

KUBRICK & MISOGYNY

Stanley Kubrick's selected filmography analyzed under a feminist perspective



I'll see you at the movies.

-Roger Ebert

One of the things the women's movement does is to make you feel pain. You feel your own pain, the pain of other women, the pain of sisters whose lives you can barely imagine. You have to have a lot of courage to accept that if you commit yourself, over the long term, not just for three months, not for a year, not for two years, but for a lifetime, to feminism, to the women's movement, that you are going to live with a lot of pain. (...) Be prepared for all the people who tell you that it's your problem, it's not a social problem, and why are you so bitter, and what's wrong with you? And underneath that is always the presumption that the rape was delusional, that the battery did not happen, that the economic hardship is your own unfortunate personal failing. Hold onto the fact that that's not true: it has never been true.

-Andrea Dworkin

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INTRODUCTION

I started being passionate about cinema at a young age. The images I saw on the TV screen in my room fascinated me in such a special way that I couldn't get them out of my mind. The soundtracks of those movies became part of myself; they sank into my soul so deeply that now when I hear them again I still can't help getting chills. Later on, when the chaotic years of adolescence started getting to me, I became aware of what cinema really was and how much it meant to me. I began reading film reviews by the great Roger Ebert and they inspired me so much because I realized that I was not the only one who felt that strong attraction towards those stories; I wasn't going insane. It was okay to love a film character from so deeply; and truly feel their agony, their fear or their heartache.

When asked to choose a topic for this big assignment, I didn't think twice: I was going to write about movies in some way. I then thought about all of the themes within cinema that would interest me. I knew I wanted to focus on just one cinematographer in order to fully understand his idea of cinema and what he did of it. My main options were Stanley Kubrick, Alfred Hitchcock, Kristof Kieslowski, Michael Haneke or Wim Wenders. I finally decided to go with Kubrick because I have always been fascinated and somehow disgusted by the way he portrayed women in his movies. And as much as I read lots of studies on Hitchcock's misogynistic tendencies, I have not heard much about Kubrick's vision of women, and I felt the need of doing it myself.

Writing about gender inequality is something I consider essential in order to fight off the situation of our current society. Female discrimination is not something

that we can leave up to the gods either to be solved or changed. We must talk about it and write about it with all the wisdom inside of ourselves, empowering other women to do the same thing.

As a feminist who also happens to be a cinephile, watching certain movies can get hard sometimes. For instance, as much as I have always enjoyed with every bit of my heart Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather*, it is frustrating to see the lack of empowered female characters; women in this film only exist as a plot device, and the importance relies on male characters. If I refused to watch every single movie that portrays misogynistic values, the range of movies I would watch would be narrowed to a 5% approximately. That's why I do not judge a film by its values because if I did I would not be able to enjoy cinema ever again.

Going back to Kubrick, I've always wondered why he didn't make women more relevant all along his filmography. With other directors I am not so curious because I just assume they don't really care about gender equality and that they are misogynists themselves. But Kubrick is known for his perfectionism, every detail in his movies seems to be premeditated. Not only I am speaking about his cinematographic techniques but also about his messages, metaphors and the symbols that he creates. So my objective is to find out whether four of his significant films really contain misogynistic values, and if I conclude that they do, I want to understand if there is a pattern for that misogyny. I will analyze four films in which women are somehow relevant: *Lolita* (1962), *A Clockwork Orange* (1972), *The Shining* (1980) and *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

GENDER IN FILM

In the 1970's, during the Second-wave of feminism, the interest in genre and cinema studies started growing in the United States and in Great Britain. According to Ann Kaplan, at that time the feminist cinematographic critique valued women's roles as positive or negative, following the idea of what an autonomous woman should be. Kaplan mentioned Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* as a good guide for that.

The objective was to build new representations of what feminine should appear in movies and to give women the same narrative importance given to men. In order to get to this point, it was necessary to analyze the differences between men and women that had been repeating themselves throughout Hollywood history. In the mid 70's, two books were published in the United States whose aim was to evaluate women's role in classical movies under a feminist perspective: *From reverence to rape*, by Molly Haskell (1975), and *Popcorn Venus*, by Marjorie Rose (1973). Also, around that time, some festivals were created in order to exalt the vision of women in movies, for instance the International Women's Film Festival in New York in 1972 or the 1973 Toronto Women & Film International Film Festival. The celebration of those festivals coincides with the release of the American magazine *Women and Film*.

All of those texts and acts supported the idea that there was a relationship between cinematographic representation and the real world. According to Annette

Kuhn, “una película, al registrar o reflejar el mundo de una manera directa o mediatizada, sirve, en cierto sentido, de vehículo para transmitir significados que se originan fuera de ella: en las intenciones de los realizadores, quizá, o en las estructuras sociales. Puesto que dondequiera que se sitúe su origen, los significados se ven como entes que existen previamente a su transmisión a través de las películas, existe cierta tendencia a considerar el cine como un medio neutro de comunicar significaciones ya construidas.” (Díaz Rodríguez, 2018)

In 1975, film theorist Laura Mulvey published an article, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, which revolutionized feminist cinematographic critique. Mulvey appealed psychoanalysis in order to reveal the way in which classical cinema identified both genders. She concluded that the images of classical cinema related women to passivity and on the other hand, men to activity.

Following Mulvey’s idea, Giulia Colaizzi stated that conventional films “identifican la mirada y la economía escópica en general con el poder masculino. Hacen iguales poder y masculinidad y sitúan a las mujeres en situación exterior al poder y a la representación, equivalente a la falta de poder y objetualización”. (Díaz Rodríguez, 2018)

Some years later, in 1985, Alison Bechdel published a comic strip called *Dykes to Watch Out For* that popularized the so-called Bechdel test. The aim of the test is to measure the representation of women in fiction, more specifically in movies, by asking three questions:

1. Does the film have at least two women in it?
2. Do those women talk to each other?
3. Do they talk about something other than about men?

This test moved into mainstream criticism in the early 2010's and some people consider it "the standard by which feminists judge television, movies, books and other media". Others are more harsh on this technique and do not think it's valuable at all, especially because it started as a simple joke. My conclusions at the end of this project will make me determine whether or not I think this test is useful in order to analyze misogyny in films.

In 2012, Julie Levinson published *Genre and Gender*, an article that analyzes gender in Western movies. She states that the Western genre divides women into two stereotypical categories: "Archetypal Western women come in two varieties. First, there is the transplanted Eastern woman who, by profession or personality, is a schoolmarm. Educated, chaste, and proper, she represents all of the forces that threaten to displace the world of the Wild West. The Western hero respects and protects her and often courts her. But she is his polar opposite, embodying as she does the seeds of progress [...] For a female soul mate (not to mention for sex), he turns to the other type of Western woman. Euphemistically referred to as the dance hall girl or the good-time gal, she is, in actuality, the town whore. As tough and independent and self-sufficient as the hero, her fate is generally even sorrier than his. Things inevitably end badly for the Western bad woman. At best, she is jilted in favor of the virtuous woman or shunned by the town's self-appointed guardians of morality. At worst she is gunned down or she dies, presumably of

some unnamed but fatal moral malady. The details vary from film to film but, in routine Westerns, the women fall into one of these camps, with little latitude for movement between the two.” (Levinson, n.d.)

More recently, in 2017, Violeta Kovacsics wrote an article for the famous Spanish magazine *Caimán Cuadernos de Cine* where she also criticized stereotypes in a specific film genre; in this case horror movies. She distinguished different feminine stereotypes in such films, for instance “the mom”, “the seducer” or “the hysterical woman”.

When reflecting on the films, I will take into account these authors and their ideas in a general way in order to improve my analysis. But mainly, I will use two tools, the **Madonna Whore Complex** concept and a term named **fridging**, explained on the next page.

ANALYSING THE FILMS: SPECIFIC TOOLS

Madonna Whore Complex

Sigmund Freud developed a theory to explain men's anxiety towards women's sexuality, and he called it the Madonna Whore Complex. He suggested that men divide women into two categories: the Madonna, a virginal presence who they respect and see as pure, and the whore who they disrespect profoundly but are really attracted to.

Some men usually look for a partner, to whom they view as the Madonna, in order to get married, have kids and share their life together. However, they still miss the presence of the whore, and they seek her in the form of an affair, for instance. This way, they are able to achieve both idealizations that are impossible to project onto the same woman because they are opposites to each other.

As mentioned before, Julie Levinson stated that the Western genre identified two types of women: the schoolmarm who is respected by the hero, and the town whore who the hero longs for sex. This coincides with Freud's theory of females being seen as different people that have different functions for men.

