The Problems with Lolita (1962)

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Chapter 4

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James Fenwick

For sixty years, *Lolita* (1962) has been reviewed and interpreted as a minor masterpiece, a psychological portrayal of lust and desire, a vision of cinematic artistry, and an important example of adaptation.[1] But what has largely been overlooked is how *Lolita* is a film that normalises the predatory behaviour of a paedophile, potentially allegorises its own production, embodies exploitative and abusive cultures of production in Hollywood, and represents the ongoing uncritical (non-feminist, western, director-centred) use of auteur approaches in academia.[2] This chapter argues that it is time to fully acknowledge the problematic status of *Lolita,* both in terms of its representation of a relationship between an adult and a minor, and in terms of its production, with archival evidence available in the Stanley Kubrick Archive (the SKA) at the University of the Arts London that reframes understanding of the film and, in particular, the treatment of Sue Lyon.

In order to contextualise the approach taken in this chapter, it is necessary to briefly critically reflect on the work of scholars involved in the study of those films associated with Stanley Kubrick and the methods adopted to date. The chapter will then progress to outline alternative approaches, adopting a critical feminist use of archival sources by reading against the grain to demonstrate the ways in which archival methods can reframe the textual understanding of films like *Lolita*.[3] The chapter considers the material and social realities of *Lolita*'s production and the lived experiences of those that worked on the film, and discusses how the film itself—that critics, academics, and audiences have watched, interpreted, discussed, and 'canonised'—can be perceived as the visual and material evidence of its very problems. The chapter builds upon the author's previous work in this area,[4] the long-overdue feminist interventions of Karen Ritzenhoff,[5] co-editor of this volume, and the intellectual

framework of feminist scholar Stefania Marghitu.[6] In doing so, the chapter considers not only the problems with *Lolita* but the wider issue of the problems with film and media studies and discussions of male film and television auteurs.

The chapter intervenes in studies of *Lolita*, and in the growing field of Kubrick studies, following recent allegations against James B. Harris—the film's producer and Kubrick's business partner at the Harris Kubrick Pictures Corporation—that he had sex with Sue Lyon when she was only fourteen years old.[7] The chapter also intercedes following revelations about Kubrick's own working practices towards women on his films.[8] As such, the importance of the chapter must be placed within wider recent social and cultural contexts of the #metoo and Time's Up movements and charities that have formed in response to the historic and contemporaneous widespread, systemic, and institutionalised sexual harassment, assault, and rape of women and children in the entertainment industries. Therefore, at the centre of this chapter are the structural issues of men exuding power and control over women, the problematic construction of film history from the perspective of those men, and the intellectual responsibility of academics to challenge those structures of gender and sexual inequality, exploitation, and abuse.

The *Lolita* Legacy

Lolita's enduring legacy is the image of Sue Lyon, the fourteen-year-old girl who played the title role, in a bikini, wearing heart-shaped sunglasses, and sucking a lollipop. It is a pervasive image that has impacted across twentieth and twenty first-century culture, fashion, photography, and even pornography.[9] The image, part of a series of photographs taken by Bert Stern—fashion photographer and Kubrick-friend—of Lyon shortly after she had turned fourteen, is loaded with sexual connotations. As cultural and fashion studies scholar Morna

Laing argues, it has become a "visual shorthand for a 'young, sexually available girl.'"[10] The image has been an enabler of the paedophilic gaze, contributing to the normalisation of the sexualisation of young girls and the sexual gratification of men looking at such imagery.[11] Indeed, the link between *Lolita* (both the book and film) and paedophilia is often made within the media,[12] including most recently highlighting how convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein informally nick-named his private jet the "Lolita Express".[13] At the same time, however, the media is also culpable of engaging with, celebrating, and furthering the sexualisation of young, pre-pubescent girls. And in Hollywood, former child stars such as Natalie Portman have spoken out of the fear, and realities, of sexual assault by men in the entertainment industries (and beyond) due to the way in which young girls have been represented, analysed, and portrayed as sexually available objects.[14] As Portman revealed in one interview, "I was definitely aware of the fact that I was being portrayed […]as this Lolita figure."[15]

Lolita the film, and the images of a sexualised child it generated, has left a definite and damaging legacy. However, the role of the two men most responsible for this legacy and impact—James B. Harris and Stanley Kubrick—is typically overlooked. Yet, Harris and Kubrick were instrumental in the creation, evolution, and promotion of the "Lolita image", as they themselves termed it. This leads to the question of why the Kubrick studies community continues to uncritically commemorate the film, despite the indications that it has contributed to the wider sexualisation of young girls in the media and in the entertainment industries. The costs of continuing such an approach, avoiding and even marginalising its problematic construction of gender and sexuality and its exploitative conditions of production, is to exonerate Harris and Kubrick of culpability and to allow dominant, male, auteur-centred histories to erase the experiences, narratives, and exploitation of women like Sue Lyon and the women sexualised in the "Lolita image"—like Natalie Portman—that came in her wake. What is required are critical feminist approaches that deconstruct the problems of the film

and its production and signal the ways in which *Lolita* and its producers contributed to wider systemic and structural inequalities and abuses in Hollywood.

