

**FORGET ABOUT LOVE:
MEMORY AND THE END OF THE WORLD
IN LITERATURE AND FILM**

By

Myung-Ok An

**A thesis
submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of**

MASTER OF ARTS

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Abstract

In my thesis I investigate how four works (two novels and two films) explore issues of memory and forgetting. The first chapter examines Michel Gondry's film, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004); the second chapter examines Haruki Murakami's novel, *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* (1985); and the third chapter compares Milan Kundera's novel *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1984) to the film adaptation (1988) by Philip Kaufman. My central contention is that each of these works, in its own fashion, argues that a certain kind of memory is the foundation of human identity, and that the consequences of intentionally or unintentionally forgetting our private history—including pain and loss—is to lose sight of who we are. I will spend some time considering the form of each of these works, the visual and textual structures of which guide us in different ways through an experience that involves the reader/viewer's own memory. In my conclusion, I attempt to reveal how all four works, in the very act of dismantling our naïve convictions about identity and perception, ultimately build to a strangely optimistic vision of the possibilities of the human imagination.

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For my parents,
who inspired me to be who I am.

Introduction

"Body cells replace themselves every month. Even at this very moment,"
she said, thrusting a skinny back of her hand before my eyes. "Most
everything you think you know about me is nothing more than memories."

Haruki Murakami, A Wild Sheep Chase(197)

In the following thesis I investigate four post-modern tales of love: Michel Gondry's film *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, Haruki Murakami's novel *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, Milan Kundera's novel *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, and Philip Kaufman's film adaptation of Kundera's novel. Each of these works centers on a love story which is in turn linked, inextricably, to issues of memory and forgetting; each posits, in its own way, the argument that it is only by facing and owning one's memories of love and pain as fully as possible that a meaningful relationship with one's self, one's loved ones, and one's world can be assured. All four works make it clear that memory is a burden we are often too eager to set aside, but only to discover that we are (almost literally) nothing without it.

Apart from this central thematic similarity, I have chosen to examine these four particular works for several reasons. First, each work explores different aspects of what

it means to remember and forget. *Eternal Sunshine* and *Hard-Boiled Wonderland* specifically examine the consequences of forgetting and the importance of memories—even painful ones—to our fundamental sense of identity. They differ significantly, however, in the ways in which they focus these concerns: if *Eternal Sunshine* seeks to demonstrate the cyclical nature of human behaviour as a result of our desire to forget the past, then *Hard-Boiled Wonderland* explores more fully the inner landscape of a human mind that can no longer remember (except in fleeting fragments) a world outside its own walled borders. Both versions of *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, on the other hand, explore how the same event can take on a strikingly different significance according to the kind of memory through which it is viewed, whether that be public (historical) or private (individual). Like the other two works, however, Kundera's novel and Kaufman's film adaptation suggest that "truths" are always a relative commodity, and that the "self" is a concept constructed out of memories which are always fragile, malleable, and fraught with unreliability. By bringing these four works into contrast with one another, I hope to demonstrate that each of them, while exposing the slippery and ambiguous terrain of memory and forgetting to be a harrowing foundation for human consciousness, still manages to resolve its narratives with a vision of hope. They each suggest, in their own way, that it is only by accepting the ephemeral nature of human consciousness that our lives can be lived to their fullest potential.

My second rationale for choosing these four particular works has to do with the implications of their forms. All four works demonstrate a remarkable and ingenious fusion of form and content. The reader or viewer becomes a participant in these narratives in such a way that one's own memories are called into action again and again; by engaging with these texts, we are asked, in other words, to consider how their concerns reflect our own ways of seeing the world. Moreover, in exploring two novels and two films, I hope to contrast the different means both literature and film employ to elaborate the same themes and issues. Throughout the next three chapters I'll be touching, catch as catch can, on topics such as spectatorship, narration, and point of view; in the third chapter especially, I will bring two versions of the same story together in order to compare what is gained, lost or changed for the reader/viewer when a work of literature is adapted into cinematic form.

The first chapter presents my interpretation of *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, whose protagonists, Joel and Clementine, re-experience their relationship through memories that can be reproduced, edited, and erased by Lacuna, Inc. The film draws our attention to the parallels between its narrative structure, which is oneiric and closely linked to Joel's subjectivity, and the viewer's own experience and perception of consciousness. I investigate these parallels by revisiting some of the more fantastic sequences in the film from the perspective of Colin McGinn's theory of film.

A second chapter explores another example of telling a story about memories and a perception of the world that is available only through one's unconscious.

Murakami's *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* is structurally divided between chapters that tell the stories of "I" and "She". My discussion looks at how these two alternating perspectives draw a contrast between objective and subjective reality, as well as their relation to memory and forgetting. I also explore how the chapters that take place in the "The End of The World" portion of the novel trace out an intricate map of the human unconscious. I discuss, in particular, "I"'s role as "dreamreader" of dreams, memories, and fantasies.

In the third chapter, I examine Kundera's novel *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, and compare it to Philip Kaufman's film adaptation. I compare and contrast the specific narrative strategies that both author and filmmaker employ in their respective versions of the story, such as the disorder of time, the obvious interruption of the "author", and the fragmentation of narrative structure.

In my conclusion, I step back and take a wider perspective on the works I have been discussing. Each of these stories suggests that there are responsibilities we must strive to live up to whenever we confront the memories of the past: the honest acceptance of ugliness, a willingness to face pain, and a commitment to a more fulfilling existence in the world of the heart. All four stories present us with the difficulties of defining

individual identity in an era of shifting and ambiguous definitions of who we are, of which values remain worthy of pursuing, and, ultimately, of how we are to survive as responsible “dreamreaders” in the post-modern world. As tales of love, these tales offer faint echoes of hope amid the clamour of the end of the world—whether it is the world existing outside ourselves, or within our own minds.

Chapter 1

“Brain Damage”: The Dangers of Forgetting in

Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind

Who am I? ... You are the one in memory,

You are the other in forgetting.

Carlos Fuentes, Terra Nostra

In *The Art of the Novel*, Milan Kundera argues that modern art’s “greatest discovery”—as well as its greatest challenge—is a representation of human experience that explores, as fully as the art-form’s strictures will allow, the dream component of our existence. What he describes is the obvious paradox of leading the reader into a landscape wholly ungoverned by reason and rationality in a work which must, “by definition”, remain sufficiently lucid if it is to avoid meaninglessness.

His comments about the novel, which I will explore in relation to two specific literary works in later chapters, might just as easily apply to another art-form—that of cinema, which has its own complex relationship with our experience of dreams and dreaming. As Colin McGinn states, in *The Power of Movie: How Screen and Mind interact*, “The ability of cinema to imitate the sensory/affective fusion of dreams is a

large part of its power over the viewer's mind—its power to engage and penetrate the viewer's consciousness. Dreams reach to our deepest emotions by means of sensory representation; and so do movies”(105). Although film is an art-form with an inherent affinity to our experience of dreaming, films, like novels, must also strive for the kind of lucidity the novel demands, and for the same reasons.

Elsewhere McGinn argues what amounts to another paradox: while film investigates the emotional rather than the physical reality of those who inhabit its images, it is an obvious physical reality that is recorded in the first place. Those films which directly endeavour to emulate the dreaming process or the perilous, ever-shifting inner landscape of human consciousness are therefore instructive on several levels: they reveal, inherently, those aspects of the medium that are most similar to the process of dreaming; they reflect back; and finally, they highlight the differences in the ways in which the novel and the film handle oneiric narratives.

In this chapter I explore one example of such a film. Michel Gondry's *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, while not ostensibly concerned with dreams and dreaming, does achieve much of its emotional power by exploring the experience of memory and forgetting in a manner that could be called, at the very least, “dream-like.” Throughout the film, the viewer is encouraged to accept, as fully as the medium will

allow, the illusion that she has entered the inner landscape of the protagonist's mind which remaining, paradoxically, within the safe boundaries of her own consciousness.

The film's nonlinear structure and surrealistic set-pieces confront the viewer with a reality that appears, at first, to be utterly "freed from the control of reason and from concern for verisimilitude"(Kundera, *Art* 80) in precisely the manner of our dreams.

Only gradually does a more "lucid" portrait of the inner landscape take shape. *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* therefore asks us what exactly separates memory from dreaming. It also repeatedly questions the naïve belief that it is possible to draw a clear line between the private inner world and the public outer world, not only as they are represented within the film, but as they exist in the viewer's own participation in the viewing experience. Ultimately, the film suggests that our sense of human identity is ultimately nothing more, or nothing less, than the sum total of what we remember and what we forget.

I.

Dreams are featherweights,

And memory can shake them off at ease.

It's a tough customer.

It sits on our shoulders,

Weighs on our hearts,

Tumbles to our feet.

Wistawa Szymborska, The real world

At the most basic level, the film's love story is hardly different from countless others: Joel Barish (Jim Carrey) is depressed because his lover, Clementine Kruszyński (Kate Winslet) doesn't love him any more. The film takes its title from Alexander Pope's 18th-century poem, "Eloisa to Abelard". Brannon M. Hancock in *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* explains that:

In the poem, mourning the loss of her fallen Abelard, Eloisa learns that it is "the hardest science to forget!" She longs to replace her lingering love for Abelard with "God alone, for he/ alone can rival, can succeed to thee." But memories of Abelard still haunt Eloisa, separating her from God and driving her to suicidal despair, for as she expresses, "If I lose thy love, I love my all."

The poem takes on a more elaborate resonance in the film when Joel learns that Clementine has had her memories of Joel erased from her mind. To retaliate, Joel visits the company that erased him from Clementine's memory—Lacuna, Inc.—and agrees to have her erased from *his* memory. The film's otherwise conventional love

story distinguishes itself as something truly unique, not only through the novelty of its central idea, but—more importantly—through the manner in which the narrative is presented to the viewer. J. Hoberman in *Village Voice Review* points out that “*Eternal Sunshine* recalls the nearly erased memory of Alain Resnais’s nutty time-machine romance *Je T’Aime, Je T’Aime*. But even more, Gondry uses the crazy structure of the erasure process to illustrate the fragility of human perception.”

The interior reality which Joel is forced to journey through as the employees of Lacuna, Inc. set about erasing his memories of Clementine doesn’t stand out, at first, from the physical, exterior reality in which Joel actually lives. The viewer must gradually learn how to distinguish between these two worlds. The film opens, for instance, with a sequence that follows Joel as he makes a trip to Montauk, where he meets (presumably for the first time) a young woman named Clementine. A series of scenes then follows Joel and Clementine through the first stages of their relationship together, culminating in a fade to black. When we return from this darkness, some time has passed: Joel is the picture of abject misery as he watches Clementine’s apartment and checks in with mutual friends—Rob and Carrie—to find out why she doesn’t want to see him anymore.

The fade to black that closes the pre-title sequence acts as a kind of lacuna,

but one the viewer isn't likely to find obviously jarring or disruptive. It is the convention of film editing, after all, that we follow only those events which the filmmaker feels are of narrative or thematic significance to the unfolding drama.

