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Kubrick’s Jewesses Onscreen and Offscreen

What value is there in considering the Jewess in relation to the art of Stanley Kubrick given that he never explicitly represented Jews and further that he favored homosocial environments that largely excluded women? When they do appear, Kubrick is not known for his positive portrayals of women. They are certainly largely peripheral in his films or relegated to the margins, limited to the roles of mothers, children, and whores with minimal subjectivity.¹ For example, his 1957 Paths of Glory featured only one female in a role where all she is required to do is sing to a room of leering men. Likewise, Dr. Strangelove, Or How I Stopped Worrying and Learned to Love the Bomb (1964), was noted for its complete lack of women other than one scantily dressed secretary who doubles up as a Playboy magazine centerfold. Kubrick was aware of this lack, admitting in 1966, “If I ever have a part, a decent part for a woman, which for some reason I never seem to write into films, she would certainly do it.”²

This article will initiate a discussion of how the figure of the Jewess onscreen, as well as the Jewish women with whom Kubrick worked, helps us to understand better Kubrick’s work and working processes. It will do so by utilizing the latest insights in the emerging field of Kubrick Studies. First, by engaging with the growing work on Kubrick’s Jewishness, as well as on Kubrick and feminism.³ Second, by referencing the “new historical turn,” which is based on exploiting material now deposited in his archive at the University of Arts, London, it will explore Kubrick’s films from a biographical perspective, in particular his personal and professional relationships with Jewish women. While it would be strange that in such a Jewish-dominated industry as Hollywood if Kubrick hired no
Jewish personnel, at the same time, it will be argued it is significant that several actors and other creative personnel employed by Kubrick were Jewish.

While seemingly an arbitrary choice, I have chosen Jewish women both as a continuation of my investigation into Kubrick’s Jewishness and how it expressed itself in his films. It is also a realistic and tightly defined first step towards recovering the labor essential to the process of making a movie, often elided in auteur-centered film studies, such as those of Kubrick, which often tend to emphasize the unique artistic aspects of a genius rather than the process of collaboration. By beginning to consider specifically those Jewish women with whom Kubrick worked, we take a crucial first methodological step towards critically re-evaluating Kubrick’s working practices and relationships, particularly with regards to (Jewish) women. Like many creative women in Hollywood, their role in the films they worked on has been marginalized. In the words of Aaron Hunter, “This marginalization perpetuates the single author, auteurist paradigm that dominates New Hollywood scholarship. It also helps maintain the notion that New Hollywood was fundamentally a cinema solely of creative men.” Such a paradigm is evident in the work of those academics involved in similar fields of study dedicated to the life of an individual (typically “canonical”) filmmaker.

By contrast, this article employs archival and biographical research combined with formal analysis of Kubrick’s films to argue not only that women’s authorial contributions can be discerned, but that those contributions were essential to the development of anything resembling a “vision” in the films. My intention here is not simply to reassess Kubrick’s work but also to centralize, or at the least de-marginalize, those Jewish women whose creativity and labor played a central role in developing vital aspects of Kubrick’s oeuvre, a
role that has been overlooked due to the historical framing of his work as one dominated by the figure of the male auteur director. To appropriate a term used elsewhere, this article will examine some of those “Jewesses who sweated” in the service of Kubrick’s films.

This material will then be followed by that drawn from the new Jewish cultural studies to argue that important characters in Kubrick’s work can be read as “crypto-Jewish.” First used by Leslie Fiedler in 1964, crypto-Jewish refers to protagonists who were in “habit, speech, and condition of life, typically Jewish-American, but are presented as something else – general American,” that is, reinvented as gentile or goyish in order to make them more universal. For Fiedler, there is no trope more “Jewish American” than these “hyper-goyim.” Other scholars have productively deployed this concept to “describe onscreen characters whose Jewish identity is ambiguous, hidden, or suppressed but hinted at through narrative gestures, personal qualities, or physical features and often by being played by a Jewish actor.” Specifically, it will deploy a hermeneutic strategy of reading Jewishness into a text beyond explicit representation with reference to the blossoming scholarship into the image of the Jewess on film. Previous work has explored the contrasting and desirable (typically to gentiles) “la belle juive,” that “exoticized female ‘other’” who “is depicted as submissive, passive and lascivious.” It has also focused on the erstwhile and negative stereotypes of the hag, the Jewish mother, and Jewish American Princess. These portrayals of Jewesses on screen positioned them as ugly and demanding, lazy and unproductive, and the reasons for the Jewish male’s defection from the fold. Where I began the process of exploring those women who can be read as Jewish, if not with certainty, in a range of films since 1990 in my 2012 book, this article proposes to extend that work backwards to examine the representations in the films of one giant of postwar
mainstream American cinema, Stanley Kubrick who, while Jewish, has only been acknowledged to be so belatedly.

In what follows, I explore relevant aspects of the source material for two of Kubrick’s films – *Lolita* (1962) and *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999) with a primary focus on how the fictional characters and their stories create Jewish moments in his films. I also suggest ways in which the representation of Jews connects with his Jewish cast and crew. I argue that knowledge of the source texts for Kubrick’s films combined with his casting choices, as well as how roles were performed in his films, among other factors, leave palimpsestic traces thus permitting us the possibility of reading the Jewess into the film albeit without certainty.

**Jewessess Who Sweated**

Did Kubrick have a problem with women? His films famously lacked them, and he seemed to have a rocky working relationship with leading actresses named Shelley: Shelley Winters in *Lolita* (1962), who he found difficult to direct, and Shelley Duvall in *The Shining* (1980). But is this an accurate reflection of a director (and father) who, as his wife admits, was surrounded by and surrounded himself with women? As Christiane Kubrick, his third wife, stated:

The man was surrounded by women his whole life. He had good relations with his mother and with his sister, he had three daughters and he was a far better mother than I was. He had no choice but to love the world of women. Stanley was fond of women and was an avid supporter of women’s liberation. When we met, in Munich,
he was the first man I had ever known who used to call his mother regularly and hold pleasant conversations with her.\textsuperscript{11}

