Dark Façades: Gender and the Films of Stanley Kubrick

David Eric Browning
University of Miami, ericbrowning2011@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/oa_theses

Recommended Citation
https://scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/oa_theses/423

This Open access is brought to you for free and open access by the Electronic Theses and Dissertations at Scholarly Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Open Access Theses by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Repository. For more information, please contact repository.library@miami.edu.
UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

DARK FAÇADES: GENDER AND THE FILMS OF STANLEY KUBRICK

By

David Eric Browning

A THESIS

Submitted to the Faculty of the University of Miami in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Coral Gables, Florida

June 2013
DARK FAÇADES: GENDER AND THE FILMS OF STANLEY KUBRICK

David Eric Browning

Approved:

Christina Lane, Ph.D.
Associate Professor, Department of Cinema and Interactive Media

M. Brian Blake, Ph.D.
Dean of the Graduate School

William Rothman, Ph.D.
Professor, Department of Cinema and Interactive Media

John Soliday, Ph.D.
Associate Professor, Department of Cinema and Interactive Media
The work of iconic film director Stanley Kubrick is generally studied in terms of visual style and its reliance on male protagonists. Looking past the traditional focal points, one is able to examine the truly fascinating female protagonists that inhabit these dark worlds. By uncovering three distinct types of women included in the filmography of Stanley Kubrick: the instigator, the victim, and the empowered, I have reasoned that the director evolved alongside these female characters as his career advanced. Focusing on the instigating nature of the women in his early films, I have showcased how these individuals held powerful grips over the men in their lives, leading to violent outcomes. The victims in Kubrick’s work reside primarily in the mid-portion of his career, and are shown as reactionary examples of femininity in response to an overpowering androcentric world. Finally, the empowered Alice in Eyes Wide Shut showcases Kubrick’s evolution by featuring a woman with agency, who is not reactionary in any way. Alice is capable of making her own decisions based on her own desires and need for change. The evolution of Kubrick as a director can be traced alongside the transformation of his female characters, highlighting the true importance of these individuals in seemingly male driven works.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 THE KUBRICKIAN INSTIGATOR</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 THE KUBRICKIAN VICTIM</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 THE EMPOWERED KUBRICKIAN WOMAN</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Films Cited</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

In the annals of film history, there are few directors that have had such a diversified and iconic filmography as Stanley Kubrick. While having a much smaller body of work than many his contemporaries, Kubrick immersed himself in his films in a way that few directors ever have by devoting his full attention to every minute detail on screen. As scholars have analyzed the legendary director, they have touched upon every aspect of his work. Violence, male character study, and aesthetic debate have filled the pages of many books discussing the sociopathic tendencies of Alex in *A Clockwork Orange* (1972), the true meaning of the ending of *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), and the anti-war messages of *Paths of Glory* (1957) and *Full Metal Jacket* (1987). One area that has been written about, but not in such a specific fashion, is that of gender in the Kubrick world. It is the female characters that inhabit these dark worlds that are the most captivating. While there are rare exceptions such as *Full Metal Jacket* or *2001: A Space Odyssey*, where women barely make an appearance, it is in Alice (Nicole Kidman) in *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999) that we find the emotional center of that world, or in the young, unnamed woman at the end of *Paths of Glory*, whose image so perfectly captures the horrors of war. There are several types of characters that these women portray. I suggest that Stanley Kubrick, in fact, evolved alongside the women he showcased on screen. The three categories of the Kubrickian woman that I will be discussing in my work are: the instigator, the victim, and the empowered. While many fall into the category of victim, it is in the remaining areas that the most intriguing and noteworthy characters reside. There
are two characters that fall through the cracks of this system, characters that are given very little screen time, but deliver profound anti-war messages. The young German singer, played by Kubrick’s future wife, in *Paths of Glory* and the VC Sniper at the end of *Full Metal Jacket* will be discussed in reference to the other women in Kubrick’s work. Through the evolution of these figures, Kubrick developed as a director, and with Alice in *Eyes Wide Shut* was able to transcend the boundaries of gender to create a character that was not reactionary to her male counterpart, but a fleshed out individual with agency, capable of making her own choice.

To give a very brief overview, I will point out a couple of examples of the characters that reside in each section. Sherry, the scheming wife in *The Killing*, and the titular character in *Lolita*, with Clare Quilty, occupy the category of instigator. Lady Lyndon in *Barry Lyndon* (1975) and the various victims of the sociopathic Alex in *A Clockwork Orange*, and Wendy Torrance in *The Shining* (1980) represent the victimized Kubrickian woman. Finally, Alice in *Eyes Wide Shut* is the solitary empowered figure. These complex women often overlap into another category. For example, Lolita is a hybrid of both the instigator and the victim. By including original and fresh readings of the women in Kubrick’s filmography, I have fleshed out these categories to showcase how the director evolved alongside these figures.

In this work, I take a close look at each of the women that inhabit these areas of film by examining the performances, the way in which Kubrick films the actors, and their relation to Kubrick’s other characters. In so doing, I will
showcase the evolution of these women and the paralleled transformation of the
director. These figures greatly evolved from the early days of Kubrick’s career to
his final film. Both Sherry from *The Killing* and Alice from *Eyes Wide Shut* have a
great power over their husbands. But it is with the evolved Alice that Kubrick
grants the authority to make her own decisions based on her need for change
within her marriage. By utilizing feminist and auteur theories as well as close
textual analysis of formal techniques, I examine these figures from every angle,
discovering the meanings behind their characters and uncovering the true
identity of the these women. When most think of a woman in a Kubrick film they
immediately picture the women treated so poorly and violently in his most
controversial film *A Clockwork Orange*. That is but one piece of the puzzle. In
order to grasp this evolution, one must go through his entire filmography and
analyze these figures one by one, comparing them, while still carving an
individual place for each.

This particular view has barely been touched upon in the years of
academic study of Stanley Kubrick. There have been several books written on
the man’s films, but gender has only very briefly incorporated. There will be the
occasional chapter on the character of Alice in *Eyes Wide Shut* or a study of Sue
Lyon in *Lolita* (1962), but that is usually the furthest the scholars will go in
studying these figures. There are entire chapters written on *The Killing* where
Sherry’s name is not even mentioned. For my work, I will be closely examining all
of the women in Kubrick’s films, shining a new light on patterns used over his
career when portraying females on the big screen. Nicole Kidman’s Alice is one
of the most intriguing characters in modern cinema, and thusly her performance dominates that film. Alice is striking, because she is a character that speaks her mind free of consequence. We see her go through her daily routines and we understand that she is not satisfied in her marriage. Throughout the film, we know that she is constantly imagining what her life would be like if she had left Bill and their daughter behind to be with the sailor. In the end, she still attempts to make her marriage work. As a viewer we are left not knowing if their relationship will last, but we do know that the pair is hopeful for its longevity. Alice is empowered in this relationship, because at the end of the day, she is capable of making her own decisions, allowing her the chance to express her dissatisfaction.

Leading up to this, the women in his earlier work are similarly fascinating. While the majority of the focus is on the titular character of Lolita, it is in the character of her mother (played by Shelly Winters) that a truly brilliant performance shines through. Examining the relationship between these two strikingly different, yet subtly similar characters will help showcase Kubrick’s take on adapting Vladimir Nobokov’s novel to film. By looking at The Killing, I explore Kubrick’s take on the femme fatale as the noir style was coming to an end. This rarely discussed film is truly the quintessential film noir in every possible respect, and I will show how Kubrick used his knowledge of the genre to craft the perfect representation of the femme fatale. Most of the analysis done on Barry Lyndon has focused on Ryan O’Neal’s iconic performance as the young man constantly striving to improve his social standing. I will be dealing with the unfortunate Lady
Lyndon, whom Barry uses solely to gain greater stature in society. In these films, the representation of agency varies from character to character. Kubrick was aware of this, and every aspect of his films was expertly calculated to deliver the genre defining features that he is known for. As they say, when Kubrick approached a new genre, he mastered it. That is why many regard *The Shining* (1980) to be the perfect horror film, and *Full Metal Jacket* to be the perfect war film (or anti-war, as the case may be). I feel that the reason for the evolution of the Kubrickian woman was that as Kubrick’s career developed further, he became interested in new representations of women in the literary works he was reading. All of his films are literary adaptations aside from his very early work. With iconic female characters like Lolita and Alice, Kubrick showed his range in characterization.

In addition to looking at the female characters, I will also be examining the gender roles taken on by the characters in his film, particular the interesting relationship of Bill and Alice in *Eyes Wide Shut*. In this particular marriage, Alice is seen as the dominant figure, while Bill is rather submissive. Again, when we are shown the pair making love in the mirror, all of the attention is on the gaze of Alice, we barely notice Bill. We are looking at Alice’s eyes, as we know she is projecting her pleasure onto the elusive sailor. It is in intimate moments like this that Kubrick plays with gender roles, as we gain access into the private moments of Alice and Bill.

The level of research done on the women in Stanley Kubrick’s films is rather lacking. The various academics have examined Kubrick’s skills as an
auteur, the intense thematic elements featured in every film, and the controversial art of the Kubrick adaptation. Few have touched upon the female characters that inhabit the frame. The rare examples that I have encountered have focused on just one figure, never the group as a whole and never looking at the transition of these figures over Kubrick’s career.

The controversial middle of Kubrick’s career is filled with debate over the treatment of women in his work. When it was announced that Kubrick was attempting an adaptation of the scandalous *Lolita*, written by Vladimir Nabokov, the public was sure that such a shocking story would never be able to be filmed. The thought of images featuring a young girl having relations with an older professor sparked great outcries from the public. What resulted, due to the need to appease the censors, is an incredibly subtle film that hides its innuendo in sly comments and suggestion.