Sudden dislocations in time and space are a hallmark of the film viewing experience and are, of course, a "natural" consequence of the medium's mechanical process. But as we follow Joel through various scenes of post-break-up despondency, the narrative itself begins to break down in a more alarming fashion. The transitions between scenes depicting Joel's discovery that Clementine has had her memories of him erased and his first visit to the office of Lacuna, Inc., for instance, become increasingly abrupt. By the time Joel agrees to undergo the Lacuna process himself in order to have his memories of Clementine erased, we realize that the process is, in fact, already underway, and that what we have been witness to since the fade to black that ends the pre-title sequence is the initial stages of memory mapping and erasure, from Joel's own point of view.

Intriguingly, the darkness of the lacuna is, in some ways, very similar to the darkness of the theatre in which the film is being projected. According to Bruce Kavin, this darkness in turn corresponds to the darkness of sleep that surrounds our dreams:

Watching a film and having a dream are both passive and active events.

The dreamer/audience is physically cushioned in a darkened room, most of his movements restricted to slight shifts of position in a bed or chair, and mentally in various degrees of alertness, watching a visual process that often tells a story and often masks/presents some type of thought. In both cases the eyes move and the mind exercises creative attention. The dreamer might be considered more creative since the dream manifests his own thought processes, but the role of film audience is also an active one since the viewer creates his own experience of the work (Quoted in McGinn 156).

Kawin's comments are especially pertinent to *Eternal Sunshine* because of the distinction he makes between active and passive viewing. Film viewers are active in more than one sense: they choose the films they view, and they bring their own memories (which we might also call experience) to bear, in varying degrees, on the action taking place on screen. Our emotional response to a given film depends largely on the filmmaker's ability to elicit our identification with the events and characters it depicts. Even the most fantastical subject matter can only succeed as compelling storytelling material if there exists, first, some kernel of universal experience for the

audience to relate to. The proper functioning of this process naturally depends on our ability to remember our own experiences.

Eternal Sunshine takes this basic premise one step further by not only presenting a love story its audience can relate to, but by demanding that we bring our memory to bear on what transpires before our eyes. Throughout the middle section of the film, a number of sequences draws the viewer deeper into the landscape of Joel's memories. Our journey, however, is a disorienting one because Joel experiences the memories in reverse chronological order. Each time we re-enter Joel's memories, we are forced to use our own memories to draw meaningful connections between events that intentionally thwart the complacent convention of cause and effect that cinematic storytelling so often entails. Without the active involvement of our memory, the experience of watching *Eternal Sunshine* would easily disintegrate into the shapeless incoherence of a troubling but vivid dream.

Moreover, the film's visual style seeks to mimic our perception of memory as incoherent, deceptive, and indifferent to external laws of time and space. Choppy montage and shaky hand-held shots keep us from gaining firm footing in the film's interior reality, just as our memories do in our own lives. Gondry shoots the film using bleached-out exposures: his images, like our memories, seem constantly on the verge of

disappearing. Joel appears in his memories both as a remembered participant in previous actions and as a silent observer. In a visit to Dr. Howard Mierzwiak's (Tom Wilkinson) office, for instance, he hovers at the edge of the scene, watching himself having a conversation with the doctor. If time is out of order in this film, then so too is space: doorways and thresholds lead into and out of spaces that, in the real world, are otherwise far apart. Thus Joel, fleeing an encounter with Clementine in the Barnes and Noble bookstore where she works, passes through a doorway and finds himself back in his own apartment. (Memories seem to share this quality with our dreams, which frequently conflate space and time in a similar fashion.) Faces, objects, and settings fade into the background as Joel remains in focus; elsewhere a spotlight effect zeroes in on figures in a scene while other details are lost to the surrounding darkness. These effects beautifully capture the subjective nature of our memories, which retain those elements deemed most important while misplacing, ignoring, or "selecting out" trivial details.

As *Eternal Sunshine* progresses, the film's visual effects and condensation of space and time create scenes that bear a remarkable similarity to the surreal landscape of dreams. Towards the end of the film, for instance, Joel finds himself in a beach house under siege by the Lacuna erasure process, which has followed him there to erase the

last vestiges of his memory of Clementine. (This memory of Clementine I will call “Clementine” for clarity, even though she is obviously distinct from the woman she is based upon.) The collapsing walls of the house act as a surreal metaphor for what is happening to the boundaries between Joel’s interior and exterior worlds. Joel and “Clementine” interact in a space that is, literally and figuratively, falling apart. Water from the shore rushes into the living room where they are standing; the boundaries between categories such as “interior” and “exterior” appear to have become meaningless. Just as the soaring winds and crashing waves rage around them inside the house, so too do Joel’s memories live, breathe, and perish in the bounds of time. These surreal poetic images are naturalized, however, within the context of a narrative that frequently adopts the subjectivity of a man re-experiencing his own memories. Jason Sperb in *Internal Sunshine: Illuminating Being-Memory in Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* describes this scene as follows:

As he talks about wishing he “had stayed” with Clementine that night, following her up the stairs, the summerhouse comes crashing down around him. He realizes the failure of his love, and the failure of his nostalgia—“one is nostalgic,” writes Boym, “not for the past the way it was, but for the past the way it could have been.” But, of course, Joel

now momentarily accepts the past “the way it was.” The sand and ocean floods over the kitchen and living room floors.

II.

I want to ask them

If they don't remember—

A moment face to face

In some revolving door?

Perhaps a “sorry” muttered in a crowd?

A curt “wrong number” caught in the receiver?—

But I know the answer.

No, they don't remember.

Wistawa Szymborska, Love at first sight

The idea of erasing or remapping the memory of a human being is, if initially appealing, also deceptively dangerous. The invasion of the public world (as portrayed in the film by Lacuna, Inc.) into the private realm is silently accepted by the characters in the film because of their vulnerabilities: they are either unable or unwilling to face their own pain, to deal with the errors of the past; to move on from the present; or to recreate themselves without revealing too many of their vulnerabilities. As Lacuna's

receptionist, Mary (Kirsten Dunst) highlights the film's reflection on this theme when she quotes a Nietzschean aphorism from *Beyond Good and Evil*: "Blessed are the forgetful, for they get the better even of their blunders." This is exactly what happens to Clementine, for instance. She doesn't know how to deal with her past with Joel, how to separate herself from the past and survive in the present without feeling guilt, regret or pain, or how to define herself without Joel in her life. The difficulty of overcoming the damage we have leads us seek out the balm of forgetfulness in the public realm—in this case, in the neurological expertise of Lacuna, Inc.

Mary makes clear, February is the company's busiest time of the year. For a business whose chief service is to supply the erasure of memories, it is hardly surprising that Valentine's Day—that yearly celebration of romantic love—should trigger a greater than usual demand for an escape from the pain of rejection, loneliness, and an unhappy romantic history. David L. Smith in *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind and the Question of Transcendence* states that:

The characters in *Eternal Sunshine* who opt for Lacuna's brand of therapy are, in effect, making the same mistake. They want to discard a piece of their lives. But experience is a delicate network, and no one thread of it can be pulled without threatening to unravel the

whole. Nietzsche, from a similar view of the nature of things, drew a similar conclusion in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: “Have you ever said Yes to a single joy? [...] All anew, all eternally, all entangled, ensnared, enamored...”

Lacuna exploits the weakness of human nature by offering its clients a radical quick fix to the problem of pain—that is, the burden of painful memories we carry around with us throughout our lives, and from which it seldom seems we will ever achieve anything more than an illusory or temporary freedom.

A key stage in the Lacuna procedure involves “mapping out” the memories that are to be erased by the company’s technicians. In order to facilitate this process, clients are requested to bring to the Lacuna office all physical belongings from home bearing even a remote association to the memories that are to be erased. After clearing out his apartment in a frenzy of thoroughness, Joel arrives at the Lacuna office with two garbage bags full of the material detritus of his relationship with Clementine.

Frederika Shulman in *The Objects of Memory: Collecting Eternal Sunshine* states that memory is:

itself a process of conflation and construction (an idea embraced by contemporary scholarly discourse). In this sense, memory-

making is performed consistently not so much in the recollection of a thing itself, but in the recuperation of the *sense* of it; the very essences inhabited in collected objects serve as far more than mere repositories of memory transmission, but as actively engaged sites of memory practice.

These photographs, letters, trinkets and diary entries are then shown to Joel while he sits with his head enclosed in a neural scanner. As the objects he looks at trigger various memories and emotional responses, the locations of his memories appear on a computer screen as a list of neural “coordinates” which the Lacuna staff will later use to guide the final erasure. Dr. Mierzwiak explains to Joel, “Technically speaking, the procedure is *brain damage*.” and calmly reassures Joel that the physical artifacts themselves will be destroyed. But these precious objects are more to Joel than mere garbage; they are the physical evidence of who he is and what he has been doing for the past two years.

What this amounts to, finally, is an investigation of the issue of human identity. The question is not so much “Who are we?” but rather “Where do we exist?” How much of our identity is defined by the physical reality around us, and how much by the interior reality within our own minds? The film’s love story is, ultimately, a tale of identity, of the inescapable fact that we exist at once in private and public worlds—or

perhaps somewhere in between. Joel and Clementine represent contrasting attitudes towards the importance of memory in our lives. Clementine impulsively seeks out and acquiesces to the Lacuna process; emotional progress is, for her, an endless refusal of pain. In her view, failure and pain are experiences best dealt with by sloughing them off. Joel, on the other hand, discovers that he is not willing to let go of his past in order to free himself from pain. Giving up his memories of guilt, regret and pain to Joel means relinquishing those things that make him the person he is.

The film dramatizes the issue of identity and its relationship to memory at midpoint, when Joel decides that he no longer wishes to have his memories of Clementine erased. The only way to escape the Lacuna effect, Joel must flee with his memories of Clementine, embodied by "Clementine" herself, into memories located off the map of his mind that Lacuna has constructed. He must therefore retreat into his innermost private recesses in order to preserve that which he realizes now is precious to him.

Several of these memories are from Joel's childhood, and mark a return to a world Joel left behind long ago. The film makes it clear that there are dangers to be faced in his return to childhood: by entering into these memories, he quickly becomes absorbed by them and begins to lose his grip on his adult persona. Crawling under the

kitchen table of his childhood home, Joel begins to behave like a five-year-old, pouting, crying, sucking his thumb, acting out for his mother's attention, thrilling in the security of a kitchen-sink bath. Clementine's attempts to shake him out of his regression by titillating him with an erotic peepshow meet with infantile revulsion. Later, Joel hides out in a sequence of childhood humiliations. In one memory he is bullied into hitting the body of a dead bird with a hammer. The adult Joel can't seize control of his childhood self and rise above his pre-emotional responses. Retaliating against the bully who has coerced him into striking the bird, Joel finds himself physically overpowered once again and allows humiliation to once again overwhelm him. He confronts his humiliation but cannot correct it or find a way past it. Memory, in other words, is a landscape that one cannot alter, but only leave behind.