Given the overwhelmingly textual focus of the study of Kubrick’s films, often divorced from their industrial and historical contexts, scholars have typically overlooked Kubrick’s creative collaborations in favor of finding primarily textual evidence for his misogyny. Consequently, the roles of his wives and daughters have been insufficiently examined, just as his creative relationships with other women throughout his career have been reduced to the few minutes of him berating Shelley Duvall that we glimpse in his daughter’s documentary film, \textit{Making The Shining} (1980). (As David Mikics notes, Vivian shot more than 100,000 feet of film, but the final cut is just thirty minutes in duration. \textit{The Shining}’s editor Gordon Stainforth remarked that Kubrick wanted the scenes cut out in which “he was warm and nice” and “what was left for the sequences of him shouting at Shelley in the snow.”\textsuperscript{12})

With the advent of the Stanley Kubrick Archive, however, it is now possible to test these judgements through his personal and professional relationships. The Archive has given scholars unprecedented insight into his working practices allowing us to consider in greater detail with whom Kubrick worked and how and how they actively contributed to the production of his films. As a result of new archival, biographical, and historical research, it is now being acknowledged that Kubrick “was surrounded by women and devoted to his wife and three daughters, all of whom worked in varying capacities on his films over the years, drawing on their individual artistic expertise.”\textsuperscript{13} Furthermore, as Mick Broderick states, “Kubrick collaborated professionally with women in all manner of business
(administrative, secretarial, nannies, writers, actors, etc.) and formed lasting relationships over decades.”

Many of these collaborators were Jewish women and, in this section, an overview of these collaborations will be provided with a view to facilitating a better understanding of the material circumstances of Kubrick’s productions.

The first major Jewish female influences on Kubrick were his mother and sister. Gertrude Kubrick [née Perveler] was close to her eldest child and only son and she indulged him. According to Christiane Kubrick, “She said that he took no interest in himself as a child. He was a gifted boy, brilliant and independent, and she, in her wisdom, succeeded in implanting in him a strong belief in himself.”

Despite living overseas for over three decades, Kubrick remained close to his mother. Evidence of this provided later in Kubrick’s career when, while filming The Shining (1980) in England, she visited him on set and is shown in Making The Shining asking Jack Nicholson about the different colored script pages. As the only extant footage of Kubrick at work, and featuring anything close to his personal life, this clip, however small, retains a singular importance. According to his driver and confidant, Emilio D’Alessandro, he called his sister, Barbara, in Connecticut nearly every evening.

We can certainly say that Kubrick had a history of working with Jewish women over the course of his long five-decade career, during which he also employed Jewish female family members both in front of and behind the camera on his films. This began with his earliest photography. Jewish photographer Diane Arbus took him under her wing, making a long-lasting impression on the young Kubrick, which can be detected at various points throughout his work. Arbus believed that “a photograph is a secret about a secret. The more it tells the less you know.” We can hear an echo of this in Kubrick’s explanation,
“I think for a movie or play to say anything really truthful about life, it has to do so very obliquely, so as to avoid all pat conclusions and neatly tied up ideas.” Furthermore, as Daniel Morris has stated, Arbus brought “to post-World War II photography the Jewish ethical concern with documenting the significance of the least among us,” an ethical concern which, it has been argued elsewhere, characterizes all of Kubrick’s oeuvre, still and moving. Her focus on society’s undesirables and outsiders can be seen in the protagonists of many of Kubrick’s films, particularly the early ones, such as the washed-up boxer and his taxi-dancing girlfriend in *Killer’s Kiss* (1955), the gangster and his motley crew in *The Killing* (1956), or those selected for execution in *Paths of Glory*. Furthermore, given that, as Dvana Metlić has pointed out, his “cinematic style was undoubtedly shaped during the years he spent as a staff photographer at *Look,*” one can suggest that Arbus undoubtedly shaped his future films. His use of masks, most notably in *The Killing* (1955), *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), and *Eyes Wide Shut* was, Metlić argues, influenced by Arbus who often portrayed disguised people. Her photograph *Identical Twins, Roselle, N.J., 1966* is uncannily echoed in the twin Grady girls in *The Shining* as is her *Puerto Rican woman with a beauty mark, N.Y.C., 1965* in *Barry Lyndon* (1975).

As Kubrick moved into the movie-making business, both of his Jewish wives played a significant role behind the scenes, as well as smaller roles onscreen, in Kubrick’s first three feature films: *Fear and Desire* (1953), *Killer’s Kiss*, and *The Killing*. Both had also previously appeared in his photographs. His first wife, Toba Etta Metz, was born in New Jersey in 1930. Kubrick and Metz met in high school where she was his sweetheart and they married in 1947. They lived together in Greenwich Village and no doubt she played a key role in this formative stage of Kubrick’s career. Described as “a beat
generation chick [sic],” one can infer that she introduced Kubrick to some of that bohemian culture, the influence of which can be seen in his later films, particularly *Lolita* (1962) and *Dr. Strangelove*. Indeed, the character of Vivian Darkbloom, as played by Marianne Stone, in *Lolita* resembles Metz. Metz also appeared in a *Look* magazine spread, “What’s Your Idea of a Good Time?” (December 10, 1946). She subsequently worked on Kubrick’s first feature film, *Fear and Desire* (1953), utilizing her secretarial skills to provide administrative support, and acting as the film’s dialogue director. She also appeared in the film as a native fisherwoman. Although Kubrick and Metz divorced during the making of *Fear and Desire*, she remained lifelong friends with his mother.

When Kubrick met and subsequently began a relationship with Ruth Sobotka in 1952, she, too, played a formative role in this key stage of Kubrick’s early career. Sobotka was born in Vienna in 1925 and immigrated to America aged 14. She studied at the American School of Ballet and danced with the New York City Ballet. Kubrick and Sobotka met when he was still married to Toba Metz when he photographed Sobotka for *Look* magazine in 1947 (“Meet the People,” January 7). Kubrick can also be seen, with Metz, as an extra in the 1947 film *Dreams That Money Can Buy* directed by Hans Richter in which Sobotka had a role. Kubrick and Sobotka married in 1955 and divorced in 1961, although they had separated in 1957. They may have only been together briefly but as Michelle G. Turner, who has researched Sobotka’s life, stated, “she was prodigiously talented, contributing substantially to Stanley Kubrick’s artistic and personal life.” Three years older than him, Vincent LoBrutto, Kubrick’s biographer adds, “Ruth really wanted to be his collaborator not just his girlfriend or wife.” Thus, Sobotka not only served as art director on Kubrick’s second feature film, *Killer’s Kiss*, she also appeared in it as a ballet
dancer, having been a student at Carnegie Tech where she studied stage design and having designed costumes for the theater and ballet including Jerome Robbins’ *The Cage* (1951). Sobotka, as Iris Kane, performs a balletic set piece at the heart of the film which she had also choreographed. David Mikics suggests of this performance