In *Sigmund Freud and his impact on our understanding of male sexual dysfunction*, Uwe Hartmann concludes that even though some of Freud's theories are obsolete and sexist, the Madonna Whore Complex is still viable and relevant in today's

society. So taking this concept as a mold to analyze Kubrick's movies would be very appropriate because it gives an explanation to the weird vision that men have on women's sexuality, and it is not obsolete to this day.

Fridging

The term fridging comes from the comic book *Green Lantern* in which the protagonist, Kyle Rayner finds his girlfriend stuffed into the refrigerator. It was popularized some years later on the website *Women in Refrigerators* created by Gail Simone. It refers to characters, mostly women, who are killed, raped, incapacitated or abused for the only purpose of giving the hero a more interesting plot. These women only exist as an excuse for the protagonist to save them, take revenge, go for the bad guys, etc.

Even though this idea originated in comic books, it can be easily transferred to cinema. Directors like Christopher Nolan have been accused of fridging the female characters in his films.

In order to analyze Stanley Kubrick's films under a feminist lens, I'll use mainly these two concepts: the **Madonna Whore Complex** and the **Fridging**. I think it will help me understand the complexity of the female characters sexuality and the relevance of women in Kubrick's cinema. However, I will also use some of the ideas mentioned before, for instance the Bechdel test, in order to add additional meaning to the study.

PRACTICAL APPROACH

As I said in the introduction, I will review four films directed by Stanley Kubrick under a feminist perspective. The four analyses will all have the same structure:

1. A short introduction.
2. The synopsis of the film explained (this part will obviously contain spoilers).
3. A general description of how women are portrayed in the movie.
4. A more specific analysis of gender relying on the Madonna Whore Complex and the term fridging.

The analyses are ordered alphabetically, so the first one reviews *Lolita*.

LOLITA

In 1962, Stanley Kubrick directed *Lolita*, a British-American film that was rated “X” by the British Board of Film Censors and no one under 16 years old was allowed to watch. It is based on Vladímir Nabókov’s homonymous novel and the Russian narrator himself was the only one to write the movie script.

Synopsis

The film starts *in media res*¹ near the end of the story when Humbert Humbert, played by James Mason, kills a drunken man called Clare Quilty, played by Peter Sellers, in his own house. As an audience, we don’t know the reasons that lead Humbert to murder, and in fact we won’t find out until the film is over. Then, the movie takes us on a flashback 4 years earlier, when Humbert is looking for a room to rent during summer before he starts working as a French Literature professor in Ohio. He meets Charlotte Haze, a widow played by Shelley Winters, who kindly offers him a room in her house. He almost declines the offer until he sees Charlotte’s daughter: a beautiful, young girl called Lolita and played by Sue Lyon. He falls in love with her immediately and, as an audience, we sense that the kid will become his obsession and downfall. In order to be closer to Lolita, he accepts the offer and from then on the three of them start living together like a family. Charlotte makes clear her interests towards Humbert from the very start; she is infatuated. But he obviously does not correspond her love, he is too busy contemplating her daughter.

¹ **In media res:** In or into the middle of a narrative or plot.

Unfortunately for him, Charlotte decides to send Lolita to an all-girl camp during summer in order to keep her away from boys during a few months. "Don't forget me", Lolita whispers to Humbert, believing that they will not see each other again. But as Humbert does not picture a life without her, he decides to marry her mother, who is enchanted by the idea. However, things don't turn out as planned in the marriage for it's clear that Humbert abhors his wife and she starts to suspect it. After a heated argument, Charlotte finds Humbert's diary where we wrote about his love for Lolita. On it, he also reflected his hate for his wife and ridiculed her. This leaves the poor woman horrified: not only she finds out that her husband doesn't love her, but that he is a pedophile who is obsessed with her daughter. She tells him, weeping and screaming: "You're a monster! You're a disgusting, despicable, loathsome, criminal fraud!" She is so shocked because of this discovery that she runs away from the house and gets hit by a car in the rain, dying instantly on the impact. When Humbert finds out, he is so relieved that decides to have a drink while taking a bath. We have already figured out that he is a despicable human being.

After this incident, Humbert picks up Lolita from the summer camp and lies to her saying that her mother is sick. They stay in a hotel that has many police officers attending a convention and one of them suspects of Humbert's relationship with his "daughter". He interrogates him but the protagonist manages to escape the situation and goes back to his hotel room where Lolita is sleeping. Implicitly, the next morning they have sexual relations for the first time and some days later, Humbert tells her lover that Charlotte is dead. This makes Lolita burst into tears for hours, and he consoles her saying: "Try to stop crying. Everything's going to be

all right.” Later on, she begs: “Promise you’ll never leave me. I don’t want to be ever in one of those horrible places for juvenile delinquents.”

Six months later, Humbert works as a French teacher at Beardsley College and Lolita attends the city’s high school. It’s here when Humbert’s jealousy starts to be dangerously dominant, for he showers his daughter with questions about where she was at a specific time or place, or why was he sitting down with two guys at a restaurant. Meanwhile, their neighbors start suspecting about the nature of their relationship and Humbert is visited by a stranger called Dr. Zempf, who claims to be part of the staff of Lolita’s school and obligates him to let Lolita participate in the school play as the main character. After her successful performance some time later, her piano teacher tells Humbert that she has been missing classes for the past four weeks and this enrages him. “What have you been doing these afternoons?” he asks her horrified. To what she answers: “I’ve been going to extra rehearsals”. But he does not believe her and is tormented by the idea that she might have been going out with other men.

After a long heated argument, they decide to move somewhere else in order to improve their relationship. When they are on the road they find out that a car is following them but after some time, it leaves them alone. Because of the trip, Lolita becomes sick and stays in hospital during a few days. On one of those nights, Humbert gets called by a suspicious man who tells him: “I wonder if you’d be prepared to give our investigators a report, professor, on your current sex life, if any.” This frightens our protagonist very much and he runs to the hospital to check

out Lolita, but someone unknown has already done it. After finding this out, he becomes even crazier than before.

Three years later, Humbert receives a letter from Lolita in which she asks him for money. He goes to visit her at her house and after seeing her pregnant body and meeting her husband, he asks who kidnapped her at the hospital. She says it was Clare Quilty, the one who was following them, the one who dressed up as Dr. Zempf and the one who called threatening him. Quilty was all of those men. Then, he begs her to come with him again and she denies stating: "I've ruined too many things in my life. I can't do that to him (her husband), he needs me." Humbert loses control of the situation and burst into tears. Crying he hands her 13,000\$ and leaves to kill Quilty, the actual first scene of the movie.

Analysis

Years after directing the film, Kubrick stated that if he had known how strict the censor limitations were going to be, he would have never made the movie. While Lolita's character was 12 years old in Nabókov's novel, in the picture she had to be 14 for the censors to approve it. Also, Kubrick was not allowed to film any unambiguous scenes at all, so Humbert's real relationship with the kid is never said or showed explicitly, although the audience gets it from the very start.

Watching *Lolita* it is crucial to understand that we are looking at the girl through the eyes of a pedophile. At the start of the film, comedy is used over and over to ridicule Charlotte and to trivialize Humbert's thoughts towards Lolita. It almost

seems as if he is not a pervert and they are meant to be together. Luckily, as the action advances, we are witnesses to the protagonist's obsessive and twisted mind that only hurts the girl in many different ways. The problem here is that some people might romanticize their incestuous relationship and empathize with Humbert's feelings. They might even blame Lolita for leaving him and his neurosis at the end of the film. But the indisputable truth here is that a middle-aged man shouldn't be allowed to have romantic or sexual relations with a 14 year old, even if she is "very mature for her age".

The first scene of the film is a close-up shot of Lolita's feet, and it shows Humbert painting her toenails. She is sexualized from the very start as feet are related to sexual fetishes. On her second appearance, some minutes later, she is wearing a bikini and takes her glasses off in a provocative way. The thing is, we shouldn't be able to detect that she is attractive because she is just a little girl, but as we are seeing things in Humbert's eye, at least at the beginning, we are perverted too. Any rational person who would look at her would see a kid trying to appear older with her hormones revolutionized. Unfortunately, this is not Humbert's perspective.

As the movie advances, we get to see how perturbed Humbert actually is. He becomes so obsessive with Lolita to the point where she can't even participate in a school play because other men act in it. He is so insecure about himself that he fears she will leave him. When she is staying at hospital and Humbert comes to visit her, he finds notes on her bedside table. Immediately, he asks threatening: "Have you been getting notes in the hospital?" But then the nurse comes in and tells them: "Does your father think that you get notes from my boyfriend?" Even

the nurse sees how ridiculous the whole situation is and how paranoid he is acting. He traps her in his own world until she gets tired and luckily flies away as a butterfly kept closed in a jar for a while and suddenly set free, leaving him heartbroken .

