

BETWEEN TWO WORLDS: THE FUNCTIONS OF LIMINAL SPACE IN TWENTIETH-
CENTURY LITERATURE

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A dissertation submitted to the faculty at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English in the Department of English and Comparative Literature.

Chapel Hill
2017

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ABSTRACT

Adam J. Engel: *Between Two Worlds: The Functions of Liminal Space in Twentieth-Century Literature*
(Under the direction of Pamela Cooper)

"Between Two Worlds" examines strategies used by Joseph Conrad, E. M. Forster, Virginia Woolf, Thom Gunn, and David Lynch to craft spaces in which characters can articulate seemingly ineffable experiences. To give meaningful accounts of isolation at sea, World War I's impact on a family structure, the dissolution of an AIDS-riddled body, the spiritual dissonance produced by colonization, and the danger of ignoring materiality in favor of ideological nostalgia, these authors establish spaces in which characters can challenge their bodies' boundaries. The "liminal" or middle phase of the rite of passage, treated as a real or imagined setting, enables this by temporarily dissolving conventional social hierarchies. The author hopes to draw attention to the potentially therapeutic practice of communicating liminal experience through writing, especially as it manifests during crises unique to the twentieth-century. This study intervenes in both anthropology and ontology by revealing artists' use of liminal spaces to challenge hierarchies, reimagine connections between individuals, and return voices to people who have lost them.

Two central questions emerge: Why do in-between spaces enable extraordinary communication? What sort of self exists in a space that is, by definition, between identities? In a departure from contemporary modernists such as T. S. Eliot, Conrad, Woolf, and Forster face the unsettling possibility of the self's dissolving without a new form or afterlife to follow. Gunn and Lynch never expect such a world. Rather, they learn to embrace the transient world they inhabit. To cross the threshold into liminal space is to confront all of these possibilities, and to emerge—if at all—with shifted bodily boundaries.

To Brandon, whose strength, love, and laughter made this adventure possible.
And to Dante, who helped.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I could not have completed this tome without the support of my mentors: John McGowan, Shayne Legassie, Ruth Salvaggio, and George Lensing. Thank you for contributing your time, wisdom, and patience. I would especially like to thank Pamela Cooper, for whom no idea of mine is too weird to work with. Your constant encouragement, feedback, and belief in my ability to succeed were vital to this project. I would also like to thank my past mentors who have helped me blaze this trail: David Venturo, James Stacey Taylor, Steve Runske, and Stephen O'Toole—you taught me to walk and chew gum at the same time (a skill I am still mastering). I owe many thanks to Brandon Linz and Dante von Blitzen, who put up with me throughout this endeavor. I would like to thank Autumn McClellan for her formatting expertise, life-enriching friendship, and wonderful dog Garvey. I offer gratitude to Katie Walker and Doreen Thierauf for their editorial eyes, advice, and steadfast friendship. Finally, I thank my parents, Jeff and Sheila Engel, who have provided constant support and have always encouraged my interest in literature.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 2: APPROACHING THE EVENT HORIZON IN JOSEPH CONRAD’S “THE SECRET SHARER” AND <i>HEART OF DARKNESS</i>	11
A Brief History of Nothing.....	14
Liminal Golems	18
Threshold People	26
Flirting with the Base.....	35
CHAPTER 3: THE LIMINAL SHARED MEAL IN VIRGINIA WOOLF’S <i>TO THE LIGHTHOUSE</i> AND DAVID LYNCH’S <i>TWIN PEAKS</i>	45
Gazing into the Boeuf.....	46
Something's Fishy in Twin Peaks	55
CHAPTER 4: FRAGMENTS OF MEMORY IN THOM GUNN'S <i>THE MAN WITH NIGHT SWEATS</i>	74
The Problems of Safety and Containment	76
The Material of Memory.....	82
The Body in Gunn's Liminal Dreamscapes	88
CHAPTER 5: LISTENING TO NOTHINGNESS IN E. M. FORSTER'S <i>A PASSAGE TO INDIA</i>	97
Nothing Lurks in the Marabar Caves.....	100
Navigating Liminal Waters.....	110
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION	116
ENDNOTES	120
WORKS CITED	122

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Joseph Conrad, E. M. Forster, Virginia Woolf, Thom Gunn, and David Lynch craft interstices in which their characters are able to articulate seemingly ineffable experiences. To give meaningful accounts of isolation at sea, World War I's impact on a family structure, the dissolution of an AIDS-riddled body, the spiritual dissonance produced by colonization, and the danger of ignoring materiality in favor of ideological nostalgia, these authors establish spaces in which characters can challenge their bodies' boundaries. The "liminal" or middle phase of the rite of passage, treated as a reified or imagined setting, enables this by temporarily dissolving conventional social hierarchies. This study intervenes in both anthropology and ontology by revealing artists' use of liminal spaces to challenge hierarchies, redraw subjective boundaries, and return voices to people who have lost them.