There is a void in the area of Kubrick scholarship concerning the women in his films. I draw greater attention to this area and shine the light on these figures that are often set on the back burner while the scholars tend to dwell on the male protagonists of the films. This is a common trap to fall into, as the protagonist for every single film is a male. How great an understanding for *Eyes Wide Shut* would one get from simply examining the character of Bill, however? It is through his wife Alice that the major thematic debates of the film are drawn out. And it is the relationship between the two of them that leads Bill on his sexual odyssey. It is much easier to apply analysis to the primary characters of the film. When looking at the films of Kubrick, the majority of the authors
reference the female characters as a mere side note. It is through the relationships with these individuals that the male protagonists undergo the changes necessary to reach the end of the narrative. The many women that Bill encounters during *Eyes Wide Shut* prove to him that he still wants to make his marriage work. Without studying these interesting figures, one simply cannot understand the film.

Even in his earliest work as a photographer for *Look Magazine*, Stanley Kubrick was capturing unique and engaging images of women. Looking back on these stills, it is easy to see that women have played a major part in the director’s life, and have encouraged him to create fascinating female figures in his work, women that outshine their male counterparts. The majority of his early photography was focused on creating a realistic recreation of life in New York City. In a photograph of the Canal St. station, we see a lone woman waiting for the train to approach. Kubrick held the camera back a great distance, allowing the woman to make her statement without the aid of a close-up shot.

This true-to-life portrayal of New York is what won him such high respect at the magazine. Another great example of female perspective in his early photography
is additional image on a New York train. Here, however, we see an unknown woman flirting with her supposed boyfriend using only her foot. Shot from the knees down, Kubrick was able to convey a very intimate relationship between these two figures. Much like in his filmic work, it is the relationships between men and women that drove his early photography.

Few directors have had such a variety of female characters, as well as controversy regarding their representation, in their filmography. I delve deeper into the minds of these characters to show how they are used to impact the narrative. The transition from these figures being reactionary to the men in their lives to the empowered Alice who is her own woman showcases the true evolution of Stanley Kubrick in terms of gender representation in his films. From instigator to victim to empowered, these women exemplify three very distinct figures present over the course of Kubrick's career. As he developed as a director, so too did his view on women and their importance to the narratives of his work.
Chapter One: The Kubrickian Instigator

While the nameless young woman captured by the soldiers in *Fear and Desire* can definitely be described as a victim, the most fascinating women in Stanley Kubrick’s earliest works can be described as instigators, figures who drive the male protagonists to steal, murder, and commit other criminal acts. *The Killing*’s Sherry is the perfect example: a steely and conniving woman dedicated to destroying the life and sanity of her husband, George. Six years later, Kubrick released *Lolita*, a tale of Humbert Humbert and his pedophiliac affair with his stepdaughter, Lolita. It is instinctual to view this young girl solely as a victim of a disturbed older man, but in reality, Lolita is a prime example of a hybrid of both instigator and victim. She knows her psychosexual hold over Humbert and uses it to her advantage in order to spend more time with Clare Quilty, the man she truly desires. In turn, however, she is victimized by Quilty who uses his intellect and deceit to entrap this young girl. As instigators, Sherry and Lolita are both capable of ensnaring the men in their lives, enticing and encouraging their lovers to do their bidding.

The women in Kubrick’s earliest work are some of his darkest. These earliest works are bleak and devoid of any hope at all for any of the characters. It would not be until his final film, *Eyes Wide Shut*, where his female protagonist is able to instill a sense of hope and possibility in her male counterpart. In both *The Killing* and *Lolita*, the two figures detailed in the following chapter are the main driving force behind the downfall of the male characters. With *The Killing*, Sherry brings about the violent showdown at the end of the film, while *Lolita* sees the
titular character using the male protagonist as a form of punishment for her mother, and ultimately a form of escape. Kubrick's dark themes of his early films will echo into the even darker middle of his career, where the violence will begin to be exacted upon the women themselves.

Shot like a documentary, Kubrick's third feature film, The Killing, is a tightly wound crime drama that has inspired countless modern directors with its non-linear narrative and iconic film noir elements, a film that perfectly showcases the filmmaker's developing skill. The aesthetic and narrative differences between Killer's Kiss and The Killing suggest the shift from apprentice to master. Filled with character actors who epitomize standard film noir fare, The Killing serves as an impeccable representation of everything that noir exemplifies, at a time when noir had one foot in the grave. By incorporating a matter-of-fact narrator, Kubrick is able to create a world in which every action is believable. As he details the various events leading up to the heist, the narrator's presence creates the illusion that the viewer is watching a news program. It is this gritty realism, accompanied by the perfectly achieved camera movements that set The Killing apart from Kubrick's earlier work. While Fear and Desire and Killer's Kiss were flawed due to over-the-top performances and stereotypical genre conventions, The Killing shows the emergence of the perfectionist artist that Kubrick would become.

As soon as the viewer is introduced to The Killing's Sherry Peatty, played with catty zeal by Marie Windsor, one knows that she is a woman who gets what she wants. Married to George, a small and pitiable man, Sherry is clearly the dominant force in the relationship. Throughout the film, we overhear incredibly
witty and condescending remarks expelled from Sherry’s lips, hitting poor George right where it counts. In this sense, Sherry is the definitive example of a Kubrickian instigator. As Sherry belittles George and accuses him of not loving her, he responds by revealing the intimate details of the heist, and thus illuminating his intense desperation. Sherry’s hold over George is one of the most stimulating elements of the film, in that it provides the viewer with an insight into a very disturbing and one-sided relationship, where Sherry is consistently able to manipulate George into bowing to her will. Her quick wit and malicious cunning make her a fascinating individual to watch onscreen, and her snappy retorts to George provide some of the few humorous moments in the film. *The Killing* is indeed a bleak film, one where every character resorts to measures of extreme violence and/or manipulation in order to reach their goals of either financial or romantic contentment. This longing for gratification literally drives each protagonist in every Stanley Kubrick film. *The Killing* stands apart, as this desire for fulfillment and the “perfect life” fuels every character in the narrative. Sherry longs for George’s robbery to succeed so that her lover can steal the money and the two of them can escape Sherry’s humdrum existence. George only wants Sherry to love him, and if he earns his substantial cut of the heist, he feels he will have saved his marriage.

The sequence where George arrives home from working at the racetrack is the best example of their unhealthy marriage. In it, the viewer is given an honest look at the inner workings of the union without the veil of perspective. The entire film grants the viewer uninhibited access into the lives of the characters,
and the camera movement suggests that one is looking into a dollhouse. George enters the apartment, walks over to Sherry lounging on the settee, and reveals his romantic nature and love for her by detailing his encounter with an amorous older couple on the train.

Sherry: Hello.
George: Feeling okay?
Sherry: Fine.
George: I've been kind of sick today, keep getting pains in my stomach.
Sherry: Maybe you got a hole in it George, you suppose you have?
George: A hole in it? How would I get a hole in my stomach?
Sherry: How would you get one in your head? Fix me a drink, George. I think I'm developing some pains myself.
George: Sherry, can't I ever say anything at all without you joking me about it?
Sherry: Hurry up with that drink, George. The pains are getting worse.
George: I saw something kinda nice coming home on the train tonight. Something well... kinda sweet.
Sherry: A candy bar, George?
George: No, not a candy bar, darn it. It was people. This couple sitting just in front of me. Oh, they weren't young exactly. I guess the woman was about your age.
Sherry: A little senile, you mean? With one foot and a big toe in the grave?
George: You wanna hear this or not? Do you or not, Sherry?
Sherry: I can't wait. Go ahead and thrill me, George.
George: Well anyway, like I say, they were sitting just in front of me, and I could hear what they were saying, well, part of it. They weren't young exactly, and they weren't really old.
Sherry: She was about my age, you said. But not anymore. Maybe she was when you started telling this story, but not now.
George: Anyway, she was calling him papa. And he was calling her mama.
Sherry: And the climax to this exciting story? The moral? The punch line, George?
George: Forget it, Sherry, I just thought I’d tell you about it, but I might have known.

As George attempts to convey a tender sentiment to his hardened wife, she snaps back with several jabs that prove his point was moot in the first place.

Sherry has clearly not had any interest in this man for a long time, if she ever did. It is her lust for financial security that keeps her with George. This moment is revealing, as it suggests that George knows that he might, in fact, be losing Sherry. A look of tragedy is ever present in the eyes of this man, as we see him throughout the film. Kubrick reveals this knowledge to us by countless shots of George with his head down, looking sullen and mistreated. This greatly contributes to his participation in the heist, as he feels that it will be a way of salvaging his marriage: a way of buying Sherry’s love. It is with responses like those made in the dialogue excerpt above that Sherry drives George to extreme action.

Kubrick keeps the camera far from these individuals, by utilizing mainly establishing shots. Going against the norms of modern cinematography, the sequence does not include a single reactionary shot. Kubrick forces his viewers to keep their distance from these characters, never allowing for the most intimate of shots, the close-up. The director shows us the characters as he sees them. We get the Kubrick perspective, never the perspective of George or Sherry. As with the majority of his films, he incorporates a mirrored angle into the sequence
as Sherry sits down to brush her hair, while arguing with George. As the couple converse, Kubrick deepens the realism by allowing his subjects to look away from the camera as they look toward one another, innovatively breaking another cinematic practice.

This twisted relationship spirals out of control quickly, as George discovers that Sherry is cheating on him with Val, a much younger and better looking man. With Sherry’s bitterness and clear resentment towards George, one would assume that George had known for quite some time that his wife was dissatisfied with him, but Sherry keeps this wrapped up nicely, knowing that her financial bliss is in the imminent future. With every snide remark, Sherry attacks his position in their relationship and decimates his nearly non-existent self-esteem, driving him deeper into the criminal underworld. Kubrick’s portrayal of women in this film is not the most gracious. In Sherry, we see the conniving and ever-plotting woman with her mind solely on the money from the heist. It is not until Nicole Kidman’s Alice in *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999), that women in Kubrick’s films are given the breath of open honesty and free will that they deserve.

