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“A CHANGE FROM IGNORANCE TO KNOWLEDGE”: FOUR INCARNATIONS OF
STANLEY KUBRICK’S TRAGIC HERO

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ABSTRACT

This paper uses the Aristotelian tragic hero from the Poetics to analyze some of Stanley Kubrick's films. The paper argues that Aristotle's scenes of Reversal, Recognition, and Suffering are present within *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *A Clockwork Orange*, *The Shining*, and *Eyes Wide Shut* and the respective tragic heroes in each film endure this journey. Using Aristotle's tragic hero blueprint in conjunction with these films adds another dimension to the selected characters because the application of this method provokes the audience's sympathy. Choosing to focus on the Aristotelian tragic hero structure, rather than the minutiae, simplifies and demystifies the content of Kubrick's work.

Keywords: Stanley Kubrick, Aristotle, The Poetics, Tragic hero, *The Shining*, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *A Clockwork Orange*, *Eyes Wide Shut*

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Aristotle's *Poetics* serves as a quintessential text for understanding classical drama. This fragmented treatise discusses both comedy and tragedy as poetic forms, placing emphasis on the latter. As a result, we have terms such as "tragic hero" and "fatal flaw" which are used when discussing drama, literature, and film. In his introduction, Eugene Garver discusses the fatal flaw concept, which is referred to as *hamartia*, in *The Poetics*. Specifically, Garver underscores that *hamartia* is "an apparently important idea that the *Poetics* never defines" (11). Oddly enough, Aristotle clearly defines other crucial tragic terms in his writing such as *Reversal*, *Recognition*, and *the Scene of Suffering*, which function as signifiers in relation to the action of the plot. To Aristotle, plot refers to both "the arrangement of the incidents" as well as "the soul of the tragedy" (17, 21). Tragedy, defined by Aristotle, "is an imitation, not of men, but of an action and of life" and within this action "the most powerful elements of emotional interest" are both the *Reversal* and *Recognition* scenes (19). The *Reversal of the Situation* occurs when "a change by which the action veers round to its opposite" while *Recognition* "is a change from ignorance to knowledge" (31). *Recognition* and *Reversal* "will produce either pity or fear" which in turn leads to the *Scene of Suffering* or "a destructive or painful action" involving death or serious injury (33). Although not formally used as a tragic term, Aristotle also mentions the concept of the change of fortune which is a change "from good to bad [as a result of] some great error or frailty" (37). This term is separated from the formal definition of the *Reversal* but they can be interpreted to have parallel meanings. In describing what would be known as a tragic hero,

Aristotle's blueprint for tragedy involves a protagonist who remains "between two extremes, — that of a man who is not eminently good and just, yet whose misfortune is brought about not by vice or depravity, but by some error or frailty" (35). With the definition of the change of fortune as well as the description of a tragic hero comes the phrase "error or frailty" which translates to Greek as *hamartia* and is commonly translated as "tragic flaw" (34). S.H. Butcher writes that "Aristotle's meaning is more simple and concrete than [tragic flaw]. The error that causes a change from good to bad fortune cannot be an accident and cannot be fully deserved, since neither would produce pity or fear" (34). While applying the Aristotelian tragic terms to drama, literature, and film one must identify, the protagonist and their error must be first identified in order to isolate the scenes of *Reversal*, *Recognition*, and *Suffering*.

Infamous for his aversion to publicity, Stanley Kubrick created several films that have reflected his so-called cold and misanthropic nature (Naremore 4). Spanning different genres and styles, Kubrick's filmography certainly stands out among other filmmakers due to the subject matter as well as the cinematographic style, which has a tendency to evoke a sense of discomfort. According to James Naremore, Kubrick "was a virtuoso of the moving camera" adding that "he usually created a more rigidly geometrical feeling; his tracking movements follow the characters in a lateral direction, traveling past objects in the foreground, or they advance remorselessly down a fearsome corridor toward impending doom" (4). Using wide angles and long shots, Kubrick creates a sense of isolation in the audience while simultaneously directing their attention on the subject material. One example of this technique can be found in *The Shining's* Room 237 scene, where Jack Torrance (Jack Nicholson) enters this mysterious room alone and finds a naked woman who turns into a haggard elderly woman. Aside from Kubrick's camera-wielding abilities, it is a known fact that he adapts and significantly alters literary works through film. His

subject material has fascinated many to synthesize their own theories about his work. One clear example can be found in Rodney Asher's 2012 documentary *Room 237* where several possible theories about *The Shining* are discussed.

