

An Existential Crisis in a Psychoanalytical Narrative: Transformation in *Groundhog Day*

By

Adriaan van der Linde

Master's Thesis

MA Literary Studies: English Literature and Culture

June 19th 2021

Supervisor: Prof.dr. P.T.M.G. Liebrechts

Second Reader: dr. M.S. Newton

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
Chapter I: The existentialist exposition of <i>Groundhog Day</i>	6
Chapter II: The time loop.....	14
Chapter III: Jungian analysis.....	25
Chapter IV: Author-oriented approach and overall narrative of <i>Groundhog Day</i>	41
Conclusion.....	51
Bibliography	53

Introduction:

The film *Groundhog Day* (1993), directed by Harold Ramis and co-written with Danny Rubin, may be generally known as a comedy, but throughout the years has been subjected to philosophical and psychological analysis. According to Benesh's 2011 overview on *Groundhog Day* studies, various studies have commented on the transformative nature of the narrative (e.g. Bacha 1998, Kaplan 2005, Robertson 1997). Philosophers, psychologists, and theologians alike, seem to be attracted to the film's idea that people can improve themselves. The film presents various underlying figures (characters, archetypes, and possible allusions to various religions and philosophies) that cause this vast range of interpretations. Some studies (e.g. Hillman 1983 and Volger 1999, 2007) have therefore analyzed the film using theories akin to Joseph Campbell's monomyth theory derived from his work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949). The monomyth theory suggests that the concept of the hero's journey—being a narrative archetype—can be used as a basis to compare narratives. This theory is heavily influenced by Jungian philosophy and psychology, in which the concept of archetypes is explored, that is, the idea that there are primordial and universal concepts. This has led to archetypal criticism, which focuses on “searching texts for collective motifs of the human psyche” that are representative of “primordial images of the human unconscious” (Klarer 108). The unconsciousness becoming conscious is, in turn, a main concept in the work on psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud (1856 – 1939) and Carl Jung (1875 – 1961). However, although Benesh (2011) notes that there are articles that analyze certain aspects identical to Jungian concepts, she states that “with the exception of Hauke's (2005) commentary [...] I have found no published Jungian work on *Groundhog Day*” (Benesh 50). Therefore, this thesis will use the Jungian framework to analyze the “growth in consciousness” that is presented in the film's narrative (Benesh 41). These Jungian concepts will be explained and pointed out in the film's narrative in the subsequent chapters.

Nevertheless, because the unconsciousness slipping into consciousness is the subject of various studies, philosophies, and art forms, this Jungian analysis will be set alongside an existential reading of the film which will be used to describe the state in which the protagonist, Phil Connors (played by Bill Murray), finds himself. As such, an existential reading of *Groundhog Day* will show that Phil is an absurd hero, a claim that will mainly be justified by relating the film to Albert Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942), a foundational text of the absurd. This will solidify and contextualize the Jungian process of individuation, in the framework of which the journey undertaken by Phil will be explored. Individuation can be described as a process "which promotes wholeness, bringing unconscious potential into expression" (Benesh ii). According to Benesh, "individuation was, for Jung, more of a journey than a destination, so it is a fitting lens for a film depicting a protagonist for whom time is stopped" (41). Individuation can therefore be seen as a psychological and therapeutic technique or process, but for *Groundhog Day* it can be seen as a narrative structure. Though still therapeutic in nature, the film mainly revolves around Phil facing his shadow and growing into a more consciously virtuous person, or in short, working on self-improvement.

In *Groundhog Day*, the self-improvement occurs through means of a repetitive time loop. This challenges philosophical and psychological theories to engage with the film as a thought experiment, seeing as the narrative transcends a conventional understanding of time. Nietzsche's concept of the eternal recurrence will be used to critically look at the implications of the film's featuring of a time loop and how this philosophical view indirectly comments on the process of individuation. The transformation, through individuation, accounts for the fact that there are clearly—at least—two versions of Phil that can be analyzed. Therefore, an existentialist reading will present his attitude before his transformative time loop, and the Jungian idea of self-actualization will account for his attitude after his transformation.

The research question of this thesis thus will be: how does Harold Ramis and Danny Rubin's *Groundhog Day* (1993) encapsulate an overlap between existentialist philosophy and Jungian psychoanalysis within the film's narrative? Firstly, I will analyze the existential exposition of the film through the lens of the absurdist concepts of Camus, which will subsequently lead into the analysis of the time loop, in order to show how these concepts challenge and interact with each other throughout the narrative. Then, the Jungian analysis of the underlying figures will be presented. The encapsulation of all these theories will be explored more deeply by looking at the film through the lens of an author-orientated approach, much like auteur theory. However, auteur theory is "problematic when discussing film" as the director is "only one of the many people who contribute to the creation of the movie" (Klarer 130). Therefore, besides Harold Ramis as director, Danny Rubin as screenplay writer and Bill Murray as main actor will be taken into account. This should give a more versatile depiction of what sort of conscious and unconscious decisions led to the narrative presented in *Groundhog Day*. Finally, the earlier existential exposition of Phil will be contrasted with the virtuous and self-actualized version of Phil. This will illuminate Phil's confrontation with his shadow, in Jungian terms, and therefore his unconsciousness.

Chapter I: The existentialist exposition of *Groundhog Day*

As stated in the introduction, there are—at least—two distinct versions of Phil to be analysed in *Groundhog Day*: pre-transformation Phil and post-transformation Phil. The post-transformation and self-actualized version of Phil appears to receive the most attention by critics, fans, and researchers alike. This is because most of the theories on transformation that are applied to the arc of development of Phil's character are better suited either during, or after, his journey to self-actualization. In order to understand the cause of Phil's transformation, this thesis will also delve into the exposition of the film, and analysing what the initial flaws in Phil Connor's character insinuate. The post-transformation version of Phil will be analysed in later chapters. In this chapter, the exposition of the film will be treated as an interpretation of existential philosophy. Moreover, this chapter will also point out how the film extends on the ideas brought up in existentialism. Therefore, an initial starting point of Phil's character is crucial in understanding his non-linear journey towards self-improvement. Afterwards, this will be related to Camus' notions of the Absurd.

Phil existential onset

Phil's existential crisis is brought to attention in the first half of the film. Most summaries of the film describe pre-transformation Phil in a similar fashion: a "cranky and arrogant weatherman" (Benesh 3); a "cold cynic" (Walters 137); as "acerbic and detached from his fellow humans to the point of nervosa" (Arikan); "sarcastic television weatherman" (Kuczynski); "egotistical and mean-spirited weatherman" (Blessing 3). Phil's evident cynicism has been identified by various viewers as it is reflected in his sarcastic interactions with his colleagues, his apathetic demeanor, alongside his "jaded smugness and ironic detachment with which his weather report is delivered" (Walters 137). As the film might initially present itself as a light-hearted romantic comedy, the viewer could be drawn into thinking that *Groundhog Day* is a generic feel-good film—one that promotes optimism

through the depiction of a cynical character's transformation into a likeable person. Phil has already been established as a cynic, and when he first sees Rita his "deft changes of expression" show his "potential for emotional affinity with another human" (Walters 138). In other words, Phil's pursuit of Rita is heavily implied and foreshadowed. However, in a much later scene where Phil comes to terms with himself and Rita, Phil admits he doesn't "deserve someone" like Rita (*Groundhog Day*). Evidently, this type of self-awareness is not present in his character portrayed in the opening half of the film.

In Benesh's overview on *Groundhog Day* studies, she notes that Phil's cynicism is required as an initial step in psychological interpretations of the film such as the "Gestalt cycle of Experience" (featured in Wheeler 1998) and the "Kubler-Ross" model (featured in Daughton 1996) (Benesh 21). The psychological interpretations of Phil's transformation are convenient to describe his progressive stages and renewed self, though they often lack a critical understanding of Phil's opening cynicism. There is not much written as to why he is so disenchanted, yet a philosophical comprehension of Phil's onset is crucial for analyzing the overall narrative.

Phil is a man who lacks responsibility for his own life. Within the field of existentialism, responsibility means that "Man is responsible for his acts, since his decisions are grounded in nothing" (Galvin 88). This calls for a rejection of the notion or belief that a metaphysical higher power holds responsibility over individuals, and consequently that humans are burdened to construct meaning in life for themselves. As Phil will eventually change, though slowly and incrementally, into a self-actualized person by means of a time loop (the film's transformative premise), he will have to come to terms with the fact that the way he has been living his life is unacceptable for the future. (Note that this word choice is very deliberate, as in various existential works there is an emphasis on not wanting to change the past, which is seemingly impossible and therefore a truism. Instead existentialists stress

rather the coming to terms with an idea that can alter a person's present and future experience. However, this notion will return in the analysis of the time loop as the film's premise alters the notion of perceivable time).

Before the time loop ensues, there is no answer as to why Phil undergoes this phenomenon of change; this presents a question that, debatably, remains unsatisfied at the end. However, *Groundhog Day* has been described as an "incredibly secular film" (Arikan), the reason being that "an omniscient force never takes shape in *Groundhog Day*, as the film presents a world without clear natural reason, where inexplicable events can simply occur without necessarily being clearly motivated" (Walters 136). There is no tangible evidence that allows a simple answer as to what is happening to Phil. The theological interpretations tend to answer this hypothetical with whatever metaphysical being aligns with their doctrine, though these perpetuate a deceptive rhetoric. These interpretations reject that "Phil is in his own world, an empty one, out of which he creates an endless winter" (Almond 1388). Theological interpretations (Goldberg 2005, Jewett 1997, Kuczynski 2003) suggest that Phil exists in the world of a metaphysical being and though *Groundhog Day* cannot be said to necessarily deny this idea, it surely does not mention it either. Therefore, a philosophy that does not attempt to actualize intangible concepts will suit the analysis better. The various coping mechanisms (religion, emotions, and distractions) for the dauntingly unanswered questions on existence eventually fail to live up to fulfillment. The existential method "is one of analysis and not of knowledge" (Camus 11). Existentialists do not claim to know the answers to these fundamental questions, but at the very least they do not shy away from attempting to conjure an understanding around the meaning of life; "The core of existentialism is a recognition of inescapable personal responsibility" (Shand). This is the lesson that Phil needs to learn and this is why his cynical exposition can be deemed as an existential crisis, though he is unaware of this.

This is getting absurd: applying the existential concepts

Before turning to Albert Camus, a famous notion from the philosophy of Jean- Paul Sartre will provide the proper background for introducing the Absurd within *Groundhog Day*'s narrative. Jean-Paul Sartre's *Existentialism is a humanism (L'existentialisme Est Un Humanisme, 1946)* includes the popular existential axiom "existence comes before essence", a phrase often slightly altered and rendered as 'existence precedes essence' (Sartre 2). By this Sartre means that people are born into the world and are burdened with the task to define themselves later. Camus expands on this in his work *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942): "We get into the habit of living before acquiring the habit of thinking" (8). Both Sartre and Camus devoted their work to ontological ideas and concepts that to this day dominate the secular existentialist perspective on life. Moreover, their work focused on the meaning life—or rather, lack thereof—but in such a manner that the pursuit of meaning became a topic for analysis.