Val, the young thug who Sherry has been seeing on the side, is guilty of the same practices as she, in that he only expresses interest in Sherry once he
knows that George will be coming into a great deal of money. Sherry’s jealousy is apparent as she confronts Val for his infidelities. She sees more than sexual physicality between them, she sees the possibility of an actual future; something that never occurs to Val. This young man is one who lives solely for his own gratification. When he finds himself in need of financial support, he cleaves to another wealthy married woman. He is a leech. As such, he is the perfect match for Sherry, as both enjoy benefitting off of the monetary intake of others.

Sherry exercises complete control over George in their marriage, and while she grows tired of Val’s seeing other, younger women, she still manages to bend him to her will with the promise of wealth. To quench her lust for financial security, Sherry enlists Val’s brawn to eliminate George from the picture, with the intent of pilfering his intake from the heist.

In his survey of Kubrick’s work, Norman Kagan briefly touches upon the themes of each film, and in his study of *The Killing*, Kagan writes of Sherry, “Mrs. Peatty is fickle; her submission to Val a sort of bid for passivity; her tormenting of her childish husband and the catastrophic double cross she plots are the courting
of destruction."¹ While I agree with the idea that her manipulation of George leads to the violent conclusion of the film, I do not agree that Sherry is submissive to Val. Here is a very intelligent and calculating woman who has based her adult life around the control over her spouse, driving him to think only of her and her happiness. To think that she would allow herself to be controlled in such a way by any man is a faulty assumption and disregards the key attributes of her character. This superficial submission is an act, an act to appeal to Val’s dominating nature. She knows that if she were to try to manipulate him in the same manner that she manipulates George, Val would not go along with her plan, and would leave her and move on in his never-ending pursuit of rich, lonely women.

Sherry is the quintessential femme fatale. However, she does goes against the nature of the character, in that she is never presented as a woman of innocence. Barbara Stanwyck’s Phyllis is perhaps the most legendary of these figures. Fred MacMurray’s Walter sets out to help her, as he believes her husband is mistreating her. Alternatively, Sherry is malicious from the very instant she is seen on screen, and as such goes against the traditional image of the femme fatale. She may convince George that she is in love with him, but the audience is completely aware of this empty sentiment. Sherry remains with George out of financial stability and necessity. As soon as she gets her hands on his earnings from the heist, she will leave him high and dry. She says she will be with Val after all is said and done, but this is most likely another ruse. Even when

Sherry and Val are intimate, artfully suggested by a lengthy fade to black, her true nature is shown with her ever-present look of malice and trickery.

It is Sherry’s instigating nature that leads to her eminent demise at the end of *The Killing*. Over the course of the film, we see her push George further and further into madness, as she threatens to leave him if he does not participate in the heist. As the plan solidifies, she listens outside the door of the secret meeting place and overhears all of the elaborate details of the plot. When discovered by Johnny, she uses her sexuality to appeal to him, hereby reducing her punishment. Originally threatened with death for being privy to the plan, Sherry is instead smacked in the face and encouraged to go back to her husband. George is absent from this encounter, however, as he was thrown out of the apartment as soon as Sherry is discovered. Equipped with all of the information she needs, she soon reports it to Val, an action that will later seal her doom. Val later takes matters into his own hands, and attacks the thieves at their hideout. After being shot by Val, George kills Sherry’s lover and, armed with the knowledge of Sherry’s infidelity and betrayal, returns home and terminates their marriage with a bullet. Bringing the tragedy of *The Killing* full circle, Sherry Peatty is the driving force behind the majority of the violence that occurs in the film, outside of the robbery.

Contrasting with the devious Sherry is Johnny Clay’s girlfriend, Fay. Colleen Gray’s take on the character is one of submission. Fay is truly dedicated to her Clay and never questions his judgment. During Clay’s five years in the big house, Fay has remained at home, waiting for him. Upon his release, Clay is at
the heart of the film’s heist, hoping to make enough money to set the two of them up for good. Early on in the film, as the pair are being reunited for the first time in five years, outside prison walls, Johnny is already planning the big heist, knowing that he can be sent back if things turn shady. He tells Fay that his biggest mistake was “shooting for peanuts” instead of large deals with greater returns, suggesting that this will be his most financially rewarding job yet. Fay responds, “You don’t have to sell it to me, Johnny. I’ll go along with anything you say. I always have, you know.” This devotion to Clay illuminates Fay as the polar opposite of conniving Sherry.

This devotion continues throughout the film, and is never once absent. Fay is the reason why Johnny is going through with the plot, but unlike Sherry, Fay is not demanding of Johnny to put himself at risk to showcase his love for her. She can be identified as a victim of her own devotion, however, as she has spent years waiting for Johnny to get out of prison. And when all is said and done, she will be left alone again, as Johnny is once again arrested by the two determined police officers at the finale of the film.
It is important to note Kubrick’s innovative use of non-linear storytelling. In his lengthy study on Kubrick, Mario Falsetto comments by stating, “The narrative action proceeds swiftly and is made more interesting and complex because of this jigsaw-puzzle structure… To my knowledge, no film elaborates as complicated a time structure as *The Killing.*”² As one watches the film, it is easy to see why filmmakers like Quentin Tarantino were so heavily influenced by its pioneering methods. Looking at Tarantino’s *Reservoir Dogs* and *Pulp Fiction*, his debt to *The Killing* is quite clear in both narrative and method, as he has based his career on non-linear storytelling. Adding to Falsetto’s argument, Alexander Walker writes,

In *The Killing*, Kubrick “puts back the clock” as each portion of the racetrack robbery reaches climax, and begins again on the next. Repeated shot of dray horses hauling the starting gate into position provides a time check of an “edge” to each cliff-hanger episode: the brawl at the bar which keeps the cops preoccupied as the marksman prepares to shoot down the favorite horse, thus delaying the payout and giving Johnny, in his bizarre clown’s disguise, the necessary time to hold up the pay office.³

Like Falsetto stated, it is this unique technique that makes for such a riveting film experience.

It would be six years before another female character would command the screen in the fashion of Sherry Peatty. *Paths of Glory* features a very brief, but incredibly moving performance, by Kubrick’s future wife Susan Christian (later known as Christiane Kubrick) as the nameless German girl captured by the Americans during WWI. It is her tragic song that encapsulates the heartbreak

---

and pain of war, and instills this feeling in the victorious troops, bringing them all to tears as the film closes. 1960’s *Spartacus* features a rather bland performance by Jean Simmons as Varinia, the love interest to the film’s protagonist. Simmons is absent from the majority of the film, so her interactions with Kirk Douglas’ Spartacus never seem real. Unlike the young German girl in *Paths of Glory*, who also receives very little screen time, Varinia is never given the chance to convey any powerful emotions. Had Kubrick been allowed to have complete control over the narrative, perhaps he would have been able to create a convincing relationship between the two characters that could have been used as a driving force in the film. *Spartacus* is the main film in the Kubrick filmography that does not contain the typical style and atmosphere of the idealized Kubrick film. This was due to the fact that Douglas served as the executive producer of the film and had final say over its content. Kubrick and Douglas constantly fought over the narrative, and afterwards Kubrick stated that he would never again make a film without being the sole figurehead.

His next feature would give him the opportunity. As the trailer for 1962’s *Lolita* boldly stated, “How did they ever make a movie of *Lolita*?” It can be argued that a film such as this could never have been released prior to Alfred Hitchcock’s *Psycho*. Hitchcock himself has stated that *Psycho* proved to be the death of the classical era of cinema, ushering in a more violent and more controversial wave of filmmaking. *Lolita*, the tale of Humbert Humbert, a man who engages in illicit relations with his 14-year-old stepdaughter, shocked the nation. The toning down of the source material was key, however, as the novel
by Vladimir Nabokov, who also wrote the screenplay, was far more controversial with detailed accounts of said encounters. The 1998 retelling of the story by Adrian Lyne is well known for taking a far more direct approach when dealing with the sexual content of the story. Kubrick’s take on the material is instead filled with double-entendres and suggestion. For a film dealing with such darkly illicit material, it is a film of great comedy, much of which is provided by the great Peter Sellers and the phenomenal Shelley Winters. Lolita, herself, is a fascinating character to examine, as she is a hybrid of two classifications of the Kubrickian woman. She is indeed an instigator, while also a victim.

Sue Lyon’s performance is one of great subtlety, perfectly encompassed in her introduction to Humbert. She lies under the sun in her backyard, listening to her portable radio, as Humbert is shown about by Charlotte Haze (Shelley Winters). The two emerge from the house, as Charlotte intends to show her guest the prize-winning flowers there. Immediately, his eyes are drawn to Charlotte’s “nymphet” daughter, Lolita. She looks up seductively at the man, raises her sunglasses, and then returns to her sunbathing, fully aware of her effect on Humbert.
Oblivious as always, Charlotte does not see the instant connection shared between the new renter and her daughter.

Differing from the narrative establishment in *The Killing*, *Lolita* features voice-over narration from the film’s protagonist. Humbert details his side of the story, and creates an extremely pitiable man that has been destroyed by his love for this young girl. Like many other Kubrick protagonists, obsession proves to be his downfall. In *The Kubrick Façade*, Jason Sperb describes the detached style of narration by writing,

> Such an emotionally indifferent voice-over (in some respects, as detached as earlier third-person narrators) – where Humbert talks about his earlier days in Ramsdale yet makes no connection between this beginning of the flashback and the story’s violent conclusion – suggests an obliviousness that in part prevents the audience from aligning with the narrator... Moreover, the voice-over allows the audience to glimpse what is going on in the man’s head (an especially important point, from a censorship point of view, considering the subject matter – pedophilia – in which Humbert will eventually be involved).  

It is through this “emotionally indifferent” narration that Humbert defines the idea of the “nymphet,” an idea given much more detail in Nabokov’s novel. Due to the high censorship standards of the time, Kubrick was forbidden from the physical descriptions of the pubescent female bodies, resulting in a more philosophical idealization of the figure. Humbert’s view of the “nymphet” is described in the film by his stating, “What drives me insane is the two-fold nature of this nymphet... of every nymphet, perhaps. This mixture in my Lolita of tender, dreamy childishness and a kind of eerie vulgarity.” This definition is Humbert’s attempt to express the alluring presence surrounding the titular character that creates this intense

---

appeal and wills Humbert to disregard societal norms and regulations. Specifically, it is the very essence of her character that establishes her status as an instigator. With her combination of innocence and vulgarity, Lolita is a character unlike any other in the conservative town of Ramsdale, New Hampshire. The film also differs from its source material in the past of the protagonist. In the novel, there are a few nymphets that stole the attention of Dr. Humbert, while Lolita is the sole figure in Humbert’s life in the film.

