

Running Title: Sex, Text and Screen

Sex, Text, and Screen: Kubrick's Adaptation  
of Sexually-Explicit Scenes from Text to Film

By

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## ABSTRACT

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Over the course of Stanley Kubrick's career, he adapted three controversial novels into three of his most successful films. *Lolita*, *A Clockwork Orange*, and *Traumnovelle* are all full of sexually-explicit content which, when adapted to film, caused even more controversy. Print and film are fundamentally different, and Kubrick faced a unique challenge by choosing source texts that were often uncomfortable for their audiences to read. Sexually explicit scenes in film are much more potent than those in novels; thus, for Kubrick to be successful he must find a balance between recreating the scene's effect from the novel and allowing the audience to be comfortable enough to continue watching.

My thesis demonstrates that the more subtle the representation of sexuality, the more effective the film is in its recreation of the source text. Kubrick was able to duplicate the tension found in the source material by using symbolic representations, changes in the narrative and in characters. By analyzing how sexual tension is produced in these novels and the films *Eyes Wide Shut*, *Lolita*, and *A Clockwork Orange* I prove how detail in their narrative construction, mise-en-scene and dialogue successfully creates sequences that toe the line between discomfort and sexual explicitness.

For Dad

## **Table of Contents**

<b>Introduction</b>	1
The Language of Film	2
Narrative Changes	4
Audience Reaction	6
<b>Lolita</b>	8
Humor As Cushion	10
Narrative Changes and Character Juxtaposition	13
MPAA and Forced Regulations	23
Conclusion	25
<b>Eyes Wide Shut</b>	27
Marital Encounters	28
Emotional Encounter	36
Physical Encounter	40
Underage Encounter	44
Multiple Encounters	48
Conclusion	54
<b>A Clockwork Orange</b>	56
Rape in Feature Film	58
Explicitness in Consensual Sex Versus Rape	64
Rape and Murder	66
Narrative Choices	70
Conclusion	72
<b>Conclusion.</b>	74
<b>Works Cited</b>	i

## Introduction

The very meaninglessness of life  
forces man to create his own meaning.  
If it can be written or thought,  
it can be filmed.

- Stanley Kubrick<sup>1</sup>

Film is a medium that comes from a variety of inspirations, but many times a film is based on a novel or story that was originally a text. The adaptation of stories into film always requires swaps, cuts, additions, and/or changes to allow the audience to enjoy the film. But successful transposition of a source text is always difficult to achieve, “converting the verbal to the visual is a translation to an entirely different medium. So much cannot be described. Much has to be compressed. Many monologues are suppressed so the film will not be talky or stagey. The camera’s eye is the observer of all that is seen; it follows the screen writer’s point of view, but it narrates from omniscient heights” (Loewenberg, 262). But what happens when the source text that is being adapted is explicit in nature? How can one adapt something that is uncomfortable to read, let alone watch?

For the late director Stanley Kubrick, this question was raised in several of his film adaptations. In three of his films the specific issues of sexual explicitness, perversion, and violence are pushed to the forefront. All of these topics were found in

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<sup>1</sup> Found in Halliwell's Filmgoer's and Video Viewer's Companion. See Works Cited for full Bibliographic information.

their source texts, but adapting them to film while staying true to the original proved difficult.<sup>2</sup> Sexual explicitness is a more general term, encompassing any uncensored sexual activity, whereas perversion and violence are more specific terms (used regarding taboo topics such as pedophilia and rape respectively). In *Lolita* (1960), based on the novel with the same name by Vladimir Nabokov, *A Clockwork Orange* (1970), based on the novel with the same name by Anthony Burgess, and *Eyes Wide Shut* (1998) based on the short story *Traumnovelle* by Arthur Schnitzler, sexual explicitness, perversion and violence draw in audiences and simultaneously render them uncomfortable. This analysis will begin with the least sexually explicit (*Lolita*) and move to the most (*A Clockwork Orange*). Despite a brilliant oeuvre, these three films stand out: “the graphic or outrageous is filmed exquisitely. The audience is torn between looking away and gazing with uneasy delight” (Murray and Schuler, 134).

## THE LANGUAGE OF FILM

But how does Kubrick accomplish such a feat? Although all of these films were successful in the box office, the question is not whether the film is successful financially, but rather is it good? Of course, that raises the question “what is good?” In neo-formalism, good is equated with beautiful, unified, and an aesthetic that makes sense – that is, elements in the film exist for a reason. According to David Bordwell, “the human mind craves form. For this reason, form is of central importance in any artwork, regardless of medium” (Bordwell, 39). Or for things to “make sense” there needs to be a

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<sup>2</sup> In both the films *Lolita* and *Eyes Wide Shut*, Kubrick employed help with the screenplays (Vladimir Nabokov and Frederic Raphael respectively). However, Kubrick would use very little of these original screenplays.

pattern or structure. Random choices do not necessarily make sense, register a response from the reader (other than confusion) and most importantly, do not convey what the author intended. So, in film, for something to make sense all the elements involved must have a purpose. These elements include props, setting, costumes, make-up, and dialogue. In other words, “A film is not simply a random batch of elements. Like all artworks, a film has form. By film form, in its broadest sense we mean the overall system of relations that we can perceive among the elements in the whole film” (Bordwell 40). By analyzing these elements and their purpose we can determine whether or not a film is unified and in this way, define the film as good. In this crucial approach, “all of Kubrick’s films adhere to the ‘canonic’ story format, a scheme of fibula organization that, because of its high degree of codification and recurrence, can help the viewer fill in any information the text may fail to provide” (Raphael, 70). Therefore, because of Kubrick’s history of using patterns and schemes the audience must be prepared to be active within the film by reading into settings and mise-en-scene to gain complete access to the film.

Kubrick’s films employ “a narrative mode in which the textual side of the film is constantly emphasized, and in which all the elements of mise-en-scene, including characters, are manipulated to create meaning” (Raphael, 73). The unification between these elements and the story are imperative in the description of sexually explicit actions because without them Kubrick must be more obvious. With obviousness comes graphic, and in turn graphic becomes uncomfortable and potentially gratuitous. In terms of adapting sexually explicit moments in a novel to film, this means Kubrick uses subtle elements of the film to describe the sexual moments and tension without explicitly

showing it. For example, in both *A Clockwork Orange* and *Eyes Wide Shut* Kubrick uses a mask as both a literal cover for the characters, but also as a representation of sexuality. In *A Clockwork Orange*, the protagonist Alex wears a phallic mask while preparing to rape a defenseless woman. Although Kubrick does not show the rape, the mask represents what Alex is about to do. Such a subtle element “demands from the viewer a great capacity to establish links between elements, to relate elements by similarity or contrast and infer a meaning from these relationships” (Mainar, 82). Therefore, some elements maybe lost on the audience and require several viewings before all connections can be made. This is why Kubrick makes other changes that are more obvious to represent sexuality on film.

## **NARRATIVE CHANGES**

An obvious change that Kubrick makes in all of his narratives was the removal of scenes and change of characters to lessen sexual explicitness. Simple changes in characters of the films are obvious, and clearly done to mitigate sexual perversion. In all three films Kubrick changes the ages of some of the characters. *Lolita* was barely twelve in the novel, however in the film she is at least fourteen, if not older. In the novel *A Clockwork Orange* Alex rapes two ten-year old girls; in the film the two girls are at least sixteen and the sex is consensual. Even in *Eyes Wide Shut* Kubrick changes one young girl’s age to be a teenager, whereas in *Traumnovelle* she is twelve. These obvious changes help diminish the audience’s discomfort with sexually explicit active characters. In today’s culture, even though it is (sometimes) acceptable to be seen in writing, it is not



acceptable to be shown the sexuality of underage peoples, and Kubrick understands this. Rather than be completely faithful to the text, he makes changes that will allow for acceptance by a wider audience.

Another way that Kubrick takes advantage of the audience's perception is in the narrative changes he made during adaptation. Since audiences are pre-disposed to understand that the camera represents a third-person perspective, there is a removal of subjectivity from the narratives. This means that how the characters act on screen is exactly how the audience will judge them. Furthermore, the amount of information and the time that Kubrick disseminates this information throughout the film also changes how the audience sees characters. For example, in *Lolita*, Kubrick switches the narrative structure of the novel by starting with one of the last scenes. By doing this, Kubrick creates a bias within the audience immediately, and this bias will affect how they view the monster that is Humbert Humbert. By the end of the film the audience will not see Humbert as a monster as they do in the novel, and this change successfully curbs the sexual perversion attached to the novel. Kubrick also removes scenes entirely. For example, in *A Clockwork Orange* he skips a homosexual prison rape scene that is found in the novel. By choosing not to include this sequence, Kubrick immediately makes his adaptation less sexually violent than the novel.

Of course, Kubrick keeps other sexually violent and explicit moments in the film; however, his choice to do this is necessary for impact. For example, if Kubrick had removed all the sexually violent moments in *A Clockwork Orange*, he would have completely removed the audience's negative response to the sexual aspects of the film. As Kubrick said in an issue of *Sight and Sound* magazine in 1972:

It was absolutely necessary to give weight to Alex's brutality; otherwise I think there would be moral confusion with respect to what the government does to him. If he were a lesser villain, then one could say: 'Oh, yes, of course, he should not be given this psychological conditioning; it's all too horrible and he really wasn't that bad after all.' On the other hand, when you have shown him committing such atrocious acts, and you still realize the immense evil on the part of the government in turning him into something less than human in order to make him good, then I think the essential moral idea of the book is clear. (Kubrick, 1972)

Therefore, Kubrick's choice to include or cut scenes in each of the screenplays was for good reason. What Kubrick keeps is for narrative impact and what he removes is what he considers to be unnecessary or gratuitous for the audience.

## **AUDIENCE REACTION**

As stated earlier, all three films enjoyed box office success. However, they all were also subjected to audience backlash. With copycat crimes following the release of *A Clockwork Orange*, Kubrick removed the film from circulation in Great Britain even though it was the second most successful film ever at the time (Stanley Kubrick: A Life in Pictures, 2001). Audiences reacted to its sexually violent nature and how it was affecting the generation that was seeing the film, claiming that Kubrick was attempting to corrupt the youth. However, as with most audience backlash against his films, these "howls of execration were based on a misunderstanding of the director's intentions" ((Shaw, 222). Even though some reactions to his films were negative, he achieves immortality in the film world by taking the lead "with sex, nudity and violence; there is the matchless

eroticism of the toenail-polishing sequence that opens *Lolita* and decades later it is still harrowing to watch scenes from *A Clockwork Orange*” (Murray and Schuler, 134). With shock factor and unequivocal beauty Kubrick finds a way to make horrific actions stay in the audience’s mind.

For Kubrick, the inclusion of sexual explicitness, perversion and violence was not to titillate the audience or encourage these acts. Rather, it was to force the audience to question what is good, what is bad, and what can a human do and still be forgiven? By exposing the capacity for cruelty humans have and blurring the lines between what is right and what is wrong, Kubrick challenges his audience. These basic moral questions provide an avenue for these sexual themes and although they are dark, uncomfortable and painful to view and comprehend, they are necessary to understanding the answers to these questions. Kubrick’s elegant solution to showing horrific actions allows the audience to discover what they do believe in. As he once said, “however vast the darkness, we must supply our own light” (Kubrick, 1968).

## **Lolita**

What drives me insane is the twofold nature  
of this nymphet, of every nymphet perhaps,  
this mixture in my Lolita of tender, dreamy  
childishness and a kind of eerie vulgarity....

- *Lolita*

The ultimate story of taboo desire, Vladimir Nabokov's 1955 novel *Lolita* was published to mixed reviews. Of course, the nature of the story was bound to cause that reaction. Following the life of Humbert Humbert, a sophisticated European who makes his way to America to teach at Beardsley College, the first-person account tells of how he falls in love with a nymphet<sup>3</sup> by the name of Delores, also known as Lo and to Humbert Lolita. In the novel she is barely twelve years old, and by chance, Humbert is a guest at her mother's house until he could find another place to stay. Realizing that young Lolita was the love of his life, Humbert marries her widowed mother, and following her death becomes Lolita's guardian and lover. Based on this description the novel seems nothing short of a graphic, pedophilic story and this was the impression that many browsing readers would have initially perceived. In truth, the novel is funny, caring, and delicate at times, but horrifying and slightly erotic at others. However, editors and critics deemed the

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<sup>3</sup> This is a very specific classification given by Humbert to young girls who possess a certain quality. They are pre-pubescent, sexually pervasive, have no acne, are thin, etc.

novel inappropriate, and when Kubrick purchased the rights to the novel in 1961 he was faced with a question: how could he ever make a movie about *Lolita*?

Kubrick hired Nabokov to write the screenplay, and together they completely changed the novel, cutting large sections and reorganizing the chronology to make it more film-friendly. In the end, Kubrick only used part of what he and Nabokov collaborated on.<sup>4</sup> There were so many changes that the film became a very different version of the novel, but it still ran into the same obstacles in terms of pornography charges. The film inverts the chronology and begins with the ending of the novel, when Humbert confronts Clare Quilty over the demise of his lovely Lolita. But more importantly, the film also inverts the focus of the narrative. The story is no longer about a depraved, middle-aged man who is fighting a life-long battle against pedophilia – specifically an attraction to those he deems “nymphets.” Rather, it is about the relationship between a sensible, middle-aged man who eventually gives in to his desires through the seduction of a seemingly innocent girl. For many, *Lolita* “clarified the feeling we all have that good and evil does [sic] not come in the expected package” (Kubrick, 2001).

By adding a great deal of humor to the story, by changing the narrative’s timeline and characters, and by making edits forced by the MPAA (Motion Picture Association of America) and the Catholic Legion of Decency, Kubrick was able to greatly subdue the sexually explicit content of the original text.

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<sup>4</sup> Nabokov’s original screenplay was over 400 pages, but Kubrick used very little. Despite this Nabokov receiving full screenwriting credit.