Through examination of Kubrick's distinct genre ventures that correlate with the conventions of science fiction, action, dystopian fiction, horror, and thriller, I hope to show a correlation between the tragic hero formulated in *Poetics* with the protagonists in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *A Clockwork Orange*, *The Shining*, and *Eyes Wide Shut*. Although some of these protagonists may not perfectly fit the mold of an Aristotelian tragic hero, they each certainly make a dire mistake that leads to their demise. By examining the films in this manner, audiences can view the selected tragic figures under another analytical layer as they already have dynamic features. In order for this Aristotelian character to emerge, the respective scenes of *Reversal*, *Recognition*, and *Suffering* must be isolated. While several bizarre theories of Kubrick typically utilize formalistic approaches, applying the Aristotelian tragic hero's journey to his characters and the plot allows for an interpretation grounded in classical drama while simplifying the complex works.

Chapter 2

The Blue Danube Waltz

2001: A Space Odyssey is one of Stanley Kubrick's most enigmatic films as its conclusion usually leaves viewers in a state of confusion. While this film in particular has three distinct parts—The Dawn of Man, Dr. Floyd and Clavius Base, and *Discovery One*—the one that features the tragic hero, Dave Bowman, is the final and longest segment. Audiences are introduced to Dave Bowman and Frank Poole, who monitor *Discovery One* and its three additional members in a state of hibernation who are to be roused upon arrival at Jupiter. These men are assisted by HAL 9000, a computer that “can mimic most of the activities of the human brain” and functions as the “brain and central nervous system of the ship.” When questioned by a human television interviewer in one scene, HAL describes himself and the rest of the 9000 series as “foolproof and incapable of error,” arguing that this particular series “is the most reliable computer ever made [and] no 9000 series has ever made a mistake or distorted information.” As viewers are exposed to the daily lives of Bowman, Poole, and HAL on the *Discovery*, they witness the human-like connection that these two men have with the computer. HAL is able to transmit birthday messages from Earth to Poole and later challenge him in a game of chess. He also critiques Bowman's drawings of the crew members in stasis, calling them “a very nice rendering” while also commenting on the development of his overall artistic skills.

Operationally, HAL detects a problem on one of the satellite dishes on the *Discovery* which demands Bowman's attention to the exterior of the ship. Bowman concludes that the communication satellite was not actually failing, and thus HAL was incorrect. This incident provokes HAL to blame the mistake on “human error” while he reinforces the 9000 series' perfect record and infallibility. Following this, Bowman and Poole enter an exploratory pod to discuss HAL's error and his possible disconnection in private. After ensuring that they were not audible to the computer while in the pod, HAL, unbeknownst

to the crew members, has the ability to read their lips and understands their imminent betrayal. HAL's anger is shown following the film's intermission when he kills Poole while on an external mission and sends him flying into the abyss of space. HAL also proceeds to kill the three crew members in hibernation. As Bowman remains the sole crew member, HAL attempts to desert him in the pod that was used to retrieve Poole's body.

Dave Bowman manages to reenter *Discovery One* through an airlock port on the ship's exterior and dismantle HAL's memory and logic terminals. In the midst of killing the computer, a classified recording of Dr. Heywood Floyd plays disclosing that HAL knew the true objective of the mission—to search for more evidence of intelligent life and to find the purpose of the mysterious black monolith. Essentially stranded in space, Dave Bowman aboard the *Discovery* nears Jupiter, where the black monolith floats ominously. Bowman's space pod is suddenly sucked into a vortex of psychedelic colors and patterns until he reaches an ornate residence that appears to be in another dimension. The peculiarity of this location is shown through Bowman's rapid aging that begins as he steps out of the space pod. The familiar *Discovery* Bowman suddenly has wrinkles and looks into another room to see an older version of himself. The final Bowman that materializes is in a bed, appearing incredibly sickly and old. The black monolith finally appears before Bowman dies and transforms into the Star Child.

