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‘Dreadful Sorry:’ Spots of Passion and the Memory of Being Human in Kaufman’s “Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind” and Pope’s ‘Eloisa to Abelard’[i]

*By: June-Ann Greeley, Ph.D.*

***The Introduction***

Memory is a journey of infinite possibility, a continuous passage through time and sense that offers each person an opportunity not merely to recall and to reflect on former occasions and previous experiences, but to reconsider and to reexamine the past as a guide, as instruction, for healthy individuation. Memory, then, can be understood to be the aggregate of experiential and emotional recollection that frames the essential ground in forming and realizing individual identity. Both Alexander Pope in his poem “Eloisa to Abelard” and Michel Gondry/Charlie Kaufman in the film “Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind” offer portraits of individuals who, in asserting the critical function of their memories and of the very act of their remembering, including the emotional responses such memories evoke, actually particularize and affirm their unique selves and their quintessential humanness; as offered by the characters of Eloisa and Joel, memory is the collective experiences of an individual as understood by the individual, which understanding comes to shape a unique conception of the self.

Yet Pope and Gondry/ Kaufman posit another essential dimension to the significance of memory, especially in relation to the formation of the individual, independent self: the critical aspect of the other. The sorrowful and frustrated, then reassured and slightly hopeful, narrations of the primary characters, Eloisa and Joel Barish, do seem to claim that personal interactions with the ‘other,’ alliances with others, and the gathered memories of the self in concert with others, or as one “remembers” that others might have regarded oneself, beneficially augment personal recollection and thereby dynamically refine both individual and collective

humanity. There is an inherent bond connecting one person to another, those voices imply, that persuades the identification of the self as an existant in counterpoint to the ‘other,’ and thus memories of others, and of self with others, expand the dimensions of private reality into a collective existence, and so encourage the individual to welcome all particulars of memory. Such memories of shared experiences, or of similar circumstances, or even recognition of the other within the layered expressions of memories, might well encourage, in the end, a kind of compassion and even forbearance, as the individual comes to recognize the self as an aspect of a greater whole, a distinctive but not solitary participant in the unbroken procession of human existence.

### *Two Vignettes*

First vignette: A man wakes up. He feels odd—not ill, actually, but vague, disoriented. What time is it? Morning, already? When was the evening? When did he fall asleep? Why is he wearing those strange blue pajamas? He has no name, yet he is familiar: he walks to his car and discovers that there is a remarkably hideous dent on its side, an unreasonable injustice, really, he fumes. He waits on the platform of his commuter train station, impatient to be about his business and yet loathing another day at work. He is unshaven, unkempt, not ready to endure a day like every other day at the office. His voice, lethargic, numb, is heard over the murmur of a line of commuters, grumbling that it is Valentine’s Day, a day that “makes people feel like crap.” That is just how the man must feel because that is just how the man looks, unshaven, unkempt, bemoaning the hapless state of his romantic life, his dismal loneliness on this Valentine’s Day. “I woke up in a funk this morning,” he complains. Yet, suddenly, he decides to do something out of character, apart from his routine (“I’m not impulsive,” he protests), and-- he breaks free. For reasons that have not yet crystallized for him, he races to the other, nearly empty, side of the

railroad tracks and jumps into a departing train, heading off into the cold, toward the melancholy solitude of an isolated stretch of beach, to be alone with his thoughts, contemplating his unhappy relationships, his aching loneliness. He is seen next on that beach: It is a cold, windy, late winter morning, and he stands alone, chilled in his meditation, aware only of the vigorous tide, and, down the beach from him, a woman in a bright orange sweatshirt, walking, also alone, along the glistening shoreline. Does he know her? He feels he might. Does he know this place? He feels he might. An uneasiness disposes him to ignore the woman, but they will exchange greetings soon, the man and the woman, and learn each other's name: Joel and Clementine.

Second vignette: A woman sits alone, in the chilled seclusion of an isolated cloister. She seems to be fixed in place and time; she is, however, very conscious of her circumstances, in deep reflection of her present melancholy. Unlike Joel, she is nearly stumbling over the measure of words she furnishes to her feelings. She laments:

*In these deep solitudes and awful cells,*

*Where heav'nly- pensive contemplation dwells,*

*And ever-musing melancholy reigns:*

*What means this tumult in a vestal's veins?*

*Why rove my thoughts beyond this last retreat?*

*Why feels my heart its long-forgotten heat? (1-6)[ii]*

She knows: she can identify her source of agony and even articulate it with a name:

*Yet, yet I love!—From Abelard it came,*

*And Eloisa yet must kiss the name. (7-8)*

The woman Eloisa is also in despair of companionship and love, sitting alone in a place of “relentless walls” (17) and “repentant sighs” (18) that is enclosed by “rugged rocks” (19) and “caverns shagged with horrid thorn” (20), and she confesses a seemingly emotional coldness, that she has “unmoved and silent grown.” (23) While Eloisa remains physically encased in her icy prison, nevertheless, she is unbound in her memory as she declares that “I have not yet forgot myself to stone” (24), while Joel, at liberty and unrestricted in his physical setting, is emotionally imprisoned, hardened like stone and closed even to himself. However, both characters-- Joel Barish of “Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind,” Michel Gondry’s/Charlie Kaufman’s idiosyncratic film, and Eloisa of “Eloisa to Abelard,” Alexander Pope’s eloquently feminine perspective on the notorious medieval romance-- are linked to each other, not merely in their frosty despair and lovelorn separation, but in the dynamic refusal of each one to release her/his grasp onto memories, in the conscious recognition of memory as the essential constituent of the individual, and in the clear understanding of the peril the soul will find itself when memories are lost, or destroyed, or denied. The essential constituent of the self becomes absent, and there is a painful disconnect, or a very skewed connection, to the truest, surest self, when memory, the collection of details defining who the individual has been, what the individual has felt, to the present moment, is rebuffed. Pope’s poem evokes the potency of memory, lays bare its richness in imagery and in emotion and thus, its critical role in the consistent formation of the individual. Eloisa exemplifies the individual who is suffused with memory, becomes an embodiment of memory itself, because she has refused to allow her mind to become ‘spotless,’ purged of all recollections and reminders for, were she to do so, she realizes, she would have to surrender her passionate remembrances of Abelard, passions and recollections of her experiences of him, the other, Abelard, that have created her as she is; she would have to surrender her humanity.

Similarly, Joel Barish, for all his weepy tentativeness and doleful resignation, will, finally, refuse to allow himself to be cleansed, made 'spot-free,' of his passionate remembrances of Clementine because he comes to understand that the person he is, who he has become, is fundamentally tied to his memories of his experiences with, love for, and emotions about her, the other, Clementine. Memory—the integrated aggregate of things remembered—becomes in fact the locus of identity in the life of Eloisa, and in the life of Joel. Both Pope and Gondry/Kaufman assert that the impressions generated by the constructs of memory become for each individual the signifiers for particularizing specific human-ness, the narrative “building blocks” for determining the individual self. Memory is clearly more than just recollection: as offered by Eloisa and Joel, memory contains stored and recalled images and sensations which are simultaneously visual, tactile, aural, oral, emotional, personal and particular, and thus forms in total the collective experiences of an individual and the individual's understanding of those experiences, which understanding comes to form the individual conception of the self.