Apart from the pedophilia, there are also some other interesting factors to write about, for instance stereotypes. Although this subject shows itself in a different way as it does at present, the film stresses the different roles played then by men and women in society. For instance, when Humbert's and Charlotte's marriage sinks into a state of boredom and day-to-day routine, he starts getting the habit of drinking, a conception attributed to men. She, on the other hand, weeps uncontrollably and talks about her feelings all the time, a conception attributed to women. Also, at one point of the movie he says: "Charlotte, I haven't had my cup of coffee yet." To what she replies: "You want me to make you some?" "Please do, like a good little wife." Even though she is wealthier than him because she inherited her husband's heritage, she is still forced to serve him and take care of the domestic chores like a good woman. In addition, when Humbert visits Lolita at her new house, he catches her ironing and her husband fixing something in the garden. Again, this shows the gender stereotypes present in the film. But can we blame Kubrick for this? We must not forget that this movie was made in 1962 and is set in the mid 50's, a time where it was rare to see independent, empowered women. The movie simply reflects the reality of the United States at that time, and unfortunately too of many women nowadays all around the world.

From the very beginning, Lolita is portrayed as a free, independent teenager who

doesn't need anyone to survive. But the truth is, Lolita needs lots of people, especially men, in order to be saved. She depends on Humbert when he stays with her when her mom dies and some years later to give her money; on Quilty in order to convince Humbert to let her be at the school play and later on to pick her up from hospital, and finally on her husband to get a good job in order to raise their kid properly. When we see her in the first part of the movie, it seems as if she is a privileged girl gifted with beauty and charm that can have any man she desires. It also seems as if she is torturing Humbert and sometimes she can appear as evil. But we do see her realistic fate at the end of the film; she is married to a man she does not love and the child she carries in her womb will stop her from achieving any dream and ambition she has ever had. It's very sad but that was, and still is, the awaiting future for most women.

MADONNA WHORE COMPLEX

Lolita does not exactly portray the image of Sigmund Freud's Madonna Whore Complex. Although there are two very different visions of women, Lolita and Charlotte, none of them is presented as a whore. Instead, one is seen as a virginal presence who is the center of everything and the other, the mother, is seen as an annoying, dumb "cow" who only disturbs the protagonist. Of course, this vision is given to us through Humbert and we are able to see how much hate some men feel towards a certain type of women.

From the very start, Humbert dislikes Charlotte: she's a middle-aged, ridiculous stay-at-home mom; a sexually frustrated widow who is never presented as a beautiful or appealing woman. She wants to sound intellectual by constantly

repeating French expressions like “C’est la vie”. When she tells Humbert her idea of sending Lolita to a summer camp, she says: “Ain’t I clever?” It seems as if she is trying so hard to be “equal” to Humbert’s intellect, because he is a very cultured man. She definitely feels inferior to him but we know that her moral values are much more superior to his for she would never do such thing as abusing a minor; her heart is a lot purer than Humbert's.

However, Kubrick makes fun of her every time she is in a scene, we can’t blame him though, because he directs the story from Humbert’s perspective. When he reads the love letter Charlotte wrote to him, he cracks up laughing of how stupid she can be. Some of the viewers might laugh too, and some others might feel bad for her; but anyways she is ridiculed. Lolita, on the other hand, is shown as a completely different person from her mom. In Humbert's eye, she is a precious girl who deserves all of his attention and love. It’s interesting how Kubrick always places her in the middle of the shot, while Charlotte is most of the time placed to one side.



Fig. 1- Charlotte being placed to one side and Lolita on the center.

From the two females' point of view, it's also interesting to see the competitiveness in between; sometimes it seems as if they hate each other. When Charlotte finds out what Humbert truly feels for Lolita, she obviously gets mad at him but also calls her daughter a "miserable brat", making it clear that she blames her too. It's disconcerting how women are taught to compete against each other so much, that even when a mother realizes that her husband is sexualizing her kid, she blames her too. But what's Lolita's sin? She has been gifted with beauty and that has only brought her problems because men are highly attracted to her. We can't forget that she is 14 years old; she doesn't know how to manage things or how to react in certain situations. Lolita should never be blamed for anything she did with Humbert because, even if she was very matured for her age, she still was a kid and he was supposedly the adult.

FRIDGING

This concept only appears in the movie when Charlotte dies. Her death serves as a plot device, for it means that Humbert and Lolita can finally be "happy" together because the evil witch has disappeared. It's a very disturbing way to put it, but it's undeniably Humbert's reality. Her role is to be annoying and to be hated by many characters in the film and then suffering a ridiculous death that makes the audience smile rather than cry and feel sorry.

BECHDEL TEST

Does *Lolita* pass the Bechdel test?

1. Does the film have at least two women in it?

Yes.

2. Do those women talk to each other?

Lolita talks to her mother a few times.

3. Do they talk about something other than about men?

Yes, Charlotte tells her to stop eating that much sugar.

Lolita passes the Bechdel test. It is fascinating and at the same time horrifying, how a movie that romanticizes pedophilia and is so full of misogynistic values and stereotypes does pass this test. This proves that it is impossible to evaluate a movie based off three questions; a deep analysis is necessary in order to determine whether or not the film is sexist.

Finally, I want to mention the film's last shot, which shows a painting of a lady with two bullet holes in it that Humbert has shot towards Quilty. It is a powerful image that, even unintentional, perfectly reflects the situation of women in this movie and in most of Kubrick's filmography: female characters are physically or psychologically attacked; no matter what they do about it, they always lose because they are inferior to men. Lolita, for instance, is a helpless kid who has been taken advantage of. It was impossible for her to own her life; her fate was to suffer ending up pregnant and married at a very young age to someone she isn't really in love with. Her mother also loses for she dies for falling in love with a pedophile who drives her nuts. There was nothing she could have done because her fate as a woman was also predetermined... it always is.



Fig. 2- Last shot of the film.

Conclusion

With this being said, I can conclude that *Lolita* does portray misogynistic values: a 14 year old girl is seen as a sexual object by his middle-aged stepfather, gender stereotypes are clearly repeated throughout the film, and most importantly, the protagonist is forced to renounce to her dreams and reluctantly accept having a kid at a young age and sharing a life with a man she does not love. Unfortunately, this fiction reflects reality; women all around the world face these difficulties and many more.

Also, the film coincides partly with the Madonna Whore Complex, for it clearly shows two different perceptions that men have of women. When the female characters are pretty and young, they are seen like angels worth dying for. However, when they grow older they lose any of their attractive and become annoying and clownish. The term fridging also appears in *Lolita*, when Charlotte's death works as a tool to make the plot more interesting.

A CLOCKWORK ORANGE

In 1971, Stanley Kubrick directed what is considered his most controversial film: *A Clockwork Orange*. Known by its wide use of violence and explicit scenes, the movie was banned in the UK in 1973 after some youth crimes in real life seemed to be influenced by it. It was actually Kubrick who requested Warner Brothers to withdraw the film because of the allegations that it was responsible for copycat violence. However, he stated: "To try to fasten any responsibility on art as the cause of life seems to me to put the case the wrong way around. Art consists of reshaping life but it does not create life, nor cause life. Furthermore to attribute powerful suggestive qualities to a film is at odds with the scientifically accepted view that, even after deep hypnosis, in a posthypnotic state, people cannot be made to do things which are at odds with their nature." (Strick and Houston, 1972) With this statement, the English director defends the idea that cinema reflects real life, but real life is not influenced by cinema.

Synopsis

A Clockwork Orange is a dystopian crime film that tells the story of Alex, a charismatic young delinquent whose interests include committing ultra-violence, petting his snake and listening to Ludwig van Beethoven's symphonies. He is the leader of a little group of friends, or *droogs* as he likes to call them, and together they seek for victims in the cold nights of winter. The first victim in the movie is an old, drunk homeless man who sings peacefully on a solitary street. When Alex and his *droogs* come into scene and beat the hell out of the poor man, us the viewers realize what we are getting into: a violent, sadistic film whose protagonist is the

personification of evil. Many more crimes are committed throughout the first part of the movie until Alex is caught by the police after killing a woman in her own house. After spending two years in prison, he becomes the subject of an experiment to test the new *Ludovico* technique, which is supported by the government and the minister. This intends to “cure” criminals by forcing them to watch very violent films while being injected drugs that will produce them aversion to what they are watching. In one of those footages, Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony is being played on a gramophone, which will cause Alex a huge aversion to the piece. Surprisingly, this works with Alex, as he is unable to do any harm at all after the treatment, he can’t even have consensual sex with a girl because he’s also been shown images of rape during the treatment. Because he is rehabilitated, he gets out of prison but what he finds in the outside world is not as pleasing as he thought: his parents kick him out of his house and his *droogs*, now converted into police officers, beat him up to the point where he almost dies. The worst part is that he is unable to defend himself because the *Ludovico* technique has left him weak and powerless.