In *Groundhog Day*, the meaning of existence is played within various ways, hence the strong resonance with existential literature. Phil is introduced to us as a man who is dissatisfied with his life: "at the beginning of the movie, he is a miserable human being living a relatively meaningless life" (Blessing 2). He is conscious of this, though he is not conscious of any means to improve his life. He merely lashes out to others as he cannot fathom why he is so miserable. His trip to Punxsutawney is used as a "transition into the world he loathes" as "Phil hates the small town as a concept", because to him it is a "life of whimsy, a life of naïveté, and a life of earnestness" (Arikan). Though he hates Punxsutawney and everything it stands for, it is clear that he is not satisfied with his life outside of Punxsutawney as well. Walters (2008) claims that the opening scene in front of the blue screen, where Phil delivers the weather report, can be seen as a metaphor for his superficial life: "The blankness of the screen constructs the space he occupies as a featureless, dislocated place" (137). The very

first line in the film reveals his restlessness about his current location: “Somebody asked me today: “Phil, if you could be anywhere, where would you like to be?”. I said to him, “Probably right here” Elko, Nevada”, Phil says whilst pointing to a blank screen. Juxtaposed with the actual shot of the live broadcast, Phil is shown pointing at a map of the United States and his ideal location: Elko, Nevada, because of the nice weather. Immediately, there is a sense of incongruity. Phil is somewhere where he does not want to be.

Phil, then, is a troubled individual, who is undergoing an existential crisis long before he wakes up on the same day in Punxsutawney for the second time. He notes that it is already the fourth time he has to report on the Groundhog festival, which leads him to believe that his current life is already a somewhat repetitive cycle. The Delbert McClinton song that plays over the opening credits, “Weatherman” (1993), almost confirms this with its opening lyrics: “Predictions show a steady low. You’re feeling just the same”. The feeling of despair becomes observable: Phil is miserable (by being in a place he does not want to be) but takes no action, and thus evades his responsibility for the state of his own life. Camus would say that Phil is “making the gestures commanded by existence”, that is, recognizing the “ridiculous character of that habit, the absence of any profound reason for living” (Camus 6). The only thing Phil clings onto is a distant feeling of hope, which not so coincidentally is another theme in Camus’ text: “Hope of another life one must ‘deserve’ or trickery of those who live not for life itself but for some great idea that will transcend it, refine it, give it a meaning, and betray it” (Camus 8). Phil is living in existential anguish and this is noticeable throughout the film up until his realization that he does not deserve Rita. This concept is fleshed out when Phil gets to Punxsutawney and later gets stuck in the time loop, as will be discussed in the next paragraph.

Phil's existential hell

The weatherman's first Groundhog day in Punxsutawney goes exactly as expected: Phil is sarcastic, condescending, and outwardly irritated towards everyone he encounters, perfectly summarized by camera man Larry's comment: "prima donnas". As Phil wakes up the first time on February second, the day of the Groundhog festival, he engages in small talk with Mrs. Lancaster, the bed and breakfast hostess. After some condescending remarks, one phrase, uttered by Phil, stands out in particular: "Did you want to talk about the weather or just chitchat?". It was already clear that Phil shows contempt for all residents of Punxsutawney, but here he is caught in a conversation on his expertise: the weather. He sees no purpose in discussing it with someone he believes has not have a firm grasp of the material or, better yet, he believes that he is the omnipotent source for the weather. This is shown later when he proclaims "*I make the weather*".

Phil's existential demeanour carries on into his first day in Punxsutawney and it really shows that he cannot find any meaning to his current situation: why is he in Punxsutawney? Why are these "hicks" so overjoyed about the groundhog? Why do they worship a rodent over him? Camus' text provides a backdrop for Phil's experience: "the regular hiatus between what we fancy we know and what we really know, practical assent and simulated ignorance which allows us to live with ideas which, if we truly put them to the test, ought to upset our whole life" (Camus 18). Phil does not aspire to be his most cynic self but he cannot help it. He does not yet possess the strength to test his assertions, to stare the blank universe in the face and rise up to his responsibility as a true Absurd hero. Then, magically, he awakes one day and is shocked to discover that he is trapped in Punxsutawney. Time has caught Phil and he is forced to come to terms with the Absurd. The Absurd is the "confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world" (Camus 28). After the Jungian analysis later on in this thesis, this absurd confrontation will be linked to confronting the

shadow archetype of the mind. For now, Phil's attempts to deal with the Absurd will be analysed in terms of Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus*.

Phil's first reaction to waking up and hearing the same radio broadcast is denial and he thinks he is being tricked: "At first, Connors thinks it is a hoax" (Blessing 4). After delivering the report on the festival, he asks Rita: "What if there is no tomorrow? There wasn't one today". This is where Phil enters the absurd "confrontation and an unceasing struggle" (Camus 31). This struggle "implies a total absence of hope (which has nothing to do with despair), a continual rejection (which must not be confused with renunciation), and a conscious dissatisfaction (which must not be compared to immature unrest)" (Camus 31). These three phases are present in Phil's reaction to encountering the Absurd. First, the absence of hope is shown when Phil realizes there are no consequences to his actions. He asks two locals at a bar: "What would you do if you were stuck in one place and every day was exactly the same, and nothing that did matter?". He does no longer anticipate that February third will arrive for him, thereby acknowledging that there is no meaning to what he does within the day as when he wakes up his world will have been reset.

The continual rejection is Phil's hopeless pursuit of Rita. The literal rejection, getting slapped in the face numerous times, is not necessarily what is meant by Camus. However, in *Groundhog Day*, the romantic pursuit of Rita is what drives the narrative. Every time Phil falls back onto his "one-dimensional portrayal", by acting "like somebody else", he is physically punished by Rita (Walters 144). This physicality is required to let Phil know that he cannot fake himself out of his deceptive behavior. After this hedonistic phase of facing no consequences, he uses the time loop to learn information so that he can use this to his advantage. Despite the fact that Rita "cannot begin to explain" his "extraordinary knowledge", she still sees right through his attempts (Walter 144). In a similar way, Camus urges that "man is always a prey to his truths" and that "once he has admitted them, he cannot

free himself from them. One has to pay something” (Camus 31). Phil’s trickery fails to come across as genuine and this does not allow him to reconcile with the painful truth that he has to yield to an actual transformation. This leads us to conscious dissatisfaction, the phase in which Phil realizes that all his previous actions have not caused a positive change to his situation: “From the moment absurdity is recognized, it becomes a passion, the most harrowing of all” (Camus 22). Accepting this harrowing experience is the first step to metaphorically defrosting his existential winter.

Chapter II: the time loop

The narrative in *Groundhog Day* relies heavily on the premise of the time loop. Understanding the time loop provides useful insight as to why Phil Connors transforms in the film. It also provides an understanding why the film has such universal resonance as its message is inspiring. The title of the film has even become synonymous with repetitive situations as it “has entered popular parlance and journalism of all varieties [...] to variously mean repetition, déjà vu, and transcendence” (Benesh 2). The use of the time loop has been variously interpreted in the light of the Buddhist and Hindu idea of Samsara, Christian purgatory, therapeutic psychology, the often repetitive nature of daily life, the Greek myth of Sisyphus, and Nietzsche’s notion of the eternal recurrence. This chapter will focus on the time loop using the Nietzschean view of repetition.

In the previous chapter I noted that there is no metaphysical being to be analyzed in *Groundhog Day*, and the analysis in this chapter will continue to adopt this secular approach. To fully understand the importance of the time loop, and Phil’s situation, this chapter will deal with the ontological power vacuum that occurs when God is indeed declared dead, in the best of the Nietzschean tradition. No authority provides answers as Phil “has no way of obtaining an explanation, because there is nobody qualified to provide one” (Coniam). Therefore, the “interpretations of this central mystery vary” as “the viewer is left to draw his own conclusions” (Goldberg). The time loop can therefore only be analyzed justly in terms of what it does to the overall narrative of the film. In *Groundhog Day*, “repetition also becomes a means of escape from his characterological dilemma” (Almond 1387). This chapter will therefore build on the existential onset described in the first chapter and further show how this leads us into the concept of the Nietzschean eternal recurrence. Both these intertextual readings will provide an analysis for the narrative without linking it to religion. With reference to Spence (2005), Benesh notes that Nietzsche “emphasizes the importance of the

present as a counterpoint to Christian idealization of an afterlife that minimizes the importance of earthly life” (Benesh 27). Much like existentialism, Nietzsche’s work serves here as a method for analysis and not for contemplating theological matters of faith. Nietzsche and Camus are committed to philosophize the ‘here and now’ and that is precisely what makes their theories relevant for analyzing the premise in *Groundhog Day*. This chapter will then lead into the transition towards the Jungian analysis of Phil’s transformation. The Jungian frame will focus on the process of individuation (where one’s *self* is responsible) rather than relying on distractions or deceptions (such as hedonism, religion, and nihilism).

From Camus to Nietzsche

In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus states that he is aware of occasionally making evident claims, but notes that “they are not interesting in themselves but in the consequences that can be deduced from them” (Camus 18). He eventually writes: “I know another truism: it tells me that man is mortal” (Camus 18). For Camus, and humans in general, this is a factual statement. However, in *Groundhog Day*, this ‘truism’ is shaken by the time loop premise. Phil calls himself “I am a God” (1:06:12) and claims: “I am an immortal” (1:06:38-1:06:40), thus recognizing he possesses a power that previously was deemed impossible. He arrives at this statement after committing a series of suicides only to continually wake up on February 2nd in Punxsutawney. For this analysis it is of interest that Phil enunciates that he is a God. At this moment, the film ties in with the existential concept of abandonment, which is “the condition of man consequent upon the death of God” (Galvin 84). Hence, Phil is thrown into a state of absurd confrontation as discussed in the previous chapter. Phil is realizing that his situation’s origin will remain mysterious to him and therefore, he must turn to himself for guidance.

The absurdist doctrine proposed by Camus states that man has three options in confronting the absurd: committing suicide, engaging on a leap of faith, or accepting the Absurd. As there is no 'higher power' to save Phil, his only option left is to accept the Absurd by simultaneously rebelling against it. However, this is no easy task. Phil questions the world around him in an existential moment of abandonment after realizing there is no God coming to help him. This in turn aligns with Nietzsche's infamous proclamation in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883): "God is dead." (Nietzsche had published this adage earlier in his work *The Gay Science* in 1882). By this, Nietzsche meant that people start to denounce God when their critical questions are left unanswered by religion. Religion expects people to live for (and believe in) an otherworldly concept, such as a heaven of some sort, and critical uncertainty can cause one's faith to crumble. "Nietzsche's worst indictment of the Christian God is that he is an absentee landlord, and that to concern ourselves with him is to devalue the here and now" (Gravlin 58). After denouncing religion, humans can feel a great sense of despair when they cannot comfort themselves, which in turns aligns perfectly with Sartrean existentialism and Camusian absurdism. Evidentially, Phil's existential state worsens after realizing he is trapped in a time loop. His existential dissatisfaction with his life becomes exponentially worse as to him, Groundhog day in Punxsutawney is the worst time and place for him to be trapped. In the opening scene he sarcastically mentions: "I want to stay an extra second in Punxsutawney? Please!" (3:03-3:07), and in the bar scene, after describing his best day ever, he wonders: "Why couldn't I get that day over and over and over?" (30:10-30:14). If Phil was ever to be tested to the extreme, it could only be on the day he hates the most. He has to learn that this is part of his being. Phil's time loop can therefore be seen as a "psychological test of an individual's resolve" as "Nietzsche thought such a test is necessary given the death of God" (Blessing 7). The test, in Phil's case, is dealing with repetition, possibly for eternity.