## HUMOR AS CUSHION

One of the most potent defenses against the sexually explicit nature of *Lolita* is the fantastic dark humor throughout the film. In fact, before Kubrick had production green-lighted he promised the MPAA that humor would be used “to make the relationship palatable” (LoBrutto, 215).

When Humbert first meets the Haze family he tours their home. Charlotte Haze, the widowed mother of Lolita, is comical on a variety of levels. She tries too hard to be sophisticated and fails miserably without ever realizing it. When showing off her home, she proudly comments how “there is a nice view out this window, of the front lawn.”<sup>5</sup> She continues to look foolish by continually mispronouncing French words, and claiming that, “Monsieur, if what you're needing is peace and quiet I can assure you, you couldn't get more peace anywhere.” Ironically, she continues to jabber for rest of the scene, and in any other scene she is in. At another point she humorously claims, “culturally we are a very advanced group...we are very progressive, intellectually of course,” but refers to a Van Gogh reproduction as her “little Van Gawk.” In expressing her love and undying desire for Humbert she claims, “Hum, you touch me and I go limp as a noodle!” Quickly, and without the slightest change in voice, he responds, “I know the feeling.” She continues to smile, completely unaware of the insult. The humorous exchanges between these two are ironic because of her obliviousness and his understanding. It also activates the audience in the film. They are now also part of the joke that she does not understand.

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<sup>5</sup> All subsequent dialogue in this section without citation is from *Lolita*, 1962. See Works Cited for full bibliographic information.

This also helps the audience identify with Humbert, because they are in on the humor and therefore find him more appealing.

However, Humbert making fun of Charlotte is not the only humor in the film. The scene immediately following Humbert's agreement to be a lodger begins with a sequence of a monster attacking a man. It turns out that Humbert, Charlotte and Lolita are at the theatre, watching a horror film. Sandwiched between the two Haze women, Humbert is in the perfect position to comfort them when they get scared. Kubrick next displays a medium shot of Humbert seated in the theatre chair with his hands on his knees. Off screen a girl screams and Charlotte and Lolita each grab onto one of his hands. Humbert casually shakes off Charlotte's hand by scratching his nose, and then replaces his hand on top of Lolita's. Another scream from the girl in the movie and Lolita places her other hand on top of his. Charlotte then reaches across his lap to grab onto Humbert's hand; however, once she realizes it is her daughter's they all quickly fold their arms to avoid the awkward situation. This moment clearly shows Humbert's attraction to Lolita, but the situation is masked by the comedic element of him trying to avoid Charlotte's advances. Therefore, it confirms Charlotte's attraction to him, and also suggests that Lolita has feelings for Humbert as well. Furthermore, the fact that each character is trying to keep his/her attraction for another secret is amusing, especially since they all choose to ignore it. Humor in this situation seriously downplays the fact that Humbert is attracted to a fourteen-year-old girl and introduces this narrative theme that will become more prevalent; therefore Kubrick is smart to use it.

Another dark, comedic moment that functions both to further the narrative and explain the characters occurs at the summer dance that the whole town seems to attend. In

the middle of the dance floor a very cool and smooth Clare Quilty dances with a beautiful woman with a crowd of people around them. Stylishly dressed, the duo is obviously a celebrity presence as all the adults are just watching these two slide on the dance floor. When Mrs. Haze spots them she exclaims she “must say hello” since she had him speak at her book club last summer. Lacking any social etiquette, she immediately walks through the crowd watching them, up to the couple, and begins to tap on Quilty’s shoulder. He ignores her. Persistent as ever, she cuts into the dance and replaces Quilty’s partner. After the dance they begin to chat; Quilty clearly has no idea who she is and eventually Mrs. Haze catches on, “Don’t you remember?” she pouts, “That afternoon changed my whole life!” Mrs. Haze leans in and whispers in his ear for six seconds during which Quilty’s chuckles and smiles, “Did I do that? Did I?” he purrs. “Yes, that was fun,” he sarcastically comments, as she glows. But before he turns away for good he remembers something. “Didn’t you have a daughter,” he excitedly asks, “one with a lovely name?” “Lolita,” Charlotte answers for him. “Dolores and the roses and the tea” he replies with a knowing smile. Beyond the initial laugh of the sequence, this scene uses humor to reintroduce Clare Quilty.<sup>6</sup> Here the audience gleans that he is famous, stylish, promiscuous, and recalls Lolita (but not her mother whom he slept with). Like the scene in the theatre, Kubrick humorously suggests a sexually perverse relationship to lessen the audience’s discomfort. Furthermore, with humor, Kubrick is able to cloud important facts (such as those about Quilty and Lolita) that will later become a large part of Quilty and Lolita’s relationship. In turn, this forces the audience to be more engaged in deciphering the clues between the two as the film progresses.

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<sup>6</sup> In the novel, Quilty is first mentioned as the nephew of the local dentist, he doesn’t have a real appearance until Part II when Humbert and Lolita are in Beardsley.



Mrs. Haze clearly functions as the comedic relief in the first half of the film, but her humorous comments don't trivialize the fact that Humbert still has several problems. In fact, these situations are almost exclusively in the first half of the film when Mrs. Haze and Humbert are married. Once she dies and the relationship between Humbert and Lolita begins to develop into a sexual one, the humor steadily decreases. Therefore, comedy lessens the explicitness of the situation when it is still quasi-playful, but once the relationship gets serious, the noticeable absence of humor cues the audience into realizing that it is not healthy. Thus, Kubrick is able to downplay the obscene content when he wants to or emphasize it later by the obvious elision of humor.

### **NARRATIVE CHANGES AND CHARACTER JUXTAPOSITION**

The largest change in *Lolita's* adaptation was the removal of the subjective voice of Humbert Humbert. In the novel, he narrates the entire story, which not only severely limits the information the reader has access to, but also obscures his view of Lolita instead of how she really acts. This is absent in the film. For example, Humbert is unaware of the scene described above between Charlotte and Quilty at the dance. Therefore, the audience now knows information that Humbert does not, and this allows them to understand plot nuances before Humbert does. Furthermore, from this scene they know they are viewing the film from a third-person, limited perspective. It is limited because nearly every scene includes Humbert, which in turn highlights any scene that does not include him. This cues the audience to pay attention to these moments. The dramatic irony and third-person, limited perspective in this film functions to benefit Humbert. This is because not only does the audience know characters' motives that he

does not, third person narrative also substantiates that the how the characters are seen on film are how they really are. Therefore the characters are not tainted by the subjective narration that Humbert gives in the novel and the audience can believe what they see on the screen as real.

Kubrick importantly reorganizes the narrative from the novel to the screenplay. In order to elude parts of the narrative that were clearly inappropriate for the film industry and culture, Kubrick changed around the novel's entire chronology. Nabokov's *Lolita* begins with Humbert Humbert recollecting, but not immediately his relationship with Lolita. Rather, he begins with his childhood and builds a case for his problem, claiming that he first fell in love with a nymphet when she was twelve and he was fourteen. The girl dies, but Humbert never recovers from the relationship. He claims this romance arrests his romantic development, and therefore he will always love this type of girl. However he proceeds with his life: his marriage, life in Paris, his divorce and then his travel to America. In fact, the reader doesn't get to his interactions with Lolita until a quarter of the way through the novel. Kubrick effectively cuts out all of this background. Although he too begins the film at the chronological end, he changes the beginning substantially. Instead of Humbert explaining to his reader that he fell in love with this young girl, Kubrick begins with Humbert confronting Clare Quilty in his large but extremely messy home. A put-together Humbert demands justice from an intoxicated Quilty "because [he] took advantage of a sinner...[,] because [he] took advantage of my disadvantage...[,] because [he] cheated me, because [he] took her at an age" when she was still Humbert's. Humbert enters the home with a gun and shoots Quilty by the end of the scene. This scene happens in the novel, however it's near the end. The film audience

doesn't know what the connection between the characters is exactly, but they can assume that Clare Quilty took someone –presumably a girl named Lolita– away from the man wielding the pistol. After the gun holder shoots Quilty the scene fades to black and a screen card appears with “ 4 years later”.

This inversion of the chronology biases the audience as they enter the flashback. First, Humbert (the man with the gun) is a put-together and well-spoken man who comes off as much more likeable than the drunk and erratic Quilty, whose home is in utter disarray. Even more importantly, Humbert is the victim who was cheated, who had someone stolen from him, and he immediately garners pity from the audience. Even though he does shoot a man, this crime seems to be one of passion, of love for this stolen sweetheart. An uninformed audience member may not know that Lolita is thirty years Humbert's junior, but even someone who knows cannot deny that Humbert's crime – that resulted in the death of a man – was one of jealous passion.

This fact also cues the audience into realizing before the story begins that Humbert really loves Lolita, and even though their relationship is perverse, it is not founded on plain lust; there is real emotion behind it. Furthermore, he recognizes he is “a sinner” and has a “disadvantage,” which means he knows what he did was wrong. This in no way exonerates Humbert for his actions later in the film; however, it does alleviate some of the repulsion toward his character.

Moreover, as the story unfolds in the film, the presence of Quilty around Lolita is more apparent than in the novel. In *Lolita*, Humbert recounts several times when he received phone calls or was spoken to by the police and followed by a mysterious car. These moments seem like paranoia on Humbert's part; however, it is actually Clare

Quilty who had been taking tips from Lolita and toying with Humbert. Readers do not discover this until the end of the novel, because they only know as much as Humbert does. In order to alleviate this confusion, Kubrick introduces Quilty at the very beginning of the film, telling the audience to pay attention to his character. This expansion of Quilty's character is two-fold. Firstly, because he has so many disguises in the film the audience can benefit from the visual and vocal cues to understand that this is all the same man. In this way his character is expanded just because the story moves to the screen. Secondly however, Kubrick also expands his role in the story.

In one case Quilty pretends to be a school psychologist, Dr. Zempf, and although Humbert does not recognize this man as Quilty, the audience does. Dr. Zempf claims, "The onset of maturity seems to be giving her some trouble." Humbert denies this, even though he has been stifling her in his constant attempts to control her. He refuses to let her join the school play, he follows her after school to see who she is hanging out with and refuses to allow her to participate in any extracurricular activities. Dr. Zempf, who just wants Lolita in the school play, suggests having some psychologists come and examine their home life. Threatened by the suggestion, and by what the psychologists may find, Humbert refuses this request. At this point Dr. Zempf suggests the other logical solution: to stop the "acute repression of her libido" would be to allow her to participate in extracurricular activities, such as the school play. This entire sequence was added by Kubrick to enhance the character of Quilty. It shows his tricks, manipulations and the games he uses to torture Humbert and win Lolita. Quilty is more reprehensible than Humbert, and the audience can pity Humbert because he is being taken advantage of although he does not know it.

Later in the film, he pretends to be a cop at the hotel where Humbert and Lolita are staying. Just to tease Humbert he comments on how he “noticed when you were checking in you had a lovely little girl with you, she was really so lovely.” Humbert is paranoid to begin with and immediately leaves the company of the fake cop, but this would not be the last time he is heard from. At another point Lolita is sick in the hospital. While visiting her there, Humbert finds a pair of man’s dark sunglasses. Lolita claims they are the nurse Mary’s, but in reality they belong to Quilty, who has also been visiting her. After returning home Humbert gets a call in the middle of the night from none other than Quilty. Although the audience does not see him, his voice is obvious on the phone. He reprises his nervous cop role, and much more aggressively begins to ask Humbert about “his sex life” and tricks him into believing that the police have an ongoing investigation about him and that “lovely girl.” Humbert hangs up and believing it to be real, rushes to the hospital to get Lolita. When Humbert arrives, he finds Lolita gone. Quilty discharged her earlier in the evening, in the disguise of her uncle.

At the end of the film, Lolita has to put all the facts together for Humbert. Quilty was in her life before she even met Humbert. She had “a crush on him ever since the times he came to visit” her mother. And he followed them around the country, each time finding an excuse to be with Lolita. For her, Quilty was “the only guy [she] was ever really crazy about.” For Humbert, Lolita was the girl he was crazy about, and Quilty stole her; hence, his crime of passion that was shown in the introduction of the film. Not only does this make Quilty just as awful as Humbert in terms of his sexual relationship with Lolita, but also it makes him worse. This is because Humbert cares for Lolita, whereas Quilty was sexually attracted to her but there was no true emotional attachment. Lolita

claimed she loved Quilty, but he threw her out of his house after she wouldn't appear in one of his "art films," a code for pornography. Therefore, Quilty has done the following: slept with Mrs. Haze, seduced and slept with Lolita, and tricked and manipulated Humbert. Thus, by Kubrick's increasing of Quilty's role in the film, he becomes a character to whom the audience can compare Humbert. Both men are not cleared of their endophilic crimes, but Quilty is worse. This mitigates Humbert's sexual perversion of in the film.

Another character that lessens the explicitness in the film is Lolita's mother and Humbert's wife, Charlotte Haze. In the novel she is portrayed as obnoxious, annoying and completely nonsensical. However, the reader can imagine her voice as he or she chooses. Furthermore, because the entire novel is from Humbert's point of view, it is not unreasonable to think that she really is not "obviously... one of those women whose polished words reflect...any deadly conventionality" (Nabokov, 37). She also may not be one of those "women who are completely devoid of humor...indifferent at heart...but very particular about the rules of such conversations" (37). These statements are very clearly Humbert's opinion. Conversely, in the film, there is no subjectivity around Mrs. Haze. As discussed previously, her voice actually is screechy and she actually is unintelligent. Furthermore, Mrs. Haze does not care about her daughter. She is constantly calling Lolita a "miserable little brat" and blaming her for things that are not her fault. At one point she claims her daughter has "always been a spiteful pest, since the age of one, you know she kept throwing her toy out of her crib so I'd have to stoop down and pick them up, she's always had some kind of gripe against me." Clearly, this is a ridiculous statement and this only deepens the audience's belief that she is more childish than her

daughter. Again, the comparison between Charlotte and Humbert does not excuse Humbert for his actions, but it certainly makes him more likeable and less like a lustful monster.

