

**EN PASSANT**

# Reflection Statement

The purpose of my short story, *En Passant* is to scrutinise the pursuit of artistic perfection and highlight the cost it has on the artist, actors and, ironically, the art itself. This is achieved through an exploration of the iconic 20th-century director Stanley Kubrick and his unique artistic approach to filmmaking. Despite his critical success, I ultimately aim to show that the cost of Kubrick's pursuit outweighs the advantages of his callously pragmatic approach to filmmaking. Kubrick's method involved cold efficiency, wherein he would tire actors into submission or feign companionship to accomplish his goals. These methods are represented through the extended motif of chess, from which Kubrick made a living in his youth and its correspondence to Kubrick's filmmaking. *En Passant* conveys the character of Kubrick in a contemporary historical fiction format, thus this short story is intended to challenge educated readers interested or involved in the ecology of creative processes. To target this audience, the Australian magazine, *Voiceworks*<sup>1</sup> would be an appropriate choice as it publishes works of experimental fiction from young writers allowing it to explore issues and ideas about the dilemmas of creativity with readers who would be receptive to its postmodern fragmented form.

Being a keen fan of Kubrick's filmography, particularly *Dr. Strangelove*<sup>2</sup>, my initial personal attachment led to the development of the focus and context whilst a generous portion of form has been shaped by the study undertaken in the HSC Extension and Preliminary Advanced English course. The vignettes of Vic Lang's life drawn from a traumatic childhood in Tim Winton's short

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<sup>1</sup> *Voiceworks*. 2017. Voiceworks. [ONLINE] Available at: <http://www.voiceworksmag.com.au/>. [Accessed 18 June 2017].

<sup>2</sup> *Dr. Strangelove: Or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*, 1964. [DVD] Stanley Kubrick, United Kingdom: Columbia Pictures.

story anthology, *The Turning*<sup>3</sup>, studied in Advanced English inspired the form of interlinking short excerpts to illustrate Kubrick's life. This steered the Major Work away from portraying the process in only *The Shining*<sup>4</sup> and *A Clockwork Orange*<sup>5</sup>, to incorporate Kubrick's personal life, the majority of his filmmaking career and secondary themes, such as Kubrick's camera fetish. Additionally, the HSC Extension Cold War elective shaped how thoroughly form and style was influenced by context resulting from my study of *The Spy Who Came in From the Cold*<sup>6</sup> and related text *Dr. Strangelove*<sup>2</sup> which both shape form to reflect Cold War ways of thinking. This is portrayed in my Major Work's experimental form, particularly in using film techniques and chess moves to allow the restricted third-person narration to delve into Kubrick's mindset, 'Stanley, tracking focus at Russell's figure zooms out to notice the laughing and clapping.'

A comprehensive understanding of Kubrick and his work was necessary in order to create an authentic historical setting to write the historical fiction for my intended audience. In researching content, I found numerous repeated anecdotes of Kubrick's life confirmed in Harlan's biographical documentary<sup>7</sup> with various eyewitness accounts such as Jack Nicholson describing Kubrick's abuse and neglect of Shelley in *The Shining*<sup>3</sup>. To uphold the historical authenticity of the story I consulted accounts on Kubrick, in particular, Duncan's<sup>8</sup> and Baxter's<sup>9</sup> respective biographies, which lay the framework for the story's setting, including many contextual elements

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<sup>3</sup> Winton, T, 2004. *The Turning*. 1st ed. Brisbane: Penguin Books.

<sup>4</sup> *The Shining*, 1980. [DVD] Stanley Kubrick, United States: Peregrine Productions.

<sup>5</sup> *A Clockwork Orange*, 1971. [DVD] Stanley Kubrick, United States: Polaris Productions.

<sup>6</sup> Le Carre, J, 1963. *The Spy Who Came in From the Cold*. 1st ed. Victor Gollancz & Pan: Penguin Books.

<sup>7</sup> *Stanley Kubrick: A Life in Pictures* (2001) Directed by Jan Harlan [Documentary]. United States: Warner Bros.

<sup>8</sup> Duncan, P, 2011. *Stanley Kubrick: The Complete Films*. 1st ed. New York: Taschen.

<sup>9</sup> Baxter, J, 1997. *Stanley Kubrick: A Biography*. 1st ed. New York: Perseus Books Group.

such as *A Clockwork Orange*'s<sup>4</sup> 'copycat crimes' or the '241 walkouts' of *2001: A Space Odyssey*'s<sup>10</sup> premiere.