The theory of liminal space begins with the study of ritual. In *The Rites of Passage* (1960), Arnold van Gennep lays the foundation for the study of threshold ritual. Van Gennep, concerned with “ceremonial patterns which accompany a passage from one situation to another or from one cosmic or social world to another,” divides such rites into three subcategories: “preliminal rites (rites of separation), liminal rites (rites of transition), and postliminal rites (rites of incorporation)” (van Gennep 11). All of these rites may apply either to an individual or a social group—including an entire culture. For the individual, rites of separation involve a physical removal from the activities of daily life. Rites of transition involve time spent in a space apart from one’s society, often in the company of a mentor with whom the participant exchanges knowledge, objects, gazes, or more—van Gennep likens this exchange to a communion (31).

Rites of incorporation involve a reintegration into society with the knowledge needed to fulfill a particular role (typically in a hierarchy). In “Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in *Rites de Passage*” (1964), Victor Turner pushes van Gennep’s argument further by analyzing the second category, rites of transition. During the liminal phase of a rite of passage, participants are often rendered symbolically invisible, forbidden to interact with non-participants. They become “not yet classified” and are symbolized by their cultures as embryos or newborns (Turner 236). In this way, a participant loses any tie to his or her socialized self, at least temporarily. As beings invisible to their cultural structure, the participants are regarded as close to their conception of infinite power (perhaps a deity) (236). They are compensated for this isolation with complete equality to all other participants in the ritual. By the end of this phase, Turner claims, participants are supposed to have been imbued with *gnosis*, the “arcane knowledge” of their culture that will allow them to take their place among their peers (239). This passage through the ritualized threshold, whether part of a coming-of-age ritual or a graduation, is a point of no return. Participants have been permanently altered, either in their own eyes or in the eyes of their culture. After temporary dissolution, those who undergo threshold rituals return not to their old selves but to new ones—albeit embedded within the same society.

In “Whose Threshold? Women’s Strategies of Ritualization,” Jan Berry suggests that rituals can challenge dominant (often patriarchal) narratives by introducing new symbolic expressions into women’s lives. Berry gives the example of a woman who builds a dream-catcher with her friends to celebrate the completion of her dissertation. Rather than settling for the typical graduation ceremony, a relic of a community characteristically exclusive of women, this woman chose to create her own transition ritual, one that is not sanctioned by social authority but instead challenges (or in this example, merely ignores) that authority (Berry 278-9).

Berry's suggestion points to questions at the heart of my project: why do certain experiences warrant ritualized commemoration, and how do authors use ritual to approach these experiences in their art? Citing Heather Walton, Berry highlights the role of ritual in articulating difficult experiences:

There are some stories that resist telling. Heather Walton argues that some stories cannot be told without domesticating the pain and the horror of the experience, and that new ways of speaking need to be found: 'What is needed is not narrative but poesis; images, symbols and metaphors that carry the pain of trauma without committing the blasphemy of trying to represent, comprehend or reconcile the horror in story form.' [. . .] This poses the question as to whether ritual comes into its own when words and stories are inadequate. [. . .] Perhaps there is an elusive element in ritualizing which takes us where storytelling alone cannot go. (Berry 287; Walton, "Speaking in Signs" in Berry)

But what is this "elusive element" of ritual, and how can it take us farther than words? And what sort of experiences cannot be adequately approached by words? I wish to argue that Berry's understanding of threshold ritual as more than a socially-sanctioned, temporary escape from hierarchy applies not only to women's ritual, but potentially to any liminal experience, especially those secular rituals enacted in a text rather than a temple.

The precise meaning of the threshold or liminal phase in ritual has been a subject of recent debate. In the aforementioned "Whose Threshold?", Berry raises several feminist critiques of Victor Turner's theory of liminality. Caroline Walker Bynum points out that Turner's concept of the threshold is problematic for women and other marginalized groups, who often neither have the luxury of withdrawing from their society nor stand to improve their status by doing so:

"liminality itself—as fully elaborated by Turner—may be less a universal moment of meaning needed by human beings as they move through social dramas than an escape for those who bear the burdens and reap the benefits of a high place in the social structure" (Bynum 34). Berry pursues Bynum's logic to suggest that "women's ritualizing of the liminal phase will look very differently from that of men" (Berry 276). Anthropologist Ronald Grimes broadens the scope of

this difference. After a year of passing around an egg-shaped sock darning with his students before and after each class, Grimes offers a final explanation of the activity: “It means whatever it has come to mean by the actions, feelings, and thoughts you have mobilized around it in this class” (Grimes 81). Grimes suggests that a ritual practiced by twenty people may be no less a ritual than one practiced by a nation, and that (as Berry reiterates) even critical, self-aware individuals may practice and create threshold rituals (Grimes 82; Berry 281). If we accept this, then the practitioners of many individual threshold rituals will seek to subvert van Gennepe’s postliminal phase, avoid a return to normalcy, and replace this return with a representation of their struggle, or even a renegotiation of power relations (Berry 283). This project will use van Gennepe’s and Turner’s model as a base, noting the significant ways in which rituals diverge from this model depending on the practitioner’s personal experience.