At this point of the movie, after his former friends have almost killed him, Alex seeks for help in the nearest house he can find. The hosts open the door in order to assist him but he is so unlucky that the man of the house is actually an old victim of Alex. In the old days of ultra-violence, he raped the man’s wife and left him paralytic while singing the tune *Singing in the rain*. The man recognizes him and decides to torture our protagonist by locking him in a room and forcing him to listen to Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony because he read in the papers that the tune would trigger him. Alex can’t take it and jumps out the window. Later, he wakes up

in hospital, all wounded and he realizes that he does not have aversion to sex and violence anymore. The minister comes to apologize for all the harm he's done to him with the extreme experiment and as a gift, he brings in a stereo record player playing Beethoven's Ninth. Alex then pictures himself having sex with a woman and thinks to himself: "I was cured, all right!"

Analysis

Stanley Kubrick described the film as: "A social satire dealing with the question of whether behavioral psychology and psychological conditioning are dangerous new weapons for a totalitarian government to use to impose vast controls on its citizens and turn them into little more than robots." (Jun, 2013) It is obvious that the movie has a big message behind it; it discusses whether it's better to live free as a bad man or as a man who has the good imposed upon him. It also criticizes the manipulation of citizens by the authorities, in the form of the minister who uses Alex as a toy for his own purposes.

Although the moral of the story is extremely interesting, this project explores gender in Stanley Kubrick's filmography and *A Clockwork Orange* offers plenty of gender issues to consider. The film's first scene shows Alex Delarge enjoying a glass of milk and surrounded by his three *droogs*. As the close-up zooms out, we see the multiple mannequins that decorate the bar: white, naked figures of women with their legs wide open that serve as tables to place the glasses of milk on. One of the *droogs* talks to a mannequin and says: "Hello Lucy, had a busy night?" then presses a button and milk is released out of its nipple. He talks to that image of a

woman just as if she was a prostitute. This is the first out of many times where women will be shown naked and objectified in this movie.



Fig. 3- The Korova milk bar.

On the next scene, the protagonists find a rival band which is about to rape a naked woman who screams and tries to escape: "They were about to perform a little of the old in-out on a weepy young *devotchka* they had there." Then, not even after 10 minutes the film has started, another rape occurs: Alex and his *droogs* ring on a house pretending to seek for help after a car accident. When a charming, young woman opens the door, they take her and start running around the house aggressively. They find a man inside and they start to beat him up with a truncheon. While one of them holds the woman, Alex takes a scissor and cuts her boil suit where her nipples are. Then he cuts the rest of the suit and implicitly rapes her while her husband watches.

Later on, Alex visits a record store and finds two girls enthusiastically licking an ice cream shaped like a penis. He tells them: "Enjoying that, are you, my darling? A bit cold and pointless isn't it, my lovely?" Then he licks one of the girls' ice cream as a clear proposal for sex. On the next scene, edited in fast-motion, we see Alex having sex with both of them. They try to get dressed but he is constantly undressing them and taking them to bed again and again, showing that they are under his control.

After the *Ludovico* technique has been tested on him, the doctors bring a young, beautiful topless woman to see if he dares to touch her. He narrates: "She came towards me with the light like it was the like light of heavenly grace. And the first thing that flashed in my *gulliver* was that I'd like to have her there on the floor with the old in-out real savage". Alex tries to touch her because he does not have any respect for her, but becomes sick just when he is about to touch her breasts. This shows the appearing success of the experiment because the subject is unable to commit rape, or even have consensual sex with the girl.

Towards the end of the film, when Alex wakes up in the hospital because he threw himself out of the window, he hears two people having sex and, after he calls their attention, they run away. We don't get to see much from the man, but we do see the woman, who seems to be a nurse and just like most of the female characters in *A Clockwork Orange*, is naked.

But women also appear naked in Alex's fantasies. For instance, when he is in prison and is reading the Bible, he sees himself as a Roman who is beating up Jesus and then is fed by three naked women who take care of him. Or at the very last scene of the movie, he sees himself having sex with a woman. It's then when he says the film's last line: "I was cured all right!"

So basically, almost every single female character in *A Clockwork Orange* is sexualized. Girls are not only seen as objects, but also treated as such, for they are either murdered or raped. But, what happens with the other women in the film who do not appear naked and do not have sex with the protagonist? These are old, ugly ladies who are a burden and seem to make life harder for Alex, for instance his mom. When she first comes on screen, looking purposely ridiculous, she tells her son to go to school, which obviously he doesn't. She insists and really becomes annoying, even for the audience, because she doesn't let the protagonist go on with his bizarre adventure. In addition, when Alex comes back from prison, neither his mom nor his dad let him live in the house anymore.



Fig. 4- Alex's mom portrayed as a ridiculous old lady.

Also, when Alex is going through the *Ludovico* treatment, Doctor Branom is shown as a middle aged, frivolous woman who will also find a way to hurt the protagonist. When he is watching a violent film and Beethoven's Ninth Symphony comes on, Alex begs the woman and Doctor Brodsky, to stop it because he does not want to feel aversion towards his favorite composer. However, the doctors do not stop the screening and as an audience we feel bad for Alex and blame them.

MADONNA WHORE COMPLEX

These two different perspectives of women in the movie partly match Sigmund Freud's Madonna Whore Complex theory. The idea that men cannot project everything they look for in women in the same person, so they divide females into two categories: the Whore, a disgusting creature who they deeply disrespect and feel shameful about and the Madonna, the virginal presence that deserves respect. Even though the Whore is obnoxious, men are highly attracted to them but on the other hand, they do not seek for sex on the Madonna, because that would change the image that they have of her.

This idea is clearly reflected in *A Clockwork Orange*. The multiple women who appear naked are always highly desired by male characters, who show no respect to them for they try to rape or somehow seduce them. It is undeniable that Kubrick sexualizes women in this film, especially when we take into account that not a single young girl appears fully dressed. They represent the Whore in Sigmund Freud's theory.

However, the Madonna figure is absent in this film. The presence of a virginal woman who deserves respect actually doesn't exist. As I wrote before, the only female characters who are not seen as sexual objects are seen as youth hungry housewives who retain Alex's youth. So not a single woman in *A Clockwork Orange* actually receives respect, not even the protagonist's mom. All of the women in the film have something in common: they are somehow being hated either because they are young and desired, which makes them impure creatures, or because they are old and not desired which makes them not good enough for men. Women always lose here no matter what.

FRIDGING

It is also important to analyze how Stanley Kubrick *fridges* the female characters in this film. As I wrote before, many feminists have blamed director Christopher Nolan of killing, raping or abusing women in movies in order to create a more interesting plot. But not much has been said about Kubrick doing the same thing and *A Clockwork Orange* is the perfect proof that he does. Four minutes after the film has started, there's already been an attempt of rape to a poor woman, who luckily for her, is able to escape. Only three minutes afterwards, Alex and his *droogs* implicitly rape and then murder the writer's wife. Later, our protagonist invades the house of another woman and kills her with a giant penis sculpture, which is a haunting but a brilliant metaphor. Apparently, there is a strange pleasure in seeing women being killed or brutally abused by men who are in control of the situation.

BECHDEL TEST

Does *A Clockwork Orange* pass the Bechdel test?

1. Does the film have at least two women in it?

Yes, plenty of them.

2. Do those women talk to each other?

The two girls in the record store talk to each other.

3. Do they talk about something other than about men?

Yes, they talk about music.

A Clockwork Orange does pass the Bechdel test. And the fact that a film that objectifies women so clearly passes it, demonstrates how unreliable the test is. When the two girls talk about music in the record store, they are licking an ice cream formed like a penis at the same time. So even though they are not talking about men, a fact that would make the movie fail the test, they are seen as sexual objects and their only purpose as characters is having sex with the protagonist. When analyzing a film under a feminist perspective, it is very important to use other resources that really tell whether or not the picture is misogynistic, other than the simple Bechdel test.

Last but not least, when Alex is in prison the priest talks to him and says: "I know of the urges that can trouble young men deprived of the society of women". I find this quote very representative of men's whole philosophy in the film. It seems as if for them, their own evil nature that leads them to harm women, is not even their own fault, but the female's. They don't even think that they are doing anything

wrong at all because women are born to be victims and men to be aggressors; for them, this is the natural course of life.