It is easy to see how the viewer can identify Lolita as a victim, as she is a minor in a relationship with a man many years her senior. In said relationship, Lolita holds the upper hand, leaving Humbert to pine after her while she is away with various other suitors. Lolita’s fidelity with her stepfather is non-existent from the beginning of their affair, as she is disloyal while spending the summer with Charlie, the son of the director at the aptly named Camp Climax. Lolita continues these flings with boys of an appropriate age throughout the film, as Humbert’s jealousy spirals into paranoia. As early as the school dance, where Charlotte and Humbert chaperone, Lolita is the object of desire for the young men around her.
Lolita keenly observes the over-the-top fashion in which her mother throws herself at the professor, and also knows that the professor has no interest in the woman. As Lolita engages with Humbert, her mother catches the occasional suspicious moment shared between the two. Lolita uses Humbert as a way to attack her mother. Having what Charlotte is never able to achieve, the love of Humbert, Lolita is finally able to have one up on her mother, the woman who has been nagging her since her father passed away. Both Lolita and Humbert fall victim to the incredibly cunning and diabolical Clare Quilty. Lolita openly states at the end of the film that Quilty was the only man she’d ever loved before her husband, proving to Humbert that all of his affection has been notably one-sided. Lolita is victimized by Quilty after he checks her out of the hospital without Humbert’s knowledge. Quilty’s desire to have her in his “art film,” leads Lolita to run away from his ranch in New Mexico as well. Additionally, it is Quilty that fans the flames of paranoia and madness beneath Humbert, driving the professor to cling tighter to Lolita, which later drives her away from him.

Kubrick hints at the separation between Lolita and Humbert constantly through the staging of the actors and the positioning of the camera. In many shots throughout the film, Lolita is seen in the foreground of the frame, while Humbert and Charlotte are further back, suggesting a great physical divide between the characters. A particular sequence that showcases this suggested variation of power is when Humbert sits in Charlotte’s backyard, with the intention of reading, but finds himself drawn to Lolita as she exercises using her hula-hoop. Charlotte snaps a picture of Humbert, oblivious to his lustful gaze.
In her article “That Hurts!: Humor and Sadomasochism in Lolita,” Ilsa J. Bick writes of this stylistic choice by stating,

These disparities and inequities in power between Charlotte and Lolita are initially underscored by the great distance between them in the frame. This distance emphasizes Charlotte’s pathetic obtuseness and Lolita’s icy desirability. Kubrick uses such physical distancing repeatedly as a contrasting device.\(^5\)

This stylistic choice highlights the intense desperation of Charlotte, while proving that Lolita is very skilled at projecting herself to ensnare the men in her life. In the majority of the intimate scenes shared between her and Humbert, we see Lolita lying down on a bed in the foreground, with her feet raised in the air behind her. This links to the interesting title sequence of the film, in which Humbert slowly paints each toe on the young girls left foot. The lengthy sequence maintains the same shot for its duration, in which only Humbert’s hand and Lolita’s foot are in the frame.

Turning away from Quilty at the end of the film, Lolita writes to Humbert, after approximately two years, asking for money to support her new family. She is, in fact, pregnant by her new husband. Humbert drives to their rundown house, prepared to run away with Lolita. When we see Lolita as she opens the door to Humbert, it is obvious that she has greatly matured in the two years she was missing. She has settled down in her role as wife and soon-to-be mother, doting on her husband. Here is a young woman who has learned from her mistakes and has made the most out of her situation, living a seemingly happy and incredibly conventional life. Prior to her escape from Quilty, Lolita would never have been content with such a mundane lifestyle, as she was eager to travel and see the world. Quilty’s victimization of her has changed Lolita, implanting a desire for normality in her. As Humbert hands over the check that will support Lolita and her husband for quite some time, he breaks down and runs from her house. Kubrick makes clear that it is Humbert, not Lolita, that is the main victim of this narrative. His own desires and unrequited love for his nymphet stepdaughter have brought about his emotional downfall.

Lolita is clearly a hybrid of instigator and victim, while The Killing’s Sherry is solely an instigator. It is with the help of the devious Clare Quilty that Lolita unknowingly unhinges Humbert, causing his violent murder of Quilty. But Sherry, working alone, is capable of driving Val to execute the men in order to steal the earnings from the heist. The women in this early period of Kubrick’s work are figures of dark deception and infidelity. Both Lolita and Sherry are unfaithful to the men in their lives, causing the men to take violent action at the climax of both
narratives. Revenge is a big part of both films, as George kills Val and then Sherry, while Humbert hunts down Quilty. Kubrick’s films would prove to get even darker as he entered the next portion of his career with A Clockwork Orange and The Shining. It is with these films, along with Barry Lyndon where we see the victimization of key female characters at the hands of the male protagonists, whether violently or socially.
As with any director, the middle portion of Kubrick’s career features his greatest triumphs as well as his greatest controversies. Following the timid success of the *2001: A Space Odyssey*, Kubrick released his most disturbing and nihilistic work: *A Clockwork Orange*. Based on Anthony Burgess’ darkly violent and futuristic tale of gang violence in Britain, the film delves deep into the heart of its sociopathic protagonist to convey the very nature of evil itself. His next film would be his biggest flop. *Barry Lyndon*, the tale of an 18th century Irishman climbing up the ladder of the aristocracy, is a film of sublime visuals and meticulous set-design. With every frame looking like a painting from the period, Kubrick had new camera lenses created in order to film by candlelight, adding greatly to the realism of the picture. In the wake of the disastrous box-office figures of Barry Lyndon, a disheartened Kubrick decided to work on a more commercial piece. He achieved this greatly with the horror classic *The Shining*. Departing heavily from Stephen King’s novel, Kubrick’s vision is his own, and is perhaps the most visually appealing horror film ever created. All of these films are disarmingly beautiful to look at, but the victimization of the women featured in their narratives adds to the darkness at their cores. While prior female characters had pulled the trigger, inciting the violence at the center of his earlier films, in this period of Kubrick’s career, the violence is turned against the women, adding to the hopeless feeling surrounding the works. This stage is truly the darkest of Kubrick’s career, as characters like Alex in *A Clockwork Orange* and Jack in *The
*Shining* enact great levels of violence against the women shown on screen with them, while Redmond Barry in *Barry Lyndon* uses Lady Lyndon merely as a tool for his societal ascension. With figures like Wendy Torrance in *The Shining*, Lady Lyndon, and the female victims of Alex and his crew in *A Clockwork Orange*, Kubrick portrays a brutal picture of gender relations.

*A Clockwork Orange* opens with an extreme close-up shot of Malcolm McDowell's Alex. As the camera slowly pulls back, we see Alex and his droogs sitting in the Korova Milk Bar, their regular gathering spot. A milk bar may sound innocent enough, but Kubrick uses the location to establish the harsh views towards women that fill the dark world of the film. In this world, women are viewed solely as objects. To say that the objectification of women in the film is limited to the men seeing them as mere sexual conquests would be denying the extreme nature of the film. In the Korova Milk Bar, the tables and milk machines are all graphic sculptures of naked women. The women are truly seen as objects. In the sequence we see Dim, one of Alex's gang members, go to one of the milk machines to fill his cup. He holds his cup up to the breast of the sculpture and the milk is released.
As this image showcases, in this world, women are being objectified in the literal sense, in that they are actually physical objects to be used by men. Dim even asks “Lucy” if she’s had a busy night before receiving his drink. It is critical to notice that Lucy’s hands are chained to the platform she sits on, an example of restraint and force used against women in the film. The Korova Milk Bar serves as a prime illustration of how women are mere possessions in the universe of *A Clockwork Orange*, objects intended for the sexual gratification of the men who inhabit it.

The primary victimization of women in the film is at the hands of Alex and his droogs. As they prepare for an evening of “the old ultraviolence,” plans of rape, gang warfare, and other vicious acts run through Alex’s head. The primary targets of these malicious crimes are women. While Alex and his gang may enact aggression against homeless men, rival gangs, and husbands of female victims, it is the women who are shown on screen in the greatest detail. Early on in the film, the gang leaves the city and stages a home invasion. Pretending that there has been a deadly car accident outside, a tactic used again later in the film, Alex convinces the woman to open the door, letting in the gang of rapists. While delivering a disturbing version of Gene Kelly’s “Singin’ In The Rain,” Alex proceeds to attack and ultimately rape the woman. This gleeful disregard for the act that is being committed is one of the many examples that highlight the true sociopathic nature of the protagonist and his companions. With this, the first of the violent attacks against women in the film, Kubrick features a disconcerting style of fast shots and the occasional close-up to heighten the impact of the act.
Alex, seen here donning his iconic pointy nose and codpiece, and his droogs are all dressed in white, while their victim wears a vibrant red jumpsuit. Kubrick’s modernist design of the film is present in the decoration of the house with its minimalist furniture and lighting. Kubrick features intense close-ups of the victim’s husband’s face as he is forced to watch while the young men violate his wife, adding to the horror of the sequence.