“Eloisa to Abelard” and “Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind,” are both also moody articulations of the problematic conflation of memory, passion, and the obsessive distempers of that passionate self that *seemingly* disrupt the efficient working of a healthy mind. In the case of each culture, the health of a mind has been determined to be the degree to which a mind is constantly eased by the assurances of reason and decontaminated by emotional disengagement especially fueled by details of memory. Baleful and disturbing memories are to be repressed and destroyed. Gondry/Kaufman and Alexander Pope both understand the aloneness, the aggrieved unhappiness, and the indignant fury of the lover who seems unable not to remember, who cannot rescind the past or its meaning, and both authors also appreciate “Eloisa's/ Joel's” fright at the volatility and strength of their emotional responses. Yet compounding that sympathy is also a

very clear sense that, tolerable or not, disruptive or not, troublesome or not, such emotional responses to memory and the actualities of memory itself are not only valid but in fact necessary for the complete and healthy integration of the individual: to one degree or another, each individual is the result of what (s)he has been, of what (s)he has experienced and how (s) has responded to those occasions, and how (s)he has internalized as well as realized those images and revelations of memories. Pope's Eloisa seems obsessed with the memories of sensate details and is at first incapable, and then finally unwilling to separate her mind (and her soul?) from bodily recollections and ardent remembrances of Abelard, of herself with Abelard, for those memories, remembered sentient states, and the emotions they evoke constitute, essentially, what she has become in the present. Joel Barish (Gondry's/Kaufman's 'Eloisa') is so overwhelmed with sensate recollections and passions of the past that he seeks to have them deliberately excised from his mind, only to realize in the end that his very self, his identity and who he is as an individual cannot be separated from who he became once he became attached to Clementine, the eccentric "Abelard" of the film. Of course, history itself seems to be the imprint of memory as the audiences of both the poem and the film are presented a series of events and affective responses to those events only as they exist filtered through the memory of a specific individual, Eloisa or Joel: past events and individuals of those occasions, notably Abelard and Clementine, are authentic only to the degree that each one is realized as the subjective impression of an individual mimesis.

### ***The Poem and the Film***

As has been noted, the poem "Eloisa to Abelard" opens with no evasive delicacy, no epistolary amenities, but with the immediacy of sincere sentiment, with Eloisa's emotional and spiritual pain:

*In these deep solitudes and awful cells,  
Where heav'nly-pensive contemplation dwells,  
And ever-musing melancholy reigns;  
What means this tumult in a vestal's veins?  
Why rove my thoughts beyond this last retreat?  
Why feels my heart its long-forgotten heat? (1-6)*

With acknowledgement, as noted above, to the literal place of Eloisa's woe, her cloister, the reader is also aware of being borne irrevocably into the painful privacy of Eloisa, into her mind and memory, the "deep solitude" and "awful cell" where "contemplation dwells" in deep melancholy. Her "ever-musing" reflection on her predicament, vibrant with reminiscences, and the overwhelming memories of her former love, have broken upon Eloisa's will such that there is a "tumult" in her veins, an excited unhappiness that precludes all else, such that the pain of the present cannot be balanced by the joy of the past, or, at least, the calm dullness of her immediate surroundings does not balance out the anguished memories of her former life, her former self. She is in turmoil, and yet it is a turmoil that cannot chase away the power of memory, the potency of recollected sensations and thoughts. Similarly, after the initial scenes of the film place Joel and Clementine in the 'present,'-- when the shy, reticent, depressed Joel inexplicably strikes up an acquaintance that will transform into a relationship with the cranky, eccentric, emotive Clementine who in fact initiates their liaison when she introduces herself to Joel on the train with the line "Do I know you?" as Joel sits (the echo of Eloisa: ...*Thou knowest how guiltless first I met thy flame,/When love approached me under friendship's name...*, 59-60), timid, withdrawn from the world around him, a world which only engages by sketching on a pad

his impressions of what he encounters -- up to the moment on a cold, crisp morning two days later when a strange young man knocks on the window of a car in which Joel is sitting as he waits for Clementine, the film shifts time and focus to disclose to the audience the agony Joel was experiencing merely two nights before. At that time, another Joel appears, a rumpled man weeping uncontrollably in his car as he drives in the rain, hands trembling on the steering wheel, and listening to a tape that leaves him so distraught that he finally flings it out the window: as if to permit the rain to wash away all memories and the utter despair that the memories evoke (Eloisa wails: *...Oh cursed, dear horrors of an all-conscious night...*, 228). The rain falls harshly, sadly, and it is in the next scene that Joel is seen arriving at his apartment on what will be the evening before his encounter with Clementine on the beach and on the train: it is the evening when he will receive his mysterious “treatment” of having his memory of Clementine, and of their previous relationship, completely erased. Joel indeed had sought to cleanse his mind of all troubling and troubled “spots” of memory of a relationship that had withered and soured, painfully, from its delightfully unconventional beginnings.

Like Pope and his Eloisa, Gondry/Kaufman will allow the audience a window into the mind and memory of Joel Barish, a window that spans most of the film. Joel, the audience learns, has employed the services of the decidedly creepy Dr. Howard Mierzwiak and his agency, Lacuna, a fantastically imagined enterprise that offers people the opportunity literally to erase memories, usually of lost loves, with no more serious damage to the brain, the good doctor suggests, than what one would experience after a night of heavy drinking!<sup>[iii]</sup> What Eloisa momentarily evokes:

*...Oh Grace serene; oh Virtue heavenly fair,  
Divine oblivion of low-thoughted care!*

*Fresh blooming Hope, gay daughter of the sky!... (297-299)*

Joel is able to realize—although, as will happen, much to his deep chagrin. Joel had, in fact, discovered Howard Mierzwiak’s bizarre endeavor inadvertently. As the Lacuna treatment commences, the first memories to be ‘extracted’ and destroyed are in fact his most recent -- and heartrending -- memories of his life with Clementine, at the very end of their tumultuous relationship and his agonizing despair thereafter. Thus it is at the very beginning of the Lacuna process that Joel recalls (and the audience is grateful for this insight) a recent scene in the home of his friends Rob and Carrie, a bickering married couple, when he was describing for them a wrenching experience he had just endured when he visited Clementine at her job in a local Barnes and Noble. He had brought with him with a gift of jewelry as a token of reconciliation, the two having recently had one of those excruciatingly cruel arguments only two people deeply involved can have, and he desperately wanted to resolve their relationship, especially since Valentine’s Day was approaching. Yet, as Joel recounted to his friends in complete stupefaction, when he finally went to see Clementine, she had looked at him evenly, calmly, dispassionately, as if he were a stranger, a mere client of the store, and had in fact been distracted by another man named Patrick, her boyfriend! Joel was clear that Clementine was not feigning ignorance: he was indeed a stranger to her. Replaying the scene in his mind as he described it to his friends caused Joel to become nearly hysterical with agony and confusion, and it was at this point (Joel remembers) that his friend Rob divulged the terrible truth to him: Clementine had recently undergone a treatment that had erased all her memories of Joel and her life with him. Rob showed Joel a simple card on which was printed the company name ‘Lacuna’ and its address, as well as the starkly declarative statement that “Clementine Kruczynski has had Joel Barish

erased from her memory. Please never mention their relationship to her again.”[iv] Joel was stunned and then became enraged that Clementine had taken such a drastic step so effortlessly (he assumed), his contempt at the seeming ease with which she had discarded their relationship, and at the listless equanimity with which she had looked at him in the bookstore, as severe as that of Eloisa when she taunts Abelard with the accusation that

*For thee the Fates, severely kind, ordain*

*A cool suspense from pleasure and from pain—*

*Thy life a long, dead calm of fixed repose;*

*No pulse that riots, no blood that glows... (249-252)*

Eloisa assumes that Abelard has simply chosen to forget her, or, at the very least, their past together, to rid himself of his memories and the emotional realities that color them, in order to attain a kind of stolid serenity in his new life. She is indignant at his silence but scornful of his choices, for well she understands that in “suspending” pain, he is also forfeiting pleasure, that the rejection of the turbulence (“rioting” pulse and “glowing” blood) of a life of emotions can only result in the “repose” of a deadened survival. The realization of one’s humanity, Eloisa suggests, and Joel discerns, is the full integration of all passions and energies, those that afford pleasure and those that incite disturbance, for by balancing opposing passions that in fact compliment the other, the individual may delight in or endure the complete spectrum of human experience, the breadth of being human. That Eloisa suggests “the Fates ordained’ an erasure of his past more clearly anticipates her belief that Abelard so chose his path less by compulsion of circumstances than by the proclivities of choice: exasperated, Eloisa directly confronts her lost lover with the rhetorical ...*Come, Abelard, for what hast thou to dread?* (257), clearly demanding from him a

renewed consideration of choices he has made.