Conclusion

With this being said, I can conclude that *A Clockwork Orange* does portray misogynistic values. This is clearly exemplified when we consider that literally all young women in the film are seen as sexual objects because they all appear naked. Elder women are portrayed as ugly housewives who are precisely the opposite of attractive. This distinction of female characters is similar to the one taking place in *Lolita*, the film analyzed before. The difference lays in that Lolita's character never appears naked and Charlotte is not portrayed extremely old or ugly, she's simply inferior to her daughter. In *A Clockwork Orange*, however, Kubrick takes things to the extreme and represents the main character's cruel perception of women more explicitly. It partly coincides with the Madonna Whore Complex, but the presence of the Madonna is absent because Alex does not think of any woman as a respectable virginal queen, he hates all of them. Female characters are divided into two groups: the beautiful young girls, and the rest. Also, in *A Clockwork Orange*, Kubrick fridges women exorbitantly, a female character is raped or murdered every ten minutes or less. It takes the term fridging to the extreme and anyone who really hates women will gladly enjoy the film.

THE SHINING

In 1980, Stanley Kubrick made the only horror film he ever directed: *The Shining*. Based on Stephen King's homonymous novel, it starred Jack Nicholson, Shelley Duvall and Danny Lloyd portraying a "happy" family.

Synopsis

It tells the story of Jack Torrance, a middle-aged writer who accepts a job as a hotel winter caretaker. "Five months of peace is all that I want", he says referring to the solitude he needs in order to write a book. Manager Stuart Ullman warns Jack about the place's past: the previous caretaker developed cabin fever² and killed his wife, his two daughters and finally himself. Nicholson's character does not seem to hold back because of that information, he even gets more excited.

Jack and his family move to the Overlook Hotel and while both parents are being toured around the place, something strange starts to happen. Danny, the son, finds himself communicating telepathically to Dick Hallorann, the head chef. After the cook has realized that the kid has powers, he talks to him: "I can remember when I was a little boy, my grandmother and I could hold conversations entirely without ever opening our mouths. She called it shining, and for a long time I thought it was just the two of us that had the shine to us." At that moment, Danny realizes that he also possesses that shine, and the audience can already guess that it will be useful

² **Cabin fever:** lassitude, irritability, and similar symptoms resulting from long confinement or isolation indoors during the winter.

for the kid throughout the film. After the tour day, everyone leaves, including Hallorann, who leaves for Florida, and the family is left completely alone.

One month later, Jack starts getting frustrated because he hasn't written a single word yet and there are only four months ahead. At his point, he starts behaving oddly, almost in a violent way. Meanwhile, Wendy, Jack's wife, finds out that the telephones do not work due to weather conditions and Danny comes across two creepy twin sisters in the middle of the hallway. Not only that, but he finds room 237 opened and decides to go inside. Later on, he appears with bruises on his neck and Wendy immediately blames Jack: "You did this to him, didn't you? You son of a bitch", she screams crying. But then Danny says that a lady tried to strangle him in room 237, a confession that leaves Wendy horrified. Jack goes to that room in order to find the woman, what he does, as he sees a young girl lying on a bathtub. They kiss each other then unexpectedly she becomes a putrefied corpse, making the protagonist run terrified.

At this point of the film, Jack has reached the top level of madness. He goes to the Gold Room, and finds lots of ghosts attending a ball. Their clothing style reveals that they might be from the 1920's. Then, a waiter spills some drinks on him and takes him to the bathroom to clean his jacket. Jack finds out that he is the old caretaker who murdered his family and then killed himself. He tells Jack that he should "correct" his wife and son just like he did in the past. Meanwhile in the hall, Wendy finds out what his husband has been writing all the time: "All work and no game makes Jack a dull boy". This sentence is repeated a million times across a

hundreds pages. Jack catches his wife reading the work and goes mad, even worse than he went before. He gets closer to her like a predator as she steps backwards crying and carrying a bat in her hands. After some time, Wendy eventually beats Jack with the bat and he falls down the stairs. As he is unconscious, she locks him in the pantry.

Unfortunately for Wendy, she finds out that her husband has disabled the radio station and the snowcat, so they are trapped at the hotel. Meanwhile, the ghost of the previous caretaker unlocks Jack from the pantry so he goes where his wife and son are and breaks through the door with an ax screaming "Here's Johnny!" At that moment, they hear the head chef arriving with a snowcat because he perceived something was wrong through his telepathic connection. Jack leaves his family and goes to kill Hallorann, stabbing him in the stomach. Finally, after Jack pursues his son into the garden's maze, Danny is able to trick Jack by leading a false trail of footprints, and gets the opportunity to escape with his mom driving Hallorann's copycat. Jack freezes in the snow. The last image of the movie is a photograph in the hotel hallway from a party in 1921 where Jack appears smiling among other people.

Analysis

I order to analyze the misogynistic attitudes in this film, I'll work mainly on one character: Wendy Torrance. Even though some other women will be analyzed, she'll be the focus of this reflection because of her relevance in the movie. Let's start with the basics: she is submissive in dealing with her husband. This is shown

on the very first scene that she appears in. Danny asks her: "Mom, do you really want to go and live in that hotel for the winter?" To what she replies not fully convinced: "Sure I do, it'll be lots of fun." Is she really excited to be isolated and far away from everyone for five months? Or does she rather not have any other option because she is scared of contradicting her husband?

Meanwhile, when Jack is being interviewed for the caretaker job, the manager brings up the hotel's horrifying past. The protagonist says: "As far as my wife is concerned, I'm sure she'll be absolutely fascinated when I tell her about it. She's a confirmed ghost story and horror film addict." But does he ever tell her about it? Would she really be fascinated about moving there after having that information? Again, Jack is the one who takes the decisions, he even decides what his wife does or does not like.

Later, when Danny falls into a trance after a bad premonition about the hotel, a doctor assists him. She notices bruises on him and Wendy confesses that some years ago Jack dislocated his son's shoulder after binge drinking. Obviously, the doctor gets alarmed and Wendy tries to gloss it over by saying: "Anyway, something good did come out of it all because Jack said: "Wendy, I'm never gonna touch another drop and if I do you can leave me", and he didn't and he hasn't had any alcohol in five months." This does sound a little bit like an abuser psychologically tricking a poor helpless woman. Or for instance, when they are driving on their way to the hotel and Danny says he is hungry, Jack replies rudely: "You should've eaten your breakfast". To what Wendy adds kindly: "We'll get you something as soon as we get to the hotel." It seems like she tries to soften

everything her husband says or does, even if their own kid is being abused. She fits into the profile of an abuse victim.

Even though Jack is frivolous to his wife, she always seems to be ready to please him and take care of him. For instance, once they are settled in the hotel, she wakes him up in the morning and brings breakfast to his bed. "Good morning honey, I made them just the way you like them, sunny-side up." After this sign of love, he does not seem thankful or show it in any way, and when she asks him to take her on a walk, he replies: "I ought to try to do some writing first." It's not so much about what he says, but the rough tone in which he says it. Some scenes later, when Jack is writing, Wendy comes to support him and offers to make some sandwiches. Almost screaming he says: "Fine. Now we're going to make a new rule. Whenever I am in here and you hear me typing or whether you don't hear me typing, whatever the fuck you hear me doing in here, when I am in here that means that I am working - that means don't come in. Now do you think you can handle that?" Then she replies with a faltering voice: "Yes." So Jack screams: "Fine. Why don't you start right now and get the fuck out of here, hmm?" During this conversation, he treats her as if she were dumb and he swears a lot, which makes her even more nervous. Even though it may seem that this abuse is just caused by the madness that the hotel has within, Jack does have a past as an abusive man. And if we observe Wendy, she is submissive from the very beginning.

Later on, Wendy gets the chance of talking to a ranger through the radio station. They introduce themselves and chat on the weather. Before hanging up, she says:

“It was really nice talking to you.” The way in which she expresses that makes us believe that she hasn’t had a good conversation or any attention whatsoever for a long time, maybe even before she moved into the hotel. Wendy seems almost relieved that she’s been able to talk to someone who does not scream at her and treat her with the average respect that everyone deserves.

Right after Wendy accuses Jack of beating up their son, he goes to the Gold Room and talks to the ghostly figure of a bartender: “But that bitch. As long as I live for she’ll never let me forget what happened.” As an audience, we’ve seen enough of his wife to know that she is not a bitch. She is a loving mother who keeps her family together and gets nothing in return. Then, Wendy tells Jack that it was actually a woman from room 237 who tried to strangle Danny. To what he responds with a mocking tone: “Are you out of your fucking mind?” He doesn’t even try to understand what she is saying, but rather just assumes that she is stupid.

