

國立政治大學英國語文學系碩士論文

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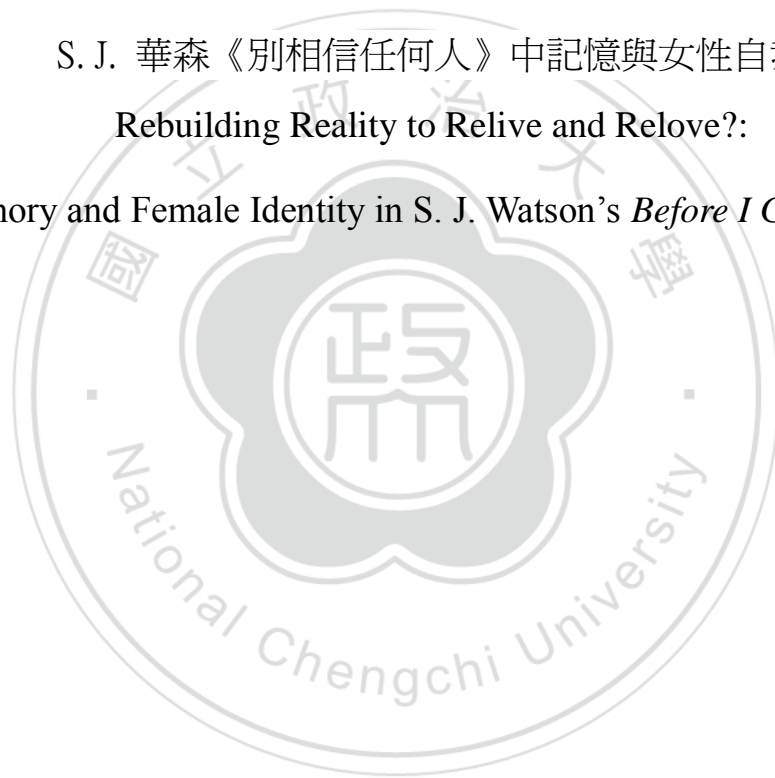
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重建真實後再一次心跳？：

S. J. 華森《別相信任何人》中記憶與女性自我

Rebuilding Reality to Relive and Relove?:

Memory and Female Identity in S. J. Watson's *Before I Go to Sleep*



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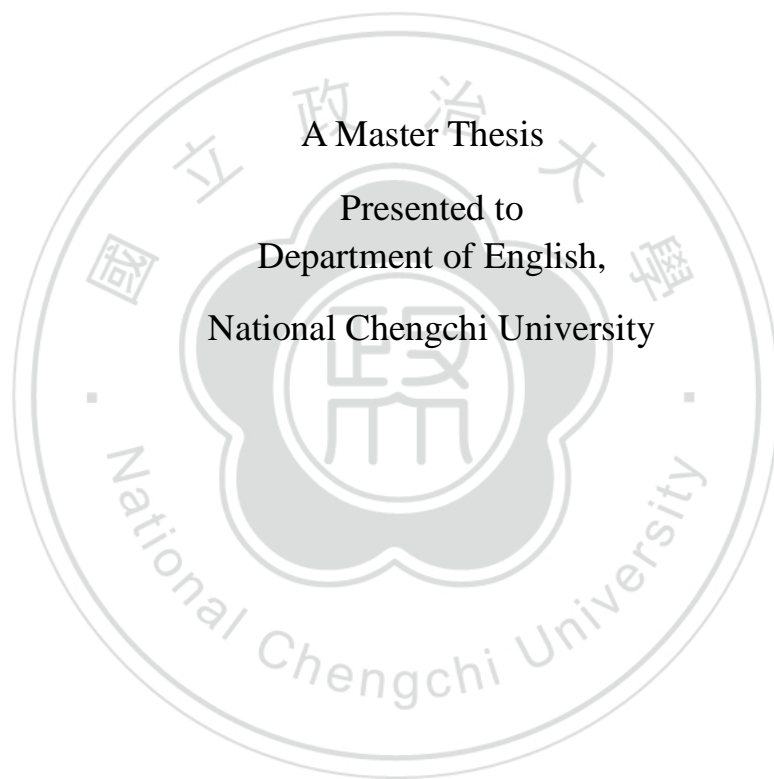
July 2015

Rebuilding Reality to Relive and Relove?:

Memory and Female Identity in S. J. Watson's *Before I Go to Sleep*

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國立政治大學英國語文學系碩士班

碩士論文提要

論文名稱：重建真實後再一次心跳？：

S. J. 華森《別相信任何人》中記憶與女性自我

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論文提要內容：

心理驚悚小說體現了當代犯罪文學作品的多樣性。隨著時代的變遷，最受大眾喜愛的文學體裁也備受考驗。近來有一股潮流試圖重新定位犯罪小說，而S. J. 華森的小說《別相信任何人》正是最佳典範。此書之所以引起各界的熱烈討論與受到全世界廣泛讀者的喜愛即在於它將看似毫無交集的元素完美融合——懼怕、懸疑、愛情、兩性關係、記憶與真實、女性意識、身分認同及重建。傳統犯罪文學的敘事結構中總著墨於主角對清楚絕對答案的追尋；然而，在這個帶有家庭黑色小說(domestic noir)色彩的文本中，最終的真理卻是遙不可及。

書中的女主角克莉絲汀是名失憶患者，爲了重新找回自己，她只能盡力從破碎的記憶中找尋蛛絲馬跡，拼湊被遺忘許久的自我。重新建構自我顯然並非易事，而個人記憶的真實性也有待商榷。事件發生與否和當事者是否能記得之間的落差所造成的空缺又該如何填滿？事實上，克莉絲汀渴望的絕非只是單單地活得如普通人般緬懷過去並展望未來，而是能重建一個充滿女性意識及自主的自我，

因此克莉絲汀也必須細心體會、感受並專注於眼前的生活及人事物。《別相信任何人》為犯罪文學帶來嶄新風貌，不僅成功突破以往的角色設定發展框架，劇情安排描述也導向了有關記憶真實性與身分重建的可能性探討，而對愛情的悸動、兩性婚姻關係的維繫、作為女人與母親身分的意識更是與克莉絲汀重建女性自我密切相關。

關鍵字：《別相信任何人》、S. J. 華森、兩性關係、記憶與真實、女性意識、身分認同及重建。



Abstract

The psychological thriller demonstrates how diversified contemporary crime writing can be like a chameleon. In the emergence of reconstituting the much-loved literary form, S. J. Watson's *Before I Go to Sleep* infatuates the reader with its high concern for elements that unusually match: fear, identity, love, reality, relationship, memory, and female consciousness. The clear-cut answer featured by traditional crime fiction cannot be offered in this novel that blending literary thriller and domestic noir together when the female protagonist only possesses fragmentary memory. To regain her sense of self, Christine the main character has to recall her reminiscence, which sometimes can be imaginary. In fact, what she longs for is not simply rebuilding her identity as a normal person, but the identity that has a lot to do with female consciousness and autonomy, which requires her to live her present life as well. Rather than another psychological thriller that tells an old story depicting the quest for the truth, *Before I Go to Sleep* shifts the focus from the deeply-rooted tradition in crime fiction, exploring the question of (un)reliability and (un)reconstructability of memory as well as what love means in a relationship. Only when Christine can relive as a woman, a wife, and a mother to re-experience love can she reframe her female identity.

Keywords: *Before I Go to Sleep*, S. J. Watson, relationship, memory, reality, female consciousness, identity.

Introduction

Before I Go to Sleep (2011) by S. J. Watson is an international bestseller, selling over four million copies in over forty languages around the world. It also catches the attention of director Rowan Joffe, who produces a same-name motion picture in 2014. This novel is unique for successfully connecting neuroscience with literature. The author S. J. Watson graduated as a Physics student and worked as an audiologist that specialized in the treatment of hearing-impaired children in the National Health Service in London for a couple of years. He was then accepted into Faber Academy's "Writing a Novel" course, which consists of classes related to novel-writing and guest seminars by acclaimed writers, agents, and publishers. This debut novel is exactly the result of the writing program.

In the author's note section at the end of his novel, S. J. Watson reveals that his work is largely inspired by the lives of Henry Molaison and Clive Wearing depicted in Wearing's book *Forever Today: A Memoir of Love and Amnesia*. Molaison suffered from amnesia at the age of twenty-seven and died when he was eighty-two years old. It thus makes Watson wonder what life might be like in those decades when the patient cannot form any new memory. Obviously, *Before I Go to Sleep* benefits from Watson's medical background that enables him to offer rich information on neuroscience and latest technology for amnesiacs in the novel. His second book *Second Life* was published in June, 2015. Both of his books discuss the issue of identity, from identity rebuilding to identity multiplying. S. J. Watson's work can be roughly deemed as a literary thriller and domestic noir for its setting in daily life and within a marriage. Obviously, S. J. Watson's (S stands for Steve) female character is

so convincing that “ninety percent of the publishers and ninety percent of the people who read it think he's a woman.”¹

In the aspect of memory loss and retaining, the issue of searching for and rebuilding of identity, especially female identity, is actually the central concern in *Before I Go to Sleep*. Female self-awareness thus surfaces as the key element that links the case of memory loss to the meaning of existence and relationships between men and women. Consistent themes in crime writing pertain to reality, death, and identity, all of which are related to the solving of crime. The issue of female identity is well-investigated in crime writing as well when the rise of multiculturalism by the 1980s and 1990s leads to more diversity within the genre. Much attention has been paid to the feminist appropriations of the genre; essays and books after one another centralize how women, like men, have the ability to take the role of the professional detective. Nonetheless, is it only by competing with men or fighting against gender norms deliberately that women can construct their own identity? In S. J. Watson's *Before I Go to Sleep*, past recollections not only help Christine achieve self-understanding but also form her female consciousness; yet when personal memory is blank, she demonstrates that women can rebuild a new one by claiming her autonomy in terms of body and mind.

In this study, I will reinterpret *Before I Go to Sleep* as an excellent example that signifies the development of the crime fiction genre. This study will comprise three chapters. Chapter One will first focalize on the background to contemporary crime fiction, tracing how the thriller genre, particularly psycho-thriller is historically situated within a larger sphere of crime fiction. Wittgenstein's (1953) Family

¹ See <<http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052748703730804576315520689651538?mg=reno64-wsj&url=http%3A%2F%2Fonline.wsj.com%2Farticle%2FSB10001424052748703730804576315520689651538.html>>.

Resemblance theory will be applied here to enunciate the generic ideas of psychological thrillers and crime fiction. Fascinating trends visible in contemporary thrillers show that a wider variety of themes are explored in the thriller, which serves as an appealing writing style. S. J. Watson's novel proves this statement amazingly. Its primary concern shifts from questing for the truth in the traditional crime fiction to reconstructing female consciousness under the condition of memory loss.

Chapter Two will articulate the significance of memory with notions of identity reconstruction. Furthermore, it will delve further into the relationship between memory and reality: how one is conventionally privileged over the other. How the personal past is represented and how it influences the building of identity in *Before I Go to Sleep* will be scrutinized. The way memory can be constructed and manipulated will be discussed as well. The chief questions posed in the novel for this section are: firstly, past events shape who you are today. What if one cannot remember them? Do memories really define us? Secondly, which is more important: memory of the incident or the incident itself? An event has happened only because one remembers it? What happens if one cannot remember any of it? What if one unconsciously changes some parts and memorizes it not as the way it is? Why does Christine want to remember the tragical past even though she has to experience the pain endlessly? Sue Halpern, author of *Can't Remember What I forgot*, points out the importance of memory in forming self-identity as well— “We rely on memory not only to remember but to walk and dream and talk and smell and plan and fear and love and think and learn and more and more and more.” With “absent memory, [amnesiacs] are strangers to themselves” (xii). Unsurprisingly, life can be despairing for someone whose whole life ahead becomes a blank to him/her.