In spite of the Lacuna procedure, eventually Joel and Clementine meet and fall in love again, without the memory of their earlier failure. At the end of the film, after listening to taped recordings of their first meetings with Dr. Mierzwiak in which they catalogue the reasons for wanting their memories of each other erased in painful detail, they both gain knowledge of their first affair. Jason Sperb points out that:

The film must return to "the paradoxical characteristics of a non-chronological time: the preexistence of a past in general; the

coexistence of all sheets of past; and the existence of a most contracted degree” in the present. Or, put more simply, “contemporary nostalgia is not so much about the past,” writes Boym, “as about the vanishing present.”

The final scene captures their helpless nostalgia for the vanishing present. After persuading Clementine—who wants to leave it all behind again—to wait, Joel and Clementine talk to each other in the gloomy corridor outside Joel’s apartment:

Clementine: I’m not a concept, Joel. I’m just a fucked-up girl who is looking for my own peace of mind. I’m not perfect.

Joel: I can’t think of anything I don’t like about you right now.

Clementine: But you will. You will think of things. And I’ll get bored with you and feel trapped because that’s what happens with me.

Joel: Okay.

Clementine: Okay.

This notion of the vanishing present literally overlaps with the vanishing white screen, allowing the viewer to ponder the nuances of the moment in visual terms.

The act of viewing Joel’s attempt to hold on to his innermost sense of identity in *Eternal Sunshine* leads the viewer to appreciate the precarious nature of her own

identity. The universality of the film's themes—love, humiliation, memory and forgetting—draws forth our own memories and experiences of these things in our own lives; the visual and narrative strategies it employs dovetails perfectly with our own experience of subjectivity. The film ultimately lets us accept that ours is an evanescent existence built out of memory and forgetting, and that we can still possibly love one another even in a world of illusions.

III.

Reflected in the rippling lake,

Trees tembled, nebulous and gray;

O swallow, let them never, never

Forget this day.

Wistawa Szymborska, Commemoration

David L. Smith mentions that:

Nietzsche envisioned no way out of the traps set for us by our own natures or the nature of the world. Nevertheless, in eternal recurrence he believed he had found an idea that effectively transformed that trap from within. [...] Eternal recurrence, then, is not a cosmological theory but a practical response to the knowledge that life is inevitably

bound by its own character and that we have nowhere else to go. It affirms liberty in spite of the prospect of endless quotation. It achieves transcendence, not by recourse to an imagined “elsewhere,” but precisely through the renunciation of supernaturalistic notions of transcendence—rejecting the desire for a different world in favor of the world we actually inhabit.

Eternal Sunshine reveals both the attractions and the perils and pitfalls of ‘eternal recurrence’ as Joel and Clementine, by confronting their memories of one another, reject an illusory view of the world (and of themselves) in embrace, instead, the possibility of another basis for human relationships. In Gondry’s film, it is the human faculty of imagination that ultimately overcomes the vast gulf between external reality and internal experience. Art, which is itself predicated on the powers of imagination, leads us in turn to a more crucial understanding of human experience. It leads us down a strange but familiar road towards an encounter with our most intangible truths. Without art, it could be said that there is no life. As an art-form whose qualities inherently resemble the processes of human subjectivity, film acts as perhaps the most accurate mirror of our private conflicts, longings, and dreams.

Chapter 2

Dreamreading: Parallel Minds and Parallel Worlds in

Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World

First, our love will die, alas,

Then two hundred of years will pass.

Then we'll meet again at last-

Wistawa Szymborska, Buffo

In *The Art of the Novel*, Milan Kundera compares the novel as an art-form to a seam of coal long since exhausted. He implies that commercialism has reduced the novel's techniques and thematic concerns to mere effects and surfaces: "If the novel really should disappear, it will do so not because it has exhausted its powers but because it exists in a world grown alien to it" (16). He goes on to argue, however, that there still remain unheard-of appeals in the novel's power. Of these appeals—or, at least, the ones that are of particular concern to Kundera himself—the most compelling is that of the dream. Kundera explains that:

The slumbering imagination of the nineteenth century was abruptly

awakened by Franz Kafka, who achieved what the Surrealists later called

for but never themselves really accomplished: the fusion of dream and reality. This was in fact a longstanding aesthetic ambition of the novel, [...] but its fulfillment required a special alchemy that Kafka alone discovered a century later (15).

If Kundera is tracing out a kind of genealogy of the oneiric narrative, the Japanese novelist Haruki Murakami is surely one of the more recent and prominent of its descendents. Although Murakami might appear to belong, at first, to an Eastern novelistic tradition decidedly outside the scope of Kundera's arguments, his novels are nevertheless so thoroughly informed by Western cultural references and literary styles that his own particular fusion of dream and reality is worth considering, in light of Kundera's comments, at some length. His novel *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, for instance, explores the possibilities of representing the inner landscapes of the human mind through an implicitly "Kafkan" narrative; that is, it fuses dream and reality in precisely the manner Kundera describes above.

Kundera goes on to define a Kafkan narrative as "one fundamental possibility of man and his world, a possibility that is not historically determined and that accompanies man more or less eternally" (106). Whether Kafka's novels are set in a totalitarian regime or a democratic society, their jargon is not history or politics; they are instead an oneiric hyperbole of the world that transcends a specific context. To put it

another way, the particular historical or political context through which a novel's characters move is less important than the universal experience of human perception and consciousness it explores. Like *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, Murakami's novel positions human consciousness at the meeting place of memory and forgetting. From this perspective, the world itself suddenly becomes a fantastical place, strangely familiar but compellingly alien, like the world in our dreams.

In fact, *Hard-Boiled Wonderland* takes place in two very different worlds. In the first world, the "Hard-Boiled Wonderland," a character named "I" recounts in a past-tense (memory-bound) narrative his efforts to unravel a mystery having to do with information trafficking, which leads him to shattering metaphysical discoveries about the nature of his own mind. In the second world of the novel, another "I" tells the story, in present-tense, of his arrival at a walled town called "The End of the World." After having his shadow removed, he takes on the duties of reading dreams in the town's library and adjusting to his new life. The chapters in the novel alternate between these two worlds and points of view; as the novel progresses, however, the boundaries between these two perspectives become increasingly meaningless. The narrative structure of the novel leads the reader first into a place of dream-like confusion and then, through a series of revelations, exposes the true relationship between these two worlds. As a protagonist who lives in both worlds, "I" reaches a point at which he is compelled to appreciate his

existence in two radically different realities. In pulling off a narrative of this kind, Murakami practices exactly the kind of literary alchemy that Kundera calls for in making an imagined world fully palpable. The novel's love story, which centers on the relationship between "I" and a woman named "She" who also appears in both worlds, can be fully recovered only at the end of the novel as the reader, along with "I", puts the pieces together at the end of the world and, in so doing, regains the mind he has lost.

I.

Returning memories?

No, at the time of death

I'd like to see lost objects

Return instead.

W. Szyborska, Still life with a ballon

Along with "I" and "She", no characters in *Hard-Boiled Wonderland* are given proper names. Characters are most often referred to by their profession, such as the Professor (the grandfather of "She") who hires "I" at the beginning of the novel to scramble and encode his research. This lack of labelling suggests that the individual identities of the characters are less important than their function in the world or their professional affiliation. Each character in the novel embodies a kind of archetype, forcing the reader to fill in the blanks with her own imagination. In other words, the open

scheme of Murakami's characterization invites the reader's participation in a way that a more closed scheme, with names for individuals, might not. Who then is "I"? As a Calcutec—or kind of human computer whose job is to absorb, encode and decode vast amounts of information—"I" travels through a perplexing, chaotic world without finding any way out of it by himself.

"I"'s behaviour is limited almost entirely to his professional identity as Calcutec. His affectless first-person narration reveals an inner life largely detached from the events transpiring around him. He exists in a constant state of alienation and loneliness from which he cannot find an escape route; he is incapable of deepening his connection with "She", even when she makes herself available to him. The objects he surrounds himself with and consumes—American movies and records, brands of liquor, the newspapers he reads, his cooking—have specific names and often evoke specific cultural references; indeed, collectively and individually they carry more evocative weight (or "identity") than the man who uses them. Without these concrete reference points, the character of "I" constantly threatens to dissolve and vanish before our very eyes. In the Hard-Boiled Wonderland he is nothing more than a tenuous outline of a human being, but an outline with enough awareness to recognize the problem this presents, even if he can find no way to a firmer sense of self. Patricia Welch in *Haruki Murakami's Storytelling World* points out that:

Murakami's characters appear content, though they are portrayed ironically. They commute to ordinary jobs, drink whiskey and beer, and listen to American music. Solitary creatures, they shut out the world with psychological barriers and self-imposed isolation. Nothing is obviously wrong with their lives, but something is amiss. Many try to fill their only vaguely sensed longing through mindless repetitive action and consumerism, not realizing that what they believe to be "identity" is largely a by-product of ideology that supports the interests of the state and capitalism. Then something traumatic rattles their complacency, triggering a quest in which they struggle to plumb the deep wells of personal and cultural memory for meaning (57).

Commenting on Murakami's unique world, Christopher Taylor also has observed that the "Murakami Man is an instantly recognizable character, although his names and biographies naturally come and go" (Quoted in Ellis and Hirabayashi 550).

The novel enlarges "I"'s predicament by placing him in a world whose physical properties are every bit as mystifying as the interior landscape of his mind. Like Kafka, Murakami leads the reader into a world in which the nominally familiar quickly opens into bewildering and fantastic dimensions. Murakami writes, "Reality is created out of confusion and contradiction, and if you exclude those elements, you're no longer talking

about reality. You might think that—by following language and a logic that appears consistent—you're able to exclude that aspect of reality, but it will always be lying in wait for you, ready to take its revenge" (Quoted in Welch 58). The novel opens with "I" entering an elevator that will lead him to the Professor's office. The elevator is a blank box of mysterious design characteristics: it lacks floor markers of any kind. When the elevator arrives at its destination (without feeling, to "I", to have moved at all), "She" is waiting for him. "She" leads him through a series of corridors opening on to endless doorways whose numbers are entirely out of order. The Professor's office contains still further puzzles: paperclips on a desk without any paper, minimal featureless furnishings.

Despite the oddities described above, these bureaucratic spaces and features lead the reader to expect to find herself in the reasonably familiar territory of Kafkaesque bureaucratic absurdity. But as "I" proceeds deeper into the complex structure of the building, the reader discovers that the space "I" has entered is merely a cover for a hidden labyrinth of subterranean chambers and underground waterfalls. These hidden spaces are an echo of "I"'s complicated interior reality: the author hints to the reader that the spaces "I" visits are at once unexpected and strangely familiar, like the Professor's office behind the waterfall, which is nearly identical to the office above-ground that "I" has just left behind. "Had I been led around in a circle back to the same room?" he wonders (26).

The physical structure of the world itself appears to defy all logic and reason.