A later victim of Alex is Ms. Weathers, also known as the Cat Lady, the proprietor of Woodmere Health Farm. Alex’s droogs know that she will be alone at her estate, so they plan an attack. Upon arriving at the Health Farm, the gang attempts the same accident technique to get into the house, but Ms. Weathers does not fall for it, and immediately calls the cops, having heard the similar details of the previous attack by Alex’s gang on the news. While the previous victim is not given a chance to defend herself, as she is thrown off guard by the intrusion of Alex and his gang into her home, Ms. Weathers actually goes against Alex as he enters her exercise room, which is filled with cats. With a “cut the shit sonny, and get out of here before you get yourself into some very serious trouble,” Ms. Weathers displays a confidence that is absent from all of the other
women in the film. She warns him to leave before the police arrive, and goes as far as attacking him with a sculpture, while screaming “I’ll teach you to break into real people’s houses.” The room is filled with countless sexually charged symbols, primarily featured in paintings hung on all of the walls. The sculpture that will bring about the death of Ms. Weathers is naturally the main phallic symbol in the room. A large sculpture of the male genitalia sits atop a table in the room, and Alex notices it immediately upon entering the space. This attack differs from the first in that Alex does not sexually violate Ms. Weathers. Instead, she is symbolically defeated by the phallic artwork she has collected. The viewer sees Alex hold the large piece over a restrained Ms. Weathers, and then Kubrick quickly cuts to a horrifying close-up of the woman’s face, as she knows her doom is imminent.

Ms. Weathers is clearly a victim of Alex’s violent nature, but it is key to note the degree to which she fights back against her aggressor, something none of the other female victims in the film are capable of.

The mise-en-scene of the film is filled with suggestive imagery that was constructed by Kubrick. Vivian Sobchack discusses the importance of décor in the film by stating,
The home of Kubrick’s Cat Lady, however, is filled not with the undisplayed momentoes and antiques of the novel, but rather with a collection of erotic painting and sculpture emphatically on display and omnipresent during the violent confrontation between Alex and the Cat Lady… The art becomes forcefully, visually, implicated in the violence… Both Alex and the Cat Lady fight to the death with art objects as their weapons… The death of the Cat Lady is metaphorically rather than graphically represented on the screen by an accelerating montage of details from the various erotic paintings hung about the room, linked together by the recurrent image of an open mouth from one of them which seems to be visually screaming in paroxysms of orgasm and death.5

The link between sex and violence is present in many of Kubrick’s films, but it is at its most blatantly graphic here. It is quite apparent that the close-up of Ms. Weathers screaming is meant to parallel the paintings of women screaming in pleasure that adorn her walls. Ms. Weathers serves as the most interesting of all of Alex’s victims in the films, as she is one capable of fighting against her assailant, and because she has such an intriguing collection of erotic art.

Alex applies the same cavalier attitude to consensual sex in the film. The one instance of sexual activity is a ménage à trois with two young women he meets in a record shop. Instead of providing a lengthy and explicit scene, as one might expect, Kubrick presents the sequence as a race, sped up greatly so the viewer is left disoriented by the action. Meanwhile, the motions are matched by a sped up and modernized William Tell Overture. This suggests that Alex gets no pleasure out of sexual practices outside of the realm of violence and rape. These two unnamed women are seen solely as a way for the protagonist to pass the time, serving merely as meaningless sexual conquests.

As with every Kubrick film, the music is a key attribute to the narrative: heightening emotion, solidifying tone, and capturing the feeling of the scene. Here, the director utilizes the musical obsession of Alex, Beethoven, whom the protagonist affectionately calls “Ludwig Van,” to accompany the many violent sequences. Galia Hanoch-Roe critiques this stylistic choice by writing

Most of the ultra-violent scenes, which include rape, gang-rape, murder, violence and sexually violent fantasies, are performed to the sound of classical music... Stanley Kubrick, in his film adaptation of the book, chooses the Ninth, from all other works, as a continuous narrative to the action. In all the ultra-violent scenes, including those of the authorities against Alex, and his dehumanization, Kubrick concentrates almost exclusively on the Ninth as Alex’s focus of admiration.\(^6\)

This use of score allows for some truly captivating, and immensely disturbing, sequences. This music always suggests triumph; triumph over rival gangs, triumph over women, and ultimately triumph over society’s attempt to humanize the sociopath.

In *A Clockwork Orange*, Kubrick again features a character on the verge. For the viewer, we are hopeful that society has managed to humanize Alex, eliminating the threat of future violent acts by the boy. For the protagonist, hope comes in the form of the dream that he will someday be able to attack again without the intense sickness he has been trained to associate with violence. Much like the director’s other work, with the exception of *Eyes Wide Shut*, the viewer is left helpless as Alex returns to his old self at the conclusion of the film boldly narrating, “I was cured alright!” as fantasies of rape fill his head. In a

---

twisted way, Alex is awarded the capacity for violence, previously thought discarded from him, allowing for the character to achieve his goal. This is a rare exception throughout the Kubrick filmography, as Tom Cruise’s Bill in *Eyes Wide Shut* is the only other protagonist afforded even a fraction of a hope of transcendence into happiness.

Contrasting with the apocalyptic minimalism of *A Clockwork Orange*, *Barry Lyndon* creates an engrossingly beautiful and lush world, comparable to the 18th century paintings that fascinated the director. With this film, the victimization of Lady Lyndon is much more subtle and restrained, lacking the physical violence of Alex’s victims. Instead, she is subject to the leeching nature of her husband, his countless infidelities, and his forceful control over her actions. Early in the film, the viewer sees the tragic young romance between Barry and his cousin, ending with her rejection of him. It is this action that sets him on his quest for a position in society, one that would make him appear desirable to her.

The viewer first lays eyes on The Countess of Lyndon, played by Marisa Berenson, right as Barry sees her for the first time. In a shot that epitomizes the stylistic perfection that is *Barry Lyndon*, Kubrick reveals this first sight in a way that stays with the viewer, isolating the importance of it. We see Lady Lyndon on a stroll around the courtyard, while Barry and the Chevalier de Balibari sit up on a balcony. The narrator describes Barry’s desire for marrying a lady of money and power, and we see him set his sights on this “woman of vast wealth and great beauty.”
This tumultuous relationship could have been the driving force of the film, but it is truly just another step on Barry’s ladder to societal power. As the narrator says, “to make a long story short, six hours after they met, her ladyship was in love. And once Barry got into her company, he found innumerable occasions to prove his intimacy, and was scarcely out of her ladyship’s sight.” Lady Lyndon was married at the time of their introduction, and Barry is seen clinging to her, preparing for the death of her crippled husband, Sir Charles Lyndon.

The gender roles in the film are interesting, as Barry actually dons the last name of his betrothed and becomes Barry Lyndon. After the narrator announces this alteration, the viewer is immediately shown the true nature of their marriage. Lady Lyndon is described as holding no more important a position in Barry’s life than “the elegant carpets and pictures, which would form a pleasant background in his existence.” Lady Lyndon is the provider of the family, and as such Barry takes advantage of the situation. The Lady’s son notices immediately, saying that Barry is nothing more than an opportunist. This misuse of her family’s fortune to such an extreme degree takes its toll on Lady Lyndon, as she soon becomes incredibly depressed. With the increase in Barry’s adulterous activities, Lady
Lyndon is forced to sit alone with her son, while he is off parading around with any woman who tickles his fancy. Kubrick features several static shots where he artfully displays the increased depression of Lady Lyndon. These lengthy shots instantly remind one of the portraits of the time period of the women of the family sitting with their children, with looks of sadness always present on their faces. Kubrick utilizes this technique several times in the film with staggering results. These moments are truly the most beautiful in the film, as they allow unparalleled access into the minds of the characters. The lingering camera work creates a static state that perfectly captures the isolation and internal torment of Lady Lyndon.

Bille Wickre writes of Lady Lyndon,

The narrator reports that Lady Lyndon is a good mother who adores her children and is adored by them in return. Even though the narrator tells us that Barry believed his wife would enjoy the role of mother dandling the infant Bryan, the image suggests that the construction of the happy mother is but a thin tissue of lies.7

As this image showcases, Lady Lyndon lives a very withdrawn life, while Barry is out and about with various women. This destructive marriage is slowly sucking

---

the very life out of this woman. Thusly, over the course of the film, we see Lady Lyndon’s skin turn from an elegant porcelain to an uncared-for chalky texture.

It is with the death of their son Bryan that sets Lady Lyndon on a path towards self-destruction. As she mourns the loss of her youngest child, while Barry turns to a constant state of drunkenness, she attempts to take her own life, but is unsuccessful. It is here that Kubrick shows the true physical pain that her ladyship is experiencing as her body is riddled with a non-lethal amount of poison.

While this harmful act is certainly not a positive action to take to alleviate one’s troubles, it set in motion events that would free Lady Lyndon from the careless husband who had been slowly killing her for years. In her own way, Lady Lyndon took action to relieve her problems, attempting to free herself from the control of Barry and his mother.

The victimization of this aristocratic woman at the hands of Barry is what keeps him from achieving his goal. Had he simply cared for her and appreciated their time together, he would have become an aristocrat himself, but due to his poor treatment of his wife and his stepson, this “insolent Irish upstart” is cast out
of England at the end of the film. Hopelessness is hit home with the brief epilogue of the piece, in which Kubrick states, “It was in the reign of George III that the aforesaid personages lived and quarreled; good or bad, handsome or ugly, rich or poor, they are all equal now.” These words imply that despite one’s best attempt at striving for a better life, the ends will not justify the means. As Chris P. Pliatska put it, “There is a strong suggestion here of the futility of life – that no matter what we do, all our achievements will ultimately come to nothing.”

While *Barry Lyndon* may be vividly rapturous to look at, at the heart of the narrative is yet another dark Kubrick tale of misplaced hope and misfortune. Following the disastrous box-office numbers at its release, Kubrick decided that his next feature would target a wider audience, and chose to adapt Stephen King’s best-selling novel, *The Shining*. In doing so, he would be creating one of the great horror films of cinematic history. With its focus on the small Torrance family, *The Shining* is about a great deal more than ghosts and a haunted space. These elements may play a major part in the film, but it is the conflict between Jack, Wendy, and young Danny that is the driving force of the picture. Thusly, the bond between Jack and Wendy, played by Shelley Duvall, is one of the most interesting components of the film. Jack’s victimization of Wendy takes on several forms throughout the narrative. Prior to the intended physical harm, Jack injures Wendy emotionally, as he blames her for his being a failure, holding her accountable for judging his economic status and career choices.