Eternal recurrence

Nietzsche initially thought of the eternal recurrence as a thought experiment and not as a hypothesis. In *The Gay Science* (1882), Nietzsche describes a demon that proclaims that the life one has lead has to be lived “innumerable times again; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unspeakably small or great in your life must return to you, all in the same succession and sequence” (Nietzsche 194). Nietzsche’s point in this thought experiment is to invite the reader to reflect on what type of person they are: do they accept the demon’s postulation as a self-fulfilled person or do they curse the fact they have to relive their dissatisfactory lives? Ergo, how content is one in reliving their life? At first it seems as though this question has been laid out for Phil, who, after having been through multiple repetitions, tells Rita: “I’m reliving the same day over and over”. However, semantically speaking, this is not true. Phil is indeed waking up on the same day, where everything is reset, but his daily experiences can still differ from one another. Phil might be stuck in a repetition of the same day, but he has the power to change his own daily experience.

Gilles Deleuze’s interpretation of the eternal recurrence was that Nietzsche “was not in fact promoting the return of the identical, but rather, the ‘return’ of the different. Each of these returns selects the life-enhancing while rejecting the life-denying” (Faust 2). Certainly, with regard to Phil Connor’s situation, this Deleuzian reading of Nietzsche better suits the time loop envisioned in *Groundhog Day* than an interpretation wherein each day is precisely the same. In that sense, Phil has lots of space to maneuver in. It can thus be stated that “Phil Connors spends many days that are unremembered by, and thus in a sense unshared with, others”, because for Phil himself, there is no reset; he has full memory of each repetition (Benesh 38). This points out the problem for Phil: the time loop is actually an exaggerated version of his existential life before going to Punxsutawney. His dissatisfaction with his life

before February 2nd shines through in his dissatisfaction during the time loop: “You want a prediction about the weather, you’re asking the wrong Phil. I’ll give you a winter prediction. It’s gonna be cold... it’s gonna be gray...and it’s gonna last you for the rest of your life” (59:04 – 59:21). Phil expresses here that he is unsatisfied with his current life, simultaneously connecting this feeling to the dissatisfaction he felt entering the time loop. He feels like there is no escape from his existential dread, knowing he is doomed to repeat the same day over and over again; as he was not able to change his life before, so why would, and how could, he now?

Groundhog Day deviates from the Nietzschean eternal recurrence in two ways: firstly, Phil has an active memory of the previous cycles and secondly, Phil ultimately gets out of the loop. Therefore, one might argue that Phil rejects the eternal recurrence, which is what Kimberly Blessing claims in *Groundhog Day as Philosophy: Phil Connors Says ‘No’ to Eternal Return* (2020). Blessing states that the movie “rejects a postmodern or existential view of happiness and life’s meaning” (2), but embraces “optimism and hope” with an Aristotelian “virtue ethics approach”. Blessing claims that Nietzsche and Camus reject optimism and hope, but here, she wrongfully interprets the philosophical theories as rejecting these notions because they do not obsessively preach them. Camus and Nietzsche should not be considered pessimists because they theorize a potentially bitter truth, rather, they are realists. As much as Phil would like to exit his hellish time loop, there is no easy answer. There is no ‘cheap’ escape that redeems him immediately. Phil suffers pain that is required, as Nietzsche would believe, to achieve a higher sense of being. Blessing argues that Phil’s suicide attempts are the result of an overwhelming sense of despair. She notes that “the opportunity to live a miserable and meaningless life forever is a curse” (6). However, in *Groundhog Day*, Rita says to Phil: “sometimes I wish I had a thousand lifetimes. I don’t know, Phil. Maybe it’s not a curse. It just depends on how you look at it” (1:11:01-1:11:10).

This seems a rather explicit reference to the eternal recurrence thought experiment as the film here invites people to question whether they would say ‘yes’ to the eternal return.

A bleak reading of Nietzsche would argue that saying ‘yes’ to the eternal return would require to accept all our shortcomings in the present and future, but logically, Nietzsche is concerned with accepting the past. He is not denouncing regret as a real emotion, but rather he states that the past is part of who a person is. The eternal recurrence does not mean that one is forced to perpetuate a certain way of living if one is dissatisfied with it, but rather that one is given the chance to become the person that would say ‘yes’ as an ultimate ethic exercise: the eternal recurrence “is to be considered an ethical imperative” (Holte 143). Postulating the eternal return could alter the way people live their lives. “Nietzsche is not demanding that we seek stability and surety in earthly things. Rather, it is stability and static values that we must abjure. We must cease to be aghast at the most blessed feature of the earth, its nature as a perpetual becoming and decaying” (Gravil 58). Like Nietzsche, Camus offers a thought that on the surface is not attractive: “seeking what is true is not seeking what is desirable” (Camus 14). One must acknowledge that, to truly overcome the hardship of life, delving into the unconformable will be the only truly fulfilling method. That is not rejecting optimism and hope: that *is* true optimism and hope—but it requires going through discomfort. In contrast, Christianity, for example, teaches that God will love a person no matter what: “[God’s] unfailing love” (Psalm 35:5-7), “nothing can ever separate us from God’s love” (Roman 8:35.37-39), “The faithful love of the Lord never ends! His mercies never cease” (Lamentations 3:20-23). This provides an expedient for moments of anguish, but it is an inadequate solution in Phil’s case trapped in the time loop.

As Blessing wrongfully rejects Nietzsche and Camus, she puts forward Aristotle’s virtue ethics as creating a basis for Phil’s redemption. She claims that “Phil does not find meaning in his life by coming to terms with his mortality, and then simply changing his

attitude about his life and current situation”, but that “instead Phil eventually finds happiness and meaning by becoming a better person, which is done by performing virtuous acts” (2). This is correct to some extent, as Phil finds happiness in helping others. However, he must therefore first have overcome his aversion to others that is so idiosyncratic to his initial character. If Camus and Nietzsche do not offer a peace of mind then their theories have been misunderstood. Their theories are initially bitter to accept, but they allow one to consciously reflect on life and where it needs improvement. Nietzsche even calls for ‘will to power’ as he “recognizes the potentially devastating character of this thought, but also its potential to bring about change” (Holte 143). Therefore, Phil has to *want* to change for himself in order to become the ‘yea-saying’ *Übermensch* (“the highest formula of a Yea-saying to life that can ever be attained” (Nietzsche 96 *Ecce Homo*)).

Responsibility of the self

Phil is responsible for his own peace of mind, as he will not find it outside of himself. He is inspired by Rita to do so, but eventually it comes down to him to take action. Although Nietzsche and Camus do reflect on the more grueling nature of existence, they clearly put emphasis on the necessity of suffering to arrive at a rational and nondeceptive conclusion. Nietzsche and Camus do not reject happiness, even if they might appear to reject hope. Their theories are about acceptance of the fact that life is a temporary experience. These theories do not end with an optimistic adage because that would downplay the—potentially—severe gravity of undergoing a life-altering process, but ironically this means that Camus and Nietzsche are wildly misunderstood as pessimists.

Phil does find redemption, “even if Phil Connors does have to endure long hours of teeth-gnashing existential tedium before he can accede to the ‘joyful wisdom’ that eventually allows him to form a couple with Andie MacDowell’s Rita, as the film relaxes into the

reassurance of a stock Hollywood ending” (Thurston 1). In that sense, the movie ‘cheats’ its own philosophy. Screenplay writer Danny Rubin confirms this: “there’s a little dishonesty involved. It was really a kind of major change in the underpinnings of the script to change it from the experiment—the repetition—changing Phil, to having Rita change Phil, but it’s a romantic comedy and we’re trying to cement those two characters” (*Austin Film Festivals*). The film therefore starts out with an existential premise, considers and expands on the intrinsic value of affirmative life, but eventually hastily wraps up a romantic plot to secure a happy ending. However, despite following a Hollywood formula, *Groundhog Day* eventually considers the idea that Phil must become a better person for himself—not for Rita.

“Recurrence is entirely self-referential” and it is therefore one’s own responsibility to take action (Faust). This is necessary in order to become the Nietzschean *Übermensch* or Camus’ absurd hero. “At his liberation Connors is certainly no Nietzschean *Übermensch*, but he’s unquestionably become a more highly-developed individual, with far greater self-understanding” (Faust). Faust 2012 further questions that if “all of us could undergo such a process, could *Groundhog Day*’s version of eternal recurrence and eventual escape lead to the best of all possible worlds?”.

As Nietzsche “rather wants to turn the passive nihilism into an active one, by embracing the new freedom of the nihilistic condition”, we can say that Phil has to overcome the idea that his life is meaningless (Holte 143). It is when “the human revolt against the irremediable” becomes too much, that Phil enters the final stage of anguish and considers suicide (Camus 25). However, Phil emerges a virtuous and changed man at the end of the narrative—denying the fact that life is not worth living. Camus starts his essay with an infamous sentence: “There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy” (Camus 4). *Groundhog Day* argues that life *is* worth living. If it were not for

the time loop, Phil would have never discovered this. Danny Rubin's initial question of what a person would do with eternity, iterated through Rita's phrase: "is this what you do with eternity?", becomes a narrative in which the most distraught man can redeem himself, even after having attempted multiple suicides. This is why the time loop is vital to the narrative, as, without it, Phil would have probably ended up living a miserable life or committing suicide. Once a person has gone through the painful catharsis of personal transformation, this person can accept Nietzsche's *Amor Fati*: "the fact that a man wishes nothing to be different, either in front of him or behind him, or for all eternity" (Nietzsche 55, *Ecce Homo*). In a way, Phil becomes the Nietzschean Superman, "who overcomes the facticities of self and situation, creating his own good and evil, enjoying the dance of freedom" (Gravil 88). In order to understand the self, this thesis will now proceed with a Jungian analysis.

Transition into the Jungian analysis

The introduction to Phil as a character serves as an antithesis of his self-actualized version. Though the two versions of Phil can be analyzed, there is no strict dichotomy during the narrative in which the two versions are entirely oppositions of each other. Rather, there are certain qualities of Phil that have gradually changed. Within Phil's personality, virtuous qualities have risen, causing less desirable qualities to have faded. On the basis of my analysis given above, the cynical Phil has now been identified as a existentialist who turned into an absurd hero due to his confrontation with eternity, on the brink of becoming a Nietzschean *Übermensch*, only to deviate at the last moment due to a romantic pursuit. The repetition has therefore become an escape "from his characterological dilemma. The opportunity to redo and learn from experience—in particular, to love and learn through experience with a good object—symbolizes the redemptive, reparative possibilities in every life" (Almond 1387). This would eventually be the message of the narrative that resonated with many people and caused different interpretations.

The question that arises is from where these virtuous qualities have emerged. Are these qualities that have become more prominent already latent in Phil's personality (that is, has he actualized an internal potential?) or are the qualities externally acquired (that is, has Phil been inspired by Rita's qualities?) Phil also has to learn that he cannot control everything; he is not omnipotent. He might have become all-knowing through his tricks, but he is not all-powerful. He cannot stop the old man from dying and he cannot always save the child falling from the tree. The old man dies despite Phil's various efforts to feed him, bring him to a hospital, keep him warm, or resuscitate him. Ironically, in the scene where Phil brings the old man to the hospital, the boy in the red jacket that falls from the tree is seen in a wheelchair with a cast around his leg. This is to show the limitations of virtuous behavior. It is practically, and logistically, impossible to help everyone in Punxsutawney. Instead of fighting this, Phil will arrive at a stage where he can accept this. From here on, he vows to make his life more about helping others.