Studies of the book from which the film is adapted (Vladimir Nabokov's 1955 novel of the same name) have adopted—at times—much more nuanced approaches and even critical feminist approaches. Indeed, feminist scholars have reframed the textual interpretation of Nabokov's novel by analysing and reading it from the perspective of Lolita. In doing so, feminist literary scholars have reconsidered the novel from the point of view of "a child incest victim."[16] Lawrence Ratna (see Chapter 8 in this collection) has applied these feminist approaches via a psychological analysis, arguing that Nabokov's book provides a detailed account of the child grooming process, with a clinical reality underpinning the story. Ratna states, "the action in Nabokov's novel amounts to a detailed description of the process of grooming and abuse of a 12-year-old girl named Dolores (Lolita). His description of the evolving cognitive processes of a paedophile is one of the most revealing in literature."[17] What these approaches emphasise is that the story of *Lolita* is one of an adult man grooming and abusing a minor, regardless of its literary qualities.

Another key strand of scholarship, often involving a comparative analysis of the book and the film, has focused on adaptation, considering issues of censorship and the "pornographic" nature of the book versus the film, building upon wider arguments at the time of the book's publication of the degradation of popular culture with an increase in the representation and discussion of sex.[18] Some, like film and media scholar Sarah Miles Watts, have even taken the approach of blaming the film for reducing the story to that of child abuse, arguing that Kubrick and Harris's adaptation loses the poeticism of Nabokov's work.[19]

Adaptation has been at the core of approaching the study of the film within the Kubrick studies community. Yet, in contrast to the arguments of scholars like Watts, there is a tendency within Kubrick studies to suggest that the film was not sexually explicit enough,

building on a comment made by Kubrick in later life that he, "probably wouldn't have made the film" if he'd realised the levels of censorship involved.[20] As a result, film and media scholar Victoria Duckett suggests that the film was a failure, stating: "The issue of film censorship is relevant to this."[21] Duckett goes on to argue that Kubrick authors an original film, one that highlights the comedy and humour in Nabokov's novel. This is an argument picked up by translation studies scholar Patrick Zabalbeascoa, who argues that humour is used to allude to sex, and that both Kubrick and Nabokov agreed that farce could be used to subvert censorship rules.[22] Zabalbeascoa makes the point that academics should be non-judgmental of the film's subject matter, while at the same time arguing that the film is "quality" and Kubrick a genius artist, stating: "Kubrick shares with Nabokov the curse of controversy and public outrage or incomprehension as a delaying factor in achieving full-deserved acknowledgement for the value of their art."[23] He concludes that claims that the film is controversial are made without any supporting analysis and that the controversial aspects of the film must be overlooked: "Leaving aside morbid controversy, Nabokov's (1955) and Kubrick's (1962) *Lolita* can be regarded as works of art that are about much more than a story of paedophilia."[24] But this line of argument itself overlooks the fact that the lack of such analysis is arguably a result of academic avoidance, an overinvestment in auteur-centred analysis of the film, and the ongoing erasure, marginalisation, and silencing of women, particularly Sue Lyon.[25] It is a line of argument that exhibits the long-standing tendency in academia of auteur apologism.

Auteur Apologism and Women's Film History

Stefania Marghitu's work on auteur apologism sets out a framework in which critics, academics, and fans adopt a position that counteracts critical feminist approaches, feminist

movements, and women's stories of sexual harassment, abuse, assault, and discrimination in the entertainment industries or in how they are represented on screen. This apologism takes the form of suggesting controversy, problematic behaviour, and exploitative practices are a normal and required aspect of the male auteur. As Marghitu argues, auteur apologism is, "the separation of the art from the artist, underpinned by the claim that a problematic identity is a prerequisite for creative genius."[26] Marghitu focuses on a range of examples, including comedian Louis C.K., and directors Roman Polanski and Woody Allen. In the latter case, Marghitu argues that there are those who dispute the accounts given by Dylan Farrow, Mia Farrow's child, that Woody Allen abused her when she was seven years old, casting doubt so as to continue celebrating his films: "Cases of *auteur* apologism seem to thus revolve around what facts or legal disputes each individual selectively chooses to highlight, dependent on individual selective memory and a dangerous cultural amnesia."[27] For example, by selectively ignoring Dylan Farrow's testimony against Woody Allen, it overlooks the wider problematic representation of relationships between adults and young girls in Allen's broader body of work, most obviously in *Manhattan* (1979); the latter film has at its centre a story in which Woody Allen plays a writer that is having a relationship with a 17-year old girl. But when the experience of Farrow is acknowledged and incorporated into the wider narrative about, and even analysis of, Allen's films, it reframes understanding of them and him. The recent documentary *Allen v. Farrow* (HBO, 2021) included archival evidence of Allen's repeated fixation on sexual relationships between his fictional alter ego and young girls. As such, the abuses and exploitation of which he is accused fundamentally reframe the way in which his films are understood.

