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The Reader on Red Alert: Stanley Kubrick, Peter George and the Evolution of Fear

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Abstract

One of the purposes of studying adaptation is to allow, periodically, for a reassessment of the dominant assumptions concerning the relation between films and their non-filmic, often literary intertexts. The relation between Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove, or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* and Peter George's novel *Two Hours to Doom* or, to use its U.S. title, *Red Alert*, is in need of such reassessment. In particular, the currently influential work of Peter Krämer on *Dr. Strangelove* presents us with an argument in which Kubrick's film is a wholesale correction of George's novel. This paper wishes to revise this influential reading, bringing our attention back to the literary and political complexity of George's novel. Kubrick's film, I want to argue, is not a correction but an historically situated adaptation. The paper presents this revision in the context of an emergent reassessment of Peter George's wider career as a novelist.

Keywords: Kubrick; Peter George; Red Alert

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One of the purposes of studying adaptation is to allow, periodically, for a reassessment of the dominant assumptions concerning the relation between films and their non-filmic, often literary intertexts. The relation between Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove, or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964) and Peter George's 1958 novel *Two Hours to Doom* or, to use its U.S. title, *Red Alert*, is in need of such reassessment.[1] In particular, the currently influential work of Peter Krämer on *Dr. Strangelove* presents us with an argument in which Kubrick's film is a wholesale correction of George's novel.[2] This paper wishes to revise this influential reading, bringing our attention back to the literary and political complexity of George's novel. Kubrick's film, I want to argue, is not a correction but a historically situated adaptation. The paper presents this revision in the context of an emergent reassessment of Peter George's wider career as a novelist.[3]

Red Alert has been somewhat undervalued in the critical reception of Kubrick's adaptation. The decision of Kubrick, assisted in the initial stage by James B. Harris and in the last stage by Terry Southern, to transform the original "serious suspense story" into a "nightmare comedy" has led many to assume that Kubrick exploited the source text for a basic plot and not much more.[4] But as Gary K. Wolfe has suggested, after running through a host of common mistakes made about what is actually in the novel, Kubrick's film adopts and adapts a great deal of its essential features from *Red Alert*, including the dramatically tight two hours to doom scenario, the flashed cuts between the three variously isolated sites of action, exploitation of a troubling dichotomy between our conventional responses to heroic action and our awareness of deadly new circumstances, the majority of the story's characters, and the idea of a globally destructive Doomsday device. Wolfe states: "Peter George, the obscure ex-RAF officer who is so often overlooked in discussions of *Dr. Strangelove*, contributed a great deal more to the shape of the final film than he has generally been credited with" (1976: 65). The extremely complex story of the interrelations between Kubrick, Harris, George and Southern has been painstakingly examined by Mick Broderick, who writes:

> Judging from the chronology of events and the materials held in the three co-writers' respective archives, it seems that the quantitative script contribution of Terry Southern has been overestimated, much to the detriment of Peter George (and, to a lesser degree, James B. Harris). (2017: 32, 40)

There seems to be something about George's novel that leads readers to quite different critical responses. Joseph Heller clearly saw nothing of substance in the text; Kubrick himself just as clearly saw a good deal (Heller 2005: 362). Vincent LoBrutto writes that the novel "gave the message that the balance of terror is the only thing that will keep world peace" (1997: 243), whilst Thomas Allen Nelson states that "George makes every effort to impress his reader with the very real possibility of nuclear war by accident rather than design [...] [before retreating] from the seemingly implacable logic of his story by ending it on a note of liberal/moral fortuity" (2000: 84). Gary K. Wolfe sees the novel as mounting "a telling indictment of a 'liberal' foreign policy that was to continue through the sixties," an indictment which, he argues, is lessened in Kubrick's film (1976: 63). Krämer reverses this assessment, finding in the novel a racist "anti-Soviet and pro-American" logic in which, at the conclusion, "missiles are kept on hair-trigger alert, serving as a *perfect* deterrent" (2014: 64) (my emphasis). Krämer follows that up with an assessment of novel and film: "the film takes what is offered as a *solution* for the nuclear confrontation in the novel – namely the introduction of an automated weapons system acting as the ultimate deterrent – and turns it into the biggest *problem* of them all" (2014: 65).