Joel impulsively determined that he would also opt for a life of “long, dead calm” and “fixed repose,” and undergo the Lacuna therapy himself. He would recreate himself as Clementine had done, by disposing of memories, by removing from his life all traces of the anguish and suffering that memories are bound to generate, and by pursuing a condition of unnatural composure that, in its serene complacency, was insidiously attractive to the rattled, dispirited Joel, just as it might have been, quite briefly, to the aggrieved Eloisa: she, however, immediately appreciated what would be the consequence were she to do as Abelard had done: deny memories, deny emotional responses, deny nature, deny the very self. Joel will also come to understand that soon enough, but initially he is miserable enough to annihilate the self he is, has become, since his relationship with Clementine. Thus, as he sits in Dr. Mierzwiak’s office and begins to undergo the process of erasing the memories of Clementine from his mind, Joel is at first unsure but resigned—until the doctor’s assistant places certain objects before Joel, objects that have particular resonance of Clementine for Joel. He wants the process to stop, despite the emotional pain he is experiencing because it is a feeling that evokes many other interconnected feelings and memories of Clementine. He begins to describe the origin of the object and its meaning to him, so full of significance and vitality are they still for him, when he is abruptly interrupted mid-sentence (it seems) by a male voice, that of Stan, Dr. Mierzwiak’s assistant, who tells him not to talk about the objects, just ‘experience’ them, feel the emotions they evoke: clearly, even the disturbing Dr. Mierzwiak recognized that the effective deletion of memories will not occur simply by their articulation, deconstruction, or explanation, but by their essential experience, their felt reality, as well. Stan encourages Joel to ponder and sense the objects so the machine can get a good ‘recording’ of his brain, the ‘goodness’ residing not in his verbal intelligence, but

in his emotional pitch.

Like Joel, Eloisa speaks of her emotional despair when she looks upon “objects” that are reminders of Abelard:

*Soon as thy letters, trembling, I unclose,  
That well-known name awakens all my woes:  
O name for ever sad, for ever dear,  
Still breathed in sighs, still ushered with a tear!  
I tremble, too, where'er my own I find—  
Some dire misfortune follows close behind.  
Line after line my gushing eyes o'erflow,  
Led through a sad variety of woe:  
Now warm in love, now withering in thy bloom!... (29-37)*

Eloisa, like Joel, unlocks a tumult of emotions as she regards the only physical prompts of Abelard she still possesses, his letters, and, also like Joel, Eloisa reacts to those items with a volatile mixture of grief, regret, recrimination: she is weakened by trembling, endures the recovery of troubled memories, falls into melancholy, and weeps. Eloisa even intimates angrily that her abject despair is the cause of her own “withering,” a mournful condition of weakness that surely exists in sharp contrast to Abelard’s ostensible “bloom,” his vigorous resuscitation in the callous abandonment of his past. Yet, albeit so, Eloisa complains with a certain bittersweet delight, for she recognizes that the emotional tokens of memory, difficult as those might now be, provide for her a final link, an insoluble connection, to her lost past, that she at least can feel, and so remain herself whole. Thus, despite her sadness over the permanent absence of her lover,

Eloisa forges on, refusing to forget or relinquish her sensate life:

*Yet write, oh write me all, that I may join*

*Griefs to thy griefs, and echo sighs to thine:*

*Nor foes nor fortune take this power away;*

*And is my Abelard less kind than they?*

*Tears are still mine, and those I need not spare,*

*Love but demands what else were shed in prayer;*

*No happier task these faded eyes pursue:*

*To read and weep is all they now can do... (41-48)*

Eloisa, despite an anguish that has been magnified by her assumption of Abelard's woes, does not conceive of her sorrow as something to be rejected or even avoided: indeed, she refers to her "power" in "join(ing) griefs to griefs" and sighs to sighs, and insists that neither kindness ("friends") or happenstance ("fortune") can deprive her of the strength to encounter and experience her heartache. Her tears, her laments, her grappling with her unhappiness, are her weapons against adversity, and "no happier task" exists for her than for her eyes to read Abelard's letters and cry over the loss of her love. "Love demands" that Eloisa do so, and so she proclaims that both joyous and melancholy and even bitter memories are all yet enliveners of her being: to lose them would be to lose meaning, signification, wholeness, her very self. Thus, unlike Joel, Eloisa accepts the overwhelming feeling of sorrow her memories and her few articles of remembrance create within her, and regardless of Abelard's actions, she will persevere in her loving albeit doomed attachment, refusing to abandon her love or herself.

The reality of loss and abandonment becomes quite clear to Joel fairly early into the Lacuna procedure on the fateful night (the evening before the morning with which the film narrative begins), but, of course, once the procedure has begun, it cannot be interrupted, and Joel, with the audience in tow, begins the journey backwards across time and space into his relationship with Clementine—or, at least, the relationship he is recalling, based upon his own affectionate or angry memories. His initial reminiscences, as was noted, are memories which he is relieved to release, the pitiful reminders of the final weeks of his relationship with Clementine, a relationship that had become hostile, mean-spirited, resentful, and bitter. In varying degrees of detail, then, Joel recalls some of the worst moments of his life with Clementine-- the usual business of relationships after the first flush of novelty lays bare the actual dimensions of human personalities: she arrives home late one evening, in fact their last evening together, tipsy and careless, and he, cold and angry, rebukes her with hurtful accusations that incite her to respond in kind; they fall into a terrible argument about having children while walking through a flea market, and, again, Joel's memory of that occasion is primarily of a shrill and neurotic Clementine, and of a reserved, even subversive, version of himself; they are eating a prickly, tense meal in an all-too-familiar familiar Chinese restaurant, barely speaking to each other except with strained accusations and hostile complaints. Joel is relieved to quit himself of those recollections of Clementine, and as each memory is presented, recalled, and re-lived, as it were, it is then erased, and the audience along with Joel observes as each memory is deconstructed and dismantled piecemeal, until he alone remains in his crumbling memory, like Eloisa, solitary in a place within, yet for Joel a place that now has not substance or meaning.

Curiously, however, all the while his memories of Clementine were being extinguished, Joel was semi-conscious of other voices, other energies, pulling Clementine – that is, the memory of