---

Wendy is the victim of her husband’s alcoholism and slow descent into madness, and she is a victim of the Overlook Hotel as well. When she is legitimately concerned for the safety of their son, Jack is angry at her interrupting his “writing.” And when Jack is whining about his marriage concerns to Lloyd the bartender, he refers to his wife by stating his “problems with the old sperm bank upstairs.” Jack displays chauvinism from the very onset of the film, always questioning his wife’s reasoning for her actions, and instilling a sense of worthlessness in her.

While Wendy is always ridiculed by her husband, she still manages to retain a sense of agency in the film, as the needs of her son, and herself, are placed above those of her husband. That being said, however, it is Danny, not Wendy, who is responsible for vanquishing the threat of Jack at the conclusion of the film.

The contrasting acting methods taken by both Nicholson and Duvall add a great deal of depth to their characters. Mario Falsetto details this contrast by writing,

Shelley Duvall plays her scenes in a very convincing and naturalistic way. She seems to be directed to perform as if she were in a genuinely scary and more conventional horror film. She acts truly terrified and often appears physically exhausted.9

---

Duvall’s seemingly over-the-top reactions can initially come across as overacting. But Kubrick directed her in this way intentionally. Kubrick (and Nicholson) even went so far as to ignore Duvall on the set, thus further heightening her sense of alienation and paranoia both on and off camera.\textsuperscript{10}

Looking at Wendy Torrance objectively, however, reveals her to be more than a simple victim in the film. She is a hybrid, much like Lolita, as she contains characteristics of both the victim and the empowered. Carol Clover’s idea of the final girl is present here, as Wendy takes on many characteristics of this strong character. One of Clover’s theories deals with the masculinization of the feminine in order to defeat the masculine monster.\textsuperscript{11} Robert Kolker describes this suggested masculinization of Wendy by stating

Wendy assumes the “masculine” role in a wonderful symbolic gesture. Just before the scene in which she discovers Jack’s bizarre manuscript, she sits with Danny... Getting up to go to Jack, she moves to the rear of the frame and silently, so far back in the composition that it takes some attention to notice it, picks up a baseball bat, with which she will beat down her violent husband. The figure oppressed by the phallus steals it in order to control it. Later, when Jack attempts to smash his way into the bathroom where Wendy and Danny are hiding, she stabs his hand with a large knife, an act of displaced castration that further reduces Jack’s potency and threat.\textsuperscript{12}

This strengthening of Wendy in order to defend herself and Danny from Jack is when we see the character shed her victim status. Prior to picking up the baseball bat, Wendy is incredibly submissive to her husband, constantly

\textsuperscript{10} This was discussed in an interview with Duvall in the feature-length documentary \textit{Stanley Kubrick: A Life In Pictures}, where she said she learned a great deal while making the picture, but would never want to go through the experience again. It was also shown in Vivian Kubrick’s documentary \textit{The Making of The Shining}.


apologizing for questioning his intentions and stifling her fears for the safety of their son. As she strikes Jack with the baseball bat, she finally takes control of the situation, taking a stand against her oppressive husband. Finally, Wendy has armed herself with the strength to take on her abusive husband. Had she been empowered enough to take a stand against him when he initially broke young Danny’s arm, an event that occurred prior to the film, she might have been able to prevent the violent and deadly occurrences at the hotel. In overlooking Jack’s abusive treatment of Danny, she has unknowingly put her son in great danger.

As Wendy uses her bat to send Jack spiraling down the stairs, their battle for power ends, and she emerges temporarily the victor. Kubrick films this sequence in way that builds the tension as the pair ascends the long staircase. Later in the film, after Jack breaks into their living quarters, Wendy slides Danny out of the window to find a safe place to hide while she deals with Jack. Jack forgets about attacking his wife when he hears Dick Hallorann, the head cook at the Overlook, approaching in his snow vehicle, quickly placing Danny in danger again, as Jack goes to kill Hallorann. After murdering Hallorann, Jack goes outside to hunt down Danny. It is here that the child outsmarts his father, in the labyrinthine hedge
maze outside the hotel. Even without the protection of his mother, Danny is able to fend off his father, and ultimately loses Jack in the twisting, turning passages of the maze, resulting in a frozen death for his father.

Meanwhile, Wendy is frantically running throughout the hotel looking for her son. Here she encounters countless spirits and visions that the Overlook finally reveals to her. After protecting her son, the hotel has deemed her worthy of seeing the images it has been showing Danny since the beginning of the film. The finale revelation is the vast amount of blood erupting from the elevator. This transition from defensive mother to flailing and screaming victim alleviates some of Wendy’s power that she had earned by standing up to Jack.

Wendy proves to be a very complex and engaging character and her struggle between victimization and empowerment allows for some fascinating moments on screen. While it may be Danny who vanquishes the evil of Jack at the end of the film, Wendy proves herself on several occasions as she protects her son from his violent father. Furthermore, in terms of independence, Kubrick shows Wendy doing Jack’s job as caretaker of the hotel throughout the film, proving that she will be capable of raising Danny on her own. Here is a resourceful woman
with agency that, while victimized by her abusive husband and the haunted hotel, maintains a strength throughout the film. Her empowerment is motivated by a primal and instinctual drive to protect herself and her son, only when their lives have been put into extreme jeopardy. She is not granted this empowerment from the onset of the film, unfortunately, like Alice in *Eyes Wide Shut*. It is with the unfortunate moments of her running through the hotel, arms flapping around her, that Wendy loses some of her newly gained status, and resorts once again to being a victim.

In addition to Wendy, the Overlook Hotel is filled with female victims. The pair of young girls that appear to Danny, the dead children of Delbert Grady, the former caretaker, are doomed to linger in the place of their death “forever… and ever… and ever.” Thusly, the decomposing woman in the bathtub in room 237, presumably Grady’s murdered wife, is left to haunt this room for eternity. These individuals each suffered very violent deaths at the hands of a man driven mad by the influence of the Overlook.

The hope of Jack maintaining his sanity and writing his book while spending the winter at the Overlook is very quickly disintegrated, creating another hopeless protagonist for Kubrick. The hope in the film remains with
Wendy and Danny as they drive the snow vehicle away from the cursed hotel; hope that they will escape the clutches of the vicious Jack.

Kubrick would follow *The Shining* with his dark anti-war film *Full Metal Jacket*, a film that features very few female characters. Gender is dealt with very little in the film, with the exception of the intense sense of primal masculinity present in the many soldiers. Much like *Paths of Glory*, though the film ends with a powerful statement made by a victim of war. The sniper that has been attacking the group turns out to be a very young Vietnamese girl, who Matthew Modine’s Joker puts out of her misery, confirming that he is no longer a man of peace but is “born to kill.” *Full Metal Jacket* would prove to be Kubrick’s last film without hope. Perhaps it was with the death of the young Vietnamese girl that the filmmaker reached a stage of enlightenment, allowing for the creation of Nicole Kidman’s Alice in *Eyes Wide Shut*. 
Chapter Three: The Empowered Kubrickian Woman

Following *Full Metal Jacket*, it would take Kubrick twelve years to release his next, and final, picture. *Eyes Wide Shut* is a psychosexual drama that delves deep into the marriage of Bill and Alice Hartford, providing a captivating parallel to the marriage of the film’s two stars, Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman. Based on Arthur Schnitzler’s *Traumnovelle*, Kubrick’s final film is one of jealousy and remorse, but ultimately one of hope. Unlike Kubrick’s previous protagonists, the fate of both Bill and Alice is not set in stone, granting the viewer a shimmer of hope at the conclusion of the film, hope that their marriage may in fact be salvaged. *A Clockwork Orange* showcases Alex reverting to his violent tendencies, while *Barry Lyndon* features the titular character’s life torn apart by his lust for inclusion in the aristocracy. *The Killing* concludes with the violent murders of the entire crew due to Sherry’s thirst for financial stability, and *Lolita*’s brief written epilogue reveals that Humbert dies in prison. Why then are the Hartford’s worthy of this semblance of hope for a happy ending? The characters are not extraordinarily likeable individuals; in fact both teeter on the edge of pretention and self-satisfaction for the entirety of the film. What sets them apart from their predecessors? Kubrick’s filmography is filled with characters suffering from self-inflicted downfall. This is true of nearly each of his films, with the exception of perhaps *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Each of these individuals chooses the path that they go down, knowingly making the wrong decisions that will lead to their ultimate demise. It is the choices made by Bill and Alice Hartford that
grant them this seemingly impossible and surprising ending in a Stanley Kubrick film. In this light, Alice Hartford is the first truly empowered female protagonist in the director’s work, as she is the driving force behind the change in her life. Instead of sitting on the sidelines while her husband goes on his sexual odyssey, Alice is a woman who identifies something missing in her life and makes choices to initiate change, uncertain of a happy ending. While some of her actions may seem rather instigative, it is important to note that she chooses her path as a way to break away from the increasingly mundane nature of her life.

Kubrick introduces the film with an intimate shot of Alice removing her dress. We see it fall to the ground, revealing her naked body. This shot alerts the audience to the voyeuristic nature of the film. Not only will we be seeing the couple engaging in sex, but we will be seeing these characters at their most emotionally bare, as they confide their deepest thoughts to one another.

As Peter Lowenberg states, “this shot sets the theme of the film – tantalizing
sexuality abruptly seized away – a prelude to the frustrations of attraction, allurement, seduction, and lack of consummation to come.”

Kubrick grants the audience complete access to these characters, as we witness the couple go about their daily activities throughout the film. We see them at their most vulnerable: on the toilet, in bed, preparing for work, etc. It is these seemingly trivial moments that permit the audience to bond with both Bill and Alice. Were we simply to see them at the Ziegler’s lavish Christmas party, the Sonata Café, or the controversial cultish sex party, we would miss out on these incredibly everyday moments. Kubrick understands the importance of the everyday over the extraordinary, and takes us along for the ride, weaving the narrative in between these two vastly different experiences. The images the director selects are pivotal to the narrative as well, as Bill, a well-respected doctor, is shown examining a beautiful patient’s breasts in his office, a secret point of contention for Alice. It is revealed later in the film that Alice is the former manager of an art gallery in Manhattan, and now lives the life of the stay-at-home mother. Here is a woman who once had a great feeling of self-worth due to her challenging and creative job, which all but disappeared with the closing of the gallery. As Alice goes about her day, Kubrick reveals a hidden dissatisfaction with her boring lifestyle.