Marghitu concludes that it is the intellectual responsibility of academics to incorporate these accounts of abuse, harassment, and other forms of exploitation of women into film history and into the histories of male film and television auteurs. To do so will

emphasise the long-standing, and ongoing, systemic and structural gender inequalities and discrimination that underpin global entertainment industries and contribute to a wider feminist activist project, as Marghitu highlights:

> Feminist film and media scholars will thus persist in interrogating the cultural habit of *auteur* apologism in order to expose the ways that the *auteur* is not merely a product of individual genius, but, more importantly, is a product of systematic, cultural, and industrial inequality that keeps women and minorities subject to marginalization.[28]

According to Marghitu, it is not appropriate to continue auteur-centred, textual analysis of films like *Lolita* that erase the problematic issues of representation and avoid and overlook its exploitative conditions of production. To insist that the film (and the book) are simply great works of art by great artists, and that controversy and problematic identities should be accepted as part of that, is irresponsible.

Women's film history takes a range of approaches to foreground the role and centrality of women in production processes, the experience of inequality, discrimination, harassment, and abuse, and to recover forgotten, overlooked, and marginalised voices and testimonies. The groundswell of work by feminist scholars in this area has involved archival research, reframing archival collections, rethinking archival curation, and undertaking oral history. This has included: the Women's Film and Television History Network; the frequent Doing Women's Film History conferences; film historians Vicky Ball and Melanie Bell's "History of Women in British Film and Television Industries" (2014-2017) project; feminist film historians Shelley Cobb and Linda Ruth Williams' "Calling the Shots: Women and Contemporary Film Culture in the UK" project, and much more besides. Collections such as *Doing Women's Film History: Reframing Cinemas, Past and Future* (2015) and special

journal issues, such as the "Structures of feeling: contemporary research in women's film and broadcasting history" (2020) issue of *Women's History Review* have highlighted the empirical methods that have been adopted, with a particular focus on archival methods.

The urgency in adopting critical feminist approaches to the archive is clear by how archives such as the SKA foreground the history, narrative, and experience of Stanley Kubrick. Yet, the archive itself is replete with gaps and absences. What this has led to is the silencing of women involved in the production of those films associated with Kubrick, whether technical, administrative, or creative labourers. The film history and gender scholars Vicky Ball, Pat Kirkham and Laraine Porter argue,

> Just as it is a political act to draw attention to racism and sexism that keeps certain groups of people out of particular areas of work, or radically restricts their access to it and affects their experiences in work, it is also a political act to lay bare the extent to which women's history in the creative industries has been erased and lost. This can act as a cautionary tale and inform future research and archiving policies and initiatives.[29]

Holding to account and applying critical feminist approaches to a film like *Lolita* and a "canonical" auteur like Kubrick is not about taking judgemental positions, as Zabalbeascoa argues, but rather about acknowledging that all culture is a political act and, by extension, so too are archives: archives are the contested site of power, identity, and historical narratives.[30]

Feminist scholars such as Frances Galt, Melanie Bell, and Christine Martin have approached the gaps and absences in archives through a combination of reading against the grain and reading around their subjects. For Martin, this has involved analysing archival documents in a way in which they were not intended. As Martin states, "women are pervasive

in the archival record, especially–but not exclusively–in media industries. A lack of named collections does not equal a lack of archival sources."[31] Martin's work has involved recognising the labour behind many of the archival documents in media archives, uncovering the hidden history and labour of women secretaries, administrators, and assistants. Melanie Bell adopts an approach of "reading against the archival grain" to uncover and evoke the experiences of women media labourers (creative, technical, and administrative) through a range of archival documents, locating their labour in archival ephemera (notes, progress reports, letters).[32] Frances Galt's approach of "reading around" the research subject involves working outwards across of range of sources to "reconstruct women's experiences."[33] These critical feminist approaches not only recognise and recover the histories of women in film and media, but also allow for the reframing of the dominant male auteur histories, thereby contributing to Marghitu's call to incorporate these hidden, overlooked, and marginalised experiences and narratives into the historical record.