Catherine Bell notes another objection to Turner’s threshold theory and assumptions on which it rests. For Turner, the liminal phase ends with a re-inscription of social norms (“reincorporation”), and so it is a neutralized container for conflict and critique. This assumes with Emile Durkheim that all ritual has the dualistic tendency to oppose, and then rejoin, various permutations of the thought/action binary (Bell 24). A temporary critique of social norms at a safe distance, followed by reintegration into one’s society, has little or no value when one is a marginalized member of that society. Thus, as Jan Berry argues, women’s threshold rituals are concerned not with an orderly questioning of and recommitment to social norms, but with a performance outside of those boundaries (Berry 278). Marginalized people harness the implicit power of liminality to resist interpellation. As Bell suggests with her critique, to enter liminal territory is not necessarily to be a consciousness divorced from a body. Rather, it is to abandon one’s conventional limits—conventional in the sense of conforming to an established, rational

collection of social rules and assumptions dictated by one's culture—and open oneself to radical transformation.

In “From One Identity to Another,” Julia Kristeva describes an extrasemantic mode of communication that operates in asocial, liminal space outside the bounds within which the self typically operates. Kristeva argues for a conception of subjectivity she calls the “speaking subject,” the ego that becomes a distinct subject by uttering “I” (1164). This subject replaces the philological subject who stands apart from and witnesses history, thereby stabilizing it into a coherent narrative. Kristeva thinks through the potential modes of expression open to such a subject by arguing that “poetic language” reaches beyond Jacques Lacan’s Symbolic Order (the order that composes the subject according to the masculine Law of the Father, produced by the resolution of the Freudian Oedipus complex), destabilizing rather than reinforcing subjective boundaries and (as Butler suggests) multiplying the possibilities for how a subject can communicate (1167). To do so, poetic language must employ extra-semantic expression, including, for example, rhythm and intonation. Kristeva calls this mode of expression the “semiotic disposition” and compares its sounds—its voices—to engraved symbols, ones that allow for ambiguous, unstable meaning rather than the referential meanings of semantic discourse. This semiotic disposition contains the “chora,” taken from the Greek word meaning “receptacle,” a womb-like space for experiences that cannot be expressed through logical language (1167). The speaking subject, as a user of language, requires both the symbolic order and semiotic disposition to exist, but there are radical differences in the degree to which a subject uses these modes. To illustrate this, Kristeva compares scientific discourse, which privileges symbolic language—direct, clear language that attempts to be as stable in its meaning as possible—with poetic language, which does the opposite: it attempts to multiply possible

meanings, supporting the speaking subject in the absence of semantics with its rhythm, intonation, and other sonic functions (1167-8). If Kristeva is correct, then the semiotic disposition that is part of every subject also renders subjects vulnerable to dissolution when removed from conventional settings; subjects' temporary or limited departures from socialized, rational communication are departures from ego. This makes the semiotic disposition, and the liminal spaces that allow it, seem threatening to subjects who approach them. Perhaps they are—but to brave this danger often results in self-knowledge and transformation.

In “On the Limits of Sexual Autonomy,” Judith Butler carries Kristeva's observations forward by suggesting that prevailing concepts of the bounded individual are outdated. Butler calls for the reimagining of the idea of the human by introducing a concept of “ethical enmeshment.” She argues that all embodied subjects are dependent on each other, both in the material sense, for protection and basic bodily needs, and in the subjective sense, for recognition (25). Butler begins her discussion by asking what makes a life worth living, or more specifically, what makes a life “grievable.” For one’s life to be so, one must be considered human, and so Butler’s discussion of enmeshed subjectivity, her attempt to reimagine our interconnectedness, has high stakes. She claims that the way to widen the scope of human rights is not to create an all-encompassing definition of the human, but to leave that definition open in acknowledgement of its fluidity:

We might try to claim that we must first know the fundamentals of the human in order to preserve and promote human life as we know it. But what if the very categories of the human have excluded those who should be described and sheltered within its terms? What if those who ought to belong to the human do not operate within the modes of reasoning and justifying validity claims that have been proffered by western forms of rationalism? Have we ever yet known the human? And what might it take to approach that knowing? (Butler 36)

Butler acknowledges that people, especially members of oppressed minorities, must wield a unified concept of themselves in order to be politically effective, able to secure rights and

protections from their society (28). However, this is not the only way to understand subjectivity, but just a “legal” way, a useful and necessary fiction (20). Each individual’s subjectivity is not actually self-contained in this way but dependent on others’ recognition and protection. Those who are excluded from this recognition of subjectivity because they fall outside sexual and gender norms are left with diminished humanity, unable to partake in enmeshed subjectivity. If this is true, rather than working toward establishing new, concrete norms for sexuality and gender, we must expand future possibilities for norms.