Serving as a representation of Alice toying with the idea of infidelity, the Ziegler’s Christmas party sequence first shows the viewer her internal struggle with her married life. As Bill is escorted by two young models, Alice is

---

approached by a charming gentleman. Sandor Szavost is a worldly man, representing the excitement missing from Alice’s sedentary life at home. Sandor approaches Alice from the right and notices her third glass of champagne sitting on the table.

Kubrick illuminates the sequence with thousands of twinkling Christmas lights surrounding the room, perhaps modernizing his technique of filming by candlelight in *Barry Lyndon*. It gives the images that follow a truly beautiful and dreamlike feel that will continue, in other forms, throughout the film. Knowingly drinking the remainder of Alice’s champagne, Sandor reveals his seductive intentions to her. What follows as the pair ease their way onto the dance floor, is a sexy exchange of carnal possibilities, as Alice and Sandor toy with the idea of becoming intimate. Sandor states that the reason people originally decided to marry was to be free to engage with anyone they desired, hinting that Alice could be with any man she wanted. As she begins to leave, Sandor says that he must see her again. And by flashing her wedding ring towards him, she states the impossibility of that notion.
Much like Alice’s confession later in the film, this sequence is shot mainly medium close-up, with the lips of the two individuals separated by mere inches. In this sequence, Kubrick expresses the importance of fidelity to the character, despite Alice’s urges for sexual excitement.

Kubrick follows this with a uniquely framed sequence of Bill and Alice making love. Having been wooed by Sandor, thoughts of excitement and change are running through the character’s head, as she stands naked before a large mirror in the couple’s bedroom. Alice’s removing of her earrings is accompanied by Chris Isaak’s “Baby Did A Bad, Bad Thing” in the background. Instead of a non-diegetic soundtrack, a portion of the music in the film plays a part in the diegetic narrative. This is shown here as Alice subtly rocks in beat with the music. Bill slowly approaches, and begins kissing Alice’s neck and caresses her breasts. Bill’s engagement in the act is apparent, as he is the one shown making all of the effort. Alice uses the mirror in the frame to remove herself from the physical act, as she begins to assess her marriage with Bill. Never does Alice look directly at Bill as he declares his passion for her. Instead, she examines the reflection of the pair, as if looking back on a memory. This is Alice’s call to action
in the film. After her encounter with Sandor, Alice knows that something must change in her life.

Kubrick’s use of the mirror in this sequence is a great example of one of the director’s signatures. In the majority of his work, mirrors are used to display the dual nature of the protagonist. In *Killer’s Kiss*, the mirror is used to convey Davy’s feelings for Gloria as he uses it to voyeuristically see into her apartment. Furthermore, Alex’s bedroom in *A Clockwork Orange*, features a very large mirror that is utilized in many of the shots to further the divide between the human and the monstrous within the main character. In *The Shining*, the mirror within the Torrance’s living quarters at the Overlook is used in several instances to display Jack’s descent into madness. There are numerous shots where the mirror presents two images of Jack within the same frame, representing his struggle for sanity. This stylistic and symbolically charged technique is clearly present in this sequence, as Bill and Alice make love. The one-sided act is presented from Alice’s perspective as she longs for change. This duality of man is present in all of Kubrick’s work, as the protagonists struggle, often internally, to achieve their goals. This applies to Bill and Alice in *Eyes Wide Shut*, as both
characters are given lengthy moments of contemplation on screen, alluding to their internal conflict.

     Earlier in the film, a mirror is used again as Alice and Bill ready themselves to attend the Christmas party. Alice sits on the toilet while Bill examines himself in the mirror. Lindiwe Dovey refers to this important glimpse into Bill’s character, and thusly his relationship with Alice, by writing

     Kubrick uses the visual prop of the mirror, in the first scene of Eyes Wide Shut, to characterize Bill as narcissistic, as needing to undergo a journey in which he will learn how to develop a new kind of life for his wife in which he will recognize her as an equal – a more optimistic kind of life than that imagined by Freud and Lacan. In the first scene, Bill stares at himself in the bathroom mirror and says, “Perfect,” in response to his wife’s question about how she looks, without turning to look at her. The scene suggests that Bill narcissistically sees his wife in himself, as part of his property rather than as an individual being.14

     This early examination of the relationship between the couple is very telling. Dovey’s analysis perfectly encapsulates the unhealthy marriage between Bill and Alice. Bill is shown from the onset of the film to be egotistical and concerned solely with his appearance. He views his wife as a trophy, and little more.

     While the film serves mainly as Bill’s internal struggle, Alice’s screen time is rather limited, but Nicole Kidman commands such attention that her moments on screen are the strongest and most alluring in the picture. Alice’s grandest scene is the lengthy argument between herself and Bill where she details her lustful desires for another man. Preceding this confession, Bill enrages Alice, as he openly states that the only reason a man would talk to her is because he

wants to make love to her. Alice retorts with a hurtful and antagonistic monologue. While the family had been on vacation the summer prior to the events shown in the film, a young naval officer caught the eye of the married Alice. In this revelatory sequence that sets Bill out on his quest, Alice details the encounter by stating in her marijuana-driven moment of honesty,

I first saw him that morning in the lobby. He was checking into the hotel, and he was following the bellboy with his luggage to the elevator. He glanced at me as he walked past, just a glance. Nothing more. But I could hardly move. That afternoon, Helena went to the movies with her friend and you and I made love. And we made plans about our future, and we talked about Helena, and yet, at no time was he ever out of my mind. And I thought, if he wanted me, even if it was only for one night, I was ready to give up everything. You. Helena. My whole fucking future. Everything. And yet it was weird, cause at the same time, you were dearer to me than ever. And at that moment, my love for you was both tender and sad. I barely slept that night. I woke up the next morning in a panic. I didn't know whether I was afraid that he had left or that he might still be there. But by dinner, I realized he was gone, and I was relieved.

Here, the viewer is granted an uninhibited trip into the head of Alice, as she recounts her wandering lust for the naval officer, knowingly devastating her husband.

Kidman’s performance during this lengthy sequence is incredible, as Alice recalls the moment when she nearly threw her married life away for sexual gratification. As seen in the above still, Cruise maintains the same glazed over expression
throughout the sequence, providing very little range for Bill, an issue that will continue over the course of the film. Kidman’s Alice, however, creates a very realistic portrayal of a woman with serious misgivings and trust issues within her marriage. She feels trapped in her mundane existence in Manhattan, and longs for excitement, something the naval officer could possibly have delivered.

Jealousy and rage instantly consume Bill, as he hears the news of his wife’s imaginary infidelity. Although these urges were never consummated, they still hurt the man when flung at him with such callous disdain. Alice holds nothing back in the telling of her desires of the previous summer, and she knows exactly what her words will do to Bill. Kubrick films this intimate exchange by utilizing very lengthy takes, capitalizing on the acting ability of his lead actress. The camera lingers very close to Kidman as she details her lustful thoughts, allowing the viewer to see all of the naked emotion in her face. Had Kubrick chosen to use a wide shot in the place of these intimate images, the power of the altercation would have been lost. By quickly cutting to Cruise’s static look of shock and pain, Kubrick shows the emotional impact of Alice’s verbal blows.

Karen Hoffman refers to Kantian theory within the film, highlighting the internal dilemma within the character of Alice, by writing,

Kantian ethics suggests that although we cannot will desires into or out of existence, we can will ourselves to act according to something other than our desires: we can do what duty requires and act according to moral principles. So, our desires are subject to our control inasmuch as we have the ability to ignore them. But Alice believes that she was incapable of ignoring her desire for the officer. Even though circumstances intervened to remove the temptation – the officer received a telegram that prompted his
immediate departure – the possibility of her betrayal has left Alice concerned that her fidelity to Bill is accidental.\textsuperscript{15}

This perfectly captures the conflict within Alice, as she has just released her clandestine lustful memory on her husband. After this revelation, the viewer realizes this conflict has been building up inside Alice since the very beginning of the film, particularly as she observes Bill flirting with other women. Despite the fact that Alice is granted such limited screen time, this conflict, hidden beneath the surface, is the driving force behind the film. After meeting with the grieving family of a recently deceased patient, it is this conflict that sends Bill out into the night looking for sexual excitement. Hoffman also points out that Alice begins to question whether Bill’s fidelity is inadvertent as well. This is the true cause of her revealing her tale: she is testing him to see if he has had similar reactions to other women.

Following this exchange, Bill is called to the penthouse of a recently deceased patient to pay his respects to the family. The dead man’s soon to be married daughter throws herself at him, exclaiming that she would give up her fiancée just to live near Bill. Bill finds himself the object of a fantasy similar to that of his wife’s, and this drives him to leave and embark on his journey of sexual discovery. The woman’s fiancée serves as a doppelganger to Bill, in that they look very similar, have paralleled high-profile careers, and are both unaware of the straying urges of their partners. As Bill walks the streets of the city, he finds himself walking alongside Domino, a young prostitute. Domino would provide a

quick and easy way for Bill to exact sexual revenge on his wife, but Domino proves to be much more than that. While in her apartment, Domino and Bill may kiss once or twice, but the pair never goes any further than that. As they kiss, Bill is called by a concerned Alice, wondering when he will be returning home. This serves as a reconciliatory gesture from his wife, proving that she cares for him, despite her cold remarks earlier. Unlike Sherry in *The Killing*, Alice is not antagonistic towards her husband, she is confused about what she wants in her life, and if this marriage is the best place for her to be. Domino serves as a test for Bill, one that he never would have expected to pass, having recently been emotionally scorned by his wife.