This is why the absurdist concepts of Camus work so well within the narrative of *Groundhog Day*: after a series of suicides, Phil rules them futile, and then, after rejecting the leap of faith (by not clasping to any external help—especially not in the form of divine intervention), he turns to the final stage of confronting the Absurd: acceptance and simultaneous rebellion. He no longer goes through the motions of daily life, but actually starts enjoying the time loop. He is not performing his virtuous acts because he believes it to be the 'right' thing to do, but because it gives him satisfaction; something that his isolated self could never provide him. This brings him closer to the self-actualized ideal person that has undergone the process of individuation. Phil has surpassed the hardship of the time loop in a similar way that Nietzsche invites people to make "a change in our attitude towards our suffering" (Holte 149). Phil must literally overcome his own 'winter' as a symbolic journey to a better life—'spring'.

The existential Phil at the beginning of the film has gone through a confrontation with the absurd and now begins to reject his previously cynical way of life. Phil realizes that Rita will not change him, but rather he has to change himself in order to become someone Rita wants to be with. This is where he initially rejects *amor fati* by acting towards his self-improvement, but eventually comes to terms with being stuck in the time loop. Therefore, the existential onset of Phil has changed within the film's narrative. Phil enriches himself for the greater good and not just for Rita. A suitable theory to analyze his post-transformation is through Jungian philosophy, which the next chapter will be devoted to. The archetypes of the mind will be introduced in order to see how *Groundhog Day* encapsulates the overlap in existential narrative and psychoanalytical transformation. I use psychoanalysis here not so much as a Freudian concept, but rather as a means to improve one's life. "Like Nietzsche, Freud thought that life was justified by our heroic response to its challenge" (Trilling 1162). Similar to Camus' exhortation to face the absurd, to know it is meaningless, yet rebel against it anyway, Carl Jung, a student of Freud, also believes it is every human's main task in life to overcome our anguish and flaws, to adapt, and not to deceive yourself with your own persona. The next chapter will focus more on the darker side of the mind that Phil has to overcome on a psychological level. The shadow—as one of the Jungian archetypes—in a person can reveal a vastly more interesting display of character than any persona—outward appearance—ever could.

Chapter III: Jungian analysis

Thinking in solutions: where to go after an existential onset

The previous chapters of this thesis have been devoted to illuminating Phil's existential onset and analyzing the time loop. Before his imprisonment in the time loop, Phil's character shows clear symptoms of an existential man who uses cynical coping mechanisms to delay his inevitable anguish and despair. Through his cynical persona, he unleashes his own insecurities and dissatisfaction onto other people in order to gain a false sense of superiority. Phil's rejection of small-town cheerfulness, alongside his general dismissal of joviality, shows he is rather critical of any optimistic stance to life.

However, through his rejection of optimism, Phil finds himself in a meaningless life where he is unable to live in the moment. This is shown by Phil's reliance on future possibilities to relieve him from his current suffering: "there is a major news network interested in me" (2:43-2:45), "an extra second in Punxsutawney? Please!" (3:03-3:06), "Someday somebody will see me interviewing a groundhog and think I don't have a future" (4:52-4:56), "I would love to stand here and talk with you, but I'm not going to" (11:23-11:28). Phil's rhetoric reveals he is constantly avoiding the present. He eventually cries out: "What if there is no tomorrow?", revealing the despair he feels when his hope for a better future is taking away from him (24:45-24:47). This can be seen as the existential despair, defined as "disrelation between possibility and limitation", that is, Phil limits his daily possibilities with his pessimistic mindset about the present (Gravil 86). Simultaneously, his optimistic hope about the future is always met with disappointment and when he comes to terms with this, Phil emerges as absurdist hero. Trapped on February 2nd, Phil must find a way to seize the day by finding purpose in the simplest—and even the most tedious—of tasks. However, as pointed out in the analysis of the narrative using Camus' concept of

absurdism and Nietzsche's eternal recurrence, Phil must also encounter himself. He can no longer hide behind meager doctrines and coping mechanisms as he realizes his previous lifestyle—and current handling of the situation—is shallow and unfulfilling. Facing his inner thoughts proves to be extremely difficult for Phil, as it leads him to “profound frustration and suicidal despair” (Benesh 32).

Phil is suffering from his inability to be happy with his present, and initially is incapable of surrendering to true absurdism. Phil needs to realize that his pain marks his first step in his transformation. The type of transformation he undergoes has been variously interpreted, but, ultimately, all the criticism on the transformative narrative in *Groundhog Day* can be summarized as Phil becoming conscious of his unconscious. He is forced to create his own form of the Nietzschean concept ‘will to power’. The rest of this chapter will therefore analyze Phil's transformation and self-actualization in terms of the Jungian process of individuation, which “promotes wholeness, bringing unconscious potential into expression” (Benesh ii). Before examining individuation as part of the psychoanalytic narrative, I will first introduce Jungian philosophy and psychology to show the method of analysis used in this chapter. This will then lead to an analysis of the Jungian archetypes present in the film, as such an analysis will flesh out the notion of thoughts transitioning from unconscious to conscious. The Jungian archetypes will also help identify and analyze an important symbol of the film: confronting the shadow.

Why Jung: From Camus and Nietzsche to Freud and Jung

The symbols of transformation are vital to Benesh's collective work on *Groundhog Day*. She notes that they “complement the film's narrative of personal transformation embodied in its protagonist” (Benesh ii). Her study uses a combination of hermeneutics and

semiotics to show how the film portrays the transformation through symbols, thereby providing an analysis this thesis relies and builds on. This thesis also argues that the narrative of *Groundhog Day* encapsulates a person's self-actualization through the process of individuation, starting from an existential onset.

The theory of individuation must begin with understanding Carl Jung's notion of the psyche and the ultimate human goal to overcome psychological suffering. Jung believed it was possible to transform the human psyche through psychological processes, an idea which was originally conceived by Sigmund Freud with his concept of psychoanalysis. Carl Jung was a student of Sigmund Freud, and both psychologists devoted much of their work to psychoanalysis; a curative process where unconscious desires and thoughts are brought under conscious attention. Jung would eventually break away from Freud, when he began to expand on Freud's theory of the conscious and unconscious by suggesting there is a collective unconscious. Jung would refer to the Freudian unconscious as 'personal unconsciousness'. By consciousness, Jung meant: "the relation of psychic contents to the ego, in so far as this relation is perceived as such by the ego" (Jung 421 *Psychological Types*). Jungian unconscious, or what he called the personal unconscious, is essentially similar to the Freudian unconscious, and is defined as follows: "Relations to the ego that are not perceived as such are unconscious" (Jung 421 *Psychological Types*). Jung's third realm of the psyche, the collective unconsciousness, is more complex. Jung defines it follows:

The individual self is a portion or segment or representative of something present in all living creatures, an exponent of the specific mode of psychological behaviour, which varies from species to species and is inborn in each of its members. The inborn mode of acting has long been known as instinct, and for the inborn mode of psychic apprehension I have proposed the term archetype (Jung 376 *Psychological Types*).

In essence, Jung claims that every psyche follows certain archetypal figures that are universally present. These figures are represented in especially myths and later came to the fore in literary studies through Joseph Campbell's monomyth theory which relates Jungian psychology to art and literature. Freud claimed the mind was made up the id (our innate desire), superego (societal morals and values that humans have been taught in upbringing), and the ego (the component between the id and superego that makes decisions). Jung expands on Freud by proposing the mind is made out of various archetypes, the most prominent being the persona, the anima/animus, the shadow, and the self. These terms will be explained in later paragraphs, where these archetypes will also be related to the narrative of *Groundhog Day*. These are essential in understanding Phil's growth in consciousness through the Jungian process.

The process of individuation builds on the existential onset of the film because they both focus on transcending the individual self. In his ideas on individuation Jung refers to Schopenhauer and Nietzsche's philosophical ideas: "Schopenhauer's work by far transcends his personality. It voices what was obscurely thought and felt by many thousands. Similarly with Nietzsche: his Zarathustra, in particular, brings to light the contents of the collective unconscious of our time" (Jung 191 *Psychological Types*). The previous chapter already linked Nietzsche to Camus through their complementary concepts of the potential meaningless of life. The themes present in *The Myth of Sisyphus* are therefore also connected to Jungian philosophy. Camus was aware that his themes of suicide, suffering, on whether life is worth living, and on finding purpose in life, were not new. He notes that "they run through all literatures and all philosophies", and refers to them as part of the "primordial question". Therefore, there is an archetypal structure to the themes, and as Camus claims, "there is no question of reinventing them" (Camus 16). This aligns with Jung's archetypal

perspective of the human psyche, as Jung attempts to make universal theory (e.g. a psychological process) on how to improve oneself.

Lionel Trilling makes clear in this essay *On the Teaching of Modern Literature* that Nietzsche's work *Genealogy of Morals* was "dedicated to the liberation of the conscience", as "Nietzsche makes his defense of the bad conscience ... a decisive force in the interests of culture" (Trilling 1161). This in turn solidifies the overlap between Nietzsche and Camus, and Freud and Jung. Trilling notes: "Like Nietzsche, Freud thought that life was justified by our heroic response to its challenge" (1162). This links back to Camus' notion of facing the absurd, becoming heroically rebellious in the face of the potential meaningless. This then connects to individuation, as Jung believed that such a process was every human's main task in life. Jung would call it accepting the darker side of the mind (the shadow) and shedding a deceptive outward appearance (persona), in order to reach an understanding of the self. This may be linked to Freud's idea of the therapeutic process through the psychoanalytical method, and to Nietzsche's emphasis on the "rationalization of cruelty", that is, embracing pain as a tool for progression in becoming the 'yea-saying' *Übermensch* (Trilling 1161). Finally, Jung's notion of individuation may be connected to Camus' call to people to accept their meaninglessness within the universe, yet simultaneously rebel against it. These are all secular methods to maximize unconscious potential by turning it into conscious performance, meaning that having the epiphany is not enough: one must take action upon it. All these ideas iterate the archetypal resonance of *Groundhog Day*'s psychoanalytic narrative: Phil is forced to act upon unconscious desires as they are revealed to him through strenuous suffering within the time loop. The idea of desires is made clear when the psyche is seen, as Jung did, as an iceberg. The conscious is the tip of the iceberg, under the surface lies the personal unconscious and in the depths of the human mind lies the collective unconscious. These 'depths' of the mind are the main focus of psychoanalytical study and are vital for

understanding Jung's position on self-improvement. Therefore, the Jungian archetypes associated with the human psyche will now be examined.

Jungian archetypes

The four main archetypes within the Jungian model of the psyche are the persona, the anima/animus, the shadow, and the self. The shadow and the self are the most important for analyzing the psychoanalytical narrative of *Groundhog Day* as they create the main motif present in the film: facing a shadow to become self-actualized. Jung claims that these archetypes are inherent to every human psyche: "The unconscious consists, among other things, of remnants of the undifferentiated archaic psyche, including its animal stages" (Jung *Symbols of Transformation* 176). Jung clearly builds on Freudian theory here, as Freud proposed "a privileged example of the return of the repressed", demonstrated by the concept of the uncanny, that can be observed and analyzed (Thurston 10). The idea that the human psyche is impervious to psychoanalysis is "massively resisted by Freudian theory" (Thurston 10). This psychoanalytical practice therefore continues in Jung's work on archetypes within the unconscious. Freud talked about repressed images that appear to be familiar, as he called uncanny, and Jung claims that these images correspond with archetypal psychology.

