

Themes in Kubrick's Films

Jealousy

Introduction As a director interested in the darker side of humanity (mostly men, but also women), Kubrick's films often feature the powerful emotion of jealousy. In those films, jealousy appears as the dangerous alter-ego of love, a powerful impulse that is selfish and often masks a sense of male inferiority. One cannot be jealous without loving, it is often said, but Kubrick's films show us that a jealous lover is as dangerous as a vengeful man.

Killer's Kiss The love triangle in this early film pits gangster Vincent against boxer Davey for the affections of dance-hall girl Gloria, who is Vincent's employee and Davey's neighbour. After Vincent sees her with Davey, he becomes jealous—after all, he is her boss, and Davey is just a washed-up fighter. Vincent becomes even more possessive when she rejects him in favour of Davey. Angry and frustrated that she will not yield to his advances, Vincent sends his thugs to 'take care' of his rival. They end up murdering the wrong guy, which then sets up the showdown between the male competitors. It all began, with a casual glance, when Vincent saw 'his girl' talking to Davey.

The Killing As in *The Killing*, the jealous man in Kubrick's next film is a flawed man. Little George, the meekest member of the criminal gang assembled by Johnny for his perfect heist, is in thrall to his beautiful, sexy and unfaithful (who could blame her?) wife, Sherry. George's need to control Sherry proves to be the Achilles heel in the meticulously planned theft at a race track. Sherry uses his jealousy to get him to reveal the day of the theft, thereby allowing her lover to confront the gang. And when George realizes that she has a lover, he goes insane, starts shooting and everything unravels from there. Again, jealousy is shown to be a fatal weakness in a man.

Lolita A more extended treatment of this problem is found in *Lolita*. The mild-mannered Humbert, middle-aged professor of something, is knocked off his feet when he sees young, lovely Lolita sunbathing in a bikini. From that point onward, he is consumed with his secret desire for her. He writes about her in his journal, he gazes at her voyeuristically behind plants and he tries to control her every move. He does have sex with her and thinks he gains 'possession' of her when they go away and live in Ohio, but his jealousy never stops. When he finds out, at the end, that he has been made a fool by her secret love affair with Quilty, Humbert goes into a murderous rage. By trying to control her, he had done the opposite and driven her away. In this film, Kubrick suggests that jealousy is poisonous because it kills the very thing that the jealous person wants to possess.

Eyes Wide Shut Bill, a successful doctor in New York, is happily married to Alice, an attractive young woman. Or so it seems. Soon, his jealousy is aroused when she confesses to having sexual fantasies with a near-stranger. As this marital-bed conversation develops, Alice becomes angry that he has never become jealous of men who might desire her. Now, in a twist of Alice's logic, jealousy has become a measure of her husband's true love for her. Next, Bill's jealousy of her stirs his own desire for sexual adventure and he nearly, but never actually, commits adultery. In this, Kubrick's last, film, the director explores the complexity of jealousy beyond the simple idea of possessiveness.