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## **What Makes a Man: Social Constructions of Masculinity In the Works of Stanley Kubrick**

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The University of Southern Mississippi

What Makes a Man: Social Constructions of Masculinity

In the Works of Stanley Kubrick

by

Cory Taylor

A Thesis

Submitted to the Honors College of  
The University of Southern Mississippi  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
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## **Abstract**

This study examines three male protagonists from films by Stanley Kubrick, and the original literary texts, with specific focus on the social influence of each character's sense of masculinity. Much has been written about literature and film as a social critique, but there is a particular need for study through Kubrick's lens. The original literary texts are *Lolita*, *A Clockwork Orange*, and *The Shining*. By considering the historical context of both the novel and its adaptation, it is possible to provide an indication of each protagonist's effect on social constructions of manhood. It is also necessary to note the contrasts between the adaptation and the literary source in an effort to grasp any potential socially constructed ideas of masculinity Kubrick may have been trying to convey. Given that postmodern social constructions are, arguably, different than when these novels and films were originally crafted, it is imperative to consider how these texts' thematic approaches to (or critique of) masculinity offer social impact today.

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## Introduction

Stanley Kubrick is a storyteller whose films tend to center on male protagonists who are seen as socially deviant or morally corrupt. My research will focus on the leading men in the novels *A Clockwork Orange*, *The Shining*, and *Lolita*, and then examine Kubrick's film adaptations of each text. Examinations of masculinity, more specifically masculine ideologies, have been explored in literature and film, but rarely through the lens of one filmmaker whose *oeuvre* comes exclusively from works of literature. Specifically, I will focus on the differences and similarities between the original work of literature and film adaptation, the social commentary both versions are making on their respective demographics, etc. Definitions and perceptions of gender roles are changing (dramatically so in some cases) with the passage of time, so contextualizing these works is important in order to grasp social insecurities about men and their place in the social order.

*Lolita* tells the story of Humbert Humbert, a British professor and intellectual who is vacationing in New England during a summer break. Upon touring a possible room to rent in the home of a young widow named Charlotte Haze, Humbert meets Charlotte's young daughter, Lolita. Humbert falls instantly in love with Lolita and eventually marries Charlotte in order to remain close to Lolita. After Charlotte stumbles upon Humbert's diary where he discloses his contempt for his wife, but undying love for her daughter, Charlotte runs out of the house in a panic and is killed by a passing car. Humbert goes to get Lolita from the summer camp where she had been staying and the two begin a cross-country road trip. Eventually, Lolita turns 17 and leaves Humbert for another man, gets

married and becomes pregnant. Lolita dies on Christmas day during childbirth and Humbert passes away around the same time from coronary thrombosis.

The next text to focus on is *A Clockwork Orange*, Anthony Burgess's 1962 novella, which was adapted to the screen by Kubrick in 1971 and received a greater amount of controversial protesting than *Lolita*. *A Clockwork Orange* tells the story of a young man named Alex, who lives in a modern metropolis and spends his nights wandering the streets with his droogs, or peers, seeking out innocent people to assault. Eventually, the State police capture Alex and his gang, and Alex is sentenced to prison for his crimes, which were almost all sexually violent. While in prison, the State gives Alex the chance to participate in what is called the Ludovico Treatment, assuring him he will gain his freedom by submitting himself to their testing. The Ludovico Treatment is a process by which an individual is strapped to a chair, with their eyelids forced open and reels of film showing sexually violent material is played. The state hopes this sort of reverse psychology will cure Alex of his ways and encourage him to reenter society as a productive member. In the end of the novel, Burgess offers a gleam of hope that Alex is, indeed, "cured" of his ways, whereas Kubrick's version of the story allows room for debate.

The final text to discuss is Stephen King's 1977 novel *The Shining*, and three years later, Kubrick released his film version of the chilling tale. The story centers on Jack Torrance, and the doomed winter he spends with his wife Wendy and their young son, Danny, as they act as caretakers for a snowed-in mountain resort during the off-season called the Overlook Hotel. Jack Torrance becomes trapped in the Overlook Hotel with his wife and son, and ultimately attempts murder because of the pressure he feels to

conform to the social norms of patriarchy and what it *really* looks like to be a husband and father in American culture. The construct of the hotel lends metaphorical weight to this idea of confinement.

Society has decided that these three male protagonists, each with their own set of traits, are morally reprehensible. My goal is to cast these men in a sympathetic light, while also exploring how the differences between the original novels, and Kubrick's film adaptations, are determined by issues relating to social constructions of masculinity.

## Review of Literature

Delving deep into this literature, along with comparing and contrasting the screen adaptations, will essentially give postmodern readers and filmgoers a historical perspective in noting the ever-evolving issue of socialized standards of masculinity. There are many articles and essays written about these Stanley Kubrick films and, while some of them address femininity and psychological pitfalls, not many of them specifically examine masculinity. Beginning with the earliest novel and film, *Lolita*, and working forward chronologically will aid in understanding the social climate in which each work of art was created.