The term Archetype "refers to a recurrent image, character, plot, theme, or pattern that, through its repetitions in many works across the centuries, takes on a universal quality" (*Northern Anthology of Theory Criticism* 1249). Jung theorized that these archetypes account for the repetitive patterns within the human psyche, an idea that would later influence archetypal critics (such as Joseph Campbell and Northrop Frye) to use the archetypes to compare narratives. According to archetypal criticism, there are figures within narratives that resonate with various forms of culture around the world. As Jung believed the archetypes are inherent to the human psyche, it can be concluded that certain elements of a narrative

(characters, structure, plot, imagery, symbolism) can resonate with viewers, regardless of any specific acquaintance with a narrative. This resonance then becomes a pattern and in turn become repetitive. Joseph Campbell demonstrated this through his concept of the monomyth: the hero's journey serves as template for all heroic narratives told. For example, Campbell's three acts—"departure", "initiation", and "return"—can be used in comparative narratology and mythology to identify overlapping features (Campbell *A Hero with a Thousand Faces*). The conclusion to be drawn from these paragraphs, is that there are arguments to be made in academically comparing underlying figures within a narrative that resemble archetypal figures in the human mind.

The archetypal figures present themselves as repetitive patterns in the psyche. Jung, and his mentor Freud, hypothesized that psychoanalysis could break undesirable repetitive patterns as the process focusses on analyzing digressive thoughts: "the unconscious is governed by the endless repetition and deformation of discursive elements" (Thurston 10). The "discursive elements", the Freudian 'coincidental' and the Jungian 'synchronicity', are subject to repetition as they can be related to the idea of *déjà vu*: the inherent sense that people have seen something before, yet are aware that they have not seen it. This is even ridiculed in *Groundhog Day* as Rita asks Phil whether he has experienced *déjà vu*, to which he replies: "didn't you just ask me that?" (48:38-48:49). This is clearly an inside joke for the viewers who are aware of Phil's time loop and therefore recognize that Rita has probably asked Phil this question numerous times before. Jung defines *déjà vu* as when "an external event touches on some unconscious knowledge" and there "can reach consciousness" (*Answer to Job* 43). Surely, Rita has no recollection of dating Phil but something about the scene appears awfully familiar to her. As the archetypes can be reduced to "patterns of behaviour", the concept of *déjà vu* in *Groundhog Day* is not only ironic: it suggests underlying primordial patterns (*Synchronicity* 20). This reflects Rita's supposed familiarity

(the *déjà vu*) and accounts for the viewer's unconscious understanding of the various symbols of transformation. The symbols of transformation in *Groundhog Day* "compensate for and/or comment upon an absence, or an absence of awareness either in the environment or on the part of a character" (Benesh 67). Therefore, Phil's 'growth in conscious' is not only the main action within the narrative, but also feels natural to the viewer: it is a story we understand, whether we have seen *Groundhog Day* before or not: it is a part of what makes us human. "Part of what makes us human, according to Jung, is an "unconscious" inhabited by shared memories, desires, impulses, images, ideas—in word, archetypes—distinct from the personal unconscious that each of us acquires from our individual experiences" (NATC 1249).

Persona and the anima/animus

The first archetype noticeable in *Groundhog Day* is the persona. This is the outward appearance of a person, a "mask" to hide one's true self (*Psychological Types* Jung 465). It is an "exaggerated version of ourselves which we hope will make an impression", that at the same time conceals our inner desires (Stead). Phil's outward appearance is not necessarily a positive one: he is self-centered, arrogant, and condescending. Phil's persona is a psychological projection that is part of his defense mechanisms. He thinks he is a big shot and by acting like a *prima donna*, he convinces himself that he is important, although other characters in the film are not convinced. Phil appears incapable of seeing the shallowness of his persona, as well as the fact that it does him more harm than good. Jung claims the persona is a "functional complex that comes into existence for reasons of adaptation or personal convenience", so Phil's persona is a reflection of his miserable attitude towards his own life (*Psychological Types* 465). Jung further claims that the persona "is by no means identical with the individuality" (465). Therefore, we can state that the Phil we see in the opening part of the film is neither who Phil truly is or wants to be. He does not consciously know himself. This creates the meaninglessness and existential despair as his world is empty: "Phil is in his

own world, an empty one, out of which he creates an endless winter” (Almond 1388). The ‘endless winter’ refers to the key metaphor in the film: Phil the weatherman, has six more weeks of winter when he sees his shadow, just like Phil the groundhog.

The anima/animus is the “mirror image of our biological sex, that is, the unconscious feminine side in males and the masculine tendencies in woman” (McLeod). Jung calls “the outer attitude” or “outer face”, the persona, and the “inner attitude” or “inner face” the anima (*Psychological Types* 467). Jung claims the anima is “complementary to the character of the persona” (468). This means that what is presented outwardly, through the persona, is actually manifested within the unconscious. Jung notes that the anima resides within the shadow, as a component of the part of the unconscious people find most difficult to face. Phil appears to be disconnected from his feminine side, as is shown by his narcissism. Phil’s disconnection with his anima comes out of his devaluation of stereotypical feminine traits. Benesh describes this devaluation as a representation of “an entire immature and overly agentic culture”, in which “feminine and communal” traits are “suppressed” (35). This is seen when Rita describes her perfect man. One aspect of Rita’s description is: “he’s kind, sensitive and gentle... and he’s not afraid to cry in front of me”, to which Phil replies: “this is still a man we’re talking about, right?” (*Groundhog Day* 45:25-45:34). This quote shows that Phil displays a certain type of masculine fragility when confronted with—what he perceives to be—feminine traits. As the self-actualized version of Phil shows, all Phil ever wanted to be is kind, sensitive and gentle. Somehow this got lost in his unconscious as he resided in his abrasive persona. The above quote shows that the idea of being sensitive appears to Phil as an attack on his masculinity and therefore he fights against it, which, according to Jungian analysis, is actually contrastive with his unconscious desire to act out his anima. Phil is therefore clearly not at rest with his inner most feelings. His resentment for his unconscious side becomes more apparent when Phil faces his shadow.

The shadow

The shadow is the unpleasant side of unconsciousness, as it is an, usually, unexplored and therefore unknown side of the psyche. It is the “animal side of our personality (like the id in Freud). It is the source of both our creative and destructive energies” (McLeod). In Joseph Campbell’s monomyth theory, which was inspired by Jung, the shadow is resemblant of the darker side of the mind. Campbell’s notion of the ‘dark side’ has most famously appeared in George Lucas’ *Star Wars* (1978), which follows Campbell’s idea of the monomythical hero’s journey (Gordon 314). Jung referred to the shadow as the “dark half of the personality” (Jung *Four Archetypes* 124). The shadow may represent uncivilized thoughts, disturbing desires, or generally any deviance from what is deemed correct in society. “The Shadow personality tends to surface when the conscious self is confronted with a new or difficult situation” (MacAdams 118). In *Groundhog Day*, the shadow surfaces as soon as Phil arrives in Punxsutawney. The narrative of the film emphasizes the difficulty of overcoming the shadow, as Phil is a very stubborn character. It is ironic that Phil is skeptical of the groundhog ritual, because everybody knows the festivity is based on suspense of disbelief. Nobody actually believes that the groundhog speaks to the chairman of the festivity board in ‘Groundhogese’ to forecast an early arrival of spring or a prolonged winter.

Phil’s dismissal of small-town ritual makes him feel superior, yet he himself is not critical enough to see his own flaws and act upon his own desires. He cannot stand up to his shadow. As the groundhog sees its own shadow and ‘declares’ six more weeks of winter, “the narrative issue is established: the film’s Phil (Murray) will be seeing his shadow, having more winter, before spring can come” (Almond 1388). Phil cannot escape his time loop until he ‘sees his shadow’ and incorporates it with his conscious. He must reconcile with his inner most desires, anxieties, and flaws. Ironically, he thinks “all people are morons” and criticizes people who have a ‘simple’ character by calling them “hicks”. Whenever someone is upset

or polite – or opposes his cynicism in any way – he attacks them. Marie-Louise von Franz, a psychologist, notes that when a person feels “an overwhelming rage coming up in you when a friend reproaches you about a fault, you can be fairly sure that at this point you will find a part of your shadow” (Stead). This can be seen by Phil’s “aggressively tinged impulsiveness” that “substitutes for facing himself, his isolation and underlying self-hatred” (Almond 1389).

Jung claims that people tend to shy away from their shadowy unconscious: “People will do anything, no matter how absurd, in order to avoid facing their own soul. One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious” (*Dreams* 173-175). Phil makes it clear he will not attempt to face his shadow by turning to existential despair after his failed attempts of Rita are unmasked as ingenuine. When he does come to terms with his shadow, his idea of romancing unrequited love for Rita, he starts to realize he must shed his shadow to become a better person. In other words, he must acknowledge his dark side to narrow in on the self, a totality of the psyche, and he does so through the Jungian individuation process. “The darkness which clings to every personality is the door into the unconscious” (Jung *Four Archetypes* 57). Phil will have to learn more about his ‘darker’ side and how to integrate it with the self. For Phil, creating a new persona to hide behind is simply not an option anymore. “If we observe our resentment towards ourselves and others, and if we consider the moral aspects of our behaviour, then we have the opportunity to bring the shadow into consciousness” (Stead). Evidently, as analyzed in the time loop chapter of this thesis, it is only after being subjected to the feeling of eternity that Phil decides to overcome his anxiety of facing his shadow.

Self

The self is defined by Jung as “the totality of the psyche” (*Psychology and Alchemy* 41). Acknowledging the self, and thereby the state of selfhood, is, to Jung, “the ultimate aim

of every individual” (McLeod). Jung describes the self as “not only the center, but also the whole circumference which embraces both conscious and unconscious” (*Psychology and Alchemy* 41). Jung claims that the ego is the center of consciousness and that the self is the center of both the conscious and unconscious. Coming to terms with the unconscious therefore means gaining a new insight as to where one’s center truly lies. Without the unconscious, the position of the self is falsely perceived as the ego will be perceived as center of the psyche. According to Jung, this is what leads to psychological problems such as unwished behavior or suffering. In *Groundhog Day*, Phil’s major vice is that he believes he knows it all. He acts as a big shot, that, according to himself, has superiority over small-town “hicks”. What Phil has yet to realize, is that his current self-consciousness disregards his unconscious and that he is therefore not aligned with his true self. His abrasiveness and cynical character constitute his persona, his outward appearance, but not his true self. He has to face his shadow, metaphorically presented as winter, in order to become more psychologically grounded.

Phil is incapable of becoming grounded, although, luckily for him, the narrative involves a time loop and a quest for Rita’s love in order to hint him towards the right direction. “In Jungian terms, MacDowell’s character represents the elusive self that we all strive to find during our life’s journey” (Faust 3). Rita is the reason Phil starts to change, and it can therefore be said that she serves as an individual that inspired him to be better. However, Faust claims that “by winning her, Connors has in effect completed Jung’s arduous process of individuation”, which is not necessarily the case (3). In regards to the narrative, Faust claims, this moment “is so momentous that at that point Connors actually escapes recurrence and recenters the normal of time”. There is no debate that Phil has become “a transformed human being”, but there can still be a discussion on whether Phil has become “fully self-actualized”. Faust claims that in every way Phil has found himself and that his is

due to his success in wooing Rita (3). Rita is definitely the starting point for Phil's individuation process as "she transforms Phil's experience of daily repetitions from depressive sameness to an opportunity for love and change" (Almond 1393). However, it is only after Phil actually passes on an opportunity with Rita that he becomes the true self-actualized version of himself. This is shown when Phil runs 'errands' across Punxsutawney instead of accepting Rita's invitation for a cup of coffee. This part of the individuation process will be more highlighted when the Jungian concepts are related to the overall narrative of *Groundhog Day*.