In his critical study, *Dances with Sheep: The Quest for Identity in the Fiction of Haruki Murakami*, Matthew Strecher “explores the various ways that Murakami’s works demonstrate the dehumanizing aspects of contemporary society” (Quoted in Welch 59). The parallel riddles that Murakami poses about “I”’s identity and the nature of the world he lives in draw even closer together when a pair of thugs, eager to get their hands on the information “I” has brought back from his meeting with the Professor, break down the door to “I”’s apartment. Contemplating the doorway after they have left, “I” remarks that “The door stood for something” (135). While the door obviously signifies the literal boundary (now compromised) between the private realm and the anonymous, brutal forces of the outside world, it also augurs the breaking down of the boundaries between the world “I” thinks he lives in—the Hard-Boiled Wonderland—and the world of his subconscious he will soon find himself trapped in forever. “I”’s refusal to fix his door signals an acknowledgment not only of the meaninglessness of privacy in a world where his mind is merely a tool, but also, perhaps, a subliminal awareness that all boundaries—including those between the self and the world it perceives—are merely illusory. To have any faith in boundaries of any kind is to delude oneself about the true nature of human consciousness—and of identity itself.

The novel’s plot, of course, literalizes these metaphysical issues the moment the Professor explains to “I” that his mind, as a Calcutec tool, has undergone various

procedures and experiments. The various layers and compartments of "I"'s cognitive systems have been manipulated in order to transform it into an unbreakable cryptographic machine. To ensure that "I" and his fellow Calcutecs are not themselves able to access or consciously decode the information they have digested, and therefore risk compromising the security of their clients, the Professor has placed in the depths of their minds a "black box" where the actual "shuffling" and "laundering" processes take place, safely out of reach of even their own conscious minds. These black boxes are designed out of the raw material of an individual's dreams, thoughts and memories, and as such, are impenetrable to anyone wishing to break into a Calcutec's mind and steal what is hidden there. The perfection of the Professor's mind-machine depends, in other words, on that which makes us who we are, but to which we do not, ourselves, have direct access:

Each individual behaves on the basis of his individual mnemonic makeup.

No two human beings are alike; it's a question of identity. And what is identity? The cognitive system arisin' from the aggregate memories of that individual's past experiences. The layman's word for this is the mind.

No two human beings have the same mind. At the same time, human beings have almost no grasp of their own cognitive systems. I don't, you don't, nobody does. All we know—or think we know—is but a fraction of the whole cake. A mere tip of the icing (255).

Significantly, the black box the Professor creates for his subjects is not merely a duplicate of his own subconscious. In order for the subconscious to function effectively as a machine, it must first be opened up and then reassembled:

Next thing I did was t'read your black box into the computer pre-programmed with those patterns, and out came an amazin' graphic renderin' of what went on in your core consciousness. Naturally, the images were jumbled and fragmentary and didn't mean much in themselves. They needed editin'. Cuttin' and pastin', tossin' out some parts, resequencin', exactly like film editin'. Rearrangin' everything into a story (262).

Prominently, the Professor compares "I"'s evanescent mental images to images on a movie screen, and his own manipulation of those images to film editing. Every human being needs a narrative, a story, which allows him or her to bridge the gap between the world around them and the world within them. Just as our conscious minds edit and sift through the material accumulated in our subconscious in order to make sense of ourselves and the world around us, the Professor's black box allows him to maintain outside control over a process that would otherwise remain as irrational and disordered as our inner dreamscape. Cathy Steblyk in *Corpi, Murakami, and Contemporary Hardboiled Fiction* states that "Murakami's postmodern texts consistently demonstrate the ambivalence of

truth through a sub-textual query of mental landscape and physical reality, clogging the generic engine of ratiocination even while the highly ocular-based strategies of traditional detection are deployed.”

Of course, the experiment on “I” and his fellow Calcutecs has not gone entirely according to plan. A hidden design flaw in the mechanism that connects the various layers of the Calcutec mind to one another has caused the entire mind-machine to malfunction. “I”, the last surviving Calcutec, has lasted longer than the others, but in the end he too will suffer their fate. While to the outside world it will appear that “I” has died, he will in fact find himself imprisoned for the duration of an “eternal now” within the black box of his own mind. Before this moment arrives, however, the black box itself takes over “I”’s original subconscious, reassembling his sense of reality in the process.

For this reason, the Professor explains:

the world you see right now is changin’ bit by bit t’match up. Changin’ one precept at a time. The world here and now does not exist. But on the phenomenological level, this world is only one out of countless possibilities. We’re talkin’ about whether you put your right foot out or your left foot—changes on that order. It’s not so strange that when your memories change, the world changes (283).

As the memories the Professor has altered take over the original memories in “I”’s

subconscious, his identity undergoes a series of miniscule if significant transformations.

But because "I" has no larger perspective on his own cognitive machinery, he cannot experience these shifts as such. The Professor's final statement reveals the chilling truth about the nature of our perception of the world we live in: that our sense of the world as forgetting beings depends on memory. "I" pretends to be a satisfied, independent individual with a coherent identity in the external world of the "Hard-Boiled Wonderland" but each of these assumptions is merely an illusion.

Ultimately though, it is the simplified structure of the "End of the World"—his interior mental landscape after it has been reduced to a narrative—that appeals to "I". The Professor explains that "It's a peaceful world. Your own world, a world of your own makin'. You can be your self there. You've got everythin' there. And at the same time, there is nothin'. Can you picture a world like that?" (286). The Professor's description allows "I" to accept that he will soon spend an eternity in an unknown but comfortingly familiar world. "Compared to that," the Professor continues, "this world isn't but a momentary fantasy. Please, don't forget that" (290). A human being living in "a momentary fantasy" moves into another world which is *eternal*.

II.

Cramped, crumpled souls all dying to get out,

One last half drop of Lethe in my phial...

Not faith in the beyond, but only doubt

Can make you, sorry soul, a bit less wretched.

W.Szyborska, On the banks of the Styx

“I” spends his last day in the Hard-Boiled Wonderland of the “real” world drinking beer and listening to Bob Dylan’s song, “A Hard Rain’s A-Gonna Fall.” He thinks about rain: “A mist so fine, it almost wasn’t rain. Falling, ever fair, ever equal, it gradually covered my consciousness in a filmy, colourless curtain” (396). And so he passes into the eternal, internal world the Professor has fashioned from his subconscious mind, in which the prominent features of his “real” life outside take on new forms and identities. But as I stated at the beginning of this chapter, the novel’s structure, rather than breaking at midpoint to follow “I” into his new world, instead alternates from its opening chapters between one world and the other. The reader is at least initially unaware of the significance of this fantastical symbolist reality at “The End of the World” in relation to the “I” that exists in the Hard-Boiled Wonderland. We are forced, like the “I” in the novel’s even-numbered chapters, to gradually piece together at least part of the larger picture on our own. Jay Rubin in *Haruki Murakami and the Music of Words* points out that:

Each narrative creates a different world, each echoing the other at first in

only the tiniest details (such as the odd prominence in both of paper clips), but obvious parallels begin to emerge. Both narrators become involved with librarians, and both visit the library in connection with unicorns. The great adventure of reading the novel is to discover how the two worlds are interrelated (117-118).

This structural tactic has the effect of depriving us of the advantage of memory and places us on equal footing with the protagonist we are following. The odd-numbered chapters that take place in the Hard-Boiled Wonderland only gradually present us with the revelations that open up a bridge between the two worlds, so that as "I" begins to recover fleeting fragments of memory at the End of the World, the reader experiences a viscerally similar expansion of perspective. Jay Rubin points out that "for Murakami, all reality is memory and fiction is strictly the interplay of words and imagination" (116). He also states that "Murakami has said that a tendency to contrast 'existence' with 'non-existence' or 'being' with 'non-being' is fundamental to his work. His writings tend to posit two parallel worlds, one obviously fantastic and the other closer to recognizable 'reality'" (116).

Even before these final revelations take place, however, the novel sets up moments in which the two worlds echo one another, and plays off the reader's natural tendency to find meaningful points of connection between separate but congruous

narrative elements. Shortly after he first arrives in the Town at the End of the World, for example, “I” is told by the Gatekeeper that his duty in the Town is to be its “dreamreader”—to read the dreams stored in the Town’s Library. At the Library, “I” meets “She”, his assistant, who instantly reminds him of someone he cannot quite remember. She shows him the process of dreamreading by handing him an animal skull from a shelf.

Looking at the skull beneath her slender fingers, I am overcome with a strong sense of *déjà vu*. Have I seen this skull before? The leached colorlessness, the depression on the forehead. I feel a humming, just as when I first saw her face. Is this a fragment of a real memory or has time folded back on itself? I cannot tell (60).

Not yet able to grasp the meaning of his dreamreading, “I” finds himself disoriented by feelings of *déjà vu*. Although he isn’t aware of it yet, certain details he encounters in the Town at the End of the World are clearly echoes of his previous life in the Hard-Boiled Wonderland. There, the Professor introduces him to his research into skulls and bones. The Professor has invested his whole life in the study of the mammalian palate: “How the mouth works, how it gives voice” (27). In the Professor’s office, “I” confronts a number of animal skulls on shelves. The Professor explains that the open jaw of each skull can communicate memories from the animal’s past:

Every bone has a unique sound. It's the hidden language of bones. And I don't mean metaphorically. Bones literally speak. Research I'm engaged in proposes t'decode that language. Then, t'render it artificially controllable. [...] F'r instance, suppose you could draw out the memories stored in bones; there'd be no need for torture (28-29).

The skulls in the Professor's office have no particular fantastical qualities; they are just materials to be analyzed. The Professor's description of his research emphasizes their function as objects of scientific study. On the other hand, the origin of the skulls in the End of the World links them, in a more fantastic fashion, to dreams and memories. They belong, "I" is told, to the Golden Beasts that wander the Town. The unicorn-like Beasts die in the winter and the Gatekeeper preserves only the skulls, shorn of their horns, which are then stored in the Library for the dreamreader to read. "I"'s shadow reveals that:

People's minds are transported outside the Wall by the beasts. [...] The beasts wander around absorbing traces of mind, then ferry them to the outside world. When winter comes, they die with a residue of self inside them. What kills them is not the cold and not the lack of food; what kills them is the weight of self forced upon them by the Town [...]" (335).

The skulls in the Town represent the residue of the mind and the scattered remnants of dream and imagination. "I" has transformed them from objects of scientific study into

mystical objects of folklore.