In his essay “Pistols and Cherry Pies: *Lolita* From Screen to Page,” Dan Burns examines the critical reception of Kubrick’s adaptation of *Lolita*. Burns considers this specific social reception as a reflection of how and why it is sometimes too great a task to adapt a novel “whose effects depend on a richly rhetorical first-person narrator” (245). Rather than concluding that this adaptive process is true for *Lolita*, Burns uses commentary from both Kubrick and Nabokov to suggest that psychologically driven novels can, and should, be translated for an aesthetic audience. Burns states, for example, that “visual references function in place of the dense texture of verbal punning and allusion which Nabokov uses throughout the novel to lead the reader to Quilty’s lair.” (246).

Burns spends a large amount of time assessing the critical reception of the film, noting that many critics were initially off-put by the film but, over time, grew to appreciate it. He cites film critic John Thomas, who writes that “*Lolita* the movie violates

*Lolita* the book only if you think that Nabokov's novel is about sexual perversion, or even about Lolita" (Burns 246). This statement reflects my study of *Lolita*, not as an exploration of sexual desire or pedophilia, but as an empathetic view of a tortured protagonist. Burns further concludes that the novel and film both "share a common substructure... characterized by a disintegration and projection of the protagonist's personality... followed by his imprisonment, isolation, and death" (Burns 247). This article illustrates very well the importance of the relationship between a film and its novel of origin. Specifically, Dan Burns investigates the psychological nuances that are visually transferred from the pages of the novel to Humbert Humbert's face because "it is through his voice that we empathize with him, madman and monster he may be" (249).

Continuing to comment on the importance of understanding the psychological nature of one of Kubrick's earliest characters, the next essay closely centers on Humbert Humbert's sexual "madness." In a chapter from his book "The Philosophy of Stanley Kubrick," Jerold J. Abrams closely examines Humbert Humbert's character from *Lolita* as an interpretation of and potential resemblance to a detective. Abrams begins by outlining the obvious parallels between the femme fatale Lolita and Edgar Allan Poe's "Annabel Lee." Abrams explains "the confession that is the text of *Lolita* is equally a literary 'reincarnation' of Poe's "Annabel Lee"" (111). The author goes on to say that the construction of this young girl and her "temptress" nature is "a kind of Pythagorean nymphic transmigration of the literary soul of Annabel Lee from Poe's verse to Nabokov's novel to Kubrick's film" (111). The connective thread between Lolita and Humbert's investigative "madness" for her are, then, fully rooted in both versions of the story.

Abrams goes on to examine Humbert's madness, "a madness he knows well and for which he has been institutionalized more than once" (113). It is this madness that enables a sense of sympathy through which to measure Humbert's actions. Humbert actually believes his sexual attraction to young girls is a disease ("nympholepsy") and is, therefore, out of his control. Abrams ties the detective element of Humbert's character back in by explaining that his ability to categorize and remember minuscule details is a common trait of detectives, though he lacks the creative imagination of his supposed literary predecessors (like Poe's Dupin or Conan Doyle's Holmes). Humbert's "nympholepsy," as a result, outweighs his ability to utilize his detective qualities.

Abrams goes on to consider Humbert's love of chess as a possible indicator of why he fails at making a successful detective. Instead, Abrams argues, Humbert simply calculates his moves too intensely: "... while teaching Charlotte to play, Humbert says, rather pleased with himself, 'Yes, that can leap over the other pieces' – just as he, Humbert, can simply "leap over" Charlotte to get to Lolita" (Abrams 120). More than focusing specifically on Humbert's traits as a man, this chapter provides an interesting perspective that places the doomed protagonist in the context of other literary predecessors. This context not only highlights Humbert's lack of imaginative fervor, but also considers that, unlike these other men, Humbert's case should be a social exception since he is disease-ridden and mentally obsessive.

Transitioning to the next novel and film, *A Clockwork Orange*, the next article highlights the relationship between sexual politics and violence as it relates to the story's setting. The relationship between sexual politics and the story's setting is important to contextualize the plot in a postmodern lens. Susan Carruthers, in her article "Past Future:

The Troubled History of Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange*," details the importance of setting in the novel and subsequent film. The author begins by detailing the film's initial reception in the 1970s and the potential impact the film could have through its scheduled rerelease shortly after Kubrick's death. According to Carruthers, the film exists purely in its time period and any sort of postmodern implications would be hard pressed for legitimacy. The author says "... its sexual politics and 'artfully' pornographic violence bespeak an age that now appears alien... the rerelease serves as an opportune moment to consider the film's troubled relationship with its own time, and the questions that its adulatory reception may raise for ours" (Carruthers 30). The author goes on to compare and contrast the original novel by Anthony Burgess and the adaptation by Stanley Kubrick, noting the importance of Burgess' first-hand experience with violent youth (like his protagonist, Alex), while Kubrick's hero "delivers a more muddled morality" (Carruthers 31).

