

More Small Details of *Eyes Wide Shut*

Kubrick's painstaking cinematic technique ensured that even the most insignificant details in the frames would cohere with the themes of the film. Why would he care so much about minuscule details? It all relates to the Dream Story. The minor details of *Eyes Wide Shut* contribute to a dreamy atmosphere of strange and comic resonances. This technique is claustrophobic, in that these minor details converge around Bill and enclose him. But this technique also opens up the form, for us, the audience, because these details might inspire lateral thinking, which allows us to be in at least two minds at once: alongside Bill, but also far away, looking in.



Scene 46. A tense and unhappy Dr. Bill is about to meet Domino. He passes an extra who is speaking on the telephone. "I'll see ya," the man says, "take care, babe." This minuscule moment has a double thematic resonance. (1) The theme of seeing (See my "Notes on *Eyes Wide Shut*"). (2) A good guess is that the man is speaking to his girlfriend or wife. What the man says is humorous in light of its juxtaposition to Bill feeling alienated and alone. Just moments earlier Bill had passed a pair of lovebirds making out in front of the Nipped in the Bud flower shop. It is comical that everyone around Bill seems to be getting along with their lovers—everyone but Bill.



Later in scene 46. Standing in The Lotto Store, visible through the picture window, is a guy in a bulky yellow jacket looking at magazines. (While this guy is more readily apparent on the big screen, he is still discernable at the far right of the DVD image.) He grabs a magazine from near the back of the rack (might it be a porn mag?). The guy becomes conspicuous because of his energetic movements. Looking for more magazines, he bends his knees, leans back and pushes his hips forward. It is a suggestive sexual pose: vigorous hip-thrusting movement. It is a comic moment in light of its juxtaposition to what is going on outside: Dr. Bill considering a dalliance with Domino.)



The name Helena has a significant ring to it. Napoleon died on St. Helena. Marilyn Monroe died on Fifth Helena Drive. Kubrick, of course, wrote a screenplay titled *Napoleon*. As for the Monroe echo, it's consonant with the Amanda Curran drug overdose theme, as well as with the film history resonance that pervades *Eyes Wide Shut*. These are all distant resonances, however, similar to the memory of a dream . . .



Everyone noticed the mask beside the dead Lou Nathanson's bed . . . right?



Scene 49. Alice sits in her kitchen while Bill is about to get up close and personal with Domino. The film she's watching on television is *Blume in Love* (1973), directed by Paul Mazursky. This detail has a triple signification. (1) Just as Kubrick alludes to at least a half-dozen of his films at Rainbow Fashions, so here he alludes to his first film, *Fear and Desire*, in which Mazursky featured as an actor. (2) Similar to the appearance of a John Updike novel in the Harford's apartment, *Blume in Love* is featured here because of its subject matter: it is a film that examines the institution of middle-class marriage. (3) The scene on the TV takes place in Italy and one of the characters refers to the Italian language. This reminds us of the theme of the Italian Renaissance in *Eyes Wide Shut*. By the way, Alice is eating cookies and milk, a child's traditional pre-bedtime snack.



The blackboard behind the waitress lists the soup on offer: Clam Chowder/Chicken Noodle. While these are ordinary menu items for a coffee shop, by virtue of being in *Eyes Wide Shut* they take on a humorous sexual meaning. Think of "bearded clam" and "limp noodle."



Persistence of Memory: Alice recalls for Bill a significant moment from her recent past. Isn't it interesting that CDs and videotapes are visible on the windowsill behind her, media that preserve information in the manner of a memory?



There are two puns in the film, one visual and one verbal, that play on colloquial expressions used in England. (Everyone knows that England became Kubrick's adopted home.) The first comes just after Bill has decided to go inside with Domino. Visible in the center of the screen is the word PULL. "Pull" is a common U.K. expression that means "pick up a person for sexual purposes." (Indeed, when I saw *Eyes Wide Shut* in England, one guy sitting in the theater near me laughed and said "pull!" out loud, laughing at the comic resonance.) Later in the film, Milich tells Bill, "Thanks for the business." "The business" is a common euphemism used by prostitutes in the U.K. ("Would you like the business?", i.e., "Would you like to come inside with me?") This is an apt phrase coming from Milich, who has just pimped his daughter to the two Japanese gentlemen.