized. This essay will discuss how Kubrick's unique approach to films creates these phenomena and why he deserves to be recognized as an auteur. Author's views on how their novels are interpreted will then be presented. Further, the validity of fidelity as a criterion will be discussed, before Kubrick's adaptations, mainly *The Shining* and *A Clockwork Orange*, will be compared to their respective source material to illustrate how analysis of these are valuable, yet fruitless. The aim of this essay is to demonstrate that Stanley Kubrick's adaptations conjures a stature which renders comparisons to the source material futile.

The Shining tells the story of two parents, Jack and Wendy, and their child, Danny, staying a winter at the Overlook Hotel. Jack is hired to be the caretaker and has time to work on his novel while they stay there. The hotel is haunted, and Danny has mysterious supernatural abilities that are linked to the hotel. It is up to the viewer to decide whether Jack becomes possessed or goes insane from solitude before he goes on a murderous rampage to kill his family. Regardless of the cause of this rampage, the apparitions in the hotel manipulates the characters, particularly Danny and Jack (*The Shining*). *A Clockwork Orange* was created by Kubrick nine years prior and details the young boy Alex' journey in a dystopian England from the leader of a gruesome gang of hoodlums to a subject of an experimental treatment titled the "Ludovico Technique". This treatment transforms Alex into an involuntarily law-abiding citizen. Alex is released from prison thanks to his participation in the experiment but is punished for the crimes he claims to have atoned for by society. The story is threefold in both the film and the novel, where, in the first act, Alex wreaks havoc on society. He and his friends break into the home of a couple, where they tie the man up and rape the woman. The hoodlums continue this conduct, with Alex' friends growing gradually more tired of him, until they decide to break into a rich woman's house, where the droogs betrays Alex and he is arrested. The second act of the story consists of Alex being in prison.

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Here he learns about the Ludovico Technique, and realize that it is a possibility for him to prematurely get out of prison. The process of the technique is cruel and taxing. Alex becomes programmed to feel ill whenever he associates with violence. When he is released, in the third act, society punish him for what he has done to them. He is no longer welcome in his home and his former droogs has become police and abuse him. He seeks refuge in the closest house after being abused by his former droogs, he unknowingly goes to the home of the couple he had attacked in the first act. When the, now, widower recognizes Alex due to recollecting him singing the same song at both visits to the house, he seeks revenge and punishes Alex by playing the music he formerly adored, but accidentally were programmed to feel ill by being exposed to.

(*A Clockwork Orange*, Kubrick). All these elements of the story are present in both Burgess' novel and Kubrick's film, but it would be highly unrealistic to expect Kubrick to completely recreate the story with no noticeable differences. Still, authors have been vocal about their disdain for how Kubrick has interpreted their novels in their respective adaptations.

Kubrick has long been regarded as an auteur. Griggs defines this as a director whom "exhibits a distinctive style across a body of work and is credited with having a unique, creative vision (249)". One would assume that adaptations would hardly be relevant for meriting this title, considering the work would not be an original product, yet Kubrick is one of the most undisputed directors in regard to this title despite the majority of his films being adaptations. Kubrick's artistic influence on adaptations such as *A Clockwork Orange*, *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) and *The Shining* (1980). One distinction in Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* which differentiates the film from its source material is the emphasis on the boot camp prologue. While being merely 28 pages of the novel, it comprises the first 45 minutes of the film (Welsh 255, *Full Metal Jacket* 00:00:00-00:45:25). The emphasis on the Boot Camp provides depth to the main character, Joker, and is intended to allow the viewers to relate more to him. The theme of the duality of man, which also is a central theme in *A Clockwork Orange*, is stressed by drawing more focus towards the early trauma Joker, a seemingly playful character, suffers (*Full Metal Jacket*). This is one example of how Kubrick makes directorial decisions that justify his perceived creative ownership of films, there are several major and minor changed made in the adaptation of *The Shining* which highlights this. The perspective is no longer centered around Danny, but rather Jack, which is a major change (Welsh 252). This allows the exploration of psychosis to be more elaborately explored, as opposed to the supernatural elements of the film. The supernatural is still prevalent but not directly expressed through the boy Danny, which sets the film apart from the novel to a

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certain extent. Still, there are numerous minor changes which alter the story to suit Kubrick's style and recognizable traits.