It’s hard not to see in Ruth’s *Killer’s Kiss* dance solo a premonition about the future of her relationship with Stanley. Iris gave up her dancing for her husband’s sake. In 1955, the year after *Killer’s Kiss*, Ruth left ballet so she could move to Los Angeles with Kubrick […] The movie sidelines [Iris] as much as Ruth Sobotka […] as much as she would find herself shunted aside by Kubrick’s burgeoning career. (27-28)

Sobotka was also the art director for Kubrick’s third film, *The Killing*. A story in the *New York Times* (1955) suggested she was the first female to receive such a credit on a Hollywood feature. James B. Harris Kubrick’s then producing partner recalls that “she wanted us to be right in there with us, a partner […] She would have liked to sit in all the script meetings, in decisions. She even wanted her name on the door […] She was a forerunner of a lot of the Women’s Lib.” But, as Mikics observes, above, this was not to be.

Sobotka’s influence, nonetheless, outlasted these early collaborations. As Mikics states, “Sobotka, emissary from the *Mitteleuropäische* artistic world, left a lasting mark on Kubrick.” She introduced Kubrick to art, ballet, and literature. It was during this time that Kubrick discovered the short stories and plays of Arthur Schnitzler and Stefan Zweig, writers he greatly admired, and both of whom he worked to adapt during his career. He
spent five decades attempting to adapt Arthur Schnitzler’s 1926 Traumnovelle (*Rhapsody: A Dreamstory*) for the screen, influencing all his feature films in the process, culminating in *Eyes Wide Shut* in 1999, which was “inspired” by Schnitzler’s novella. It was no coincidence, as has been suggested, that following Sobotka’s death in 1967 that Kubrick first moved to buy the rights to the novella. What is more, James Fenwick has argued that her influence is also demonstrated in Kubrick’s early themes and characters:

> Time and again the characters Kubrick created were failed artists trapped in doomed relationships. The latter was a theme that seemed to dominate his thinking in 1956, starting with the adaptation of *Love Is A Dry Season* and *Burning Secret*. It may well have been that the themes of love, marriage, and the anxiety of new-found romance preoccupied Kubrick as a result of his own disintegrating relationship with Ruth Sobotka.

This is evident in such projects as *Anxious Husband Prepares for His Bride, Jealousy, Married Man*, and *The Perfect Marriage*, which Mikics has explored in more detail, strongly implying that Sobotka had a much more malign influence on Kubrick’s view of Jewish women until his death. Infidelity is another theme of these early screenplays, echoing a suggestion from Christiane Kubrick that “their marriage did not succeed because Sobotka traveled a great deal and was not faithful to him.”

But by far, Kubrick’s longest and possibly most influential marriage was to Christiane Harlan, who was German and not Jewish. He met her while making *Paths of Glory* in 1957 and they were married shortly thereafter. Kubrick remained with Christiane
until his death in 1999, a relationship of over four decades. Born in 1932, Christiane came from a wealthy and artistic family, the daughter of opera singers and the niece of the notorious Nazi filmmaker Veit Harlan, who made *Jud Süß*, one of the most antisemitic films of the Nazi period. This aspect of the relationship was particularly fraught for the Jewish Kubrick, especially when the two filmmakers met face to face. Nonetheless, Kubrick had seen all of Harlan’s films, including *Jud Süß*.

Christiane, in her own words, came from “a state of murderers.” At the age of ten she, like all her peers, was inducted into the Hitler Youth. She and her family lived in the occupied Netherlands where they witnessed first-hand the mistreatment of Jews and she carried this “burden” since “childhood.” She continued:

Stanley took a great interest in my catastrophic family background. We spoke about it a great deal. People asked him, “How could you marry a German woman, especially one with a background like that?” I thought a lot about the fact that no one could have taken a greater interest in my family background than Stanley, who understood that I came from the other side, which was the opposite of his [background]. But he also knew that my generation could plead innocence: I was very young during the Holocaust, though at the same time old enough to remember everything.

Christiane’s contribution to Kubrick’s life and career as a partner, muse, and collaborator was huge. Kubrick was obsessed with all things German. Whether this was because he was a Jew growing up in the post-Holocaust era or because of his marriage, or
both, we cannot precisely know. But Christiane’s family background had a major influence on Kubrick. For Dalton Trumbo, who collaborated with Kubrick on Spartacus (1960), his marriage to Christiane was essential to understanding the director, “Stanley, who is thirty years old, has married a German. The question in my mind is this: Did he marry her because he loved her or did he marry her because he wanted to marry a German girl in order to punish the Germans (through her) for what they had done to the Jews.” He added that Kubrick “is a Jew, and he’s a man who hates Jews. He has said to me that the Jews are responsible for their own persecutions because they have separated themselves from the rest of humanity.”

Kubrick regularly employed close female and Jewish family members in senior positions on his productions. This accelerated from A Clockwork Orange onwards, when Kubrick signed a deal with Warner Brothers thus achieving the full creative autonomy he had been seeking since Spartacus in 1960. His eldest daughter, Katharina (b. 1953) was heavily involved in helping in the art department of Barry Lyndon (1975) and her artwork appears in Eyes Wide Shut. For The Shining (1980) she traveled to Alaska to scout second-unit locations and to the American Southwest to acquire Native American rugs and other objects to be used as set dressings. His youngest daughter, Vivian (b. 1960), was the heir apparent. As Mikics puts it, “Christiane Kubrick turned out to be less of a creative partner for Kubrick than his youngest daughter, Vivian, his protégé. Vivian, who appeared briefly as a toddler in 2001, became a director at seventeen, with a documentary about the making of The Shining, and her father urged to film a novel by Colette, a writer he much admired.” Vivian also worked behind the scenes in the art department on The Shining, as well as directing a documentary on the making of the film. She composed the music for
*Full Metal Jacket* using the pseudonym Abigail Mead (her father liked the name because it means “my father’s joy”) and filming a never-seen documentary about it. Kate McQuiston notes how his hiring of his daughter was part of a “notable” pattern of hiring of female composers, especially “considering that women represent a very slim minority in the film music industry.” Vivian’s connections led Kubrick to employ the Italian-Jewish Lisa Leone on *Eyes Wide Shut* as one of the film’s art directors and its production manager, helping to create the look of New York on a backlot in London (she also played a small onscreen part as the main character’s secretary). Kubrick’s daughters also appeared in front of the camera. Vivian featured onscreen in four of his films: as Heywood Floyd’s daughter, “Squirt,” in *2001*; as an unnamed extra in *Barry Lyndon* (1975) and *The Shining*; and as a news camera operator in *Full Metal Jacket*. Katharina and Anya also appeared in *2001* but their scene was eliminated in the editing process. Katharina did appear uncredited in *A Clockwork Orange* and *The Shining*, as well as in *Eyes Wide Shut*.