Krämer's negative reading of *Red Alert* is, of course, hugely significant given the importance of his recent research into the film and its archival record. Outside of his BFI Film Classics study, Krämer presents a sustained

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1 (Bryant 1985). (NdA) Hereafter George. Peter George used the pseudonyms of Bryant Peter and Peter Bryant, as well as publishing other novels under his real name.

2 See, for example, Krämer 2014.

3 David George, the author's son, was in the process of republishing all six of George's novels with Candy Jar Press. Sadly, David George died in February 2017. An authorised biography of Peter George is currently being written by Rhys Lloyd. My work on this paper and on Peter George generally has been assisted by the kind and generous support and advice of David George. Added to this reassessment of Peter George's contribution to *Dr. Strangelove* we should add the monograph by Mick Broderick, *Reconstructing Strangelove: An Archaeology of Stanley Kubrick's Nightmare Comedy*, 2017.

4 Both phrases come from Kubrick's publicity text "How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Cinema" to be found in Castle 2005: 360-1.

account of *Red Alert* in his essay " 'The Greatest Mass Murderer since Adolf Hitler': Nuclear War and the Nazi Past in *Dr. Strangelove*" (2013). His assessment of the racist logic of the novel is there based partly on speeches made by the American President. We need to be careful, however, not too easily to attribute the speech and opinions of the novel's characters to the novel's author, thus reducing or even denying the artistry of George's novel writing. The manner in which George subtly manipulates character identification is part of the import of this current reading.

Having stated that the novel has a "confident" even a "happy" ending, Krämer writes the following:

> It took Kubrick a long time to adapt this novel into a movie. In the process of doing so he and his collaborators introduced a series of important reversals. The U.S. general who launches the initial attack in the film is mentally deranged rather than making a rational case for his actions as in the novel. The only German scientist in the film works for the United States, not the Soviet Union and, rather than being a marginal figure from the past like the scientists mentioned in the novel, he becomes so central to the story that he gives the film its title. Instead of the Soviet leadership, it is the American president who is equated with Hitler. Finally, the novel's happy ending makes way for the film's final catastrophe, caused by a Soviet doomsday device, which is – in the film, but not in the novel – based on an American idea. How did these reversals come about? (2013: 25)

As my reading will show, the fact that Brigadier General Quinten makes a rational case for attacking Russia is part of the novel's challenge to the reader and is hardly representative of George's desires or beliefs.[5] Secondly, George, as we know, was fully engaged in developing the character of Strangelove, writing a treatment of his backstory (2015: 183-214). Thirdly, Krämer's argument about what Kubrick and George did to associate the U.S. nuclear military establishment and President with Nazi Germany is an important one, but it is less a reversal than a development and even an evolution of the story. And lastly, the novel, as I will demonstrate, does not have a happy ending (Krämer 2013: 131). Again, we are not dealing here with fixed texts with fixed positions, so much as a collaborative process of responding to the nuclear threat in which each text (novel, film, and the texts which they themselves made possible) requires to be read as a provisional, historically situated act of engagement and reading (understanding reading here as an act of contextually determined interpretation).

My contribution to this debate is to suggest that we pay more attention to *Red Alert* as a fictional work and to the logic of reading contained within it. The relation between logic and reading is, after all, deliberately thematised in the novel. *Red Alert* is a text which bears out the now classical Bakhtinian description of the novel as a medium which stages the dialogic conflicts that make up society and culture (Bakhtin 1981). Assisted by a largely unobtrusive omniscient narrator, George's novel pulls its readers into a central conflict between a military and a moral logic, played out crucially between Brigadier General Quinten and Major Paul Howard. On the one side of this ideological conflict are the heroic crewmen of the Alabama Angel, totally cut off from the most necessary information, blindly doing their duty in the most tragically heroic of fashions. On the other stands the President of the United States, surrounded by the hawkish military personnel in the war room, faced with the decision about how to respond to the actions of a physically sick but mentally sane General Quinten and the fraught and occasionally belligerent responses of the Russian Premier on the other end of the phone.