The importance of this article lies in its question of whether or not this particular story (and, thus, the novel and film) is still worth contemporary review or contemplation. Carruthers suggests that part of the issue is not the violence itself, but that if it is contained within its own "era," then perhaps the content of the story is irrelevant. Part of the argument in dating the film, Carruthers suggests, is that "the present censorial regime adopts a more restrictive approach towards the aestheticization of rape than it did thirty years ago" (33).

This article is interesting because it is necessary, at times, to examine both the historical *and* social impacts of the novels and films of Stanley Kubrick. Further, *A*

*Clockwork Orange* is a text where the historical and social impacts are not clearly defined, leaving the possibilities of research open.

Focusing specifically on masculinity, the nature of the research requires commentary on masculine identity, as is found in the next article. In a chapter from his book “Writing Men: Literary Masculinities from Frankenstein to the New Man,” Berthold Schoene-Harwood takes an unsympathetic look at *A Clockwork Orange* and considers the possibility that the male protagonist of the story is simply fueling patriarchy rather than moving away from it. To begin, the author describes patriarchal masculinity as “a force that feeds on its practitioners who find themselves at constant risk of becoming casualties...” (Schoene-Harwood 71). He claims there is a “ceaseless and arbitrary struggle for self-assertive dominance over whatever it [masculinity] chooses to perceive as its other(s)” (Schoene-Harwood 72). For Alex, the “other(s)” include the innocent people who are subjected to his ultra violence and sexual assault. Alex’s need for violent expressions of masculinity stems from being “conditioned by society’s cultivation of a particular kind of masculinity that specializes in curbing the allegedly natural volatility of boys” (Schoene-Harwood 70). The author adds that Alex’s social conditioning into a man is a result of “masculine gender performances in imperial Britain,” and, therefore, his subjection to Ludovico’s Technique – “designed to make him a good person and valuable citizen” - was systematically useless (Schoene-Harwood 70).

Aside from social conditioning, Schoene-Harwood examines the possibility of Alex’s violent and sexual rebellion to be linked with his seemingly feminine interests. He claims Alex behaves this way to “distract from his ‘queerness’ as a working-class boy who listens to Beethoven and is fond of displaying a sophisticated manner that borders on

aristocratic snobbery” (Schoene-Harwood 73). Playing devil’s advocate, the author argues that Alex is not deviating at all from the societal norms in place and, therefore, poses no great threat to patriarchy. He suggests the social standards are, rather, “easily manipulable elements of the masculine standard, subject to systemic expediency and the vicissitudes of political fashion” (Schoene-Harwood 76). This article is particularly fascinating not only in its direct correlation with my research, but also in the author’s contrasting position to mine. I intend to pursue a sympathetic view of the three male protagonists, but Schoene-Harwood presents Alex in an extraordinarily convincing negative light.

Transitioning to the next novel and film, *The Shining*, the crucial relationship between masculinity and femininity comes to light. Stanley Kubrick’s 1980 film *The Shining* tells the story of Jack Torrance and his descent into madness, ultimately leading him to stalk and attempt to murder his wife and son as they are trapped in the blizzard-stricken Overlook Hotel. Robert Kilker’s article “All Roads Lead to the Abject: The Monstrous Feminine and Gender Boundaries in Stanley Kubrick’s ‘The Shining’,” explores the idea that Jack is a sympathetic character who, though cemented in film history as evil, should not be so quickly damned. In understanding the relationship between Stanley Kubrick’s films and the potential commentary they make on masculinity in American society, this article is essential. One of the most interesting approaches to Kubrick’s film (and the Stephen King novel upon which it is based) is to consider the historical context and possible social constraints on masculinity. Kilker focuses his argument on the ghosts of the Overlook Hotel controlling Jack’s actions and claims that “he is driven by notions of the American Dream that require men to achieve material

success at whatever psychic cost to themselves or others” (Kilker 55). The author goes on to compare Jack’s actions in *The Shining* to Carrie White’s murderous behavior in *Carrie* (also based on a novel by King), concluding that both characters “may, in their own ways, be read as the results of institutionalized repression” (Kilker 55). The implication, then, shifts to Jack’s wife, Wendy, and Kilker explains her “kind of monstrous feminine” behavior as the ultimate catalyst for Jack’s loss of sanity.

One of the metaphorical views of this challenged patriarchal ideology is found in the giant topiary maze located on the hotel grounds. Kilker states that claiming the “maze was ‘built’ suggests ‘man-made’ - feminine nature disciplined by phallic trimmers” (58). In the novel, the maze is what ultimately brings Jack to his doom, as if the “monstrous femininity” of the hedges literally swallows the life from him. Finally Kilker centers on Jack and Wendy’s son, Danny, stating that in order for him to “overcome a hysterically aggressive father, he has to free himself of his unwieldy feminine power and think of a rational way to outwit the monster lurking close behind” (62).