Some minutes later, after all of this crazy situation, Wendy starts weeping uncontrollably: “I think we need to get Danny out of here.” Even though this is a considerate thought, Jack replies annoyed: “It is so fucking typical of you to create a problem like this when I finally have a chance to accomplish something. When I’m really into my work. (...) Wendy, I have let you fuck up my life so far, but I’m not going to let you fuck this up!” It is very typical of an abuser to blame his wife for his own failures, that way he feels less guilty and everything becomes her fault. But we know that Jack’s failures are not Wendy’s fault, she does everything at her

reach to help him. If he hasn't written a book yet, maybe he is not good enough at it, period. A mysterious lady has strangled Danny and she, as any rational parent would be, is worried and wants to get him out of that situation. But Jack likes to think that her aim is to ruin his life, that's how selfish he can be.

Some time later, Wendy finds the disturbing quote that her husband has written over and over again, and she gets even more scared. When Jack comes into scene, she holds a bat with her hands and says: "Stay away from me." Here we see her at her most vulnerable and helpless moment in the film. She is sweating, crying and can't even speak because she has realized that her husband wants to murder her. So while she's stepping back Jack says the famous line: "I'm not going to hurt you, I'm just going to bash your brains in. I'm going to bash them right the fuck in." Somehow she manages to hit him in the head with the bat and he falls down the stairs. When she locks him in the pantry, he wakes up inside and tries to blackmail her emotionally: "Wendy, I think you hurt my head real bad. I'm dizzy. I need a doctor. Honey, don't leave me here." Luckily, she does not fall for that trick and in a sad tone she says: "I'm going to go now." Sometimes, after a man has physically abused his wife, he'll try to turn himself into the victim so that the woman will forgive him and feel bad about herself. This is exactly what is happening here, Jack is trying to get Wendy's forgiveness and make her open the door. But she is a lot smarter than he thinks she is, and she proves it all throughout the film. He probably has never considered his wife being something other than a housewife.



Fig. 5- Wendy Torrance at her most vulnerable moment.

The most famous scene in the movie takes place when Jack breaks a door with an ax and screams: "Here's Johnny!" On the other side of the door we see Wendy, holding a knife with her hands and screaming absolutely terrified. Her fear seems so extreme that no one can relate to her, only those who have suffered great tragedy. "Please don't", she begs. Even if it is unintentional, this scene and all of the scenes where Wendy is being attacked are the personification of domestic violence towards women.

MADONNA WHORE COMPLEX

Besides all of this analysis on Shelley Duvall's character, in order to follow the project's line, the film needs to be studied under the Madonna Whore Complex and the *friding* perspectives. Starting with the first one, *The Shining* does not really portray these two ways of seeing women that Sigmund Freud theorized. Wendy Torrance is the only relevant female character in the picture and she represents an

abused person, but she doesn't really tell us much about men's anxiety towards women's sexuality.

Even though this concept is not existent throughout the film, there is a particular scene that represents to perfection the Madonna Whore Complex, even if it was unintentional. When Jack goes to room 237 to find the woman who apparently strangled Danny, he sees her lying naked on a bathtub. She stands up and we get to see her body and face: she is a charming, beautiful, young girl. When she starts to touch Jack, he doesn't think twice and kisses her. But after some seconds, he realizes terrified that he's been kissing an old lady's corpse. Was she ever young or did he just picture it in his head? Whatever it is, the image of a young girl becoming all of a sudden disgustingly old, clearly represents Freud's theory. Women are young sexual objects that don't deserve any respect because they are attractive and when they grow old they become disgusting clowns to society: There is not a mid-point, it's either one thing or the other. I don't think that Stanley Kubrick intended to give a message about the view on females with this scene; he probably just liked the aesthetics of it. However, when you look at it under a feminist perspective it becomes extremely interesting.



Fig. 6- Young woman turning into a putrefied old corpse.

FRIDGING

On the other hand, the concept of fridging is exemplified in *The Shining* explicitly because one of the main characters, Wendy, is almost killed by her husband. Not only that, but the old caretaker murdered his two daughters and wife, the three of them being females. But why can't Duvall's character be the one who murders Nicholson's? Can you imagine Jack Nicholson playing a helpless man who runs away weeping and asking for mercy? Would he even accept the role if he was the victim? Maybe he would, and based on his acting skills he would probably nail it,

but he was not asked to do it so we'll never know. It is acceptable and normal for a woman to run away from her husband terrified but if we turn the situation round, it almost seems funny and goofy. We've seen women getting murdered, raped and abused by men so many times in fiction that we've accepted it as normal, and to me, that is as horrifying as all horror movies put together.

BECHDEL TEST

Does *The Shining* pass the Bechdel test?

1. Does the film have at least two women in it?

Yes.

2. Do those women talk to each other?

Wendy talks to the doctor that checks on Danny.

3. Do they talk about something other than about men?

No, they talk about Danny, who is a male character.

The Shining does not pass the Bechdel test. This is the typical example of a film that gives such little importance to women that they don't even talk about anything other than men, because their whole existence depends on them.

Last but not least, I find it important to write about Shelley Duvall's disturbing experience when making the film. Roger Ebert asked her how it was working with Kubrick, to what she replied: "Almost unbearable. Going through day after day of excruciating work, Jack Nicholson's character had to be crazy and angry all the time. And my character had to cry 12 hours a day, all day long, the last nine months

straight, five or six days a week. I was there a year and a month. After all that work, hardly anyone even criticized my performance in it, even to mention it, it seemed like. The reviews were all about Kubrick, like I wasn't there."

Like she wasn't there.

With this statement, it can be concluded that Stanley Kubrick is not only portraying misogynistic values in fiction, but also he's being sexist and pushy towards women when he shoots his movies. Some critics excuse him by saying that he did it in order to get a better performance, i. e. Shelley Duvall's interpretation in *The Shining*. As she said, her talent was not even recognized by the audience, so was it all worth it? No one acknowledged her hard work and all of the suffering she had to go through, however, everyone praised Jack Nicholson's performance as a crazy and aggressive man.

Many times in Hollywood, actresses have been tortured allegedly for the sake of films. The most disturbing example is found in Bernardo Bertolucci's *Last Tango in Paris*, where Maria Schneider's character had to be raped by Marlon Brando's but instead of faking it, Brando actually raped her. The director and him had planned it and she of course didn't know it. Her pain and suffering was not acted, she was actually being brutally hurt. Bertolucci stated: "I wanted her reaction as a girl, not as an actress. I wanted her to react humiliated." These techniques made "in the name of cinema or art" cannot be justified in any case, especially when they only harm women, because most of the times they are the ones who play weak and submissive characters.

Conclusion

With this being said, I can conclude that *The Shining* does portray misogynistic values. Although its main theme focuses on Jack's madness and how he tries to murder his family, there is a hidden theme about abuse. Undeniably, Wendy suffers abuse from her husband, even at the start when he is not crazy yet. She fears his reactions so she does everything at her hand to please him and he treats her with frivolity and rudeness. During the film, Wendy admits that her husband hit their child in the past, so who knows if she was hit by him in the past? Judging by their relationship, I am sure that he did. All of the fear that Wendy feels when Jack has gone nuts and is trying to kill her, serves as an accurate metaphor for what many battered women go through. To me, this film belongs to the horror genre not only because of its creepy ghosts or its scares, but also because of Wendy's suffering as an abused victim, which represents the reality of many women in real life which mean true "horror" stories.

EYES WIDE SHUT

In 1999, Stanley Kubrick directed his last film: *Eyes Wide Shut*, and died four days after showing the definitive cut to Warner Bros. The story is based on Arthur Schnitzler's novella *Traumnovelle*, translated into English as *Dream Story*.

Synopsis

Featuring Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman, it tells the story of Bill Harford, a wealthy doctor, and his wife Alice who live in New York. They have a little daughter but she is not very relevant during the film, for the action focuses mainly on her parents. The movie starts when Bill and Alice leave their luxurious apartment to attend a private party held by one of Bill's clients: a millionaire New Yorker called Victor Ziegler. Once there, they chat with Ziegler and his wife and shortly after that, they split temporarily and find each other new partners to dance with. However, before that, Bill gets reunited with an old friend from med school who dropped out: Nick Nightingale, the piano player. Nick invites him to come someday to the jazz club he plays at. Meanwhile, Alice chats with a Hungarian mature man who sips from her drink shamelessly and offers her sex upstairs. Even though she is drunk and seems to be attracted to him, she refuses, showing loyalty towards her husband. On the other hand, Bill walks around with two young models who also makes clear advances on him. Just when he is about to either accept or decline the offer, a man sent by Ziegler reaches out for him and asks him to come upstairs. When he goes to see what's wrong, he finds an unconscious naked woman called Mandy who has overdosed on a speedball. As the audience, we guess

that she is a prostitute and has been paid to have sex with Ziegler. After a couple of minutes, the doctor makes her come to life again.