Though writing at disparate times, the authors I discuss are all modernists linked by a concern for consciousness and the boundaries of subjectivity. In *A Genealogy of Modernism*, Michael Levenson argues that Joseph Conrad considers "the 'subtlety' of human consciousness" to be "the source of meaning and artistic 'justice'; against the evanescent flux of the phenomenal world, it provides permanence, pattern and significance" (2). I will assume with Levenson that this curiosity about the nature of individuality, and literary experimentation with "evanescent" or temporary subjectivity, is a cornerstone of the modernist movement that began in the early twentieth-century. The publication of modernist monoliths such as James Joyce's *Ulysses* and T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* in 1922 are a high-water mark for modernism, but its themes persist into the 1980s and 90s, alongside postmodernism. Conrad, Forster, Woolf, Gunn, and Lynch, though bridging the twentieth century, display a similar modernist proclivity to experiment with expansion of the self and with the communication it enables. All suggest a shared material foundation of subjectivity: the non-hierarchical, underlying self which Georges Bataille considers base (*Visions* 31). And, in all of the texts I discuss, this base element is prone to arise at any moment: in the texts of Conrad and Lynch, the base is the menacing, vital-seeming forest;

in the texts of Woolf and Lynch, it is food's force upon the body; and in the texts of Gunn and Forster it is the bodily relationship that persists beyond national borders and even after death.

My approaches to these artists' texts raise questions that persist throughout the study: why do in-between spaces enable extraordinary communication? What sort of self exists in a space that is, by definition, between identities? In chapter two, I demonstrate Conrad's preliminary answer to both questions: a base self exists in liminal space, indistinguishable from the forest or sea surrounding it and so able to acquire and express dangerous knowledge, if only temporarily. In chapters three and four, Woolf, Lynch, and Gunn address the latter question by experimenting with representations of bodies in liminal settings. Lynch, though he works later than the other authors and in the medium of television, is among the most relevant contemporary examples of an artist placing characters within liminal space to enhance their expressive capabilities. He uses doppelgängers to explore liminal thresholds in a modernist mode that echoes Conrad's exploration of subjectivity through doubling in "The Secret Sharer" and *Heart of Darkness*. Lynch's doppelgängers survive on repulsive food, and this food disrupts the small community of Twin Peaks in the same way that Mrs. Ramsay's food unites her family and friends. In chapter five, I claim that Forster addresses both questions at once by placing characters haunted by their relationship's colonial power dynamics on a literal collision course. Each of these authors experiments with the crossing of threshold spaces into new subjective territories.

Chapter two analyzes Joseph Conrad's use of ritual form in *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and "The Secret Sharer" (1910). Conrad reveals the dangerous, tempting knowledge communicable only in liminal settings. His works are marked by darkly comic moments of absurdity, including a dead scorpion in an inkwell and canons fired wantonly into a continent. William Freedman argues that the "foggy spots" in Conrad, moments that language is powerless to articulate, do

more than outline the contours of what can't be known. They also express Conrad's ambivalence about the truths to which knowledge refers: should they be known? Are they dangerous? Should we turn back? I argue that Conrad draws the supposed contours of language's limit and invites readers to glimpse truths beyond that threshold. Conrad's narrators are able to approach these truths only by proxy; in both *Heart of Darkness* and "The Secret Sharer," their doppelgängers must take the final steps. Conrad allows his narrators to approach the truth found at the end of rites of passage, and to contain it (imperfectly) within language.

My third chapter focuses on the ritualized tedium of shared meals and dinner parties, beginning with Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927) and moving to David Lynch's *Twin Peaks* (1990-1), a television series that owes much to Woolf's treatment of the liminal dinner and uses it to warn against idealistic nostalgia. Mrs. Ramsay's dinner in Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* will act as centerpiece for a spread of instances in which troubled relationships and repulsive materiality erupt into the dining space. Conventional hierarchies are not replaced, as in Conrad, but thrown into sharp relief: tensions and forces burst through ritual's placid surface. After discussing *To the Lighthouse*, I will trace the ritualization of the tedious meal through scenes from Lynch's *Twin Peaks*. Both Woolf's Mrs. Ramsay and Lynch's Laura Palmer drive their narratives before and after their absence. Each narrative becomes a series of these women's traces, and their agencies persist after they become lifeless material. Dale Cooper and Donna Hayward discover that this path of traces leads not to cathartic knowledge, but to ubiquitous forces that can only be encountered, never contained.