Finally, the character that palliates the most the charges of pedophilia, rape and erotic pornography against Humbert (and Kubrick for that matter) is Lolita herself. In the novel we know she has a relationship with Humbert; however, his descriptions of her advances are filtered through his subjectivity: “Then she crept into my waiting arms, radiant, relaxed, caressing me with her tender, mysterious, impure, indifferent, twilight eyes” (120). Lolita may have climbed into Humbert’s arms but the perceptive reader knows that what she is doing is not sexual; rather she is a child in need of attention. Yet, Humbert obscures her objective action with his subjective desires. In the film, however, the audience sees first hand that she is also an aggressor in the situation because the film posits an objective point of view. Before even knowing Humbert, Lolita is very aware of her sexual nature. When Humbert first sees Lolita, she is propped on her towel sunbathing. As she sees him, she lowers her heart-shaped glasses and slowly looks over the top of them before removing them entirely. This gesture, looking over the top of the glasses, suggests being critical of a situation. Here Lolita is critical of Humbert and sizes him up. Not coincidentally, a close up of Lolita in this scene was one of the few promotional images for the film. Thus, before the film is even viewed, Lolita is already perceived as sexually aware, rather than as an innocent little girl who is taken advantage of.

At another point, she brings Humbert his breakfast in his room. After promising he wouldn’t “give away any of her secrets” she flirtatiously decides to give him a prize.

“For that you get a little reward” she exclaims and picks up one of his fried eggs, “put your head back. Put your head back! Open your mouth, you can have one little bite,” she teases. In this exchange Humbert does not make any moves, he is not aggressive in the slightest and, although nothing happens, Lolita clearly initiates the flirtation.

Her sexual awareness turns to aggressiveness when Humbert and Lolita are at a hotel after he picks her up at summer camp. At this point Lolita does not know that her mother has committed suicide once she discovered Humbert really loved Lolita; she just thinks she is sick. But she doesn't seem too concerned about her mother's health and jokes about the two staying together without her mother. “My darling, when my mother finds out she is going to divorce you and strangle me,” she jokes, as she lies down in her short dress, stomach down, across the width of the bed. Her legs are crossed and raised behind her, in a flirtatious pose. As he explains how this won't be an issue she kicks off her heels. The camera is behind Lolita during this sequence, so her legs are in the immediate foreground but the audience is unable to see up her dress and while Humbert is speaking you can hear him begin to stammer as she removes her shoes, and his eyes watch them fall off. “How about you go check for that cot,” she teases and the scene cuts. Again, not only is she in control of the action in the scene, an obvious point is made to show her flirtatious behavior and manner. Not only does it show Humbert's self restraint, but it promotes her dominance in the relationship.

Perhaps the most telling example is the morning after this scene. Lolita wakes up and leans at the head of Humbert's cot. She wakes him and soon enough is stroking his face, telling him he needs to shave. “Well, what should we do now?” she asks him. He responds, go get some breakfast. “No I don't want to do that,” she decides. “Well, what



do you want to do?” Humbert earnestly asks. “Why don’t we play a game...? I played it with Charlie... he’s that guy that you met in the office,” she coyly suggests. Humbert’s confusion is apparent and she continues, “Are you sure you can’t guess what game I’m talking about?” “I’m not a very good guesser,” he truthfully states. She leans down and whispers something in his ear, then giggles, “Alrighty then,” she says, and adjusts her body. Although you can only see her in the shot, she very clearly moves around the headboard of the cot to right above Humbert. The scene cuts immediately after this, showing no sexually graphic material, not even a kiss.

From this point on the film is full of times when Lolita is in control of their relationship. Furthermore, by the end we find out she was sleeping with Quilty as well. This makes Lolita the aggressor and severely lessens the charge that Humbert is a monster for being with her. Not only is the relationship consensual between her and Humbert, it is also consensual between her and Quilty. This can be seen clearly through the film because of the objective nature of the medium; it is not muddled by the narrative subjectivity of Humbert in the novel. On top of this, Kubrick also expanded Lolita’s personality in the film. In the novel she is an object; she is hardly given emotional personality and certainly is tainted by the subjective narration. In fact, in the novel, there is very little evidence that she truly is sexually aggressive. Humbert describes her this way because that is what he wants her to be. This is done away with in the film; she is seen for who she is. Also, in the novel the name Lolita is a pet name, only known and used by Humbert. This name is then inherently sexual as it is attributed to her with his full sexual desire implied. In the film, everyone calls her Lolita. This effectively lends the

sexual nature implied with the name to her and her character. No one, especially the audience, sees her as innocent.

The last character that benefits from the objectivity inherent in film is Humbert Humbert. While the camera functions as an unbiased, 3<sup>rd</sup>-person narrative point of view, the audience sees Humbert, in contrast to all these characters, as a rather likeable man. Unlike in the novel, the audience is not privy to his thoughts, with the exception of some unremarkable diary entries and some description of setting. Therefore, the most horrific parts of his character are never at the forefront of the film. For instance, in the novel, the reader knows that when Humbert first comes to America he chose the McCoo family to stay with because they had a daughter whom he had been “imagining [in] all possible detail ... [whom he] would coach in French and fondle in Humbertish” (35). This pre-planned pedophilic attack is abhorrent, but is completely absent in the film. This is partly because the McCoo family situation was cut from the narrative, but also because Kubrick does not allow Humbert’s disturbing thoughts to be communicated to the audience. The same can be said about his relationship with Lolita. For instance, in the novel at one point he imagines Lolita “warm, drowsy, drugged – and was ready to weep with passion and impatience” (79). If this were revealed it would show Humbert as too sexually perverted. The more sexually perverse he is perceived to be, the less Lolita is the aggressor, and the less their relationship is consensual. This would inevitably lead to the belief that Humbert coerced Lolita in the relationship, insinuating rape. This is exactly what the novel gets at, but on film, this would be too sexually explicit to allow.

## MPAA AND FORCED REGULATIONS

Although Kubrick made many changes to narrative and character to ensure a less explicit version of the novel, more changes were enforced by the MPAA both before and after the production of the film. The MPAA is responsible for the rating system of films released in the United States. Before Kubrick could even get studio backing he had to change the story completely. In one instance, Warner Bros studios suggested that the story be about “a middle aged man married to a young wife who ruins his life” (LoBrutto, 215). Although the film was eventually green-lighted at the studio, Kubrick made attempts to avoid any obstacles he would face with the MPAA.

The first requirement was that Lolita had to be at least fourteen years old, two years old than she is in the novel (Stanley Kubrick: A Life in Pictures, 2001). Although her age is never explicitly revealed in the film, gauging by her appearance in high school and the high school play she is at the very least fourteen, if not older. This is a change slightly diminishes the perversity of the novel. Furthermore, Kubrick didn't object to the requirement, he felt that fourteen was a more believable age for her anyway. By changing Lolita's age, it is certainly more viable for a fourteen year old to be sexually curious and aggressive than a twelve year old.

Another main point of concern was that the film would fall under “the area of sex perversion” (LoBrutto, 215). In order to avoid this controversy Kubrick made the actress who played Lolita look as old as possible. After a few actresses turned down the role in

fear of spoiling their reputations, the unknown Sue Lyon was cast. She was sixteen when filming was wrapped, and this lends to her “older” air in the film.<sup>7</sup>

During post-production of the film, Kubrick submitted the film to the MPAA for code approval. In return, he was given a report that deemed the screenplay unacceptable. Furthermore, the examiner elaborates that “the script, in my opinion, has turned an important literary achievement into the worst sort of botched up pastiche that could be imagined” (LoBrutto, 215). Kubrick had some work to do to make the film acceptable in the eyes of the organization.

But this was not the only commission that Kubrick had to contend with. The Catholic Legion of Decency also had to be pleased in order not to receive a “C” or Condemned rating. This rating was even more detrimental than that given by the MPAA, because it determined whether any Catholic who saw the film would be committing a sin. The Catholic Legion of Decency initially gave *Lolita* the “C”, but would revoke it if Kubrick cut shots in two places. Not coincidentally, the MPAA also had deemed these scenes sexually inappropriate.

The first scene is where the newly-wedded Humbert and Charlotte are in bed. Completely clothed, Humbert begins to kiss her neck and she exclaims “oh Hum, you’re all man!” But the result of stimulation she is alluding to is not coming from his attraction to her; rather, there is a photo of Lolita on the bedside table, a large 8” by 11” school picture, clearly visible to the audience and also to Humbert. Many times during their embrace Humbert looks at this photo. The MPAA and Legion of Decency claimed that these repeated glances were a sexual stimulant for the character and over-emphasized his

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<sup>7</sup> Age verified at “*Lolita*” at the Internet Movie Database. See Works Cited for full bibliographic information.

attraction to the girl. To remedy this, a close up on the photo was cut, as was another shot earlier in the film when Humbert looks at a photo of Lolita on his desk (LoBrutto, 217).

Of course, the scene in which it is insinuated that Lolita first becomes intimate with Humbert also caused a problem with these organizations. The fade to black was cut sooner so that the audience does not see Lolita lean down all the way over Humbert's cot. Finally, after six months the film was given an R rating, and the Catholic Legion of Decency recommended that the one of the film's captions was that it was for people older than 18.

## CONCLUSION

For the most part, Kubrick and his production team were able to negotiate through the MPAA and Legion of Decency to greatly mitigate the obvious sexual explicitness of the film, but still have a product in which sexuality was allowed exist. Furthermore, the controversy surrounding the film benefited it in other ways. Kubrick was gifted with a great tag line, "How did they ever make a movie of Lolita?" and "Yes, they did it! They made a movie about Lolita" (Stanley Kubrick: A Life in Pictures, 2001). Yet, the greatest gift from the mess was all the free publicity. The controversy boosted its box office receipts, and the film earned more than two million dollars. Perhaps the most important result of the critical and box office success was the reputation Kubrick gained as a director. This initial success laid the foundation for his partnership with Warner Bros, where he would enjoy complete creative control over the rest of his films, a luxury few directors ever have had. Despite the commercial success, *Lolita* was not an artistic

success in Kubrick's eyes, years later he was quoted as saying that "if [he] had known how severe the limitations were going to be [he] probably wouldn't have made the film" (Stanley Kubrick: A Life in Pictures, 2001). These limitations forced creative changes to the story, characters, and narrative to create a film that is successful in allowing an appropriate version of *Lolita* to be experienced.

## Eyes Wide Shut

...and those trivial encounters became  
magically and painfully interfused  
with the treacherous illusion of  
missed opportunities...

- *Traumnovelle*

In *Eyes Wide Shut*, there are a bevy of uncomfortable and perverse sexual encounters, all of which are imperative to aligning the narrative of the film with the source text *Traumnovelle*. In both the novel and the film, each of these experiences is told from the point of view of the respective protagonist Fridolin/Bill. In each medium the narrative follows a similar arc. Bill<sup>8</sup> and his wife Alice<sup>9</sup> seem to be the perfect couple: they are good looking, have a lovely daughter, plenty of loose cash, and apparently nothing wrong in their lives. While the happy twosome is at a Christmas ball held by a wealthier friend, they each have the opportunity to be unfaithful with a very attractive partner. However, both refuse and go home to make love to each other. However, the next evening, as they begin to make love again Alice and Bill get into an argument over why each is faithful. As the argument gets more aggressive, Alice confesses in full detail to falling so hard for a man she only saw once that she would give up her entire life for just one night with him. This revelation shakes Bill's seemingly perfect world. For the rest of the film, "Bill tries to come to terms with the implications from [sic] what he has

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<sup>8</sup> Played by Tom Cruise

<sup>9</sup> Played by Nicole Kidman

just been told. He embarks on his own sexual journey, attempting to clarify his own sexual desires and fantasies” (Raphael, 66). He experiences emotional, physical, forbidden, and ritualized desire. By the end of his night, he is as unsure as the audience if what just happened was real. He attempts to retrace his steps but does not find the answers he was looking for. However, he finds the grit in his wife that he had lost during his jealous journey, and in the end the two are stronger than when the film opens.

### **MARITAL ENCOUNTERS**

The very first sexual experience in both the film and the novel occurs at the beginning. And this is the only experience in which intercourse is actually consummated. Man and wife take to bed after an opulent Christmas party. In *Traumnovelle* the ball had taken place the night before the novel begins. The description is given very little attention, less than a page, and the last event of the evening even less. Simply described, “they sank into one another’s arms with an ardour they had not experienced for quite some time” (Schnitzler, 176). The description is anything but explicit, but it makes it quite clear that the couple had not made love so passionately in a while.

Kubrick tackled the introductory scene of *Eyes Wide Shut* with much more detail than Schnitzler does. First, the party scene takes up a more significant amount of time in the film than in the novel. The film opens the night of the party. Beginning with trivial, everyday actions before leaving the party, Kubrick sets up a picture of superficial, marital bliss between Bill and Alice Hartford. The couple exchanges several banal questions,



such as, “Honey, have you seen my wallet?”<sup>10</sup> from Bill. Alice can answer without even looking, and from off screen suggests he try the bedside table, where it is resting. Alice goes to the bathroom in a stunning, tight-fitting lace dress; she now asks how she looks, and Bill, who can also answer without looking, responds, “Perfect.” The two are an efficient team: Alice can remind Bill of the name of the babysitter when he forgets, Bill can help Alice put on her coat when she struggles, and they both can give parental love to their young daughter. The apartment they own shows a degree of wealth and class that adds to their perfect family picture. There is nothing to suggest any tension in their relationship. Everything is seemingly perfect.