The individuation process for Phil Connors

Through the process of individuation, Jung believes one can achieve "psychic totality, consisting of both conscious and unconscious contents" (*Psychological Types* 460). This involves shedding the persona, encountering the shadow and the anima/animus, and incorporating these unconscious archetypes in order to find the self: the psyche's true center. According to Jung, this promotes "wholeness" and should therefore be a highly sought after psychological achievement (Benesh ii). Becoming aware of the self proves no easy task, and this is precisely what the narrative of *Groundhog Day* plays with. Danny Rubin, the script writer, conceived the idea of a man stuck in a time loop after being inspired by a novel about vampires. Rubin considered how a "self-centred, adolescent-like adult protagonist" would change if they were to live forever forever (Brew 1). Danny Rubin initially intended to create a film about immortalization, but with rewrites by director Harold Remis the film became more about transformation. Phil has to intrinsically change who he is. The pursuit of Rita is what appears to resolve his flaws. "Romantic love, in particular, is a traditional metaphor for resolving conflict by synthesizing and integrating opposing elements" (Benesh 17). In regards to the individuation process, this can be identified as the integration of the anima, slipping from the unconscious into the conscious mind of Phil. However, the narrative takes a slight

detour first. Phil is seen taking on a false persona, as initially he copies whatever Rita likes in order to woo her. For example, he pretends to be interested in French poetry after initially mocking it and he pretends to like her favorite drink. Even his rhetoric opposes his cynical exposition: “I think people place too much emphasis on their careers. Gosh, I wish we could all live in the mountains” (49:29 – 49:36). This is a completely different attitude by the arrogant weatherman who was worried that reporting the groundhog festival would cost him his future career.

Throughout the film, we have seen Phil’s “chronic defensive nastiness”, as it hides his own insecurities and makes him an unlovable type of person (Almond 1392). Rita offers a perspective of how life can be when virtues are genuinely put to action in daily life. Phil initially dismisses Rita as “not [his] kind of fun”, but he grows to see that she has qualities that he does not possess, yet wishes to acquire. The narrative can be seen as a struggle between “virtuous living versus egoistic hedonism” (Kupfer 35). Phil’s attitude is what needs to change, and the individuation process is what releases him from his existential onset. “For Phil, it is a coping strategy for dealing with loneliness, purposelessness, and boredom. For the film, it adds an orientation, a direction, and an endpoint. For both, it is a cure for the moot repetition and meaningless meandering” (Crumbo 64). Aside from the romantic plotline, the film still touches upon incremental change in Phil’s attitude to daily life within the time loop. Rita allows Phil to discover his “internal limitations” in order to find “new possibilities” on how to live his life (Almond 1387). Subsequently, this leads to a ingenuine pursuit of Rita that ends in Phil getting slapped by Rita numerous times. Phil must come to terms that attempting to ‘cheaply’ win over Rita with tricks is not going to be sustainable for long term happiness as he realizes he “confuses conquest with love” (Almond 1391).

Phil comes close to realizing he has to face his shadow: “There is no way that this winter is ever going to end as long as this groundhog keeps seeing his shadow. I don’t see

any other way out”. However, the fulfilling way out would be becoming conscious of the desires in his unconscious but frustratingly, here Phil means that he is going after the groundhog: “He’s gotta be stopped and I have to stop him” (1:00:04 – 1:00:21). Phil still fails to recognize the problem within himself and latches his self-hate onto externalities. Phil’s unsustainable character comes to a literal end, as he proclaims: “I’ve come to the end of me, Rita. There’s no way out now” (1:00:46 – 1:00:48). Initially, this is the part of the film where Phil goes into a depressive cycle of repetitive suicide. However, eventually, Phil comes to terms with his dissatisfaction of who he is. The jokingly phrase “I don’t even like myself” now becomes a serious critical self-reflection (55:23-55:24). Almond points out that his “callousness” has become “aggression turned on the self” (1391). Phil is visibly displeased with himself. However, he shows a “glimmer of hope”, which indicates that Phil has to change sooner or later. Overall, the narrative starts with Phil asking himself the question where he would like to be: “Phil, if you could be anywhere...where would you want to be?” (0:58-1:01). At the end of the film he tells Rita: “no matter what happens tomorrow, or for the rest of my life, I’m happy now because I love you”, signalling he is now happy in the moment and with his self (1:33:56 – 1:34:05). This is followed by the scene where Phil wakes up next to Rita, which signals he has escaped the time loop:

Phil: Something is different

Rita: Good or bad?

Phil: Anything different is good...but this could be real good

(*Groundhog Day* 1:35:27 – 1:35:40)

Phil and Rita are seen emerging from the bed and breakfast. Phil looks up at his environment and shouts out: “It’s so beautiful!”, potentially mirroring the groundhog coming out and not

seeing his shadow (1:37:32). Phil's winter is over, he has become a new man. However, though Phil has indeed changed for the better, one line suggests otherwise. When Phil suggests to Rita: "let's live here", he kisses her, and follows it with "we'll rent to start" (1:37:43 – 1:37:55). Phil answers his initial question ("where would you want to be") with "here". The ambiguity of 'here' raises the question whether he means Punxsutawney or whether he means him being with Rita. The way he backs out of this comment (by saying "we'll rent to start"), challenges whether he has really completed the individuation process. He is by no means the Nietzschean *Übermensch*, so the ending leaves room for interpretation. When the Nat King Cole song, *It's almost like being in love* (1953), starts playing, the viewer is left to wonder whether Phil's and Rita's newly found love will last. The film feels incomplete, but note that Jung's individuation process is a life-long process. In the same sense, Nietzsche idea of sublimation is a "perpetual self-overcoming", so perhaps the ending implies that Phil's road to the self is incomplete, though he is definitely in a better place than at the start of the narrative (Gravil 88). "Jung relates individuation to a growth in consciousness and associates it with the transcendent function which guides individuals beyond collective norms." (Benesh 41). In this sense, Phil has undergone the individuation process. His selfishness has been turned into selflessness and he now realizes what makes him happy: "the self is identified with a sense of control over its needs, and the source of satisfaction" (Almond 1391). The earlier claim of Rita is now fully disputed by Phil's new self: "I know you're egocentric, it's your defining characteristic" (37:34-37:37). In order to see how well the individuation process fits the overall narrative, the next chapter will be devoted to the decisions made by director Harold Ramis, screenplay writer Danny Rubin and lead actor Bill Murray. This will also lead into a discussion on how the Jungian concepts overlap with the existential onset and how this is encapsulated within the narrative of *Groundhog Day*.

Chapter 4: Author-oriented approach and overall narrative of *Groundhog Day*

Moving into author-oriented approach: a romantic comedy, drama, or therapeutic masterpiece?

The previous chapters have shown that the Jungian process of individuation accounts for Phil's transformation in *Groundhog Day*. After the relentless discovery of an unstoppable time loop, Phil is forced to see his shadow. Then, he has to face his flaws and integrate the 'darker' side of himself in order to achieve a self-realised version of himself, or rather, his true self. During the therapeutic narrative we have seen Phil doubling down on his existential onset, by becoming gluttonous and enjoying the nihilistic freedom of not having to deal with consequences, only to find out that all of these deceiving distractions do not fulfil him. The viewer's familiarity of being stuck in a rut is essential to the narrative, as well as the frustration one might feel when not properly addressing repetitive problems. Evidently, no human's goal is to suffer more than is required—or for that matter, more stupidly than is necessary. The idea that psychological suffering can be analysed and fixed will find opposition from cynics, like Phil, who deem their life meaningless. This turns into a paradox in which people who are unhappy choose to stay unhappy when changing appears difficult, frightening, or downright useless and without purpose. This aligns with Phil's character during his existential onset, where Phil thinks he can escape his current unhappiness by merely waiting around, being cynical, taking no action, and yet expecting the world to be served to him on a silver platter. The key questions when time freezes for Phil, as screenplay Danny Rubin explains, are then: "What am I doing here? What could I be doing here? What should I be doing here?" (Whalen-Bridge & Rubin x). There is no clear evidence to support that Phil was thinking these questions before being trapped in Punxsutawney, but he most certainly had to question his life after realizing he has been granted eternity. Phil has been given the opportunity to refine himself in every way he seems fit. This does not go without

trial and error, as evidenced by the numerous comedic failures Phil undergoes that constitute the greater part of the film. A question that arises is whether *Groundhog Day* is really a romantic comedy, a cleverly disguised drama, a modern mythological tale, or a philosophical thought experiment. How much of the archetypal resonance was consciously put into the film's narrative? This chapter is concerned with connecting the arguments made in previous chapters to the construction of *Groundhog Day*. Afterwards, a final overview of the thesis' research question will be provided to show how Ramis and Rubin have encapsulated an overlap between existentialist philosophy and Jungian psychoanalysis within the film's narrative.

Author-oriented approach

There is no question that film makers indulge in creating narratives that in some shape or form hold up a mirror to our own lives. "Film, the emergent art form of the 20th century, searches out the major narrative themes in our culture, among them the therapeutic" (Almond 1387). Film, therefore, potentially aims to provide catharsis by putting the viewer through an experience that they themselves do not undergo, yet understand and empathize with. The viewer's comprehension of narratives can be analyzed in various ways, such as semiotics, symbolism, formalism, textual framework, aesthetics, and feminist film theory. What often lacks in such methodologies is the multi-disciplinary approach that accounts for multiple perspectives and allows narratives to be compared in more than one field of study. The archetypal resonance of narratives can be a deceptive subject as there is never a guarantee that an author intended to place certain symbols or signs within their work. However, if we follow Jung's idea of a collective unconscious, there is something substantial to be said about narratives, as they can be identified as an expression of universal human conditions: "various cultures, religions, myths, and literatures have recourse to primordial images or archetypes that – like a subconscious language – express human hopes and fears" (Klarer 109). The

collective unconsciousness is a place where mythological narratives take their place. Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899) focuses on creating an applicable theory on symbolism. Jung takes this idea further by claiming myths are similar to dreams. Films then, are in turn the product of conscious and unconscious decisions made by an author and can therefore be analyzed in a similar way to dreams and myths.

Danny Rubin and Harold Ramis on the overall narrative

Danny Rubin wrote *Groundhog Day* with the idea in mind to capture a self-centered adult whose confrontation with himself was inevitable, as a time loop allows the protagonist to exploit all of his options. Rubin claims his screenplays come from his “mixed dust of dreams and memories” (Whalen-Bridge & Rubin ix). This reveals Rubin is consciously aware that *Groundhog Day* is formed from narratives he himself knows or are inherent to his mind, or, at least, reflecting a story that is relatable for the viewer. Rubin also acknowledges the fact that there is a great deal of himself in his screenplays: “I refine my own story with every new screenplay, each time getting closer and closer to someone I believe to be me” (Whalen-Bridge & Rubin ix-x). Originally, the film was meant to be “much darker” (Brew). Ramis commented that he made Rubin's original screenplay “more entertaining and more accessible” (*Hudsonunionsociety* 2:16-2:19). The original screenplay was about a man struggling to find himself and who is granted infinite time to figure this out. After the movie studios declined to make the film as Rubin had written it, Rubin allowed for changes to be made: “Harold was turning it from whatever it was that I had into a romantic comedy” (*AustinFilmFestival* 5:48-5:53). The romantic pursuit of Rita was therefore not Rubin's original plot driver. Rubin notes that he wanted to see the film as an experiment in which a character “lives longer than a single lifetime” by means of a “repetitive day” in order to see what would happen to him (21:00-21:16). However, when Ramis reviewed the screenplay he “took out any references as to how long Phil had been there”, and rounded up the story as a

romantic comedy in order to make it marketable (*AustinFilmFestival* 23:04-23:08). Initially, both Rubin and Ramis thought the concept had similarities with Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946), with Ramis calling *Groundhog Day* "kind of a *It's a Wonderful Life* for our time" (*AustinFilmFestival* 1:50-1:52). Rubin mentions that when he was younger this film was always on the television on repeat: "every time you turned on the television, that's what was on" (24:16-24:19). Like Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life*, *Groundhog Day* has now also become a classic and the irony of this film being repeatedly played was underscored by British television stations Sky, who showed the film for a total of fourteen repeats on February 2nd 2019.