Of particular importance in researching content was characterising Kubrick convincingly. This required a series of interviews and profiles provided by an anthology by Gene Phillips<sup>11</sup>. In this anthology, Bernstein's profile of Kubrick<sup>12</sup> was pivotal in the creation of *En Passant*. Describing Kubrick as 'the Master' and 'a chess hustler,' Bernstein recalls games of chess with Kubrick, comparing the mind games in chess with filmmaking. This established the chess motif in *En Passant*, solidified by Menand's observation that Kubrick sees 'filmmaking in terms of chess combinations: every move set up another move, the goal always a little bit beyond the other player's grasp,'<sup>13</sup> shown in the repetition, 'walk into position, into check'. In contrast, to other articles<sup>14</sup> illustrating negativity, co-writer of *The Shining*<sup>3</sup> Diane Johnson's biographical article states his 'reputation of monomaniacal difficulty' was unfair<sup>15</sup>, defending his perfectionism and how 'Kubrick was not fond of actors,' amplified by Kubrick's consideration that actors are 'emotion-producing instruments' in a 1969 interview<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> *2001: A Space Odyssey*, 1968. [DVD] Stanley Kubrick, United States: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

<sup>11</sup> Phillips, G, 2001. *Stanley Kubrick Interviews*. 1st ed. United States of America: University Press of Mississippi.

<sup>12</sup> Bernstein, J, 2010. *Playing Chess With Kubrick*. The New York Review of Books, [Online]. 2010 Issue, 2 at <http://www.nybooks.com/daily/2010/04/05/playing-chess-with-kubrick/>.

<sup>13</sup> Menand, L, 1999. *Kubrick's Strange Love*. The New York Review of Books, [Online]. 1999 Issue, 3 at <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/1999/08/12/kubricks-strange-love/>.

<sup>14</sup> Hamad, R, 2016. *The abuse of Maria Schneider in Last Tango in Paris just the tip of the iceberg*. The Sydney Morning Herald, [Online]. 1, 1.

<sup>15</sup> Johnson, D, 1999. *Stanley Kubrick (1928–1999)*. The New York Review of Books, [Online]. 1999 Issue, 2 at <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/1999/04/22/stanley-kubrick-19281999/>.

<sup>16</sup> Gelmis, J, 1969. *An Interview with Stanley Kubrick (1969)*. Visual Memory, [Online]. 1, 1.

Due to Kubrick's characterisation being my focus, I consulted Arthur Conan's chapter on characterisation<sup>17</sup>. This parallels Robert Graham's instruction<sup>18</sup> of 'knowing your character' and writing anti-heroes similar to Chekhov, thereby 'more kindly than they deserve.' This lesson in characterisation was augmented by the *Gotham Writers' Workshop*<sup>19</sup> posing a multitude of questions to better understand Kubrick's character. These exercises in character are shown in the piece where Kubrick feigns friendship with McDowell, specifically as Kubrick 'keeps rolling' despite McDowell's real danger. To present Kubrick's character, I chose a limited third-person narration after research into viewpoint<sup>20</sup> as this would allow the reader to 'be in the dark' amplifying suspense and provide multiple perspectives on Kubrick such as in the metaphor of Shelley's eyes having 'thin red cracks and fissures running across their gelatinous surface.' Importantly, when drafting *En Passant*, I was grammatically 'unsound,' in response, reading Williams' chapter 'The role of Grammar Police'<sup>21</sup> assisted me in 'heavy sentence construction.'

Furthermore, the short story *Picasso: A Shorter Life*<sup>22</sup> uses fragmented narrative, wherein scenes are split across Picasso's life using famous paintings as a conduit to reveal his sinister nature. I decided to write in a similar form, whereas most scenes revolve around Kubrick's films displaying Kubrick's monomaniacal flawed nature, reinforcing the central purpose. The experimentation of form in the historical-fiction short story *In the Light of that Dawn*<sup>23</sup> wherein

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<sup>17</sup> Conan, A. (2013) *The Art Of Writing Fiction*. 2nd edn. Routledge: Pearson Education Limited.

<sup>18</sup> Graham, R. (2007) *How To Write Fiction (And Think About It)*. Edited by Palgrave Macmillian. 1st edn. New York: Palgrave Macmillian.

<sup>19</sup> *Gotham Writers' Workshop: Writing Fiction*, Gotham Writer's Faculty, ed. A Steele, Bloomsbury, New York and London: 2003:267-270.

<sup>20</sup> Disher, G, 2001. *Writing fiction an introduction to the craft*. 3rd ed. Australia: Allen & Unwin.

<sup>21</sup> Davidlow, S. Williams, P: 2016. *Playing with Words: An Introduction to Creative Writing Craft*. 1st ed. United States: Palgrave.

<sup>22</sup> Scott, J, 2015. *Picasso: A Shorter Life*. *The Best Australian Stories 2015*, 15, 21-31.