This article, while not providing any concrete conclusions as to the nature of American masculine ideology in the films of Stanley Kubrick, does offer unique and specific perspectives. Further, the author conveniently cites many influential sources, which provide me with many cross-references to dive into as I further try to focus my argument on the gender politics to be found in the films of Stanley Kubrick and the potential effect they had on American (masculine) society.

The author of the article “Mister Strangelove” is noted to be Stanley Kubrick, but this cannot be so due to the fact that it was published in 2009 and blatantly refers to certain events having taken place after Kubrick’s death in 1999. That aside, the article

seeks to explore whether or not Kubrick's films, which are arguably sexual in nature, are actually sexy. The author explores Kubrick's entire career, with primary focus on the films that have, at the very least, some sexual implication to them (including *A Clockwork Orange*, *The Shining*, and *Lolita*). Though there are certain issues or counter-arguments I would propose to the research done in this article, it is by far the most interesting piece of literature I've read about Kubrick thus far. The author focuses on details that seem miniscule. For example, "the very last word ever uttered in a Kubrick film is "fuck", not as a curse but as invitation" (19). The author goes on to suggest that Kubrick changed or self-censored his films intentionally for heroic, dramatic effect. In *A Clockwork Orange*, a rape scene involving the hero Alex was criticized "for aestheticising and mocking sexual violence," and Kubrick did indeed pull the film from Britain for the rest of his life. Further, it was important for Kubrick to show the femme fatale in *Lolita* as a more influential catalyst than the doomed hero, Humbert; implying that "these changes render Alex and Humbert more heroic, the sex less disturbing" (20).

Unsurprisingly, the author quotes Kubrick from an interview done with *Playboy* magazine in the 1960s around the release of *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Other than this source, though, the author does not specifically cite any other sources, simply drawing from personal filmic observations. The overall point the author is making, however, is still clear: Kubrick's films that either address sexuality or contain literal sexual acts are "so meticulous that all colour is drained from any sexual tension that might have bubbled up from the subject matter" (21). In relation to my research, the idea of Kubrick as a "sexy" filmmaker seems a negligible, irrelevant claim to make. Still, in the broader context of my study, the sexual nature (or an implied one) of Kubrick's characters

directly ties to my observations of their relationship to society and theoretical gender roles.

In her article “The Material Poetry of Acting: “Objects of Attention,” Performance Style, and Gender in *The Shining* and *Eyes Wide Shut*,” Sharon Marie Carnicke sets out to explore how actors set out methodically to perform scenes of gender conflict, while specifically focusing on the relationships portrayed between two married couples in two very different films by Stanley Kubrick. The author focuses on one scene from each film and, in so doing, she is able to “explore how performance style and commentary on gender emerge from the actors’ modulation of body and voice” (22).

Carnicke’s approach to this material, specifically the nuances across gender lines, is unique and fascinating. It is imperative to examine certain scenes within these films (though, of the two, I only intend to use *The Shining*) because the films are as equally impactful in my research of gender and society as the novels upon which they are based. Carnicke describes Jack Nicholson’s performance in *The Shining* as theatrical, “using clear and precise articulation” (23). This fact contrasts with his wife Wendy’s retreating behavior. Carnicke goes on to describe a bedroom scene in *Eyes Wide Shut* between Nicole Kidman and Tom Cruise where Kidman describes to her husband a sexual fantasy about a naval officer she saw once. Nicholson’s crazed, theatrical performance is, Carnicke argues, parallel to Kidman’s subtle and slow delivery.

## Methodology

Stanley Kubrick has been hailed as one of the most influential filmmakers of all time. Focusing on his films, along with the literature from which the films emerge, has provided a wellspring of information and insight into masculine ideals in American society. Therefore, in contrast to the original literary text, it is necessary to consider how Stanley Kubrick imagines masculinity as a social construction. Placing each protagonist in his historical context may provide insight to his motivations and actions. Still, it is not enough simply to explicate the original texts; rather, I will need to spend a large amount of time exposing myself to scholarly research in my field of interest. There have been a number of articles, dissertations, and books written about both the films and novels, and masculinity as it relates to literature and film. I have quite a few books specifically about Stanley Kubrick and his sense of creation through adapting literature into film. Also, I am closely examining the annotated version of *Lolita*, complete with helpful footnotes and other supplementary material. Given that postmodern social constructions are, arguably, different than when these novels and films were originally crafted, I will focus part of my research on their thematic approach to (and critique of) masculinity in hopes of offering contemporary social insight. With the emergence of a more broad sense of gender equality, analyzing the protagonists' actions will draw out parallels in today's society.

My method of research involves maintaining a point of specific interest in the protagonists of the three texts I am researching while still qualitatively examining the numerous outside sources (both theoretically based and generalized observations) as they relate to my thesis. Considering some characteristics of the masculine antihero, it is

necessary to consider how these traits relate to notions of gender politics in American society, noting any alignment.