Danny's interaction with the supernatural is not as prominent as in the book, his has the effect of making the hotel a character in itself. This is achieved with elements that seek to disorient the viewer, such as subtle logistical impossibilities (*The Shining*). Kubrick's presence in this film is felt by the viewer as they are captivated by sharing the characters' disorientation. The earliest example of this occurs in Jack's interview with Ullman. Seconds prior to the interview, a hallway can clearly be seen in the background of the shot that would lead to a hallway behind Ullman's office, yet trees are visible from the window of this same office the moment Jack reaches the doorway (*The Shining* 00:03:23-00:03:28, 00:03:34-00:09:53). The hallway behind the office would thus be an impossibility. Another similar phenomenon occurs in the film when Jack enters room 237. There are two showerheads that are visible when Jack opens the door to the bathroom but removed in the next scene when Jack enters the room, before they are visible again in the next scene (*The Shining* 01:12:37-01:14:00, 01:14:08-01:15:03, 01:15:33-01:15:50). These phenomena would in most instances be regarded as continuity errors, yet these scenes, in addition to numerous other scenes, are frequently debated about whether they are intentional inconsistencies or not. These errors do serve the purpose of disorienting the viewer, which is a plausible motivation considering the plot and atmosphere of *The Shining*. The hallway behind Ullman's office is the example that is most problematic to dismiss as merely a mistake. There are no cuts between the hallway being visible and the windows entering the frame. This scene was a tracking shot in a long take, meaning the set would have to be specifically built in this manner. This would either entail that neither Kubrick nor anyone working on set noticed the error, or Kubrick did not care about this detail. Both scenarios are unlikely due to Kubrick's excessively demanding nature as a director. He is notorious for demanding an unreasonable amount of takes on set, with *The Shining* being an extreme in this case, rather than an exception (Taylor 18). Meta elements such as these contribute to the mystique surrounding Kubrick and his films, which became a major aspect of how he is perceived as an auteur.

Kubrick's fame and status often cause his films to overshadow the novels they were adapted from. *The Shining* is an adaptation where there are particularly noticeable differences, much to the dismay of Stephen King, author of the novel. Stephen King produced his own adaptation of *The Shining* in 1997, which is a testament to his disdain for Kubrick's version. This adaptation was not as popular as the 1980 film but more faithful to the novel (Welsh 253). This is not the first instance of an adaptation by Kubrick that the author of the novel has

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expressed having issues with. Anthony Burgess frequently criticized Kubrick's interpretation of *A Clockwork Orange*. Burgess' most frequent account for his issues is the ending of the film being completely different from the ending of the novel, a fate shared by *The Shining*. Stephen King's *The Shining* ends with Jack's self-sacrifice as he burns the hotel to the ground, while the adaptation ends with Jack freezing to death and becoming a permanent part of the hotel, symbolized by a picture in the hotel that he becomes a part of (Godfrey 126). The contrasts in these two endings are striking. Not only is Jack cured and finds redemption at the end of the novel while being doomed to eternal punishment at the end of the film, he burns to death in the novel and freezes to death in the adaptation. These endings are quite opposites, even though both do allude to an afterlife, the works respectively allude to heaven and hell. Kubrick's ending of *A Clockwork Orange* differs similarly Burgess' ending of *A Clockwork Orange*, to the extent of having opposite conclusions. In the novel, Alex is cured and resorts to his old ways until, in the 21st chapter, he discovers that he has grown tired of the crimes he once enjoyed (*A Clockwork Orange* 202-204). This moral redemption is comparable to Jack's fate in the Stephen King novel, additionally both characters are redeemed after being cured. While in the Kubrick adaptation the story ends when Alex is cured, implying he will return to committing crimes. Alex does, in fact, return to committing crimes in the novel before growing up. Still, the film conveys the message of Alex permanently staying a criminal, which removes character development. The message of Alex choosing another life for himself due to being significantly older than the beginning of the story, thus commenting on how violence is a phenomenon restricted to immature, young delinquents, is lost.

