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Age, Decrepitude and Fatherhood in Kubrick

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Introduction

When Stanley Kubrick passed away in 1999, during the post-production phase of *Eyes Wide Shut* he was 70 years old and had been making films for nearly 50 years. Age and longevity had not hampered his ability to create. It also seems fitting that his final film had a longevity of his own: he, having been trying to make it since the 1960s, and it, being realised only shortly after his passing. Kubrick was not a prolific film maker and as James Fenwick has noted the reasons for his lack of completed productions were down mainly to industrial factors and a surfeit of creative freedom given to him by the studios (rather than the increasing impediment of old age or ill health).¹ Nevertheless, old age, evanescence and entropy; characters who “rage against the dying of the light” refusing to go “softly into that good night” (to quote Dylan Thomas) permeate Kubrick’s cinematic universe. It is therefore somewhat surprising there has been so little critical scholarship around the representation of the old and ageing in his films, especially given the number of older characters who exist in dialogue with and in opposition to younger ones.

There has been more of a sustained critical focus on childhood in Kubrick’s work. The image of the violent or brutalised child who breaks their programming – be it the young Marines of *Full Metal Jacket* (1986), Alex in *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) or HAL in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1969) is a Kubrickian trope which I have dealt with elsewhere². More recently Nathan Abrams has discussed the centrality of childhood to Kubrick’s work in his early photography and early film, his unrealised films and completed canon of work.³

Here it’s worth noting that the early photographs taken during his time as a photographer for *Look Magazine* between 1945 and 1950 also anticipate and prefigure some

of the depictions of aged and ageing characters that populate his later work. His 1948 photograph of a circus performer is a study in the defiance of age and entropy and of masculinity and strength (Fig 1). An ageing circus strongman stands staring defiantly and unflinchingly into the middle distance; a shirtless, muscular tattooed torso and heavy weights painfully attached to his nipples dragging his chest downwards. The image pre-figures the characterisation of Gunnery Sgt, Hartman (R.Lee Ermy) in *Full Metal Jacket* (1986): another study of an ageing character who is in part defined by his refusal to acquiesce to age and physical decline (see below). The photograph is part of an early collection of circus images taken of the Ringling Bros. & Barnum and Bailey Circus.

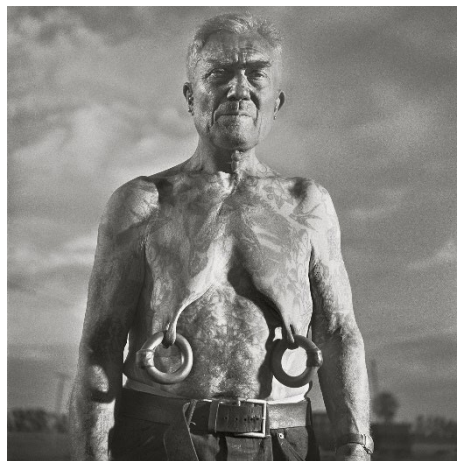


Fig 1: Man with tattoos and body modification, 1948 (Museum of the City of New York)

By comparison, Kubrick's first image for *Look Magazine*, 'Truman was a New Dealer Too' (Fig 2, 1945) depicts a Newseller, at his stand, for whom time has caught up. He is framed between the past and the future, positioned next to a sign announcing the death of Franklin Roosevelt (we might even therefore describe the photograph as a 'Vanitas Image')⁴, architect of the New Deal – the series of social and government spending programmes that helped bring about the end of the Depression, raised employment and

helped economically rebuild the USA. Directly above him is a sign announcing that Harry Truman taking office. This is an image in which age, death and rebirth are all present (themes which will become Kubrickian cinematic tropes), and in which the news seller becomes a cipher for an America caught between the end of the second world war, the death of liberalism, the cold war and the bomb. This is also a diametrically opposed image to the defiant Circus performer as the news seller's eyes are cast downward, his head resting on hand: an image of acquiescence and entropy.



Fig 2: Truman is a New Dealer too (1945)
(Museum of the City of New York)

Both of these are images of old age filtered through the eyes of the young. Kubrick was 20 years old when he took the photograph of the circus strongman and a mere 16 years old when he photographed the newspaper vendor. As Phillip Mather indicates,

When Franklin D. Roosevelt died on April 12, 1945, Stanley Kubrick was a 16-year-old high school student from the Bronx, seldom seen without a camera hanging from his neck. He persuaded a newspaper salesman to adopt a dejected facial expression, and

then took a photograph composed in a way that uses newspaper titles as a visual frame and a verbal commentary. He sold the picture to *Look* magazine for \$25, and it appeared prominently in the June 26 issue[...] After graduating from high school, Kubrick was offered a staff position at *Look* magazine, where he worked for five years, publishing close to 900 photographs.⁵

These images which appear to give a ‘slice of life’ impression are in fact deliberately posed and constructed as, therefore, are the implied commentaries on age. Kubrick’s own youth stands in tension with these images of ageing, time passing and the defiance of time, as throughout his cinema old age is set in contrast to youth and young manhood.