A day after Bill and Alice come home from the party, they smoke a blunt of marijuana and reflect on the previous evening. They slowly get into an argument and she ends up telling her husband about a fantasy she had with a naval officer last summer, a confession that leaves him petrified. Their conversation is interrupted by a phone call from the daughter of a patient who tells him that her dad has died, and Bill leaves to her home to give his condolences. Once there, the daughter tries to seduce him and passionately kisses him, but he refuses her and runs away politely.

After such a disturbing episode, Bill walks the streets of New York tormented by his wife's previous confession. While he is waiting for a traffic light to turn green, a hooker called Domino reaches out to him and invites him to go to her apartment, an offer that he accepts. Once there however, he receives a call from Alice and sees himself forced to leave without having sex with Domino. When he's on the street again, he stumbles upon a jazz club called Cafe Sonata and remembers that his old friend Nick Nightingale plays there. So when he goes inside and chats with him, Nick says something that leaves Bill highly intrigued: he has another gig later tonight where he plays blindfolded. He also says that in order to get admittance one needs a mask and a costume, and tells him the address and the password: Fidelio. Bill then goes to a costume store that's closed in order to rent what he needs and offers Mr. Milich, the owner, a lot of money for the disturbances. Before

showing Bill any costume, Milich finds his teenage daughter and two older men naked and hidden. This outrages the owner.

Later, the protagonist takes a taxi and goes to the address he's been told by Nick. After giving the password, Fidelio, and putting on his mask, he enters the mansion and finds out what is going on inside: a crowd of masked people dressed as monks silently watches what looks like a mysterious ritual. Suddenly, some girls take off their clothes and their naked bodies illuminate the room. One by one, they find someone from the crowd and take them with them. One of the women reaches out for Bill and while they are heading to another room, she whispers: "You don't belong here. There's still a chance for you to get away". He obviously doesn't listen to her and stays to watch a very bizarre scene: he sees the naked girls from before copulating with the costumed people shamelessly. A sexual ritual is taking place. Later on, a porter takes him to the ritual room where a red-cloaked master of ceremonies confronts him and asks him to take off his mask, recognizing that he doesn't belong there. Bill is aware now of the big danger he's in and right after the "boss" asks him to undress, the woman that tried to warn him before screams: "Stop! Let him go. Take me! I am ready to redeem him." So, she is taken away and Bill is set free. However, the man in red tells him: "But I warn you, if you make any further inquiries or if you say a single word to anyone about what you have seen there will be the most dire consequences for you and your family."

Just before dawn, he arrives home tired and confused and catches Alice having a nightmare and laughing uncontrollably. He wakes her up and she explains that in

her dream she was having sex with the naval officer mentioned before and many other men. This disturbs Bill even more. The next morning, he looks for Nick, the piano player, at his hotel but according to the desk clerk, he checked out at 5 am with a bruise on his cheek and accompanied by two big guys. This only increases the protagonist's curiosity. Later on, he goes to the rental place in order to give back his costume and finds out that he forgot the mask at the party. He also realizes that Mr. Milich is selling his daughter into prostitution as he offers her services to Bill. Also, he visits Domino's house, the prostitute from the other night, but he doesn't find her there and her friend Sally tells him that Domino found out today that she is HIV positive.

Some time after that, Bill reads in the newspaper that a beauty queen died last night of an overdose and out of suspicion decides to see her in the morgue. He identifies the corpse as Mandy's, the girl from the very start of the film who Bill revived at Ziegler's party. Later on, Ziegler himself asks him to come to visit him in at his house. Once there, the millionaire confesses something breathtaking: "I was there. At the house. I saw everything that went on. What the hell did you think you were doing?" He also confirms that Mandy was the girl who redeemed him at the ceremony and then died of an overdose in her hotel room. According to him, the society did not hurt her in any way. Also, he adds that Nick Nightingale got sent back home and is safe now. Of course, neither Bill nor us, the audience, know if Ziegler is telling the truth.

When he returns home, he finds the mask he lost at the party laying next to Alice, who is sleeping. This is the straw that breaks the camel's back; he starts crying uncontrollably waking up his wife. He says: "I'll tell you everything". The day after that, the two of them and their daughter Helena go Christmas shopping and Alice whispers the last sentence of the film, which was also the last sentence to ever appear on a Kubrick movie: "There is something very important that we need to do as soon as possible. Fuck."

Analysis

It is fair to say that *Eyes Wide Shut* is Stanley Kubrick's most mature film gender wise, for it explores the relationship between men and women in a more intimate and intelligent way than previously. Nicole Kidman plays the most developed and interesting female character out of all of Kubrick's filmography, because for the first time we are able to understand a woman's concerns and respect her as a person. However, the movie still portrays some misogynistic values that are worth writing about.

The very first scene in *Eyes Wide Shut* shows Alice getting undressed and we are able to see her slim nude physique from behind. Many more women, mostly girls, will appear naked throughout the film and all of them will have the same flawless body: Mandy from the first party, a patient of Bill who appears topless, and all of the women in the sexual ritual who share almost the same exact body type. It seems as if Kubrick is trying to avoid the fact that women with fatter thighs or smaller boobs, for instance, exist. Also, not a single old female is showed naked or presented attractive in any way. Ziegler's wife, who briefly appears at the very

start of the film, is the perfect example of this for she is absolutely irrelevant and is one of the few women who are not sexualized.



Fig. 7- Naked women in the sexual ritual.

Another recurring theme in *Eyes Wide Shut* is the idea that women are powerless next to men. In all of the relations between both genders, men are always superior. The most obvious example is found on the protagonists' relation: Bill is a highly successful doctor and Alice is unemployed because she lost her job in the art business. Economically, the husband is superior to his wife. At the first party, we also witness this dynamics when Bill chats with two models who are portrayed almost like prostitutes, whose income seems to be a lot lower than his. Meanwhile, Alice dances with a Hungarian aristocrat who is obviously wealthy. After she says that she is unemployed, he replies kindly: "I have some friends in the art game. Perhaps I can be of some help." His way of expressing this makes it look as if Alice was unable to find a job by herself and as if he was her only chance to grow

economically. Later on, when Bill is called upstairs to revive an unconscious girl, this pattern between men and women is repeated again. Ziegler has hired a prostitute who has overdosed on a speedball, a mixture of cocaine and heroin. When she comes to life, he says: "That was one hell of a scare that you gave us, kiddo", to what she replies: "Sorry". The tone of the conversation makes it clear that Ziegler is Mandy's master, that she is fully submitted to him. Some time later, during the sexual ritual that takes place in the mansion, it seems like all of the women who appear naked have been hired to be there. This assumption can be made when we consider that we know one of the girls' identities: the one that redeems Bill is Mandy, the prostitute just mentioned before. Her being a hooker makes us think that probably all of the others are being paid for having intercourse with all of those masked men. And considering that Ziegler attends the party and he is a millionaire, it wouldn't be insane to assume that all of the members of the creepy secret society are rich too. Again, this is another example of men taking advantage of women because of their social and financial superiority.

Alice is the most interesting character in the film, and luckily for the contents of this project, she is a woman. As I wrote before, she lost her job in the past and now she is completely dependent on her husband's income. Sadly, this is a reality for a large number of women in the real world. Although she lives comfortably, she seems kind of trapped in her own life. Her name might be a reference to the main character in Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, a little privileged girl who is very bored and travels to Wonderland. Many times during *Eyes Wide Shut*, we catch Kidman's character staring at herself in the mirror, maybe looking for another reality to escape to and get away from the lonesome life that she carries.



Fig. 8- Alice looking at herself in the mirror.