In Thom Gunn's *The Man with Night Sweats* (1992), the focus of my fourth chapter, each sexual act is brush with death, an opportunity poised between the greatest possible intimacy and the greatest possible loss. Gunn creates liminal dreamscapes in his poetry to contain fragments of

his deceased friends' subjectivity. By doing so, he expands his own sense of self, and his poems present narrators that envelop and protect the characters they remember. For Gunn, liminal settings such as dream allow cathartic contact between bodies that would no longer be possible in conventional space. This is not a promise of transcendence after death, as earlier modernists like T. S. Eliot seek, but a method for embracing the fluidity of the self despite the vulnerability it entails.

My final chapter explores the transformative potential of ritualized sound in Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924). Forster dwells on the liminal Marabar caves, marking them as ancient and hollow, empty of semantic meaning in a way that renders human activity invisible and irrelevant. The sign that the novel's English tourists have crossed the threshold past which history loses its meaning is a persistent echo, "boum," that renders speech impossible. When language, one of humanity's oldest institutions, loses meaning in these ancient caves, nothing remains to enforce ideological and national divisions, though friendship is still a challenge. Forster uses ritualized repetition in liminal settings to break down language, and without its influence, the rational hierarchies established by colonial power become unstable. Though this does not ensure successful connection between colonizer and colonized, it does allow for these selves to collide in potentially transformative ways.

CHAPTER 2: APPROACHING THE EVENT HORIZON IN JOSEPH CONRAD'S "THE SECRET SHARER" AND *HEART OF DARKNESS*

“[F]or academic men to be happy, the universe would have to take shape. All of philosophy has no other goal: it is a matter of giving a frock coat to what is, a mathematical frock coat.”

—Georges Bataille, *Visions of Excess*

Joseph Conrad's works are distinguished by their moments of absurdity, at times humorous, often dark: a scorpion in an inkwell, guns fired wantonly into a continent, and a hurricane successfully yet mysteriously traversed are a few examples. William Freedman argues that the "foggy spots" in Conrad, moments or phenomena that language is powerless to articulate, do more than outline the contours of what can't be known. They also express Conrad's ambivalence about the truths to which knowledge refers: should they be known? Are they threatening or dangerous? Should we turn back? This chapter explores the other side of the coin: does Conrad not only draw the supposed contours of language's limit, but also invite us to glimpse truths beyond that threshold? If an encounter with points of hidden truth generates what Victor Turner calls "*gnosis*," arcane knowledge granted during rites of passage, then these foggy spots not only threaten Conrad's characters, but also tempt them toward transformative experience. Conrad's narrators are undoubtedly fearful of these foggy spots. But coexisting with that fear is the desire to know truths that are inaccessible to rational understanding, and perhaps a linguistic means of realizing—if ephemerally—this desire. By imposing a ritual form onto his stories and setting them within what Turner calls "liminal space," Conrad allows his narrators to approach *gnosis* and to contain it (imperfectly) within their stories—within language. Following Arnold Van Gennep, Turner outlines the form of transitional rites, a pattern familiar to readers of Conrad:

The first phase of separation comprises symbolic behavior signifying the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure or a set of cultural conditions (a "state"); during the intervening liminal period, the state of the ritual subject (the "passenger") is ambiguous; he passes through a realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state; in the third phase the passage is consummated. The ritual subject, individual or corporate, is in a stable state once more. ("Betwixt" 47)

"Liminal entities," including space and its occupants, are "betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial [sic]" (*Ritual* 95). Before returning from this space, participants are imbued with *gnosis*, the "arcane knowledge" that will allow them to take their place among their peers (Turner 239). The initiate-captain's urge to approach the dark land mass Koh-ring in "The Secret Sharer," and his mix of apprehension and ecstasy while doing so, becomes understandable in this context: it is a ritual movement through liminal space and toward a horizon both feared and craved.