He finds himself still devoted to Alice, despite her revelation, and is therefore incapable of engaging intimately with Domino. Bill gives her the money he promised to pay her, and then leaves. The next day, nearing the end of his sexual odyssey, Bill returns to Domino’s apartment and is greeted by her roommate, who informs him that Domino has discovered that she is HIV positive. As Bill contemplates this news, and the idea that he could have become infected
himself had he stayed with her, he comes to terms with his marriage, and decides that he wants to make it work.

Throughout the film, Bill is haunted by dreamlike images of his wife engaging in passionate lovemaking with the naval officer. Kubrick lights these sequences just as he does the film’s nighttime scenes, with an ethereal blue light. It is this light that makes it difficult to discern what is a dream and what is reality, a major theme of the film. As Bill encounters various women throughout the film, never actually engaging in intercourse with them, this lighting is present. It is present in every nighttime sequence in the Hartford home, suggesting that the marriage may be based on a dream; a dream of fidelity and trust that has come into question.

As the stills above show, as Bill imagines this adulterous act, his eyes are closed. Kubrick is commenting on the dreamlike state of the story, as the viewer is never aware of the legitimacy of the images shown. Having been informed about the elite party by his pianist friend, Nick Nightingale, Bill sets out to find it. On his way, Bill visualizes Alice making love with the officer. It could be said that everything that follows, the Illuminati-esque sex party and his public humiliation at entering without an invitation, is in fact a dream. As with nearly every Kubrick film, the director likes to leave certain elements up to the viewer, enabling them
to participate in the narrative, and to inform their own opinions about what they are experiencing.

While Alice may be the most empowered female character in the filmography of Stanley Kubrick, *Eyes Wide Shut* comments on the objectification and victimization of women as well, particularly by those in the upper class. Victor Ziegler, played by director Sydney Pollack, is the primary representation of misogyny and chauvinism in the picture. As soon as Ziegler is shown on screen at this Christmas party, he notes how stunning Alice is. When he tells her he does not say that to all of the ladies, his wife quickly interrupts and says that he actually does. There is an uncomfortable look on his wife’s face as she says this that suggests that she is well aware of his infidelities. At the party, Bill is called away from the models he is flirting with to assist Ziegler in the bathroom. Upon arriving there, he sees a naked young woman overdosing on a combination of heroin and cocaine. Ziegler has obviously had intercourse with this woman, as he is shown pulling his pants up. It is unknown whether she was conscious for the act, itself. Bill helps the young woman, later revealed as Mandy, recover and gain consciousness, warning her to evaluate her lifestyle and make changes to save her life. The set design of this room is strikingly similar to that of the Moloko Milk Bar and Ms. Weather’s exercise room in *A Clockwork Orange* as the walls are covered in artwork of naked women, continuing the victimization of women through objectifying art, and commenting on Ziegler’s treatment of women. Bill tells Mandy that she is a very lucky girl, in that she has not killed herself with her drug intake. She responds, “I know.” Kubrick films this in a way that, upon seeing
the complete film, the viewer is able to sense foreshadowing here. As this exchange is going on, over Bill’s shoulder, we see Ziegler towering over the two. The viewer knows that Mandy is not lucky at all, as she is being passed around the various men of the elite organization for degrading sex.

At the sex party itself Kubrick presents the most intense images of female objectification in the film. As the male participants look on, the women undress, and are shown completely naked, aside from their eerie masks worn to conceal the identities of those involved. This in and of itself shows that these men view these women as sole objects of sexual gratification, as they are completely devoid of identity. Their physical attributes are the solitary form of identification among the women. They are faceless, and thus, as the men engage sexually with them, they do not develop a sense of guilt.
As shown above, the women are on their knees, bare in front of a spectacle of male voyeurs, hidden behind their masks and cloaks. A masked and costumed Bill sees countless instances of masked figures in various sexual positions, while the remaining men watch eagerly. Throughout, the men are identified solely by their eyes through their masks, an eerie element that casts a nightmarish feel over the entirety of the sequence. A mysterious woman escorts Bill for a portion of the scene, warning him that he had better leave, as the men know that he does not belong there. She leaves, and soon after he is accosted by the group, and forced to remove his mask, revealing his identity to everyone in the room. He is about to be punished for his sneaking into the party, whatever that may mean, when the mysterious woman offers herself up as a sacrifice so they will release Bill. She is taken away, and Bill is set free, under the condition that he never speak of the events he has witnessed to anyone, threatened with the safety of his family. Though Alice is physically absent from the majority of these key events in Bill’s struggle for balance within his marriage, she is ever present in Bill’s mind. He is constantly viewing the women he encounters in relation to Alice, gaining him a better understanding of the woman he is married to. Having viewed her as a mere extension of himself at the beginning of the film, through his meetings with Domino and the mysterious woman, Bill finally sees her as her own individualized person.

Another instance of female victimization occurs in the film in the form of the daughter of the owner of Rainbow Fashions. As Bill rents his tuxedo, cloak, and mask to sneak into the elite party, the owner catches his teenaged daughter
engaging with Asian businessmen. Outraged, he locks the men in his office, and threatens to call the police. The daughter, running from her father’s rage, hides behind Bill, and clings to him. She then whispers something into his ear, a presumed request for sexual contact, before walking away. Bill is shocked by the offer, and is repulsed by the behavior of the businessmen. When he arrives the next day to return his costume, he finds the daughter with the businessmen again, clearly having paid to interact with the young girl. The owner of the shop even offers his daughter to Bill. Dismayed, Bill asks why the man had not called the police, and the owner says that the men had come to an understanding. This young woman is clearly the victim of her father, selling her body to any men that come into Rainbow Fashions.

Much like his use of red in *The Shining* and *A Clockwork Orange* to highlight violence and inhumane behavior, Kubrick uses vibrant red in the sequences here to match the dramatically indecent actions that transpire “where the rainbow ends.”

Obsessed with the events that took place at the sex party, Bill is constantly attempting to connect certain clues, and assemble a form of reality.
Ultimately, he discovers an obituary in the newspaper and feels that it is that of
the mysterious woman at the party. Using his medical license, he goes to the
morgue and sees the body for himself, confirming her identity. The mysterious
woman was in fact Mandy, the young woman whom he had saved from
overdosing at Ziegler’s Christmas party. Bill then confronts Ziegler who states
that Mandy was passed around sexually that night, and nothing more. He claims
it was her drug addiction that killed her, foreshadowed by Bill’s treatment of her
earlier in the bathroom at the party. Kubrick smartly leaves the interpretation to
the viewer to decide the true fate of Mandy. Bill certainly does not believe
Ziegler’s words, and decides to return home to his wife. This dialogue is filmed
while Ziegler shoots pool in his lavish den, a clear display of his power and his
unconcern.

Kubrick ends the film with Bill and Alice. Bill returns home to find the mask
he thought he had lost sitting on his pillow next to a sleeping Alice. Horrified at
being discovered, he begins uncontrollably sobbing, waking her, and promising
to tell her everything. Kubrick matches his sobbing with the next shot, an
intensely close shot of Alice, clearly having cried for hours.
The following morning, the pair take their daughter Christmas shopping, and discuss the future. They are unsure of where to go in the future, and clearly uncertain if they should even remain together. Having “awakened” from their erotically tempting “dreams,” where their eyes were indeed “wide shut” to one another, their eyes are now wide open at the tumultuous future before them. Leaving the judgment up to Alice, Bill asks her what she thinks they should do. Hesitant to display certainty, she states, “I do love you. And you know, there is something very important that we need to do as soon as possible.” He asks, “What’s that?” And she responds, “Fuck.” Kubrick ends the film with this dramatic use of the word, stating that the pair must engage with each other physically to see if they still are carnally passionate for one another.

With his last film, Stanley Kubrick has achieved the fully formed female character that he had been working up to over the course of his career. True, she may not be present throughout the entirety of the narrative, but Alice Hartford is clearly the most vital figure in *Eyes Wide Shut*. Bill’s entire sexual odyssey is set in motion through her admission to adulterous longings. Alice is the first woman with real agency in Kubrick’s work. Unlike Shelley Duvall’s Wendy Torrance in *The Shining*, Alice’s empowerment is not given because of primitive reaction,
Alice is in control of her own choices, allowing the viewer to gain a unique perspective other than Bill's in the narrative. Many of the characters in Kubrick's early work are shown solely as reactionary figures to the male protagonists. Lady Lyndon in Barry Lyndon is a prime example of this. Alice transcends the limitations of this, in that she is her own idealized individual, for better or for worse. She is a realistic portrait of a woman unhappy in her marriage, a woman looking for something that's missing. At the beginning of the film, Bill viewed her as an extension of his own narcissistic self, but by the end of the film, he sees that she is in fact her own person. While the future of their marriage is uncertain, Eyes Wide Shut is the first Kubrick film to truly end with hope. Both Alice and Bill are hopeful that they will be able to work out their frustrations through physical intimacy, and in turn regain a sense of passion and recognition in their relationship.

The cinema of Stanley Kubrick is filled to the brim with incredible visual images and emotionally charged moments. With his unique cinematic perspective, Kubrick captured audiences worldwide and influenced a generation of filmmakers. His portrayals of women have greatly varied, ranging from instigator with Shelley in The Killing, to victim in A Clockwork Orange, Lady Lyndon in Barry Lyndon, and Wendy in The Shining, to ultimately empowered with Alice in Eyes Wide Shut. Kubrick developed as an artist as he developed his inclusion of women in his narratives. While many mainly notice the male protagonists in his film, it is the female characters that shine through the hopeless darkness and incite the most emotional response in the viewer.
Bibliography


Films Cited


*Fear and Desire* - Dir. Stanley Kubrick, 1953, Kubrick Production Co.


*Killer’s Kiss* - Dir. Stanley Kubrick, 1955, MGM.

*The Killing* - Dir. Stanley Kubrick, 1956, MGM.

*Lolita* - Dir. Stanley Kubrick, 1962, MGM.


*Paths of Glory* - Dir. Stanley Kubrick, 1957, United Artists.


*Spartacus* - Dir. Stanley Kubrick, 1960, Universal.