The main theme in this story is free will, which is discussed through the moral conflict of eliminating Alex' choices to improve his behavior. This may be interpreted as a criticism of unregulated government control, but Burgess is reluctant in embracing this analysis of the story. "Young Alex and his friends speak a mixture of the two major political languages in the world – Anglo-American and Russian – and this is meant to be ironical, for their activities are totally outside the world of politics (*A Clockwork Orange* 262)" Burgess insists, before elaborating that he thinks the real problems of this age were internal, not economic or political. "Acquisitiveness. Greed. Selfishness. Above all, aggression for its own sake (*A Clockwork Orange* 262)". These were the problems Burgess wished to exhibit in his novel, which may have been lost in the film, since Alex wins on his own terms in the end (*A Clockwork Orange*). Burgess may dismiss any political connotations to ward off the criticism and controversy *A Clockwork Orange* garnered when he claims the moral of this novel was

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supposed to be the importance of free will, rather than a cautionary tale of unregulated government control, a moral which becomes more distinct in the 21st chapter of the novel (*A Clockwork Orange*). This ended up being a futile attempt, as critics widely reproached it due to the graphic depictions and not the possibility of the motivation behind the work being political critique. Kubrick's previous satirical works had been exaggerated and obvious satire, while *A Clockwork Orange* proved to be more enigmatic and convoluted due to the crueler themes and depictions. John Fraser claimed, in 1974, that *A Clockwork Orange* was the main instigator of the condemnation of violence in films in the early 1970s (Welsh 253-254). The film received an X rating both in the US and the UK and allegedly sparked riots and violence after screenings (Lázaro 77-78).

The controversy surrounding the film was not the first obstacle *A Clockwork Orange* had to face. Burgess claims he "would resist to the limit any publisher's demand that a glossary be provided (*You've Had Your Time* 38)" as this would defeat the purpose of his novel. A central theme in the novel is brainwashing, which Burgess hoped the novel would achieve itself (*You've Had Your Time* 38). The Nadsat in this novel is a constructed language with its lexicon being a hybrid between English and Russian (Craik). By reading this novel the reader would pick up Russian words without realizing it, which would thematically reflect the story itself. Including a glossary with the novel would completely nullify this effect. Still, the American edition included a glossary, in addition to the exclusion of chapter 21 (*A Clockwork Orange* 261). This may explain Burgess' disdain for Kubrick's adaption, which also excluded the events of the 21st chapter. Burgess infamously did not condone Kubrick's treatment of the story which further ascended him into stardom. Despite the expansion of audience, Burgess was rather remorseful for allowing this adaptation to happen, and went on to condemn the whole story, including his original edition, with claims like the novel being "knocked off for money in three weeks (*Flame into Being* 205)", which undermines his emotional investment in the story. He has also commented that "it is ironic that I am always associated with *A Clockwork Orange*. This, of all my books, is the one I like the least. I wrote this book in 1961, which was the year after I was supposed to have died, and the book reveals a lot of the turmoil in my mind at the time (*A Clockwork Orange* 257)", which implies that he was wrong to write it, and the novel is of low quality. He is even more explicit in his remorse when he states that his novel "became known as the raw material for a film which seemed to glorify sex and violence. The film made it easy for readers of the book to misunderstand what it was about, and the misunderstanding will pursue me until I die. I should not have written the book because of this danger of misinterpretation (*Flame into Being* 205)". These