As Žizek states, the detective novel is about the “detective’s effort to tell the story, i.e., to reconstitute what ‘really happened’ around and before the murder” (49). Crime fiction has always insisted on achieving the ultimate truth through making good use of the reasoning mind. However, reality resides in memory, which stores the knowledge of everything around us. What if memory is lost forever? Or, memory deceives us? To an amnesiac like Christine, reality is substantialized as written records and images. Yet, these concrete touchable things are very likely to fail to stand for reality. In *Before I Go to Sleep*, deception devastates Christine’s relationship with Ben,² who disguises as her husband to live with her. Hide-and-seek for truth thus becomes the invisible battle between the couple when Ben uses more and more lies to hide the fact about his true identity. In fact, deception is not unidirectional. It is also used as a shield for Christine to recapture her lost past when she hides what she finds out from her husband Ben and needs to creep out of bed to write things down in her journal after Ben falls into sleep. *Before I Go to Sleep* shows that memory might be untraceable or deceptive. Therefore, the self-image sustained by memory that resides in reality can be misleading and distorted.

Chapter Three continues in the same vein from memory possession to identity forming, arguing that the protagonist’s identity is largely built on her femininity awareness. Proceeding from identity searching to female consciousness, the first half of Chapter Three will compare the primary text with its predecessors on the characterization of females. In terms of female character setting in crime writing, it actually does not vary much—from the typical male-like professional female

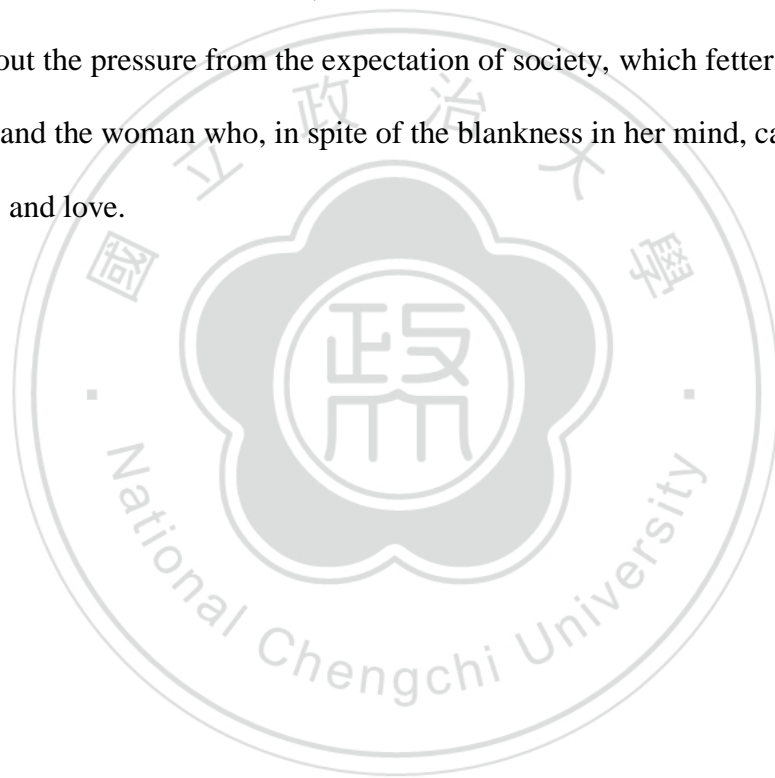
² Not until the last chapter of the novel is the truth disclosed—the guy whom Christine lives with is not her husband Ben. Feinting to be Christine’s husband to spend life with her, the guy is actually Mike, who has had marital affair with her decades ago. Therefore, all the “Ben” mentioned in this study refers to Mike.

detective to a detective that solves crime while not forgetting to express femininity and sexual attraction to men.

Crime writing is traditionally characterized as a genre that is structured around white male heterosexual mind, but female crime novelists have tried to reshape the genre by showing that their female protagonists surely can be detectives as powerful as men, proving the belief that women are not subordinate to their male colleagues. Besides, these female detectives also do not take too much interest in appearance, clothes, and hairdo. Yet many of these female writings still fail to challenge the male-centered world. The female characters are still trapped within the patriarchal ideology; their behavior or purposeful performances still do not break the deeply rooted gender categories as they deliberately imitate men's way of doing things.

The second half of Chapter Three will rely on textual analysis and further explore how female identity is represented in *Before I Go to Sleep*. S. J. Watson takes a thematic leap beyond the scope of the psychological thriller, incorporating the meditation on female consciousness into the storyline. Unlike the assertions voiced by the feminists that point out the erroneous beliefs in the male-oriented society and claim to break free from such oppression by discarding all feminine traits in the characterization, female consciousness possessed by Christine in *Before I Go to Sleep* is about the way she sees herself, understands herself, and remembers herself. Female consciousness stands for Christine's ideology, carving her ideal image of herself that reflects how she has become an independent woman fearing not to love. The main female character is especially vulnerable owing to her disability to retract and store memory. Female identity can be built through memory, but without memory, female consciousness can be reformed when the female protagonist feels herself not only as a normal person, but also as a mother and a woman.

Finally, the section will analyze reasons for the female protagonist' longing for regaining memory. The biggest motive is to live with knowledge of the past so that she can lead a normal life. However, the life she desires for is not simply the one that frees her from depending on others like a child. It is the life that has much to do with her craving to live as a woman—the woman who has her own occupation, instead of staying in the house all day long, the woman who can live through the experience as a mother to feed and raise kids, the woman who can share happiness and sorrow with the closest female friend, the woman who owns freedom and defense of her body without the pressure from the expectation of society, which fetters her role as a spouse, and the woman who, in spite of the blankness in her mind, can enjoy sex, feel passion, and love.



Chapter One

Stories Untold:

Past and Today of Contemporary Crime Fiction

Delving into the chaotic mind of Christine, who has to relearn her circumstances from scratch whenever she wakes up in the morning, S. J. Watson's *Before I Go to Sleep* is commonly referred to as a psychological thriller. Since the psychological thriller derives from crime fiction, framing the reference of crime fiction for the following chapters is imperative.

Crime fiction has received substantial recognition by both readers and scholars ever since its invention. The current landscape of crime fiction has been shaped by the trend of blending different categories together in the post-millennial decade. Several writers inaugurate this literary phenomenon. The diverseness offered by the genre is undoubtedly remarkable when more and more variations to the traditional crime novel develop into a substantial part of the genre. Most critics devote their research to different categories, stages of the development of crime fiction, such as the classic whodunit, hard-boiled, police procedural, thrillers, and so forth. Essays comparing and contrasting aspects of plot and character arrangement of crime genres are numerous. The categorization of crime fiction genre is rather miscellaneous and complicated when the genre recognizes a cluster of elements. Hence, the overlapping nature among the subgenres is easily perceived. According to Wittgenstein's Family Resemblance theory, a particular family can be recognized without difficulty, while the characteristics cannot be exhibited by each member of a family. Taking the word "game" for example, Wittgenstein argues that there is no one single common feature

that can be applied to all games, such as ball games, card games, chess games, and so on. It may seem that at least all games involve winning and losing, yet a game of a child throwing a ball to the wall and then catching it does not have this feature. The skills used in chess games are far from the one used in soccer games. Some games offer amusement or entertainment, while some others are aggressive competitions between two groups of players (31). What Wittgenstein suggests is that no one single characteristic can be observed by virtue of all games. Instead, only the connection that is interrelated among these games can be seen under the word “game.”

Wittgenstein’s Family Resemblance theory is quite insightful; it does point out the unnoticed phenomenon within a group. Yet, it cannot be applied to every word. However, it is still appropriate to explain genres with this theory. Novels under the same genre, such as crime fiction, may not represent every specific feature separately, but share the family resemblances instead; they are all related. A set of overlapping characteristics links some of them together, while another set of features runs through other subgenres. In this study, crime fiction and detective fiction will be used interchangeably on account of their high degree of similarity. Crime fiction is often defined as “the unravelling and detection of the truth about a crime, usually but not exclusively murder, plays the central role in the plot” (Shepherd et al. ix). In the case of the classic whodunit, readers take the side as the detective, craving to know who the villain is. Police procedural heavily strengthens the process of crime committing as a form of how-done-it, while the psychological thriller, which focuses mostly on the murderer’s inner world, can be seen as a narration of why-done-it. Thrillers certainly share some resemblances with crime fiction, but thrillers more often than not focalize more on the present action and future event, rather than past crimes.

In “The Typology of Detective Fiction,” Tzvetan Todorov situates the thriller as

a sub-category of detective fictions, claiming that the thriller genre was created in the United States before, particularly after World War II. As Todorov finds, there is a duality in the whodunit that includes two stories—the story of the crime and that of the investigation. The first story is about what really happened, while the second story is about how the narrator has come to know about it. The thriller “suppresses the first and vitalizes the second.” Owing to the fact that prospection takes the place of retrospection in the thriller, its suspense lies in the fact that “everything is possible” (47). Uncertainty can definitely generate suspense in thrillers. Instead of scrutinizing the literary or sociological history of the thriller in general, Ralph Harper in *The World of the Thriller* digs into the existential themes of the thriller, especially readers’ involvement when gaining the sense of satisfaction by reading a thriller. Harper, linking the thriller to Greek tragedy, points out the shared similarities that feature the genres: pity and fear. It is the growing tension that intrigues readers so much when reading the thriller. Yet, the sense of shock that straps the reader must be relieved by the finale that reassures the act of poetic justice. Citing Albert Camus’s concept of “the absurd,”³ Harper declares that the thriller presents “the disjunction between the nostalgia for justice and unity on the one hand and the unreasoning silence of the world on the other” (8-9). Only with the offer of an end, the sense of fulfillment, can the thriller satisfy readers’ need to seek for meaning. This paradox and ongoing balance of the insecure and the secure aptly defines the thriller.

By the 21st Century, the thriller has grown and thrived as a mature writing form.

³ Albert Camus’s observes humans’ desire for clarity and meaning, which enable us to value our life. Nonetheless, the world offers neither meaning nor reasons for further explanation. Only when one recognizes “the absurd” situation, in which he cannot escape from and finally rests upon, can one feel free.

Simpson, citing David Glover's categorization of the thriller⁴, verifies the broadening territory of the versatile thriller (187). Patrick Anderson, weekly book reviewer for *The Washington Post*, declares that "by the 1970s the crime novel began to mutate into something that was bigger, darker, more imaginative, and more violent: the modern thriller" (5). In his book *The Triumph of the Thriller*, Anderson observes the phenomenon that popular fictions about mystery, suspense, violence, and crime have hooked readers more in recent decades. Devoting a whole chapter in his work to the background of the birth of the thriller, Anderson points out that the transformation of book publishing as well as outbreak of wars and economic recessions all contribute to the reason why people show much preference for the thriller, which "remind[s] us how ugly and dangerous our society can be and yet offering hope in the end" (7). Vietnam War and Watergate as well indicate the end of innocence for a generation. Therefore, the "illusion of order and justice" presented in the thriller is what shelters readers from the confrontation of rotten reality (7). Thrillers offer readers consolation and hope in that the criminal will be punished and justice will be done. The social order thus does not seem to be violated or reversed.