After they walk out the door of their apartment the scene cuts and reopens to a tracking shot following the couple into an enormous, marble atrium where they are greeted by an older couple. The Zieglers<sup>11</sup> welcome Bill (who is their private physician) and Alice warmly as they are the hosts of this Christmas party. Clearly, the Zieglers are even wealthier than the Hartfords and presumably the other guests at the party are similarly upper class. In *Traumnovelle*, there is no host specified, but in general most of the other parts of the narrative are upheld. Both Fridolin and Albertine are approached by admirers: Fridolin by “two dominoes [whores] dressed in red” who engage his attention then leave and he intently looks for them; Albertine by a foreign stranger who “at first intrigued her, but who had then suddenly let slip a surprisingly crude... remark that had... frightened her” (176). The difference is Fridolin does not actively push them away, but rather they passively leave him. This is important and will be at the crux of the couple’s argument later. On the contrary, his wife actively leaves the foreign lounge

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<sup>10</sup> All subsequent dialogue in this section without citation is from *Eyes Wide Shut*, 1999. See Works Cited for full bibliographic information.

<sup>11</sup> Played by Sydney Pollack and Leslie Lowe

lizard who is clearly trying to woo her. But nothing is made of either's encounter.

Likewise, in the film, both Alice and Bill have separate but equally tempting offers to be intimate with others. Two beautiful young women offer to take Bill to the "end of the rainbow," and a suave, foreign gentleman asks Alice to forget that she is married and go upstairs with him. After a brief interlude of Bill doctoring a beautiful, naked, young model that has overdosed in Mr. Ziegler's bathroom, Bill does not find the women he was with; instead, he finds his wife. At this point, the two resume their evening together, go home and have sex.

In terms of sexual energy, tension, and action, there is a lot going on here. There is the obvious sexual energy between Alice and her admirer, there is sexual tension between Bill and the women, and there is sexual action between Bill and Alice. This party sets the tone for the rest of the film. It is sexy, there are beautiful people, and there is temptation everywhere for both Alice and Bill. Furthermore, by juxtaposing Alice and Bill's situations, the difference between the actions of the two is made clear: which one would have been more likely to cheat, although neither was unfaithful. So sexual tension here is necessary for the film, even though it is nothing explicit.

The sex that takes place between Bill and Alice at home is important to note on a variety levels. Like in the novel, it receives far less attention than the party description. Lasting a mere ten seconds, the scene consists of Alice looking at herself in a mirror. Although she is half-naked the audience can only see from below her bra and above. Her look is one of self-admiration. Then Bill comes into frame from behind her, looking at himself in the mirror over her shoulder. He also, in admiration of her beauty, removes her bra, turning her so they are perpendicular to the mirror. Then he kisses her neck while she

looks at herself in the mirror, again admiring herself. Despite its brevity, the scene is still very sexy and its success lies in the fact that the audience believes more is coming, but Kubrick ends the scene before things get too sexually explicit and before Alice reciprocates. The short scene demonstrates that the sex here is not overwhelmingly loving – they are not even looking at each other – and the audience does not need to see the sex to gather this; one look from Alice says it all. Therefore the subtly Kubrick employs is perfect to get the necessary point across and anything more would be gratuitous.

Worth noting is that this particular scene was used as in the trailer when the film was being advertised<sup>12</sup>. So audiences had a preconceived notion that this moment was going to be incredibly explicit as the film was dubbed “the sexiest movie ever made.” Also, the actors portraying Alice and Bill, Nicole Kidman and Tom Cruise respectively, were married to each other at the time. Again, used as advertising fodder, some audience members expected this to be an opportunity to voyeuristically enjoy a celebrity couple’s real sex life. If this is what the audience is anticipating then this particular moment in the film there is a discord between what they are getting and what they thought they would see. However, the disjunction also serves a purpose. By teasing the audience with this scene, they have a preconceived notion of what the film will contain, and this was presumably the climax. Obviously it is not, and this removes the audience’s preconceived notions. Thus, when the film cuts to the next morning when the couple is going about their everyday activities, the audience has no idea what is going to come next.

Both Bill and Fridolin’s world is shattered upon the revelations that would happen the evening following the party. Here is where the narrative motivation for the rest of the

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<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, Chris Isaak’s “Baby Did A Bad Thing” plays over the scene, which in a deep and smooth voice repeats the title. This is only adds to the obvious sexual connotations of the trailer.

novel comes into play. Albertine asks if he slept with the two dominoes in red, and in turn Fridolin inquires what the suave Polish man wanted from her. As the two exchange truthful answers, they begin to speak about the presence of other desires in their hearts in order to make each other jealous. The same goes for Bill and Alice. As they light up a joint in their bedroom, Bill attempts to engage Alice in some foreplay. As he sits behind her on their red bed in nothing but his black boxer briefs, he begins to fondle her breasts.

The costume here is an important signifier for the audience. Bill is the one who wasn't actively pushing away his admirers; therefore, he is dressed in opaque black because he will not be entirely truthful and forthcoming in the coming argument. On the contrary, Alice in sheer white because she is honest about her intentions with the other man and is not hiding anything. As the conversation continues, neither covers up. Their lack of clothes becomes symbolic of their naked and truthful emotional state. The unity between costume and dialogue is evident, without being too sexually explicit or unnecessary. Furthermore, this trend will continue through out the film, where the clothing – or lack there of – is adding to the character or situation and thus necessary to include in order to fully understand the film.

Alice at first seems to enjoy the action from her husband, but then suddenly exclaims, "Hmmm... tell me something... those two girls at the party last night. Did you, by any chance, happen to fuck them?" Bill, surprised by the question, chokes on his smoke and honestly responds, "What? What are you talking about?" As the conversation continues, Bill explains he disappeared to help Ziegler (although he doesn't reveal why) and that she too was flirtatious with someone other than him. Given that Bill continues to kiss and touch Alice, clearly he does not find the man Alice was dancing with a threat.

Alice relaxes a little and begins to close her eyes, even giggles, when Bill whispers, “[he] wanted to fuck my wife.” He even continues with, “well, I guess that’s understandable.” Alice immediately opens her eyes and sits up. “Understandable?” she asks in a very serious voice. “Because you are a very, very beautiful woman,” he responds matter-of-factly, again thinking he is complimenting her. “Whoa, whoa, whoa!” Alice exclaims as she gets off the bed and moves to the other side of the room. Here the sexual tension has completely broken off, despite the fact that both are half naked. Bill is still only sporting a pair of tight, black boxer briefs and Alice is wearing white underwear and translucent white tank top that her breasts and nipples are seen through. So, although what they are wearing is provocative, the situation they are in at the moment is not.

As the conversation continues, the dialogue becomes more provocative. “So... because I’m a beautiful woman, the only reason any man wants to talk to me is because he wants to fuck me! Is that what you’re saying?” Alice demands. Bill, still apparently confused by what is instigating Alice’s aggressive questions, responds half-heartedly with: “Well, I don’t think it’s quite that black and white, but I think we both know what men are like.” Their argument continues for sometime with Alice picking apart Bill’s justification for trusting his wife.

He tells Alice that she is just trying to make him jealous, and that he has never been jealous of her and he is “sure of” her fidelity. At this point the perfect world that the audience witnessed at beginning of the film, the world that Bill believes he resides in, begins to crumble. Everything he is sure about -- his wife, his family, and himself -- begins to disintegrate as Alice relays the same story that Albertine tells Fridolin about the young sailor she saw while they were vacationing the previous summer. Alice sits down

on a stool, still removed from Bill, and calmly and deliberately details her recollection. How he glanced at her, “just a glance, nothing more” but she “could hardly move.” And how that evening, as she and Bill talked about plans for their daughter, she “thought if he wanted me, even if it was for one night, I was ready to give up everything. You, Helena, my whole fucking future. Everything.” As the camera shows a close-up of Bill’s stunned face, the audience sees his world crash around him. His wife just admitted a stranger she never said a word to could have changed his whole life. Bill has no response to her story<sup>13</sup>.

Again, the clothes that at the beginning of this sequence were provocative, now represent how stripped down the couple has just become. Furthermore, the opposition between their actions in the bedroom and those of their everyday lives is apparent in this scene. They are no longer the unit of the opening scenes; instead they are splintered and broken. And this was revealed in the most private of places, a couple’s bedroom. Furthermore, a bedroom is a place of rest, relaxation and of sex, none of which happened in this scene

What they are wearing and saying on the surface seems provocative; however, neither costume nor dialogue functions as sexual explicitness after the first minute in the scene (essentially, after Alice gets off the bed). These two elements support the narrative. The costumes in a more immediate sense emphasize the nakedness of the conversation. The dialogue is the thread that will run through the narrative and function as the impetus for Bill’s journey ahead. Furthermore, the audience does not see anything that would be considered sexually graphic. The only potential titillation as audience member might

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<sup>13</sup> In the novel, Albertine tells a similar sailor story to Fridolin; however, when she is done, he also relays a story of desire. She finally crushes him by admitting she almost slept with another man while they were engaged.

incur is Cruise's chest or Kidman's slightly visible nipple. There is no physical sexual act that the audience could find uncomfortable.

However, this scene is sexually uncomfortable in a different way, and this is due to the nature of the conversation. The conversation they have is necessary to the story, but is still sexually explicit. It is not explicit like talking dirty, but the subject matter still has the potential to give members of the audience an uneasy feeling nonetheless. Marital infidelity and promiscuous sex in general are topics that can be uncomfortable in more ways than one. They can be uncomfortable because of social and moral guidelines that say sex simply for pleasure is wrong; therefore to talk about it is unacceptable. Which is all part of the conversation that Alice and Bill had earlier. But they also can be uncomfortable because more likely than not these feelings of extramarital desire are familiar to the audience even though they don't want to admit it. This second type of discomfort is embarrassment: attempting to not think about the potentially desire to cheat, but thinking about it anyway. It is convenient for someone who has thought about cheating on his/her spouse (or actually followed through with it) not to think about what s/he has done or would have done, because s/he knows it was wrong. And Alice's candor in conveying what she might have done in this scene can rouse those suppressed feelings in the audience. In other words, this scene is uncomfortable because it asks the audience to analyze your own relationship with your partner and question if they have ever thought about being with someone else or if you have ever thought of being with someone else. Questioning leads to self-doubt and self-doubt is never comfortable. Furthermore, self-doubt is exactly what Bill is feeling at the end of the scene, so this discomfort establishes audience identification with Bill. And because Kubrick consciously decided not to have a

narrator to the film, the audience now not only sympathizes with what Bill is feeling but they can empathize with it too. Ultimately, it connects the audience to Bill so that they can pity or berate him for his choices in the rest of the film. By the audience's own discomfort with the conversation, they can now judge Bill by what they would do if they were in such a situation.

In these opening scenes the audience has preconceived notions of what the film will be and show. However, these are quickly removed, as the audience will not see the sexually explicit scenes they had initially expected, but only hints that intercourse happened.

## **EMOTIONAL ENCOUNTER**

Near the end of his and Alice's conversation, Bill is called to one of his private patient's homes, forcing him to leave the situation with many unanswered questions, emasculated and completely lacking self-worth. This leads to the second sexual encounter of the story: between Bill and his recently deceased patient's daughter, Marion<sup>14</sup>.

In this scene Kubrick makes hardly any narrative changes from the novel, except he adds Bill's entrance into the scene. The sequence begins with Bill in the back of taxi, dressed entirely in black – again a signifier of his inability to be truthful, this time with himself. Bill is heavily shadowed from the glow of the billboards and neon on the streets of New York City, but he is not looking out the window. He has a blank stare, and appears to be deep in thought. In one of the few times in the film, the audience gets to see what is happening inside of Bill's head. He is thinking about the sailor Alice had

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<sup>14</sup> Played by Marie Richardson



described beginning to make love to her. We know that Alice and the officer never consummated anything, moreover they didn't even speak, but the foreplay that is happening between the two is still consuming Bill's thoughts. This quick glimpse into Bill's head is short enough to not be uncomfortable, but it is necessary to show. What Alice said is truly affecting Bill. In doing this the audience now knows his motivation for his further actions, jealous revenge. In this way, showing the fantasy of Alice and the sailor is necessary to the believability of the narrative and continuation of the story.

After the taxi ride, Bill enters into the lobby of a swanky apartment building. As the audience tracks Bill they see that the home of his patient is clean, filled with beautiful art, and the hallway floors and walls are pristine white and the room is completely symmetrical, showing the great care that must of gone into decorating. It seems that everything in this home has been done with a purpose and that nothing is out of place. Bill knocks on the door and is called in by a voice off-screen that is shaky and uncertain. Once Bill enters, we see into the bedroom: the curtains are drawn, it is much darker than it was in the hallways, the walls are a dark green, and the room looks as if it is a mausoleum – majestic but bare. Furthermore, items in the room are in more disarray. The mini-Christmas tree has lights that are drooping, the medical equipment seems clunky and highly out of place, and the sheets on the bed are not crisp and tight.

From the setting alone the audience is given cues to two things. The first is to be sad: he father has just died and the setting supports this sadness. It is dark, unkempt, and depressing. The second cue is the juxtaposition between the bedroom and the rest of the apartment. The seemingly disjunctive physical elements seen in the bedroom versus what is seen in the rest of the apartment are important. The entry and hallway are white, clean,

and precise, in direct contrast with the bedroom. The rest of the apartment may be for keeping up appearances, but the bedroom is not. The bedroom is for housing a dying man, thus, it no longer matters how it appears, but rather what it is. In this way, the apartment represents Marion: how she appears is much different than the reality of the situation. Inside the bedroom she no longer has to put on a face. She can tell Bill what she truly feels and this becomes imperative to the success of the scene. Here the setting works as a descriptor of her. She is a different person outside of this bedroom, but inside it she acts on her true feelings.

He really has no desire for Marion; in fact, his only reason to see her is that her father died and he is the physician. Furthermore, his only motivation for entertaining the idea of sex with her is because he is still reeling from his wife's attack on his masculinity. The same can be said for Fridolin in the novel. He describes her no emotional attachment. "He had always known that she was in love with him" (190) and he "drew Marianne closer to him, but without feeling in the least aroused" (191). In the film, Kubrick is faced with a challenge that was touched on before: he does not have a narrator. Unlike the thoughts of Fridolin, the thoughts that are occurring inside of Bill's head are unknown to the audience. Therefore, the audience must gather Bill's emotional response to his patient's daughter by different means. This gathering of information by inference not only invites the audience to become actively involved in the film; it also lends ambiguity to Bill's choices. Since there is no exact quote, the audience has to use clues to decipher what his desire is.