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comments from Burgess may indicate that the increased controversy from the film release motivated him to completely dismiss the novel and everything related to it. The division of interpretations may thus be explained by the exclusion of this final chapter in the American edition of the novel. Burgess claimed to be “plagued by the fact that it has really been two books” (*A Clockwork Orange* 261) because his American publisher did not condone the ending of the novel. The “American version” differ from the version published for “the rest of the world” by being 20 chapters (*A Clockwork Orange* 261). Alex’ “American end” has him revert to his old habits of cruel behavior illustrated in Part 1 of the novel (*A Clockwork Orange*). This differs greatly from Alex’ farewell in the British version, where he decides to grow up, search for a wife to start a family with and lead by example for his future son (*A Clockwork Orange* 202-204). The change of heart presented in this chapter leaves an impression that one can always change for the better, and this theme of redemption or hope is exactly what the American version is missing. The American “unhappy ending” may have motivated the frequent interpretation of this story glorifying violence. Tragically, for Burgess, this is the novel Kubrick happen to read. Kubrick was simply unaware of the British version’s existence until the film was completed (*A Clockwork Orange* 261).

It seems Burgess’ vision for *A Clockwork Orange* strayed far from the intended purpose of his novel. This is not an ideal basis for an adaptation. The aforementioned factors contributed to the unlikeliness of Kubrick’s adaptation faring well with those who set fidelity as a criterion. It is no surprise that Burgess labels the film “a radical remaking (*A Clockwork Orange* 245)” rather than “a mere interpretation (*A Clockwork Orange* 245)” after seeing it in theater. Burgess further distances his work, and himself, from the film by saying “it was no impertinence to blazon it as *Stanley Kubrick’s Clockwork Orange* (*A Clockwork Orange* 245)” amid reiterated praise of Kubrick’s talent, which on the surface appears to be an approval of Kubrick’s adaptation, while he simultaneously highlights the dissimilarity between the novel and film (*A Clockwork Orange* 245). But should an adaptation be identical to its source material as far as this is feasible? I previously mentioned it would be highly unrealistic to expect Kubrick to completely recreate the story with no noticeable differences. The criteria of fidelity, or “faithfulness”, and its relevance have been heavily debated (Griggs 1-2). George Bluestone stated in 1957 that “changes are *inevitable* (5)” and “the film becomes a different *thing* in the same sense that a historical painting becomes a different thing from the historical event which it illustrates (5)”. These statements argue that novels and films should not be judged on the same bases because the formats are simply incomparable. Still, authors would most likely find it desirable for the relevant adaptation to

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be as close to how they would imagine the story and depictions as possible. A new problem arises in the creators of adaptations not knowing exactly how the author would imagine the film. It is normal for directors to consult authors when adapting a novel. This is not always possible, and, in some instances, perhaps unnecessary. Geoffrey Wagner has tried to help alleviate this tiresome debate with his suggestion of three categories of adaption:

transposition, commentary and analogy. A transposition would have “a minimum of apparent interference”, a commentary would be “either purposely or inadvertently altered in some respect”, and an analogy “must represent a fairly considerable departure for the sake of making another work of art (Cartmell and Whelehan 205-206)”. Burgess was likely concerned that critics would view the film as a transposition, thus, casting equal blame on him for the controversial depictions in the film. This may be the reason Burgess declared the film an analogy (*A Clockwork Orange* 245), which is as far from the novel as this film could be while sharing its name. Still, the film follows the plot of the novel closely, presents the same characters, and contains frequent identical dialogue, which are indications of the film being a commentary. Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* is significantly closer to its source material than *The Shining*.

While it is clearly established that complete fidelity is near impossible, this does not necessarily equate an inhibition. Kubrick does make the story his own, like Burgess stated (*A Clockwork Orange* 245), by utilizing filmic equivalences where it is necessary. The novel achieves a symmetrical effect through the parallels and contrasts in the first and third parts. Many of the wrongdoings Alex commit in the first part of the story is done to him in the third part. Another literary device used to convey symmetry in the novel is the repetition of the phrase “what's it going to be then, eh?”. This question is echoed on page 7, 85 and 143, as the very first sentence of each part, before it is answered on page 204 (*A Clockwork Orange*). Kubrick's filmic equivalent may be argued to be the visual symmetry in the film, in addition to the parallels and contrasts in the plot (Kubrick). The phrase “what's it going to be then, eh?” is a motif occurring with different meanings throughout the novel. One could argue that the different meanings this phrase takes upon itself in the novel is Burgess' showcase of the versatility of language, much like he does with the Nadsat. This depth is difficult to convey in a film. Kubrick's *Orange* contains this phrase once, when the priest in the prison chapel lecture the inmates on morality, maintaining the sentiment of the phrase in this context, yet does not convey the same effect of framing as Burgess' novel, where the question is answered in the end (*A Clockwork Orange*).