Despite a range of contemporary critical literature turning to focus on ageing in film. There has not only been little critical engagement with the ageing process in the Kubrick universe. Tim Shary and Nany Mcvittie's book *Fade to Gray: Aging in American Cinema*⁶ and Sally Chivers *Silvering The Screen*⁷ have both turned to a focus on aging and the elderly and Miller and Van Riper’s study⁸ turns to the representation of ageing within horror cinema. Here we may note that with films like M.Night Shyamalan’s films *The Visit* (2015) and *Old* (2021) as well as *Relic* (Natalie Erika James, 2020), contemporary horror cinema is increasingly looking to anxieties over the ageing process. Furthermore a 2017 special edition of *Journal of British Cinema and Television*⁹, chose to focus on the link between old age, sexuality and gender.

Stanley Kubrick however is a notable absence from the critical discussion in any of this recent scholarship. Only Karen Ritzenhoff has started to break ground in this area of Kubrick studies (and film studies more broadly) with her (forthcoming at the time of writing) study of the aged, violated and objectified female body in *A Clockwork Orange* (1971).¹⁰ She considers the framing of the Cat Lady’s murder by Alex and Kubrick’s use of quasi pornographic art in the sequence, connecting age, gender and violence, noting that:

In the logic of the scene, the Catlady has surrounded herself with nude pictures of women in explicit sexual poses but does not need a lover to translate those visual provocations into real physical sex. In that way, it seems as if she symbolizes a combination of age and auto-eroticism that is no longer motivated by intercourse with a male (or female) lover. In Burgess's novel, Alex and the Droogs also assault and intimidate an old man coming out of the 'Public Biblio' with a book called *The Miracle of the Snowflake*; they accuse him of being a pervert, destroying his book. While this scene did not make it into the final cut, its presence is also felt in the Catlady scene, in the juxtaposition of old age and sexuality.¹¹

If Ritzenhoff's analysis focuses on the juxtaposition of age and sexuality, this chapter aims to make a broader examination of the ageing process in Kubrick's cinema this chapter aims to offer a critical survey of the role and presentation of old age across the wider canon of his work (later in this chapter we will return to a discussion of *A Clockwork Orange*, with specific reference to the depiction of Alex's parents 'M and P' played by actors Sheila Raynor and Philip Stone). The chapter considers how Kubrick uses old age as a narrative device and as a way of engaging with the passing of time.

While not engaging directly with the issue of old age, Eliza Pezzota also draws attention to Kubrick's staging of time passing across his films, noting how Kubrick expresses time and its passing via a range of stylistic and narrative techniques creating a "distinctive expressed time for each one of his films, until, in his last ones, he brought the very concept and experience of time to the fore". She notes how according to psychiatrist Eugenio Borgna "space and time become active subjects, semi human entities who act as character's antagonists [...] so that we are able to watch a spatialised time that is plural, synchronic and labyrinthine".¹² In this chapter I will draw from across a range of films from *The Killing* (1956) to *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999) considering characters who are at the mercy of this antagonist, and I will observe how while characters like Dave Bowman seem to flow with the ebb of time others, like Gunnery Sgt. Hartman, Delbert Grady (Phillip Stone) in *The Shining*

1981), or even Victor Ziegler (Sydney Pollack) in *Eyes Wide Shut*, attempt to resist time's onward march towards evanescence and death through confronting them.

The chapter considers the depiction of decay, evanescence and mortality and how the depiction of ageing and time passing might be compared with or seen through the filter of the work of the Irish playwright Samuel Beckett to whom such themes were similarly central and evident. Research at the Stanley Kubrick Archive (SKA) however has turned up no evidence of Kubrick engaged directly with Beckett's work (i.e there are no copies of any of Beckett's prose or drama in the director's extensive archived library for instance), however certain images within the films, point at least to a clear (inter) textual awareness of Beckett whose work from the 1950s through to the 1980s prior to his death was pre-occupied with not only the depiction of the aged, evanescent body, but also with a post-modernist concern with the erosion of personal subjectivity.

If Kubrick's archived library contains no evidence of Beckett's drama, then his work certainly displays an intertextual awareness Beckett's writing which from the late 1950s was increasingly concerned with age, death and entropy. As Beckett scholar Elizabeth Barry indicates:

In the work of Samuel Beckett [...] ageing is anything but absent. Old age—or at least the tropes associated with it—are everywhere, and Beckett seemed to appropriate the condition as spiritually his own [...] Beckett had been anticipating and identifying with the experience of old age for most of his life—not for the wisdom, philosophical or aesthetic maturity, or even rancorous energy that it might popularly be expected to afford, but, imaginatively at least, for a diminishing of powers that might force upon a writer the qualities he had in fact been seeking all along.¹³

In *A Clockwork Orange* F.Alexander is played by the Irish actor Patrick McGee, the first actor to play Beckett's aged Krapp in the one man play *Krapp's Last Tape* (1957), a role that Beckett wrote specifically for him. *Krapp's Last Tape* is a play about getting old, decrepitude, and the decay of memory and was performed first in the UK at the Royal Court

Theatre in 1958 (this first UK production directed by Donald McWhinnie). In Beckett's play, Krapp is reaching the end of his life, and as is his habit each year on his birthday, he turns to both listen to past recordings of himself and to record and reflect, this time for the final time. *Krapp's Last Tape* is a defining moment in the post war Theatre of the Absurd, a comic and existential text, which presents ageing a Sisyphean task. Krapp sifts through his past memories archived and contained for posterity on catalogued spools of tape – a medium which degrades and decays. The play ends with Krapp's final proclamation: "Perhaps my best years are gone. When there was a chance of happiness. But I wouldn't want them back. Not with the fire in me now"¹⁴