Despite covering three distinct periods of time, *2001: A Space Odyssey's* tragic hero is found in the final segment of this film. In this film there are two *Reversal* scenes: HAL's lip reading of Bowman and Poole's plans which is known only to the audience when it occurs and the second, for Bowman, is HAL's sudden anger manifested in his killing of Poole and the hibernating crew members. For Bowman, because of HAL's misdiagnosis of the satellite, Bowman underestimates HAL's ability as the flawless "brain and central nervous system" of the *Discovery*, thus his discussion of disconnecting HAL inadvertently killing his fellow crew members, leaving him alone. When Bowman dismantles HAL, he encounters the recording of Dr. Floyd which reveals the true nature of the mission and which was never disclosed to the human crew. Since Bowman is aboard a ship with faulty technology that killed his four

crew members, the mission to find more evidence on intelligent life in the vast reaches of space seems more like a suicide mission for all involved. Because of this, the Floyd video functions as the *Recognition* scene, as the true morbid purpose of the *Discovery* mission reveals itself. Stranded in space near Jupiter, Bowman is then transported across colorful dimensions and unfamiliar landscapes and soon finds himself alone in an undisclosed location. In the colorful lights and psychedelic patterns, the camera cuts from the surroundings to Bowman, who is making horrible and strange faces several times showing a level of personal suffering and discomfort. The final location to which Bowman is mysteriously transported shows rapid aging leading to death. While the color vortex caused Bowman to exhibit signs of discomfort and confusion, he physically suffers by witnessing his rapid aging. In these scenes of suffering, the unnatural space travel combined with the unnaturally rapid natural phenomenon of aging leads to Bowman's demise and simultaneous suffering. In Bowman's case, pity is evoked as his superior deceives him and his crew. Although audiences witness his sudden aging, catharsis is found knowing that the suffering in his imminent death was brief and that the inevitable came quicker than expected.

Chapter 3

Ninth Symphony

Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* centers on the violent actions and subsequent consequences that the protagonist Alex faces. Viewers are introduced to a teenager who enjoys beating people, raping women, and stealing. Because of these behaviors, Alex clearly does not fit into the definition of a tragic hero as he is too violent to be considered a decent person. However, Alex endures the journey of a tragic hero by encountering a Change of Fortune followed by scenes of Recognition and Suffering. As a “victim of the modern age” at the hands of the state, audiences may feel a sense of pity towards Alex. As the de-facto leader of a teenage gang, Alex’s drives lie within his criminal behavior, but the aspect of domination is present throughout these activities, leading to the *Reversal*. This theme of domination appears clearly in the *Reversal* scene, where Alex's droogs (friends) betray him and he ultimately is convicted of murdering a woman. Prior to this, Alex wanted to get his droogs to accept him as their leader and resorted to violence to achieve this by means of instilling fear in his subordinates. George, one of Alex's accomplices, orchestrated a home invasion for the four of them to carry out, but this specific instance was revealed as George's revenge on Alex for picking on Dim—an appropriately named gang member. In his assumption of absolute power and control over his friends, Alex does not believe that his “subordinates” would revolt and this error in judgment leads to his *Change of Fortune*.

After some time in jail, Alex discovers what he needs to do in order to be released. Because of his close relationship with the prison minister, Alex is informed of the Ludovico technique--a cutting-edge “cure” for criminals. Eventually, Alex is chosen to be a test subject for this treatment which involves forced viewing of violent films featuring Nazis and gang rapes. In addition to being disgusted by violence, one of the film's soundtracks uses music from Beethoven’s “Ninth Symphony,” a piece that

Alex enjoys. As a result of the “Ninth’s” inclusion as background music for repulsive sights, Alex becomes nauseated when he hears something that was once appropriately pleasurable.