While crime fiction seems to follow a supertext that narrates the fixed story about the discovery of crimes and the investigating process, literary thrillers come into view to advocate the possibility to combine crime novels with themes that seem to have nothing to do with the solving of crimes. Scenes of chases and gun-fire are no longer necessary. From then on, more and more writers like Lawrence Sanders seek for the answer about how variant the conventional crime stories can become.

Anderson depicts literary thrillers as "novels that are better written and/or more

⁴ David Glover classifies the thriller into several kinds: "racing thrillers (Dick Francis), legal thrillers (John Grisham), psychological thrillers (Dick Lehane), political thrillers (Jack Higgins), futuristic thrillers (Philip Kerr), and so on (139).

ambitious in terms of characterizations and subject matter than the traditional thrillers” (139). Complex characters take the place of flat ones that only change a little bit from start to end; elements such as humor, history, supernatural beings, fancy, and so on are added to the new territory of crime fiction. James Crumley’s literary works, as Anderson notes, shine not with its plot, but with his “rough poetry, scenes . . . moments” (142). What captures readers’ attention may not be the story itself, but how the story is told, which enables readers to immerse themselves easily in the fictional world.

Probably one of the most worldwide well-known examples of the literary thriller is Dan Brown’s *The Da Vinci Code* (2003), which has won unprecedented acclaim since its publication. The issue of how corruptive the Catholic church is has been dealt with many times before; nonetheless, few writers present the case “through the most popular form of fiction we have, the modern thriller, which enable[s] him to use murder, mystery, suspense, romance, chases, and related devices to hook the reader” (Anderson 143). Developing to the stage of contemporary thrillers, crime fiction has demonstrated its capacity and versatility not only in serving as a format, a genre, but also in serving as an efficient vehicle for writers through which various themes attract readers freshly. Todorov has similar viewpoints regarding the difference between the thriller and traditional detective fictions: “the contemporary thriller has been constituted around the milieu represented, around specific characters and behavior; in other words, its constitutive character is in its themes” (48). The sole focus on the crime is thus decentralized. Karin Danielsson from Uppsala University notices the diversity that crime writings can be, too. In her dissertation *The Dynamic Detective*, she discusses special interests in contemporary detective fiction, such as hobbies or pastime interests, a professional interest, gay and lesbian interests, race and

ethnicity interests, and so on, which are featured in latter-day detective series. These materials gradually become a new convention in crime fiction, expanding the characterization of the detective, whose personal life turns out to be the focus that weighs over the plot of investigation. The twenty-first century has become a golden age of burgeoning literary thrillers.

Conventional issues that thrillers center on like persisting social inequalities in contemporary society that are related to crime no longer dominate the development of plot. John O'Connell reviews *Before I Go to Sleep* in *The Guardian*, observing the possibility that the literary work demonstrates in the writing, which weaves literature (high) and recreation (low) together: "[t]he structure is so dazzling it almost distracts you from the quality of the writing. No question, this is a very literary thriller. It reifies books as memory boxes, dispatches from the dead. It also has—and expects its readers to share—a delicate appreciation of the links between fabulation (that is, the writing of stories that violate readerly expectations) and confabulation (the creation of false memories and experiences by a damaged brain)."⁵ Except for *Before I Go to Sleep*, not coincidentally, several thrillers like Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl* (2012), another *New York Times* bestseller that has a film adaptation in 2014, advocates this new development, too. In one interview, Flynn, though often praised as a remarkable thriller writer, reveals that all her novels attempt to explore the dynamics and psychology of relationships of all kinds while the mystery is only used as a thru-lane.⁶ This shows the inclination for more contemporary writers to dig into deeper issues with the form of popular literature, suggesting the perfect blending of so-called high art and low art.

⁵ See <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2011/apr/16/before-i-sleep-sj-watson-review>>.

⁶ See <<http://www.usatoday.com/story/life/2012/10/08/gillian-flynn-interview/1610623/>>.

Generally, *Before I Go to Sleep* is accepted and considered to be an outstanding crime novel and winner of several well-known awards, including the Crime Writers' Association Award for Best Debut Novel, the Galaxy National Book Award for Crime Thriller of the Year, and so forth. As mentioned before, under the umbrella of crime fiction, texts may differ from each other so much. Therefore, to simply put the novel into the category of crime fiction is rather negligent and questionable. In reviews on S. J. Watson's *Before I Go to Sleep*, the term psychological thriller seems to be the most frequently-seen word. Even so, does the literary work fit into what we think about the so-called psycho-thriller? Or does it refresh the genre? As to the origin of the psycho thriller, Simpson deems that even though the psychological thriller traditionally falls into the territory of horror given to the fear and anxiety it is often permeated, it actually "derives its mood and atmosphere from another kind of literary phenomenon: the so-called 'noir' style," which "helps construct a coherent framework around the genre's history and direction" (188). What the noir is about is social issues. It addresses inequalities with "its prevailing mood of pessimism, personal and societal failure, urban paranoia, the individual's disconnection from society, and cynicism" (189). This noir style morphs into several subgenres of crime fiction like hard-boiled fiction and police procedural, and therefore shares common characteristics with the psychological thriller. To Simpson, the criminal consciousness definitely has a strong connection with society, where people sense alienation and helplessness.

Furthermore, Philip Simpson notes that "[i]t is at this juncture between class noir and post-noir, between criminal fiction and earlier mystery and detective fiction, that one sees the shape of the contemporary psycho thriller begin to emerge" (193). One of the most obvious features of the thriller is the use of cliffhangers. The thriller

typically narrates one physical danger after another that threatens the protagonist's life, intensifying the action to a climax to create suspense. Likewise, the psychological thriller relies a lot upon escalating the tension to the highest drama, yet it is normally about the emotional state of the main character, who is afraid of being detected his true identity. The psycho-thriller is defined by Simpson as the "genre in which crime is represented as an outward manifestation of the internal workings of the pathological individual psyche." (187). In other words, a psycho-thriller can be regarded as a "character study" that intimately examines the "deviant mind" of the criminal, whose mental conflict is most explored by crime novelists. The criminal is definitely not a normal person; he/she is the one that is out of his/her mind, a person whose inner "psychological imbalance" and "physical danger" are thus usually closely connected. Most psychological thrillers suggest that the behavior of those perpetrating crimes can result from their psychological problems (Chen 180). Psychological thrillers thus are tales that aim to discern the motive of these psychologically damaged culprits. In the case of *Before I go to Sleep*, the story is told from the point of view of the victim, Christine, rather than the murderer. What interests both the writer and the reader is not the crazy mind of the victimizer, but that of the victim. The victimizer is in no way like the abovementioned killer with a mania or mental decline; quite the contrary, he is the one that takes care of Christine despite hiding things from her. Honestly, the victimizer never abandons Christine, who is left behind by her husband. He is the one that always stays by her side with unending love though the love somehow grows into excessive desire of possession. Had he sincerely told Christine about everything, she might have understood the situation and forgiven him. This close observation of faith and love in a relationship elevates the thriller to another realm.

This specific recent development in character arrangement can be seen in Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl* (2012) as well. Like *Before I go to Sleep*, *Gone Girl* has the victimizer and victim live together under the marriage vow, which suggests that the foundation of their relationship is built upon mutual love and cherishment originally. In fact, this kind of setting in crime fiction has come to regenerate the genre.

Domestic noir, a term come up with by the novelist Julia Crouch in 2013, refers to exactly this new literary form. Instead of enthralling readers with unspeakable dread in an urban jungle, domestic noir typically presents marriage life from an unusual view. The loving and nurturing shared in the marriage become illusion that masks the real sinister side of home life. In her own blog, Crouch defines that domestic noir "takes place primarily in homes and workplaces, concerns itself largely (but not exclusively) with the female experience, is based around relationships and takes as its base a broadly feminist view that the domestic sphere is a challenging and sometimes dangerous prospect for its inhabitants."⁷ This term aptly describes fictions that have been marketed as psychological thrillers when the label "thriller" might not be complete enough to explicate how domestic noirs distinguish from other thrillers. By incorporating the word domestic, Crouch not only points out the difference between this new subgenre that situates dark sides in familiar everyday environment and the classic one that gives its setting connotations with uncertainty as well as hidden danger, but also calls attention to the position of female consciousness in domestic noirs. However, the term domestic noir does not restrict its form by characterizing women as victims or victimizers.

Back to the case of *Gone Girl*, this novel successfully subverts the traditionally established character arrangement that applies the roles of the detective, the criminal,

⁷ See <<http://juliacrouch.co.uk/blog/genre-bender>>.

and the victim to three people, or three groups of people. This kind of setting in crime fiction implies that the aforementioned roles are plainly distinct from each other; they are not to be confused. While this clear-cut borderline offers an easily understandable story for readers to follow and a non-chaotic social order that will be more effortlessly restored later on, it actually traps the plot development and rejects the common-seen scenario that happens in real life: the overlapping part of these roles.

In fact, the blurring line among characters can be dated back to Sherlock Holmes Stories. Eva Chen (2004) observes that the roles of the detective and the criminal become more and more ambiguous owing to the chase of excitement featured in crime fiction (193). Take Conan Doyle's "The Speckled Band" for example, Chen argues that the detective actually is not the absolute opposite of the criminal. On the contrary, they both believe that individualism can be put higher than law and social norms. In order to punish the criminal, Sherlock Holmes makes the criminal die indirectly by attacking the snake, which is used by the criminal to kill the victim. The criminal becomes the victim, who does not escape from the control of the cunning Holmes, the detective whose action reveals his limitless desire to get whatever he wants without considering violating the law. This kind of irresponsible behavior of hurting others and intruding into someone's privacy is nothing far from those done by the criminal. The only difference between the criminal and the detective is the thin line of code of ethics.

In *Gone Girl*, we have two disturbing narrators exchanged back and forth to tell a story about how the all good relationships go bad. Alternative voices provided by the novel enable the reader to look through both the victim's and the victimizer's mind. Furthermore, because one of them is identified as the culprit by the police, he has to investigate about what gets wrong without the help of the police. Therefore, all

typical roles are taken by these two main characters in the story. *Gone Girl* begins with Nick and Amy quickly falling in love with each other after the first meeting. Amy loves games and she always sets up a treasure hunt for their anniversary. At first, Nick loves all what she does and they enjoy the happily-ever-after married life. However, things start to get wrong gradually. One day, Nick finds that Amy disappears at their fifth wedding anniversary. She totally evaporates and leaves no clue at all. Not surprisingly, all things hint that Nick is the suspect: he looks not quite sad at the news of his wife gone; he increases her life insurance; Amy's neighbor points out his irresponsibility as a husband and a father, revealing that Amy is pregnant; Amy's diary discloses her unconditional love to Nick, who yet does not treat her well. Meanwhile, Amy is actually hiding in other places and seeking help from her ex-boyfriend Desi, who finally locks her in his mansion out of his obsessive love to Amy. Despite finding that Amy frames him, he has no way to prove it. Not until he eventually confesses his sincere love to Amy on a TV show does Amy decide to go back with her husband and thus kill Desi to escape from the house, telling the media that she has been kidnapped by Desi for weeks.