At first there is a lot of seemingly empty discussion, long pauses, and awkward small talk between Bill and Marion, as you would be bound to have with someone whose

father just died. Then Marion tells Bill that she and her boyfriend Carl are moving to Michigan and getting married. She mentions this with pauses and facial expressions that reveal she is attempting to evoke some sort of jealous response in Bill. However, the scene completely shifts when Marion swallows hard, begins to cry and leans in and begins to kiss Bill after he leans towards her in genuine concern. She pulls back a few seconds later after he half-heartedly pushes her away. Her only response to him is repeating, "I love you, I love you" to Bill as their faces are an inch away for each other. Marion has let her guard down in the bedroom by expressing what she really wants: Bill. At this moment in the novel we have the benefit of the narration of Fridolin's thoughts. Here, we must take note of Bill's words, facial expressions, comments, gestures and movements to determine if he has a similar reaction. Bill tries to justify Marion's actions by reasoning with her that she is only emotionally distraught, so the audience knows he is not going to give in to her advances, at least not right away. Yet she keeps interrupting him, repeating over and over again "I love you, I love you". Marion claims she would leave her current life just to be near him: a clear parallel to Alice's confession earlier in the evening. Bill does not seem to register this connection in the film; thus, he does not act to consummate anything with the young woman. However, before Bill can find another excuse to dissuade Marion from her declaration of love or before he can give into her desires, the doorbell rings. Marion looks at him, smiles guiltily, and says, "that is probably Carl; please don't despise me."

It is difficult to deduce whether or not Bill would have eventually submitted to Marion's claims. Despite Bill's comments we never see him push her fully away, rather he makes excuses for her advances. In fact, it is the arrival of her fiancé that prompts

them to stop. It could be interpreted that he is interrupted and that if Carl had not arrived he may have given in to her advances. However, like any action, there is always the “what if.” It is neither certain that Bill would have refused her nor is it certain he would have had her, all of which adds to the ambiguity of the moment. The audience can decide if Bill’s inability to consummate his first extramarital sexual opportunity is an action motivated out of fidelity to his wife or cowardice in his manhood. Marion gets the sexual tension rolling after it had been stopped in its tracks after Alice’s confession. This lurch forward in narrative motion, despite the length of scene and slow pace of action, is to Kubrick’s credit. Here he successfully whets the audience’s appetite to see what Bill will do next, without being overly explicit. There is no nudity, no talking dirty, and certainly no hint of a sexual romp; however, the audience has felt the threat of Bill potentially extracting revenge on Alice in this scene. In each sexual encounter to come, Kubrick will push a little further and this scene acts to acclimate viewers to the sexual landscape of this film and it is done beautifully.

## **PHYSICAL ENCOUNTER**

After Carl shows Bill out, he leaves Marion and the apartment behind and goes into the streets of New York City. Instead of hailing a cab and immediately returning home, he begins to meander down the snow-dusted sidewalk. The shop fronts are still glowing with neon lights and the street lamps light his surroundings. Similar to Fridolin in the novel, he aimlessly walks the street until “suddenly he found himself well beyond his intended destination” (197). Fridolin finds the “young Dane” that his wife had desired consumes his thoughts, and Bill too has the detailed image of Alice and the Naval officer

making love rerunning in his head. But this time, the fantasy is more explicit. Instead of just touching Alice and kissing her neck, the officer begins to assist Alice in removing her underwear from under her dress. Like before, the brevity of the scene and necessity to show it mitigates the sexual explicitness of the fantasy. The camera cuts back to Bill continuing to walk, clenching his fists in frustration. While he waits to cross the street he is distracted from his thoughts by a young woman<sup>15</sup> who has approached him. Dressed in a matching fur hat and coat with a very short skirt, lace tights and high black boots, she innocently asks the time. “Ten past twelve,” he responds while beginning to cross the street. The girl innocently says she lives just down the street and would he like to join her in “a little fun?” Bill doesn’t immediately pick up on her proposition and after she asks if he would “like to come inside.” The girl doesn’t really seem threatening in any way, nor is she seductive with her words. So after a slight hesitation, a quick, paranoid look around, and an inquiry whether they will be alone, Bill follows the girl into an apartment building. Bill follows her across the dingy lobby to another door on that floor. She enters and he follows.

Her apartment is noticeably different from the one he was just in. Cramped and dirty, there is no grand foyer to enter into, nor a maid to remove his coat for him. A small, barely lit Christmas tree leans against the wall for support as the duo walks into a tiny kitchen, which is a disaster. As Bill struggles to compliment the two-room place, he awkwardly looks around. “It’s a... it’s a... cosy, cosy place,” he stammers, clearly trying to make the experience less awkward. While he sits on the edge of the bathtub that is in her kitchen he looks around. There are dirty dishes everywhere, lingerie drying on a

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<sup>15</sup> Played by Vinessa Shaw

string behind him, and Christmas cards pinned on the cabinet doors. Not unlike the appearance versus reality of Marion's apartment, this girl (who is credited as Domino<sup>16</sup>) is more than the sexually attractive Domino outside of the apartment. And Domino inside the apartment is that the apartment ruins the fantasy that revolves around a prostitute. On the street she does not have a name, and she does not have an identity and she can fulfill the fantasy of a nameless, mysterious woman. Similarly, inside she attempts to keep this image up by talking seductively, showing off a great body, wearing very tight clothes and no bra. However, her apartment dispels this fantasy. Her Christmas cards show a family connection, the Intro to Sociology textbook on her shelf says she is a student during the day and the apartment is clearly home for her. This opposition between setting (reality of her home) and character (fantasy of a prostitute) is a unified form on its own, but it also mitigates the sexual explicitness because the fantasy is dispelled.

The effort to converse by Bill is initially awkward until the two begin to flirt about what he wants, although nothing is ever explicitly said. "I'd rather not put it into words. How about you just leave it up to me?" she purrs to him. The banter is tinged with sexuality; however, it's not overtly sexual in any way. Similar to the sexual dialogue in the argument between Bill and Alice, this conversation between Bill and the prostitute is not lewd or filled with dirty words. Therefore, even though the two are talking about sex it is not uncomfortable for the audience. What is uncomfortable is the whether or not Bill decides to follow through with the proposition. Again, the potential of a sexually explicit situation is what is uncomfortable, but it is still necessary to observe the growth on Bill's journey.

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<sup>16</sup> An obvious nod to the "dominoes in red" from the Christmas party in the novel

After some more banter, Bill and the prostitute's faces meet as she leans forward slowly and very gently kisses him on the lips. Bill hesitates and then kisses her back. She pulls away, "so shall we?" she says rhetorically. At that moment Bill's cell phone rings. It is Alice just checking in to see how much longer Bill was to be. He says he has no idea, lying; he says it's because "we're still waiting for some relatives to arrive." Of course Alice has no idea if this is true, and they both cordially say "bye." Domino changes her position on the bed to casually lying down but still with a hint of sexual undertones asks, "Was that Mrs. Dr. Bill?<sup>17</sup>" Bill sits down next to her, "yes...yes" he admits. The girl tries to seductively ask if he must go and in her tight dress and Mona Lisa smile Bill takes a few seconds to deliberate. Bill runs his hands through his hair; he puts his head in his hands and realizes he cannot go through with this. "I have to go. I think I do." Attempting to still be enticing, she asks again if he has to. But Bill cannot go through with it.

Even though Bill cannot have sex with the prostitute, she functions as a much more sexual object than Marion did in the previous sequence. Marion was an emotional threat to Bill's fidelity to Alice, whereas Domino is a physical one<sup>18</sup>. This experience is more physically motivated and it is inherently more sexual. However, this progression from emotional to physical is necessary. As Bill's journey continues and becomes increasingly more fantastic, the audience and Bill need to have graduated progression in order for it to be believable. As his journey continues the sexuality grows in order for the narrative to work. Therefore, this sexual tension needs to be palpable.

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<sup>17</sup> Of course, the confusing moment in this last scene is how does the prostitute know Bill's name and that he is a doctor? There is no introduction that the audience is privy to, and as far as we know he does not know her name, even though later on in the film he calls her by her name, Domino.

<sup>18</sup> This threat is even more apparent when Bill later finds out that Domino was just diagnosed with HIV.

Finally, like with Marion and with Alice, Bill is interrupted before the audience sees the conclusion of the situation. A ring –of a phone not a doorbell this time – of a loved one interrupts Bill and Domino kissing. This time it is not the woman’s partner, it is his. This interruption continues one of the narrative themes of whether or not Bill would have gone through with this infidelity. This interruption is not present in the novel; therefore, Kubrick made a conscious decision to change the narrative slightly from the novel with this addition. This change leaves the audience again to decide what Bill would have done. This pattern of ambiguity in the film proves that Kubrick does not need to show a full or partial sexual act to get the audience actively involved in the film.

## **UNDERAGE ENCOUNTER**

After leaving the prostitute, both Fridolin and Bill happen upon an old friend of theirs playing piano at a café. In both the novel and the film Nick Nightingale<sup>19</sup> finishes his set and catches up with his old friend from medical school. In a mix of boasting and astonishment he eventually confesses that he has been playing for a secret group of people for high amounts of cash. Furthermore, he knows nothing about the people, where it is located, nothing. Blindfolded he plays for a few hours every once and while and keeps his mouth shut. Intrigued, both protagonists probe deeper into the situation and eventually discover if each finds a suitable outfit in time then perhaps they could sneak in.

In the film, Bill enters the scene the same as Fridolin does, late at night with expectations for a costume and a costume alone. Bill too rings the doorbell of Rainbow

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<sup>19</sup> Played by Todd Field



Fashions<sup>20</sup>, a costume shop in the city. After offering the shop owner, Milich<sup>21</sup>, two hundred dollars over the costume rental price he is let in. While searching for the black cloak and mask they hear a noise. Once the costumer flips on the light switch in glass-paneled gallery the light shows a near naked older Japanese gentleman in a white wig. In nothing but his underwear he sneezes again and looks completely embarrassed by the situation he has been caught in. Milich explodes with broken English, “what is this!? What on earth is going on here!?” Ripping the wig of the cowering man’s head, he turns and notices something behind the sofa in the middle of the gallery room. As he swings the wig without abandon, up jumps a young girl<sup>22</sup> dressed only in a bra and panties that runs from the brandished hairpiece. “You!” Milich spits out in disgusted surprise, “What are you doing here? I’ll kill you! I promise I’ll kill you!” One of the small men dares to speak in an attempt to diffuse the wig-wielding Milich, “we were invited here by the young lady.” As Milich spins around to address this comment, “young lady? This is my daughter! Couldn’t you see she’s a child?” The daughter is elusive in her movements, and avoids her father’s flailing hands. She hides behind Bill, as he re-enters the scene as an active participant instead of a confused observer.

As Milich returns to the men to berate them some more, the scene cuts to the daughter wrapping her arms around Bill’s waist from behind. As she grasps his hands to hold hers, he looks back over his shoulder with a perplexed facial expression. She looks up with big, open, and inviting eyes, her expression more suggestive than anything. She then bats her eyelashes and smiles. This nymphet’s silent flirtation does not register a

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<sup>20</sup> In the Christmas Party scene, two models ask Bill if he would like to go “where the rainbow ends,” not coincidentally this shop allows Bill to go to final stop of the evening.

<sup>21</sup> Played by Rade Sherbedgia

<sup>22</sup> Played by Leelee Sobieski

reaction on Bill's face, but only because her father, who is now back to business, asking Bill the color of the cloak, interrupts him he wanted again. Similar to the novel, Bill falls under her spell momentarily and can't quite recall, "umm..." Milich answers his own question, "black?" Although she is not addressed the daughter offers her own suggestion and whispers something completely inaudible into Bill's ear<sup>23</sup>.

Kubrick remains relatively faithful to the novel in this scene; however, there are a few slight changes that relate to the sexuality permeating from the young girl. For one, despite her father's claims that she is a child she does not look it. Her body is long, and lean, and although clearly not fully developed as determined by the relatively small size of her breasts she seems to be a teenager at least. It would not be far-fetched to guess her around the age of 15, which although is very young, it puts her character out of the danger the character of Lolita faced in the previous chapter. This change is important because child-prostitution is a subject that is very taboo and incredibly sexually explicit. However, because the girl's age can be assumed to be in the teens some of this uncomfortable sexual stress can be alleviated for the audience. This switch from the novel is smart on Kubrick's part because it retains the sexual tension between a particular forbidden desire without making it completely reprehensible.

Along with this, the lack of narration operates in creating more ambiguity on Bill's desire with or for her. He does seem spellbound in her presence, but in the novel Fridolin claims that in that moment there is nothing else he would want to do but take "the girl away with him at once, no matter wherever or whatever the consequences"

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<sup>23</sup> Not unlike Lolita's inaudible whisper into Humbert's ear before the first time they are intimate.

(214). Obviously, this desired kidnapping and potential relationship<sup>24</sup> cannot be ascertained from the film; thus, mitigating some of sexual discomfort that a pedophilic relationship would cause in the audience. And yet, it is still suggested by Kubrick's close-up shot of the daughter wrapped around Bill's body. Therefore, proving the subtlety of ambiguity in this scene and suggestion of desire, rather than the explicit saying of it can be just as effective in creating sexual tension in between characters.