Clementine -- away from him, even more terribly. The name 'Patrick' and the recollection of a 'Patrick' seemed to haunt uncomfortably his remembrances of Clementine, yet it is that 'Patrick' who will become the jarring note to break the spell of forsaking Clementine. As Joel lies in his bed, strapped to the horrific Lacuna device and still captive in his memories, he suddenly 'hears' someone, another man, saying the name 'Tangerine,' and it awakens in him another sensation. He resists leaving that specific site on the scroll of memories and asks Clementine's presence why she is allowing that man to call her by that name, a name he, Joel, had given her -- and suddenly, Joel is in another memory, a delightful memory, when Clementine came home one day with her hair dyed a tangerine orange, and Joel laughs and calls her 'Tangerine,' and she laughs, and they fall into bed together, simply and truly happy. It is a joyous scene that Joel does not wish to forget and compels Joel to travel more deeply into those memories of earlier, other, more loving, more significant incidents with Clementine that his anger and resentment had long since smothered, and as those scenes are re-played before -- and then removed from -- his deeper consciousness, Joel gradually comes to the realization that as he casts off the unappealing, he is also casting off the beloved, and to lose both 'kinds' of memory has meant, in fact, to "lose" not only Clementine but himself, as he was and has been since Clementine. As some of the more satisfying, cherished memories begin to surface, only to be expunged, Joel becomes frantic not to lose any more of them, particularly after a lovely, loving reminder of a most intimate moment: of lying under a blanket with Clementine as she revealed her true, vulnerable self by recounting memories of her unhappy childhood, including an ugly doll she had which she named 'Clementine.' Joel was overcome with love for Clementine at that moment, and in his memory he experiences anew that love, that deep sweetness, and he whispers in his remembering, "Please let me keep this one, this one memory." The Lacuna procedure

persists, however, and the flood of now wonderful memories washes over Joel like a chilling stream and awakens within him all that he had loved about Clementine, and all the sensations and emotions that had invigorated him and made his life whole, and as he desperately attempts to retain those memories, the more rapidly they seem to be eliminated. His single moment of perfect happiness with Clementine during their first evening on the frozen Charles River in Boston (“I could die right now, Clem, I’m just so happy. I’m exactly where I want to be,” Joel tells her, surprised at his own joy) encourages Joel to “kidnap” Clementine (well, her mnemonic presence) from the process and try to prevent her and memories of her from again being obliterated from his memory, from him. Joel thereupon races about in the “sectors” of his memory, attempting to keep Clementine from the stealth Lacuna device, but to little avail: she is dragged and pulled and swept away from him with the disappearance of each memory. It is more than he can endure, and echoes of Eloisa’s lament of remembered love, similarly recalled but in another kind of dreamtime, resonates:

*... at the close of each sad, sorrowing day,  
fancy restores what vengeance snatched away...  
I hear thee, view thee, gaze o'er all thy charms,  
and round thy phantom glue my clasping arms.  
I wake. No more I hear, no more I view—  
The phantom flies me, as unkind as you.  
I call it aloud: it hears not what I say,  
I stretch my empty arms; it glides away.  
...Alas, no more! Methinks we wandering go*

*through dreary wastes, and weep each other's woe... (225-226, 233-238, 241-242)*

Eloisa must suffer alone, abandoned and isolated, her misery the consequence of Abelard's rejection, of "what vengeance snatched away..." and yet she revels in her remembrances as she conjures the shape, form, image of her beloved. Joel also endured similar humiliation and the anguish of rejection because of Clementine's initial decision to engage Mierzwiack, but it is only at this critical juncture in his Lacuna procedure that Joel recognizes what Eloisa has long understood, and so he moves with Clementine through the dreary wasteland of emptying memories that elude his resistance and glide away from his grasp. Each memory seems to present Clementine in a familiar posture—he hears her, "views" her, "gazes" at her "charms" and tries to clasp her, but she is constantly being pulled away from him. Joel then grasps onto his memory of Clementine tightly and they run until they finally arrive at Howard Mierzwiack's office in an effort to demand an end to the procedure (has **this** occurred in a prior visit? is this also memory? or is it imagination contrived from memory?) because, as Joel protests, "You're erasing her from me, and me from her." He does not want to lose the Clementine of lovely memory, the Clementine of blunt regard and eccentric whims, nor does he want to lose himself as he continues to recall himself in those deeper memories with Clementine. Mierzwiack, however, squinting at a bright light, and appearing slightly daft, is nonplussed by Joel's hysteria and calmly explains to Joel that the procedure, once initiated, cannot be stopped; moreover, he is powerless to do anything because, as he reminds Joel, "I'm in your head, I'm you, in your imagination." Mierzwiack cannot effect any change because he is 'real' only in so far as Joel recalls and reflects upon the good doctor: Mierzwiack is known at this point only through Joel's

memory. Thus, Mierzwiack (Gondry/ Kaufman) is also suggesting to Joel that the ‘reality’ of every/anything for each individual is essentially based on whatsoever has been generated through the experiential filters of impression and memory: in effect, each individual constructs his/her own reality. Joel is stunned in the sudden realization of what the Lacuna procedure then actually entails, of the dire consequences of his impulsive decision to his very cognizance of reality. Panicking, he aggressively turns on the doctor and tells him of his assistant Patrick’s alarming peculiarity, that Patrick has not only stolen personal items from Clementine, another Lacuna client, and has not only stolen Clementine’s affection, but in his pilfering of Joel’s private journals and papers, his personal mementos of his relationship with Clementine, Patrick has stolen Joel’s very personality, his most authentic self. Joel has quickly realized that what was being removed from him, both physically, from his mind, and sensibly, from his apartment, were not simply collections of codified images and insignificant objects from former occurrences, but images and objects that as remnants of a remembered past generate that past, generate that past self, generate the self and reality. Every individual, and every individual relationship, is a confluence of memories, and if the memories are destroyed, so also, to a very meaningful degree, is the individual, the individual’s construction of reality.

Yet, as Kaufman makes very clear, Patrick can never, will never, enjoy an authentic, sincere relationship with Clementine because, in fact, he went into the relationship without an mimetic identity, without the passionate particulars of himself that would imprint Clementine and their time together, without emotional memories or sensate recollections of his own. In fact, it seems fitting that Patrick should have “fallen in love” with Clementine when she was unconscious, having her memories expunged through the Lacuna process: what could Patrick have loved at that moment that was not superficial, devoid of telling idiosyncrasies or personal identity? There

was no ‘Clementine’ with whom he could fall in love, just as there is no ‘Patrick’ either in relationship to himself or to Clementine. Patrick never really exists with or for Clementine except only as he limply parrots another (in this case, Joel), making covert use of Joel’s transcribed thoughts and ideas to engage Clementine, who intuitively senses something out of place, something not real. She senses a troubled disconnect between certain phrases and their speaker, between certain gifted items and their giver. When she insists to Patrick suddenly that they drive to Boston to walk onto the frozen Charles River, Patrick searches quickly for the journal entry that describes what Joel said on the night he first went to the Charles with Clementine because he has no idea what he should say or how he should react since he has no memories of any similar relationship to inform and direct him, give him language to speak for himself. The comments and the phrases he uses are not of his creation, his experience, even though he has placed himself physically in the same situation in which Joel had been: Patrick has appropriated another man’s thoughts and perceptions in an attempt to entice and connect to Clementine, and to (re)create a reality, but now for them. However, Patrick more than any other person in the story lives out of reality, in a fantastical reconstruction of a ‘real’ world: he does not know how to know Clementine, but he believes that Clementine will respond to his remarks, hopefully delight in them and be moved just as she was when they were initially spoken in true time. Yet, when he robotically repeats Joel’s exact words, as noted above, when he and Clementine are lying on the frozen expanse of the river, Clementine reacts with displeasure, distress and confusion: she sits up immediately and abruptly demands that they leave. She has intuited vaguely that the words Patrick has uttered, although of themselves seemingly appropriate to the occasion, are false, do not fit him, do not belong to him or to the two of them together at that moment. Although she cannot articulate an exact reason for her reaction, the