The heart of the novel, then, lies in the exchanges between Quinten and Howard. On a purely practical note, unless Howard learns how to read Quinten's notebook there will be no chance of recalling the wing. That act of decoding is made dependent, at least in the novel's internal logic, by Howard's gradual ability to read beyond the confines of Quinten's military logic. The act of reading is thematised throughout this struggle, most symbolically in the meaning of the tale of Rikki-tikki-tavi from *The Jungle Book*. Readers may remember that Rikki-tikki-tavi is a mongoose, taken in as a house pet but confronted, after he has killed the family cobra, with a female cobra and her eggs. As General Quinten explains:

[5] Some critics, like Gary K. Wolfe 1976, have suggested in fact that making General Ripper mad leaves an escape root for Kubrick's audience (*he was mad, we can be sure this wouldn't happen in real life*!). Such a reading remains as deaf to the film's use of satire as Krämer's reading is to the dialogic nature of George's novel. In both cases, questions of genre and the aesthetic demands imposed by genre require greater attention.

> The little mongoose weighs up the odds. He can handle the cobra if she comes at him .... But the eggs hatching out are something else. Once they're hatched and the young cobras become dangerous – he's gone. He can't handle that many at once, they'll be too strong for him. So he waits his chance, and when the female cobra is causing mischief somewhere else, he breaks those eggs. The cobras inside the shells aren't dangerous to him – yet. But it's just a question of time, then they will be. So he kills them. He doesn't have to ask for proof – his instinct tells him a mongoose doesn't live with a snake. He kills the snakes, or the snakes kill him. So he acts, and he lives. He destroys the eggs, and then he destroys the mother cobra. He's safe, and the people in the house are safe. They can live their lives in peace. It's a good story, Paul, and a good analogy too. (1985: 79).

The analogy is obvious. The unhatched eggs are clearly the soon to be ready Russian Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles sites. As Quinten and Howard both know, the slight superiority of the Russian I.C.B.M. programme is soon to reach a critical point, in which the Russian ability to strike will not be matched by the U.S. ability to detect and strike back. "Russian I.C.B.M. sites fully operational," Quinten says, "even two days before their counterparts over here, can win the war" (1985: 78).

This is the military logic of survival which Howard and ultimately the President must either accept or replace with something more compelling, more persuasive. The problem for Howard is that it is not clear what that alternative logic might be. Whilst the Russians have strong armed their way in the crisis in Hungry and Eastern Europe generally, the West has dallied over the crisis in Egypt and the Middle East. Now there is the imminent arrival of a weapon that is a complete game changer, I.C.B.M.s, and Russia has taken over control of the chess board. George's novel, through the logic of General Quinten, places its reader in the Cold War hot seat, responsible strategically for the safety of millions of people and the potential annihilation of millions more. Major Howard is, then, rather classically, the novel's reader substitute, and George's novel makes it transparently clear that how Howard comes to read the tale of Rikki-tikki-tavi and its apocalyptic analogy must guide the reader.

In response to Robert Kolker's description of Kubrick's film as "anti-humanist," one can call George's novel, at least in this aspect, a rather conventionally humanist text (Kolker 2011). Again, I stress that this humanism rests on one exemplary character's lesson in right reading. It is reading, after all, through which humanism has traditionally figured itself. Far from encouraging us to extrapolate authoritative meaning from an array of fictional characters, in other words, the novel guides its readers structurally and thematically to the character of Major Howard and his central task of reading.

Following the humanist logic of the novel, we have to be very careful about how we read Major Howard's own acts of reading. It is true that Howard appears to replace Quinten's first strike logic with a patriotic logic which is less than humanistic because unable or unwilling to think about the whole of humanity: "A moment ago, Howard had found Quinten's reasoning valid. He had almost spoken right out in favour of the general's action. But this was something else. Out there Americans were killing Americans. That couldn't be justified ever" (1985: 81-2). That is not the end of Howard's struggle, however. By the time Quinten kills himself and the base has been secured Howard has moved to an ethical impasse. With Quinten's reported phrase ringing in his ears ("We will bury you"),[6] and with the knowledge now that there will be no back up strike ordered by S.A.C. command, Howard successfully interprets Quinten's notebook, uncovers the recall code, but remains unclear as to what should be done, as his call goes through to the Pentagon:

> He hesitated. The mongoose kills the snake. He does it because that is the nature of things. It is not aggression, it is self defence. We will bury you, the Russian said. He pulled his hand back, and walked slowly to the window. In his mind reason pitted itself against morality, hard fact against probability. He was sure he had the power to recall the bombers, he was not sure he should exercise that power. (1985: 124-5).