Conditions of Production

It is possible to approach *Lolita* from the perspective of silenced women like Sue Lyon, who played the title role. Lyon is someone that has been marginalised within film history—to an extent, she is totally absent—despite being one of the leading child stars of the 1960s. Indeed, Lyon's forgotten status meant that at the 2020 Academy Awards, taking place two months after her death in December 2019, she was not mentioned in the "In Memoriam" tribute. Many others who had died just shortly after her were, including Kobe Bryant, killed in a plane crash in January 2020, and Kirk Douglas, who died just days before the Awards ceremony on 5th February. Both were powerful male celebrities with histories of alleged sexual abuse and assault. In contrast, Sue Lyon was a woman that had been exploited,

mistreated, and used by Hollywood producers and the media, contributing to a life of mental health issues and drug addiction, something she hinted at during a rare interview in 1996: "My destruction as a person dates from that movie [*Lolita*]."[34] Perhaps conveniently for many at the Academy Awards, Hollywood forgot Sue Lyon and what the industry did to her in the "name of art".

Why has Lyon been forgotten and who is responsible for this historical silencing? The film's producers, Harris and Kubrick, have played a key role, as have the Kubrick estate in the years since Kubrick's own death in 1999. As discussed in "The Problems with Kubrick: Reframing Stanley Kubrick Through Archival Research," a forthcoming journal article by this chapter's author in the *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, the official travelling Stanley Kubrick exhibition seeks to mediate the sanctioned legacy and history of Kubrick and his films.[35] But it presents a sanitised version of history, selectively curating objects from the SKA that erase from the record inconvenient truths and side-lining the role, voice, and agency of women (as well as the voices of other marginalised communities). And as argued in "The Exploitation of Sue Lyon", "an alternative exhibition exists within the SKA, one that can present a counter narrative and restore the marginalised, overlooked, and forgotten experiences of women."[36] This alternative exhibition in the SKA directly relates to the conditions of production in which women like Lyon found themselves.

Material in the SKA evokes a moment in time of Lyon's life when she had just turned fourteen. While her archival presence is minimal (which immediately raises further questions about the silencing of Lyon and the way in which scholars must recognise the gaps, absences, and silences of archives, rather than resorting to privileging Kubrick), the material traces that do remain indicate the relationship between her and the film's producers. From the moment she was cast in the film, she was closely guarded and controlled by Harris and Kubrick. They had signed her to an exclusive seven-year contract, in partnership with Seven Arts, and

wanted to craft a unique image—the "Lolita image", as Harris termed it—in order to maximise her financial potential at the box office.[37]

There are items in the SKA that can indicate the kind of sexualised environment that Lyon inhabited, an environment facilitated by the film's producers. Take, for example, a letter that Lyon wrote to James B. Harris in 1960, in which she pretends to be the Head School Girl at the Elstree School for Girls and is looking to be disciplined by an adult teacher. It is a letter filled with innuendo. She says that "having assessed your qualifications we feel your qualifications are very qualified" and appoints him "Exclusive Superintendent of the Elstree School for Girls District." She says Harris will receive a salary of "10 pieces of gum." She concludes that Harris would, "cope with our student body" and that, "since the boys at our school cause us so much trouble, we need a man to supervise with a strong hand."[38] The letter itself does not suggest by any means some kind of sexual relationship between Lyon and Harris, but when placed within wider contexts, and against other archival ephemera and other sources, it can be read as hinting at the kind of sexualised environment and language that Lyon experienced. As Lyon said in 1996, "Lolita exposed me to temptations no girl of that age should undergo."[39] In a rare interview given in 1980, Lyon opened up about her time working on *Lolita*, including her initial encounter with Harris and Kubrick:

> I went on an interview to Stanley Kubrick and Jimmy Harris and I had been told it was for a television series. And I went in and usually in Hollywood when you're in interviews, err, they say, hello, what's your name. Thank you very much. Bye bye. These two said things like, erm, where, er, do you date? Where do you go? What do you do? What time do you come home? What does your mother think of that? Err,

> where did you buy that dress? They asked me questions that, you know, that I would have to answer, that I did answer. […] They kept me in there for a whole hour.[40]

Lyon implies that the casting process was different to what she had anticipated. From the moment Lyon entered the production environment of *Lolita*, in this interview she hints at how she was being sexualised by the film's producers. This extended across the entire casting process and the way in which those being auditioned were referred to as "nymphets". There are signs that the production environment was one of sexual exploitation of Lyon throughout, part of a process of transforming her into the "Lolita-image" to sell to audiences and other producers. While this was central to the production conditions of *Lolita*, the aim was to clearly extend the image beyond that one film as part of Lyon's star image and her contract with the Harris-Kubrick Pictures Corporation and Seven Arts. As Lyon goes on to state in the same interview: "I think initially, before they knew me, that they felt that they were going to build a star and in the fashion of the old studios, er, create an image and it would go on from there."[41]

Correspondence in the SKA evokes, through language being used by the film's producers, how Lyon was being treated and controlled in this process of creating a star. Harris, for example, wrote to Vera Nabokov to state that,

> we are making an effort to introduce Sue Lyon to the world, but only through photographs, the shooting of which are completely controlled by Stanley and myself. [...] we are also trying to create the "Lolita image" about the girl and this would immediately be destroyed by interviews which would reveal her as being completely opposite in real life to the character.[42]