**Reading Jewish in Kubrick’s Films**

In terms of representing Jewishness onscreen, Kubrick’s modus operandi recalls earlier periods in the history of Hollywood. In Kubrick’s case, he mirrored those Hollywood executives from previous decades – the ones in which he cut his teeth – who feared that that they would limit the appeal of their films if they appeared to be “too Jewish.” As has been shown elsewhere, Kubrick never perceived himself as a *Jewish* director. He came from that generation of American Jews who wanted to be considered first and foremost American rather than Jewish. By distancing himself from his Jewishness, he reinvented himself as an “American” or “universal” director, rather than a Jewish artist focused solely on parochial
concerns. This was entirely in keeping with the Jewish cultural production in the immediate postwar period in America when submerging Jewishness by concealing one’s ethnicity became a commonplace and accepted form of Jewish assimilation, and a way to make it. This meant dispensing, on the surface of the film at least, any obvious Jewish cultural and religious markers.36

Therefore, Kubrick deliberately and systematically erased overt Jewishness from his source material. He repeatedly wrote Jewish characters out of his screenplays from The Killing, through Paths of Glory (1957), Spartacus (1960), Lolita (1962), A Clockwork Orange (1971), Barry Lyndon (1975), and Full Metal Jacket (1987), culminating in the removal of any overt reference to the ethnicity of the protagonists of Austrian playwright and novelist Arthur Schnitzler’s Traumnovelle for his final film, Eyes Wide Shut in 1999. Wanting to make his material mainstream, he toned down many of his more explicit references to Jews, Jewishness, and Judaism when writing, shooting, and cutting his movies. A serious filmmaker and a businessman, he felt constrained by the need to make a commercial return on his films.

To this end, Kubrick drafted and re-drafted his screenplays. During pre-production, and shooting itself, a range of script documents, often by various individuals, were generated. Kubrick left behind him an archaeology of many different iterations and versions of what his films could be. This writing process and the resulting screenplay texts formed a palimpsest, is described by Maria Pramaggiore as:

An ancient papyrus scroll that was repeatedly used, then washed, and even scraped clean in order to be written on again. These gestures are only partially preserved, however; they are subsequently overwritten themselves, as the palimpsest becomes
a tissue that reveals the layers of past and present. Despite the attempt to obliterate
the past, the visible evidence of previous structures (in this case graphic or linguistic
as well as architectural and social) remains.

She continued, “the palimpsest is an appropriate metaphor for Kubrick’s films”: layers of
new material were laid on top of the original scenario mirroring the “palimpsest of
biographical, cultural, cinematic, and historical layers of his mind.”

The original intentions of the authors of the source texts that Kubrick adapted and of
Kubrick and his collaborators, however, were not wholly erased by industrial, commercial,
and other considerations. Production documents in Kubrick’s archive demonstrate that
while Jewish elements were repressed for the final films, they were clear in the production
history, and their subtle footprints remained. Certain elements remained consistent while
others were interchangeable or discarded altogether. While some of the details of the source
texts of the various drafts of the screenplays, such as characters, similes, or other figures of
speech that were not ultimately visualized cinematically and hence may have disappeared
on the surface of the film text, they nonetheless remained beneath the surface of the film as
signs of directorial intention. This was amplified by casting choices and on-set
improvisation. Together these produced multiple, consistent but coded clues that suggest
that Kubrick retained this palimpsest of Jewishness, albeit a submerged stratum,
highlighting elements in the source texts that Kubrick read and understood as Jewish, and
hence allowing us to read elements within film – here Jewesses -- as Jewish.

A “hidden Jewish substratum” can thus be detected in Kubrick’s films despite the
absence of any such explicit “ethnic” designation. There are various clues in Kubrick’s
films which produce Jewish moments, that is, where, the viewer is given the possibility of “reading Jewish,” albeit not with certainty, for Jewishness is “textually submerged.” While, in theory, it can be argued that an actresses’ ethnicity and/or religion is irrelevant to the part she is playing, the “real-life” status of the actress behind the depiction often provides the director with an additional choice to her casting, as well as providing the viewer with an extra clue to reading Jewish in the conflation of cinematic role/persona with real life since “broader ideological factors influence casting decisions,” which, in turn, become relevant to understanding the film.

It must also be noted that, when interpreting the text, there is no significant distinction between actresses and others who happened to be born of one or more Jewish parents or grandparents and those who may in some way have performed or lived “Jewishness,” or as Jews. The only meaningful distinction to be made is that those who live or perform their Jewishness more overtly provide a more obvious mode of interpretation than those who do not. It is also irrelevant to the audience’s interpretation whether the actress conceives or experiences herself as a Jewess or Jewish unless she renders that in some way in her performance. What makes her visible as Jewish to a viewer is the knowledge which the viewer brings to the film but an audience does not necessarily interpret a representation in film meaningfully in relation to either such a self-conception on the part of an actor, say, or in relation to a stereotype invoked by viewers as a framework to such interpretation. Having said that, the Jewishness of the actress might determine her performance of a role in both conscious and unconscious ways, altering the broader meanings of a given film.
Furthermore, as Henry Bial, Jon Stratton *inter alia*, have argued, minority ethnic cultural texts are frequently marked by specialist knowledge unavailable to majority audiences.\(^4^0\) Such double coded contexts produce situations “in which certain audiences may experience the material Jewishly while others less familiar with ethnic tropes might not.”\(^4^1\) This approach relies on the director (and often the actors) placing, both consciously and unconsciously, characteristics, behaviors, beliefs, and other tics, all of which require a prerequisite and prior knowledge. In this way, directors (and actors/actresses) encode clues that can be read in terms of Jewish specificity, producing what Jon Stratton has called “Jewish moments,”\(^4^2\) but which a general audience decodes as universal. This requires a strategy employing a “complex of codes that cross-check each other,”\(^4^3\) of which the Jewish identities of actors/actresses is a key, but by no means the only part.\(^4^4\) Other important clues include historical and cultural references, looks, intellect, behavior, profession, names, physiognomy, foods, verbal and body language, phenotype, aural, visual, emotional or genre signs, speech patterns, accents, hairstyles, anxieties, neuroses, conflicts, and tradition. This strategy of “directing” or “acting Jewish” relies on the viewer to locate, identify, and decode those clues which can be both textual and extra-textual. Consequently, the individual viewer is given the possibility of “*reading Jewish*” but not with certainty.\(^4^5\)