The film was conceived as a story about the possibility of redemption, or rather a story with therapeutic tendencies. Rubin explains: "The movie I wrote was not really a studio Hollywood movie, it did not conform to romantic comedy conventions, it wasn't designed to be a formula movie, it was designed to be something else" (5:10-5:26). The 'something else' is what perpetuates the discussion on what invoked *Groundhog Day* to be made, as well as the discussion what the film actually portrays. For example, Rubin notes in his foreword for *Buddhism and American Cinema* that he "wasn't trying to write a Buddhist movie" (x). However, Rubin and Ramis both get accredited for making a film with Buddhist overtones: "Buddhists thought it expresses a fundamental Buddhist concept" (Harold Ramis, *Hudsonunionscoiety* 0:54-0:58). Ramis addresses other religious projections as well: "Hasadic Jews" were walking around outside the movie theatre "with signs that say 'are you living the same day over and over again?'" (0:21-0:26). Ramis continues: "people in the yoga community" had approached him and said "that it was everything they were about", and that he got letters from "Catholic priests and Christian Baptists ministers saying 'this totally expressed our philosophy, you must be Christians'" (0:58-1:15). Rubin also addresses that

people thought he must be a Buddhist and before people said the same about him being Hindu (Whalen-Bridge & Rubin ix). Ramis comments that *Groundhog Day* is a “metaphor for a lot of things (*Hudsonunionsociety* 0:01-0:02). He therefore believes the film to be “ecumenical” and therefore receives a vast range of interpretations (1:40). All of the above shows that *Groundhog Day* resonates with different narratives, despite the narrative of the film not having been inspired by one specific religion or cultural myth suggested by fans of the film.

Ramis notes that the psychiatric community claimed that “the movie is a metaphor for psychoanalysis, because we revisit the same stories over and over” (*Hudsonunionsociety* 1:18-1:30). Ramis continues: “it’s the same message, the film is the film, it does not change, but everyone projected onto the film” (1:48-1:55). These two quotes show that *Groundhog Day* aligns well with psychological interpretations because it addresses the underlying projection of religious and cultural narratives. However, the film clearly relies on the romantic plot for a resolution and does not solely focus on Phil’s epiphanies. According to Rubin, “all it took for [Phil] was a sense of mindful awareness—and zero chance of escape” (Whalen-Bridge & Rubin x). Other academic texts have picked up on the abrupt ending (Benesh calls it a “froth of a happy ending” (121)). From Rubin’s comments on *Groundhog Day*, it can be concluded that the viewer is left dissatisfied after the complex narrative is resolved. Benesh notes that “happy endings provide a temporary triumph over entropy, disintegration, demise” (16). However, philosophical interpreters would have possibly wanted to see Rubin realize his initial screenplay which delves more into the time loop as a Nietzschean thought experiment, rather than offering a generic romantic comedy ending that feels sloppy and unsatisfying. Stephen Tobolowsky, the actor who plays Ned Ryerson, comments: “one of the miracles of the movie is that during the course of the movie we want boy to get girl” (*The Making of Groundhog Day* 8:45 – 8:50). Bill Murray’s character, Phil, is

so unlikeable that viewers are initially disgusted by him but through the comic failures he endures, he gains sympathy. “Humor makes Bill Murray’s character bearable, so that we can empathize with someone who is unpleasant, and who becomes at times more repugnant as the film progresses” (Almond 1397). Rubin has therefore also commented that “there’s a little dishonesty involved” in the narrative. He elaborates that the script has been changed from “the experiment—the repetition—changing Phil, to having Rita change Phil” (*AustinFilmFestival* 16:20-16:39). What then makes Phil a character that people relate to, yet does not satisfy the full depths of the philosophical approach to interpreting *Groundhog Day*?

Bill Murray as Phil Connors

Casting Bill Murray as Phil Connors was probably the best decision Harold Ramis made as director. Before Murray, Tom Hanks and Michael Keaton were suggested for the leading role. Tom Hanks declined, as his reputation of the ‘nicest guy’ in Hollywood would not fit well with the cynical and unlovable character of Phil Connors (*The Hollywood Reporter*). Keaton turned the role down as “he didn’t get” the plot (Acuna 1). Keaton called the character a “wry, sardonic, glib young man” and commented that no one but could have pulled it off better than Bill Murray (Acuna 1). Bill Murray had worked with Harold Ramis before, playing roles in *Caddyshack* (1980), *Stripes* (1981), and *Ghostbusters* (1984), all featuring writing credits for Ramis and acting credits for Murray. Bill Murray’s background before these films was being a member of the cast of American comedy sketch show *Saturday Night Live*, where he started in 1977 and remained in the returning cast until 1981. Murray returned in 1993, the year *Groundhog Day* was released, to host the show and guest starred in later episodes that respectively aired in 2016 and 2018 (*International Movie Database*). During the time Murray was a member of *Saturday Night Live*, Ramis was

working on *Animal House* (1978). From this film, John Belushi's character turned out to be the most popular character, despite being rather abrasive, explosive and uncivilized. Bill Murray became known for his natural grumpiness and sarcasm as seen in his other films, appearances, and skits on *Saturday Night Live*. This translated well into the character of Phil Connors, which to an extent can be seen as an excessively cynical version of Murray himself. Bill Murray had also played the cynical Frank Cross in *Scrooged* (1988), a retelling of Charles Dicken's *A Christmas Carol*. Frank Cross is dismissive of people around him that are enjoying the Christmas holiday, much in the same manner that Phil Connors is dismissive of the locals of Punxsutawney celebrating groundhog day. *Scrooged* also features a redemptive narrative and has Murray play a character that must overcome his own flaws by means of an imposed ethical lesson. Murray, being a long time cast member of *Saturday Night Live*, was not a stranger to improvising his lines, which came natural to him playing a grumpy character. Danny Rubin has commented that throughout *Groundhog Day*, Bill Murray would improvise and add lines that felt "Bill-ish" (17:34-17:49). Murray was also going through a divorce during the filming of *Groundhog Day* which could have added to his grumpiness as well as his interest in a story that is about transformation and self-improvement. Essentially, for Bill Murray himself, the film could have been a therapeutic experience. Nevertheless, this was not the case as Murray ended up breaking off his friendship with Harold Ramis over their creative differences: Murray wanted to focus on the philosophical side of the film whereas Ramis wanted to focus on the comedy (*The Hollywood Reporter*).

If film is a redemptive source, do viewers feel like Phil? Can we learn from Phil? Has the story of *Groundhog Day* not been told over and over again? Or does the film play on the repetitive nature of the narrative by including repetition as part of its own narrative? Film "searches out the major narrative themes in our culture" and reflects them back at the viewer (Almond 1387). Research by Almond (1997), Blessing (2020), and Benesh (2011) comment

on the therapeutic narrative within *Groundhog Day*. The psychoanalytical view works well as Jungian philosophy seeks to theorize the transformation Phil undergoes. The catharsis provided by emotional experience, as would occur during psychoanalytical sessions, is similar to the experience certain works of art can trigger. Nietzsche was also a firm believer in this. Jung himself noted that Nietzsche “had a pronounced tendency to credit art with a mediating and redeeming role” (*Psychological Types* 140). Viewers coincidentally laugh “at Murray” as well as “identify with Murray” (Almond 1387). Almond believes this allows the viewer to feel the same “coldness” that Phil feels, which eventually causes viewers to “wish for gratification” for Murray’s character. This could then in turn cause viewers to reflect on their own lives and wish for improvement as well.

Jungian archetypes overlap with existentialism within the narrative

Jungian analysis deals with primordial images, relating to Camus’ “primordial question” in *The Myth of Sisyphus* (16). Camus claims that his essay covers the themes that “run through all literatures and all philosophies” (Camus 16). The question of suicide that Camus tries to answer is obsolete in *Groundhog Day*, as suicide offers no escape for Phil. When Phil starts asking himself, as Danny Rubin stated, ‘what could I be doing here?’, Phil eventually has no other option than to improve himself. Phil claims that he is at the end of himself before kidnapping the groundhog and entering a cycle of multiple suicides. However, the only reason Phil ‘recovers’ from his suicidal tendencies is because the time loop does not allow him to escape through death. Hence, he may have arrived at what would be the end of a mortal person’s life, but he is forced to continue repeating February 2nd and has therefore not reached the actual end of him.

Phil as absurd hero

Phil emerges as the absurd hero after going through the process of individuation. He feels as though nothing he does matters anymore and therefore starts living his life for others. This is the ‘mindful awareness’ Danny Rubin speaks of when Phil finds out there is no escape from the time loop. Rubin and Ramis show with *Groundhog Day* that every person can better themselves, especially if someone like Phil Connors can. The lesson to be learned from *Groundhog Day* is therefore similar to the lesson learned from Camus’ essay: face the universe, know it is meaningless yet choose to rebel against it anyway. This then aligns with Freudian and Nietzschean perspectives on how to conduct oneself: “Like Nietzsche, Freud though that life was justified by our heroic response to its challenge” (Trilling 1162). Jung’s individuation process links to these philosophical perspectives as the transformative process is a practical example of how one can improve their daily life. Jung, Nietzsche and Camus urge people to overcome and adapt to the hardness of life and not deceive yourself. These deceptions can reveal themselves in various ways whether it is by creating a persona to hide one’s true self behind, or clinging to the idea of an afterlife. Jung acknowledges the relief felt by engaging with religion: “between the religion of a people and its actual mode of life there is always a compensatory relation, otherwise religion would have no practical significance at all” (*Psychological types* Jung 139). However, as claimed before in this thesis, Camus’ concept of facing the absurd and Nietzsche’s concept of becoming the yea-saying *Übermensch* are the only remedies for a man stuck in eternity. The message of *Groundhog Day* might be to reveal these concepts to be true for mortal men as well, meaning that the viewer lives through the time loop with Phil Connors by viewing the film—perhaps even on repeat. The narrative at least invites the viewer to reconsider the notion of time. The film poses the question what a person would do with eternity and in turn, asks what a mortal man should do with his time. The self-realized version of Phil knows that there are lesser things in

life, but he now also knows that they are part of daily life and should therefore not disorient him into cynicism. Like Nietzsche's yea-saying, and like Jung's call for individuation, Phil Connors realizes that life can be hard but manages to adapt by imposing the right attitude. Phil's transformation is all about overcoming the shadow, in Jungian terms, and emphasizing life, in the Nietzschean sense, with an affirmative 'yes'. Phil has become the Camusian absurd hero, as Camus would describe this hero in total control of his own destiny:

“There is no sun without shadow, and it is essential to know the night. The absurd man says yes and his efforts will henceforth be unceasing. If there is a personal fate, there is no higher destiny, or at least there is, but one which he concludes is inevitable and despicable. For the rest, he knows himself to be the master of his days” (Camus 123)