Once released, Alex realizes he is unable to defend himself with physical violence as he is being attacked by a group of homeless old men and when police officers, who happen to be George and Dim, attempt to drown Alex in a secluded basin of water. These two instances signal the beginning of the Recognition scene, as Alex realizes the Ludovico technique did more harm than good. As Alex recovers from his attempted homicide by drowning at the hands of his former friends, he revisits a residence that was subject to one of his teenage home invasions. Once inside, the writer Frank Alexander and his bodyguard attempt to make Alex comfortable by allowing him to bathe, providing him with dry clothes, and giving him a meal. Prior to this hospitality, Frank recognizes Alex, not as the former teenager that raped his wife and beat him, but as the boy from the papers. Once Alex makes himself comfortable in the bath and begins to sing "Singin' in the Rain," which he sang as a teenager during the violent home invasion, Frank overhears him from the other room and realizes exactly who Alex is. After taking the former criminal in, Frank intends to use Alex, whose face is plastered on every newspaper, for his own political agenda, which opposes using the Ludovico technique to reform criminals. Frank provides Alex with drugged food to induce unconsciousness. When Alex wakes up in the attic-type room upstairs, Beethoven's “Ninth Symphony” blares from below as Frank smiles at the pain inflicted on his guest. As a result of his inability to escape and suffering, Alex decides to "snuff it" and jumps out of the upstairs window. This additional realization that his once favorite music is painful is the final part of the Recognition scene. Because Alex has been intentionally rendered unable to defend himself and unintentionally able to listen to one of the only things that gave him pleasure without harming or degrading others, his short time in the attic is his Scene of Suffering. Although Alex does not succeed in his suicide attempt, when he arrives at the hospital he returns to his normal self and receives apologies from his parents, who kicked him out once he was in jail, and the Minister of the Interior, who selected him for the Ludovico technique.

Watching *A Clockwork Orange* using the Aristotelian tragic hero formula provides yet another perspective to the overall interpretations of this film. Alex clearly does not entirely fit the image of a tragic hero given his juvenile criminal actions. However, Alex's need to dominate his friends led to his misfortune in jail and his mistake was assuming they would continue to act as loyal subjects. Following the Reversal, Alex endures the subsequent Recognition and Suffering scenes that tragic heroes encounter. To most viewers, Alex objectively is a criminal teenager; however, using the applied Aristotelian blueprint where a miscalculation leads to demise, Alex's juvenile mind mistakenly believed that he was in control. As several years pass in this film, one can assume that the Alex in the beginning is not the Alex that sarcastically assures the audience "I was cured all right" at the end. Although Alex is physically unharmed at the end, the teenage, criminal Alex has been killed as a result of both the passage of time and apologies from authority figures (his parents and the Minister of the Interior) who can finally give him the support to prevent further descent into crime. Additionally, by omitting Burgess's 21st chapter where readers see a significant maturity change in Alex, Kubrick leaves audiences with an ambiguous ending of Alex's fate (Burgess 200-212).

Chapter 4

Dream of the Night of the Sabbath

The Shining serves as Kubrick's most recognizable film to most viewers as it features several scenes that often appear as homages in later works of art. While Jack Torrance serves as the protagonist in this film, he is not the tragic hero. In fact his wife, Wendy, follows the journey of a tragic hero while maintaining the element of existing “between two extremes, [. . .] not eminently good and just, yet whose misfortune is brought about not by vice or depravity, but by some error or frailty” (Aristotle 35). Her husband assumes the task of looking over the grandiose Overlook Hotel during its winter off-season. Audiences discover from Wendy that Jack has a history of alcoholism and violence as he once dislocated his son Danny's shoulder. This film opens with a picturesque shot of a lonely car traversing a mountainside road. Upon the Torrance family's arrival at the Overlook, they receive a tour of the facility including the grounds as well as the massive industrial kitchen. Danny begins to see visions of twin sisters who appear before him as he plays darts. As young boy, he does not find this occurrence particularly startling as he stares at the girls until they exit the room. On the tour of the kitchen with the Overlook chef, Mr. Hallorann, Danny and Wendy are shown the massive food supply that is to feed the family for the next seven months. In the store room with the dry and canned goods, the audience hears a shrieking noise over the film's soundtrack as the camera zooms and focuses on Danny before it focuses on Mr. Hallorann. In this scene, Hallorann telepathically asks Danny “How'd you like some ice cream, Doc” before later vocalizing this question in the presence of Wendy and providing Danny with the promised chocolate ice cream. Alone, Hallorann explains to Danny how he knew his parents called him "Doc" and informs Danny about the shining, an ability that allowed them to telepathically communicate. Silent at first, Danny tells Hallorann that Tony, “the little boy that lives inside his mouth,” restricts him from talking about his psychic abilities. Hallorann warns Tony about Room 237 and explains that the atrocities of the past left behind a residue that people with the shining can see.