What are the dark horizons that manifest as the line of shrunken heads outside Kurtz's house, the black hole of Koh-ring, and the seams between earth, sea, and sky which partition Conrad's ocean? These boundaries mark the threshold beyond which the traveler utterly loses her sense of conventional, embodied subjectivity: the severed heads mock the embodied Marlow by leering from their posts, Koh-ring is an all-encompassing mass of darkness, and the boundary between the shore and the Bay of Siam is "a perfect and unmarked closeness" with no defining features (Conrad 17). Even the line of fishing stakes that the captain glimpses as he enters the Bay are "mysterious" and "incomprehensible," losing their directional function in the ocean's vastness. In *Heart of Darkness*, as in "The Secret Sharer," a line of stakes—this time topped by shrunken heads—becomes an anti-sign, a warning that orientation is impossible. These thresholds force Conrad's narrators to submerge their subjectivity within ephemeral and terrifying liminal space. They are places of panic, but also of liberation: the subject who enters liminal space becomes a force free of any particular social hierarchy. This dissolution shares the

generative quality of ritual passage as described by Turner: it is *ecstatic* in the Greek sense (*ekstasis*), a chance for the subject temporarily to step outside herself, and therein lies its temptation. By approaching the threshold beyond which they'd fully abandon their subjectivity, these characters are able to glimpse the ineffable. Conrad's horizons, the lines that serve as boundaries of "impenetrable darkness," are event horizons: the relationship between a subject and its socially constructed, rationally defined roles dissolves as the subject approaches them; beyond them, subjects cannot remain intact. At the threshold of this disorienting space, the captain is able to glimpse the truth he needs to assume his new authority as captain, and at such a threshold Marlow is able fleetingly to commune with Kurtz.

Ritual is often mimetic, a reenactment, like a dream that manifests anxiety. But unlike that repetition, in which the dreamer futilely attempts to avoid a predetermined outcome, ritual can be efficacious: repeatedly, ritual's participants symbolically reaffirm their solidarity with their community (Durkheim 264). For Bataille, ritual's objects are more than symbolic: they are an embodiment of the repulsive, unknowable, irrational aspect of the sacred. The liminal self could be understood as this repulsive, irrational aspect. Like the Freudian unconscious, it bubbles up from beneath the surface established by repression. In *Heart of Darkness*, Kurtz's voice rises from a dying body to haunt Marlow until he shares its horrible vision. In "The Secret Sharer," Leggatt's emergence from the sea is an irruption of the irrational into the narrator's blossoming conventional role as ship's captain. This irrational repetition of the captain, however, does not simply return to the depths without leaving a trace; nor does its appearance provide a therapeutic opportunity for the captain to confront his hidden desires. Instead, I argue that doppelgängers in both *Heart of Darkness* and "The Secret Sharer" help the narrators navigate liminal space. Marlow and the captain glean traces of knowledge left by doubles who have crossed an event

horizon; only through such proxies can Conrad's subjects encounter truth without irretrievably losing themselves. Doppelgängers are elements in liminal rituals that Conrad superimposes onto his narrators' drama (and which they, in turn, impose on their mystified crews); Kurtz and Leggatt, intentionally or not, enable the narrators to complete and return from their rituals. How are we to understand this ineffable truth that manifests in Conrad's work to fascinate and terrify his narrators? I will explore Conrad's representations of knowledge-resistant phenomena through the lens of a particular tendency in modern German and French metaphysics.

A Brief History of Nothing

Sapere aude! declares Immanuel Kant in 1784, using the words of Horace to set the tone of the European Enlightenment. The ultimate tool for gaining knowledge, for Kant, is man's rational faculty. By exercising reason, we can access not only *phenomena*, things as they appear to us, but also *noumena*, the essence of things, or things as they really are. Kant recognizes that there are sublime objects that overwhelm our senses either through their massive size ("mathematical sublime") or through their force against our will ("dynamic sublime"). But even these objects are subject to reason. A giant redwood, for example, is not after all the object of mathematical sublimity, but instead the concept of absolute totality which it evokes is sublime—a rational concept. Similarly, a deadly hurricane is not actually the object of dynamic sublimity; the sublime is the rational concept of absolute freedom attendant on the storm. The feeling of sublimity is therefore a "rapid alternation" between our fear of being overwhelmed, and the rational knowledge of absolutes that overwhelm the overwhelming. For Kant, even what seems to be unrepresentable and formless still ultimately falls within reason's domain. To know, therefore, we must always use reason.

This mission to acquire knowledge via reason has undergone a variety of critiques in the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries. The most influential of these challenges all

suggest alternative modes of knowing and thus the possibility of non-rational representation. Friedrich Nietzsche, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, writes of Dionysian ecstasy as a state opposed to the “beautiful semblance” of Apolline “measure” (128). “Measure” is Nietzsche’s musical metaphor for limitation: as a measure of music circumscribes a rhythmic unit of notes, so the artist circumscribes his artifice, and so dreams show us a contained, aesthetic vision (“semblance”) of our experiences. Nietzsche regards the Apolline impulse as tending toward rational civilization in much the same way that the later Jacques Lacan describes a repressive “symbolic order” of logic and language into which subjects are socialized (1167). The disciplinarian undertone of these theories is appropriate when we remember the musician’s slang for measure: “bar,” an enforcer, a warden. The Apolline’s contrary is the Dionysian impulse, a drive toward the dissolution of individuality that accompanies intoxication. This impulse is most recognizable in musical sound, that which expresses meaning beyond the measurable. Nietzsche describes the penetration of the Dionysian impulse into Apollonian measure of ancient Greek art as a bending, not breaking, of bars:

It was into a world built up and artificially protected like this [Greek “Apolline” culture] that the ecstatic tones of the festival of Dionysos now penetrated, tones in which all the *excess* of pleasure and suffering and knowledge in nature revealed itself at one and the same time. [. . .] [I]n the self-oblivion of the Dionysiac states the individual with all his limits and measures sank out of sight[.] (128-9)

The “excess” of formless, unlimited collectivity—though a deeper truth than Apolline semblance—must be contained and harnessed to service an elevated “will,” human motivation which finally manifests in Greece as tragic theater, and in modernity as music like Wagner’s opera, which romanticized the heroic folklore of Germanic nations and was later appropriated by Nazism. Despite Nietzsche’s passionate advocacy for intoxication, his goal still aligns with Kant’s: *sapere aude*. For Nietzsche, what we dare to know includes an acceptance and containment of the irrational, not an unadulterated encounter with it. Though valuable, such

experience is hierarchically lower than reason, and worthless or even dangerous without reason's intervention.

Although there are many interventions between them, Martin Heidegger offers the most relevant continuation of Nietzsche's challenge to the supremacy of reason; like Nietzsche, he acknowledges the utility of encountering the irrational, but he departs from Nietzsche in affirming a total immersion in "nothingness," a liminal mode that lacks reason's mediating presence. Heidegger claims that the myriad of modern scientific disciplines, in their striving to know their specific corners of the world, miss the forest for the trees, with one caveat: there is no forest (94). The modern sciences refuse to attend to nothingness, since they consider nothingness merely the opposite of being (96). For Heidegger, nothingness is "the complete negation of the totality of beings" (98). It cannot be grasped intellectually, and thus it is more primitive than negation itself (which is an intellectual act). We may encounter nothingness during the mood of anxiety, a negative ecstasy in which identity dissolves: "We cannot say what it is before which one feels ill at ease [*unheimlich*]. As a whole it is so for one. All things and we ourselves sink into indifference" (101).¹ But what is the benefit of encountering nothing? Such authentic encounters, claims Heidegger, lead to an elevation of *dasein*, our specific, historical way of being-in-the-world (109). Not only does this attempted elevation of our *dasein* by bringing ourselves to meet nothingness create an affinity (however tenuous) between Heidegger and fascism, but it also implies something to be elevated *above*. It is therefore essential for us to encounter the nothing, but only in service to an idealized end.

Drawing on these forerunners, Georges Bataille and his radical revision of materialism provide a way into Conrad's "foggy spots," since base material serves as both a grounding and deeply unsettling substance for the non-conventional subjects who explore these ritualized

liminal spaces. In “The Big Toe,” Georges Bataille distinguishes between two kinds of seductiveness—of elegant form, and of absolute baseness—and our ability to know or not to know a phenomenon with our intellect. To know a thing’s form is to grasp it with the intellect; the formless, which Bataille equates to base material, cannot be so grasped. The formless (base) cannot be “frocked” by the intellect but also makes no pretense to elevating us via our knowledge of it (*Visions* 31). This is an historic break with past metaphysics, one that influences future philosophers, including feminists such as Julia Kristeva, who affirm a non-intellectual, arational mode of experience as an end in itself, not a means to an idealized end. Kant’s “*sapere aude*” is turned on its head by Bataille and, I hope to show, by Conrad: dare *not* to know, or perhaps more appropriately, dare to encounter the unknowable in all its baseness, without taming, containing, or elevating it. It is this uncomfortable or dangerous encounter to which Bataille refers in “The Big Toe”’s closing comment: “A return to reality does not imply any new acceptances, but means that one is seduced in a base manner, without transpositions and to the point of screaming, opening his eyes wide: opening them wide, then, before a big toe” (23). As we will see, the matter-of-factness with which the base big toe falls at the end of this piece mirrors the baseness of Koh-ring at the end of Conrad’s “Secret Sharer.”