The déjà vu that overwhelms "I" in the Town's Library doesn't permit him, of course, to penetrate into the source of his disquiet; "I" remains more or less blind to the significance of the faces and objects he encounters, and can register nothing more than a troublingly palpable sense that they are, in some way, significant. This blindness to the true nature of the Town takes on larger implications as the story unfolds. For instance, the Gatekeeper inaugurates "I"'s new position by ritualistically penetrating his eyes with a sharp knife. "These scars," the Gatekeeper says, "are the sign of the Dreamreader. But as long as you bear this sign, you must beware of light. Hear me now, your eyes cannot see the light of day. If your eyes look at the light of the sun, you will regret it. So you must go out at night or on gray days. When it is clear, darken your room and stay safe indoors" (40). The sign of the dreamreader is the scars on his eyes; to read the old dreams stored in the Town's library, he must first be blinded, rendered unable to look upon the light of day. Like the oracles of classic mythology, he must be blinded from the real world in order to see the invisible world more clearly. In her exploration of romantic subjectivity, Candace D. Lang points out that:

The truth involved here remains a fundamentally platonic one, that of an abstract eternal essence to be glimpsed in a dazzling vision or a brilliant insight; which is to say that seeing (what is hidden behind a veil of

appearance) remains the only valid mode of knowing (Quoted in Smith 7).

In Murakami's world, seeing is represented as a very deceptive mode of knowledge. The dreamreader's eyes must be scarred so that he can't be manipulated by seeing the mere surface of reality; his task is to penetrate to deeper truths.

In Plato's cave, the images reflected on the wall are all we need to concern ourselves with because the truth existing outside the cave has the potential to harm the eyes. The abstract essences of the world—the truth of things—can be glimpsed only by the dancing images on the cave wall. The dreamreader is in a state of being similar to that of the occupants of Plato's cave: he must read images that are only pale, fleeting remnants of the truth. The scar on the eyes is therefore a blessing for the dreamreader, rather than a curse.

Everything that exists in the Town represents the abstract eternal essences of the Hard-Boiled Wonderland. To put it still another way, the Hard-Boiled Wonderland exists outside the cave of Plato's parable, and the End of the World is the dancing images on the cave walls. Free from a deceptive form of vision that can only see the surfaces of things, the dreamreader is able to perceive a deeper truth by gazing on the images on the wall. Because he cannot look upon the Town itself in daylight, however, "I" can see these essences only through the act of dreamreading, an act that first requires considerable practice and hard work. When "I" asks the people living in the Town to

explain the purpose of dreamreading, nobody is able to answer him: it is simply his duty, and no further understanding is required.

At the End of the World, the dreamreader has access to only one skull at a time; each skull (and the mind it gives him access to) provides him with a piece of the larger truth. The images he reads are not a form of truth itself but a potential access to the truth. It is his task to sort out the complicated, fragmentary, fleeting, incoherent images from the skull in order to grasp the abstract essences of the Hard-Boiled Wonderland that have been hidden behind in the Town around him. "I" reads the old dreams and lost memories until he is nearly exhausted, and still finds something is missing from his dreamreading. "She" wonders if he needs to "unclose" his mind: "I do not understand things of the mind very well, but perhaps yours is too firmly sealed. The old dreams need to be read by you and you need to seek the old dreams" (183). When "I" does what "She" suggests, a kind of chemical reaction takes place in the act of dreamreading. The reason "I" survives the cognitive experiments in the Hard-Boiled Wonderland—experiments which have proven fatal to every other Calcutec—is that "I"'s mind is already too closed or sealed off from the outside world; ironically, it is this very quality that makes him a dreamreader in the End of the World. But he can't keep his mind closed if he is to be a visionary at the End of the World; he has to open his mind, breathe deeply, and let the images pour into his mind. He must make himself open and vulnerable to dreams and imagination in a way he

would not permit himself in the outside world.

In order to understand and appreciate his unique place in the Town, "I" must undergo a metamorphosis into someone different from who he was in the Hard-Boiled Wonderland. The first step in that process is to have his shadow cut from himself by the Gatekeeper. Everyone who enters the Town must give up his or her shadow; there is no choice. "I"'s shadow, like all the others, is put to work by the Gatekeeper, after which labor it will languish and die. "I" comes to understand that his shadow is the remnant of his selfhood that existed in the Hard-Boiled Wonderland; by having it cut loose, "I" is freed (whether he likes it or not) from the weight of his past. Unless he reunites with his shadow and the mind it represents, "I" will eventually become another "mind-less" denizen of the Town, like the Colonel, who declares that "The Town is fair in its own way. The things you need, the things you need to know, one by one the Town will set these before you. Hear me now: this Town is perfect. And by perfect, I mean complete. It has everything. If you cannot see that, then it has nothing. A perfect nothing. Remember this well" (85-86). The Colonel's comments recall those of the Professor when, in the Hard-Boiled Wonderland, he describes the inner reality in which "I" will shortly become trapped. In light of the Professor's comments about the orderly narrative he has created out of "I"'s subconscious, the Town might be read as a picture of our deepest selves—our "core consciousness" or "subconscious"—that has been cleaned up

and stitched into a coherent whole. But by “cleaning up” this core consciousness, something is lost: now that he is forced to live inside a world that reflects such a mind, “I” discovers that those things that have been edited out are, in a sense, vital not only to his identity but to his sense of being alive. The incoherent, the irrational, the buried—these are what truly give the breath of life to our sense of existence. By remaining in the Town, “I” risks completely forgetting his self, which is already fading fast; he risks becoming an empty memory without a mind to recall its significance and keep it truly alive.

Jay Rubin points out that:

The setting of the End of the World seems to be a medieval walled town, but later references to abandoned factories, electric lights, obsolete army officers and empty barracks, suggest something more like a post-nuclear (or perhaps simply post-war) world with ruined reminders of a past that cannot quite be remembered. [...] Only birds can travel freely between the conscious and unconscious worlds, so they act as symbols for all the delicate psychological phenomena that interest Murakami—*déjà vu*, images of half-remembered things, flashes of memory and—their opposite—sudden memory blanks (122-123).

Those in the Town who, for whatever reason, are unable to completely free themselves of

their shadow—their mind, in another words—are destined to live in the Woods, a wild region beyond the Town but within the Walls. As an archetype, the Woods symbolize precisely those things the Professor claims to have cleaned up from “I”’s mind: the wild, the irrational, the incoherent. Despite the Colonel’s warning to stay away from the Woods, “I” nevertheless finds himself strangely drawn to them during his exploratory travels:

Yet once I turn from the Wall and set foot in the forest interior, there unfolds a mysteriously peaceful world. Infused with the life breath one senses in the wild, the Woods give me release. How can this be the minefield of dangers the old Colonel warned me against? Here the trees and plants and tiny living things partake of a seamless living fabric; in every stone, in every clod of earth, one senses an immutable order (147).

If we read the Woods as the part of the landscape that represents the untameable (the traces of what the Professor sought to remove from “I”’s mind), we can also read into “I”’s response something more precise about the nature of exactly what is absent from the End of the World. “I” thrills at the Woods in the manner of a Romantic poet. His response reveals that he still has enough “mind” left to respond emotionally and imaginatively to natural beauty, to find an aesthetically pleasing order in a chaotic landscape that the mindless others living in the town find merely threatening. The

Woods overwhelm him with the force of quiet inspiration by appealing to a faculty visibly lacking in the other Townsfolk: imagination.

It is hardly insignificant, then, that only in the Woods does "I" find an object that triggers a similar response, but with greater consequences. The young Caretaker of the Town's Power Station, located just inside the Woods, gives "I" a musical instrument when "She" and "I" visit him near the end of the novel. The Caretaker asks:

Do you want to know why I collected these things? No one in the Town has the least interest. Everyone has the things they need for living. [...] No one wants for anything more. Not me, however, I am very interested in these things. I do not know why. I feel drawn to them. Their forms, their beauty (293).

The Caretaker responds emotionally to the outward forms of objects whose true purpose he can barely begin to fathom. The musical instrument (an accordion), along with a typewriter they discover, are objects whose function is the creation of art (music, literature). Not surprisingly, these objects can hold no value to the Townsfolk, who, in relinquishing the last vestiges of their minds, have also relinquished the need for pleasure and self-reflection that art provides. Even the Caretaker, who has lost more of his mind than "I", can only appreciate them as curiously shaped if aesthetically pleasing objects. He cannot link his appreciation of them to their original function, however. This task is

left to "I", who, after a great deal of effort, is able to remember a musical melody which he plays on the accordion later in the Library. The music has a seemingly magical effect on "She", who listens as he plays:

I turn out the ceiling lamp, and only then do I see the source of the glow.

It is the skulls. An ancient fire that has lain dormant in them is now awakening. [...] The flecks of light dance upon skulls. Some are old dreams that are hers [ie. belonging to "She"], some are old dreams of my own. My search has been a long one. It has taken me to every corner of this walled Town, but at last I have found the mind we have lost (370).

The song's melody (perhaps it is the Bob Dylan song "I" listens to on his last day in the Hard-Boiled Wonderland) awakens, if only slightly, the mind of "She". "She" knows, if only vaguely, that remembering a song will reawaken memories of her mother who has been forgotten for some time. In a similar fashion, the music of the accordion causes the skulls to glow because it awakens a kind of sympathetic response to the powers of art.

The Town itself represents a seemingly perfect world, but one that exists without the mind or the spirit of art—which, in the end, the dreamreader is at last able to recover. It is fitting, in the end, that the power that should break the perfect oblivion that grips the Town should be the power of art. Without art, the End of the World is really an ending, a disappearing; with art, the End of the World will be blossom instead into a new beginning.

The dull, bleak Town, frozen in the dead of winter, turns out to be a paradise of lost dreams for a dreamreader who finally acknowledges a sense of responsibility for the world in which he lives. When "I" decides to remain in the Town at the very moment when escape seems possible, his shadow makes a last-ditch effort to convince him to flee. "You yourself created this town. You made everything here (399)," he explains. But "I" justifies his choice by explaining:

I have responsibilities," I say. "I cannot forsake the people and places and things I have created. I know I do you a terrible wrong. And yes, perhaps I wrong myself, too. But I must see out the consequence of my doings. This is my world. The Wall is here to hold *me* in, the River flows through *me*, the smoke is *me* burning. I must know why.[...] As little by little, I will recall things. People and places from our former world, different qualities of light, different songs. And as I remember, I may find the key to my own creation, and to its undoing (399).

Having begun to reclaim his mind and helped another to rediscover her own forgotten memories, "I" decides to stay at the End of the World. Although he will be there for an eternity, he is no longer trapped, for he now has the power to change the world itself. By remembering what he has forgotten, "I" finally understands his place in his world.

Chapter 3

Crossing the Border: Exilic Memories in

The Unbearable Lightness of Being

Whenever, wherever, whatever has happened

Is written on the waters of Babel.

W. Szyborska, Water

Milan Kundera's novel, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, is a richly layered work that explores a seemingly endless combination of philosophical issues, including the boundaries between the public and the private world, the nature of reality and dream, body and soul, home and exile, kitsch love and true love, and memory and forgetting. The novel continually disrupts the boundaries between these dichotomies, criss-crossing over them and distorting them in a manner that warns the reader away from accepting a comfortable stance on any ground that seems firm enough to embody an absolute truth. Eva Le Grand, in *Kundera, or the Memory of Desire*, points out that if Kundera does "in fact teach us" a "fundamental truth", it is that of "the absolute relativity of all things human, and, consequently, the incompleteness and relativity of all knowledge—that of humanity, of oneself and of every true work of art" (1).