## Discussion

### Lolita

**“And this is the only immortality you and I may share, my Lolita.”**

Beginning analysis in order of publication, *Lolita* was Vladimir Nabokov's twelfth novel, which was “quietly published in Paris in September 1955” (Appel, xxxiii). The novel did not make its way to America until August of 1958, where the *New York Times* reviewed the work and claimed it to be “dull in a pretentious, florid, and archly fatuous fashion... [and] repulsive” (Appel xxxv). Nabokov himself admits in the afterword of the novel that *Lolita* “does contain various allusions to the physiological urges of a pervert... but after all we are not children” (316). Nabokov also states “no writer in a free country [America] should be expected to bother about the exact demarcation between the sensuous and the sensual” (314). On addressing claims that his New England-set novel is “anti-American,” Nabokov describes intentionally looking for “a certain exhilarating milieu”... because “any proletarian from Chicago can be as bourgeois as a duke” (315). It is this cross-cultural ambiguity coupled with the delineated explanation for a Russian-born novelist to center his story in America that makes Humbert Humbert one of the most compelling and unique protagonists in literature. Released in 1962, Stanley Kubrick's *Lolita* was received with the similar sense of controversy and frustration, complete with posters for the film stating, “How did they ever make a movie of *Lolita*?” Kubrick collaborated with Nabokov, who wrote the film's screenplay, which implies that the film is as close to the novel's sense of Humbert's character as any filmed adaptation.

The key to Humbert's madness stems from an intense childhood love, Annabel, a relationship that has permeated the professor's psyche for the majority of his life. The tortured protagonist cannot differentiate between his first true childhood love in Annabel, who died shortly after their love began to bloom, and the love of young, nymphet girls that fill his mind. He writes:

When I try to analyze my own cravings, motives, actions and so forth, I surrender to a sort of retrospective imagination, which feeds the analytic faculty with boundless alternatives, and which causes each visualized route to fork and re-fork without end in the maddeningly complex prospect of my past. (13)

Humbert describes Annabel as “that little girl with her seaside limbs and ardent tongue [which has] haunted me ever since – until at last, twenty-four years later, I broke her spell by incarnating her in another” (Nabokov 15). The “another” is, of course, Dolores Haze or Lolita, the young New England girl who seems to give Humbert a renewed passion and fervor for life.

Humbert holds on to his shortened relationship with Annabel, claiming “the spiritual and the physical had been blended in us with a perfection that must remain incomprehensible to the matter-of-fact, crude, standard-brained youngsters of today” (14). Humbert suggests that society (his and, thus, our post-modern world) does not care to seek a romantic union filled with spiritual and physical complexity, and this point seems especially accurate for men. Any sort of reflection on spirituality and physicality in the context of a romantic relationship suggests emotional vulnerability. This vulnerability implies weakness, which to be sure, is unacceptable masculine behavior.

Humbert declares that one must “be an artist or a madman, a creature of infinite melancholy, with a bubble of hot poison in your loins... in order to discern at once... the little deadly demon among the wholesome children... unconscious herself of her fantastic power” (17). He suggests there is a culmination between physiological factors and social conditioning which ultimately result in a man’s desire for a young girl, but not in his ability to recognize her in a crowd. Rather than buckle to social standards of romantic pursuits or masculine ideals, Humbert boldly states that it is the young female herself who holds the key to the threshold of possibility, and he is simply a man with a “flame permanently aglow in your subtle spine” (17).

When Humbert arrives in New England to scout locations for rent, his intention is only to remain during the summer and head back to Europe to teach for the fall semester. There is, burrowed in his plans, a fantastic sense of freedom and opportunity: to pick up and travel, explore the American east coast, leisurely work on a new novel, make acquaintances with New England intellectuals, et cetera. He is, near the beginning of the story, the definition of a “free” man (more so in the social sense than the psychological). Upon meeting Lolita, however, his idealized plans for a casual summer vanish and nostalgic memories of Annabel’s blissful and youthful love came flooding back to his mind: “the vacuum of my soul managed to suck in every detail of her bright beauty” (39). Humbert writes that “everything between the two events was but a series of gropings and blunders, and false rudiments of joy. Everything they shared made one of them” (40). The mental torture Humbert had been feeling for decades of his life had now blended with this young girl before him, and he saw an opportunity to make amends with the ghosts of his childhood by falling in love with a fresh, young face. Kubrick fashions the

initial scene of meeting Lolita in darkly comic fashion. As they walk into the piazza, the audience hears Charlotte Haze rambling in the background about her home, as she is desperate to convince Humbert the house is worth renting. Humbert is, instead, caught by the vision of Lolita, sunbathing in the infamous red, heart-shaped glasses, assuring Charlotte that it is her “cherry pies” he is staying for.