<sup>23</sup> Major Work No.,26478391 (2015) "In the Light of that Dawn".

the author changes typography to draw the reader's attention echoes Zoe Fairbairn's advice <sup>24</sup>to 'experiment in writing styles and how they are read on the page.' Portrayed in *En Passant* with the 'script' format and the chess piece asterisks accentuating Kubrick's film-centric worldview and fastidiousness. To present this visual motif of chess, I used Foer's foregrounding of punctuation in his short story, *A Primer for the Punctuation of Heart Disease*<sup>25</sup>, as a model, where his short vignettes', "'reversible colon"' is used when what appears on either side elaborates the other side (...) Father::Death' which demonstrated an experimental twist on form which taught me where and how to incorporate a visual motif, such as chess. Importantly, Kubrick's ultimate discovery that humanity in art is profound, catalysed through the realisation that random improvisations can lead to creative scenes, is illustrated through his vow 'never to perform an epaulette checkmate again' and restrict artistic creativity. This leads to his death sequence, shaped by the lyrical and stylistic writing of Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion*, 'He fazes through his reflection, hypnotized by the manic parade'<sup>26</sup>, reflected in *En Passant*, 'Pink carpet, silver masks and black ambition.' This contrasts with the majority of my Major Work's economical and dry style 'his performance is more visceral now. Stanley's lips twitch and he keeps rolling,' inspired by Hemingway's gritty, clipped sentences in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, 'his face was working and he was biting his lips and his hands were white on his flail.'<sup>27</sup> This style reflects Kubrick's cold, economical filmmaking opposed to the lyrical sections conveying the beauty and life in art. Additionally, the tense setting descriptions in the short story *Blood and Water*<sup>28</sup> reveals different character's emotions, 'skull-socket windows' illustrating the

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<sup>24</sup> Fairbairns, Z, 2011. *Write Short Stories*. 1st ed. United States: McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc.

<sup>25</sup> Foer, J S, 2002. *A Primer for the Punctuation of Heart Disease*. 1st ed. New York: The New Yorker.

<sup>26</sup> Ondaatje, M, 1987. *In the Skin of a Lion*. 2nd ed. London: Picador.

<sup>27</sup> Hemingway, E, 1940. *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. 1st ed. United States: Charles Scribner's Sons.

<sup>28</sup> Bryson, S, 2012. *Blood and water*. 1st ed. Pg 75-93: Board of Studies NSW.

protagonist's discomfort. This is reflected in 'Spain's roaring heat' indicating the heated anger of Russell Metty as he impatiently resents Kubrick. In pursuit of conveying authentic historical detail, Mansfield's 1920 short story *Miss Brill*<sup>29</sup>, proved deeply valuable, 'white wine splashed over the Jardins Publiques,' which was echoed metaphorically: 'Washington Square Monument, a sepulchral stone arch which lured victims to the trees.' This narration is profoundly influenced by Newton-John's 2012 short story *Eliot's Awakening*<sup>30</sup>, particularly in his characterisation, 'salesmen were like sharks (...) in perpetual motion. Jim had an uncanny radar for stationary employees,' which helped extensively in my development of characters such as the tricolon describing Shelley Duvall: 'Shelley looked out the window, entranced, dark rings circled her eyes.' The cyclical ending wherein Kubrick plays himself at chess alludes to the simile, 'old man (...) pale as a spectre,' an idea heavily influenced by the cyclical structure of the HSC English Extension play, *Waiting for Godot*<sup>31</sup>, and the introduction and climax of Neil Gaiman's short story, *Other People*<sup>32</sup>, where 'Time is fluid.'

Importantly, early readers have raised the notion that, while effective, the style is almost too relentlessly clipped. Therefore, some variety, such as the sibilance in the 'Eostre's River' vignette 'stars soften before Apollo's chariot', was added to break up the hammering nature of the prose and reinforce the idea that, despite Kubrick's inhuman approach to filmmaking, life creeps in formed through improvisation and actor intuition.

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<sup>29</sup> Mansfield, K, 1920. *The Garden Party and Other Stories*. 1st ed. n.a: Constable & Robinson.

<sup>30</sup> Newton-John, P, 2012. *Fault Lines - 'Eliot's Awakening'*. 1st ed. Australia: n.a.

<sup>31</sup> Beckett, S, 1952. *Waiting for Godot*. 2nd ed. New York: Grove Press.

<sup>32</sup> Gaiman, N, 2006. *Fragile Things: Short Fictions and Wonders "Other People"*. 1st ed. New York: William Morrow.

In this way, independent research has supported the development of *En Passant* to manipulate form and content to depict the pursuit of perfection in art and its costs, particularly alluding to the integral role of humanity. Kubrick's life was one of success and hardship, and with *En Passant* I hope to challenge predefined concepts and ideas in the ecology of artistic processes today.