Jewishness, then, is textually submerged in Kubrick’s films and hence detectable to those able to read the clues and/or those familiar with source texts. Contemporary re viewers certainly noted Jewish traces in his films. Ultimately, it will be argued that the underlying Jewishness evident in Kubrick’s source texts when combined with the various screenplay drafts together with casting choice, still penetrated through to the final screen
versions, even if explicit references to Jews, Jewishness, and Judaism were seemingly conspicuously absent from the films themselves.

**Crypto-Jewesses in *Lolita* and *Eyes Wide Shut***

For the remainder of the article, I will focus on the two films that bookend Kubrick’s career in terms of depicting female, crypto-Jewish, lead characters: *Lolita* and *Eyes Wide Shut*. As Karen A. Ritzenhoff has argued, “There is direct continuity from *Lolita* to *Eyes Wide Shut*, not only because female underage teenagers are sleeping with grown men, but also because women are shown in a predictable visual vocabulary.”\(^4\) Both films also feature mothers in what Catriona McAvoy and Ritzenhoff call “prostitute housewives” roles.\(^4\)

In Kubrick’s adaptation of Nabokov’s controversial 1958 novel, a series of clues combine to allow us to read Charlotte Haze (Shelley Winters) as crypto-Jewish. While there is no indication in the novel that she is Jewish, nor is there any such explicit evidence in the film, the ethnicity and previous roles of Winters in influencing Kubrick’s casting are hard to ignore. Winters was born Jewish, as Shirley Schrift in 1923. She had already played Natalia Landauer, a German-Jewish girl, in *I Am a Camera* (Henry Cornelius, 1955), based on Christopher Isherwood’s *Berlin Stories*, about the doomed intelligentsia in pre-war Berlin. In 1959, she won the Oscar for Best Supporting Actress as Mrs. Petronella Van Daan, a Jewish refugee from the Nazis, hiding out in the attic with the Frank family in Amsterdam *The Diary of Anne Frank*. Given the prominence and success of this role, only three years before *Lolita*, it surely must have been a factor of his consideration in her casting.
I argue that Haze is the embodiment of the stereotype of the Jewish American Mother that began to emerge in post-war American Jewish literature at precisely the moment that *Lolita* was published. Furthermore, she exhibits other stereotypical tics of the postwar American Jewess: her taste in clothing and interior decoration is vulgar; her house is littered with *tchatkes*; she lacks civility, decorum, and reserve, encroaching upon the personal space of others, unaware of their discomfort; she displays poor table manners; and she talks far too much.\(^48\) She is also, according to Mikics, “juicelessly *zaftig.*”\(^49\) In this respect, Kubrick may have been influenced by Stefan Zweig’s description in his *Burning Secret* (1911), a novella Kubrick worked on adapting into a film, of the Jewish mother as “one of those rather voluptuous Jewish women just before the age of over-maturity.”\(^50\)

Charlotte’s sexuality is depicted in an unflattering fashion. She spends most of her time in the film desperately making a pass at Humbert Humbert (James Mason). Humbert only marries her because, as a pedophile, it is her daughter he is after and Charlotte is desperate to attract his attention. She is presented as possessing a tacking, predatory sexuality, as connoted by her tiger and leopard-print patterns. In his close textual comparison of the novel and film, Greg Jenkins registered that “Kubrick’s few changes work to the detriment of Charlotte, magnifying her undesirable qualities […] the Charlotte of the film is more brazen than the original, practically launching herself at Humbert.”\(^51\) Charlotte is also sexually broad-minded, open to the possibility of partner swapping and she has also slept with the writer Clare Quilty (Peter Sellers):

Charlotte: Oh, hello. Hello, again! Oh, it’s certainly been a long time!

Quilty: It certainly has, yes.
Charlotte: Do you know that I’ve been the local authority on you ever since.
Quilty: Is that so? Well, that’s very sweet of you. Thank you so much.
Charlotte: I’ll never forget that intellectually stimulating talk that you gave to our club.
Quilty: Yes, a magnificent club. Really magnificent. Tell me one thing - are you a columnist?
Charlotte: No, no. Don’t you remember? That afternoon changed my whole life.
Quilty: Oh, well, how about that? [He chuckles]
Charlotte: You remember it. [She whispers in his ear]
Quilty: Did I do that? [She nods] Did I?
Charlotte: And afterwards, you know, I showed you my garden. And I drove you to the airport.

She is also friends with swingers -- John Farlow (Jerry Stovin) talks suggestively of “swap[ping] partners” -- and she doesn’t seem to be opposed to the idea in stark contrast to Humbert’s repulsion.

Charlotte originated in the mind of Nabokov but his Jewish wife, Vera, played her part. Née Slonim, she hailed from a Jewish family in St. Petersburg. She played an essential role in the novel’s composition and publication; described as Nabokov’s “silent partner,” she was his first reader, editor, and typist and saved the novel from incineration when Nabokov wanted to destroy it. As has been noted by various sources, the novel contains references to Jews both explicit and inexplicit (was Vera responsible for these, one wonders?), which leave a palimpsestic trace on the film itself in our reading of Charlotte.
While Nabokov (and his wife) may have created Charlotte, Kubrick reinvented her into a “sodden hausfrau” whose “motherly intrusiveness saps any possible sex appeal.” As Mikics puts it, “Kubrick, even more than Nabokov, makes Charlotte unbearably clingy.” He then attributes this to his relationship with Sobotka. “He must have remembered Ruth the suction cup, the wife who fastened herself to him relentlessly in her effort to become essential to her husband’s work.”