It turns out that Amy's reason for plotting to frame her husband is that Nick has had an affair with his student. Unconditional love does not exist, but requires that "both partners to be their very best at all times" (554). Nick figures out that "[t]here's a difference between really loving someone and loving the idea of her" (28). As a psychological thriller, *Gone Girl*'s emphasis is actually put on the unravelling of a marriage, a heavenly relationship gone off the rails. The character arrangement shines the story when Amy the original victim transforms into the victimizer, while Nick the original victimizer is forced to be the victimizer and the detective. Everyone's position is never fixed but fluid. Although the end might not be a happy end, both of

the characters have figured out what gets wrong and what they truly want from each other in a relationship.

Before I go to Sleep probes into the issues of relationship and female consciousness as well. Descriptions of experiences that are particularly associated with women permeate through the whole novel. Nonetheless, to label it as a domestic noir is arbitrary. The text in question is more of a psychological thriller or domestic noir when passages after passages describing how memory works in our brain divert the reader's attention to another mysterious world related to neuropsychology: different types of amnesia, latest experimental techniques, controls in MRI, anoxia, neural excitation, operation of coding short-term memories as long-term memories, and so on (25-8, 101, 177). All of these words that readers might stumble over are well-elaborated. The literary piece is a miscellany giving readers amusement and knowledge at the same time.

What makes the fiction intriguing is not simply that it captivates readers with unresolvable tension as a psychological thriller, but that the writer of the novel has no idea how this text is going to be at the first stage. Instead of being determined to write a suspense novel that weaves violence and crime into the story, S. J. Watson simply comes up with an only vague idea of the final scene of the story, declaring in one interview that he wants to develop the characters through writing. Therefore, every character has boundless potential to develop in any direction. In fact, what he plans to write is actually a "meditative novel exploring themes of memory and identity and love." Interestingly, it is not until his agent reads the story and points it out that he realizes his novel turns out to be a thriller.⁸ Hence, we might say that the

⁸ See <<http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052748703730804576315520689651538?mg=reno64-wsj&url=http%3A%2F%2Fonline.wsj.com%2Farticle%2FSB100014240>

psychological thriller, rather than a subgenre, is “more a matter of style and substance” (Frey 15). Undoubtedly, it provides a framework for a deeper investigation on the subject matters. Contemporary psychological thriller thrills the reader not with a psychopath out of control, but with normal people seeking for comfort, answer, and truth. What S. J. Watson does in *Before I go to Sleep* is to defamiliarize and refamiliarize the novelistic form: its dimension dismembers the original form, yet all it brings together is so familiar to us.





Chapter Two

Questions Unanswered:

(Un)reliability of Memory and (Un)reconstructability of Identity

The best I can hope for is that, one day, looking in the mirror will not be a total shock, that I will remember I married a man called Ben and lost a son called Adam, that I will not have to see a copy of my novel to know that I had written one (191).

Identity forming has always been one of the most favorite themes for all literary productions. Recent studies such as *Investigating Identities: Questions of Identity in Contemporary International Crime Fiction* collects essays by international critics that analyze discourse regarding the issue of identity that is affirmed in the crime fiction nowadays. In *Before I Go to Sleep*, memory loss disturbs Christine's understanding of self and perspectives of life, which frightens her to the extent that she feels like herself withdrawn and abandoned from the world.

Due to memory deficiency, the protagonist Christine Lucas, who has been suffering from amnesia for years, has started to record her life in a journal secretly for less than one month. It is through the journal that the reader enters into Christine's life, the life that exists from the moment she opens her eyes to the time before she goes to sleep. Everything she has known will be wiped clean the next day. It is also through the information left in the journal that Christine and readers simultaneously notice the gap between Christine's and her husband Ben's version of the past. As a journal, the whole book actually begins and ends "today". The chapter divisions signify

Christine's inner conflicts and efforts with dates so that she is able to make sense of her life, which seems to be normal yet finally unveils a horrible crime already done decades ago that brings about her mental breakdown as well as amnesia.

Before I Go to Sleep does not delve into the investigation of crime and neither Christine nor the reader knows whether there is one. No serial killer, no hide-and-seek, no detective or police scenes can be found in the story. The aggressive feminist voice and the solving of the riddle or the murder itself are not matters of primary importance; instead, the main character's own personal circumstance is what drives the plot. In fact, Christine's prime purpose to accept Dr. Nash's suggestion and treatment regularly is never to find out the truth that causes her brain injury. Poor Christine finds out that years have slipped through her, leaving no trace. To her, time stretches to nothing. Time is meaningless; it represents only stagnation.

What prompts her to record even bits and pieces of her daily life is the desire to live with personal past and future as a normal person. Without dramatic plot that revolves around hidden secrets and schemes of the crime, the novel presents Christine's life in domestic settings. It appeals to readers not with its overly sensation plot device or unanticipated plot twist, but with loss of memory, the consequence of which we all might confront. It is a story of soul-searching under the condition when the past and the future mean nothing at all. According to Sharon Packer, as more and more people are haunted by the nightmare of Alzheimer at the turn of twenty-first century, more and more fictions and films centralize loss of identity and sense of displacement. Loss of memory has been a weighty topic that contemporary fictions tackle. By setting similar scenarios in which the main character loses part of the previous memory, fails to retain information in short-term memory, or tries to look back into past memory about others, writers explore how memory of certain events

might be so subjective, reflecting the gap between actuality and memory. Some others present the miserable life that amnesiacs have when all they can do is to depend on people around them.

To illustrate how essential memory is to forming self-identity, how self and identity is defined should be discussed first. According to Harvie Ferguson, identity, commonly referred to what makes something it is, can be manifest in lots of forms, including those that are often paired as opposites: particular and categorical, singular and plural, objective and subjective (10). The feature of particularity is the most important to identities of objects. Like the pen the writer bought in a Kyoto bookshop, the identity of the pen is “inseparable from the history of our relationship to them and [is] defined through this relational history.” While what makes a pen unique is that it is *my* pen, the pen is also “an instance of a multiplicity” (11-2). In the case of human identity, the pair of objective and subjective is most relevant. By applying the terms, Ferguson means that objective characteristics refer to those that are externally observable of a person, such as age, gender, and so on. However, objective data, though available from official records, is unreliable to him; to identify a person definitely requires understanding his/her belief and attitude, which are characteristics thought to be subjective. Despite the fact that these classifications are not universally applicable, as Ferguson comments, they are still important for sociology in the aspect of figuring out human experiences in life that are often taken for granted.

In the context of modern everyday life, identity a) reveals how people and things are connected, as the example of the pen given earlier, and b) is not something always fixed, exclusive, or changing, but something fragmentary, something that can be “borrowed for relatively brief periods.” Here Ferguson introduces the concept of “empathic identity,” the identity that is experienced when reading stories, which

enables the reader to identify with the character that is “other than ourselves” (17). In fact, this is the most common approach in contemporary life that lets everyone temporarily live with another identity while not discarding the original identity. Only in the age of global village can one have kimchi and coke at noon and watch an Italian Opera with his hippy outfit. Therefore, questions of identity is no longer “‘who are we?’ but ‘who are we like?’ or, ‘who would we like to be like?’” In this way, traveling abroad nowadays becomes a form of “identity excursions” in a casual but authentic mode (17). Modern forms of identity formation diversify and deconstruct what has been traditionally considered to be fundamental and permanent. Self, which is closely related to the idea of identity, ceases to embody a unity for inner perceptions and experiences of a person, rather, self is a mediation, an unresolved tension that hold different selves.

The declaration that the self is connected with interiority is reconfigured by Paul Ricoeur, who displays the relationship between narrative and self-identity: “It is the identity of the story that makes the identity of the character” (147-8). Here the literary idea of narrative is brought to correspond not merely with the plot of a story, but with the unity of the inner state of a character. To Ricoeur, the self is “best understood in terms of narrative,” and this can be best exemplified in an autobiography (113). The completion of an autobiography demands the writer’s effort to recall the past and arrange all the fragments. Consequently, the continuity and reconstruction of integrate self somehow equals what readers read in an autobiography. Nonetheless, the self that is presented in the narrative might tend to be deceptive to some extent when the writer is determined to show an ideal image of the self to readers by covering or rearranging past events.

If memory represents our understanding and recollections of the past, then it definitely plays a key role in the process of forming self-identity of us. It is widely believed that what memory provides is a sense of continuity, the supportive pillar sustaining our belief that we are subjects, who have history to reflect upon as well as future to look forward to. While most philosophers point out the strong link between memory and self-consciousness, Ferguson elaborates the concept of memory in quite a different direction: memory “is a version of selfless non-identity that stands positively at the outset of the contemporary postmodern” (113). Memory, in fact, cannot totally serve as the sole mechanism that builds one’s self-identity.

Citing Marcel Proust’s passages that describe a spontaneous flow of memory, Ferguson notes that the exact moment when memory returns is actually the moment when the self disappears. Discontinuity is thus created. The “involuntary character” of memory, therefore, “is often charged with a sense of ‘reliving’ rather than simply recalling the past, also exists exclusively in the transience of now” (109). What memory represents is not the past, but the present. If so, then what symbolizes the past? History, records preceding incidents, “is a representation of the past,” while memory, embedded in everyday life, is the means to create the present (Pierre Nora 1-3). A similar view is exposed by David Hume, who believes that just like events happening one after another does not demonstrate the operation of causality, the memory of “successive events fails to demonstrate the real continuity of self and, thus, fails to demonstrate the reality of self-identity at all” (qtd. in Ferguson 110). As Ferguson concludes, “memory works against itself; against the self. Self and identity dissolved into pure sensuous awareness, made eternal, rather than actual, in recollection” (113). Yet, no matter how strong or loose the relationship between memory and self-identity

is, or how memory stands for the past or the present, one's memory certainly occupies a large part not only in the brain, but also in the heart.

Whether reality is undoubtedly more real than memory is always a difficult question to answer. Christine strikingly illustrates the confusion: "[t]he truth was that I had no memory of the accident, and so it did not seem real. . . . It's like they don't even exist" (71). To some extent, the present results from the past. Since memory functions as we encode, store, and retrieve information gathered around incidents, memory mediates reality as the foundation that builds our vision and establishes our understanding. For a nation, memory counts even more. Histories are made by memories that are often politically driven. How about for individuals? As Christine finds, the present environment is "completely flat," "devoid of energy," and "colorless" (47). She seems to be an outsider looking at the life she nonetheless involves. On the contrary, the vision she has of past events, though just fragmented memory of moments, is "almost more real than the life [she] had opened [her] eyes to when it vanished" (60). Her memory shocks her with its clarity and hard edges. To Christine, memory does weigh heavier than reality. While she cannot dig out any meaning from the present, she feels a sense of security and belonging whenever her memory returns.

However, the fact is that the accuracy of memory has always been questioned. Cases of false memory syndrome are far from few. Studies show that a quarter of people without brain injury do find their memory to be unreliable, let alone patients with the problem of remembering things (Champion 72-3). Since we do not deliberately record incidents in our mind, we are very likely to have memories of real events and imagined ones. Substantial research has shown that errors in remembering can be demonstrated in experiments like reality monitoring and eyewitness testimony (Foster 72-3). With internal (original inability to memorize details correctly) and

external (the use of leading questions when asked to recall things) factors, the accuracy of memory is highly doubted.