Furthermore, the girl represents a different type of sexuality beyond a forbidden desire. She represents a silent type of sexuality, one communicated only through her eyes for Bill and the audience. She does not speak for Bill like Marion. The girl is a physical or bodily attraction, but this is the different than the physical sexuality that Domino represents. She is flirtatious and suggestive without speaking, and she comes onto Bill with no reserve or care. Although the daughter is caught in a compromising situation with clear sexual overtones, she is not as sexual as Domino or as emotional as Marion because she never vocalizes her intentions. She is purely interpretive, every character and the audience must interpret her actions on their own because she gives no information. Her father assumes her intentions were sexual and calls her a whore, especially after he finds out it was her who invited them over. But because she never says what happened, and nothing is ever seen it is left to the audience to decide to what extent this situation was sexual. Again, interpretation and subtly are necessary in creating a sexual scene without being too explicit, it is implied but not shown.

Furthermore, the daughter shows off Kubrick's subtly in one particular moment in this scene that epitomizes audience interpretation. As we know, the daughter does not

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<sup>24</sup> Not unlike our last protagonist Humbert Humbert!

speak for nearly the whole time, and her silence is important because it highlights the only time she does speak. This is when she whispers something that the audience cannot hear into Bill's ear before she scampers off screen. Even though the audience cannot hear what she says, the screenplay gives her line as, "you should have a cloak lined with ermine." A comment as cryptic as this understandably would render a confused look from Bill who is already in a foreign and confusing (albeit amusing) situation in a confusing and unfamiliar evening. However, the beauty of this moment in the scene is its ambiguity. The audience is left to decipher or fill in the blank to what they think she said. This is the closest that the audience gets to having a reading experience in the film. In this moment they can take her whisper as far in their imagination as they choose. She could have whispered the dirtiest thing they can imagine or she could have said good night. In any case, this interpretation of what she says is far more audience interactive than if Kubrick had chosen to have her clearly say she thinks that Bill is a king.

## **MULTIPLE ENCOUNTERS**

From the costume shop, both Bill and Fridolin make a similar journey from the shopkeepers to the ostentatious mansion to be an intruder on something that they don't understand. En route to the costumed ritual Bill sits in the back of the taxi alone. Again the fantasy of his wife making love to the sailor returns to his head. This time the sexual visions are much more explicit. It is no longer just touching and groping it is full on sex. Although no penetration is visible this is by far the most sexually explicit scene thus far. Alice is naked and bent over on all fours, a symbolic way of giving herself completely to the unknown man. He is in complete control of her and Bill's thoughts. Like all the other

fantasies the scene is acceptable in terms of explicitness. Even the growth of the sexual explicitness from each of his fantasies to the next shows how his mind is becoming increasingly more worried about the situation as the evening continues. Therefore it is necessary information for the audience to receive in order to understand Bill's actions.

Upon reaching the mansion, Bill gives the password to the masked doorkeepers, "Fidelio."<sup>25</sup> An obvious ironic nod to what is going to happen once he goes past the doors, both in the faithfulness of its members and the infidelities of the orgy<sup>26</sup>. From outside it is obvious that the mansion is enormous, and it is obvious from the inside as well. As Bill enters a haunting echoing males voice is singing in a slow deep voice words that are indecipherable. Bill follows the sound of the music and the gesturing hands of masked men also in black cloaks. When he finally makes into the main hall there are various actions of interest happening. First the main room is highly vaulted reminiscent of a church. It is complete dark with the exception of a spotlight. This spotlight is directly in the center and is shining on a ritual in the middle of it. There is a man with a mask in the middle, but instead of cloaked in black he is in red. He is surrounded by a group of twenty or so women in circle around him. They are also in black robes and masks.<sup>27</sup> As he swings an incense ball around the women begin a choreographed dance in place. Standing up and kneeling they move to the sounds of the music and Nick Nightingale's synthesized keyboard. At the final stomp of the red cloak's staff the women step out of their robes revealing them completely naked with the exception of small black g-strings.

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<sup>25</sup> In the novel the password is Denmark, an obvious ironic nod to the home of Albertine's Danish sailor.

<sup>26</sup> Even further irony can be found in the fact that "Fidelio" is the name of Beethoven's only opera, Beethoven was Alex's, from *A Clockwork Orange*, favorite artist.

<sup>27</sup> In the novel, Schnitzler has the masked ritual participators dressed in priest and nuns habits. Kubrick, presumably, removed this due to its obvious Christian connotation. Ironically, the reciting of part of the Bhagavad-Gita (the holiest Hindu book) during the orgy was cut before the DVD release by Warner Bros ("Eyes Wide Shut", IMDB).

Immediately the mysterious tension of the scene turns into a sexual one. By the women being the only ones naked the viewer also immediately gains an understanding of sexual power. The women, exposed are not in control; they are dancing for a large group of men and moving to the beats of the red cloak's staff. Also because the women remain masked they are nameless and faceless, hence void of identity and they become nothing more than an object to observe.

The women now complete their dance, and eventually rise one by one. One woman wearing a black mask with plumes of feathers from the top saunters up to Bill. She simulates a kiss (but since they are wearing masks it is not a real one) and begins to lead him out of the main room into a side room. As other couples walk around them, the woman asks Bill "what are you doing here?" Clearly, he is an intruder, and she recognizes this immediately. In *Traumnovelle*, Fridolin encounters the same perceptive warning beauty, "There's still time for you to leave. You don't belong here. If they were to discover you, you would be in serious trouble" (221).

How these mysterious women recognize that Fridolin and Bill are outsiders is not known to the audience (just like how Domino knew Bill's name and profession), but because she seems to be the only one who has picked up on the fact we understand she is more than an object. She is intelligent, and cares enough about a complete stranger's wellbeing. These facts mean that the audience now has an emotional investment in the woman and she is not longer just a beautiful naked body for the audience to enjoy. This changes her nakedness and the sexual explicitness. It goes from discomfort due to pure physical sexual desire and arousal to discomfort because the woman they are seeing is someone they care about.

Bill on the other hand seems to believe he can outwit the perceptive beauty. He responds to her question with “you must be mistaken.” But she knows that she is right, and stops him, “Please don’t be foolish. You must go now,” she pleads. As Bill tries to probe further into the woman’s identity, another man masked man approaches and takes the arm of the woman. He asks Bill if he can borrow her, and leads her away.

But once Bill is alone and free to explore the audience is shown that the women are more than just objects to be looked at, they are objects to be sexually exploited. As he follows another couple into another enormous and ornate room in the mansion, here all the women are completely naked, but still masked. On top of that, Bill sees a woman on top of a man having sex in the middle of the room, apparently oblivious to the small group around them casually watching. He stops for a second watches, and then keeps walking, where he sees another man having sex with a woman on a beautiful mahogany table. In every room that he passes through there is some sort of incredibly sexually explicit act going on. Two people having sex, two women in the “69” position, three people in a tangled position touching and fondling all with other people observing. However, because they are masked the 69 position is merely an imitation of the act, and there is no kissing or any time of sexual action that involves mouths. The only sexual act that is actually being experienced is sex. The diegetic music is of the classical vein, and coupled with the ornamented and grandiose décor and architecture of the home the primal acts happening around take an artistic effect, rather than a gratuitous effect. Furthermore, the sexual eroticism is not the bacchanalian free for all of free sex, rather all of these acts are ritualized and are anonymous. No passion can be seen or heard, everyone is naked, but they are still masked; thus, they are imitating something that truly are not. Just like

Bill who is imitating someone who belongs there, and Alice who was imitating she only loved her husband.

Furthermore, the naked women also test the audience; Kubrick deliberately places the audience in an uncomfortable situation in order for them to fully understand the situation Bill is in. For example, at one point Bill is in library watching a man and woman having sex. Into the room enters a cloaked man and naked woman, each wearing distinctive masks. The camera cuts back to Bill and then cuts back to the two. The woman wearing the mask walks up to Bill and it the woman that asks him if he'd like to enjoy himself in private. Bill says yes, eager to consummate. However, the woman wearing the mask walking into the library and the woman wearing the mask offering herself to Bill are not the same woman. In the context of the shot selection and the fact that they are wearing the same mask it makes perfect sense that they are the same woman. The only way to tell that they are not is by looking at the difference in their breast size and the shaving of their pubic hair. The use of these unreliable doppelgangers is on purpose, Kubrick is asking the audience to look at things they may be embarrassed to look at, or least ashamed to admit to. He does this again with the redeeming mysterious woman and a model named Mandy who overdoses at the beginning of the film at his friend Ziegler's Christmas party. They look similar, but the only way to tell the difference is notice the differences in their naked bodies because as the active audience member you don't have an opportunity to compare faces. Again, this ambiguity between parallel characters engages the perceptive audience. Therefore, the nakedness that identifies each of these characters is not for titillation, it is for audience recognition and a further delve into the dreamlike quality of Bill's journey. Thus, these characters and scenes are not



gratuitous in their sexual explicitness, rather they are necessary in furthering the audience participation and in the end forcing them to ask questions about what they just saw. Like Bill, the audience cannot take anything for granted.

Based on the events of the evening up to this point, what is happening makes sense. Every potentially sexual situation that Bill has found himself during the evening has gotten progressively more explicit, so this completely over the top orgy makes sense as the capstone to his night. Especially when another one of the beautiful women comes to Bill's side and asks if he would like to enjoy himself in private. At this point in the novel, Fridolin is no different than Bill, ready to give into the desire around him. Without a second of hesitation he says yes, clearly ready to consummate something with one of the intoxicating women. However, true to form, he is interrupted yet again. This time by the mysterious woman who warned him the first time. Again she warns him of the mistake he is making by staying, and again, he tells her is not leaving unless she comes with him. His desire for this mysterious woman is more than just sexual arousal; he is willing to sacrifice his life to just be around her. Similar to his wife's revelation about the sailor, where she claimed she would give up everything just for night with him. "I cannot be without you," he pleads to the faceless woman, and despite her complete nakedness and his complete coverage Bill is finally expressing what he truly wants, what he truly feels. He is being emotionally naked, even though he is physically clothed. But even though he finally has expressed his wishes, they are not fulfilled as he interrupted yet again, this time by a masked butler at the party. He leads Bill back to the great hall where the elaborate dance took place. The man in the red cloak sits in the center with the rest of the enormous hall filled with black-cloaked people in masks. They are waiting for him,

and red cloak begins to explain that intruders are not welcome. Bill is told, “to remove his mask” which he does, and shows his identity to the faceless crowd. Next he is told to remove his clothes, and become the most naked person at the event. Utter humiliation and possible torture are potential outcomes, as the room is eerily silent and the demand extreme. However, before Bill follows the command, the mysterious masked woman appears on the balcony overlooking the men below. “Stop!” she bellows, and claims she “will redeem him.” A collective cry of shock goes through all the robed figures below. Even the red cloak asks if she knows what she is doing, and she replies without hesitation that she does. Bill is immediately led out.

Bill seems forever destined to be close but not consummate anything despite his best efforts. The extreme nakedness and obvious opportunity for sex of the scene above proves this. Yet, another reason why the sexual explicitness of the scene is necessary to understanding the film.

## CONCLUSION

Throughout *Eyes Wide Shut* Kubrick uses several unifying devices to bring the together and keep seemingly gratuitous graphic sexual material necessary and important to the film. First he made changes in the screenplay that attenuate the discomfort audiences may feel. The change of the daughter’s age, the removal of Fridolin’s narration and the addition of interruptions in each sexual sequence all help lessen discomfort due to sexual explicitness or perversion. Furthermore, Kubrick’s parallels between characters and scenes draw the audience into the film, rendering them active participants rather than titillated observers. The sexual explicit scenes of the film are not gratuitous, but rather

necessary. The combination of all these elements not only make for a flowing narrative, but it also allows for something as sexually explicit as an orgy or a single infidelity to be expressed in a manner that is beautiful. The film also simultaneously asks the audience to question their relationships and beliefs.

However, despite Kubrick's attempt to use a thematic and unifying device in this scene to dispel some of the shock of the obscene amount of nudity and make it necessary to the film, it was less successful than his other films on both a critical and commercial level. Because Kubrick died before the final cut was made the final edits were left in the hands of the producers at Warner Brothers. And in order to make the film more audience friendly – and avoid an X-Rating – the editors added special effects to hide the nudity. Specifically, using computer-generated graphics, like tables or lamps, purposefully positioned to cover up several of the models' vaginas. This fact shows that this amount of nudity – according to producers and the MPAA – is too much for audiences to handle, even though it is not a pornography and much more artistic.

## **A Clockwork Orange**

It's funny how the colors  
of the real world only  
seem really real when you  
viddy them on the screen.

- *A Clockwork Orange*

The 1970's brought freedom of expression in all of its forms to a new height and for Kubrick; this brought an opportunity to make a film that pushed the boundaries of sexual-explicitness like never before. Sexual promiscuity, homosexuality, anti-war sentiments, offensive language, and a general disengagement from societal norms were seen in music, literature and in film. Kubrick had bought the rights to Anthony Burgess's philosophical but also explicit novel *A Clockwork Orange*. As a result of the newfound artistic freedom of the times, he began production on the film in 1970, making several changes from the original source text to avoid the extreme explicitness of the novel. However, this film is much more sexually graphic than *Eyes Wide Shut* and *Lolita*; therefore, it is the most sexually explicit. *A Clockwork Orange* is the story of a 15-year-old delinquent named Alex, who, with his gang of droogs (Burgess' invented word for buddies), wreaks havoc in their city. However, these are not your average teenage rebels. The boys take acid-filled milk, rape women and girls, murder homeless people, and speak in a personal slang called Nadsat. However, after murdering a woman, Alex is punished first through prison and then through an experimental medicine that "reforms" him so he

has no free will. Alex himself becomes a clockwork man: unable to make choices for himself, unable to change of his own volition, and unable to manifest his wickedness. The novel asks a core philosophical question: is it better to have free will and choose to do evil or to have no will and refrain from evil? Is any action heinous enough to demand a subject be stripped of his/her basic right to free will?