Howard looks out the window and sees a blanket put over the body of a dead soldier. It is a scene which is carefully written in a generalised humanistic discourse and so replaces the earlier, inconclusive patriotic sentiments which had pulled at Howard:

[6] The phrase is a reference to a famous outburst by Khrushchev (Ghamari-Tabrizi 2005: 89).

> But he had just seen a man die. Not a mongoose, or a cobra, but a man. That was where Quinten was wrong. It was all right for animals to kill by instinct. It was all wrong for men to kill except in direct self defence. Nothing could justify it. He crossed to the desk and picked up the telephone. For a few moments he had held the fate of the world in his hands. But he did not know that. He only knew that he could see what was right, and he had to act in accordance with what he saw. The connection with the Pentagon was almost immediate. (1985: 125)

The fact that Howard does not know about the "super bomb" adds to the transparency of this moment in the novel. Howard has read his way beyond animal morality, beyond narrow patriotism, and ultimately beyond Cold War paranoia, and has reached the ethical position the novel's readers are also encouraged to reach. As the President states when reflecting on Howard's act of interpretive intelligence: "He worked things out on his own, and he came up with the right answer. I feel we owe him our thanks" (1985: 134).[7]

There is a twist to this apparently programmatic humanism, however; an important caveat or swerve which we must also read with care. As we know, Howard's exemplary act of reading does not in fact save the day. One plane, the Alabama Angel, heroically remains in the air, poised to provoke the Russian Premier into an act of unspecified retaliation. Will he be mad enough to set off the "super bomb"? Is the President's assessment of the suicidal nature of the Slavic people, gleaned largely through a familiarity with Russian novels, accurate or simply bad reading? Will he be forced into a tit-for-tat exchange of pulverised cities (Kotlass for Atlantic City) familiar to the parallel scenario of the novel and later Sidney Lumet film *Fail Safe*? (Burdick and Wheelev 1999).[8] What use to us as readers has there been in having been led through this exercise in humanistic reading I have described, if, upon its failure to resolve the novel's basic scenario, we are dumped at the end back into the apparently irresolvable conflict between military logistics, political will, and an incompatible and unachievable moral conscience?

This is, I believe, where readers might slip up in their assessment of George's novel. The brinkmanship between the U.S. President and his Russian counterpart gets to the point, with the latter still demanding the destruction of an American city as recompense, even after the Alabama Angel has crashed and detonated its load safely away from populated areas, that the U.S. President threatens escalation of hostilities. This is only averted through the intermediary actions of Ambassador Zorubin, who knows that the President is close to breaking point and is not bluffing and manages to convince the Russian Marshall of this fact. This leads to the novel's conclusion with the President describing the imminent epoch of I.C.B.M.s and three-pronged defensive systems (missile, aircraft, submarine), and Zorubin echoing his hopes that this will usher in a new age of peace through mutually assured destruction:

> Zorubin's voice was quiet as he said, "The President is correct. Once both sides have missiles which will automatically retaliate, war becomes profitless. If it is profitless, it will not be fought". He shrugged. "Ideological differences are not so sharply defined as the line between life and death. We may have to learn how to differ. But better that than having to learn how to die". (1985: 162)

A reading inattentive to the dramatic logic of the novel might miss the radical lack of assurance in this speech and in the conclusion it heralds. The future-tense in which Zorubin speaks of the lesson that "may have to [be] learn[ed]" jars with the disaster that has only narrowly been avoided (what if next time the figures in charge are not as skilled and sensitive as the President and Zorubin?). Readers, here, no doubt remember that the situation has partly been precipitated by chance events (and what system of threatened terror can eliminate that?), and they may well also remember the novel's insistence on the present tense in its documentary-style foreword: "Most important of all, it is a story which could happen. It may even be happening as you read these words. And then it really will be two hours to doom. Yours and mine and every other living creature's" (1985: 7). While the last paragraph of the novel no doubt strives to sound out a new era of confidence and

[7] Interestingly in the screenplays and related material, this clear Presidential acknowledgement of Major Howard's act of ethical reading is ironized and ultimately eliminated, so that, for example, in the screenplay from 31 August 1962 it is Colonel "Bat" Guano who is attributed (incorrectly) with the heroic act of interpretation.