Besides the notion that there is high possibility that we remember things not as how they actually had happened, memory, to a large extent, functions to fulfill the psychological and social need: to memorize things that had taken place in a particular way, we unconsciously believe it and make it real. Memory of oneself is generally considered to be one's representation of self. It constitutes the persona that one retains. Self is "a *relation* rather than a simple unity"; this self is as "continuous possibility of becoming aware of the world as ongoing, past and future potential experience," which we are aware of "ourselves as having, or undergoing" (Ferguson 20). Similarly, to Craig Barclay, memory does not work singly, but interactively. Remembering has much to do with interpersonal interactions; it is "used adaptively" to "form friendships or love relationships." It is deeply engaged with how we feel and need, "especially for nurturing relationships" (285, 319). Christine in *Before I Go to Sleep* definitely longs for a close friend and beloved husband to depend upon. Without them, she hardly can reform her lost identity and relive with hope.

The concept of autobiographical memory suggests that there is a priori self, the past self, which can be consulted as a file containing a record intact. Nonetheless, Barclay's view is that "there is no one stable self or collection of selves to be remembered." Any memory can become an autobiographical one when it "specifies the personal significance and meaning of that memory for the person," who evaluates the "embodied experience;" hence, remembering ourselves is just a reconstruction in the present "for some contemporary purpose" (296, 285). Consequently, memory of oneself is never reliable. On the contrary, it is virtual memory.

Autobiographic remembering is concerned more with a sense of the past in the present to serve some function or goal, than with the accuracy of some specific recollection that would inform us about how such a recollection is represented cognitively (Lowenthal 1985; Neisser 1982). On this view, remembering can be seen as serving both social and psychological functions; namely, the establishment and maintenance of intimacies through the sharing of autobiographical memories and collective remembering as in families (Halbwaches 1925; Middleton & Edwards 1990), and the maintenance of a psychological and emotional well-being (Barclay & Smith in press) (qtd. in Barclay 290).

Craig Barclay's account of memory and self is based on an understanding that autobiographical memory differs from general memory in that it "is associated with feelings that are interpreted within the context of cultural models that provide explanatory systems for understanding our everyday experiences and emotions" (286). Because it is as a sociocultural phenomenon that is so meaningful to the person, its inaccuracy can be anticipated. What it stores may not be the objective record of things and people, but those added a layer of appearance that he/she prefers more instead.

Before I Go to Sleep, though not a neurological textbook, does infuse the narrative with rich illustration of how memory works and how it might confuses people: patients with amnesia often tend to have confabulation. "Things around them do not seem to make sense, and so they feel compelled to invent details [a]bout themselves and other people around them, or about their history. . . It's thought to be due to the desire to fill gaps in the memory" so that it can be "understandable, in a way" (188). Therefore, memory, instead of a result of how the brain stores images and

conversation, turns out to be a way we use to explain what has happened. It is subjective interpretation.

Solving the riddle raised in crime fiction is always one of the climaxes at the end of the story. It brings readers back to the beginning, reaffirming the original social order and familiar view of the world. However, *Before I Go to Sleep* differs from this long-established tradition, for it brings out the idea that what really happened does not quite count. What one can remember or what one thinks one can remember is the truth. Sally Munt identifies psychological thrillers as the genre characterized by “a dissolving sense of reality” (20). The supremacy of truth over memory is severely questioned. The blurring borderline between reality and memory reflects the view of post-structuralism regarding to truth: there is never objective truth. Logocentrism,⁹ which is found on a fragile basis, can thus be reversed. The logocentric way of thinking asserts how pure truth is, how it is privileged and superior to anything else. Yet, there are only constructions/representations of truth. What is really real can never be traced again; it is actually built on a shaky foundation and thus can be dismantled. It is just verisimilitude, an air of truth. Now that truth is constructed, memory represented in Christine’s journal is a construction of truth.

The majority of book reviews on *Before I Go to Sleep* highlights the close relationship among identity, memory, and reality. Rob Minshull’s book review on *612 ABC Brisbane* believes that the novel puts the possibility of trusting and living without memory into question. Val McDermid, author of *Fever of the Bone*, praises this psychological thriller as “a deeply unsettling debut that asks the most terrifying question: what do you have left when you lose yourself?”¹⁰ One reader under the ID

⁹ Logocentrism, a term used by French deconstructionist Jacques Derrida, refers to Western belief or desire for absolute truth, the center where all thoughts revolve (76).

¹⁰ More reviews can be found under the section of “Reviews & Press” on the official website

name of *The Book Slave* on the website *Geeks of Doom*, notes the ambiguity between reality and memory as well, and extends the query to illusion: “[w]ere those mere fabrications of imagination produced by her [Christine’s] broken brain or were they real memories of a dear friend long, long gone?”¹¹ Indeed, the searching for a transcendental signified, the ultimate truth can be agreed to be the goal of crime fiction. It is the story about finding out what really took place before, who hurt others out of what kind of reasons.

Michael Holquist examines kitsch functioning in the classic detective novels. Kitsch, “the sense of reassuring sameness,” comforts in the way that an escape from irrationality is provided: it “is not real, but it is familiar” (152). He finds that the world of the detective story is “ordered” and “ultrarational,” so everything can be understood under “the power of reason.” The “supremely rational quality” is one of the biggest unbreakable rules for detective and crime fiction (156, 158-9). The belief crime fiction presents is that nothing is unsolvable with the reasoning mind. Emphasizing the logical solution to the puzzle through step-by-step inquiry, detective novels must offer narrative closure, “the promise of an answer,” so that the tension built along the plot can be relieved through “the experience of an end” (Porter 339). This end can be achieved only when the truth is disclosed through reasonable explanation, which governs the direction of narrative in crime fiction. Likewise, Moretti and Porter acknowledge that the function of mass culture is “to expel the ‘strange’ and reaffirm the ‘normal’” (qtd. in McCracken 56). The interest of the majority of crime writing is to rehabilitate the dominant social order that is threatened and destroyed at the beginning of the story.

of *Before I Go to Sleep*. See <<http://www.sjwatson-books.com/beforeigotosleep/reviews-press/page/3/>>.

¹¹ See <<http://www.geeksofdoom.com/2011/12/10/book-review-before-i-go-to-sleep>>.

In *Before I Go to Sleep*, no one knows what happened the night when Christine lost her conscience due to the attack by some people or someone else. Christine, the only one who knows the fact, is now an amnesiac who can only retain memory within twenty-four hours. Therefore, memory, encoded in the journal, books, articles, and photographs, serves as a tool to reconstruct reality and identity. But, it is the reality that is highly questionable, and thus the self-image is ambiguous. The old saying “Seeing is believing.” cannot be applied anymore. Christine’s career as a novelist leads her to the constant fear that all the contents documented in her journal might be her own imagination. *The New Scientist* published an article on how highly possible that people may remember things that never happened.¹² Rather than impressions rooted deeply in the mind of the perceivers, memory is re-constructable and easily maneuvered. Christine believes that the scrapbook “is a version of [her] past, but chosen by Ben” and she wonders whether the journal she just gets from Dr. Nash contains another version of her past (31). Depending fully on the journal, which represents her past, Christine believes that she is nothing without her journal. It does terrify her a lot when Mike, after revealing his true identity, burns her journal in the hotel finally. Nevertheless, can the journal really be that reliable when some pages containing crucial facts are torn off by her fake husband? Can those photocopies be real when computer technology can make them with just some clicks? The psychological thriller reveals that memory can also be deceptive.

¹² See <<http://www.newscientist.com/blogs/culturelab/2012/01/remembering-things-that-never-happened.html>>.

Ben takes advantage of Christine, who will not believe anything until she sees it in person, manipulating her process of rebuilding her self-image. Ben glues all pictures of him and Christine on the wall in the bathroom, where she goes every morning after waking up. By doing so, Ben makes her practice believing what she has seen: Ben is whom she makes wedding vows to. In addition, he makes a clipping from newspaper and puts it in the forbidden box that contains some photos of Adam to let Christine believe that Adam is dead. Despite not adding extra words in the journal kept by Christine, Ben does transform the authentic journal into a weapon that corrodes her reason by tearing off some pages and leaving the part that proving Christine's love to Ben. Truth cannot be represented in tangible objects. Hence, Christine relies a lot upon her own memory, those visions coming to her whenever and wherever something triggers them. Yet, her memory sometimes turns out to be imagined one. Therefore, to reconstruct her female consciousness, Christine has to not only trace back to her past, but further live in the moment: to create new memory, that is her life with and perception of Ben, Claire, and especially Dr. Nash.

Chapter Three

Herself Lost and Found:

Female Consciousness and Autonomy of Self-image

Most articles reviewing the novel in question merely meditate upon the series of questions regarding the significance of memory to identity, the identity of Christine as a normal person. Nonetheless, these reviews overlook the prominent role that female consciousness plays throughout the story. In *Before I Go to Sleep*, the level of profundity is intensified by its impeccable blend of the popular and the literary by gradually bringing up themes of female identity and the relationship between two sexes. What the protagonist Christine Lucas loses is not just simply memory, but her identity as a woman and all that accompanying consciousness. All she wants is to exert her free will, to be in control of her life and to love again as a woman.

Female character arrangement in *Before I Got to Sleep* shows the refusal of conventional setup for women at some extent, marking the boundless possibility of the contemporary crime genre. An increasing number of writers, usually female ones, aim to rewrite this genre that is traditionally deemed as deeply implicated with masculinity. In fact, the masculine featured in this literary genre can be easily reversed, as Rowland states that “the whole crime fiction genre, representing the Other of traditional social order, is in itself inherently feminine” (qtd. in Knight 164). This indicates the hybrid characteristic forming crime fiction. With the goal in mind to demonstrate that women can be masters of crime solving, feminist writers assign their female protagonists to the task of investigating crimes by depicting them as extraordinary intelligent and rational, which are features that are not acknowledged as

those belonging to women. Some female characters are even given names that do not disclose their gender. As Theo D'haen disclaims in his essay "Plum's the Girl! Janet Evanovich and the Empowerment of Ms. Common America," female detectives in women's crime writing in the eighties "apparently prefer potentially male names: 'Kinsey', 'Kat', 'V. I.' occasionally lengthened to 'Vic' as short for Victoria" (150). Likewise, Sue Grafton's alphabet series introducing Kinsey Millhone, a private detective, displays the trend to neutralize the female character's sexuality: picking "the name Kinsey from a newspaper story because she liked it and it could be either male or female" (Anderson 94). Kinsey's androgynous characteristic not only enables her to compete with men but also successfully performs another kind of femininity.

In the context of the feminist movement sweeping the world, it seems that covering the feminine identity of the protagonist and revealing it later on is the most often adopted approach for writers to express the idea that women who are first considered as men by readers because of their names are able to deal with the so-called masculine stuff. Unlike women in precedent crime fiction, who intends to hide their femininity and thus abbreviates their name to a more masculine one, Christine is often called by her friend Claire as "Chrissy," an absolute feminine name. As a patient suffering from amnesia, Christine cannot learn from her experience or plan for her future, let alone substantiating women's competence. On the contrary, what readers often see on her are vulnerability and helplessness. This fragility never fades throughout the whole novel, yet it is accompanied by growing belief to stay calm and strong. Christine, though not might a perfect ambassador of professional investigator, shows women's versatile feelings and lasting perseverance in the face of depression and difficulty.