Realizing his place in the social order, Humbert decides it is more prudent to marry Lolita’s insufferable mother, whom he calls “the Haze woman,” than to leave his new love at the end of the summer, never to see her again. After the newly married Mrs. Humbert finds her husband’s private diary, thoroughly purveying his honest feelings concerning her and, more importantly, her daughter, Charlotte threatens to expose Humbert and divorce him, declaring he will “never, never see that miserable brat again” (96). Charlotte then runs out of the house in a panic, is struck by a car, and killed.

Returning again to Humbert’s place in the social order, he finds himself legally responsible for his stepdaughter, the love of his life, who is currently away at a summer camp. Humbert goes to retrieve Lolita from camp and tells her that Charlotte is in the hospital, and that the two of them must travel across the country. When Lolita asks Humbert how he fell in love with her mother, Humbert responds by essentially confessing his true, shadowed feelings for her. He says, “Some day, Lo, you will understand the many emotions and situations, such as for example the harmony, the beauty of spiritual relationship” (112). Though Humbert and Lolita have connected on a physical level, the social wall requiring Humbert to maintain his dutiful obligations to his stepdaughter prevent him from achieving the “harmony” he believes they both can obtain. Humbert’s constant meditation on the importance and intensely overwhelming

nature of a spiritual relationship, along with the necessity of understanding emotions, illustrates his singularity among “average” men. Humbert’s sense of masculinity is misaligned with contemporary culture’s vision of manhood. His feelings, though objectively impractical and legalistically immoral, focus more on psychological balance and aesthetic spirituality than social expectations.

## A Clockwork Orange

**“Another victim,” he said, like sighing. “A victim of the modern age.”**

In 1962, Anthony Burgess published his novella *A Clockwork Orange* assuming it would eventually fade into the background of most postmodern literary circles. Instead, nearly a decade into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the story of Alex’s violent pillage through the streets of London resonates with horrific truth to the effects of socialistic modernity. As defined by a character in the story, “A clockwork orange” is “the attempt to impose on man... laws and conditions appropriate to a mechanical creation” (Burgess 25). When the American-born filmmaker Stanley Kubrick came across the book and later adapted a version to film in 1971, the story itself became legendary in its own right, providing a glimpse of a future that none would want to admit can exist.

Alex, the protagonist of the story, is a young man frustrated with his peers’ lack of aesthetic appreciation. The correlation between such a character envisioned in the 1960s and one today is seamless: the undercurrents of social expectations for men do not always allow room for aesthetic appreciation, especially in a capitalistic postmodern world of greed and political corruption. Alex, instead, prefers to spend his time listening to classical music and, when Burgess first introduces Alex’s infatuation with classical music, the scene is described with an almost erotic tone:

Then, brothers, it came. Oh, bliss, bliss and heaven. I lay all nagoy to the ceiling, my gulliver on my rookers on the pillow, glazzies closed, rot open in bliss, slooshying the sluice of lovely sounds. Oh, it was gorgeousness and gorgeosity made flesh (37).

Just before, as Alex and his friends sit in the milkbar, a woman begins to sing so beautifully that Alex “felt all the little malenky hairs on my plot standing endwise and the shivers crawling up like slow malenky lizards and then down again” (Burgess 32). Alex becomes so consumed in the performance because he knows exactly which opera she is singing from, down to the actions of the particular scene. One of Alex’s droogs, Dim, begins to howl, unnerving the self-proclaimed “Humble Narrator.” “I felt myself all of a fever and like drowning in redhot blood... ‘Bastard. Filthy drooling mannerless bastard’” (Burgess 32). Classical music, for Alex, represents the highest form of art and, thus, his greatest Romantic ideal of beauty. Unlike Alex’s peers who are supposed to be his equals, he has become frustrated by the fact that classical music has been reduced generally to mere escapism or plain background noise.

A newspaper article Alex reads suggests “Modern Youth would be better off if A Lively Appreciation of The Arts could be like encouraged” (Burgess 46). Such statements personally offend Alex and provide a key source of his victimhood. For Alex, art equates individuality and expressive liberty; however, when reduced to a socialized, banal form of escapism, art loses its freedom and becomes mechanized, arguably like all other elements of society. Therefore, sexual assault, pillage, and robbery are mediated forms of protest against his potential enslavement to mechanized society.

During one of his nightly raids with his “droogs,” Alex is captured by the State and is subjected to the Ludovico treatment, a method of psychological conditioning where an individual is strapped down and forced to watch sexually violent material. In the eyes of the State, Alex endangers the capitalistic endeavors of postmodern society by robbing from stores and the homes of the wealthy, and his subjection to variations of his

own actions will, the State assumes, cure him of his deviant ways and force him into a life of social normality.