If *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* has made itself available to a striking range of analysis and interpretation, it is not only because of the complexity of the issues it grapples with, but also because of its unique narrative structure, which frequently resorts to disordered time, the obvious interruption of the novel's narrator, and overall fragmentation. Reading Kundera's work requires the reader to depend to an unusual extent on her own memory's power of ordering, given the absence of a continuous, unified narrative flow. The narrator's intrusive ruminations and meditations on various metaphysical concepts, problems of language, political situations and poetic meanings require the reader to make connections between the novel's narrative and its self-conscious reflections. The novel, in other words, invites the reader into a kind of labyrinth in which the reader must make his or her own way, leaving provisional truths behind like bread-crumbs, only to discover that they have been snatched up by birds.

In this chapter, I will investigate the approaches of two different media—the original novel and the film adaptation by Philip Kaufman—towards issues of memory and forgetting. I will also explore the ways in which both versions of the story approach the fusion of dream and reality so close to Kundera's heart. Both the novel and the film invite us to compare the landscape of memory and forgetting to the landscape of dreams. Finally, I will deal with the role of kitsch in memory. I will convey this relationship by exploring images of the eye and the tear in both the novel and the film. This will lead me,

finally, to a discussion of the dog Karenin and his philosophical position in relation to issues of memory and forgetting.

I

Memory's finally found what it was after.

My mother turned up, my father has been spotted.

I dreamed up a table and two chairs. They sat.

They are mine again, alive again for me.

The two lamps of their faces gleamed at dusk

As if for the Rembrandt.

W. Szymborska, Memory Finally

The four central characters in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* are Tomas, Tereza (his wife), Sabina (his lover) and Franz (Sabina's lover). Kundera himself in *The Art of the Novel* has pointed out that he doesn't have any interest in providing his readers with any physical descriptions or personal details for his characters that might occlude those provided by the reader's own imagination:

As I was writing *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, I realized that the code of this or that character is made up of certain key words. For Tereza: body, soul, vertigo, weakness, idyll, Paradise. For Tomas: lightness, weight. In the part called "Words Misunderstood," I examine the

existential codes of Franz and Sabina by analyzing a number of words: woman, fidelity, betrayal, music, darkness, light, parades, beauty, country, cemetery, strength. Each of these words has a different meaning in the other person's existential code. Of course, the existential code is not examined *in abstracto*; it reveals itself progressively in the action, in the situations (29-30).

The narrator of the novel points out that his characters are, for him, fictional beings born from a situation or concept that has gripped his attention:

It would be senseless for the author to try to convince the reader that his characters once actually lived. They were not born of a mother's womb; they were born of a stimulating phrase or two or from a basic situation.

Tomas was born of the saying "*Einmal ist Keinmal*." Tereza was born of the rumbling of a stomach (39).

In the absence of specific anchoring details, then, the narrator of the novel tunes in to each of his characters' minds by foregrounding their memories, dreams and impressions.

Hana Pichova, in *The Narrator in Milan Kundera's The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, points out that "He chooses an open-ended structure for his narrative. In this way, the characters' desire for freedom on the thematic level is supported by the narrator, whose choice of narratological techniques enables him to free the characters on the structural

level" (219).

At times, the novel feels like an extended philosophical essay rather than a conventional fictional narrative. The reader is left to piece the scattered fragments together in order to assemble them, mosaic-style, into a picture of the truth. The novel is constructed, in other words, using an open scheme that allows the reader to participate in making connections. In a similar fashion, the film version of the novel offers the viewer a stream of images to work with, rather than words. But in the very act of translating Kundera's prose into the medium of cinema, the filmmakers are forced to make choices that cannot help but alter the meaning of the story. Kaufman's film achieves something far more complex than a faithful adaptation of the original text because no matter how faithful the filmmaker strives to remain to his source material, the film—if it is to remain true to its medium—must find its own procedures using its own visual language including fine actor's performance.

The film's opening sequence demonstrates how this act of translation works. In the opening shot, the following title appears: "In Prague, in 1968, there lived a young doctor named Tomas...." In a scene that takes place shortly after the opening of the film, another title appears: "But the woman who understood him best was Sabina..." Then: "Tomas was sent to a spa town to perform an operation...." Later the writing itself finally disappears and is substituted by fade-outs that separate scenes whenever a change

in mood occurs. These devices, while trying to offer substitutes for the novel's narration, result in completely different nuances. It is the music of the film that takes on the novel's role of narrator most effectively in each situation. Patrick Catrysse in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being: Film Adaptation Seen from a Different Perspective* suggests that:

The choice of written texts is [...] related to the general light approach at the beginning of the movie. It also connects with the musical composition of the film. When the first text is shown, the musical accompaniment starts Leos Janacek's *Fairy Tale: Third Movement*. It is a cheerful violin concerto that accompanies the scenes about Tomas's sexual adventures. It translates the lightness of being in a musical way (228).

Through these different approaches, the novel and the film each reach their respective goals in a fashion unique to each medium.

Early in the novel, the narrator comments on the idea of eternal return: "The idea of eternal return is a mysterious one, and Nietzsche has often perplexed other philosophers with it: to think that everything recurs as we once experienced it, and that the recurrence itself recurs ad infinitum! What does this mad myth signify?" (3) A moment in life is not returned to once it passes; therefore every decision a human being makes has no significance. The unbearable lightness of our being in the world is unavoidable. A woman's laugh—Sabina's laugh—in the opening shot of the film may

hint at this unbearable lightness.

Throughout the novel, numerous motifs are repeated to signal eternal returns: Sabina's bowler hat, the number six, Oedipus, the park benches, etc. Each time these motifs reappear, their meaning evolves from what they meant the last time we encountered them. For instance, when he first meets Tereza, Tomas asks her to bill his drink to his room number, 6. Tereza replies that her shift finishes at six o'clock. At the end of the story, the viewer watches the couple enter into room number 6 at a country motel. At first, the number 6 represents to Tereza the concept of fortuity—for instance, the number of accidental events that lead her to encounter Tomas. At the end of the novel, Tomas books room number 6 at a country inn for Tereza; Tomas's act indicates that number 6 has evolved from a symbol of fortuity to fate: their fate to be together.

Sabina, a rebellious artist, owns a bowler hat which she inherited from her great grandfather. The meaning of Sabina's hat evolves as memories are added to it: it becomes a relic of the past, the present, and the future. The tale of Oedipus has a broader repetition in the story. Tomas is reading Oedipus Rex when Tereza meets him for the first time. The book itself (indeed, all books) are to Tereza a symbol of a higher life for her, a transcendence of the world of the body which her mother inhabits. Later on, Oedipus comes to stand for Tomas's faith in himself: the article he writes about the similarity between Oedipus and the Communist regime (they are both ignorant of the

atrocities that happen before their very eyes) results in his being deprived of his vocation as a doctor. In one scene, Tomas reads a book on a bench outside the restaurant where Tereza works; she mentions to him that she always sits on the same bench when she reads on her own. Much later in the film she watches the bench floating down the river as it winds its way through the city of fog. Each of these recurring motifs adds crucial layers of meaning to the issue of memory and forgetting as their significance shifts and evolves throughout the novel.

In the film, Tomas's first line of spoken dialogue is "Take off your clothes."

As in the novel, this is his standard command for initiating an erotic tryst. But both the novel and the film explore his love affairs in different ways. The film continually focuses on the scenes of Tomas's sexual conquests from a voyeuristic standpoint, which diminishes the intention of the novel's author and his philosophical approach to love. In a society which permits individual freedom only through the expression of sexuality, love takes on an even deeper existential meaning. Kundera's decision to foreground the love story in his novel makes sense because the love story has a universal appeal that transcends specific politics or ideologies. Tomas, as a womanizer, lives life according to the principles of lightness while Tereza, his wife, lives it according to heaviness: Tomas stands on the side of the body and Tereza on the side of the soul. Fred Misurella in *Understanding Milan Kundera: Public Events, Private Affairs* argues that Kundera

presents "Tomas as a scientist obsessed with the mathematics of catastrophe and chance, and Tereza as an aesthete obsessed with the search for form" (75). Although he perhaps simplifies Kundera's ruminations on lightness and weight, Misurella places "the desire for sex" on the side of lightness and "the desire for love" on the side of heaviness, concluding that Tomas lives out both sides of the antinomy by virtue of his dominant loves, Sabina and Tereza. After a short encounter with Tomas, Tereza visits him in Prague hoping, perhaps unconsciously, to escape a fate that has bound her to her mother's oppressive small-town world. The spell Tomas casts with the words "Take off your clothes" doesn't work on Tereza because she has a different memory of what "taking off one's clothes" actually means. For Tereza, undressing and nakedness mean exposing her soul, her private life, to outside judgment and condemnation. Abhorring her mother's coarse and sarcastic view of the female body, Tereza longs for the more sublime surge of the soul within the body.

At one point in both the novel and the film, Sabina calls Tomas "a monster in the kingdom of kitsch." To her, his lightness in life contradicts the heaviness of kitsch, which is itself a function of memory and forgetting. Defining the concept of kitsch, the narrator says,

The feeling induced by kitsch must be a kind multitudes can share. Kitsch may not, therefore, depend on an unusual situation; it must derive from the

basic images people have engraved in their memories: the ungrateful daughter, the neglected father, children running in the grass, the motherland betrayed, first love. Kitsch causes two tears to flow in quick succession. The first tear says: how nice to see children running in the grass! The second tear says: How nice to be moved, together with all mankind, by children running in the grass! It is the second tear that makes kitsch kitsch. The brotherhood of man on earth will be possible only on a base of kitsch (251).

The ironies and ambiguities the novel employs have the sole purpose of destroying such an idyllic and illusory view of the world. Kundera warns the reader of the necessity of avoiding the trap of kitsch, which is everywhere in the world—in our personal emotions as much as in political propaganda. As I said earlier, memory is needed for the reader to follow the fragmentary text and piece it together; it is, even more importantly, crucial to piecing together the larger truth that Kundera wishes to expose. Kundera points out that totalitarianism can be found even in a democratic society where the individual retains his freedom and the private is valued as highly as the public. The illusion of believing otherwise in matters of so large a scale only reveals the pervasiveness of kitsch in every facet of our being, down to the smallest perceptions and impulses. More dangerously, kitsch is a universal trap. The author has chosen, in this case, to demonstrate the

workings of kitsch on characters living in Prague, 1968 because his familiarity with that time and place allows him to ground his story in convincing concrete experience, but he could just as easily have set his tale in New York or London or anywhere else. Kitsch is not limited to a specific time and place; it is deeply rooted in our own consciousness and our habits of memory and forgetting. The historical and political context of the Russian invasion of Prague only sharpens Kundera's aim by heightening his exploration to matters of national and individual life and death.