Harris' language indicates a process of silencing Lyon, controlling access to her, and manipulating her media image. The producers did not want the world and the media to receive Sue Lyon as Sue Lyon, but as Lolita and a sexualised child star. It can be argued that this was inevitable, that it was the role of the producers to do this, and that many other film producers had done something similar to other child stars many times before *Lolita* throughout the history of Hollywood. But is it not now the intellectual responsibility of film and media scholars to ask at what cost to Lyon Harris and Kubrick were doing this? Is it not now time to highlight that Harris and Kubrick were doing this, thereby contributing knowledge to a wider project in film and media history that foregrounds the nature of power, gender, and sexual relations within the entertainment industries, just as Marghitu calls for?

This transformation of Lyon was controlled throughout by powerful men in Hollywood. A key part of it involved the Bert Stern photoshoot, organised by Harris and Kubrick. The photographs, taken at Sag Harbour in 1961, involved Lyon being dressed in only a blue bikini, wearing heart-shaped sunglasses, and sucking a lollipop, or in other images, laid on a bed in only her underwear and white nightgown. As Ritzenhoff has argued, "Stern created a visual vocabulary of teenage female sensuality in which Lolita is predominantly engaging with the viewer behind the camera, satisfying voyeuristic pleasure, that is echoed in Kubrick's films. Stern's promotional photography, therefore, was more representative of male power than female empowerment."[43]

Stern himself had a controversial history. He met his own future wife, Laumeister Stern, when she was just 13 and he was 53, and described her as his "fey-like blond child-girl 'pubescent nymphet.'"[44] In later life, he discussed how he became obsessed with the subjects that he was photographing, describing himself as a "voyeur":

> We are obsessed with possession. We want to OWN the thing, or the person we photograph. It's not as aggressive as rape and there is a style to it that no lowlife punk can appreciate but still, we are in the inner sanctum of our devious, perverted, refracted minds, Humbert Humberts.[45]

Stern defends his work through language that equates art with a need for possession and obsessiveness. It is, in many respects, auto-auteur apologism: the male auteur excusing himself of any wrongdoing in the name of art.

The sexualised world that Lyon inhabited centred on her grooming by powerful men like Harris, Kubrick and Stern, who were solely focused on crafting the Lolita-image. Indeed, this involved Harris putting together a relentless publicity schedule for Lyon, in which she would tour the USA and other countries around the world. It was at this time that stories emerged in the press about Lyon's relationship with Harris. While the SKA contains a vast array of news clippings for most of Kubrick's feature films, these particular news clippings are not included (at least, they are not included in the publicly accessible material). Instead, we have to turn to online newspaper databases to locate this material.

The first item, from *The Washington Post* in July 1962, describes the relationship between Harris and Lyon as follows:

> Sue Lyon, the pretty star of "Lolita" has bowled over her producer, James B. Harris. Her age is 16, according to her studio, and he's an old man of 33. She prefers the company of mature men, and James may be just her cup of tea when she's a little older and he decides it's proper to court her.[46]

The second item, again in *The Washington Post* in September 1963, suggests that Harris himself had been the one pursuing Lyon:

> Producer James Harris, who has been [Lyon's] most ardent suitor since the "Lolita" days, still has hopes of recapturing her affections, and is talking of renting a house in Mexico while Sue is in Puerta Vallarte for "Night of the Iguana". So Jimmy and Sue may write their own thrilling chapter.[47]

Throughout the production, distribution, and exhibition of *Lolita*, Lyon was constantly around Harris and Kubrick. She inhabited the sexualised world they had crafted for that entire time and, indeed, was at the centre of that world. Harris and Kubrick controlled access to Lyon, they controlled what she said in public, what was reported about her, and how she was portrayed in profile pieces. In this context, the above two news items, both published in the same newspaper by the same journalist, reflect this sexualised environment crafted by Harris and Kubrick. Whether the news items reflect a truth of sorts is uncertain. But they do reflect the ongoing ways in which Lyon was exploited by powerful men at an incredibly young age.[48]

Within the SKA, those few items where we can identify Lyon's presence often indicate the ways in which she was being controlled by men. Her voice is absent in the many letters between Harris, Kubrick, and other male producers, all discussing her future, her contract, how they want to use her and publicise her. Frequently, she is referred to as a sexual object with limited box office potential and is therefore reduced to appearing in films in which she suffers sexual abuse or is, in some way, a teenager involved in a sexual relationship with a much older man. Her earliest screen appearances involved similar subject matter: her first television appearance in 1959 was in *Letter to Lorretta* (NBC, 1953-1961),

an anthology series in which she plays the role of Laurie, a student that accuses a new teacher of inappropriate behaviour towards her, foreshadowing her later role in *Lolita*; in *Lolita* she played the role of a minor exploited and abused by a male adult; and in *The Night of the Iguana* (1964) Lyon played a teenager attempting to seduce a priest played by Richard Burton. Harris and Kubrick, in liaison with Seven Arts, had secured the latter role. Harris even attempted to develop his own project, what would have been his first as a director, called *I Want My Mother*, in which Lyon was to be cast as a rape victim. In one letter to Kubrick about the project, Harris describes Lyon as an "exploitable value."[49]