Groundhog Day is then seen as an answer to existential dread. It is a narrative that starts with an existential onset, pushing an already disillusioned man further into despair, all to have him transform into a self-realized person who learns the power of selfless virtue. Yet, the ending of *Groundhog Day* leaves much open for interpretation. Phil's uncertainty about living in Punxsutawney (“we'll rent to start” (1:37:43 – 1:37:55)) might be a rational reaction to his earlier exclamation that came out of the excitement of finally escaping the time loop. His uncertainty could also show that Phil Connors is not fully done with his learning process. Phil Connors still has his life to go and is not free from anguish creeping back into his life. The only difference now is that he has a better idea of how to handle the situation. “The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy” (Camus 123). *Groundhog Day* shows that the struggle and suffering of daily life is worth undergoing as it can ultimately lead to a positive change, as Ramis mentions: “What Danny and I both wanted to say with the movie, you *can* live better, you *can* have a better life, people *can* change, you know, and when you do change you get those rewards that you think you want from life” Ramis (*The Making of Groundhog Day* 10:41-10:55).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the narrative of *Groundhog Day* presents an overlap between existentialist philosophy and Jungian psychoanalysis. The first chapter argued that Phil is cynical due to his existential despair. This mindset prevents Phil from living in the moment and causes him to be unhappy which in turn causes him to lash out at others, especially small town 'hicks' or anyone who dares to oppose his feeling of superiority. Phil is a person who clearly lacks responsibility for his own life. When Phil is trapped in the time loop, he initially displays grotesque behavior that is even worse than his initial character. In turn, this makes Phil even more miserable as he eventually enters a suicidal phase. As his multiple suicides do not offer him an escape, he has no choice but to become someone who is proud of their lifestyle: a Nietzschean yea-saying *Übermensch*, who embraces the eternal recurrence as a Camusian absurd hero. Phil attempts to better his life after Rita points out to him that the time loop is only a curse then viewed from a negative perspective. The transformation process that ensues can be seen as the Jungian process of individuation. Phil has to face his shadow in order to learn about his true self. Looking at other roles Bill Murray has played, as well as his natural character, there is a clear message in *Groundhog Day* that tomorrow can be better if we as individuals allow it to be. Harold Ramis and Danny Rubin show with *Groundhog Day* that individuals are capable of positive transformation through secular psychological processes, as long as one obtains the right attitude. The intertextual readings from Nietzsche's, Camus', and Jung's work reveal that this attitude involves facing the day the best way one possibly can, without shying away from difficult or unattractive tasks. Suffering can be seen as a way to learn more about oneself as suffering can provide a method to fix the reasons a person is psychologically unhappy. Eventually suffering teaches an individual on how they should live their life in order to minimize their suffering. One must learn about their true self in order to know how to properly react to the absurd notion of chaotic universe.

Then, when one becomes aware of his self through individuation, individuals can improve their lives. What the viewer learns from *Groundhog Day*, is that individuals do not need eternity to figure out how to fulfill oneself. Fulfillment and purpose can be achieved everyday by facing the tasks that lie ahead, by simply facing the universe despite knowing full well the act of living might be meaningless.

Bibliography

Primary sources:

Ramis, Harold & Rubin, Danny. *Groundhog Day*. Columbia Pictures, 1993.

Secondary sources:

Acuna, Kirsten. "Why Michael Keaton Turned Down The Chance To Star In 'Groundhog Day' And 'Lost'." *Business Insider*, Business Insider, 14 Oct. 2014, www.businessinsider.com/michael-keaton-turned-down-caddyshack-lost-2014-10?international=true&r=US&IR=T.

Arikan, Ali. "Imagining Sisyphus Happy: A Groundhog Day Retrospective." *Slant*, 2 Feb. 2009, www.slantmagazine.com/film/imagining-sisyphus-happy-a-groundhog-day-retrospective/.

Aronson, Ronald, "Albert Camus", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. 2017, edited Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2017/entries/camus/>.

AustinFilmFestival. "On Story: 508 Groundhog Day: Deconstructing the Comedy Classic." *YouTube*, YouTube, 6 June 2015, www.youtube.com/watch?v=nBDvz0mAzVY.

Beighton, Christian. "Groundhog Day? Nietzsche, Deleuze and the Eternal Return of Prosumption in Lifelong Learning." *Journal of Consumer Culture*, vol. 17, no. 3, 2017, pp. 695–712.

Benesh, Julie Ellen. *Becoming Punxsutawney Phil: Symbols and Metaphors of Transformation in Groundhog Day*. Santa Barbara, UMI. 2011.

Blessing, Kimberly. "Groundhog Day as Philosophy: Phil Connors Says 'No' to Eternal Return." *The Palgrave Handbook of Popular Culture as Philosophy*, edited by David Johnson, Springer International Publishing, 2020. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-97134-6_31-1

Bolton, Lucy. "Existentialism and Contemporary Cinema: A Sartrean Perspective." *Journal of Contemporary European Studies: Regionalism and the Nation State in the Era of Globalisation*, vol. 20, no. 4, 2012, pp. 539–540.

Camus, Albert. *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*. translated by Justin O'Brien. New York: Vintage Books, 1991. Translation originally published by Alfred A. Knopf, 1955. Originally published in France as 'Le Mythe de Sisyphe' by Librairie Gallimard, 1942.

Coniam, Matthew. "Rodents to Freedom." *Philosophy Now: a Magazine of Ideas*, 2001, philosophynow.org/issues/32/Rodents_to_Freedom.

- Commercialhalloffame*, Commercialhalloffame. "The Making of Groundhog Day - Harold Ramis." *YouTube*, YouTube, 19 Aug. 2018, www.youtube.com/watch?v=2d7kkecft4w.
- Crumbo, Daniel J. Repetition, Compulsion, and Matrimony in Groundhog Day, Matchstick Men, and What About Bob? (2019), *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, 36:1, pp. 62-80, DOI:10.1080/10509208.2018.1465372
- Davis, Colin. "Existentialism and Contemporary Cinema: A Sartrean Perspective (review)." *Modern & Contemporary France*, vol. 20, no. 3, 2012, p.378-378.
- Daughton, Suzanne M. "The Spiritual Power of Repetitive Form: Steps toward Transcendence in Groundhog Day." *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, vol. 13, no. 2, 1996, p. 138-154.
- Faust, Michael. "Groundhog Day." *Philosophy Now: a Magazine of Ideas*, 2012, philosophynow.org/issues/93/Groundhog_Day.
- Frye, Northrop. "The Archetypes of Literature" *Norton Anthology of Theory Criticism* Edited by Vincent Leith. pp. 1250 - 1262
- Gilbey, Ryan. *Groundhog Day*. British Film Institute, 2019.
- Goldberg, Jonah. "A Movie For All Time." *National Review*, National Review, 18 Oct. 2018, www.nationalreview.com/2006/02/movie-all-time-jonah-goldberg-2/.
- Gravil, Richard. *Existentialism*. Penrith, Humanities-Ebooks, 2007.
- "Happy 'Groundhog Day': Here's 5 Things You Didn't Know About the Movie." *The Hollywood Reporter*, The Hollywood Reporter, 2 Feb. 2015, www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-news/happy-groundhog-day-heres-5-769137/.
- Hudsonunionsociety. "Harold Ramis on the Metaphor of Ground Hog Day." *YouTube*, YouTube, 4 Dec. 2009, www.youtube.com/watch?v=BkEUpymTanA.
- Holte, Stine. "Nietzsche's Eternal Return and the Question of Hope." *Studia Theologica*, vol. 74, no. 2, 2020, pp. 139–158.
- Jung, C.G. *Four Archetypes Mother, Rebirth, Spirit, Trickster*. Edited by Sonu Shamdasani. Translated by Hull C., Princeton University Press, 2011.
- Jung, C.G. *Synchronicity: An Acsual Connecting Principle*. Edited by Sonu Shamdasani. Translated by Hull C., Princeton University Press, 2010.
- Jung, C.G. *Dreams*. Edited by Sonu Shamdasani. Translated by Hull C., Princeton University Press, 2011.
- Jung, C.G. *Answer to Job*. Edited by Sonu Shamdasani. Translated by Hull C., Princeton University Press, 2011.
- Jung, C. G. "Symbols of Transformation". *Collected Works of C.G. Jung, Volume 5*. Edited by Gerhard Adler, Princeton University Press, 2014

- Jung, C. G. "Psychological Types". *Collected Works of C.G. Jung, Volume 6*. Edited by Gerhard Adler, Princeton University Press, 2014
- Jung, Carl G. "Psychology and Alchemy". *Collected Works of C.G. Jung. Volume 12*. Edited by Gerhard Adler, Princeton University Press, Course Book ed., 2014.
- Koehl, Victoria. "How Bill Murray's First Divorce Impacted His Work on 'Groundhog Day'." *Showbiz Cheat Sheet*, 1 Jan. 2021, www.cheatsheet.com/entertainment/how-bill-murray-first-divorce-impacted-his-work-on-groundhog-day.html/.
- Kupfer, Joseph H. "Film Criticism and Virtue Theory." *Visions of Virtue in Popular Film*, Routledge, 1999, pp. 13–34.
- Leith, Vincent. "Northrop Frye" *Norton Anthology of Theory Criticism*. pp. 1248-1250
- Lyden, John C. "Eternal Now: Recent Time Loop Movies and the Sanctity of the Moment." *The Journal of Religion and Film*, vol. 22, no. 3, 2018, pp. 1–11.
- MacAdams, Alison Joyce. "Secretly Numinous: the Role of Joseph Campbell's Monomyth in James Joyce's Ulysses, Mario De Andrade's Macunaíma, and Boubacar Boris Diop's Le Cavalier Et Son Ombre." *Brandeis University*, 2004. Dissertation.
- McLeod, S. A. "Carl Jung". *Simply Psychology*. May 21, 2018
<https://www.simplypsychology.org/carl-jung.html>
- Mitchell, W. J. T. "Groundhog Day and the Epoché." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 47, no. S2, 2021, pp. 95–99.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. "Ecce Homo." Edited by Oscar Levy. Translated by Anthony Ludovici and Paul Cohn, *The Project Gutenberg*, 30 May 2016,
www.gutenberg.org/files/52190/52190-h/52190-h.htm.
- Ramis, Harold. "Shrink Rap: the Guy Who Put De Niro in Therapy Tells How to Get Comfortable on the Couch. (Mind Body)." *Men's Health (Magazine)*, vol. 17, no. 10, 2002, p. 98.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. *L'existentialisme Est Un Humanisme*. Nagel, 1946.
https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/complexity/people/students/dtc/students2011/mailtand/philosophy/sartre-eih.pdf
- Segal, Robert A., editor. "Myths and Dreams/Fantasies." *Jung on Mythology*, vol. 2, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1998, pp. 101–108
- Shand, John. "Existentialism Edited by Robert C. Solomon." *Philosophy Now: a Magazine of Ideas*, 2005,
philosophynow.org/issues/53/Existentialism_edited_by_Robert_C_Solomon.
- Stead, Harry J. "4 Carl Jung Theories Explained: Persona, Shadow, Anima/Animus, The Self." *Medium*, Personal Growth, 22 Oct. 2019, medium.com/personal-growth/4-carl-jung-theories-explained-persona-shadow-anima-animus-the-self-4ab6df8f7971.

The Holy Bible: Containing the Old and New Testaments. Trinitarian Bible Society, 2010.

Thurston, Luke. "Prologue: Groundhog Day." *James Joyce and the Problem of Psychoanalysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004. pp. 1-14.

Walters, James. "The Search for Tomorrow." *Alternative Worlds in Hollywood Cinema Resonance between Realms*, NBN International, 2008, pp. 135–154.

Whalen-Bridge, John and Rubin, Danny. *Buddhism and American Cinema*. State University of New York Press, 2014.

Whooznext. "The making of Groundhog Day" Harold Ramis. *YouTube*. 2018 <https://youtu.be/2d7kkecft4w>