Charlotte’s daughter, the eponymous Dolores “Lolita” Haze (Sue Lyon) can also be read as crypto-Jewish. Her characterization in the novel deliberately played on the Hebrew legend of Lilith. Prior to composing *Lolita*, Vladimir Nabokov had written a poem called “Lilith” published in 1928. And while he claimed that there was no link whatsoever with his later fiction, *Lolita* does contain the line, “he was perfectly capable of intercourse with Eve, but it was Lilith he longed for.” In this vein, then, it is not a stretch to compare Charlotte to Eve and Lolita to Lilith, whose names are remarkably homophonous. A figure in Midrashic stories, Lilith typically appears as a demon that preys on women in childbirth and young children. In Medieval Midrash, she was popularized as Adam’s first companion who refused to submit to him and so was replaced by Eve. As Humbert reimagines Dolores as Lolita, she begins to transform into having demonic attributes. This connection is continued in the various screenplay iterations. One draft version of the screenplay makes this comparison almost explicit, “Their true nature is not human, but nymphic – that is, demoniac. One learns to recognize the little deadly demon among the wholesome children.” Although this version, by Calder Willingham, was not ultimately used, it still appears to have informed Kubrick’s characterization. Furthermore,
correspondence from the Kubrick Archive, during the production of Lolita indicates that Sue Lyons was being considered for the lead role of Robert Rossen’s 1964 film, Lilith.\(^57\)

In the film, Lolita is presented paradoxically as both guiltless and guilty. While Humbert and Quilty (Peter Sellers) use Lolita for their own ends for which she is prematurely sexualized, she is also depicted as a temptress. As Karen Lury argues, Lolita may not, in fact, “be as passive or as innocent as she is made out to be.”\(^58\) Karen A. Ritzenhoff adds, “Lolita is a teenage erotic object who has sexual appetite.”\(^59\) Owing to Production Code restrictions, Kubrick was careful not to eroticize Lolita too explicitly in the film. Its promotional material, on the other hand, was another matter entirely in its simultaneous infantilization and eroticization of the teen actress. This is particularly evident in the iconic poster image of Lolita seductively gazing at the camera with a pair of red heart-shaped glasses while suggestively sucking on a red lollipop. The image was captured by Jewish American fashion photographer, Bert Stern, who also took a series of frank pictures of Sue Lyon in bed wearing white clothing, her bare legs covered by the cartoon section of a newspaper (anticipating the Playboy magazine centerfold in Dr. Strangelove) or in a bikini spread out on a blanket while tanning in the sun. Thus, Stern’s promotional photography “created a visual vocabulary of teenage female sensuality in which Lolita is predominantly engaging with the viewer behind the camera, satisfying voyeuristic pleasure,” which is echoed in the film itself.\(^60\)

Kubrick’s final film, Eyes Wide Shut, is the culmination of his representations of palimpsestic crypto-Jewish female sexuality. This is because its source text, Arthur Schnitzler’s 1926 Traumnovelle, is a deeply Jewish novella a Jewish couple, Fridolin and Albertine, living in fin-de-siècle Vienna. In the lead roles, Kubrick cast real-life married
couple Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman and asked that they be “goyish.” On the surface, owing to a lifelong commercial considerations Kubrick did not depart from his impulse to “think Yiddish, cast British” (or Australian and American in this instance). Thus, Alice never seems to be meant to be read as Jewish. Furthermore, Kidman, as actress, conforms to the stereotypical shiksa in appearance while her character of Alice Harford conforms to the Jewish stereotyping of small-featured Gentile blondes as promiscuous and sexually adventurous. The switch of the name from Albertine, which alludes to the morally ambiguous girl who fascinates the protagonist throughout Proust’s very Jewish novel *In Search of Lost Time*, to Alice (as Albertine becomes in the film) seems to further erase the extant Jewishness of the character in invoking *Alice in Wonderland* to the effect that the character might be read as a highly sexualized version of that blonde more easily than she would be read as a Jew.

Nevertheless, the superficial whitewashing Kubrick gave the novella when turning it into *Eyes Wide Shut* could not remove the palimpsestic layer (or “stain”) of what Hitler described as “Jewish filth.” Those familiar with Schnitzler, as well as *Traumnovelle* (and Proust) thus bring this knowledge with them to the reading of the film (those that do not, do not) allowing for the palimpsestic trace of Albertine to be read as a crypto-Jewess on screen even in the guise of Alice. So, in choosing the name Harford, Kubrick adopted one that was a possible contraction of Harrison Ford, an actor with a Russian Jewish mother, a detail Kubrick surely knew.61

It is also significant that Alice is sexualized from the outset of the film. The very first non-title image is Alice stepping out of a dress to reveal her naked backside (she is only wearing heels). The viewer’s next image of her situates her in the bathroom -- itself
noted as a sign of Jewish cinematic space and signification, helping to establish the Jewishness of the character -- as she is sitting on the toilet. In an influential essay, Tim Kreider, argues that Alice is depicted as “just another classy acquisition for display […] a higher-class whore.” He continues: “Alice’s role as a voyeuristic object is defined by her first breathtaking appearance and by her first onscreen line: ‘How do I look?’ […] Being beautiful is Alice’s job.” Thereafter, everyone she encounters in the first fifteen minutes of the film compliments how she looks. We see her daily routine, which Kreider argues, is that of “a courtesan (or an actress), devoted to the rigorous maintenance of her looks,” and more than any other character in the film, she is associated with the mirror. Furthermore, “a series of insidious parallels throughout the film unmistakably suggest Alice’s real status—the wife as prostitute” (Charlotte Haze’s predatory sexuality is echoed in the motif of the stuffed tiger). Lee Siegel sees the various prostitutes that Bill meets as different incarnations of his wife, the one woman he is really seeking all along. Finally, Kreider argues, Alice is also “grooming her daughter Helena (named after the most beautiful woman in history) to become a high-ticket item like herself.”

The sexualization of Alice continues in the sequence when Alice confesses to Bill the story of the naval officer. She tells of her desire for a man she did not even know, a desire so strong she was willing to abandon her husband and only child for him.

He... he glanced at me as he walked past, just a glance. Nothing more. But I could hardly move. That afternoon Helena [their daughter] went to the movies with her friend and you and I made love, and we made plans about our future and we talked about Helena and yet at no time was he ever out of my mind. And I thought if he
wanted me, even if it was for only one night, I was ready to give up everything.