It is possible to begin to understand the attitudes and approaches adopted by the men that were controlling Lyon in this period of her life. In particular, Harris uses language that shows an obsessiveness toward her, alongside a disregard. In reference to letters between Harris and Kubrick contained in the SKA, Fenwick argues, "Lyon was persistently reduced to, and traded as, a sexualised commodity and business asset."[50] Repeatedly, the producers use the phrase "use her." For example, "[we] have the right to either loan her out or *use her* ourselves and keep the entire amount of money that we get for her"; "She might be worth $100,000 when it is our turn to *use her*, and we don't have to both producing the picture which I am sure neither of us want to do";[51] and "We never figured to *use her* for more than one picture a year anyway" [italics are for emphasis and are not used in the original documents].[52] The phrase "use her" is central to the ways in which Lyon was being exploited as a sexual commodity. The producers had devised an image, one in which Lyon was fully immersed by them into a sexualised environment, and then traded as a ready-made "Lolita-image" object to be used.

Archival documents also indicate Harris' attitude to the pastoral care that the producers should have been providing Lyon. This, however, was clearly something Harris did not want to provide. The only time Harris enjoyed any form of pastoral care was when it

involved him controlling Lyon, as he admitted to Kubrick, stating, "If I were selfish, I could have taken the position that I enjoyed being the guiding light in her career, and could have taken a great personal satisfaction in sitting on top of all approvals."[53] Instead, however, Lyon herself seems to have indicated to the producers that she was not happy working for them and continuing to inhabit the "Lolita-image" they had crafted. As she revealed in an interview in later life, "after they realised that, er, and understood my motivation for doing the film, and also I pointed out to them, you know I said you've made a tremendous amount of money off of me, and I think you owe me the respect to be who I am."[54] But despite this, the letters show that Harris and Kubrick were confronted with owning a business asset—Lyon—that would not cooperate with their desire for control. As a result, they lost interest in her. As Harris stated in one letter to Kubrick, "Our big advantage is that we know that there aren't too many pictures left in her, unless she changes her attitude about her career."[55] Harris was looking for a way to sell Lyon so that he and Kubrick no longer had contractual responsibility for her. This involved negotiating a deal with Seven Arts. As Harris told Kubrick,

> I also personally like the idea of [Seven Arts] taking over, which eliminates an awful lot of petty annoyances with career guidance, which as you know without a picture for her to do it a complete waste of time. So by next year if she is still in show-business, we can make some money in this direction.[56]

Harris uses language that indicates he and Kubrick had only one interest left in Lyon: to fully exploit her commercial value in order to make a profit.

Conclusion

This chapter suggests that academics in film and media studies need to reframe the approach taken to the study of films by canonical, male auteurs, particularly when there are obvious, yet frequently overlooked, problematic identities associated with them. The dominant approach taken to the study of Kubrick, and a film like *Lolita*, is to focus exclusively on the male auteur, thereby intentional or otherwise obscuring (and potentially erasing) the experiences of marginalised people and groups, in this case women. What the chapter suggests is that Sue Lyon has been forgotten within film history and in studies of *Lolita* in favour of the dominant historical narrative of Kubrick as artist and genius. But this overlooks the myriad of archival documents and other primary and secondary sources that evoke exploitative conditions of production in which Lyon found herself.

By adopting critical feminist approaches and utilising the intellectual framework of Marghitu, it is possible to begin recovering the hidden history of Lyon. While her agency and voice have largely been eradicated from the historical record (which in itself raises questions about the contested nature of archives, who created them, who curates them, and who uses them), there are still ways in which we can evince moments of her experience on *Lolita* and her work during that time period. What it shows is how powerful men in Hollywood sexualised and groomed Lyon into a "star," but that this centred around crafting and controlling her "Lolita-image", reducing her to an exploitable commodity. This was a process that was primarily facilitated by Harris and Kubrick, aided by a range of other powerful men. Adopting Marghitu's approach, we can write these exploitative and abusive conditions into the production history of *Lolita* and the biographical history of Harris and Kubrick. Doing so can also impact on the textual interpretation of the film. When taking account of Lyon's experiences, *Lolita* can be read as the textual embodiment of the exploitative conditions of production on that film. Lyon was a young girl "used" by men who wanted to sexualise her

and to cast her repeatedly in films about sex. What we watch on screen is the textual embodiment of that process and of the systemic material, cultural, and social realities of production in Hollywood. It is the intellectual responsibility of academics to ensure that this history is not lost or overlooked and to recognise that it is problematic to divorce the images from the realities of production in the guise of auteur apologism.