Although Kubrick made several changes from the novel, he did not change the language that Alex uses. Nadsat, invented by Burgess, is a combination of English slang and Russian. The words, which are difficult to understand within the text, are also difficult to understand in the film. In both cases, language has the potential to distance Alex from the audience. The reader or viewer cannot identify with this slang, but also because they simply cannot understand him. By including Nadsat in the film, Kubrick again asks his audience to actively engage. They must think about what Alex is saying and use contextual clues to decipher what he means. Similar to *Eyes Wide Shut*, Kubrick is forcing the audience to be active in the film and if they want to understand the story and in turn the bigger motivation behind it, they must be engaged. Therefore, by being forced to learn Nadsat the audience is also forced to understand Alex, both literally and eventually figuratively. By forcing the audience to be active, instead of passively entertained, the audience must interpret the images as well. Keeping this in mind, the exploration of these devastating and shocking scenes will be done from an active audience member.

## RAPE IN FEATURE FILM

One of the most horrific acts that Alex<sup>28</sup> and his gang commit in the novel occurs within the first few pages of the story, immediately making the reader privy to the violent tendencies of the young men. Kubrick follows the first part of this scene rather faithfully, also setting it within the first fifteen minutes of the film, after an evening of drinking hallucinogenic milk, “there was real kick and good smeeks [laughs] and lashings of the ultra-violent” (23). The foursome goes looking for innocent people to torture to get their jollies. In the film the hoodlums first beat a defenseless bum to a pulp and nearly kill him, but this violence is not enough for them. After a while they come to “a small sort of cottage on its own,” where a number of strangers that they have no connection to live (23). The complete innocence of these strangers makes the following scene even more horrific. Alex walks to the front door and knocks “nice and gentle” (23). But at first nobody comes, so he knocks again, and this time he “could slooshy [hear] somebody coming, then a bolt drawn, then the door inched open an inch or so, then I could viddy [see] this one glaz [eye] looking out at me and the door was on a chain.” (24-24) Kubrick shows the conversation about to follow with a series of shot and reverse shots between the woman on one side of the door and Alex on the other. The interior is a modern 1960s home where an attractive, middle-aged woman in a red jumpsuit lives. She keeps the door chained, but Alex is only slightly deterred by his inability to take immediate action. He turns on his charm and duplicitous voice to make sure he can have his fun. In response to the woman’s query as to who was at the door, he uses “a real gentlemen’s goloss

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<sup>28</sup> Played by Malcolm McDowell

[voice]”<sup>29</sup>: “‘There’s been a terrible road accident. My friend’s in the middle of the road bleeding to death. Can I please use your telephone for an ambulance?’” (23). The woman, dubious about the claim, replies she is sorry, but they “‘don’t have a telephone. You’ll have to go somewhere else.’” Alex, refusing to give up on the situation, pleads with her again, with more force this time, “ ‘But missus, it’s a matter of life and death!’”

Sympathizing, the woman asks him to wait, but Alex seizes his chance:

She went off, and my three droogs had got out of the auto quiet and crept up horrorshow [good] stealthily, putting their maskies [masks] on now, then I put mine on, then it was only a matter of me putting in the old rooker [hand] and undoing the chain, me have softened up this devotchka [female] with my gent’s goloss, so that she hasn’t shut the door like she should have done, us being strangers of the night.

Up until this point Kubrick sticks faithfully to the dialogue and action of the scene; however, at this point he sharply departs from the novel, since what follows in Burgess is incredibly sexually explicit and violent. In the novel, after breaking into the home, the foursome finds the woman “sort of cowering, a young pretty bit of sharp horrorshow goodies [breasts] on her, and with her was this chelloveck [man] who was her moodge [husband].” (25) The frightened couple attempts to keep cool, as the husband demands that the gang leave. Yet, ever calm and perceptive, Alex realizes that the “all the time his goloss was trembling and his rookers too. So I said ‘never fear. If fear thou hast in the heart, O brother, pray banish it forthwith.’” (25) Soon his wife begins to scream; Alex issues the order for his buddy Dim to hold the woman and for the other two droogs to

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<sup>29</sup> All subsequent dialogue in this section without citation is from *A Clockwork Orange*, 1971. See Works Cited for full bibliographic information.

hold the already bloodied and beaten man. Ironically, this man is a writer whose most recent exposé, titled *A Clockwork Orange*, defends prisoners who have the experimental treatment Alex receives later in the film. But, of course, they are not aware of this, and Dim does as he is told and holds her hands behind her back while Alex “ripped away at this and that and the other, the others going haw haw haw still, and real good horrorshow goodies they were that then exhibited their pink glazzies [nipples], O my brothers, while I untrussed [undressed] and got ready for the plunges.” (27) Even with the language barrier it is obvious what Alex is about to do: rape this poor woman while her husband watches. But Burgess takes it a step further and begins his description:

Plunging, I could slooshy [hear] cries of agony and this writer bleeding veck [man] that Georgie and Pete held on to nearly got loose howling bezoomny [crazy] with the filthiest of slovos [words] that I already knew and others she was making up. Then after me it was old Dim should have his turn, which he did in a beastly snorty howly sort of a way... while I held on to her. Then there was a changeover, Dim and me grabbing the slobbering writer veck who was past struggling really... and Pete and Georgie had theirs. Then there was like quiet and we were full of like hate, so smashed what was left to be smashed... ‘out out out out,’ I howled. (27)

Here, the text leaves little to the imagination. In the word “plunging” alone a reader can nearly feel the pain, and then the subsequent gang rape is obscene. Not only is there inherent shock value because it’s so early in the novel, but the material itself is also shocking. Its explicitness and detailing of such a taboo and horrific subject is shocking



in itself. With such a detailed and abrasive explanation so early in the novel it is possible that the reader would be too uncomfortable to continue reading.

Thus, it is quite clear why Kubrick makes that sharp departure from the source text after Alex and his droogs enter the home. Not only would it have been incredibly difficult to film a rape<sup>30</sup> but it would also have been nearly impossible to watch and, like the book that is shut, this movie would be rendered unwatchable. Instead, Kubrick tries to tone down the sequence without losing the horror of Alex's actions. Therefore, after Alex and his henchmen burst into the house masked they immediately pin the woman against the entry room wall. As she screams, they lead her through the home to the living room, also taking the husband prisoner. Holding the woman down, the gang begins to beat the husband. After finally getting him to the floor, they gag him with a ball and tape and force him to watch what is about to unfold.

Alex begins to dance around the room in glee as he savors his "bit of ultraviolence." The masks create an even more terrifying atmosphere, as they are frightening, with slanted eyes and long, beak-like noses. Simultaneously phallic and terrifying in nature, they symbolize what the group intends to do: terrify outsiders, but pleasure themselves. These masks differ significantly from what is described in the novel, where they commit their heinous crimes in masks of famous people: Disraeli<sup>31</sup>, Elvis Presley, Henry VIII and "Peebee Shelley", or Percy Bysshe Shelley<sup>32</sup>. It is important to notice that Kubrick decides to forgo the potential symbolic nature of figures from art and politics for something more obvious. Because the actual penetration of the rape is not shown on screen, and the depiction is significantly less visceral than the novel in this

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<sup>30</sup> The actress first cast as the wife quit the film because it was too difficult to film the lead up to the rape.

<sup>31</sup> A British Prime Minister in the 1800's

<sup>32</sup> Writer from the late 1700's and early 1800's

moment Kubrick's masks also represent that act itself. So not only do they cue the victims to what is going to happen, when the sequence ends the audience knows what has happened.

Another of Kubrick's additions to the scene is the diegetic music, courtesy of Alex. Slowly he and his henchmen begin to torture the woman who is trying her best to fight off their ecstasy and glee. Ironically, as Alex dances around, taking his time cutting holes in the woman's red jumpsuit around her breasts and vagina, he is all the while singing "Singin' in the Rain."<sup>33</sup> The song comes from the 1952 musical film of the same name. Sung by Gene Kelly, splashing around as happy as can be, the song is synonymous with joy no matter what type of weather, or, essentially, happiness despite adversity. The irony of this being sung by Alex during this scene is rank, even though, quite literally, he is singing while it is raining outside. Conversely, it is salt in an open wound to the victims in this scene who obviously are not going to find happiness despite the adversity they are currently experiencing, while conversely fitting Alex's mood perfectly.<sup>34</sup> He is happy as a schoolboy, savoring every moment of his "fun." He impersonates Gene Kelly as he sings he is "happy again" as he strips the woman of her outfit completely, rendering her naked and ready to be violated.

Here Kubrick uses props and dialogue (because Alex is singing himself it is not considered soundtrack) to represent something sexually explicit and how it can be terrifying to one party and joyous to another. As absolutely reprehensible as the act of rape is, to Alex it is a source of pleasure which makes his actions even worse, and

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<sup>33</sup> This song was initially added because it was the only song that actor Malcolm McDowell knew all the words to; Kubrick loved it so much he immediately purchased the rights for it to be used in the film (Stanley Kubrick: Life in Pictures, 2001).

<sup>34</sup> Later in the film Alex discovers the woman committed suicide.

Kubrick emphasizes this fact with the song “Singin' in the Rain” as performed by Alex. On the other hand, the use of the masks represents what these men are to the victims: monsters. Terrifying, ugly and powerful, these masks represent the horror the victims see in the perpetrators.

Despite Kubrick’s use of symbols to represent the feelings and emotions of the rape, the scene is still incredibly difficult to watch. Once the woman is completely stripped naked, Alex removes his white jock strap to prepare himself, but before he completes the action he kneels down to her husband and says, calmly, coolly, “viddy well, my brother, viddy well.” At this point the scene ends, but the three minutes of preparation for what we know is about to happen is too much. The scene is uncomfortable to watch in the moment, but ultimately it becomes even more uncomfortable after the film is over. This is because, by the end of the film, Alex becomes the character the audience pities the most, and they feel bad for him even though they saw exactly what kind of person he was and still is. We see him torture and rape a woman and enjoy absolutely every second of it, and yet, paradoxically, he is sympathetic due to his free will being stripped from him. His forced change into becoming a clockwork man makes him the victim rather than the attacker. Thus, the most potent form of discomfort comes from the audience identifying with this victimized position. The audience knows that any moral person could not feel bad for such a horrible person, one who murders and rapes for fun, and yet they do. Unfortunately, some of the backlash against the film came from audiences that found it easier to claim that the sexually violent and explicit content was the film’s problem than work through the complex moral behavior that Kubrick questions.

## EXPLICITNESS IN CONSENSUAL SEX VERSUS RAPE

In comparison to the novel, the fact that Kubrick does not actually show the rape of the woman by any of the gang members means that he did tone it down. However, in another part of the adaptation, Kubrick had to change the story completely. In the novel, Alex enters a record shop where he meets two ten-year-old girls he finds attractive. He lures them home where “they would grow up real today. Today I would make a day of it. No school this afterlunch, but education certain, Alex as teacher” (49). Alex brings them back to his apartment, gives them a few drinks and waits for his moment to attack. He then “leapt on these two young ptitsas [ladies]. This time they thought nothing fun and stopped creeching [screaming] with high mirth, and had to submit to the strange and weird desires of Alexander the Large<sup>35</sup>” (51). He continues to rape these defenseless girls until he decides he has had his fill, even though “they were creeching and going ow ow ow as they put their platties [clothes] on... as I lay there dirty and nagoy [naked] and fair shagged and fagged on the bed.” (51). This scene is utterly disgusting, and although not as explicit as the first rape scene in terms of language, it doesn’t need to be. The subject matter of a rape of young girls is enough to make the reader as uncomfortable as the first rape.

Kubrick completely changes the screenplay in this scene, with good reason. Alex still meets two ladies at the record shop, but they are clearly not ten. The two are sucking on some phallic popsicles when Alex approaches them. “Pardon me ladies. Enjoying that are you my darling? Bit cold and pointless isn’t it, my lovely? What’s happened to yours,

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<sup>35</sup> A pun on Alexander the Great, which was the basis for Alex’s name in the film, Alex de Large because the novel does not give him a last name.

my little sister?” he asks the one whose Popsicle is beginning to droop. The two giggle as they ask Alex what record he is purchasing. Seeing his opportunity, Alex responds, “What you got back home, little sister, to play your fuzzy warbles [records] on? I bet you got little save pitiful portable picnic players. Come with uncle and hear all proper. Hear angel trumpets and devil trombones. You are invited.” This is the entire dialogue of the scene.

After Alex makes his last statement the scene cuts to the threesome in the apartment, where they begin a quasi-orgy in fast motion set to a sped-up version of the William Tell Overture<sup>36</sup>. The sex here is completely consensual. Even though there is no dialogue or sound other than the music, based on the body language, it is evident that none of the parties is forced to do anything. The women are on top of him various times, and dress and undress for him without attempting to leave. Furthermore, the scene provides an equal sexual situation by showing all of them completely naked. Full frontal male nudity is a rare occurrence even now in film let alone in 1970, and the inclusion of it in this film and particularly in the scene drives home the fact that Alex is just as exposed as these ladies in this particular sexual experience. Moreover, the scene is also sped up helps the audience distance themselves from the sequence, and this distancing also helps lessen the explicitness. Furthermore, if this were a rape and the audience saw the entire sexual sequence as they do in this scene, it would be much too sexually explicit to show. Instead, because it is consensual, this sex scene – which goes the furthest in the movie in terms of showing the act of sex – becomes the least sexually explicit because it is the least sexually violent. Furthermore, this scene does not distance the audience from

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<sup>36</sup> The choice of this piece gives an overtone of violence. William Tell is best known for shooting an apple of his son’s head; however, he also assassinated his town leader and is a symbol of (potentially) violent revolution

Alex; his actions here seem plausible, and nothing in this scene is morally reprehensible. In fact, the threesome might even invoke a jealousy in some audience members as he lives out a fantasy of a ménage-à-trios with two beautiful women. Even if the audience is not jealous, this sexually explicit scene does not add to their abhorrence of Alex and therefore continuing the audience's eventual pathos for him at the end of the film.