indisputable strength of its power, its undeniable authenticity, overwhelms her, and she simply cries during the entire drive back to New York. The hapless Patrick is more baffled than ever, unable to comprehend that he had stumbled toward Clementine with words that were indeed rich with meaning, and therefore identity, but meaning and identity that had originated from another individual and thus belonged to another's experience, another's reality, another time, another relationship, none belonging to Patrick. Such words had been fashioned by the unique pairing of Joel and Clementine who, in creating and defining them according to their lived time together, had articulated for each phrase a separate signification based upon their own independent memories, their remembered past together, and their separate storage of associated memories. Of course, insofar as they are common utterances, they are just words ("I could just die..."); however, the richness of their value lay in the unique reality of their expression, the reality of Joel with Clementine in another time. Reality exists for Patrick only as stolen keepsakes and pilfered thoughts, and so therefore does not exist at all—or he does not exist, in a sense: as long as Patrick negotiates the world, especially people, and especially Clementine, through the filter of the remembered narrative of someone else, and not with a self-awareness constructed by his own recollections and remembered experiences, there can be no reality, for there is no self. Clementine was reacting, although unaccountably, to the apparent incongruity between the pronouncement of authentic phrases and the lived reality of that moment: the disengagement was too harsh, too contrary to truth, for her to tolerate. The hollowness of Patrick, the emptiness of his relationship with Clementine, is matched only by the voided identity of the sad receptionist Mary, whose mindless recitations of memorized quotations (from her beloved *Bartlett's Quotations*), like Patrick's equally mechanical recitation of Joel's words, crystallize the distinction between genuine memory and vapid memorization, between authentic existence and

feigned reality: one is constitutive of signification and identity, and the other is simply patterns of words, voiced into the air, devoid of any consequence. That distinction is particularly well underscored by Mary's artless recital to her beloved physician of Eloisa's verse (see below) that supplies the title of the film. Mary, as will be realized later, is herself a demonstration of the "spotless mind" the Lacuna protocol so champions: she initially identifies the author of the quotation as 'Pope Alexander,' so unacquainted is she with even the source of her material, and her blithe repetition of Eloisa's lament-- which she recounts to the bemused doctor in order to impress him -- is utterly empty of any of the complex irony with which Eloisa had proclaimed those lines in the throes of her sorrowful recollections, and with which the evil doctor must hear the recitation and recall his own history with the receptionist.

Eloisa, unlike Joel, seems to prefer her emotional turbulence and bold reminiscences to a condition of quietude: her audacious passion becomes, in fact, her defining attribute, and is testimony of her humanity. While she certainly does seem to appreciate the pragmatic remedy of moderation and forgetfulness for her aching heart, she is stunned by the impossibility of such a curative:

*...Unequal task! A passion to resign,  
for hearts so touch'd, so pierc'd, so lost as mine.  
Ere such a soul regains its peaceful state,  
how often must it love, how often hate!  
How often hope, despair, resent, regret,  
conceal, disdain—do all things but forget... (195-200)*

Eloisa's ardent complaint does suggest a rationale for persisting to dwell in her miserable heartache, for she is, in fact, insisting that the fuss and stir of the soul create the essential dynamism of earthly existence, not the tranquility that is characteristic of the life hereafter. The soul is the locus of human experience, the vessel of human emotion, and the stored memories (for the soul can "do all things but forget") that enlivens the soul sustains both fundamental humanness, and individual humanity. Eloisa feels she is unequal to any attempt to renounce her despair, for to do so would be to work against nature: the natural process of the soul is grounded in the synergy, the interactive tension, between divergent emotions: love and hate, hope and despair, regret and disdain, each a binary set of affects, but one: she does not acknowledge remembrance and forgetting. Thus, when Mary, Mierzwiack's assistant, eagerly recites to him select lines (207-210, bolded below) from Eloisa's distressed protest against her circumstances, the inherent sarcasm of the verse is completely lost on her, she who with no appreciation for the necessity of memory but with an infatuation with memorization, painfully wanders away from the aggravated frustration at the core of the verse:

*Oh, come! Teach me nature to subdue,*

*Renounce my love, my life, my self—and you...*

***How happy is the blameless vestal's lot!***

***The world forgetting, by the world forgot.***

***Eternal sunshine of the spotless mind!***

***Each pray'r accepted, and each wish resign'd;***

*labor and rest, that equal periods keep;*

*obedient slumbers that can wake and weep;*

*Desires compos'd, affections ever ev'n,*

*tears that delight, and sighs that waft to Heav'n...* (203-204, 207-214)

For Eloisa, any attempt to neutralize her infatuated present with a blissful erasure of her memory is impossible -- and undesirable -- because it is unnatural: it is neither her nature, nor human nature, to “renounce,” reject, forget, dismiss that which has not only brought her to her present circumstance, for better or ill, but has also formed her as she exists in that place. She – every individual – at every stage of life is the result of past experience and its recollection. Eloisa, unlike Joel, cannot and does not wish to forget her past love affair, and the riotous emotions its memory evokes, and so fashion an existence of vapid satisfaction and effortless thought as she described in her complaint, for she privileges the effects of her fundamental nature, recognizing that to abandon her memories and the sensations such memories evoke, to relinquish her love and the passionate memories that love inspires, would be to lose her very self. The preference for an equilibrium in deed (“labor and rest,” slumber and wakefulness) and in emotional response (composed desire, affections that are “even,” tears and sighs that are comforted by celestial peace) that her beloved seems to have championed in his new life (he who is challenged to “teach” Eloisa how to “subdue nature”), and that her current religious vocation advocates, lacks both plausibility and appeal for Eloisa. The feigned serenity of such a life, even one attended by “whispering angels and “golden dreams” (216), and gladdened by the promise of the “unfading Rose of Eden” that will bloom perpetually (217), persuades Eloisa not at all, for such rare solace and contrived tranquility imply to her not merely a suspension from the mundane travails and details of earthly life, but an actual condition of death, albeit one scented by the “divine perfumes” of seraphs (218) and accompanied by the “sounds of heav’nly harps” (221). Of course, Eloisa is also ruefully critiquing her cloistered life as an avowed religious,

a situation to which she had reluctantly assented at the brutal end of her love affair with Abelard, but one to which, as her trenchant depiction of the forgotten and forgetting “vestal” clearly indicates, she has not happily adapted. Nevertheless, Eloisa has chosen to resist a future as a “blameless” but unnatural holy vessel, and has opted instead to champion the vibrancy of her interior life, though framed by the tangle of unconstrained emotions:

*Far other dreams my erring soul employ,*

*Far other raptures, of unholy joy:...*

*... conscience sleeps, and leaving nature free,*

*All my loose soul unbounded spring to thee.*

*Oh cursed, dear horrors of all-conscious night,*

*How glowing guilt exalts the keen delight!* (223- 224; 227-230)

Eloisa acknowledges her preference for the times when her nature is able to be “free,” when her passionate memories, her fervent remembrances, no longer held in check by ‘conscience,’ are “unbounded,” so that even as Abelard remains cold, Eloisa can recall in “keen delight” her romance, and persist in her love with an ardor that is able to ... *light the dead, and warm th’unfruitful urn...* (262). Unlike Abelard and even the unhappy clients of the “Lacuna” treatment, Eloisa is willingly poised to fall into the flushed imaginings her ardent memory has fashioned, distraught as she might become, but she is not insensitive to the complexity of her situation. Eloisa does recognize the inherent conflict between the ‘veiled’ emotional life of her “erring soul” and the appropriate detachment of a cloistered religious; however, she is determined to ignore her conscience and await, if she must and can, the solitude of evening to relive her past love affair. Like Joel, she finally cannot stem the flood of memories, and her

recollections and the rich assortment of emotions prompted by those remembrances prevail at will: she attempts to pray and the image of Abelard appears; she intones a hymn, and hears instead his voice, and, even at her Hours, when she should be in deepest contemplation, she cries out that memory intervenes, and her truest feeling – her truest self -- emerges:

*... One thought of you puts all pomp to flight-  
priests, tapers, temples swim before my sight:  
in seas of flame my plunging soul is drown'd... (273-275)*

Time has no meaningful authority for Eloisa: the seductive sensuality of her immediate surroundings (clerical robes, scented candles, illumined shrines) cannot compel her to stop the swift saturation of her soul in the recollection of the past, and thus Eloisa still exists in full knowledge of herself, is still able to express her most authentic self. When Eloisa cries