A month after the tour, the Torrances are settled in, Jack struggles with writing, and the audience is exposed to daily life at the abandoned Overlook. Jack becomes increasingly aggressive in his isolation and finds comfort in the likenesses of Overlook ballroom ghosts. As Jack bounces tennis balls against the hotel's walls and lounges around inside, Wendy cooks, watches television, checks the boiler room, uses the radio to talk to the local police, and spends time with Danny as they walk in the hedge maze. After noticing Danny's strange behavior, Wendy soon confronts her husband about the well-being of their child, and is mocked by Jack and criticized for being solely concerned about Danny. As Jack predatorily taunts and threatens Wendy, his madness becomes apparent during this scene where Wendy delivers a blow to Jack's head with a baseball bat in self-defense and locks his unconscious body in the industrial pantry.

During Jack's time in the pantry, he threatens Wendy and experiences auditory hallucinations from the ghost of Delbert Grady. Grady confronts Jack about his inability to "correct" his wife as promised and informs him that his wife is "stronger" and "more resourceful" than they imagined. After being mysteriously released from the vault, Jack proceeds to go on a violent rampage through the hotel but succumbs to the snowy outdoor landscape as both his wife and son outsmart his plans for murder. Just as Grady before him, Jack has been immortalized in the hotel's memory, shown in a hotel photograph dated 1924.

Through an Aristotelian lens, Wendy Torrance's journey in *The Shining* fits the tragic hero's. The audience is exposed to a woman who strives to hold her family together as they relocate to the Overlook. During this five-month period, Jack wanted to write and complete his occupational obligation of looking over the hotel. However, Wendy quickly assumes responsibility of the enormous property while finding personal time to spend with her son. Unbeknownst to Wendy, her husband and son have seen, interacted with, and ultimately witnessed the dark side of the hotel. Almost simultaneously, Jack begins to exhibit aggressive behaviors while Danny's shining symptoms surface and are noticed by Wendy. The staircase-baseball bat scene is the Change of Fortune as Wendy realizes her son needs medical attention and is forced to resort to violent means to contain her jealous and erratic husband. Clearly during the rampage

scene, Wendy realizes her husband's murderous intention, however, she witnesses the true supernatural nature of the hotel once she stumbles upon a fellating ghost in a bear costume. Following this, she encounters more apparitions and grows increasingly afraid as she frantically searches for her son. While Jack's idleness and isolation allowed for the Overlook ghosts to interact and subsequently influence his behavior, they are now taunting Wendy in her erratic state. Although she is not being physically tortured, she endures the terrifying hallucinations from the ghosts. Because of the mental strain combined with her desperate search for her son, Wendy endures a psychological Scene of Suffering until she is finally reunited with Danny.

Chapter 5

Suite for Variety Stage Orchestra

In Stanley Kubrick's final film, *Eyes Wide Shut*, audiences are introduced to the life of Bill and Alice Harford. As a doctor in New York City, Bill and his wife are invited to a lavish party hosted by Victor Zigler, one of Bill's patients. Notably at this party, Bill reunites with Nick Nightingale, a friend from medical school, and saves Mandy's life as she overdoses in the company of Zigler. Through these instances, the audience is exposed to Bill Harford's personality characteristics as he is both socially pleasant and committed to his professional obligations as a doctor. Late one evening, Bill receives a house call about a dead patient. While he is out, Bill encounters a prostitute and visits Nick Nightingale at a jazz club. During their conversation Nick reveals that he sometimes plays piano blindfolded "in a different place every time" and once, because his blindfold was loose, he saw strange things. Bill becomes curious when Nick receives a call requesting his presence at a secret location. With knowledge of the password given to Nick, Bill searches for a tuxedo, a hooded black cloak, and a mask to gain admittance to this clandestine meeting. After finding a place to rent those items, Bill travels to the mansion, uses the given password, and gains access to the mysterious party.

Inside, Bill sees Nick Nightingale blindfolded at the piano providing background music for a strange ritual involving naked masked women and masked spectators in black cloaks. One of the women approaches Bill to warn him, but he ignores her advice choosing to explore the house. Bill wanders the ornately decorated rooms and witnesses an orgy before his eyes. The same masked woman finds Bill and warns him to leave again. Their conversation is interrupted by a masked man who takes Bill to the ritual room where he is confronted by what appears to be the group's high priest. Before a room full of masked and cloaked guests, Bill is requested to recite the respective admittance and house passwords. Although he correctly uses Nick Nightingale's password, he fails in giving the second password and is forced to remove his mask. Bill is spared from removing his clothes when the masked naked woman who previously warned him interferes with the confrontation and sacrifices herself. Bill is set free but given a

warning to not "make any further inquiries" or "say a single word to anyone about" what he saw because he and his family will have to face "dire consequences."