Attempts to align Kubrick with the philosophies of the post war modernist and post-modernist European Avant Garde are thin on the ground (there is currently more critical weight being given to viewing Kubrick through the cultural, ideological, artistic and philosophical lens of 19th century 'Mittel European' Central Europe, a well spring for 20th century Modernism). Nevertheless Jerold J. Abram does engage with Kubrick and the Absurd in his essay 'Kubrick and Philosophy' citing D.A Cooke who called Kubrick a 'Unique kind of absurdist'.¹⁵ Referring to both *Fear and Desire* (1953) and *Doctor Strangelove* (1964) he references Cooke saying that both of these films "have the same basic message: failure to live with one's fear, to face it authentically alone, leads to the most tragic ending of all". Age and impermanence are fears which permeate Kubrick's work and characters attempt to visibly stave off the inevitable: a similarly Sisyphean and existential task.

The image of Krapp in front of his tape recorder is one of the most iconic in the Beckett canon, and in *A Clockwork Orange* Kubrick resurrects and repurposes this image using the same actor: F.Alexander is depicted in front of a reel-to-reel tape recorder as it blasts out the Beethoven which is torturing young Alex (Images 3 and 4)



Image 3: *Krapp's Last Tape*



Image 4: F. Alexander

Certainly, Kubrick would have been aware of, if not familiar, with Beckett's work (they had a mutual friend in the British playwright of 'the absurd' Harold Pinter) and Beckett's dramatic ruminations on the passage of time and the decrepitude of the body may be superimposed across Kubrick's film work (as this chapter will presently indicate)

The Passage of Time

In a previous chapter I debated Kubrick's position in relation to the British film industry from the early 1960s.¹⁶ Whilst England was his adopted home from the early 1960s and he made use of the infrastructure provided by the British film industry (studios, technicians, etc) Kubrick has also been adopted into the framework of the emergent American New Wave (certainly according to writer Robert Kolker who examines his positions within an American 'Cinema of Loneliness'). Within this 'New Hollywood' milieu, perhaps Kubrick's closest contemporary (in terms of the representation of the aged and elderly) is the American director Hal Ashby whose seminal film *Harold and Maude* (1971) similarly offers a character, the 79-year-old Maude (Ruth Gordon), who attempts to defy the aging process (and who is also a Holocaust survivor), through joyfully refusing it. Eventually she does so through suicide. Like Kubrick, Ashby's film may also be viewed through a Beckettian lens and Krapp's final words also resonate through the characterisation of Maude.

Like Kubrick's characters, Beckett's characters also present powerful acts of resistance (in Beckett's case often through minimal gestures) against the diminishment of their own personal subjectivity by age and evanescence; physical decline or the regulation of the body (demonstrated in the final raise of 'Actor's head in Beckett's later, shorter play *Catastrophe* [1982])

Hal Ashby's 1981 film satire *Being There* also contains various homages to Kubrick and features former Kubrick collaborator Peter Sellers as the central protagonist Chance the Gardener: a middle-aged man with the mind of a child who, on the death of his benefactor, is finally forced to leave the house he has grown up in and where he has tended the garden all his life. For the first time enters the outside world. This is a kind of (re)birth highlighted through a new name which is conferred upon him, 'Chauncy Gardiner' .

Both Kubrick and Ashby, prominently among their New Hollywood contemporaries, offer a clear narrative concern with ageing and the passage of time. *Being There* contains an intertextual sequence in which the childlike Chance is displaced from the wealthy home into the urban wilderness of Washington D.C which is soundtrack by a disco funk rendition of Richard Strauss's 'Thus Spake Zarathustra'. This piece is of course a bookend to *2001: A Space Odyssey* in which film it reaches its musical climax as the newly born Starchild turns to gaze into and challenge the eye of the viewer. *2001: A Space Odyssey* is a film that is about the passage of time, and which places the viewer, experientially, at the centre of the evolutionary trajectory from Alpha to Omega and beyond. Ashby's playful reference to Kubrick's film frames the start of Chance's own 'Odyssey': his rebirth and experiential journey (a series of accidents will eventually lead him to the White House) . The use of Strauss's music is also ironic: despite his age, Chance remains childlike and unevolved throughout the course of the film, he remains in stasis, caught between childhood and old age. Chance learns nothing, he does not change, he has no real agency and instead is borne along

on the whim of the current (much like Bowman in *2001: A Space Odyssey*). Ashby's film offers an intertextual recognition of Kubrick and his own pre-occupation with age, time passing. Kubrick's film is a counterpoint to his own: Bowman's ultimate acquisition of self-knowledge in the film's finale which ultimately leads back from old age and decay to renewal and rebirth. In fact, of all Kubrick's characters, Bowman is the one who most successfully 'defies' the ageing process. In *2001*, Bowman passes through the stargate, but the film suggests that like the stargate, old age is not something which is finale and to be resisted, but also something that must be passed through in order for change, evolution and rebirth to occur. There can be no more iconographic image in Kubrick's cinema detailing the passage of time (other than the celebrated bone/spaceship jump cut) and the aging process than in the finale of *2001* in which the viewer is presented with a sequential montage of shots of astronaut Dave Bowman, each progressively aging him (Bowman's sequential witness to his own ageing is also a process of self-discovery and self-knowledge), until his final dissolve into the newly evolved Starchild. *2001* is a film which obsesses around the passage of time, birth and death and across his work Kubrick presents birth, ageing and death as part of a cycle.