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A film may not be able to measure up to its source material on all accounts, yet has possibilities where a novel would be limited. One could imagine the supply of accompanying Beethoven to the scenes' events is an element Burgess would desire as a reader experience if it was a possibility. Kubrick invents elements in this story which did not appear in the novel, like Alex' snake in a drawer in his bedroom (Kubrick 00:19:00). This is an intimate and private location to Alex, which is comparable to his relationship with his droogs. If we take a closer look at the semiotics of this film, we see that Alex' snake is a signifier to foreshadow his droogs turning on him (Nichols 32). A snake is a symbol of betrayal, like the black mamba was used by Elle Driver, played by Daryl Hannah, in *Kill Bill vol. 2* (2004) to betray Budd, played by Michael Madsen (*Kill Bill vol 2* 01:09:48). The snake is also used to signify Alex' parents' discomfort around him, like the danger felt at the presence of such an animal, proven by them ridding themselves of the snake after Alex goes to jail (Kubrick 01:32:40). Another independent narrative tool is the song *Singing in the rain*, which provokes an irony exclusive to the film. Alex sings this song when he and his droogs attack a couple and rape the woman. The jarring juxtaposition of the elation related to Alex' singing and the cruel nature of the attack taking place is an instance of Kubrick elevating this scene in his own right. The song later provides irony and suspense when Alex sings it in a bathtub in a room above the man he previously attacked, which causes the man to recollect the events and take revenge (Kubrick 01:49:18). In addition to supplying these elements to his telling of the story, Kubrick took measures intended for practicality. Nichols explains in *Engaging Cinema* that "continuity includes all the ways of organizing shots so that the transition from one shot to the next does not jar the viewer (30)". This was utilized by Kubrick when he chose to cut the part where Alex is transported into the city. He also chose to have the bums rush Alex in the tunnel where he first beat up the old man with his droogs, which creates another case of symmetry and underlines the revenge aspect, as he reaps exactly what he sowed (Kubrick).

This supply of independent narrative tools compensates for the limits of adaptation. Novels and films have different effects on the readers and viewers. The film may have received harsh criticism and censorship (*A Clockwork Orange* 245), yet Christopher Ricks of *New York Review of Books* argued in 1972 that the film aimed to portray Alex as more forgivable than in the novel. Ricks specifies that "Alex is made younger than in the book (*A Clockwork Orange* 280)", the prison staff is crueller, and sentimentality for "drugs and syringes (*A Clockwork Orange* 280)" is replaced with sentimentality for his pet snake when Alex returns from the prison among other things (*A Clockwork Orange* 280). Also, the girls Alex brought home to have sex with were 10 years old and did not consent in the novel, but

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were consenting teenagers in film (*A Clockwork Orange* 284). If this attempt at garnering sympathy for Alex was Kubrick's true intentions this would be a controversial choice in itself, as it could be related to truly glorifying violence by making Alex the true hero of the story, the good side. This might rather be a natural result of the film format. The actor's pained expressions may invoke sympathy more than possible in the novel, and the less frequent narration from Alex as an internal monologue directed at the reader or viewer may result in viewing the events of the story more objectively. The intimacy between the narrator and reader is hard to equivalently translate to the film because Alex' complete thought process cannot be included, which may be the most glaring difference in the adaptation; the change of perspective to the third person. Who is to say whether the narrator-reader relationship or visual supplementation is superior? If the film invoked more sympathy for Alex than the novel did, this would suggest that films are more effective in this subject, but that would be highly speculative. Still, one cannot deny that literary devices differ in impact dependent on which format it is presented on.