Her revelation visibly shocks her husband Bill and thereafter the power dynamic remains with Alice as he attempts to catch up with her sexually. Further, Alice’s confession creates in Bill a haunting mental image of her together with the officer and it is as sexually explicit as any in the film; indeed, Alice is the only unmasked, and hence clearly identifiable, woman shown to be engaged in sexual intercourse. Even those women in the orgy are masked and were cast to resemble her, conceived as her avatars.

Compounding the feeling of cuckoldry, Alice later recounts a dream of sexual abandon, but which simultaneously humiliates Bill. She is making love to the naval officer “and then I … I was fucking other men, so many... I don’t know how many I was with. And I knew you could see me in the arms of all these men, just fucking all these men, and I … I wanted to make fun of you, to laugh in your face. And so I laughed as loud as I could.” Kubrick asked graphic artist Chris Baker aka Fangorn to visualize these scenes which he did in some very explicit drawings, including Alice and the naval officer “fucking” while astride a horse. Understandably, Kubrick dropped these ideas – preferring to tell rather than to show, not least because of the practical difficulties involved in shooting the latter sequence – but it gives an indication of how he envisaged Albertine/Alice and leaves its palimpsestic traces on the finished film.

Significantly, the final words of Eyes Wide Shut – indeed, the final words of any Kubrick film – are given to Alice.
Alice: I do love you, and you know there is something very important we need to do as soon as possible?

Bill: What’s that?

Alice: Fuck.

Thus, even more significantly, Kubrick has wrapped up his oeuvre with an epithet but also an instruction to go forth and multiply, preferring, as Kurt Taroff notes, “the cruder ‘fuck,’ as opposed to ‘make love’ to describe the sex that will presumably renew the Harfords’ marriage.” What is more, he put those words in the mouth of the leading female character in what we can read as being the most crypto-Jewish of any of his films. In sum, Alice, plays a larger role in the narrative than any of Kubrick’s previous crypto-Jewish female protagonists, overcoming the passivity and lack of voice that characterized Charlotte and Lolita. She has agency in the story: she is willing to abandon her daughter and husband to satisfy the urge to sleep with a naval officer she does not even know. Aware of her individual needs and power, she refuses to conform to the simplistic stereotypes of wife and mother.

Kubrick’s other casting choices for Eyes Wide Shut cement this link between Jewish femininity, La Belle Juive, and unbridled sexuality. It is now been established that the women that Bill meets on his encounters were cast to resemble Alice/Albertine physically. Many of them were inspired by the models in the work of the Jewish photographer Helmut Newton. Many of them were played by Jewish women; for example, in his surgery, Bill examines a topless woman who is played by Ateeka Poole. She appears later as a masked participant in the infamous orgy sequence. Marion Nathanson, whom Bill encounters in an
erotically charged scene, is described as “a beautiful woman in her late thirties” in the published screenplay. She is grieving the loss of her recently deceased father and declares her love for Bill exuding an air of desperation despite being engaged to another man. Kubrick initially shot these scenes with Jewish actress Jennifer Jason Leigh (whose father, Victor Morrow -- born Morozoff -- and whose mother Barbara Turner were from Russian and Austrian Jewish families respectively). Ultimately, although Leigh was dropped from the film owing to clashing commitments and replaced by Swedish actress, Marie Richardson, her Jewish palimpsestic traces remain, especially given that the name Nathanson can be read as Jewish.

The themes of female Jewish sexuality continue with the next females Bill encounters. He exits the Nathanson apartment and wanders the streets of Greenwich Village where he is accosted by a prostitute, Domino, who invites him in for “a little fun” by asking, “Would you like to come inside with me?” Domino is based on Mizzi in the novella and given the location where Fridolin meets her, we can guess that she is Jewish. Furthermore, in fin-de-siècle Vienna, in which Traumnovelle is set, prostitution was construed as a Jewish trade by the Catholic majority: “the entire affairs of prostitution and of the white slave traffic are almost exclusively in the hands of the Jew.” White slavery became the dominant antisemitic rhetoric in newspapers, magazines and “scholarly” reports. As Sander Gilman notes, the Jew and the prostitute were believed to have a special relationship: “Both the Jew and the prostitute have but one interest, the conversion of sex into money or money into sex.”

In most big cities that contained a large, poor population of Jews (Warsaw, Odessa, Vilna, Cracow, Budapest and Vienna, for example),” Nelly Lass explains, “there were concentrations of Jewish prostitutes working in brothels
for Jewish pimps.”69 This is reinforced when we learn that Mizzi contracts syphilis as, during the late nineteenth century, syphilis was linked to Jewishness through the agency of the prostitute. A suggestive trace of Mizzi’s Jewishness remains in the film, as Bill and her stop to talk outside the “Joseph Kreibich Knish Bakery,” an exact replica of Yonah Schimmel’s Knishery, established in 1910, on Houston Street on the Lower East Side.70 Furthermore, Domino is played by Vinessa Shaw whose family’s original surname was “Schwartz,” and her ancestry on her paternal grandfather’s side is Russian and Jewish. Bill later meets a nameless young girl, very much resembling Lolita, who is shown consorting with two scantily dressed men. She whispers a sexual innuendo in Bill’s ear (“you should have a cloak lined with ermine”). It is revealed later how her father, Milich (Rade Sherbedgia), is more than willing to prostitute her out, and seemingly not against her will either. This actress is played by Leelee Sobieski whose maternal grandfather, Robert Salomon, was Jewish and her maternal grandmother of Ashkenazi Jewish descent.

