

The Shining: Studies in the Horror Film Ed. Danel Olson, (2015), Colorado: Centipede Press. (752 pp.), 978-1613470695, Paperback £30.00 / \$45.00

It is difficult to believe that Stanley Kubrick's only horror film, *The Shining*, was met with mixed critical reviews upon its release in 1980. These opinions resonate as quite short-sighted today, with the film entering cult film circles in the early years following its release, until its eventual and deserved ascension to its firmly held classic status in the horror genre today. The film, based on Stephen King's 1977 bestseller, can be found somewhere within the manifold of lucid, dreamlike imagery which marks the film as distinctly Kubrickian, eclipsing its source material and its best-selling author, much to King's chagrin. The war of words over such ownership – it is Kubrick's *The Shining*, or Stephen King's *The Shining?* - marred the aftermath of the film's lukewarm reception upon release, with King overtly dismissing Kubrick's vision as too cold and removed from his novel (p. 73), and Kubrick's relative silence on the matter evidencing his overall disengagement with King's critique, and King in general. To reinstate his ownership of the story as he envisioned it, King's novel was readapted into a three part mini-series in 1997 (directed by Mick Garris) but this retelling is simply no match for Kubrick's artistry. For all of the absurd rumours surrounding the film's notorious, if not genius director, including the exhaustive (and occasionally downright absurd) analyses to which his films are often subjected, Kubrick's version remains a chilling study of an isolated family at the mercy of its alcoholic and disillusioned patriarch's psychosis, trapped together in a hotel haunted by the nightmares of American history. Spatially, the film simultaneously reinforces the gothic contradictions of the Overlook hotel to make it seem at once both too big - Wendy (Shelley Duvall) declares she'll need 'a trail of breadcrumbs' to find her way back from the kitchen during her orientation, and later, Jack throws a ball around the Colorado Lounge as though he were outside - and claustrophobically too small, particularly in scenes which reinforce our visual proximity to Danny (Danny Lloyd) as he explores the hotel on his Big Wheel trike. These infamous sequences have become the visual trademark of the film (alongside the infamous elevator of blood) as it effectively interlaces an increasingly tense yet fluid ethereal quality with the revolutionary debut of the Steadicam, crystalizing the overwhelming gothic contamination of the hotel. Dylan Trigg's convincing reading of spatial hauntings and gothic echoes of time is analysed through its use of mirrors as a doubling effect, and 'the double as the mirror' (pp. 280-81) which demonstrates the Kubrick's Overlook as illusory and filled with contradictory uncanny spaces, including the (still terrifying) mirrored revelation of Danny's reversed

scrawl of REDRUM on the bedroom door (p.282). When one thinks of the nightmarish afterlife of *The Shining*, it is impossible to escape these confluent hauntings.

Those of us invested in the scholarly exploration of the horror film may indeed feel that we have always known *The Shining*; its extraordinary moments of horror and terror have become seared on to the popular imagination, to the extent that it may be next to impossible for many of us to remember the state of the horror film before Kubrick's film adaptation. Celebrating the 35th anniversary of the film's release, Olson's timely and beautifully designed collection of critical essays and extensive interviews with its cast, crew and late director, captures the essence of the film's critical complexity and cultural transcendence from cult to commercial spheres. In addition to the collection's exhaustive and frank 'behind-the-scenes' interviews and reflections by its cast and crew, including the Grady twins Lisa and Louise Burns, Joe Turkel (Lloyd, the infernal bartender), Jack Nicholson, Shelley Duvall, Leon Vitali (personal assistant to Kubrick), Garrett Brown (inventor of the Steadicam), and numerous others, the book includes concept art, fan-designed alternate one sheets, a video arcade game poster (complete with Jack as a demented Pac Man), all of which was sourced from online posts by the artists, and positively affirming the film's rich multi-media afterlife.

This book is no mere *Room 237* (Rodney Ascher, 2012), for which I must confess a peculiar, lingering fondness – rather, as the dense layers of scrutiny unfold, Olson's book reveals the depth and density of *The Shining* as a text, which inadvertently but nonetheless conclusively reduces Ascher's documentary to little more than a tasty morsel. Frankly, it is the text *Room 237* wanted to be. The rich selection of critical essays combine readings set both within and beyond the confines of screen, from Pixar's Lee Unkrich's introduction to John Baxter's rich analysis of the production's history, aptly titled 'Kubrick in Hell', to Dennis Bingham's insightful reading of Kubrick the auteur and the (shifting) critical reception of the film, and its peculiar afterlife as a film believed to be riddled with clues to be mined for (often bizarre) sub-textual meaning, in a fascinating account by Bev Vincent. Looking back to King's novel, Greg Jenkins' offers an exhaustive comparison of the novel's adaptation to the screen by Kubrick and Diane Johnson, complementing Paul Mayersberg's exploration of labyrinthine structure of the Overlook hotel itself. Tony Magistrale's probing of Jack Torrance's masculinity and pride in crisis, acutely underscored by his insightful close reading of 1920s and 1970s cultural politics, logically concludes that Jack (in his ego-centric fancy) feels very much at home during the epoch of Modernism as found in the 1920s Gold Room - the hotel's 'historical simulacrum that absorbs him' (p. 158). Christine Gengaro's

exploration of the soundscape and distinctive soundtrack of the film, with its aural hauntings and complex layers which ‘dip in and out of consciousness’(p. 217) reinforces the enduring uncanny nature of the hotel, and the film; the film’s encoded horrors of the genocide of Native Americans is thoroughly documented by Joseph Bruchac, and furthered in Bernice Murphy’s reading of the film as a Windigo story, each providing compelling close readings of historical and folkloric visual echoes in the film’s narrative and its iconic *mise en scène*. Olson’s own reading, which concludes the essay section of this mammoth book, situates Kubrick’s film alongside the cinema of Guillermo del Toro through an imaginative visual mediation of childhood trauma in fantasy and horror. As evidenced by these dynamic essays, the book combines rigorous scholarship and completism in equal measure. Furthermore, the book really is the de jure last word on a film that has provoked a myriad of readings since its release, from the mad (cloud pattern analysis and running the film backward and forwards simultaneously) to the outlandish and paranoid (Kubrick’s alleged faking of the Moon landing in July 1969), debunking the outrageous while carefully probing the film’s unique cultural imprint.

In sum, the interviews and critical essays enrich the film’s legacy, and are beautifully crafted and presented within the ever-familiar carpet design and intertitles, alongside previously unpublished set photographs, and handwritten annotated notes and scripts. The book instils a deliciously compulsive need to re-watch (pause and review) moments in the film to meticulously analyse various clues/readings and production nuances as documented and argued by its contributors. To discover something new and exciting about a classic horror film is a rare gift, especially when we feel, as many of us do, that we have always known *The Shining*.

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