Neither copying the socially-accepted image of men nor trying to fit the standard of good women, Stephanie, the protagonist in the Stephanie Plum series by Janet Evanovich, just wants to be herself; she lives on junk food while showing pretty awful skill at doing any house chores, which is often designated as women's responsibility. Even so, Stephanie does not lose her sex appeal at all. The most remarkable point of this literary work is that, as D'haen claims, to be a successful detective, "you do not necessarily have to look or talk like the male or even the female stereotype of the genre" (158). Female empowerment, well performed in Stephanie's thinking and style of life, helps her triumph over men. Stephen Knight notes that Evanovich "communicates a good deal about the world of post-feminist young women and rustbelt America" (171). More emphasis is put on Stephanie's love life, which welcomes readers to set out the journey with her at the beginning of the novel: "There are some men who enter a woman's life and screw it up forever. Joseph Morelli did this to me—not forever; but periodically" (Evanovich 3). Highlighting the female protagonist's complicated relationship with men, Evanovich does project a new concept of an independent woman in this serial that combines crime fiction and romance. The main female character's intertwined life story shared with men drives the plot of the series. Similarity can be seen in Sue Grafton's alphabet series, where readers definitely note Kinsey's "girly stuff, [her] preoccupation with her hair and her butt and her romantic frustrations (Anderson 101). More and more crime fictions that surround the female protagonist elevate the significance of the inner life of the main characters, who do a research on how things develop the way they are and still live like everyone else at the same time. However, the vivid illustration of private life of the detective is not seen in classic male-oriented crime fiction. As Anderson observes, Sherlockians are not sure where Holmes goes to university, yet those who read the

Kinsey Millhone series “know the name of the bully who tormented Kinsey in the fifth grade” (96). The detailed portrayal of the heroine’s life, sometimes even dating back from the childhood, has gradually become a big part that constitutes a crime novel. Sometimes the text dealing with the protagonist’s personal circumstance even weighs more than the goal of solving the crime and capturing the culprit.

Women-centered crime fiction in recent years develops in the direction of subordinating the process of investigating the crime to the daily life and in particular the love life of the female characters. Similar variations can be seen in Russian detective stories. Willem G. Weststeijn in his essay “Russian Women Detective Writers” claims that crime fiction written by Russian women pays much attention to matters that hardly have relation to the history of the murder case (160). Weststeijn discusses a crowd-pleasing genre in Russia: *lyubovno-detektivnye romany* (love-detective novels), which is more welcomed by Russian readers than its counterpart in the West—the pure romance novel or pure detective one. Apparently, the popularity of this genre that combines love story and detective fiction in post-perestroika Russia reflects the hardships of Russia society and signifies Russian’s personality. Examining present-day works by Russian writers, Weststeijn finds out that in this kind of compound genre, female detectives outstrip their male counterpart by intuition, the perception that is opposed to rational science and logic. In addition, what occupies so many pages of a novel actually is not so related with the murder; what the writers narrate turns out to be the daily life and love life in particular of the heroine. To Russians, pure romance novels and detective fiction are too unrealistic to be true, for both literary forms head for a bright future: the love bubble within a couple never pops; the crime is always solved in the last chapter. It is this kind of promised denouement that readers feel difficult to identify with. Before the tied-up

end comes, a variety of obstacles in life should be told to make the story probable. Therefore, the arrangement of hardness that blocks the protagonist has a lot to do with the “masochistic streak in Russian themselves.” Experiences of “suffering and grief are considered natural and necessary” (165). Adding a large proportion of ruthlessness to the narrative, Weststeijn notes that suffering “purifies the soul and raises man above the mere material” (165-6). These above-mentioned factors make Russian love-detective novel different from previous female detective fiction. The feminist voice and the solving of the riddle or the murder itself are not matters of primary importance; instead, the main character’s own personal inner growth as well as various milieus around her are what drive the plot and what the writers want to elaborate so that readers are more likely to identify with the heroine.

S. J. Watson’s *Before I Go to Sleep* expands the field that crime fiction reaches. Actually, it establishes a new form that serves as an excellent example of contemporary literary works exhibiting various aspects of life like a kaleidoscope, which shows unlimited possibilities inviting readers to join in from different perspectives. Unlike preceding crime texts that are written by and about and for women, *Before I Go to Sleep* seamlessly pieces disparate elements like neuroscience, love relationship, female consciousness, psychological tension, and so on. Besides, it dismantles normally held view about character arrangement in crime fiction, which involves a crime committed fairly early and a series of questions regarding who hurts others for unknown reasons. In a psychological thriller like *Before I Go to Sleep*, the victim does not commission a private investigator to help her detect who the criminal is, nor does the criminal keep trying to endanger the victim’s life.

As the victim, Christine the protagonist can only find out who hurts her years ago by her own keen observation every day because of her amnesia. Yet, Christine

has no idea that someone has intentionally attacked her. Her habit of recording things and her inner states is not for figuring out who might hurt her, but for remembering who she is to rebuild her identity. Paying attention to every detail that happens around her, Christine notices unusual things: the bruise on her body, the uncomfortable look of herself in the picture in an article that reviews her first novel, what she and Ben have for dinner, and so forth. Suddenly she realizes that the Ben she lives with has hit her, who remembers that her friend Claire mentions once that Ben “convinces me [Claire] that fish have as much right to life as an animal with legs” (315). He is a person incapable of any violence. The Ben who eats meat with her is actually said to be a vegetarian. Suddenly she realizes why the handwriting on the board in the kitchen, where Ben writes down memorandums and chores for Christine, disturbs her so much. Its neatness is entirely different from the scrawls on Ben’s letter that her friend Claire gives her. It turns out that the Ben Christine depends on is not Ben at all. He is her secret lover Mike, who pretends to be her husband Ben and takes her back from Waring House, the hospital she has lived in for seven years. Though mistakenly believing that the guy living with her to be her original husband, Christine finally sorts out all things and saves herself not with the feminine characteristic, the sixth sense or intuition, but with quite masculine features: sharp observation, careful detection, and logical explanation.

Living with female consciousness is pivotal to Christine’s expectation of what her self-image should be. The female consciousness represented in *Before I Go to Sleep* should not be confused with what is promoted with the rise of female movement. Rather than providing a fancy version of life enveloped in a shroud of alleged female empowerment propagandized by feminism, *Before I Go to Sleep* realistically reflects what is the most important to a forty-seven-year-old woman with memory disorder.

To Christine, feeling pretty, confident, ambitious, loved, and needed is the most important. Like all women in the world, possessing an appealing appearance and sexy figure definitely matters no matter how old she is. For women, staying beautiful and elegant is a lifetime goal.

Every morning is another nightmare for Christine to face the new her, the old her. To Christine, she merely wakes up in the bedroom of another sweet guy that she meets in the crazy party. Nonetheless, twenty-two years have already passed silently, stolen between endless nights. Her body becomes so alien to her, the sagging breasts, scars, and wrinkles in skin. The fact that she is no longer the lovely young girl depresses her. Christine once notices a young guy glancing over her and Dr. Nash in a café; to her dismay, this guy does not look up at her again, and the twenty-year-old Christine is really upset (29). Mental youngness cannot catch up with physical oldness, which does not restrict her from searching for her love.

Regaining the feeling of expectation and desire to be with a loved one is what Christine pursues in reconstructing her identity. As a woman, Christine, at the age of forty-seven, like women in romance novels, absolutely dreams for the moment of her heart throbbing at the sight of the man she is deeply in love with. Now that her mind is reset every day, Christine cannot recognize her husband, let alone loving him. However, every time she meets Dr. Nash, she can feel her heart race. It is weird for her to love a young doctor when she is old enough to be his mother. Yet, his scent surrounds her as she feels his body hard against her. There is tenderness in his eyes, in the way he rests his hand on Christine's (144). That kind of stare is what makes time freeze, what she never experiences when facing Ben, mistakenly referred to as her husband owing to her amnesia, who sometimes even eats with her in near-silence.

The attention, the feeling of connection. For a moment, in the middle of everything else that was going on, there had been a tiny pinprick of joy. I had felt attractive. Desirable.... Though I knew that Dr. Nash had not been flirting with me, for that brief space in which I thought he was, I had not felt old. I had felt alive. (146-7)

The existence of Dr. Nash makes her integral as a woman. Her affection toward him is the only thing she can be certain of when all things in her past are veiled with Ben's lies. Though she just tells herself that Ben is strong enough for her to cling to, Christine cannot help but start imagining what will happen to Dr. Nash and her if she puts her hand on his and moves forward. It is the experience of getting along with Dr. Nash that reminds Christine of what she searches for—she is still a human being, not an animal. Because of Dr. Nash, Christine's life becomes colorful. She finally has something to look forward to. Time has meanings now. Her interaction with Dr. Nash arouses the young woman always living in her mind. She now has the motive to put on stockings and tight dresses with necklaces and earrings. Unfamiliarity is certainly pronounced, yet she feels ready, ready to embrace her long-lost sexual desire that is much related to her understanding of having female consciousness (147-8).

Her desire for Dr. Nash even retains through nights as a form of dream, where she can manifest her femininity. When Christine recalls that her situation actually does not result from a hit-and-run car accident on an icy road, but from an attack she encounters in a hotel in Brighton¹³, a name pops up suddenly. She figures out that the attacker, her lover outside of the marriage, is someone called Ed. She even has had a dream about being so happy to be in bed with this Ed. Nonetheless, not until she tells Dr. Nash about what she has remembered lately does she get the knowledge that Ed is

¹³ Memory hits Christine that the night when she passes out, she is waiting for someone (supposed to be her lover) in a hotel, where she gets head injury and anoxia.

actually Dr. Nash's first name. It is not a memory but a fantasy. She wants to wake up with someone called Ed: "Waking with this man called Ed was not something I had done in the past but—even though my consciousness, waking mind did not know who he was—something I wanted to do in the future. I want to sleep with Dr. Nash" (199). Accidentally revealing her crush on Dr. Nash, Christine feels embarrassed yet empowered. She eventually insists on claiming that Dr. Nash must have felt the same way as she does: the uncontrollable outpouring of desire. This deep desire finally transforms into an action in real life: to feel and explore the body of Dr. Nash.

Quite often does Christine's mind linger on how she and Dr. Nash interact physically. Their knees touch, but neither of them draws away when they have the regular talk about her progress (198). Her mind cannot help but wandering in the wonderland of observing and experiencing Dr. Nash's body:

I felt as if I understood his words, yet at the same time didn't. I felt the warmth his body gave off, saw the kindness in his eyes. . . . He seemed to become bigger, until his body was all I could see, his breathing all I could hear. He spoke, but I did not hear what he said. I hear only one word.

Love. (226)

Love, the emotion Christine regains while looking at Dr. Nash, completes her as a woman. It is something she can hold of, something she does not have to be told to do, something she can feel right here and now. When kissing Dr. Nash, she is stunned at her discovery: "I had been somewhere else and a new Christine had stepped in, taken me over completely, and then vanished" (227). Because of "the new Christine," something has happened; something like kissing a young man passionately has been achieved. Even though Dr. Nash refuses to go further, it is enough. Despite the fact that the love is not mutual, Christine feels satisfied that she is not indifferent to those

around her because of her short memory. What seems to be unreachable is reached. Finally, Christine regains the feeling of loving someone. She can feel alive again.