Aged Fathers

The first half of *Full Metal Jacket* (1986), the 'Bootcamp section' details the dehumanising and brutalisation of a set of new recruits by an ageing Marine, Gunnery Sgt Hartman. It is first interesting to note the disparity between the age of character and its performer. Hartman's age is unstated and ambiguous. Nevertheless, his position of authority and military role, we might assume, position him as a veteran of at least two conflicts: the Korean war and World War II. Ermy was 42 when the film was released, however, so still relatively young. The actor drew on his real-life experience as military drill instructor, and

Full Metal Jacket was to be his first film. The second half of *Full Metal Jacket* jumps forward in time¹⁷ to the new recruits (specifically Private Joker [Matthew Modine] and Private Cowboy [Arlliss Howard])) experience 'in country' after having completed their basic training and Hartman's death at the hands of one his own 'machines', the unfortunate Private Pyle. We may here hypothesise an evolutionary cyclical journey from birth to death beginning with the inept and inexperienced Private Pyle (Vincent Donofrio). Pyle never makes it into the second half of the film as the first concludes with his murder of Hartmann and his suicide with his trusty, well cared for and now immaculately maintained rifle 'Charlene'. In the film's 'Vietnam' section we are presented with the character of 'Animal Mother' (Adam Baldwin), a young marine who also has been divested of his humanity, he is much a machine for killing (and for killing Vietnamese) as 'Charlene' is in the hands of Pyle. Kubrick invites us to ask the question, is 'Animal Mother' the brutalised, dehumanised military machine that Pyle *would* have become had he made the transition into the second half of the film (or if he had made the temporal jump 'through the stargate' from one filmic space to another). Following this train of thought one might also wonder, had 'Animal Mother' himself survived the film, would the next stage of this evolutionary journey have been for him to become a replacement for the dehumanised Hartman himself. These three characters exist cyclically. They are Kubrick's 'three ages of man'. In this way, Kubrick engages with a mode of representation which finds origin in the High Renaissance with artists like Titian and Giorgione who allegorically and visually chart the journey from childhood to adulthood and thence to death.

In Kubrick's cinematic world the aged male figure is frequently associated with either brutality, seduction and violence (Hartman, Grady, or even Ziegler [Sydney Pollack] in *Eyes Wide Shut*) or they are associated with apathy, decrepitude, vanity (here there is a Ven cross over with Ziegler) and acquiescence (all of which are demonstrated via Alex's father; the

Chevalier de Balibari in *Barry Lyndon* (Patrick McGee); or F.Alexander in *A Clockwork Orange*). In *The Killing* the older character, Marvin Unger (Jay C. Flippen), forms an attachment to the younger Johnny Clay (Sterling Hayden) and in one sequence asks Johnny to forget his marriage and come away with him (an offer Clay rejects). Here Kubrick presents the relationship between the two men through the lens of the Plato's Symposium where the relationship between an older and younger man is transactional, the older offering wisdom and experience, and the younger his body in return (although this is implied reading rather an explicit reading). This is not the last time such a relationship would be seen in Kubrick's studio films: we may also refer to the infamous 'Snails and Oysters' sequence in *Spartacus*, between the younger Antoninus (Tony Curtis) and the Roman General Marcus Licinius Crassus (Lawrence Olivier). This relationship is reconfigured in *Lolita* (1962) via the relationship between paedophile Humbert Humbert (James Mason) and the 14-year-old 'Nymphette' Lolita (Sue Lyon).

Joy McEntee further comments on how Kubrick's older (male) characters are set in contrast with younger ones. Commenting on the homosocial relationships that occur across the films she foregrounds the role of the (aged) surrogate father. In discussing the reluctant father/child relationship that develops between Joker and Pyle in *Full Metal Jacket*, she also notes that

These relationships, along with the ones between Marvin and Johnny, Spartacus and Antoninus, Barry Lyndon, Captain Grogan and the Chevalier de Balibari, and David and Gigolo Joe suggest that it may be in order to reconceptualize "family" to fully account for Kubrick's oeuvre. Homosocial relationships that are affectionate—and have the quality of family relationships consistently shape Kubrick's films and competitive relationships between men need also to be accounted for. In several films, Kubrick gives us antagonistic or seductive masculine relationships that drive or draw men away from women and children.¹⁸

In Kubrick's universe an older man is defined through his homosocial and at times homoerotic relationship with a younger. Later in *A Clockwork Orange*, for instance F. Alexander's wife we learn has killed herself as a result of the trauma ensuing from her rape. She is later replaced by Julian (played by then British heavyweight weightlifting champion David Prowse) who, with his rippling Charles Atlas-esque physique stands in marked contrast to the broken, aged and wheelchair bound Professor. Julian's position in the home and his (potentially homoerotic) relationship to the professor is never fully explained in the film, it is left encoded and deliberately ambiguous. He is presented, when we first meet him pumping iron in a pair of tight-fitting briefs and vest – an embodiment of camp hyper masculinity. In a paper given at the 2019 SCMS conference in Seattle, I proposed that Kubrick appropriates Richard Hamilton's British Pop art collage *Just What is it that Makes the Modern Home so different, so appealing?* Into the sequence which introduces the character of Julian who replaces the figure of Atlas in Hamilton's piece:

The Charles Atlas-like image has been replaced by real life body-builder David Prowse (here playing the Professor F. Alexander's minder, Julian; the mise-en-scene of the home interior in Hamilton's image is also transposed, from the placement of the stairs to the replacement of the images on the walls (in Hamilton's image) with mirrors and artwork in Kubrick's; the settee on which the woman reclines has been replaced by a weight bench (Julian is coded as both minder/protector and lover).¹⁹

If the relationships McEntee singles out are of a (seemingly) benign nature, Kubrick also presents a series of inverted 'mirror image' versions in which these younger characters are either brutalised or seduced by their older counterparts: Young Alex and Mr Deltoid in *A Clockwork Orange*; Bill Harford and Victor Ziegler in *Eyes Wide Shut*; the aforementioned Antoninus and Crassus in *Spartacus* and between Jack Torrance and Grady in *The Shining*. In this film Kubrick sets up two opposing and corresponding pairs of 'paternal younger /older relationships. He contrasts the corrupting supernatural influence of Grady on Jack with the benign and nurturing supernatural relationship between Halloran and Danny – a relationship

which fills in the paternal void for Danny by Jack (who is absent from his family when we first encounter him and remains distanced from Danny (if physically present) throughout most of the film). The corrupting (and “correcting”) Grady, the ghostly caretaker of the Overlook Hotel is played by Phillip Stone, the same actor who plays Alex’s insipid father in *A Clockwork Orange*. Kubrick intertextually sets these two in direct contrast with each other (through the casting of Stone): one who no agency and one who has an excess of agency – to the extent that in order to “correct’ he family he has taken an axe to them.

Surrogate paternal relationships in Kubrick (of a positive or negative nature) stand in for ineffectual biological fathers Gunnery Sergeant Hartman in *Full Metal Jacket* is a brutalising surrogate father to the young marines and his attempt to keep age at bay is through a mastery over it: the imposition of order and regulation, upon the young marines. As Abrams notes,

In Kubrick’s vision of Marine Corps boot camp on Parris Island, according to Connard, Gunnery Sergeant Hartman shapes the recruits into one form so that they can wake simultaneously, march and run in lines, shout as one unit on command and identify themselves with their uniform Marine corps issued rifles. Privates Joker, Cowboy, Pyle and the others are nature and Hartman is Marine Corps order imposed upon them. But nature in the form of Private Pyle “resists the imposition of order” and ultimately turns upon its instrument. Pyle kills Hartman. Then Pyle kills himself.²⁰

The sequence on the obstacle course is exemplary of this imposition of order. During the sequence, Hartman bullies the inept Pyle whose weight and inexperience puts him at a disadvantage in surmounting the various physical challenges of the course. In *A Clockwork Orange*, before being savagely beaten by Alex and his Droogs the old Tramp laments the state of the world, how “there’s no law and order nor more” and how the world “lets the young get onto the old”. This position is reversed later in the film when Alex receives a beating off the same Tramp and his associates, but it is also clearly reversed in the Bootcamp section of *Full Metal Jacket*. Hartman dispenses violent abusive behaviour and weaponises violent aggressive language as a form of military ‘law and order’ (Image 5). The

nature of Hartman's abusive, petty tormenting and public humiliations of the inadequate child-like Pyle (forcing him to stand on a box and eat a pilfered jelly donut while his fellow pay for his crimes by doing push ups; making him sit on a wall with his cap on backwards like a child, thumb in mouth during parade; making him march with trousers round ankles) frame Pyle as infant and Hartman as an abusive 'correcting' father (drawing comparisons with Delbert Grady). With age it seems comes experience and an intolerance for the inexperience of youth and here in this militarised world the Old are allowed to 'get onto' the young. At one point Hartman, in the obstacle course training sequence, yells at Pyle "You climb obstacles like old people fuck" a clear indication of Hartman's own refusal of age. He is waging a war on two fronts: vicariously fighting the Vietnam war (a conflict in which he will never be directly involved) through his young recruits and also against the inevitability of oncoming old age and its attendant weaknesses. He implicitly rejects the ageing process through a compensatory display of hyper masculinity and military aggression, just as later Victor Ziegler (Sydney Pollack) in *Eyes Wide Shut* implicitly tries to defy the inevitable through a display of potency and virility.

This is evidenced in the sequence at the party in which Mandy, a prostitute he has been fucking takes on overdose. When Doctor Bill Harford (Tom Cruise) arrives on the scene, Ziegler is depicted post-coitally, shirtless and bare chested. He is priapically positioned against a painted mirror image of a prone, naked woman (Image 6)



Image 5: Gunnery Sgt Hartmann (R. Lee Ermey) Image 6: Victor Ziegler (Sydney Pollack)