### **RAPE AND MURDER**

Thus far Kubrick has to censor the tone of a scene and completely change another in order to make the visceral experience of the film bearable. In a similarly sexually explicit scene in the novel, Kubrick must also mitigate the sexually violent tone. In an attempt to recreate the first rape of the novel, Alex and his droogs find another home to break into. Using the same ploy, Alex knocks on the door and uses the same story of a “terrible accident” and that he needs to “use the telephone for an ambulance.” However, this woman being more perceptive than the last, she refuses to open the door, claiming she “never opens the door to strangers after dark.” Alex, too, is smarter this time, and instead of pushing the woman more only thanks her and wishes her good night. However, once Alex leaves the front door, he and his henchmen go around the side of the home and find a window for Alex to climb through so he can open the door from the inside. Meanwhile, the woman (called Catlady in the credits) calls the police, explaining, “a young man rang the bell asking to use the telephone.... [T]he thing that caught my attention was what he said: the words he used sounded very much like what was quoted in the newspapers this morning, in connection with the writer and his wife who were assaulted last night.” Of course the woman's intuition is dead on, and the police offer to

send “a patrol car round to have a look around.” While the Catlady and the police officer are having their conversation, the large, open room that she is in is showcased. On every wall there are modern and expressionist paintings of female nudes. Although breasts are the most striking feature in the majority of the pieces, one cannot help but notice a completely white, three and a half-foot sculpture of an erect penis sitting on a table next to the door.

Just as the Catlady hangs up the phone, Alex walks through that very door. In his diabolical mask he confidently begins to taunt her, “Hi hi hi, there. At last we meet.” But the Catlady is quite confident as well, and after realizing this was the man from the door she demands that he leave: “Now listen here, you little bastard. Just turn around and walk out of here the same way you came in.” Alex shrugs off the woman’s demand and looks around the room. Taking notice of the penis statue next him, he gently touches the tip, causing it to rock back and forth. “Leave that alone!” she yelps, “Well, what the bloody hell do you want?” she continues, still without the slightest fear in her voice. Alex remains in the doorway, and continues to mock the woman, explaining he is “taking part in an international students’ contest to see who can get the most points for selling magazines,” and even though his humor is slightly amusing, the woman does not back down. In her last attempt to reason with him she sternly, directly tells him to “cut the shit, sonny, and get out of here before you get yourself into some very serious trouble.” Of course, Alex does not heed the advice and proceeds to pick up the giant penis.

From this point on, any shot containing the Catlady also contains the penis, showing its domineering presence in the scene. The obvious symbolic nature of the sculpture is its representation of male sexual power, which is Alex’s motivation for rape.

He doesn't need to rape a woman to fulfill his sexual desires, as proved by the consensual threesome. Furthermore, his rape victims have been strangers whom he has never seen before, so it's not as if he is a frustrated stalker. It is clearly a need for power and the intoxicating feeling that comes with it that motivates him to commit these heinous crimes. For Kubrick and Burgess to highlight Alex's sadistic nature only facilitates the audience's initial abhorrence of him, which in turn will only make their eventual pity for him at the end more unnerving. Alex picks up the statue and holds it just where his erect penis would be and charges at the woman; meanwhile, the Catlady picks up a small bust of Beethoven<sup>37</sup> and begins to brandish it at Alex. They dance around each other, each swinging his/her weapon of choice, but very quickly she is lying defenseless on the ground while Alex stands over her. He raises the giant phallus over his head. Kubrick then cuts to a close up of the Catlady's face, her eyes open in fear, and then cuts back to Alex as he plunges it downwards. Although the contact is not seen, he presumably hits her in the head<sup>38</sup>.

The next second of the film goes by obviously in the blink of an eye. However, in extreme slow motion, the viewer sees that Kubrick shows a still of the feminist paintings from the woman's walls for two frames, or 1/12<sup>th</sup> of a second. These paintings depict a vagina that looks like a mouth with teeth, a hand grabbing at a lone breast, a woman naked in a dominatrix position, and a woman stimulating herself with her hand. Each painting is shown twice, with the exception of the vaginal teeth painting, which is shown six times. The *vagina dentata* image displayed in the painting is important because it shows female power as castrating potential and the possible ramifications if Alex goes

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<sup>37</sup> Ironic as this is Alex's favorite musician

<sup>38</sup> Later in the film, you find out she died from the attack.



through with his attempted rape. At this point the only way to defend against Alex is to castrate him, which (in a way) is what the government does with the Ludovico treatment. By taking away his ability to choose, they effectively “castrate” his manhood/humanity. And this happens because of Alex’s actions in this scene. After murdering the Catlady, Alex is picked up by the cops in his attempt to escape.

Like the first rape scene, this attempted rape is full of symbolism that helps tell the story without having to show each and every detail. The most obvious symbol is the giant statue of the penis. Alex uses it to hurt the woman and it also represents his intentions (like his mask) to use his own erect penis to damage the Catlady even further. The fact that this woman, clearly a confident female, was living alone in this home (unlike the first woman) and owned an erect penis statue and other feminist art pieces suggests she was a champion of feminine ability and power. Therefore, her death is even more ironic because she is killed by a giant penis sculpture that she owns. Similarly, the fact that Kubrick decided to flash through her paintings after her death is ironic. Perhaps these images are what flashed through her mind as she was hit; hence, the extreme brevity and her continued belief in feminine power. In a sense, she does defend against Alex because he is captured due to her phone call. So even though she loses the battle, in a roundabout way her strength allows her to win the war. If she had immediately given in to his desires and did not delay him by fighting back (verbally and physically), perhaps Alex would have escaped to hurt yet another innocent woman.

Most of the action and dialogue in the novel resembles this scene in the film, with a noticeable exception. In the novel there is no mention of feminist paintings, a giant penis statue, or confident banter by the woman. The woman is much older and does land

a few cracks with her cane, but Alex eventually steals it from her and ends up killing her with it. The fact that Kubrick adds the heavy feminist quality to the Catlady instead of focusing on her attempt to direct her cats to attack him adds a slightly more positive light on women in a film where women are consistently helpless and victimized by men. Like the first rape scene, the most discomfoting part of this scene is really in the audience's minds once the film is over. Adding up all the awful things Alex has done or would have done only compounds the audience's guilt over feeling bad for such an immoral person. If he had committed only one of the crimes in the film or didn't enjoy it as he did, perhaps feeling bad about his punishment would be easier. However, the combination of similar horrific actions only makes it harder to accept sympathizing for him, even when one truly does. Again, the true success of this film lies in its pattern of horrific events to ask questions about the importance of free will; without these sexually explicit and violent scenes to tell Alex's story, the point would be significantly less poignant.

## **NARRATIVE CHOICES**

Another way that Kubrick emphasizes the radical swing in the audience's feelings for Alex is by removing two significant parts of the original novel. The first is a homosexual gang-rape scene that happens while Alex is in prison. In the scene Alex's already overcrowded cell adds another prisoner who had "a very dirty mind and filthy intentions" (96). In the middle of the night, Alex wakes up to this new prisoner in bed with him "govereeting [saying] dirty like love-slovos [words] and stroke stroke stroking away" (97). In response, Alex begins to defend himself and wakes up the rest of the prison mates who all gang up on the prisoner. Eventually, they all take turns raping the

new prisoner, “in a queer gentle way...the new plenny [prisoner] did creeched [screamed] a malenky [little] bit at first...and he just went oh oh oh” (99). The next morning, they find the prisoner dead and Alex the chief cause of it. Kubrick’s exclusion of this scene drastically mitigates the amount sexually violent material that the novel includes. Furthermore, it eliminates homoerotic violence from the film, which eliminates any discomfort the audience may have due to a homosexual situation, sexually explicit or otherwise. Despite the fact that in this scene Alex is first assaulted, his response is overwhelmingly more violent than the initial attack. Not only does the whole cell beat the prisoner, they rape him as well, and eventually leave him to die. It would be gratuitous to show this sequence to prove Alex’s monstrous behavior; he has already raped one victim and there is no need to show another. Therefore, by removing this scene in the adaptation, Kubrick only includes the sexually explicit material necessary to develop the narrative and the character development of Alex.

Another important exclusion from the novel into film is the final chapter. When Burgess first wrote the novel this final chapter was included; however, when it was published in America, the chapter was removed. This chapter discusses the changes Alex makes after being cured from the Ludovico treatment. He reforms his ways and becomes an upright citizen of society by his own choice. It is unknown which version Kubrick read, but when the novel was released he had been living in Britain for some time. It is possible that he was aware of the British final chapter and consciously excluded it. If the final chapter were included it would be easier to accept Alex because the audience knows Alex reforms. However, by leaving this out, the audience must contend with the facts they have, and make a judgment on Alex that is not so simple. Furthermore, if the chapter

were included, the heinous crimes that Alex commits would be trivialized because he is good in the end. Instead, these crimes are still at the forefront of Alex's character, therefore keeping his sexual violence in the film. By highlighting his character traits, only reinforces the necessity to include sexually violent scenes to fully understand Alex.

## CONCLUSION

For some, *A Clockwork Orange* was a beautiful meditation on human nature: Kubrick “explored these extreme subjects that you kind of sometimes wanted to recoil from... but they were explored in a way that was dissecting... to try to find to out what makes that kind of evil tick... to say in a way in a world where we know man is capable of the most base shockingly destructive behavior is hope and virtue possible?” (Pollack, 2001). Despite the fact that Kubrick's adaptation is significantly less explicit than the novel, some audiences recoiled too much. Notwithstanding the film's critical and financial success, it was attacked in the media (Stanley Kubrick: A Life in Pictures, 2001). In fact, shortly after the film was released, there were several acts of violence similar to those in the film. The perpetrators of the crimes blamed their actions on seeing “Clockwork” in theatres. One victim of a rape noted that her attackers sang *Singing in the Rain*, just like in the first rape scene of the film (Stanley Kubrick: A Life in Pictures, 2001). In the case of a teenage boy who killed another teenage boy, the defense claimed he was only repeating what he saw in the movie (Stanley Kubrick: A Life in Pictures, 2001). British newspapers ran stories with headlines boldly declaring “‘Clockwork Orange’ Attack,” “‘Clockwork Orange’ Terror Wave” and even “‘Clockwork Orange

Gang Killed my Wife” (Stanley Kubrick: A Life in Pictures, 2001). In response, after less than a year in theatres, Kubrick pulled the film, promising it would not be seen in Great Britain until after his death. This decision did not come from the heads at Warner Bros. Studios because the film was the second most successful film in the studio’s history at that point (Stanley Kubrick: A Life in Pictures, 2001). Rather, this decision was made on the suggestion of the police after several threatening phone calls and letters were sent to Kubrick’s family (Stanley Kubrick: A Life in Pictures, 2001). Clearly, the film and the message it was sending to some of its audiences enraged the public.

In America, the film was released with an X rating for only a short time. In order to achieve an R rating, Kubrick was forced to cut over 30 seconds of any sexually violent footage, including the scenes described above (Stanley Kubrick: A Life in Pictures, 2001). Of course, this curbed most complaints of the film being too sexually violent; however, in doing so, it also diminished the final feeling of guilt over feeling pity for Alex. Clearly, removing part of the rape scene undermines the film’s basic motivation. Therefore, it seems that in its original form Kubrick’s depiction is indeed successful. The use of subtle symbolic elements in the dialogue, setting and costume keep the sexual content from being gratuitous. Even the parts that are overtly violent and disturbing are necessary to the overall point the film attempts to convey and the removal of these scenes only diluted that message. Furthermore, in comparison with the source text and its explicitness, Kubrick is successful in reducing the gratuitous description in the rape scene and therefore strikes a successful and delicate balance in retrospect. Thus, despite media and audience backlash, Kubrick is without a doubt successful in handling the necessary, sexually violent and explicit material to tell the story of Alex.

## Conclusion

“The reality of one night, let alone  
that of a whole lifetime  
can ever be the whole truth”  
“And no dream is ever just a dream”

- *Eyes Wide Shut*

Kubrick’s films enjoyed the success of taking sexually explicit and deviant material and handling it with beauty and control. In no case is the material sexually gratuitous or unnecessary. He did not achieve this by simply negating the explicitness. Instead he chose to mitigate what audience’s might have viewed as vulgar to employ the same point that the original text had implied by including it.

Although there were distinct differences between the source texts, he was still able to create the sexual discomfort found in the novels. By using symbolic elements in both the costume and mise-en-scene, he created parallels and continuities that allow the audience to ascertain meaning without explicitly showing sexual content. Since the audience has to figure these connections out on their own, Kubrick forces the audience to become active in the film. Kubrick challenged his audience to ask their own questions. He was “a hybrid, an auteur of high aesthetic and intellectual ambition” (Cocks, Diedrick and Perushek, 10). This combination facilitates the audience’s experience, because the film is no longer just entertainment, it is intellectual stimulation.

Other changes, such as changes in the narrative structure, chronology and characters, also mitigate sexual explicitness. Kubrick can manipulate the way an audience reacts to a sexual moment by removing scenes and controlling “the quantity of information to which the viewer has access; the kind of information, expository or not; and the way in which such information is offered” (Raphael, 70). These combined choices add up to allowing the audience to view the film and ask the questions Kubrick wishes to communicate.

Furthermore, some of these changes were mandated by Warner Bros studio and other organizations, such as the MPAA. The changing of characters ages and the cutting of scenes that were too suggestive may have curbed Kubrick’s creative ideas, but he worked with them excellently. These changes help tone down the potential discomfort caused by overtly sexual scenes.

All of Kubrick’s films caused plenty of controversy among audiences. The films made money, were praised by some critics, and cursed by others. But no matter what side of the argument an audience member came down on, each was challenged and shown visual sequences that they will never forget.

Ultimately, Kubrick was utterly successful in creating good, symbolic and unified work that expressed sexual explicitness without creating discomfort. His ability to toe the line between necessary and gratuitous sexual scenes is uncanny, and luckily for us, we have proof that even the most monstrous of actions can be beautiful.

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