

## ENGLISH: 1984

### How do texts bring into question the natural human ego by framing humankind as weak or easily swayed, particularly in a position of extreme duress?

As human beings, it is inherent within us that we place great importance on our values and our place in this world. This is evident throughout everything we do, from the use of social media to perform our lives to others who don't *really* care, our natural stubbornness in arguments when we are only half-sure we're right, or even just global warming on the whole. Through extreme pressure and coercion of a human being, this idea is deconstructed by leading the victim to often completely change their beliefs, opinions or lifestyle, dismissing natural human ego and the idea of invincibility within oneself. 1984 is a novel by George Orwell published in 1949 that was written as a warning to British society about the dangers of a totalitarian regime after Orwell had witnessed the horrors of absolute political authority within Spain, Germany and the Soviet Union during WWII. A Clockwork Orange is a film adaptation of Anthony Burgess' novel of the same name directed by Stanley Kubrick in 1971. Burgess was born a Catholic before leaving the church as a young man and as a result, was eternally intrigued by the concept of freewill and the coexistence of good and evil, both ideas being prevalent within the text.

Within each text, the characterisation of each protagonist initially appears strong and unassailable. Throughout 1984, Winston progressively grows more passionate in his distaste for the Party as he becomes more aware of their ill intentions. In chapter one, Winston is hidden from the telescreen when he opens up a diary and regurgitates a stream of consciousness. He begins to write, 'DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER', repetitively on his page. The repetition and capitalisation of the words, along with his lack of control over this act, outlines his repressed beliefs and foreshadows the strengthening of these ideas later in the novel. Later on, Orwell excuses Julia's lack of education of the Party by questioning "One knew that it was all rubbish, so why let oneself be worried by it?". This enforces not only Julia's ignorance, but the differences between herself and Winston, emphasising Winston's efforts in educating himself and the strength of his hatred towards the Party as a result of this. Within A Clockwork Orange, Alex is a dangerous, self-assured criminal who possesses extraordinarily psychopathic tendencies. The film begins with a close-up shot of Alex's face, his gaze retaining for long enough to prove intimidating and uncomfortable for the audience, resulting in a villainous characterisation of Alex. Later, Alex and his droogs beat a man within his own home and rape his wife all while Alex hauntingly sings Gene Kelly's 'Singin' in the Rain', juxtaposing innocence with evil and emphasising their unperturbed approach to their wrongdoings. The characterisation of the protagonists within each text is immediate and unforgiving.

Within the texts, the tool used to diminish natural human ego by framing humankind as weak is extreme duress and coercion of a human being. Winston's physical torture within 1984 successfully forces him into forgetting his former opinions and adopting the Party's ideal beliefs. After Winston responds to a question with an answer O'Brien disapproves of, he is punished by a surge of pain, described by "The air tore into his lungs", the metaphor expressing the severity of the feeling and the intensity of punishment for a wrong answer to a simple question. Later, Winston is brought into Room 101 and confronted by a cage of rats that intend to bore into his face. As the rats draw nearer, he begins to exclaim "Do it to Julia! Not me! Julia!". This unexpected fit of self-defense proves the torture's final success as Winston betrays the woman he once loved and abandons former values. Within A Clockwork Orange, the objective of Alex's torture is to force him to associate his former behaviour with a feeling of unbearable nausea and sickness. A medium shot demonstrates Alex seated within the cinema, his faint smile exuding his naivety towards the situation. As the process continues, this previous expression is challenged when a close-up shot demonstrates Alex's

genuine horror as he screams in pain, the camera remaining still to communicate his inability to escape. The torture exhibited within both texts is inhumane yet effective.

Natural human ego is dismissed with ease in the presence of extreme duress as it diminishes a human's former behaviour and values. "They could have lain down on the ground and done *that* if they had wanted to. His flesh froze with horror at the thought of it.", the italicisation of 'that' demonstrates Winston's pure disgust towards the idea of a sexual relationship between himself and Julia, enforced further by the metaphorical imagery of his flesh freezing. The contrast between his original attraction to Julia and this sudden shift is indicative of the severity of the torture and its power over Winston. The novel finishes with "He loved Big Brother.", the short sentence communicating a simple yet powerful conclusion and its impossibility to change. As A Clockwork Orange finishes, Alex imagines himself having sex with a woman as he smiles at the camera, sarcastically stating "I was cured all right", implying his old values are still intact. Although, the audience remains aware that if Alex were to attempt his beloved 'ultraviolence' again, he would fail terribly. The human ego is rightly diminished when framed as weak after the behaviour and values of the protagonist within each text are altered.

Thus, in summary, texts bring into question the idea of natural human ego by framing humankind as weak or easily swayed, particularly in a position of extreme duress. This is evident within George Orwell's 1984 and Stanley Kubrick's A Clockwork Orange through the protagonist's experiences with torture and a complete shift in beliefs and values. We like to believe we are important, it helps us with our self-esteem and our will to live. Although, at the end of the day, we mean nothing. We are insignificant specks of flesh in a universe of beautiful vastness. In other words, we are human, and only human.