Here the viewer might be reminded of Hartman's previous chastising of Pyle and be assured that in his old(er) age Ziegler (played by the then 65 year old film director Sydney Pollack) has no problems in that department (in other words this is how "old people fuck"). The relationship between Ziegler and Harford is of a seductive surrogate father and son: Ziegler's benign façade falls in the final pool table sequence with his veiled threats to Bill. Elsewhere *Eyes Wide Shut* presents other absent or depraved fathers, like Jack Torrance, Harford is an absent father (in one sequence this sense of absence is alluded to in the positioning of Alice (Nicole Kidman) and young daughter Helena around the breakfast table à la Danny and Wendy in a similar sequence toward the start of *The Shining*. In both, the father (Bill and Jack) is conspicuously absent, a void in the scene articulated through the lack of connection or interaction between the characters who ARE present. Furthermore Mr Milic (Rade Serbedzija), the costumer from whom Bill Harford buys his costume for the 'Fidelio' party in the mansion provides another example of a corrupt and aged father figure who opportunistically marketizes his own daughter's (Leelee Sobieski) burgeoning sexuality (Image7). Elsewhere I have noted elsewhere how Milic and his daughter are Sadeian figures – the daughter's transition from virtue to vice replicating that of the Divine Marquis' *Justine* [1791]²¹



Image 7: Mr Milic and his Daughter

A Clockwork Orange

Of all Kubrick's films, *A Clockwork Orange*, most clearly evidences the post war generational tension between old and young (the root of Burgess's own novel was his shock on returning from his years Malaya at the changes in British society and a seemingly out-of-control British youth – this was the age of the Teddy Boy). . Here I would like to focus particularly on the representation of Alex's parents, his 'M and P'. In Anthony Burgess's novel the author neglects to give a description of Alex's parent's; Kubrick however, in keeping with his approach to depicting the aged or ageing, also present's them as figures who are both trying and failing to fend off the ravages of age. In doing so Kubrick present's them as a pair of grotesques, dressing and making up in styles which are too young for them. This is of course, especially true of Alex's Mother who sports a purple fright wig, cartoonish make up and short skirt (Image 8)



Image 8: 'Pee and Em'

As Nathan Abrams describes

His [Alex's] taste in décor is vulgar. The only piece of pop-culture kitsch, Erica Eigen's "I Want to Marry a Lighthouse Keeper" is played to hint at the bad taste of his parents. Alex's mother (Sheila Raynor) does not dress as befitting her age, especially by comparison to his father (Philip Stone), who is more traditionally dressed. Addicted to "sleepers" she dresses in outlandish fashion and purple wigs, In classic stereotypical fashion, is father is a weak figure, while his mother is overindulgent and credulously accepts Alex's poor rationalisations for how he earns his money. Mamber describes their interactions as "Pinteresque".²²

Across his work, Kubrick presents ageing characters as (Swiftian) grotesques. The earlier image of the circus strongman, whose muscular tattooed torso is being dragged down from the nipples, modified and distorted by the weights attached to his chest qualifies as such. Gunnery Sgt Hartmann's overt show of militaristic, violent aggression, masculinity and a profane language is parodic, he is a satirical grotesque parody of not only of brutalising American militarism, but of the stubborn refusal to acknowledge the onset of time. This is at the centre of Kubrick's aged characters, their grotesquery lies in their King Cnut-like attempts to stave of the inevitable. It is an existential, absurd, Sisyphean endeavour.

Mamber discusses the sequence in *A Clockwork Orange*, in which Alex returns home after undergoing the Ludovico technique. He writes

The scene of Alex returning to his parents home after his release from prison is one of theatrical parody, this time of Pinter. Alex finds that someone else's things are in his room, but when he sees the fellow seated with his parents in the living room, he completely ignores them. After engaging "pee and emm" in some trivial conversation, he bends over his father's ear and says, "Hey Dad. Who's that fellow sitting on the couch next to Em?" – a very Pinteresque situation.²³

This is not only a "Pinteresque" situation but also a "Beckettian" one. Alex's parents are positioned at the bottom of the domestic power dynamic, not unlike Hamm's parents, Nagg and Nell, in Beckett's *Endgame* (1958). Nagg and Nell are positioned at the back of the stage (or in a peripheral position around the stage) confined to live in dustbins. *Endgame* presents characters who are depicted as victims of entropy, decay and ageing. As Kirsten Porter notes

Hamm keeps his parents in trashcans, a provocative metaphor for Beckett to utilize in his hopes of inciting the humanity within his audience. The trashcans represent the poor treatment of the elderly. Nagg and Nell have been discarded; their value is equal to society's trash—what is thrown away and unwanted.²⁴

Beckett's later, shorter drama further engages with parental relationships and the diminishment of the body. These later 'parental' plays specifically foreground Mother/Daughter relationships (absent in Kubrick's work) but broadly speaking do stylistically foreground the divide between parent and child and the evanescent (and cyclical) nature of age. In *Footfalls* (1975) for instance, the disembodied voice of May's mother calls to her off stage as she shuffles across her imprisoning strip of light. Furthermore in *Rockaby* 'W's' life experience and that of her dead mother is detailed to her as she gradually rock's herself to the point of evanescence in her chair, by a pre-recorded voice from offstage.

Moonyoung Chung notes that

In the two plays of *Footfalls* and *Rockaby* which deal with the mother/ daughter relationship, the disembodiment which reminds us of fragmentation of the pre-Oedipal

mother is prevalent. There is only in *Footfalls* the dying mother's voice without her physical presence and in *Rockaby* the division between the physical old woman and her soliloquising (taped) voice.²⁵

Alex's parents are physically present but may as well not be. He is (or at least was) the one, like Beckett's Hamm, calling the shots on his parents. Here we may further note the Pinteresque nature of the sequence in which Alex is displaced by a stranger who has turned up. Alex's father appears to be as nervous around the domineering Joe the Lodger as he is around his own son, feebly recognising that Joe has paid his rent till the end of the month. They have simply replaced one domineering son with another.