Another important aspect of Alex's victimization involves the use of a linguistic technique called Nadsat, which is a form of Russian-inspired slang used by young adults in the novel and film. Esther Petix, author of an essay concerning the language of the novel, defines Nadsat as "the language of the droogs and of the night. It is the jargon of rape, plunder, and murder veiled in unfamiliarity, and as such it works highly successfully" (124.) Petix further suggests the social mechanization of this language: "In Nadsat one finds the Platonic form of mechanism: the cadence of a metronome and the ticking-tocking ramifications of humanity without its essence" (126).

For the reader, there is a certain sense of empathy swirled into Nadsat speaking, for there seems to be a degree of innocence lurking beneath the violent actions. Aside from scribing the story in first person, and having the protagonist directly address the reader ("Your Humble Narrator"), Burgess successfully garners pity simply by Alex's manner of speech. There seems to be a relationship established between Alex and the reader, so that by the time he is being subjected to the Ludovico technique, our sympathy blends with him addressing the reader and audience directly: "I do not wish to describe, brothers, what other horrible veshches I was like forced to viddy that afternoon" (Burgess 119). Burgess and Kubrick have, through the veil of Nadsat, garnered the reader and audience's compassion for Alex and long to see him released from the imprisonment slowly depriving him of his masculine ability to choose.

In its American version, *A Clockwork Orange* was published without the final chapter in which Alex decides to leave his life of crime ("O my brothers. I was like

growing up”) and start a family (211). In the introduction to the novel, Burgess states, “I meant the book to end in this way, but my aesthetic judgment may have been faulty” (xv). American publications perhaps did not believe the book would sell if it contained an ending of positive resolve for Alex; therefore, America was given a version of the story where Alex never grows out of his violent ways. Stanley Kubrick was, allegedly, only familiar with the American version of the story. In the final chapter, Alex ponders his change of heart: “But what was the matter with me these days was that I didn’t like care much. It was like something soft getting into me and I could not pony why” (206). Burgess’s complete reversal of Alex’s previously violent actions (“like something soft”) negates the masculine resolve he maintained throughout the novel. Furthermore, the unwillingness of the American publishers to keep the hope-filled final chapter reflects our desire for stories of men who, though socially condemned for their violent ways, cannot find retribution. Masculinity, in America, must connote violence, even if that connotation is “officially” condemned.

## The Shining

**“The truth is that monsters are real... They live inside us, and sometimes they win.”**

Having previously published *Carrie* and *Salem's Lot*, Stephen King was, by 1977, comfortably established as a noteworthy writer of horror. Stanley Kubrick, by the 1980 release of his version of King's third novel, *The Shining*, had already placed himself in the foreground of postmodern cinema. These two men, each a masterful auteur of his respective craft, conclusively proved that the same story can be told through two different mediums, resulting in two different interpretations. In the introduction to his novel, King states it this way: “What, exactly, is impelling Jack Torrance toward murder in the winter-isolated rooms and hallways of the Overlook Hotel? Is it undead people, or undead memories? Mr. Kubrick and I came to different conclusions... but perhaps those differences are, in fact, the same” (King xvi). Both King's and Kubrick's versions of Jack Torrance's plunge into madness center on his waning ability to be a good husband, father, provider, and writer. Such a lack in ability would make it seem difficult for any man in postmodern America to be taken seriously. But what if this man was tortured by his own personal demons and, quite literally, lost his mind?

As a novel, *The Shining* explores territory that is not entirely foreign to faithful readers of Stephen King. The brutality inflicted on Carrie from her religiously deranged mother parallels with the impending violence Jack intends for Danny. The difference, this time, is found in a psychological back-story given in the form of mental, omniscient narration. Jack Torrance was emotionally, physically, and psychologically abused, which

by all practical terms, means the relationship with *his* son is doomed. Again, Jack's overwhelming feelings of failure as a father, husband, writer, teacher, and even alcoholic, haunt him daily. Jack's wife Wendy is faithful and brazen, yet holding out hope that her husband will pull through and be a man of nobility.

King deliberately sketched three different and vivid personalities and spent many pages allowing these personalities to bloom and mix, thereby allowing the reader to make an intimate connection with these people: "If such terrible occurrences were acts of darkness, they might actually be easier to cope with. But instead of being dark, they have their own terrible brilliance, it seems to me, and none shine so bright as the acts of cruelty we sometimes perpetuate in our own families" (King xvii). The inevitability of such actions is more intensely realized when the Torrances are isolated inside the Overlook for months and months. "Inside its shell the three of them went about their early evening routine, like microbes trapped in the intestine of a monster" (King 317). The notion of cabin fever seems, at first, to serve convenient justification for the family's psychological unraveling, but it is undeniable that the hotel itself serves as a rational prison for these characters, particularly Jack, who feels the pressure to succeed as the man of the family. Jack's loss of sanity coupled with the preternaturally evil bindings of the Overlook Hotel make it overtly necessary for the hotel to explode and, thus, eradicate any possible shred of history (for it is the past, decidedly, that holds the key to the patterns of the present). Three years after *The Shining* was published, filmmaker Stanley Kubrick released an interpretation that is ingeniously revelatory yet uniquely anti-psychological.