In “The Concept of Formula in the Study of Popular Literature,” John Cawelti points out that “most works of art contain a mixture of convention and invention.” Conventions refer to the shared values held by the society, while inventions offer new visions to the traditional concepts, helping a culture to “respond to changing circumstances” (71). *Before I Go to Sleep* is certainly a popular page-turner, which neatly combines the aforementioned elements: conventions and inventions into the storyline. While weaving suspenseful elements into the narrative of peeling off the life of the protagonist, S. J. Watson develops his characters by sending out questions about the interrelation of identity and memory, as well as female consciousness and issues between men and women. In the last decade, books or articles on sex differences in psychology by columnists in the newspaper are getting more and more public attention. *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus* written by John Gray is one of the most influential books that deal with the topic. It points out the problems aroused in relationships, explaining how disappointment and argument in relationships can be diminished as long as there is a better understanding of the differences between men and women. Though not a specific book about relationship counselling, *Before I Go to Sleep* does provide readers with an authentic scenario so that they can think about what constitutes the foundation of a relationship and the essence of love.

Throughout the whole journal, Christine’s words eminently uncover her constant vacillation between love and hate toward her husband Ben. Christine knows clearly that taking care of her must be extremely frustrating for Ben, who is asked the same questions, being reminded of their deceased son over and over again. She

realizes Ben is bereaved, too, without being able to come to his wife for support. Nevertheless, resentment still grows within her. On the one hand, she feels thankful after thinking twice that Ben is really protecting himself and her so that she does not have to blame herself for losing her job, son, best friend, and marriage. Ben is the guy who tells her that the fire¹⁴ caused by her foolishness years ago is just an accident. He could have accused her of making stupid mistakes owing to her amnesia, but he didn't (117). The way how Ben has kindly accepted and embraced her insufficiency does make Christine feel so thankful and touched. On the other hand, knowing nothing is not life to her: "[i]t's just an existence, jumping from one moment to the next with no idea of the past, and no plan for the future" (194). Is ignorance bliss? Sometimes Christine thinks of the possibility to just live with her condition; at least things will be so much easier than suffering from grief and pain every single day. Though fully realizing that she has to undergo all of those heart-breaking things again and again, Christine still firmly believes that she has the right to know the truth, which her husband Ben tries to hide from her for her protection and benefit.

Before I Go to Sleep is more than a psycho-thriller about how an amnesiac discovers the crime in the process of rebuilding her identity. It is about the reality of life in a relationship. Christine's feeling toward Ben is not always one hundred percent positive. The fact that Christine cannot fully rely on Ben does not merely result from her disability to memorize things. It has more to do with the shaky basis of Christine's relationship with Ben that is not built on the most crucial factor of a healthy relationship: trust. Big or small, a lie is a lie. What's worse, to cover up a lie, one needs to tell more lies.

¹⁴ The fire in their first house is just one of the fake stories Ben (Mike actually) makes to cover up the fact that neither the photographs of them at the wedding nor those of he and their son is left.

Christine does feel lucky to have Ben, who does not grow weary of explaining things to her. After all, Ben works hard, makes meals, and looks after her. Another husband might have left this kind of wife instead. Therefore, Christine frequently tells herself that blaming Ben for not telling her all her past stories is terribly wrong. Her interrogation will do no good but hurt him, who keeps quiet all the time out of love. Besides, her affair with an unknown guy that took place years ago and her secret love for Dr. Nash make her guilty and ashamed. All these remind her that she ought to be honest to Ben and tell him about her journal and treatment by Dr. Nash. Yet, somehow she finds that she has to learn to love Ben. She needs to remind herself that Ben is the man she loves, not loved (148). Loving someone should be a natural feeling, but it turns into such a heavy burden to Christine, who is chased by her own question: Why can't I sincerely love my husband?

Whether Ben really loves her so much is also questionable to Christine. One time when Christine rushes out the house after a mental breakdown, Ben seems to be so concerned about her. He even cries when Christine is out of sight a whole day. Disturbed by Ben's mood, Christine feels so guilty, but suspicious at the same time: does he really care about her so much that all he cares about is that she is safe and sound, not where she has been (135)? Is it possible that a guy loves a woman so much that he is willing to endure the life of answering Christine's endless questions for more than twenty years? Everything is fluid unless she can be sure to fully believe what Ben says or she can grasp some concrete evidences that prove their love. Consequently, the excitement Christine gets when her vision of Ben and her comes to her is purely beyond description. Visiting her previous house with Dr. Nash triggers her memory of getting along with Ben so affectionately. For the new owner of the house and Dr. Nash, it might not be something so encouraging that Christine recalls only the

moment with her mistakenly believed husband when getting the chance to go back to her old house. Nonetheless, it is far important to an amnesiac like Christine than others can think of. It signifies that they were really in love; Christine no longer has to take Ben's word for it. Now her life is "lit with nervous energy;" the new world she faces is still mysterious and unfamiliar to her when she has no idea that so many years have passed silently, but she "[does] not see threat, but possibility" (79). Life is buzzing with potential now that she has re-experienced the moment belonging to her and Ben only. She has chosen Ben, instead of being forced to accept a stranger.

Love, unlike other affections that can be proved by photographs, requires something to ignite it. Christine's love for her parents and son is unchanged since it is a natural innate emotion towards those giving her life and those she gives life to. Nevertheless, the love between couples is never so simple that can be taken for granted. Unlike Christine, Ben believes that love can always find a solid ground to grow again as long as there are proofs: "Don't you see? Look! That's us. Me and You" (328). What Ben can do is only taking out more and more photographs of Christine and him, confirming that those images showing the two of them cuddling and smiling at the camera are the best evidences of them being happy with each other. The most important thing is that he loves her. Therefore, in order to let Christine carry on believing that she loves him, Ben does not destroy her journal at once when discovering it. The journal somehow becomes another tool for Ben to construct what seem to be real facts for Christine, who can only depend on the journal to piece together her identity. Ben's distorted concept of getting along with someone he loves eventually leads to Christine's undying search for the truth behind her brain injury.

For Christine, love does not happen in a few hours, yet she at least tries to love Ben for taking care of her. It is Ben that fails gaining Christine's trust, but destroying

her expectation again and again instead. Not trying to be Christine's significant other to support her, Ben attempts to control her life. He turns down Christine's suggestion to take her to see doctors so that her condition may go better. He even tries to hide the fact that they have had a child by locking all of the photos and cards of Adam in a metal box "for safety" so that Christine will not stumble on some things "that it's better if [he] explains to [her]" (114). When Christine accidentally reveals her knowledge about the past events that are mentioned in her journal, Ben is less than happy that she has remembered something (116).

Hearing from Christine that she is seeing a doctor and has had an MRI to see if she can get better, Ben does not see hope in the future, but insists on claiming that Christine cheats him with the doctor (306). Instead of helping Christine to rebuild her past, Ben chooses to reform a new one by selecting certain photographs for Christine that will not remind her of her dearest son and best friend. The thought whether Ben tells different versions of stories to Christine every day terrifies her. Furthermore, Ben controls her life in a way that she does not feel herself as his wife, whom he should respect and love. He treats her like she is a puppet, who can be ordered to do unwilling things. Christine's condition goes well sometimes. A sign of progress is shown when she remembers what has happened the other night. According to her memory retaining from one previous night, Ben even forces himself on her. Ben only wants to satisfy his sexual desire, but what about Christine's feeling? Is there any obligation of being a spouse? Those who do not respect their partner's feeling certainly do not deserve being loved.

Another missing piece of the jigsaw of Christine's self-identity is having children. Without them, she constantly feels incompleteness. When being told the

story about how Ben and her met each other in the university and then got married, Christine feels somehow disappointed and questions herself—

That can't be it, I thought. That can't describe my life. That can't be all I amounted to. A wedding, a honeymoon, a marriage. But what else was I expecting? What else could there have been? (52)

Obviously, this version of life offered by her husband does not satisfy Christine.

Something must be missed. The answer comes all of a sudden: children. Some part of her still subconsciously longs for the pleasure and pain of raising kids though she cannot even know who she is every morning. Christine remembers what her mother has told her: “It’s what happened to me. It’ll happen to you. It happens to everyone” (53). It is exactly this “everyone” that drives her mad. Series of questions like “if it is what everyone must encounter, then why not me? Am I not included, but expelled from being one of *everyone*?” must trouble Christine a lot. After all, a kind of identity form is founded on sameness (Ferguson 16). Being the same to what most women head for as a mother completes Christine. Without the laughter from any children in the house, the family she has with her husband does not sound like a real happy family that everyone belongs to.

It turns out that Christine has had a son before, but he died when he served in the army and was stationed in Afghanistan as a Royal Marine.¹⁵ The loss of children stands for a void in Christine’s heart and mind that cannot be filled. Thinking of the opportunity she misses to witness Adam’s first ride on a tricycle, Christine wonders if she has fitted the image of a good mother that properly accompanies her child. In the depths of despair, once she even asks a little boy in the park to go home with her so that they can live together as mother and son. So desperate Christine is, even an

¹⁵ In fact, Adam is still alive. Ben (Mike actually) pretends that Adam is dead so that he and Christine can spend the rest of life together happily ever after without any interference.

unknown kid she meets the first time can take place of her dead son. After all, the death of Adam feels not as real to her as the fact that she has a son called Adam does.

I tried to picture it, or to remember how it must have felt to be given the news that he had been killed, yet I could not. It did not seem right. Grief should surely overwhelm me. Every day would be filled with constant pain, with longing, with the knowledge that part of me has died and I will never be whole again. Surely my love for my son would be strong enough for me to remember my loss. If he really were dead, then surely my grief would be stronger than my amnesia. (142)

Here Christine brings out a new idea: Trauma survives amnesia. The overwhelming amount of shock and grief that the death of her son brings must reside deep in her heart forever. Hence, no matter how easy it is for Christine to forget trivial things, the depression of losing part of her must have been so powerful and influential that even amnesia cannot erase or alleviate the aftermath. Having her own kids means not only that she is not an exception compared with other women, it also means that part of her, which is her son, is still healthy and not insane.

A financially independent woman earns respect from other people. Life becomes more stable and secure when Christine can be her own master, instead of waiting for her husband to take his wages back home. Every now and then Christine wonders what she does every day in the past years before she meets Dr. Nash and starts writing her journal. Has she become the kind of woman that spends whole day in the couch watching television and doing house chores? This is utterly terrifying to Christine, who appreciates those that can self-sustain their lives and get sense of accomplishment in their jobs. Disappointment shrouds Christine when she hears from Ben that she works as a secretary before her brain is impaired. Obviously, working as

a personal assistant seems to darken her master degree got in English department. To Christine, who has the feeling that she used to want to write, ending up working for someone in a small office indicates that she does not make good use of her writing skill but gives up her dream. Consequently, Christine's eyes are shone with hope at the moment of vaguely having the impression that she has typed down the words "Chapter Two" (83). With Dr. Nash's help, Christine confirms that she has had a novel published titled *For the Morning Birds*, which was certainly a success. To her relief, she "had been someone, someone with a life, with goals and ambitions and achievements" (85). She has not wasted her talent by succumbing to the environment. Despite the fact that Christine cannot remember either the plot or characters of her novel, it feels real as if it beats within her like a heart. She has had her own job that offers her a stage to perform and makes her proud of. She is not a housewife responsible for cleaning their house, but a competent woman that grabs opportunities which bring out the best in her.