This approach, however, is not just about one film (the problems with *Lolita*) but about the wider film industry and the wider film studies community (the problems with Hollywood and the problems with film studies, respectively). Instead, it is necessary to reflect on the need to move beyond methods and approaches within film studies that continue to marginalise women like Lyon and continue to absolve men like Harris and Kubrick, namely in the disguise of "artists". Taking a critical feminist approach does not mean removing these male auteurs from history, but rather about working toward a wider project about the historical (and ongoing) systemic exploitative conditions of production in Hollywood. This project is not just about one film, or one director, or about the "salacious detail", but about contributing to the wider understanding of systemic exploitation, abuse, and gender inequalities across entertainment industries and across history.[57]

Notes

[1] See, for example, Richard Corliss, *Lolita* (London: British Film Institute, 1994); Nathan Abrams, *Stanley Kubrick: New York Jewish Intellectual* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2018); Elisa Pezzotta, "The Magic of Time in *Lolita*: The Time Traveller Humbert Humbert," *Adaptation* 8 no. 3 (2015): 297-320; Victoria Harriet Duckett, "Letting Lolita Laugh," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (2014): 528-540; Patrick Zabalbeascoa, "Censoring Lolita's sense of humor: when translation affects the audience's perception," *Perspectives: Studies in Translatology* 24, no. 1 (2016): 93-114.

[2] For alternative approaches to the dominant male auteur approach taken in film and media studies, see Priya Jaikumar, "Feminist and Non-Western Interrogations of Film Authorship," in *The Routledge Companion to Cinema and Gender* eds. Kristin Lené Hole, Dijana Jelaca, E.Ann Kaplan and Patrice Petro (New York: Routledge, 2016), 205-214; and Shelley Cobb, *Adaptation, Authorship, and Contemporary Women Filmmakers* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

[3] A. L. Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

[4] James Fenwick, "The Problems with Kubrick: Reframing Stanley Kubrick Through Archival Research," *New Review of Film and Television Studies* (forthcoming 2021/22); James Fenwick, "Kubrick, Women's Bodies, and Casting in *A Clockwork Orange* (1971): Questions for Film History," conference paper, BAFTSS, April 7, 2021: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-b2nkB_C78E; James Fenwick, "Kubrick and #MeToo," *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, 2021: https://nrftsjournal.org/stanley-kubrick-and-metoo/; James Fenwick, "The Exploitation of Sue Lyon: *Lolita* (1962), Archival Research, and Questions for Film History," *Feminist Media Studies* (forthcoming).

[5] Karen Ritzenhoff, "Kubrick And Feminism," in *The Bloomsbury Companion To Stanley Kubrick* eds. by Nathanx Abrams And I. Q. Hunter (New York: Bloomsbury, 2021), 169-178.

[6] Stefania Marghitu, "'It's Just Art': *Auteur* Apologism In The Post-Weinstein Era," *Feminist Media Studies* 18, no. 3 (2018): 491-494.

[7] Sarah Weinman, "The Dark Side of *Lolita*," October 24, 2020, https://airmail.news/issues/2020-10-24/the-dark-side-of-lolita.

[8] Fenwick, "The Problems with Kubrick."

[9] Jennifer Kusz & Martin Bouchard, "Nymphet or Lolita? A Gender Analysis of Online Child Pornography Websites," *Deviant Behaviour* 41 no. 6 (2020): 805-813; Jamie Loftus, "Lolita Podcast," iHeartRadio, 2020: https://open.spotify.com/show/4dvc06zTAaAylzdTrsgKzp.

[10] Morna Laing, "Rewriting *Lolita* in fashion photography: Candy, consumption, and dying flowers," *Sexualities* 23 no. 5-6 (2018): 717-718.

[11] Lawrence Ratna, "Vladimir Nabokov's Lolita: The Representation and the Reality Re-Examining Lolita In the Light of Research into Child Sexual Abuse," *Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 25 no. 8 (2020): 24; M. Gigi Durham, *The Lolita Effect: The Media Sexualisation of Young Girls and What We Can Do About It* (New York: Abrams Press, 2009.)

[12] See James Fenwick, "*Lolita* (1962), Censorship and Controversy: The Archival Remains of the Dispute Between Canon L. J. Collins and Stanley Kubrick," in *Adult Themes: British Cinema and the "X" Rating, 1958-1972* eds. Annie Etienne, Benjamin Halligan, and Christopher Weedman (London: Bloomsbury, forthcoming).

[13] Erik Eklund, "Jeffrey Epstein's Lolita?," *Church Life Journal*, November 15, 2019. https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/jeffrey-epsteins-lolita/

[14] Rachel Yang, "Natalie Portman Speaks Out on 'Pervasive' Abuse in Hollywood," *Variety*, n.d. https://variety.com/video/natalie-portman-times-up-variety-shoot/.