The most important filmic quality to note in order to grasp why Kubrick made *The Shining* as he did is found in the deliberate *mise-en-scène*. Scene arrangement, in this

case, is relevant in creating a mood, tension, and characterizations that may have been un-communicated in the adaptation process otherwise. Consider these examples: during the tour of the kitchen, Danny is placed just below a set of butcher knives hanging on a wall, one of which is later taken by Wendy; the naked posters which bookend Hallorann's hotel room; the use of space and sound as Kubrick's camera follows Danny on his Big Wheel; the eerie, high-pitched strings that intensify otherwise normal scenes; the dialogue that is flattened, two-dimensional, and uniquely cliché so that independent characterizations are difficult to create; the cascading of blood from the elevator. In the film, Jack Torrance is not only a failed family man, but is incapable of "normal" social production. What is missing, of course, is the generational back-story of Jack's childhood. He simply snaps. During one scene of the film, Jack threatens Wendy and the truth behind his masculine fear of failure is revealed:

"Has it ever occurred to you," he asks, "to think about *my* responsibility?"

"Have you considered for one second that I have a responsibility to look after the Overlook Hotel and the owners have put their complete trust in *me*?!" "Has it ever occurred to you what would happen to my future if I failed to live up to my responsibilities?!" Jack screams.

Jack is thoroughly afraid of not only losing his sanity, but also of losing his position and respect as the masculine figure of power and respect.

One of the most brilliant elements to Kubrick's vision of *The Shining* is the ending. Instead of transposing King's ending of complete eradication, Jack Torrance gets lost inside the hotel's historic maze. As he runs bloodthirsty through the snowy labyrinth, which all-too-obviously represents his psyche, Jack becomes consumed by his own

depravity. Kubrick understood the importance of visualizing the maze itself to actualize for the audience the internal struggle Jack fights in order to define his place in life as a man.

## Conclusion

Having only directed around a dozen studio films over the course of his career, Stanley Kubrick was able to cement himself as a great cinematic *auteur* who took bold chances and held fervidly to his passion for each unique project. Kubrick made films that have a specific style and mood that seamlessly fits to each story, all of which come from works of literature. His love of the written word and need aesthetically to translate certain novels has left our postmodern society with art that is timeless.

Narrowing focus to three of Kubrick's earlier films, *Lolita*, *A Clockwork Orange*, and *The Shining*, there is a common thread found between the male protagonists of each story. Also utilizing the original literary texts from which these characters emerged reveals a pattern of socialized deviance. These three men challenge their respective social standards of masculinity and, in so doing, more fully illustrate perceptions of gender roles, social expectations of men, and how both of these are changing, though contextual perception seems to be the only progressive social factor.

In *Lolita*, Humbert Humbert falls in love with a young girl and marries her mother in order to stay close to her. Though Humbert is regarded as an intellectual, his social veneer cannot withstand the psychological thread of obsession, which has been running through him since he was an adolescent. In the end, the audience is inclined to feel sympathy for this tortured man, for he has been forced to suppress his desires for most of his life. Humbert is not psychologically in control of his feelings and is forced to resign himself to thinking of "prophetic sonnets, the refuge of art" (Nabokov 309).

*A Clockwork Orange* is extraordinary in its structure, timeless in its frightening truthfulness examining not only the brutality of youth, but also the cruelty of a capital-

driven government. Stanley Kubrick took this difficult material and brought Alex to life. Kubrick utilized the raw, sexually violent material to create a victim of a postmodern society unconnected with his aesthetic sensibility, and unfamiliar with Alex's Nadsat speech. In the largely unread 21<sup>st</sup> chapter of the book, Burgess offers Alex a glimmer of hope and considers it possible that a fresh start is possible: "Tomorrow is all like sweet flowers and the turning vonny earth and the stars and the old Luna up there and your old droog Alex..." (Burgess 212).

*The Shining* essentially combines the two main elements of the previous works, utilizing both psychological distortion (as seen in Humbert's character in *Lolita*) and the social pressure to conform (as experienced by Alex in *A Clockwork Orange*). Offering the characters in *The Shining* literally nowhere to go, both Stephen King and Stanley Kubrick force Jack Torrance to confront his demons of failure as a man, and this confrontation leads to his death.

All three of these characters carry an emotional weight: psychosexual childhood love (*Lolita*), intense aesthetic appreciation for music (*A Clockwork Orange*), and the generational expectations to maintain a certain level of social success (*The Shining*). All of these men are confined by the internal struggles over which they feel they have little to no control over, which therefore, elicit the reader and viewer's sympathy. Furthermore, these characters' plights, as fleshed out by Stanley Kubrick, are not unlike those experienced by many today in our postmodern society, a fact which suggests that perhaps the issue with masculine identity lies not in individualistic perceptions, but in the social constructions that attempt to define (while simultaneously confining) what makes a man.

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