The confusion regarding continuity errors in the adaptation of *The Shining* is a testament to the status of Kubrick. They are suspected to be intentional because they are too obvious to have gone unnoticed. It is improbable that the man that demanded on average 11 takes per set up in the beginning of the production would fail to recognize blatant logistical flaws. There are numerous occasions where it would be hard to believe that Kubrick did not deliberately decide the continuity errors. Wendy changes the hand she holds her knife in between shots four times when she is exposed to the apparitions of the hotel (*The Shining* 02:09:19-02:10:08). These errors may be interpreted as a device to subconsciously simulate chaos, which would be fitting for the scene. The scene where the hallway impossibly could exist due to the windows in Ullman's office demanded 41 takes, which entails that this set was scrutinized and planned meticulously (Taylor 18). However, with Kubrick's scrupulous nature as a director, it is hard to believe that he was not aware of the existence of the British version of *A Clockwork Orange*, like Burgess postulated. If this was fabricated by Burgess, in one of his copious rants about the adaptation, it would suggest that Kubrick deliberately excluded the 21st chapter. This argument can be justified by assuming that Kubrick preferred the American ending. Kubrick stated in an interview with the New York Times in 1972 that "One of the most dangerous fallacies which has influenced a great deal of political and philosophical thinking is that man is essentially good and that society is what makes him bad (Welsh 253)". This suggests that Kubrick put more weight on the political substance of the story than Burgess claimed to do. There is no subjective, correct answer to which theme that

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is more important of free choice and government control in *A Clockwork Orange*. Kubrick may have viewed the theme of excessive government control in a dystopian society as more appealing than Burgess did. Regarding what was cited from Bluestone previously, that the two works in an adaptation are incomparable, one could argue that the visual stimuli of a film is more striking than what you read in a book, which creates more sympathy for Alex. One would assume that Alex would receive equally more detest from his crimes in this case, though. Another reason for Kubrick excluding the 21st chapter may be that the American ending was widely recognized and popular among young people in the US after its release (Lázaro 77).

The title *A Clockwork Orange* is more enigmatic in the film, as it is more emphasized in the novel. This lack of exploration of the title is debatably the most obvious difference in the works besides the narrative perspective and the end of the story. The title “is a venerable Cockney expression for anything queer (*A Clockwork Orange* 259)” according to Burgess, who continues; “‘Orang’ is a common word in Malay, and it means a human being. The Cockney and the Malay fused in my mind to give an image of human beings, who are juicy and sweet like oranges, being forced into the condition of mechanical objects (*A Clockwork Orange* 260)”. A Clockwork Orange is a symbol of Alex’ conditioned state after the Ludovico experiment, which was a scientific, mechanical process aiming to alter the organic and abstract nature of Alex’ free will. Ironically, his change into a lawful citizen was an organic process, which happened naturally in the novel. The Ludovico experiment did not achieve this (*A Clockwork Orange*). This moral disappeared in the film, which evokes the sense of evil not being possible to cure. One could compare Alex to Peter Pan in the American version and the film, how he never grows up and chooses to live on irresponsibly, which coincidentally also is a “happy ending” for him.

It is equally true that Kubrick’s film and Burgess’ novel are prospects of valuable analysis, as it is that neither work is superior to the other. Both works are entirely unique and are simultaneously undeniably akin. It is a impressive achievement that Kubrick created an adaptation to Burgess’ novel with such accuracy, while the result still is an entirely unique film. The characteristics of Kubrick films are prevalent throughout the film in everything from the mise en scène to the atmosphere conjured through literary devices. The conflict Burgess frequently refer to is likely a result of the impact of the film. Good and bad. Still, the superiority of each version is completely objective, and as Burgess says; “you must make up your own minds as to which ending you prefer. You can always leave before the end (*A Clockwork Orange* 261)”.

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