[8] *Fail Safe* (Sidney Lumet 1964). Interestingly, in Burdick and Wheeler's rendition of the fail safe story, it is the President of the United States who is described by the translator Peter Buck as the mongoose and Khrushchev as the "cobra's body" (1999: 218).

optimism based on lessons learnt (and read), the triumph, if you will, of the humanism exemplified within Major Howard and at times in the President, there is nothing the novel has actually shown that will insure those values will now control rather than continue to compete with the logic of power, strength, strategy and ultimately blind will exemplified in Quinten's logic and, for long stretches, by both U.S. President and Russian Premier. The novel ends not in assurance but with the establishment of a hotline process of ongoing, never-ending negotiation between Cold War opponents. The novel, in other words, far from a wholesale promotion of the logic of M.A.D., leaves its readers anxiously peering into a future in which a new H-bomb world of unimaginable destructive power-play is countered only by something as fragile and powerless as the logic of humanistic morality. It is an ending which, read in this way, seems a wholly appropriate reading of the post-Cuban Missile Crisis, the new I.C.B.M. epoch. The image of reading conventionally structured into the novel, in other words, is ultimately subjected to a reading in itself by the novel and is found to be at once enduring and yet unable to guarantee itself. Major Howard's act of reading may well save him (from the threat of Quinten's suicidal logic) but it does not in fact save the day; and yet, the novel leaves us thinking, *let us all hope those entrusted with control of the new nuclear dispensation have something of this humanism within them*.

What does this reading of *Red Alert* tells us about *Dr. Strangelove*? How does it help us better read Kubrick's film and the incredibly complex processes of adaptation which helped create it? It is clear that the role of humanistic reading is gradually erased from the scripts and ultimately the final film. The 31 August 1962 script retains briefly the exchange between General Ripper (Quinten) and Colonel Mandrake (Howard) about Rikki-tikki-tavi, but the character of Howard/Mandrake is now no longer that of reader substitute, and the exchange passes away without apparent structural importance. By the time of a script dated 1 January 1963 (and revised on the 27th) this exchange over reading and interpreting Kipling is completely gone and is replaced by Ripper's mad theories about fluoridisation.[9] The interrupted but continuous scene, so crucial in the novel, between Quinten and Howard is now one in which the theme of accurate and ethically positive reading is replaced by one rogue General's sexual obsessions and the British officer's helpless response to the bizarre, apocalyptic ramifications those obsessions are threatening to have on the globe. Mandrake still interprets the code, of course, but he does so without any ethical transformation. In Peter George's novelization, written in the spring of 1963, the heavy clues Ripper gives to Mandrake further empty out any sense that the latter's act of interpretation is in any way transformative or the result of enlightenment: "'Remember the purity of your bodily essences, and remember Peace On Earth,' Group Captain. 'Remember the significance of Peace on Earth'" (2015: 119). This is important, since it demonstrates George's participation in this steady elimination of his original emphasis on what we are calling humanistic reading.

This eradication of the theme of humanistic reading can be said to go hand-in-hand with a structural eradication of ethical guidance for the reader. We have seen how the act of reading is given this guiding role in *Red Alert*, and that a successful reading of the novel depends upon its recognition by the reader. It is interesting then to see elements of this aspect of the novel lingering in the scripts only eventually to be eliminated from the film. Peter Krämer's argument that Kubrick's film works as a reversal and correction of George's novel returns here. That reading of the relation between novel and film stems, as we have seen, from the argument that the novel is racist and that the film reverses this, finally incorporating a critique of U.S. nuclear policy by equating it with Nazi Germany. Much of Krämer's censure of George's novel comes from the U.S. President's view of the inexorable aggressiveness of the Slavic people, and in particular a speech in which the President blames the Russians for driving General Quinten insane: "Let the Marshall consider that if his Government had ever ceased their world-wide aggression, this would never have happened" (1985: 115). As Krämer writes: "Like most Western Cold War discourse, the novel portrayed the Soviets as aggressors, even holding them ultimately responsible for the destructive actions of a rogue American general" (2013: 129). In fact, far from a simple reversal of this perceived position, the process of adaptation appears to have seen George and Kubrick experimenting in various ways with turning the President's speech into a moment of ideological revelation parallel to Major Howard's in the novel.

[9] 31 August 1962, scene 51.1 and Khrushchev as the "cobra's body" (1999: 218).

31 August 1962, scene 51.1. http://www.archiviokubrick.it/opere/film/ds/script/ds-originalscript.html (last accessed 24-03-17).