*... I have not yet forgot myself to stone.  
all is not heav'n's while Abelard has a part,  
still rebel nature holds out half my heart;  
nor pray'rs nor fasts its stubborn pulse restrain... (24-27)*

it is apparent that although she has been relegated to the traditional service of a cloistered nun, given to prayers and fasting, and that the possibility of ever seeing Abelard again (in other than a professional capacity) is quite unlikely, she has not yet ‘forgotten’ herself ‘to stone,’ that is, she is not yet utterly emptied of affect or feelings, despite the rigors of her religious vocation, and remains, as she is able, ever Eloisa. In fact, as she admits, her own “rebel nature” continues to yearn for her former life with Abelard, or, forsaking that, to remember that former life and

the depths of emotion even its memory can still arouse. She will refuse, whilst Abelard lives, even heaven her complete adoration and longing, and she admits her resistance to eradicating her thoughts of him. Eloisa ruefully reminiscences her situation to be so because she was not a willing participant in the sacrifice of either her relationship with Abelard or of her life as a relatively public, comparatively autonomous maiden:

*... Canst thou forget what tears that moment fell  
When, warm in youth, I bade the world farewell?  
As with cold lips I kissed the sacred veil,  
The shrines trembled, and the lamps grew pale...  
Yet then, to those dread altars as I drew,  
Not on the cross my eyes were fixed, but you:  
Not grace, or zeal—love only was my call,  
And if I lose thy love, I lose my all... (109-112,115-118)*

The mesmerizing sadness of this memory, as Eloisa recounts her despondent veiling, a task that was the formal consequence of her illicit affair with the great Abelard, does resemble the fearsome confusion, ache and anger Joel experienced at the end of his relationship with Clementine and his discovery of her participation in the Lacuna project. For Eloisa, to terminate her relationship with Abelard meant to extinguish the warmth of her youth, to have the vigor of her being replaced by the frostiness of “pale lamps” and “dread altars” that chilled her soul, froze her lips and thwarted her from acceding with the warmth of devotion to her new vocation. Eloisa felt no gracious hope for, or ardent calling to, her religious life: her only calling was to her love, without which (and whom), she would ‘lose her all.’ With much the same dull coolness

engulfing his heart, Joel, as he is in the process of attempting to stop the Lacuna process that will obliterate all memories of Clementine, frankly confesses to the imagined Clementine (and, therefore, to himself) that he “can’t remember anything, anything good, without her.” Thus, in losing their lovers, and in losing love, Eloisa and Joel endure as well the diminishing of their own vitality (although that was not as immediately obvious to Joel as it was to Eloisa), and yet the despair at the initial loss was tragically intensified almost beyond endurance when they each found themselves urged to expunge the actual memories of their love -- a feat, it must be admitted, their former partners seemed to have readily accomplished. However, like Joel, who retrieved the memory of exactly where he was sitting and how Clementine was standing by the water’s edge on the day of their first encounter at the beach party, Eloisa could recollect with ravenous facility every detail of her first meeting with Abelard. For Eloisa and even eventually for Joel, the sweet simplicity of genuine sensation and the wondrous pull of recollected images were experiences too dear to lose, too powerful to avoid, and Eloisa rejects the notion that she should regret (and in regretting, aspire to forget) her initial encounter with Abelard. Her recollection is a portrait in passion:

*...Those smiling eyes, attempering every ray,  
Shone sweetly lambent with celestial day:  
Guiltless I gazed; heaven listen’d while you sung;  
And truths divine came mended from that tongue.  
From lips like those what precept fail’d to move?  
Too soon they taught me ‘twas no sin to love.  
Back through the paths of pleasing sense I ran,  
Nor wish’d an Angel whom I lov’d a Man... (63-70)*

Eloisa's emotional remembrance is a vivid quintet of senses: the vision of radiant light (eyes that "shone sweetly lambent"); the sound of a seductive voice (heaven itself pays heed); the touch and taste and even scent of a tender mouth that spoke truth and taught "twas no sin to love," all sensate remembrances as evocative as Joel's intentional nostalgia. Such excitements of Eloisa's "pleasing senses" in fact sorted and framed her experience of those initial moments with Abelard and not only secured her memory of their encounter in her mind, but also fettered the recollection to matter, the form of her being: those memories will thrive as long as Eloisa breathes life into her body and thereby arouses her memory. Eloisa does not regret their love, for the very reason that she will not idealize it, and she was disposed even then to tolerate his imperfections and their mutual shortcomings, and not to wish to be "an Angel" the man whom she adored as utterly human.

As Eloisa continues her reminiscences about her former lover, she is led to contemplate Love as an essential, and preferred, dynamic in the pulse of a human life: ... *Fame, wealth, and honor: what are you to Love?...* (80), and, at least intellectually, recognizes the authority of the emotion that makes ... *mistaken mortals groan,/who seek in love for aught but love alone...*(83-84). Love as love must be preferred for its own sake, not simply for momentary escape or superficial pleasure, and as Eloisa remembers her deep delight in her life with Abelard, she recognizes (and relishes) her complete abandon to him, insisting that

*... nor Caesar's empress would I deign to prove;*

*No, make me mistress of the man I love.*

*If there be yet another name more free,*

*More fond, than mistress, make me that to thee!... (87-90)*

By so privileging the illicit status of mistress over that of lawful wife, Eloisa has confounded societal convention: she has affirmed that her relationship with Abelard, unlike that of a legal spouse, was founded on mutual desire and guided by free will, and not duly sustained by the compulsion of law and custom. The jaundiced glare Eloisa has fixed on marriage is not, however, the imprudent declaration of an quixotic girl; rather, it is the observant reflection of an ardent, yes, but shrewd woman, who explains that

*... How oft, when pressed to marriage, have I said,  
Curse on all laws but those which love has made!  
Love, free as air, at sight of human ties  
Spreads his light wings, and in a moment flies... (73-76)*

The compulsion of “human ties” cannot coax ‘love’ to exist, as the artificial obligation of social traditions does not necessarily correlate to the binding of sincere passion: the film also presents a dour portrait of marriage, both in the scenes of resentment and anger that erupt every time Joel’s severely dysfunctional married friends, Rob and Carrie, interact with each other, and in the episode of loss and betrayal when the philandering Dr. Mierzwiack is confronted by his contemptuous wife at a most unforgiving moment. Eloisa insists that love will exist only by abiding by its own will and without the force of coercion; conversely, love cannot be destroyed under duress, to which suggestion both the film and the poem again bear testimony. Joel and Clementine are mysteriously drawn to each other, although at first they seem to be but strangers on a train, and in her nostalgic reflection, Eloisa insists that even as events have unfolded, even with the harsh truth of her present affliction, she will yet long for her beloved, and will defy even

her vows for a single imagining of her Abelard : ... *Snatch me, just mounting, from the blessed abode,/ Assist the fiends, and tear me from my God!* (287-288) It would, however, be a facile assumption indeed to conclude that Eloisa is reacting simply to the vagaries of corporeal lust, as impassioned and as sensuous as are her memories and fantasies, for she is firm in her conviction, as Joel would eventually become, that not only did she encounter genuine love with Abelard, but, and more importantly, in that love she realized her truest condition of being human, of sensing and understanding her humanity, in joy and in anger, in delight and in fear. Thus, she cannot, will not, repent her truth; she cannot, will not, forget her love:

*I ought to grieve, but I cannot what I ought;*

*I mourn the lover, not lament the fault;*

*I view my crime, but kindle at the new,*

*Repent old pleasures, and solicit new...*

*Of all affliction taught a lover yet,*

*'Tis sure the hardest science to forget... (183-186, 189-190)*

Thus, despite the dictates of society, in spite of the mandates of her penitent circumstance, Eloisa confesses that she will not and in fact cannot forget, or in forgetting deny or abandon, her love for Abelard, for it would become an “affliction” too onerous and too complex to endure, the refutation of her very self. Joel, although not constrained by social conventions, except the contemporary compulsion to avoid suffering, arrives at much the same conclusion as Eloisa during the course of his treatment. He becomes acutely aware that in the despair that had driven him to Lacuna, he had failed to recall the many loving episodes of companionship and happiness that he had shared with Clementine, prior to later, grueling moments of anguish and despair;

paradoxically, during his treatment when he is prodded into recalling all sorts of memories involving Clementine, Joel recalls the splendid amid the torturous incidents, and so he begins to perceive that those distressing occurrences and the memories such occurrences engendered would not have been so heartbreaking had he not also experienced with Clementine such joy that stood in such stark contrast to his unhappiness. Joel gradually understands—as Eloisa always seems to have understood-- that reality, the quintessence of singular humanness, is a construct framed by the integration of all individual experiences and the hold of all memories generated by those experiences, and so he suddenly becomes aware of the peril of abandoning the difficult memories, a necessary part of the whole of his existence. Sadly, Joel’s epiphany occurs too late during the procedure as the doctor and his befuddled assistant Stan are able to complete the Lacuna protocol, and Joel awakes the next morning (the opening sequence of the film), weary and utterly mystified about the previous evening. He discovers that he is ‘not himself’ that morning (see above, p. 1), and then breaks with his regular routine of going to work, by opting for a train that will take him not to his office but to the beach, the very beach, as it happens, where he first met Clementine -- and soon enough, he is in her company on the train, finding himself connected to her in some magical way that argues for no ‘scientific’ explication!

Yet, the close of the film, like the conclusion of Pope’s poem, offers a more subtle meditation on memory as the faculty that informs and integrates not only the past, but also the future, of each individual. The film and the poem regard memory, and the contents of memory, as worthy guides and able mediators for individual edification and consequent maturation: the truth, and therefore the value, and the meaning, of each human life is to be discovered not just in instances of fond recollection and happy recall, but in the sympathetic acknowledgement of all manner of memories that have been fully integrated. By returning to and reflecting upon the stored array

of past experiences and their attendant effects, each person is able to assess a unique past, and thereby to conceive of a credible future; the individual can now be directed by a more complete, and therefore, more scrupulous, understanding of past occurrences and their consequences, all of which will lay the foundation for later endeavors. Yet, the film and the poem suggest more: memory offers more than just cautious knowledge, or the illumination of a guiding light: memory, in its structure of process and pattern, can become a instrument for redemption, for a release from ignorance and deceit, and for liberation from the (supposed) random insignificance of human existence.

The final scenes of 'Eternal Sunshine' present Mary, Mierzwiack's frail and seemingly flimsy assistant, as the surprising heroine for the unwitting victims of the Lacuna program. It was not a task she assumed happily, for, much to her chagrin, she had inadvertently discovered that she herself had once been a client of the Lacuna treatment, but that her participation in the process was not the result of her own despair or remorse, but rather of her lover's callow repudiation of responsibility and his cruel self-protection. In her realization of the perversity of the Lacuna protocol, and that the procedure was not always undertaken to ease the grief and misery of desperate individuals, Mary decided to compensate for some of the wrong perpetrated by the questionable Mierzwiack by mailing to each client, including Clementine and Joel, the personal Lacuna tape that was recorded just prior to the treatment. The tapes are the raw articulations of inhibited memory and uninhibited emotion. When Joel and Clementine hear each other's Lacuna tapes they are both startled: Joel is stricken to hear the woman with whom he has just spent a "fantastic" night on the Charles River complain acidly about his lack of wit and vigor, and Clementine is shocked to hear the man who seemed to her so appealing and sweet describe her caustically as vulgar and superficial. Suddenly, what seemed to be the beginning of a

promising new relationship is revealed to be not new at all, but something old and worn, repetitive, and so inherently vulnerable that it will terminate (as it did before?) in a bilious draught of acrimony. As the tapes are played, the vivid hope of their relationship becomes tainted by the hurtful recriminations and angry words tumbling out of the recording, and the selective recollections from memory, although not readily theirs at that moment, begin to shroud their present and repudiate their future. Clementine runs from Joel's apartment, confused and frightened by the stark intensity of such potent memories, but Joel, although he had previously sent Clementine away when he first heard her tape about him, cannot finally ignore the draw of deeper feelings. He soon recognizes the opportunity granted to him and Clementine: the chance to hear themselves as they were and as they might have been, voices of remembered past; the chance to be privy to recollections that seem to have instigated the eventual descent of their relationship, and therefore the chance to gain a measure of (albeit darkened) insight into their possible future together. Still, the memory tapes' are more than just tools of admonition: Joel appreciates that the perilous conditions of their 'previous' relationship need not necessarily be replicated in their present affair. In fact, there is every possibility that, emboldened by the second chance offered them, and armed with the inviolable safeguard of (recorded) memory, Joel and Clementine will be able to avoid, or at least diminish, the impact of anticipated complexities in their future liaison. The recorded memories offer hope, not just apprehension. So, as an anxious Clementine hurries down the hall, away from Joel, Joel runs after her, without any clear understanding of his action, except that he begs her to stop and then simply asks her to wait. Clementine is dubious, fearing a future similar to the one from the remembered past she heard described on the tapes, and lamenting the coarse snags that could emerge from their relationship, even if they seem compatible now. Joel looks at her, smiles, and simply shrugs his

shoulders. “OK,” he says to a startled Clementine. She stares at him, surprised, thoughtful, and then quite pleased, and laughs. “OK,” replies Clementine, relying on the wisdom of memory to take the next step.

For Eloisa, however, there is no possibility of a ‘second chance’ with Abelard, or, rather, there is at best a kind of second opportunity to be with Abelard, but an opportunity that will require a conflation of time and space as her imagination interweaves scenes of her (anticipated) death with vibrant memories of her life with Abelard. An inherent conflict strains the two visions. On one hand, the surfeit of her emotions and the seeming paucity of his have finally worn on Eloisa, and she agonizes for some relief from her present circumstance: ...*Fair eyes and tempting looks (which yet I view)/ Long loved, adored ideas, all adieu!* (295-296), but she realizes that only at her death will her memories and her fierce passion for Abelard diminish, for only then will Divine Providence and not human will assume control:

*Love’s victim then, though now a sainted maid.*

*But all is calm in this eternal sleep;*

*Here grief forgets to groan, and love to weep,*

*Ev’n superstition loses ev’ry fear,*

*For God, not man, absolves our frailties here.’ ... (312-316)*

Eloisa is willing to concede a certain immoderation in her emotional response to her situation, such grief and disillusionment that might be perceived as indulgence, the weakening of personal resolve and integrity. From the frailty born of poignant memories, Eloisa confesses, now only God can unbind her, by redeeming the suffering of her earthly life with the eternal consolation that defies all memory; from such powerlessness before the rush of recollection, Eloisa

perceives, only death can release her, by demonstrating unerringly ... *what dust we dote on, when 'tis man we love...* (336), thus revealing her torment to be little more than an insubstantial, perhaps even unworthy, obsession.