Kubrick’s unused ideas also left their palimpsestic trace on the film. In 1979, as James Fenwick and David Mikics have uncovered, he considered reworking Traumnovelle as a story about a porn film actress, a “mystery girl” like Linda Lovelace or Marilyn Chambers, who wants to marry Bill, have a family, and to make him a good wife.71 Kubrick’s notes conclude: “Wife plays porno cassette with her at end to stimulate him.”72 Furthermore, through the 1970s and 1980s, the film was veering towards an erotic thriller which blended the transgressive sexuality of film noir with the development of softcore cinema. Screenwriter Terry Southern, who had worked on Dr. Strangelove and then penned Blue Movie (1971), dedicated to Kubrick, which was about a big-name director’s attempt to make a big-budget porn film, worked on adapting the novella, producing some explicit
gynecological dialogue. Kubrick also came up with some promotional taglines which very much played on this softcore pornographic sensibility.73

**Conclusion**

When it comes to Stanley Kubrick and his work, there appears to be a disconnect between his representation of crypto-Jewesses in his texts and those Jewesses with whom he lived and worked with in real life. He collaborated closely with Jewish women over the five decades of his career, including his two Jewish wives and daughters. He respected and listened to their views and they no doubt made their impact on his finished projects. And while the latest research demonstrates that Kubrick was receptive to the ideas of others and that those ideas had an impact on the finished product,74 in truth, I can only surmise here the level of influence each of these collaborations had on Kubrick’s work.

Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge the sweat and labor of these women in the creation of Kubrick’s films. The point being, if we are to really shift to a “Corporeal Turn” in new Jewish cultural studies, we must acknowledge the actual physical labor of Jewish women (widely defined) in the economy of film production, something often overlooked in the overwhelmingly textual emphasis of film studies, in order to progress the study of women too long omitted from Jewish studies.

Yet, in direct contrast, when it came to his casting choices and in those projects, which contained female Jewish actors, Kubrick was often less considerate. Taking an overview, it appears that Kubrick’s Jewesses related to an unbridled sexuality, as
prostitutes, desperate or abandoned women either looking for sex or being preyed upon, or precocious teenage schoolgirls. The women in Kubrick’s films are limited to the roles of mothers, children, or whores with minimal subjectivity and this is certainly pertinent when considering the crypto-Jewesses in his texts. In both *Lolita* and *Eyes Wide Shut*, it is noticeable that they conform to a range of Jewish stereotypes, most prominently the connection with sex. While many of the female characters can be read as Jewish, in Kubrick’s films they are anything but “belle” or “submissive.” They are predatory and repulsive. And they promote antisemitic stereotypes including the fat, invasive, crass Jewish mother and her daughter the sexually corrupt whore. Only by his final film, *Eyes Wide Shut*, does he create a character with agency, who drives the narrative, and is unafraid to speak her desires, but who is simultaneously sexualized and compared to a prostitute. Here it is tempting to blame Christiane Harlan, as apparently, the biggest female influence on Kubrick, and because many of the depictions of presumably Jewish women in the films can be viewed as virulently antisemitic in ways aligned with Nazi beliefs.

Finding traces of the largely hidden presence of Jewish women, especially Jewish mothers, in Kubrick’s *oeuvre* is not the sum total of a study of representations of Jewish women. But what is at stake is a step towards exploring nonexplicit Jewishness in the work of a Jewish director whose films were not considered Jewish. Furthermore, by attempting to demonstrate how an artist and actresses’ Jewishness enters the interpretive field of a text, I hope that this helps us to produce an illuminating reconsideration of Kubrick’s films by placing them within the canon of Jewish filmmaking and representation on the one hand and by extending the concept of the crypto-Jewesses to his films (where this has not been systematically applied yet) on the other. It is an important step for Jewish film studies
because previous scholarship has largely focused on analyzing the explicit textual representation of Jewish women on film and on the crypto-Jewess to a lesser extent. The films of Kubrick – and similar directors – offer us a raft of new material to explore in terms of non-explicit representation. Hence Kubrick serves as an excellent case study because he is a filmmaker with a long-standing mythos in popular culture and whose films continue to serve as templates.

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**Notes**

1 Taubin, “Stanley Kubrick’s Last Film,” 30.

2 Bernstein, “Transcript.”

3 Kubrick’s work has been notoriously resistant to a feminist analysis in that feminist scholars, such as Molly Haskell, Laura Mulvey, and Kaja Silverman, have preferred not to write about Kubrick, and hence he is not considered an object of study for feminist film scholars. Thankfully, however, this is beginning to change.


7 Ibid., 107.

8 Azagury, “La Belle Juive.”

9 See, for example, Erens, The Jew in American Cinema; Antler, You Never Call!; Abrams, The New Jew in Film; Reznik, New Jews?; Schwadron, The Case of the Sexy Jewess.

10 Karpel, “The Real Stanley Kubrick.”

11 Ibid.

12 Mikics, Stanley Kubrick, 146; Olson, Stanley Kubrick’s The Shining, 642.

13 Broderick, “Kubrick, Gender, and Sexuality.”

14 Ibid.

15 Karpel, “The Real Stanley Kubrick.”

16 D’Alessandro, Stanley Kubrick and Me, 74.

17 Abrams, Stanley Kubrick, 16.

18 Morris, After Weegee, 154; see also Abrams, Stanley Kubrick.


20 Ibid.


22 LoBrutto, Stanley Kubrick, 79.

23 Ibid., 79-80.

24 Turner, “Letters to the Editor.”

25 LoBrutto, Stanley Kubrick, 94.

26 Ibid., 115.

27 Weiler, “Precedent,” X5. See also Fenwick, Stanley Kubrick Produces.


32 Karpel, “The Real Stanley Kubrick.”


35 McQuiston, “Kubrick and Composing,” 149.

36 Abrams, *Stanley Kubrick*.


41 Schwadron, *The Case of the Sexy Jewess*, 120.

42 Stratton, *Coming Out Jewish*, 300.

43 Bial, *Acting Jewish*, 70.


45 Bial, *Acting Jewish*, 70.

46 Ritzenhoff, “Kubrick and Feminism.”

47 McAvoy and Ritzenhoff, *Selling Sex on Screen*, 160.


51 Jenkins, *Stanley Kubrick*, 43-44.


55 Kearns, “Kubrick’s ‘Lolita.’”


57 Anon. Harris-Kubrick Productions.

58 Lury, *The Child in Film*, 87.

59 Ritzenhoff, “Kubrick and Feminism.”

60 Ibid.


64 Baker, “Concept Artwork.”

65 Taroff, “‘No dream is ever just a dream,’” 145-157.

66 Kolker and Abrams, *Eyes Wide Shut*.


69 Lass, “White Slavery.”

70 Abrams *Stanley Kubrick*, 246.
Fenwick, *Stanley Kubrick Produces*; Kubrick, “Handwritten Notes.”


Fenwick, *Stanley Kubrick Produces*; Kubrick and Frewin, “Rhapsody promotional copy.”