January 1963, scene 51.1-5. http://indiegroundfilms.files.wordpress.com/2014/01/dr_strangelove_jan27_63_numbered_revised.pdf (last accessed 04-07-17).

If we look at the 31 August 1962 script, for example, we still see the President given a speech which blames the Russian resistance to disarmament for driving General Ripper insane (something Krämer finds exclusively in the novel), until this mixes with what we might feel tempted to call a Kubrickian warning about nuclear system's vulnerability to accident and chance. The President says: "Damn you, de Sade! You know as well as I do that this was the act of a mentally sick man – a single individual, whose crack-up can probably be traced to the strains and tensions caused by your country".[10] He goes on: "This dreadful accident could never have happened if your government hadn't cynically and hypocritically blocked every proposal we made for disarmament or arms control!"[11] This exchange with the pugnacious De Sade finally leads the President into a statement which clearly possesses a summative quality, conveying the "message" of the script:

> (raging) Is there a single phase of human activity that is free from idiotic mischance? How often do we read of banks adding three zeros to a hundred dollar deposit? Or the Postal Department engraving a stamp with the wrong amount? Or an operation performed on the wrong patient? [...] (shouting rabidly) The bomb may deter a rational leader from choosing deliberate war, but it cannot deter a madman, or a short-circuit, or an error in judgment. And since neither of us can reduce the chances for the idiotic mischance to zero, it simply becomes a question of when?[12]

Here is the core message of the need for disarmament expressed directly in the script. One only need refer to Kubrick's interviews around these years to know that it represents his fear of the lack of security in all nuclear systems (Phillips 2001: 29). It is a message that is carried on in the 1 January 1963 script, where the President ("exploding") says:

> What a marvellous thing for the fate of the world to depend on – a state of mind; a mood, a feeling, a moment of anger, an impulse, ten minutes of poor judgement, a sleepless night. And so what is the hope? The behaviour of nations has always been despicable. The great nations have always acted like gangsters, and the small nations as prostitutes. They have bribed and threatened and murdered their way through history. And now the Bomb has become an even greater enemy to every nation than they ever have been, or ever could be to each other. Even disarmament is not enough. We can never entirely get rid of the bomb because the knowledge of how to make it will always be with us. Unless we learn to create a new system of law and morality between nations, then we will surely exterminate ourselves just as we almost did today.[13]

Here, however, the aggressiveness of the Soviet Union has been widened out to an inherent aggressiveness of all "great nations," and the various strands of these speeches are further meshed together. As Mick Broderick has shown, using the Daily Continuity Reports for March 14 and 15 1963, a version of this speech, which he relates to J. F. Kennedy's "Sword of Damocles" U.N. speech of 1961, was filmed, only to be cut by Kubrick's editing (Broderick 2015, Broderick 2017: 162-90).

While a version of this speech is developed in George's novelisation, it is entirely missing from the film (George 2015: 142-3). Indeed all such evident or possibly summative elements are eradicated from the film, in which, ultimately, no one character demonstrates any processes of enlightenment through reading (including Mandrake and the President) and thus no character is in a position to speak for the film. Clearly, this decision to eradicate all such summative moments of enlightenment is the right one on an aesthetic and ethical level, given the turn to "nightmare comedy" Kubrick was making up to and including the final editorial process. In that genre, with all the characters flattened out into caricature types, it becomes wholly inappropriate and aesthetically impossible for one character to possess the necessary depth to be in possession of the film's "meaning" or "message." The point is, however, that this change was a gradual one and clearly involved both George and Kubrick. Kubrick's move to "nightmare comedy" dictates the vast majority of the changes made to George's novel, but they do so for generic reasons rather than as ideological correctives.

[10] 31 August 1962, scene 58.

[11] 31 August 1962, scene 58. The source of these accusations, made so much of by Krämer, can be found in George 1985: 115.

[12] 31 August 1962, scene 58.

[13] 1 January 1963, scene 58.