[15] "Natalie Portman," podcast interview, *Armchair Expert*, December 7, 2020. https://armchairexpertpod.com/pods/natalie-portman.

[16] Michele Meek, "Lolita Speaks: Disrupting Nabokov's 'Aesthetic Bliss'," *Girlhood Studies* 10 no. 3 (2017): 152-167.

[17] Ratna, "Vladimir Nabokov's Lolita," 22.

[18] Fenwick, "X-Rating *Lolita*."

[19] Sarah Miles Watts, "'Lolita': Fiction Into Films Without Fantasy," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 29 no. 4 (2001): 297.

[20] Paul D. Zimmerman, "Kubrick's Brilliant Vision," *Newsweek*, January 3, 1972, 32.

[21] Duckett, "Letting Lolita Laugh," 528.

[22] Zabalbeascoa, "Censoring Lolita's sense of humor," 96.

[23] Ibid., 96.

[24] Ibid., 107.

[25] See Ritzenhoff, "Kubrick and Feminism"; Fenwick, "The Exploitation of Sue Lyon" and "The Problems with Kubrick."

[26] Marghitu, "It's Just Art," 492.

[27] Ibid., 493.

[28] Ibid., 493.

[29] Vicky Ball, Pat Kirkham, and Laraine Porter, "Structures of feeling: contemporary research in women's film and broadcasting history," *Women's History Review* 29 no. 5 (2020): 761.

[30] The author of this chapter, James Fenwick, is undertaking a project to re-evaluate the Stanley Kubrick Archive for his book *Archive Histories: An Archaeology of the Stanley Kubrick Archive* (forthcoming, Liverpool University Press). The aim of the project is to explore, analyse, and discuss the content, structure, and meaning of the Stanley Kubrick Archive, reframing scholarly understanding of it via a focus on its materiality. While

Catriona McAvoy is conducting a doctoral research project at Sheffield Hallam University titled "Hidden Voices: Decentring and Decolonising the Narrative of the Stanley Kubrick Archive" in which she is "surfacing" the narratives of marginalised voices within the archive.

[31] Christine Martin, "Archival research as a feminist practice," *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 16 no. 4 (2018): 455.

[32] Melanie Bell, "Movie Workers: The Women Who Made British Cinema," conference paper, BAFTSS 2021. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0E6dB8j-6lM.

[33] Frances Galt, *Women's Activism Behind the Screens: Trade Unions and Gender Inequality in the British Film and Television Industries* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2020), 15.

[34] Marianne Macdonald, "Correctness fears keep Lolita under wraps," *The Independent*, August 8, 1996, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/correctness-fears-keep-lolita-under-wraps-1308824.html.

[35] Fenwick, "Problems with Kubrick."

[36] Fenwick, "The Exploitation of Sue Lyon."

[37] Letter from James B. Harris to Vera Nabakov, December 21, 1960, SK/10/8/1, Stanley Kubrick Archive, University of the Arts London (SKA)

[38] Letter from Sue Lyon to James B. Harris, November 30, 1960, SK/10/8/4, SKA.

[39] Macdonald, "Correctness fears."

[40] "Sue Lyon Interview," 1980, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NOLtXhPYxoM.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Letter from James B. Harris to Vera Nabakov, December 21, 1960, SK/10/8/1, SKA.

[43] Ritzenhoff, "Kubrick and Feminism," 172.

[44] Annette Hinkle, "The Search for Love and Lolita in Sag Harbor," *Sag Harbor Express*, July 18, 2017, https://sagharborexpress.com/search-love-lolita-sag-harbor/.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Dorothy Kilgallen, "Sue Lyon's Showing a 'Lolita' Bent," *The Washington Post*, July 14, 1962, C11.

[47] Dorothy Kilgallen, "Sue's Engagement Raising Doubts," *The Washington Post*, September 21, 1963, C9.

[48] What is not mentioned here is the role of Sue Lyon's mother, who had long facilitated her daughter's exploitation by the entertainment industries.

[49] Letter from James B. Harris to Stanley Kubrick, May 10, 1963, SK/10/6/9, SKA

[50] Fenwick, "The Exploitation of Sue Lyon."

[51] Letter from James B. Harris to Stanley Kubrick, July 11, 1963, SK/1/2/2/2, SKA.

[52] Letter from James B. Harris to Stanley Kubrick, September 10, 1963, SK/10/8/6, SKA.

[53] Ibid.

[54] "Sue Lyon Interview," 1980.

[55] Letter from James B. Harris to Stanley Kubrick, July 11, 1963, SK/1/2/2/2, SKA.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Shelley Cobb & Tanya Horeck, "Post Weinstein: gendered power and harassment in the media industries," *Feminist Media Studies* 18 no. 3 (2018): 490.

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