In 2020 ahead of the 50th anniversary of the film's release in the US and its re-release in UK cinemas, actor Malcom McDowell, then 76, posed for a publicity photograph dressed as an (aged) Alex. There is a clear sense of self-referentiality surrounding this image, not only had the film and its central actor aged but so had its central protagonist, "Little Alex". In this image, McDowell projects the image of the aged Alex, 50 years later, still maintaining his Droog persona (not unlike aged Mods who still convene for "ridealongs" to Brighton), resisting the tide of old age. Here we may also refer to the difference in ending between Anthony Burgess's novel and Kubrick's film. Burgess's novel contains a final chapter which sees Alex reject his violent youth and express a desire to get married, start a family and move on into adulthood (and presumably old age). Kubrick's film of course does not include this ending, instead cutting off at the point Alex declares menacingly that he is "cured alright". Kubrick's Alex remains as he is caught between youth and maturity (perhaps an image embodied by McDowell in the 2020 publicity photograph). While other characters attempt to defer the ageing process, Kubrick never gives Alex the chance.

Barry Lyndon

The Chevalier de Balibari [Figure] in *Barry Lyndon* is another of Kubrick's aged grotesques. Again played by Patrick Magee, comparisons may be drawn with Sheila Raynor as Alex's mother in *A Clockwork Orange*. Earlier in this chapter I noted actor R. Lee Ermy's age as being in tension with the character of Hartmann in *Full Metal Jacket* (whose own age is ambiguous, but whose maturity is implied). This is not the first time in Kubrick's cinema that a relatively younger actor has been placed in an aged role. In *A Clockwork Orange*, Magee, as F. Alexander, was 47 playing a character who, in the second half of the film, through infirmity is presented as older. Magee was 36 when he played Beckett's old man, Krapp, and made a career of playing older seeming roles (he was 45 when he played in the Marquis de Sade in the film adaptation of Peter Brook's *Marat/Sade* (Brook, 1967)) Both Magee and Raynor had entered and passed middle age. Raynor was in her sixties whilst filming *A Clockwork Orange* and Magee was in his early 50s when filming *Barry Lyndon*. In both cases their depiction of aged grotesques is manifested through the tension between the visible reality of the actor's age and the character's own attempts to appear more youthful. The Chevalier (Image 9) is bewigged, powdered and adorned by two "mouche" – artificial beauty marks sometimes worn by members of the aristocracy and privileged classes in the 18th century in order to cover up blemishes, syphilitic scars and the signs of ageing. He provides an example of one of several 'surrogate father' figures to Redmond Barry (Ryan O'Neill) in the film. The sequence in which Barry first comes into contact with the Chevalier (both of whom are Irish masquerading as Prussian is satirical and laden with comic irony as the deadpan voice over of Michael Hordern (himself 64 at the time of the film's release) relates: "It was very imprudent of him, but when Barry saw the splendour of the Chevalier's appearance, the nobleness of his manner, he found it impossible to keep disguise with him"



Image 9: The Chevalier de Balibari (Patrick McGee)

Finally, Redmond Barry's own journey through the film is from youth to surrogate (and actual) fatherhood – at which he fails at both. Barry stands out amongst Kubrick's canon of characters as he is the only one, we see complete the journey from youth and young manhood to fatherhood, old (er) age and decrepitude. We are witness to him attempt to 'impose order' on the rebellious young Lord Bullingdon (Leon Vitali) (who by this time has himself matured into a young man). Barry has inveigled his way into society and become the hated and brutalising surrogate father – ultimately cast out and cut off at the behest of the young Lord Bullingdon (who in one of the final shots of film, appears to be imposing his own influence over Lady Lyndon (Marisa Berenson) as she cuts off Barry's income). Youth and Lord Bullingdon finally bests Barry in the later duel sequence (an ironic bookend to the sequence in which young Barry bests his rival in love, the older Captain Quin (Leonard Rossiter)), crippling him. The final image of Barry his returning to anonymity with his mother, a one legged failure returning to obscurity

Across the course of the film, characters (Lady Lyndon, Barry, Lord Bullingdon) are seen to visibly age – more so than in any other of Kubrick's films. In this way the passage of time is clearly denoted. It's also worth noting here that in one of the film's final images, the ageing Lyndon family lawyer Graham (Philip Stone, Image 10) attends Barry's bedside (Image...), in a scene which almost restages that of Alex's parent's visiting his hospital bed in *A Clockwork Orange*.



Image 10: Graham, the Lyndon Lawyer (Philip Stone)

Conclusion

Over the course of this chapter I have explored Kubrick's representation of age and the ageing process across the broad canon of his work. Kubrick's older characters resist this process in a variety of ways, either through stoical defiance or through make up or costume. Frequently Kubrick associates parenthood, and specifically fatherhood with age, and confronts youth with both the attending frailties and experience of age. Kubrick's aged and ageing characters are locked in a battle with time and are frequently depicted as (often comic and parodic) grotesques. Finally we may also draw textual comparisons with the dramatic writing of Samuel Beckett and the playwright's own approach to the imposition and entropy of old age.