Of course, in the scripts where the President's summative speeches remain, there exists a tension (between apparent message and denouement) that is a continuation of that found within George's less than "happy ending" in *Red Alert*. In the film, however, that tension is placed solely inside the audience, which is an aesthetically and ideologically appropriate response to the heuristic nature of what Kubrick called "nightmare comedy" but which the allusions to Laputa and, I would add, the Lilliputian "miniature combination Rooshan phrase book and Bible," allow us to call Swiftian satire.[14] "Nightmare comedy" or satire has often been viewed as a kind of universal, general antidote to the perceived problem of a "serious" (in the sense of naturalistic) treatment of the subject of nuclear war in novels such as *Red Alert* (Nelson 2000: 85-7). However, from the basis of this more sustained look at *Red Alert*, and by remembering the difference the five or six years between novel and film made to the nuclear world order, a radically heuristic mode of satire (with no ethical summation or guidance explicitly marked within it) can begin to appear just as provisional, and just as historically contingent a decision as George's earlier problematized humanism, including its anxiously "optimistic" conclusion in *Red Alert*. By 1963/4 the era of I.C.B.Ms had arrived and M.A.D. was no longer a fictional hypothesis but an official Cold War policy. In this world, as Kubrick, George and Southern realised, and as Krämer has so usefully demonstrated, the question was not so much the play between different modes of logic (military, post-war, nationalist, humanist) but rather one of global survival pitted against a bizarre familiarity with and acceptance of the mechanisms which threatened that survival (Krämer 2014: 7-16). In such a bizarrely M.A.D. world, in which humanistic values appear to be disappearing, the viewer is perhaps best challenged by being confronted with a fictional environment in which no reassuring guidance is available. This is not a correction on Kubrick's part, it is better understood as a collaborative evolution of aesthetic response, a generically transfigured updating, if you will.

Clearly there are other factors that led Kubrick's cinema to embrace an increasingly visual quality, eschewing the older theatrical and word-based modes of telling (Phillips 2001: 90). However, it still feels possible, and indeed necessary, to suggest that the conclusion and the narrative mode and style of *Dr. Strangelove* is, at least in part, historically motivated, rather than a wholly universalized aesthetic solution.[15] *Red Alert* anticipates the imminent arrival of the era of intercontinental nuclear warfare. *Dr. Strangelove* attempts to respond to its actual establishment. Thinking about the two texts in this manner allows us to see them as moments within an ongoing creative response to the nuclear age on the part of both artists. Kubrick's next film, after all, has been frequently read as the expression of a more optimistic, liberated mid-to late sixties moment in Western culture (Krämer 2012). Whether such responses are wholly credible, it certainly is possible to say that *2001: A Space Odyssey* seeks for solutions to the moral impasse so devastatingly if comically depicted in *Dr. Strangelove*. It is interesting, in the name of the collaboration that created that film, and as part of an attempt to re-evaluate his art and contribution, to look at where Peter George went next.

Of the various novels, including the novelization of the film, published by Peter George after *Red Alert*, the novel which returns most decidedly and explicitly to the subject of nuclear war is *Commander-1* (1965). *Commander-1* has anything but a happy ending, presenting us with a post-apocalyptic scenario in which the story of four survivors is ultimately taken over by the establishment on a few Pacific Islands of a new proto-fascistic order ruled by Geraghty, or Commander-1 as he comes to be known. The fly jacket of the 1965 first edition bills the author as "Peter George co-author of 'Dr. Strangelove'," and the novel seems to bear the imprint of George's experiences working with Kubrick in many aspects of the novel's plot. Its dedication reads simply "For Stanley Kubrick," but as is often the case there is a clue of quite considerable import in that paratextual marker. *Commander-1* is a response to Kubrick's and George's earlier film, and more particularly an attempt by George to revise his view of the nuclear world seven years on from the time of *Red Alert*. In this sense, *Commander-1* stands alongside *2001 A Space Odyssey*, *Red Alert* and *Dr. Strangelove*, as an evolving response (an ongoing adaptation) to the quickly changing reality of what George in another novel calls The Big H, the age of the hydrogen bomb and explosions calculated in megatons (Peters 1961: 180).

[14] *Dr. Strangelove: A Continuity Transcript* http://www.visual-memory.co.uk/amk/doc/0055.html (last accessed 24-04-17). *Dr. Strangelove, or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (Stanley Kubrick 1964).

[15] One might refer here to Ghamari-Tabrizi's discussion of Kubrick's film within the rise in this period of radical comedy associated with *Mad* magazine and comedians such as Lenny Bruce and Mort Sahl (Ghamari-Tabrizi 2005: 256-80).

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