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A poem by David McCooey

David McCooey

A Personal History of A Clockwork Orange

(i)

In nineteen seventy-three, the year I turned six, I was taken to see my first James Bond film, Live and Let Die. Nervous beforehand, I asked
my brother, five
years older than me,
if I would like it.

‘Yes, if you like violence,’
was his answer, or how
I remember it. ‘What’s violence?’

I asked him, looking
forward to the warm
dark of the cinema.

Earlier that year, Mad
magazine had run a parody
of A Clockwork Orange, in

which the audience are
made physically sick by
what they have witnessed.

My brother, who bought
Mad, would sometimes
let me read his magazines

for money. One day, whether
for money or not, I can’t
remember, I looked over

the parody, understanding
nothing, no doubt. Some years
later, I talked about the film —

still unseen — with my brother
and a friend of his. The friend,
eager as a toddler, sketched

out the rape scene for me,
or for himself, or for my
brother, noting the three

points of the woman’s red
jump suit that Alex cuts
when he is about to rape her:

left tit; right tit; cunt.
In the early nineteen eighties — my Bowie years — the soundtrack to *A Clockwork Orange* made its way around my circle of friends, briefly turning one into a Beethoven fan. The soundtrack, released in nineteen seventy-two, was by Wendy Carlos, who gained fame for *Switched-On Bach* in nineteen sixty-eight when still Walter Carlos. Her synthesised classics sounded queasy to me, so I preferred Bowie, unaware that his Ziggy Stardust persona was a camp parody of Alex and his Droogs (‘Ultraviolence in Liberty fabric,’ as the man said).

Unaware, too, that Andy Warhol — about whom Bowie had written a song — had beaten him to it, buying the rights to *A Clockwork Orange* in the nineteen sixties, filming the novel in black and white as *Vinyl*:

the homeroetic S-&-M re-education of a juvenile delinquent, Victor, who dances to ‘Nowhere to Run’

by Martha Reeves and the Vandellas.

(iii)

In nineteen eighty-two I went to a screening of *A Clockwork Orange* at the Western Australian Institute of Technology, with its brutalist architecture and engineering students. The night was cold. The film had an R rating, so I was under-aged, though
no-one cared. I was with friends who believed that only Federal police could make an arrest on a university campus. They were all stoned. The audience was almost entirely young men.

They laughed through the film’s first fifteen minutes: a homeless man being attacked, two gangs beating one another up, and the gang-rape of a woman inside a house called ‘HOME.’

I was fifteen years of age, the same age as Alex. I had finally seen the film. All the laughter confused me, made me feel picked on. What had something wrong with it: me, the film, or the audience?

(iv)

In two thousand and five I saw *A Clockwork Orange* for the last time, with the poet Maria Takolander. The previous year we had married. We had bought a Magnavox DVD player for sixty-nine dollars and we were working through the films of Stanley Kubrick in our usual way, methodical or obsessive. Maria did not like *A Clockwork Orange*.

It made her feel ill, as predicted by *Mad* magazine the year she was born. We talked it over in the uncanny night, our
house suddenly over-lit and alien, and then we went to bed. Our

shared sleep — free from history’s horror, the mistakes of childhood, and the turmoil of others —

a blessing in the moon-coloured night.

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• Kelly Writers House
  3805 Locust Walk
  Philadelphia, PA 19104-6150