¹ Fenwick, James., *Stanley Kubrick Produces* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2020), 174-176.

² Melia, Matthew., 2018 "Stanley Kubrick at the Interface of Film and Television" *Essais: Revue Interdisciplinaire d'Humanités*, Hors-Séries 4 [Online] <https://journals.openedi->

tion.org/essais/646. Last Accessed 02/12/2021; (2017) 'The post Kubrickian' : Stanley Kubrick, Steven Spielberg and A.I. Artificial Intelligence. *Screening the Past*, 42, ISSN [online] <http://www.screeningthepast.com/issue-42-post-kubrick-dossier/the-post-kubrickian-stanley-kubrick-steven-spielberg-adaptation-and-a-i-artificial-intelligence/> . Last Accessed: 01/12/2021

³ Abrams, Nathan., “Kubrick and Childhood” in Abrams, N., & Hunter, I.Q (eds.) *The Bloomsbury Companion to Stanley Kubrick* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021). 281-291

⁴ An art historical term for an image in painting whose purpose is to remind us of our or the subject’s mortality. This would frequently take the form of a skull included within the image.

⁵ Philippe D. Mather (2006) ‘Stanley Kubrick: Photography and Film’, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 26:2

⁶ Shary, Timothy & McVittie, Nany., *Fade to Grey: Ageing in American Cinema* (Austin, Tx: University of Texas Press, 2016)

⁷ Chivers, Sally., *Silvering the Screen: Old Age and Disability in Cinema* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011)

⁸ Miller, Cynthia J. & Bowdoin Van Riper, A., (eds.) *Elder Horror: Essays of Films Frightening Images of Ageing*, (Jefferson, NC: McFarland Press 2019)

⁹ Dolan, Josephine, and Julia Hallam. “Introduction: Screening Old Age.” *Journal of British cinema and television* 14.2 (2017): 119–124.

¹⁰ Ritzenhoff, Karen “*A Clockwork Orange* and its representations of sexual violence as torture: Stanley Kubrick and Francis Bacon” in Melia, Matt and Georgina Orgill (eds.) *Anthony Burgess, Stanley Kubrick and A Clockwork Orange* (London: Palgrave forthcoming 2022)

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Pezzotta, Elisa., “Kubrick and Time” in Hunter, IQ and Abrams, Nathan (eds.) *The Bloomsbury Companion to Stanley Kubrick*, (London: Bloomsbury 2021). 249

¹³ Barry, Elizabeth, “Samuel Beckett and the Contingency of Old Age” *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui* , Vol. 28, No. 2, Special Issue: Clinique et poetique du vieillir dans le theátre de Beckett / Clinics and Poetics: Beckett’s Theatre and Aging (2016), pp. 205-217

¹⁴ Krapp’s existence, captured via the analogue medium of magnetic tape – a medium which degrades and decays, anticipates the way our own existence is contained and archived in the digital ‘cloud’.

¹⁵ Abrams, Jerold J., “Kubrick and Philosophy” Abrams, N., & Hunter, I.Q (eds.) *The Bloomsbury Companion to Stanley Kubrick* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021). 243

¹⁶ Melia, M., “Kubrick and Britain” Abrams, N., & Hunter, I.Q (eds.) *The Bloomsbury Companion to Stanley Kubrick* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021). 55-65

¹⁷ Another example of Kubrick suddenly cutting between past and present a la *2001: A Space Odyssey*, albeit here in a less visually dramatic way.

¹⁸ McEntee, Joy. “Kubrick, Marriage and Family” in Abrams, N., & Hunter, I.Q (eds.) *The Bloomsbury Companion to Stanley Kubrick* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021). 200.

¹⁹ Melia, Matthew (2019) “Stanley Kubrick: Design and Costume Research: Paper Given at SCMS, Seattle, March 2019” [Online] <https://arttvfilm.wordpress.com/2019/04/04/a-clockwork-orange-stanley-kubricks-design-and-costume-research-paper-given-at-scms-2019-seattle-march-2019-a-work-in-progress/>. Last accessed: 21/1/2022.

²⁰ Abrams in Abrams and Hunter (eds). 245

²¹ Melia, M. “Eyes Wide Shut: a Cult film?” *Eyes Wide Shut: Behind Stanley Kubrick's Masterpiece* (Liverpool: Auteur/Liverpool University Press, forthcoming 2022).

²² Abrams, Nathan., *New York Jewish Intellectual* (New York: Rutgers Press 2018)

²³ Mamber, Stephen., 2017 “A Clockwork Orange – Review by Stephen Mamber” in *Scraps from the Loft*. [Online] <https://scrapsfromtheloft.com/comedy/a-clockwork-orange-review-by-stephen-mamber/>. Last viewed: 24/01/2022

²⁴ Porter, Kirsten “Elderly Neglect in Absurdist Drama: The Use of Metaphor to Invoke Social Reform” *Magnificat*, April 2008. [Online] <https://commons.marymount.edu/magnificat/elderly-neglect-in-absurdist-drama-the-use-of-metaphor-to-invoke-social-reform/>. Last viewed 08/01/2022

²⁵ Chung, Moonyung., “The Mother/Daughter Relationship in Beckett: “Footfalls and Rockaby” *Irish University Review* , Autumn - Winter, 1999, Vol. 29, No. 2 (Autumn - Winter, 1999), 285

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