It is significant, too, that the narrator of the passage from the novel cited above chooses to link kitsch to the image of tears. These tears are part of a wide range of ocular metaphors that recur throughout the book and, of course, the film. I have already mentioned Tomas's article, which compares the blindness of Communism to King Oedipus, who gouges out his own eyes—who violently blinds himself—after the realization of his fatal mistake. Jacques Derrida in *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins*, writing about blindness in Plato's parable of the cave, points out that:

The Platonic speleology itself develops, let us not forget it, an "image" of all possible blindnesses, an "icon," as Plato often says, a world that is also translated as allegory. Still blind to the idea of the things themselves, whose shadows they contemplate as they are projected by the fire onto the

wall in front of them, these prisoners have been chained since childhood, “their legs and necks in bonds so that they are fixed, seeing only in front of them, unable because of the bond to turn their heads all the way around.” A conversion will free them from the phenomenal prison of the visible world. But before this dazzling ascent, an *anabasis* that is also an *anamnesis*, before this passion of memory that, at the risk of another blindness, will turn the soul’s gaze towards the “intelligent place,” these prisoners suffer from sight, to be sure, and they will suffer again, because “there are two kinds of disturbances of the eyes, stemming from two sources—when they have been transferred from light to darkness and when they have been transferred from darkness to light.” But Plato represents them as motionless. Never do they stretch out their hands towards the shadow or light, towards the silhouettes or images that are drawn on the wall. [...] [T]hey do not venture out with outstretched hands in the direction of this skia- or photo-graphy; their sight set on this shadow- or light-writing. They converse, they speak of memory. Plato imagines them seated, chained, able to address one another, to “dialectize,” to lose themselves in the echoing of voices (14-15).

The novel itself seems to *speak of memory* through each character’s eyes and through its

use of ocular metaphors. When Tereza is out in the street after a fight with Tomas, the walls of the buildings around her fill with the shadows of approaching Russian tanks. After the invasion, Tereza takes photographs of the people in the streets, the tanks, the dead bodies. In the film, black and white photography captures the sense of history as public memory. Tereza's photographs are emblems of frozen historical moments that bridge the events themselves to the memory of them. The insertion into the film of archival documentary footage from the actual invasion alongside shots filmed in colour break down the distinctions between the past and the present of the film. The blindfolded statues in the streets symbolize the link between Oedipus's blindness to the fatal mistakes that lead to his tragedy and the forms of blindness that are played out during the Russian invasion of Prague. Later, the face of Tereza's Russian interrogator is frozen in a transitional moment of double exposure over her photograph of a soldier. Tereza finds herself in a public interrogation chamber strikingly similar to Plato's cave: photographs cover the walls, projected by blinding beams of light. The Russian interrogators are seated, fixed, looking at the photographs like the prisoners in the cave, and *speaking only of memories* that fail to acknowledge the truth of the Russian invasion. In a sense, photography becomes a metaphor for memory that has been fixed with outside meaning, for an image can hardly yield the truth when other truths (and even lies) can be imposed upon it so readily. Ironically, then, photography is another metaphor for blindness.

In the film, the viewer witnesses Tereza's tears on many occasions, but especially when she recalls the memory of her dreams. Such moments make the connection between tears and memory even more obvious. It is Derrida, again, who states that:

The poet Samson Agonistes would have received blindness as a blessing, a prize, a reward, a divine "requital," the gift of poetic and political clairvoyance, the chance for prophecy. There is nothing marvellous or astonishing in this: Marvell believed he knew that in losing his sight man does not lose his eyes. On the contrary. Only then does man begin to *think* the eyes. His own eyes and not those of just any other animal.

Between seeing and weeping, he sees between and catches a glimpse of the difference, he keeps it, looks after it in memory—and this is the veil of tears—until finally, and from or with the "same eyes," the tears see (128).

Tereza's tears see the truth residing in her memories of her dreams, which represent another view of the reality of her existence. Significantly, the film reveals to us the contents of Tereza's first dream not through direct representation but through her own narration of what she remembers of it. We see only her face as she delivers a verbal description. Tereza's face, streaming with tears, is a perfectly eloquent indicator of the emotional content of what she has dreamt, which is too horrible, too unbearable, too real

to her. Only later does the film resort to a direct dramatization of another of Tereza's dreams, which is presented rather as a kind of hallucination. Swimming in an indoor pool, Tereza watches a group of women exercising on the deck. As her head bobs above and below the surface of the water, the women are alternately clothed and then naked; Tomas then appears and invites Tereza to get out of the water and join the naked women. The ways in which film chooses to present Tereza's dream—through Tereza's face and through a direct representation of her hallucination—underscore the film's strategy of not dividing dream from reality. If the film had chosen to present separate dream sequences faithful to those found in the novel, such scenes would be inadequate in capturing the truth of Tereza's existence, which unfolds in two separate worlds: in her external reality and in her dreams. The novel, on the other hand, describes Tereza's dreams at length, but again the reader inserts these dreams into Tereza's own subjectivity. These two different approaches to Tereza's dreams both reveal the same aspects of Tereza's existence in very different ways.

Later in the film, a similar fusion of dream and reality occurs when Tereza, after a sexual encounter with a man she assumes to be an engineer, weeps while watching a bench float past in the river. She has followed the engineer to his flat as part of an attempt to experience the world of sexual "lightness" in which Tomas so easily engages. But when a coworker tells Tereza that the man she went with was possibly a member of

the Russian secret police, Tereza suffers from a kind of vertigo that shakes her down to the roots of her existence in the world. Tereza realizes that her very existence is exposed to secret agents who might be hiding anywhere, even in plain sight or the most friendly of guises. The world now appears to her as unendurably dangerous and ugly; the river, flowing past in the fog, carries with it the refuse of a ruined city—refuse of which Tereza now feels herself a part. The film's approach invites the viewer to read the scene through two different lenses; that is, the shot of the bench reveals both the destructive physical after-effects of the Russian invasion and Tereza's psychological state of mind.

Contrary to the novel, the film's narrative progresses in a linear fashion. The one exception to this occurs towards the very end of the film when Sabina, now in the United States, receives a letter stating that Tereza and Tomas have died in a car accident. The film then cuts back to Tomas and Tereza in the bar where we last left them dancing, drinking and laughing. This one moment—the film's only abandonment of strict chronological order—makes it possible for the viewer to perceive the whole film as someone else's memory. Sabina's tears overlap with Tereza's in the viewer's memory. The moment transfigures the entire film—but only in hindsight, or the viewer's memory—into an experience that more closely resembles the sentimental mood, self-conscious reflexivity and philosophical perspective of the novel.

II.

Memories come to mind like excavated statues

That have misplaced their heads.

W. Szymborska, Travel Elegy

Tomas and Tereza cross and re-cross the geographical border between Czechoslovakia and Switzerland in a manner that corresponds to a metaphysical journey, a search for an idyllic place that is also an eternal return. Apart from their direct involvement in historical events, they nevertheless remain ordinary people. By struggling to maintain their ordinary existence in the world, they experience historical events that affect their own memories of the world (which are, of course, their own making of the world). Their decision to leave Prague for the country farm represents their willingness to leave history behind. But the country farm is also affected by history; there is no escaping history no matter how far they go. The novel confronts the reader, in other words, with the relationship between history and an individual's private existence in the public memory of history. Halbwachs sees memory as

life, borne by living societies founded in its name. It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no

longer. Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past (Quoted in Berlatsky 103).

The illusion Tomas and Tereza both have of the idyllic nature of the country farm originates from deep within their own existence, their memories of a lost idyll. Exilic memories endlessly haunt Tomas and Tereza—and especially the latter, who considers herself being on the side of weakness. She raises the question of how to define or describe the longing to go back into memories of warmth.

The novel's narrator in the early part of the novel then states of Tomas: "To assuage Tereza's sufferings, he married her (they could finally give up the room, which she had not lived in for quite some time) and gave her a puppy" (23). The connection between a puppy and an idyllic place is thus established early in the novel, even if it is only later that the reader is able to grasp its significance most fully. Tomas and Tereza name the dog Karenin after Tolstoy's heroine, but grant him the masculine inflection of the name because the dog, though physically female, strikes them as somehow more masculine. Kundera names the last section of the book "Karenin's Smile" and at this point imbues the dog with significant philosophical meaning. The metaphysical significance of Karenin becomes most pronounced when Tomas and Tereza move from the city of Prague to an idyllic country farm. Of this, the narrator remarks:

No one can give anyone else the gift of the idyll [...]. The love between dog and man is idyllic. It knows no conflicts, no hair-raising scenes; it knows no development. Karenin surrounded Tereza and Tomas with a life based on repetition, and he expected the same from them [...] Human time does not turn in a circle; it runs ahead in a straight line. That is why man cannot be happy: happiness is the longing for repetition (298).

Alice Kuzniar in *A Higher Language: Novalis on Communion with Animals*, in her discussion of the meaning of animals in the writings of Novalis, asks the question, "How is it that the dog can be emblematic of human longing? Does it mean that animals share in mankind's intimations of a higher being or immortality?" (426). Kundera's placement in the genealogy of oneiric fiction—a family tree whose descendents include Novalis, a major thinker who sought to realign the relations between man and animal in his writing—underscores the romantic tendencies in Kundera's own writing. In Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, the animals say to Nietzsche's philosopher-mystic, "Look, we know what you teach: that all things return forever, and we along with them, and that we have already been here an infinite number of times, and all things along with us" (129). Karenin therefore represents the idyllic world that Tereza longs for; he is a vehicle to carry her back (to re-awaken) her memories of some ancient Eden. Freed at last from the brutality of life in Prague, Tomas and Tereza spend much of their time on the farm

witnessing Karenin's daily routine. At this point, Tereza expects to find a happiness like Karenin's—the happiness of repetition—but realizes the impossibility of ever truly achieving this idyll in the end. When Karenin dies after an illness, the narrator meditates on the reaction of Tomas and Tereza:

Tereza keeps appearing before my eyes. I see her sitting on the stump petting Karenin's head and ruminating on mankind's debacles. Another image also comes to mind: Nietzsche leaving his hotel in Turin. Seeing a horse and a coachman beating it with a whip, Nietzsche went up to the horse and, before the coachman's eyes, put his arms around the horse's neck and burst into tears. (290)

In this passage, the narrator connects the image of the animal with the image of tears.

Jacques Derrida writes of the fusion of these images, too, when he discusses Nietzsche weeping over the horse in his own writing:

We all know about the episode in Turin, for example, where his compassion led him to take its head into his hands, sobbing. [...] Now if tears come to the eyes, if they well up in them, and if they can also veil sight, perhaps they reveal, in the very course of this experience, in this coursing of water, an essence of the eye, of man's eye, in any case, the eye understood in the anthropo-theological space of the sacred allegory. Deep

down, deep down inside, the eye would be destined not to see but to weep.