In a heated argument she has with Bill, she confesses that last summer she had a sexual fantasy with a naval officer they were sharing a hotel with. This is one of the best monologues Kubrick has ever written because it's so sincere and intense that it seems as if he understands perfectly what it's like to be a woman trapped inside of a marriage. Referring to the officer, Alice says: "And I thought if he wanted me, even if it was only for one night, I was ready to give up everything. You. Helena. My whole fucking future. Everything." Later on that night, when Bill catches her laughing uncontrollably in a nightmare and wakes her up, she explains her dream weeping: "And I knew you could see me in the arms of all these men, just fucking all these men. I wanted to make fun of you, to laugh in your face. And so I laughed as loud as I could". It is obvious that Alice feels held hostage by her husband and he doesn't even realize it until she talks about those fantasies and dreams. Back in the

first party, the Hungarian aristocrat she dances with, tells her: "May I ask why a beautiful woman who could have any man in this room, wants to be married?" "Why wouldn't she?" she replies unsure. To what her dance partner later adds: "You know why women used to get married, don't you? It was the only way they could lose their virginity and be free to do what they wanted with other men. The ones they really wanted." I'm sure this conversation had an effect on Alice, an effect that would be reflected later at night when she confesses her hidden desires to her husband.

But why did Bill not realize Alice's frustrations before? Was he too busy working as a doctor or attending fashionable high-class parties? The point here is that his wife's confession leaves him horrified as he suspects that she might be with him just for his money. Why wouldn't she leave then if she felt so trapped and misunderstood? Following Alice's admission of guilt, Bill is offered sex many times by different females: his patient's daughter, the prostitute Domino and then her friend Sally, Mr. Milich's daughter who is being corrupted by him, and one of the girls at the mansion. He never has sex with those women but he realizes that they are all interested in him because of his money, just as Alice might be too. He worries that he might have been paying for his sexual life with his wife and as an audience we never find out whether that is true or false.

MADONNA WHORE COMPLEX

Now that I have reflected on women in the film in general terms, I will start analyzing *Eyes Wide Shut* under the Madonna Whore Complex and the fridging perspectives, starting with the first one. At the beginning of the film, before Alice

opens up about her sexual fantasies, Bill views her as the Madonna because he doesn't think of her as a sexual object. Although he desires her, he has respect for her and never suspects that she might be dreaming about other men. In an argument, Alice says: "You've never been jealous about me, have you?" To what her husband calmly answers: "No, I haven't." It's here when she tells him about the naval officer, and Bill's view on his wife changes drastically; she is not the Madonna anymore. I wouldn't say he sees her as the Whore now, but his perspective on her definitely changes. When he is wandering around New York, it seems as if he looks for the figure of the Whore to cheat on Alice and feel better about his masculinity. If she has fantasized with other men, he has the right (and almost the obligation) of cheating on her. He almost has sex with a hooker and other girls who are clearly portrayed as sexual objects by the male characters in the film and by Kubrick himself. They remind me of the women in *A Clockwork Orange*, whose purpose was only to be attractive enough for the protagonist. Ziegler himself talks very disrespectfully about Mandy: "She was a hooker. Sorry but that's what she was, a hooker." He does not believe she deserves any respect at all because she has sex with lots of men and is very attractive. He probably thinks of his wife as the Madonna, a respectful faithful woman who deserves his love but is not attractive in any way.

FRIDGING

On the other hand, it may seem like Kubrick does not fridge the female characters in this film, meaning he doesn't kill them or rape them mainly for the hero's plot to be more interesting. However, some women are implicitly raped again and again throughout the entire movie, but because those women are prostitutes we don't

see it as a problem. Although some of them seem to be comfortable having consensual sex for money like Domino, for instance, many do not seem happy with their job. When Bill is asking Ziegler if they hurt Mandy after she redeemed the protagonist, the millionaire says: "Nothing happened after you left that hadn't happened to her before. She got her brains fucked out. Period." He normalizes rape because she is a prostitute and is used to it, she deserves it. Mandy is the true personification of the Whore, equally hated and desired.

BECHDEL TEST

Does *Eyes Wide Shut* pass the Bechdel test?

1. Does the film have at least two women in it?

Yes, plenty of them.

2. Do those women talk to each other?

Alice talks to the babysitter.

3. Do they talk about something other than about men?

Yes, they talk about her daughter Helena.

Even though *Eyes Wide Shut* passes the Bechdel test, I would not let this lead me to the conclusion that it is a feminist film. Alice talks to the babysitter and to her daughter a couple of times but this does not mean she is an empowered woman at all. Bill holds long, deep conversations with other men, for instance, with his old friend Nick Nightingale, the host of the party Victor Ziegler, and the boss of the secret society, among others. But Alice mainly talks to her husband and a mature man he dances with.

Last but not least, I would like to mention the Star of Ishtar, which appears on display on the Ziegler's house when they are having a party. This eight-point star represents the Mesopotamian goddess Ishtar who symbolized love, fertility but most importantly, sexuality. Ishtar was considered the "courtesan of the Gods" because she had lots of lovers. She was also said to be very cruel with men that loved her, something that reminds us of Alice. Ishtar's cult was involved with sacred prostitution and sexual rituals, two themes very recurrent during the film.

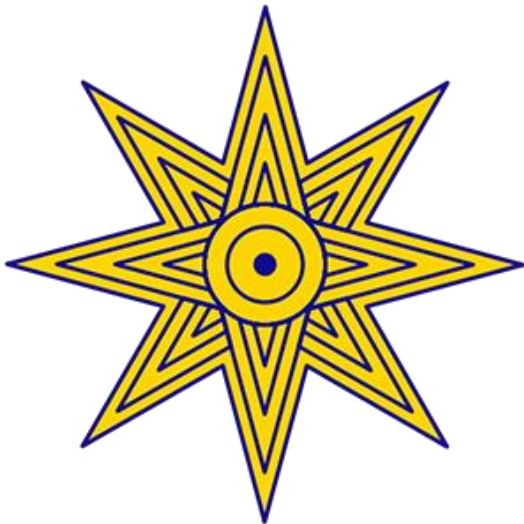


Fig. 9- A drawing of The Star of Ishtar.



Fig. 10- The Star of Ishtar represented in the film.

Undeniably, Stanley Kubrick matured as a writer and as a director with *Eyes Wide Shut* and it's a shame he didn't live to make more films after this one, for this is his most intimate, human, maybe even personal portrait of the relationship between men and women.

Conclusion

With this being said, I can conclude that *Eyes Wide Shut* does portray misogynistic values because it repeatedly objectifies women; most of the female characters are prostitutes who appear naked and having sexual relations with men. In addition, usually those men look down on these girls because they are prostitutes and deserve no respect. Also, women are always inferior to men, both economically and socially. They are powerless next to men and the male characters always have control on the female's.

However, *Eyes Wide Shut* is less misogynistic than all of the other movies analyzed because a developed female character is featured in it. Alice is an intelligent, matured, interesting woman and we come to understand her frustrations and her fears. All other female characters that Kubrick has ever created seem to be subjected to the male characters and they are merely used as a plot device. However, as an audience, we do respect Alice and we are interested in what she has to say. We do not see her as a sexual object but as a person.

CONCLUSIONS

As I wrote in the introduction, my objective while doing this project was to find out whether four films directed by Stanley Kubrick were or were not misogynistic. And if they were, I wanted to see if there was a pattern for that misogyny which repeated itself in the movies.

After a long analysis, I can definitely say without fearing to be wrong that all of those films portray misogynistic values in one way or another. In *Lolita*, we see the perspective of a middle-aged pedophile who is sexually attracted to a young teenager and how this curses her life forever. In *A Clockwork Orange* we see women through the eyes of a young disturbed man who is constantly objectifying them and attacking them. In *The Shining*, we understand how terrifying it is to be a battered woman because the fear that both Wendy Torrance and Shelley Duvall go through is immeasurable. Finally, in *Eyes Wide Shut* we see how men love to have women under their control and being superior to them both economically and socially. This demonstrates that in these films, women are discriminated simply because they are women. Their gender determines their whole existence in a negative way due to the fact that they always face more difficulties in life than men.

That being said, I would like to clarify that even though Kubrick does portray misogynistic values in his movies, he might not have been misogynistic himself. In this essay I have never tried to analyze him as a person but I have focused on his filmography only. Even though watching his movies gets hard sometimes because of how much suffering women go through, I still admire Stanley Kubrick

profoundly as an artist and I believe that he is one of the finest directors that have ever existed.

Referring to Kubrick, Nicole Kidman said: “He believed the most powerful films always have a hard grounding in truth” (Dmitry, 2017). I would like to believe that all of that hate towards women in his movies was part of his critique to society. I would like to believe that he did not agree with some of the male characters in his films who only saw women as sexual objects. I would like to believe that a cultured genius like him would have never discriminated anyone because of his or her gender, race, religion or sexual orientation. The truth is, I will never really know, but what I do know is that his films will stay with me till the day I die. No matter how inconsolable my sorrows get, those films will heal me somehow and I will forever thank Kubrick for that.

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