Nevertheless, despite the somewhat spiritual vision that encourages her to forego temporal concerns that are but “dust,” and to abide with those matters of a permanent, ethereal nature, Eloisa cannot renounce her Abelard. Her reflection on death leads her to imagine her funeral, whereupon she artlessly proposes that Abelard attend as celebrant of her funeral Mass! She envisions that in sacred robes will he stand in front of her funereal bower, and “trembling,” hold in one hand “the hallowed taper” (326) and, with the other hand, raise the cross before her unmoving corpse. Hers is not a contemplation on the grace of salvation or on the hope of redemption, however: she speaks not of private prayers or final sacraments, but only of Abelard and memory, how he, though a priest, should gaze upon the motionless form of “thy once-loved Eloisa” (329) and, recalling the roseate light and sparkle of her visage, realize that her living light has been extinguished, her restless spirit made silent and her defiant heart quieted. Eloisa betrays her true concern, not that Divine Mercy take pity on and offer solace to her aching heart with the salve of forgetfulness, but quite the opposite: Eloisa is most anxious that, like her, Abelard will indeed recall in exquisite detail their past together, that he remember her as she was when in his charge as his student, then in his care as his mistress-wife, and finally in his penitence as his lost companion. Eloisa does not dwell on the blessings of celestial bliss in any measure; in fact, as she conjures the eventual death of Abelard himself (an event of quite human proportion: ... *when Fate shall thy fair frame destroy...*, 337), she diminishes the heavens of “bright clouds” and “streaming glories” (341) to the contours of the terrestrial realm by challenging angels and saints to ... *embrace (Abelard) with a love like mine...* (342). Her love

is transcendent, resisting the natural laws of physical and temporal boundaries, and assuming dimensions that are traditionally associated with the other-worldly.

Yet, Eloisa will confound even death itself, for while death initiates the permanent condition of the physical separation between two lovers, for Eloisa death will only serve to unite her again with her Abelard, from whom she has been separated much of her life. As she indicated previously in her lengthy soliloquy, she understands that, according to her religious creed, she will have no recognition of or care for Abelard in the heavenly abode of departed souls, but her rapt gaze fixes not on heaven, but on the very terrain that will consume her body. She is assured that at death, her soul will find its path to salvation; her keenest intent, then, is to be assured of a 'second opportunity' to be with Abelard, to be reunited with him in death as their two bodies lie together in a single grave: ... *May one kind grave unite each hapless name,/and graft my love immortal on thy frame!...* (343-344). The burial site itself will become the final testimony to the devotion of memory, as earthen matter is transformed into a memorial of perpetual love.[v] It will also serve as a point of remembrance of Eloisa herself and of her Abelard for generations to come.

Eloisa does not only contemplate the peace of eternal repose for their lifeless forms, however, nor has she made the appeal for a single tomb as simple artifice, or as the selfish whim of a vengeful woman, for while she certainly desires to realize in death what she could not in life – to be with Abelard forever -- she also wishes their lives to have some meaning beyond their own narrative, for their story to have a resonance more expansive than the confines of their communities, and for their remembered tragedy to have an edifying significance for other lovers who also must endure inauspicious circumstances:

*...If ever chance two wandering lovers brings*

*to Paraclete's white walls and silver springs,  
O'er the pale marble shall they join their heads,  
And drink the falling tears each other sheds;  
Then sadly say, with mutual pity moved:  
'O, may we never love as these have loved!' ... (347-352)*

Eloisa's words evoke the chill of death, its unyielding finality. The resting place she describes is a setting bright and hard, formed of pale stone and cooling waters, an area as resolute and as austere as had been the grounds of her convent for so many years—or so she lamented at the opening of the poem. Yet its apparent simplicity is quite the contrary: Eloisa does not wish their love story to be diminished to a trivial episode, nor does she want the memory of their tragic love affair to insinuate little else than shameful scandal. Rather, she hopes that the single grave, silently enfolding her and Abelard in rigid pallor devoid of expression, might become an empty slate upon which distraught, even desperate, lovers, 'wandering' on the grounds of the fair convent of the Paraclete, can inscribe their sorrows, and reflect upon the comparable woes of the entombed lovers. Eloisa invites such lovers to recall all of her relationship with Abelard, including its heartbreaking circumstances, so that, moved "with mutual pity," those lovers may gain wisdom, or new insight, to inform their own unfortunate situations, or to recommend future bearings. For Eloisa, the authenticity of her (of any) life, the fundamental nature of being human, must be grounded in its collective unity, in the obvious integration of all experiences and their emotional qualities, and she has refused herself or others to dismiss any memories, but particularly the distressing and the heartrending portions, since she has deemed the darker details of her life as potentially beneficial to unhappy lovers. The remembered love affair with her

Abelard will indeed serve well as a cautionary tale about the desperation of love, and the woeful consequences of an audacious passion that defies conventional authority; yet, those memories are more than informational and admonitory, for they can also serve to enlighten, even to enrich, the hearts of those remembering. Thus, Eloisa suggests, any lover, any individual, gazing upon the grave and its contents of the “cold relics” of Abelard and Eloisa, and recalling their story, will not only achieve a more significant understanding of the vicissitudes of love affairs, but develop a more compassionate and merciful attitude as well. The bard who, like her, has suffered in loving “so long, so well...” (363), will be able to sing the song of her fated romance with more genuine sympathy, even empathy, and heartfelt tenderness than a mere wordsmith could convey. Or, Eloisa imagines, a person stands before the hard “stone” of her tomb, touched, even chastened, by the well-wrought memory of the unfortunate lovers: fraught with angry disappointment, the person lingers, but then, recollecting the whole of the story of Eloisa and Abelard, ... *(d)evotion's self shall steal a thought from heaven,/ One human tear shall drop, and be forgiven...* (357-358). Eloisa, perhaps based upon her own experience, proposes that the insight, even wisdom, that the person will gain through the dynamic interface of knowledge and memory will prompt not only an intelligible discernment, but mercy as well, the ability to accept and forgive the other, to respect above all the other's full humanity. The estimation of memory and the acceptance of all recollection are not behaviors that complete only the self: they complete the other as well. Joel's shrug of loving acceptance as he realizes, through memory, that his feelings for Clementine had as much to do with her unconventional behavior and her outlandish personality as with any more 'positive' attributes, signifies his new appreciation that authentic love for her must be absolute acknowledgement of her, and of himself, at least with her. That acknowledgement voices as well a newfound sense of care and understanding, of

tolerance and understanding of the other, just as gracious recognition by the other is sought for the self. Similarly, Eloisa assures those who remember honestly and reflect seriously about her affair with Abelard -- the grim consequences that befell them both subsequent to the public exposure of their relationship, and her persistence in resisting so much callous behavior with gracious loyalty -- that they will also learn to dispense with selfish disappointment and angry self-pity, and gain a measure of benevolence towards and consideration for others, as well as for the self, that will enhance, not encumber, their lives.

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[i] “Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind,” 2004, dir. Michel Gondry, written by Charles Kaufman, 2004, DVD Focus Features, 2004.

[ii] Alexander Pope, “Eloisa to Abelard,” in *Alexander Pope*, selected and edited by Douglas Brooks-Davies (London: J.M. Dent, 1996), 35-44.

[iii] At the risk of sounding alarmed, a recent “60 Minutes” reported a current project under investigation in various research laboratories in the United States that involves the creation of a medication that when applied as someone is recalling an especially emotional or traumatic memory, will erase the present emotions of dread or depression or anger or fear such memories evoke! The segment also reported that scientists have been able to initiate the experiment because science already has concluded that a memory sustains its strength and its influence over the individual to the degree that its grounding in the brain was accompanied by hormones like adrenaline—the more hormonal secretion, the more potent and thus the more easily evoked the remembered images. However, bio-ethicists have stated grave reservations about the ‘forgetting pill’ because, as one panel remarked, erasing or re-writing memories risks “...undermining our

true identity...” Please see attached printout of ’60 Minutes” segment.

[iv] See *The Shooting Script: Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (New York: New Market Press, 2004), 31.

[v] Abelard died in 1142 and was buried at his Convent of the Paraclete, which he founded and over which he installed Eloisa (Heloise) as abbess; Eloisa (Heloise) died in 1164 and was indeed buried by the side of her beloved Abelard. See Betty Radice, “Introduction,” in *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, translated by Betty Radice, (Penguin Books, 1974), 44-46.