For at the very moment they veil sight, tears would unveil what is proper to the eye. And what they cause to surge up out of forgetfulness, there where the gaze or look looks after it, keeps it in reverse, would be nothing less than *aletheia*, the truth of the eyes, whose ultimate destination they would thereby reveal: to have imploration rather than vision in sight, to address prayer, love, joy, or sadness rather than a look or gaze. Even before it illuminates, revelation is the moment of the “tears of joy.” (126)

Kundera might have named the last chapter of the novel “Karenin’s Tear”, for it is an allegory of the revelation of truth in the tearing-up of memory. Through Karenin’s life with Tomas and Tereza, Kundera points the reader to forgotten memories from deep down inside, and to the revelation of truth—of the ugliness of Prague in 1968, of the ugliness of forgetfulness, of the ugliness of history.

III.

I shake my memory.

Maybe something in its branches

That has been asleep for years

Will start up with a flutter.

W. Szymborska, May 16, 1973

The novel's narrator gives multiple viewpoints about events and ideas to the reader so the reader is left to choose whose perspective to grasp: the same events and ideas are reiterated by different characters so that the reader realizes there are no absolute truths to be found anywhere. As I have argued, this aspect of the novel manifests itself most strongly in its treatment of the issue of memory and forgetting. In Kundera's world, memory itself is transformed into something very different from objective truth or reality, and evolves eventually and inevitably into a state of forgetfulness. Kundera's novel poses with questions to the reader about her own connections to events both private and historical by way of an unconventional narrative structure.

Philip Kaufman's film adaptation also addresses the issue of memory and forgetting using the film medium's own unique properties. The viewing experience itself depends on the viewer's memory and forgetting as filmic images are intermingled with the viewer's own memories. But the greatest difference between the novel and the film lies in their respective endings. The novel emphasizes the barrenness of Tomas and Tereza's life in the country and their ultimate inability to escape the effects of the nation's totalitarian regime, while the film chooses to depict their life in the country as very romantic and simple.

In either version, however, the reader already knows that Tomas and Tereza die in the country, a fact that forces us to acknowledge our own mortality. Kundera asks us

to wonder why we burst into tears when there are still truths to be discovered and appreciated on the road ahead. No matter where our memories dwell, humanity must deal with them in the limited space and the limited time of here and now.

Conclusion

It was time to think

The whole thing over.

We'd been offered a trip

From which we'd surely be returning soon.

Wouldn't we.

A trip outside eternity-

Monotonous, no matter what they say,

And foreign to time's flow

The chance may never come our way again.

W. Szyborska, One Version of Events

The four texts I have dealt with in my thesis, which I have examined through the lens of memory and forgetting, present love stories with a distinctive end-of-the-world mood: a love story that takes place in the memories of a man as the memories themselves are being erased (*Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*); a love story that takes place in the mind of a man who is trapped in a narrative image of his own subconscious (*Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*); and a love story that ends at the edge of a

fading moment in history (the fall of Prague in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*). Each of these texts elaborates on a subjective experience of emotional disequilibrium which is itself inseparable from the context of memory, as if in keeping with the following remark by Gilles Deleuze in *Cinema 2: The Time Image*: “Memory is not in us; it is we who move in a being-memory, a world-memory” (101). Each of these works is built on narrative structures that confront us with a sense of time that is cyclical, relative, and fractured. In *Eternal Sunshine*, the viewer is exposed to the recurring love story of Joel and Clementine; in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, the reader returns to the same events again and again, but each time from a different perspective. In *Hard-Boiled Wonderland*, the reader crosses back and forth between the two worlds of “I”. This lack of linearity is far more apposite to narratives whose central thematic concerns of memory and forgetting; in other words, the form of each work is itself of a piece with the processes and procedures of consciousness it chooses to explore.

Each iteration of this kind of love story relies on the tension between an obsessive backward gaze (into the past) and a forward gaze (towards future, which is full of either loss or healing). Summarizing her understanding of Freud’s sense of this kind of distinction, Wendy Wheeler proposes that:

In melancholia, loss is perceived not merely as the loss of some other—whether a cherished person or a cherished idea—but, due to the

narcissistic incorporation of the object in order to perceive it, it is perceived as the loss of the self. In mourning, the bereaved and shattered self learns to let go of what has made its world meaningful. (Quoted in Baker 164).

Instead of suffering through the gulf that divides the past and the present, each protagonist of the four works I've discussed revisits their past as an act of mourning, and searches for a new territory that will enable them to move on into the future. In *Eternal Sunshine*, despite the loss of his memories during the Lacuna procedure, Joel meets and falls in love again with Clementine even after they both acknowledge their humiliating choices and mistakes. Joel mourns the loss of Clementine most fully only when he encounters her in his memories, where she acknowledges her own secret pain. Only after they both acknowledge that pain is a necessary component of life can they move on from their past and proceed into the future.

In *Hard-Boiled Wonderland*, "I" feels hope for his own future when he finally manages to awaken "She"'s memories, even though he is still trapped for an eternity at the End of the World. As the Town's dreamreader, he is eager to find more moments like the one in which the accordion breaks the spell of forgetfulness that has descended on those around him. "I"'s determination to bridge the gap between the Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World renews his very existence by way of lost memories

and lost dreams. In *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Tomas and Tereza remain silent in front of Karenin's grave under the apple trees, imagining the idyllic world their dog represented, and which they both dreamt of finding for themselves. Instead they promise each other to remain together, starting in the here and now.

According to novelist Kazuo Ishiguro, Murakami has two distinct styles: "the bizarre, anarchic style" and a "very controlled, melancholy approach". His works also frequently turn on a "thematic obsession going back very far into the past, [...] about the ephemerality of life" (Quoted in Ellis and Hirabayashi 548). In a similar fashion, Gondry and Kundera also explore the past, which in their works is very much like Murakami's recurring image of the falling cherry-blossom, an image that captures a fragmentary, discontinuous sense of self, like motes of dust caught in the light of memory.

The unicorn-like skull on Joel's TV mirrors the skull on "I"'s TV; the dream-images of women slaughtered in a pool in Prague mirrors the burning bodies of the Golden Beasts at the End of the World. Is it merely a coincidence that each of these works use (recycle) the same constellations of images? Throughout each of the four works, two other powerful images overlap: those of the eye and the animal. As I mentioned in the preceding chapters, both images connect to issues of memory; but I would now like to take another look at the presence of animals in these works as a way of building to a larger, more conclusive statement about memory's relationship to identity

and the nature of nostalgia in a post-modern world. The appearance of animals in these works suggests that the crisis of human identity in an ever-shifting world receives a kind of resolution only when one tries to bridge the fissure between outside reality and the interior faculty of the human imagination, and/or between the past and the present. In *Eternal Sunshine*, for instance, the presence of a huge elephant in the middle of a street is normalized by the context of the parade Joel is watching pass by even as it enhances the fantastic qualities of reality. Furthermore, the elephant (a well-worn symbol of remembering) sheds light on the mysterious and ambiguous border between the conscious and the unconscious minds. This astonishing image bridges, in a single moment, the surreal inner landscape and the outer world.

In *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Tereza witnesses Karenin's illness and death and finds an unexpected beauty in the process. She reaches a point where she finally recognizes the fact of her own death, the vulnerability of her own desire for happiness, and the impossibility of the idyllic space she seeks to find in the world. Her romantic view is crushed, but only to be renewed in a more poetically oblique fashion, just like the epitaph for Karenin which reads, "Two Rolls and a Bee." Her view of Karenin is—and has always been—a romanticized one which says more about Tereza's desires and her view of the world than the animal itself. Can Karenin really smile or cry as she imagines he does? Karenin comes in the end to symbolize the illusory idyllic

space which Tereza has searched for her own life. In the end, she must find happiness instead in the repetition of the routine, the possibilities of the moment, and her own memories.

Each of these encounters with animals bears a significant relation to the issue of memory and identity in the post-modern world. The animals in each of these four works irrefutably occupies a space which none of the human characters is capable of reaching; the reader, encountering this impossible-to-bridge schism, is left to wonder about the unknown (or unreachable) nature of their own identities.

For the post-modern author, the encounter with an animal is the perfect tool for triggering the reader to consider anew their own reality, to relocate themselves in the landscapes of the political, social, and psychological. What kind of world do we live in? What are our responsibilities to the gross errors of human history? Is it a worthwhile effort to face humanity's collective—and too often faulty—memory? What values are still worth pursuing? The works I have discussed pose questions these questions without answering them, for that, of course, is our responsibility.

In *Hard-Boiled Wonderland*, the Golden Beasts who live at the End of the World are also creatures that inhabit a kind of borderland. They are allowed to leave the Town every night and return through the Gate every morning. What they do in the daylight is to collect or absorb the remnants of human minds scattered in the Town. At

the moment they hear the call of the Gatekeeper's horn summoning them out of the Town, they raise their heads in unison as if remembering, collectively, something from an ancient Eden. Is it possible for the Golden Beasts to have memories for themselves? Aristotle, in *Parts of Animals*, points out that "many of the same attributes belong to many different kinds of animal, for example sleep, breathing, growth, wasting, death, and many other affections and conditions of this sort" (220) and that "the movers of the animal are reasoning and *phantasia* (imagination) and choice and desire" (233). It is their own innate capacity for imagination that causes the Golden Beasts to respond, if only for a moment, to the sound of the horn at sunset. Their own imagination responds to the human mind as if seeing it on the horizon; eventually they mingle into one until the boundaries that separate them blur completely. After dying off in the winter, their skulls are put on the shelves in the Library for the Dreamreader to read the fantasies, old dreams and forgotten memories they contain. Confused by unable to find a context for these images, the Dreamreader questions the difficult and baffling responsibility the Town has bestowed upon him. "Perhaps I am inadequate as a dreamreader," "I" states; "Perhaps the light is dimmed, the language eroded over untold years. Or again, are these dimensions of a different order? Does there exist an intractable chasm between my waking time and the dream time of the skulls?" (Murakami 184). He must continue to read them, however, in spite of the doubt and confusion the act of dreamreading creates.

I would argue, by way of conclusion, that this process of self-questioning echoes the creative function of nostalgia in a post-modern world. Jean-Francois Lyotard in *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute* states that “our nostalgia is coupled with irony—an irony that critiques what we feel. This irony is a central feature of the postmodern narrator, someone usually left alone with self-awareness, fragmented and supposedly beyond illusions” (167). This process of self-questioning awakens a longing for a more abstracted identity; that is, it triggers a desire to re-evaluate or decipher an imposed or assumed identity (which can be personal or communal). The sense of displacement and timelessness in the four works I have examined thus signal new ways of defining our identity. In *Eternal Sunshine*, Joel and Clementine walk side by side on the shore at Montauk where they first met each other for the first time; in *Hard-Boiled Wonderland*, “I” and “She” remain together at the end of the world, which is also another new beginning; in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Tomas and Tereza approach but never reach—in both the novel and the film’s “present-tense”—an act of death, but remain suspended in a place and time of happiness and peace. Nostalgia, as an act of mourning, can therefore be understood as a vehicle for provoking an unexpected diversion into a new and more fully realized future.

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