Formidable female friendship, though not often illustrated in *Before I Go to Sleep*, definitely matters a lot to Christine. Unlike men, women have the tendency to share all bits and pieces in daily life with their closest friends. The term BFF, standing for Best Friends Forever, is exactly created to name this interesting phenomenon. Since Christine cannot get her need for intimacy and trust from her husband, she turns to her best friend Claire, hoping that Claire can not only listens to her agony but also serves as another avenue into her long-lost past. Though barely remembers nothing between Claire and her, she still can sense her love for her best friend as if they were in some way deeply connected. Upon hearing Claire's voice on phone, Christine sees her with red hair as images flood her out of nowhere. Reconnecting with Claire is familiar "almost like coming home" (237). In spite of the fact that their conversation

on phone is punctuated by silence sometimes after so many years of no contact, Christine understands that it is because her friend realizes how little Christine can give and thus demands little. She even does not might letting Claire to read her journal that contains so many private things, including her love to Dr. Nash and her mixed feelings of love, hate, anger, and fear to her husband Ben. Only Claire can look at Christine “steadily” and “calmly” while telling Christine what she knows with “no intake of breath, no gasp of denial or look of shock” (257). Despite the fact that Claire has had a one-night-stand with Ben (the real Ben) when both of them felt so tired of taking care of Christine when she does not remember them after a few minutes, Claire still admits that they have betrayed Christine once and tells Christine all she knows about everything without holding anything back. Only Claire as her best friend assists her in rebuilding her identity not with white lies, but with bald facts.

Nearly at the end of the story are Ben’s lies unveiled in spite of Christine’s constant suspicion that emerges fairly early. Because of Christine and Dr. Nash’s over self-explanation, they neglect all unusual details, which are crucial to the revelation of the truth behind the incident that causes Christine’s amnesia. Christine’s love to Ben is always confused with thankfulness. Every time she decides to reveal what she has known about her past, her resentment is taken over by her tendency to overly interpret Ben’s behavior. When informed by Claire of the fact that Ben’s real official title in the school is lab assistant, rather than what he has told her: head of Chemistry, Christine is not angry with this new lie. Instead, she feels sorry for making Ben think that she is “so shallow that [she] would love him anything more or less based on what he did for a living” (319). After getting Ben’s letter from Claire, who got it from Ben (the real Ben) years ago when Ben decided to divorce his wife, Christine thinks she suddenly figures out Ben’s intention to lie to her. To Christine’s understanding, all the

lies are made to find happiness with Christine again. Life no longer seems to be filled with pain that she cannot consider living. The clicking of the clock has meanings now that Christine realizes Ben's love to her is sincere. They "can begin to find a way to truly be together" when there is "nothing but love" between them: even if she "[has] to learn to love him again every day, then so be it." It is by then Christine believes that finally she is able to give herself "a narrative, a life" (273-4). Her identity still cannot be reconstructed simply, yet she is willing to accept it once she can be sure her relationship with Ben is based on love.

Dr. Nash, who has some files about Christine and thus certainly knows the existence of Adam and the reason causing her amnesia, agrees what Ben has done benefits both of them. In Dr. Nash's opinion, the loss of son must be hard for Ben as well. He has to manage his grief, too. It might be possible for Ben to invent memories, changing facts so that he can make things fit in with his preferred version. The more time Ben tells himself and Christine about how things have happened, the more likely that he can start to believe it and remember it that way (206). Therefore, Dr. Nash believes that Ben does not make fake stories on purpose. Besides, Dr. Nash as one that is outside of the relationship of the couple does think it would not be right to stick his nose into it. As far as he is concerned, Ben, the guy whose identity is Christine's spouse, is the one who has the right to decide whether to tell Christine about Adam or not. If Christine has not heard about Adam from Ben, then Dr. Nash surely cannot tell her directly. To do it "wouldn't have been ethical" (229). Hence, Dr. Nash never speaks of Adam before Christine asks him. Not until Dr. Nash hears from Nicole, a nurse taking care of Christine in Waring House before, that Ben has actually divorced Christine, does Dr. Nash begin to suspect Ben for not telling all things to Christine. Now that Ben is not Christine's husband, Dr. Nash can freely interfere with the life

Ben shares with Christine. He finally can doubt Ben's reasons for removing Adam and Claire from Christine's life so thoroughly.

A person without ambition is nothing but an animal to Christine, who wants to live like others to grow, to learn things, and from things. Unquestionably, memory makes her whole as a person, a woman, and a mother. Without memory, her body becomes alien to her, who wakes up every morning believing she is still a university student or a little girl. Without memory, she still regularly removes hair on her body and worries about getting fat and old though she is already forty-seven years old. Without memory, her mental age sometimes makes her feel embarrassed to face her sexual desire, wondering whether she can really enjoy sex. Without memory, she even has to see her son's photo to arouse her natural feelings of maternity. Without an accumulation of memories, Christine finds it hard to live normally with experience building on previous ones and shaping the next. Without memory, it is like dying every day over and over. In fact, Christine wants and does not want her memory back at the same time. Wondering if this unstoppable search for truth is really what she wants, Christine has contemplated the possibility to just live with her condition:

I could tell Dr. Nash I do not want to see him again and I could burn my journal, burying the truths I have already learned, hiding them as thoroughly as those I do not yet know. I would be running away from my past, but I would have no regrets—in just a few hours, I would not even know that either my journal or my doctor had ever existed—and then I could live simply. One day would follow another, unconnected. Yes, occasionally the memory of Adam would surface. I would have a day of grief and pain, would remember what I miss, but it would not last. Before long, I would sleep and, quietly, forget, *How easy that would be*, I

thought. *So much easier than this.* (192)

Truth might be ugly. It might be too heavy for Christine to hold. However, these are what make her human. No matter how much unexpected horrors the truth carries, facing it, coping with it, and living with it is the only way Christine can relive. Even if the thought of facing her loss makes her cold with terror, experiencing the powerful emotion of sadness is what she must do. The devastating truth constitutes her past, leading to her future.

The dilemma of deciding whether to just live anew every day or not torments Christine. After all, the first words in her journal are “DON’T TRUST BEN” (32). Christine cannot trust her soul mate. What’s worse, she cannot even trust herself. The journal is all she has. She “is nothing without that journal” (348). What if everything is conjured from nothing? What if she, as a novelist, just longs for creating a new fiction so much that she unconsciously adds un-existed stories into her journal? In order to anchor herself, confirming what she writes in the journal is true, the desperate Christine even fishes out the things in the garbage can (220). She needs a link between what she has read and what she is living so that she can be sure that the past she reads about in her journal is not one that she has invented.

Upon learning the discrepancies between what she remembers and what she has been told by Ben, the devastating Christine still chooses to try hard to “love,” rather than divorcing Ben directly. We must think of the question: can a relationship survive if it is not reciprocated in returning love back? Pretty much often, Christine longs for something that can prove the love once shared within the couple. Without any photos of her wedding or honeymoon with Ben, Christine desires to get back flashes of memory about Ben and her so that she can remember how they were once in love. In spite of hearing Ben talking about their love life, Christine cannot picture anything.

Sadness stabs her hard the moment when she realizes that Ben and her can never be like other couples, who can always recall the sweet love story shared and the little secrets that belong to themselves only. She reminds herself that Ben is her husband, the person she loves—"I told myself that I must have loved him then—or else why would I have married him?—and so there is no reason why I shouldn't love him now."

When having sexual intercourse with Ben, Christine even has to tell herself that the behavior she is doing is "normal" and "natural," "an expression of love and of gratitude" (156). It seems offering her body to Ben is the only way she can return Ben's care and love though doing it betrays her true feeling. Not until she kisses her doctor does she "fe[el] like a woman, finally. In control" (226). Only when she can freely and fully experience the sweetness of love and act out to express that feeling does she sense herself as a real woman, the kind of woman that is not told by another one that she is already a wife of a man she cannot remember, but the one who owns herself.

Conclusion

This thesis aims to contribute to the growing field of crime fiction studies and heated discussions on questions of female autonomy. Though not being the founding father that creates a new genre, S. J. Watson does skillfully link the knowledge of neuroscience with literature without sacrificing the development of plot that creates the pervading suspense. A closer attention to the characterization in crime fiction and a shift of focus from the investigation of the crime to the life and experience that the protagonist tries to make sense of should be noticed.

The contention of the essay is that *Before I Go to Sleep* is not just another psychological thriller that writes cliché, talking about how a patient suffering from memory loss learns to live without others' help, nor is it telling a fairytale-like story that puts readers in the comfort zone by making the main male character earn back the heroine's love with considerate and romantic behavior. *Before I Go to Sleep* does lead readers to the distraught inner mind of a female amnesiac, a woman whose quest for possession of self unexpectedly unveils a story laced with mystery, thrills, and powerful feelings. Christine with her disintegrating mind fights against what suffocates her, clinging to bits of reality through anger, frustration, shame, and unspeakable loss.

Regenerating crime writing with the incorporation of female identity into character setting has been dealt with by several writers, especially female ones. From vulnerable victims to competent detectives, female characters have undergone dramatic changes in the development of crime fiction. Despite the fact that some female characters are deliberately portrayed as men-like characters or extremely

feminine ones, feminist appropriations of the genre do extend the possibility of crime fiction. Recently, there is a trend that writers discuss issues that have much to do with female experience, marriage, relationship, and so on in their books, which are often labeled as psychological thrillers. In fact, these literary works are more precisely described as domestic noirs because of the concerns they center around. *Before I Go to Sleep* is exactly the blend of domestic noir and literary thriller. Christine unknowingly takes the role of the detective under the condition when she is the victim that lives with the perpetrator, who takes good care of her. Had Ben been honest to Christine, she would not have persisted in tracing her history, let alone having detected her fake husband's identity.

To reconstruct her identity, Christine looks for clues and reasons that can assist her in rebuilding a self-image that is particularly related to female awareness. Therefore, getting back her memory that can rebuild her female consciousness is the most important thing to her. In Christine's opinion, having her own children, job, best friend, and the one she truly loves are what make who she is. On the one hand, domestic life that requires her to spend time raising kids is what she always longs for. On the other hand, Christine wants to be financially independent with a job that can arouse her potential. With the confirmation of these she once has had, Christine can be sure that she has had a life story that is worth telling, a dream that she never gives up, and ambition that prompts her to be a better version of herself.

While the seemingly concrete evidences embedded in her journal, photographs, and newspaper clipping cannot prove her real past, Christine reforms her female identity with the help of new experience created in the present: recognizing her infatuation with Dr. Nash. To Christine, her relationship with her husband Ben is too fragile when she is forced to accept those photographs as the solely evidence of their

love. Compared with pictures of them, remembering their story by herself is a more solid proof to Christine, who often blames herself for not being able to love her husband, deciding to learn to love Ben as a way of showing her gratitude.

Dr. Nash does not stand for just a professional doctor that encourages Christine to write down what she discovers every day in her journal to help her make sense of life, he himself really makes Christine believe that she is not a broken human or sad story, but an alive woman capable of love and worth of being loved. It is Dr. Nash that lets Christine re-experience what kind of feeling it is when falling in love with someone. Although her memory of Dr. Nash vanishes after she goes to bed, the mixed feeling of nervousness, excite, and expectation always haunts her freshly when being face to face with Dr. Nash. The fact that Christine desires for her doctor reminds her of her existence right here and right now. The ticking clock reads her future now that she can grasp something firmly and looks forward to the infinite possibility.

The past may not be easily traced, yet Christine finally realizes that her life is not deprived of color owing to her fragmentary memory. She can relive and relive not necessarily with her memory coming back. *Before I Go to Sleep* is a pulse-pounding psychological thriller that copes with the question of (un)reliability and (un)reconstructability of memory and how it matters profoundly in defining the very existence of the protagonist, whose notion of identity is not simply as a person with past, but equals to her comprehension as a woman, a writer, a best friend, a wife, and a mother.

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