Concerned for his friend's well-being, Bill asks a diner waitress and a hotel concierge about Nick Nightingale. At the hotel, the concierge describes Nick coming to the hotel with a bruised face and two threatening men before promptly checking out. Afterwards, Bill returns his rented tuxedo, cloak, and mask, but he finds that his mask is missing. When he finally arrives at work, Bill is visibly distracted and leaves early to go back to the mansion. Consistent with the warning, a butler silently gives Bill a letter at the front gate that reads "give up your inquiries which are completely useless, and consider these words a second warning." Later, as Bill walks the street at night, he realizes he is being followed and stalked by a bald man. Attempting to escape this man, Bill enters a café and reads a paper where he finds out that Mandy, from Zigler's party, is now dead. At the hospital's morgue, Bill sees Mandy's body and realizes that she is the same woman who advised him to leave the mansion.

Bill soon receives a call from Zigler requesting his presence. Zigler reveals that he was at the mansion, "saw everything that went on," and was surprised that Bill was able to find his way into the party. He openly blames Nick for telling Bill about the party and confesses that he had him followed after his conversation with the concierge about Nick Nightingale. As Zigler reveals information about Nick, Mandy, and the party, Bill is visibly shocked and uncomfortable during this scene. Returning home, Bill finds the missing rental mask next to his sleeping wife and proceeds to confess about his clandestine nightly adventures. Bill and Alice's relationship appears to be strained as they shop with their daughter; however, Alice reestablishes the security in their relationship and forgets Bill's adventure.

Characterized by his need to help others as a doctor, Bill Harford's curiosity for his friend's secret job causes him to involve himself in the hidden activities of the elite. Not expecting to witness anything bizarre, Bill unintentionally becomes privy to this elaborate ritual and its spectators. At the mansion party, Bill's curiosity led him to being exposed to highly clandestine activities and the comfort of his disguise allowed him to ignore Mandy's two warnings. Although Bill's plan appears to be going

well, he mistakenly disregards the warnings, has a taxi waiting for him, and trusts in the anonymity of the cloak and mask. The confrontation with the high priest marks the Change of Fortune because he demands that Bill's protection be removed. Afterwards, Bill lives in fear as his life is threatened and he constantly worries about the safety of Nick Nightingale. Ignoring his wife and daughter in the process, Bill's natural consideration for others causes him to follow up with Nick which ultimately leads him to discover Mandy's death. As Zigler is also a patient of his, the call that requests his presence is also surprising as Zigler wants to confess rather than have a medical evaluation from Bill. Zigler and Bill's conversation is the scene of Revelation as the truth about the secret mansion party is revealed in full. Bill's Scene of Suffering begins in this scene as he exhibits signs of being uncomfortable particularly when Zigler casually discusses Mandy's death. The missing mask that suddenly appears when he arrives home prompts more suffering as he confesses to his wife, and thus relives, his experiences as well as his subsequent lying regarding his nightly whereabouts. Although Bill's suffering does not culminate in death or serious injury, he lives in an uncomfortable state with the knowledge of a secret society that has the ability to harm outsiders who speak out.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

While Stanley Kubrick may have made a mark in film history through his unique characteristics as a director, his subject material remains controversial. While the complicated theories of Kubrick's prolific films may entertain and intrigue, the simple Aristotelian tragic hero lens may also uncover hidden structures within these works. Calling the murderous Jack Torrance and the criminal Alex "heroes" may sound strange at first, but upon examination, they share commonality with protagonists like Dave Bowman and Bill Harford, because they all have made a crucial mistake culminating in some sort of demise. Furthermore, in these heroes' respective journeys, the Aristotelian tragedy scenes *Reversal*, *Recognition*, and *Suffering* can be extracted and examined in comparison to the entirety of the work. Seeing these four protagonists as Aristotelian Tragic heroes rather than merely an astronaut, a teenager, a wife and mother, and a doctor, adds an additional depth rooted in classical thought. While the films discussed in this paper have not followed the Aristotelian unities outlined in *Poetics*, their protagonists alone have the chance to alter the genre classification of these films, as *2001* could be seen as a science fiction tragedy given the circumstance of Dave Bowman. As audiences view these four films, with attention to the human imperfection in these unfamiliar protagonists, perhaps we may see these films as cautionary tales beyond the details on-screen.

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