Although the German philosophers I’ve mentioned so far challenge the Enlightenment privileging of reason, they stop short of transcending the dualistic mode so typical of Western thought. Nietzsche’s theory of the Apolline/Dionysian binary is dualistic: the elevated, Apolline mind opposes the lowly Dionysian body. Heidegger tries to go beyond dualism by articulating a “nothing” that is more primitive than rational activity, but he fails, since his desired elevation of *dasein* implies dualism: again, the low becomes the high. By refusing to apologize for the base, Georges Bataille succeeds where Heidegger fails, collapsing the high/low distinction by

introducing base material as a third term (Noys 502). Bataille does not insist that humanity holds a privileged place in the world, and instead he chooses to dwell with the base, the space and matter that Conrad represents as primitive. Base materialism raises a question that art, rather than philosophy, can answer: how are we to conceive of a self underwritten by (or fully composed of) base material? It is in this mode of inexcusable, irredeemable baseness that Conrad portrays the self that arises during liminal ritual. Baseness consumes and transforms Conrad's characters and, like Bataille, Conrad acknowledges—but ultimately rejects as fiction—the ontological hierarchy that would denigrate the base. Baseness is irredeemable because it has no need of redemption.

Liminal Golems

I have claimed that Conrad places his characters within ritual structures to allow them to approach truths that would otherwise be inaccessible to language, especially encounters with the base. These truths are the most difficult elements of Conrad to write about: like base material, it is their nature to elude expression. One is left to describe Conrad's approach to truth—his way of knowing—much like he describes his protagonists' approaches: by tracing the approach's form, describing the process of gaining knowledge rather than that knowledge's referent. In "The Secret Sharer," for instance, Conrad gives the reader minute detail about the ship's approach to Koh-ring, a manifestation of base truth, but the landmass remains a black hole in the narrative (as I will discuss shortly). Conrad begins to elucidate the relationship between truth and knowledge in his Preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus*: "[A]rt itself may be defined as a single-minded attempt to render the highest kind of justice to the visible universe, by bringing to light the truth, manifold and one, underlying its every aspect" ("Preface"). Conrad's emphasis on "justice" and "justification" signals that art justifies itself by approaching the "truth, manifold and one," underlying the universe's every individual aspect. Hence, the "unrestful episode in the obscure lives of a few individuals" that constitutes the *Narcissus* must also be presented by the artist; if

it's an approach to truth, it's justified. The artist often fails this approach to some degree: "[a]rt is long and life is short, and success is very far off. And thus, doubtful of strength to travel so far, we talk a little about the aim—the aim of art, which, like life itself, is inspiring, difficult—obscured by mists." As Conrad suggests above, the "aim of art" is universally to communicate truths lived by individuals. This aim is "obscured by mists" when knowledge cannot reach the "clear logic of a triumphant conclusion" or arrive empirically at "one of those heartless secrets which are called the Laws of Nature"; knowledge cannot fully access truth. Marlow's narration of the never-quite-complete approach to Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness* and the Captain's thoughts during his ship's near-collision with Koh-ring in "The Secret Sharer" are particularly revealing failures to render truth communicable by language and thus knowable. Both Kurtz's bodiless voice and the black silhouette of Koh-ring are manifestations of base material, an ontological truth opaque to conventional subjects.

These obscured, dangerous, yet tempting truths are what William Freedman calls "foggy spots" in Conrad's narratives. Freedman outlines various critical interpretations of Conrad's relationship to knowledge and its occlusion. A "minority" of critics hold that Conrad believed language could make readers "see" (H. M. Deleski's appropriation of Marlow's word) a communal truth behind the semblance of reality; in other words, language grants access to a universally intelligible, knowable truth (Freedman 13). Proponents of what Freedman calls the "more common" view, including Ted Billy, suggest that though truth may exist in Conrad's world, language is an "ensnaring illusion" that can never articulate it (13). It is evident in Conrad's work, however, that language strives to articulate truth, whatever form it may take. Edward Said locates Conrad's logic in the malleability of truth: "if Conrad can show that all human activity depends on controlling a radically unstable reality to which words approximate

only by will or convention, the same is true of empire, of venerating the idea, and so forth. With Conrad, then, we are in a world being made and unmade more or less all the time" (Said 30). In support of Said, Freedman notes in Conrad "a sustained effort to make words tell, even as it is frequently evident that words are ultimately inadequate, so special and eccentric is the experience" (Freedman 13). "To make words tell" can mean to make words express truth, but it can also mean to force words to generate truth. Perhaps Conradian truth must be wrung from a struggle with language, rather than discovered.

Between this malleable truth and its articulation, J. Hillis Miller and Royal Roussel situate "an ominous darkness, amorphous and opaque, the primal chaos out of which the world was formed and to which it rushes, annihilatingly, to return [. . .] an image of matter stripped of all attributes but existence. It *is*, but nothing more can be said about it" (Roussel in Freedman 13). If, for Conrad, intelligible truth is created through struggles to control and even apprehend language, then this darkness is the source of all epistemological difficulty. The language these critics use to describe Conradian darkness implies both extreme excess and extreme simplicity: the darkness is "ominous," "amorphous," greater than the world and capable of annihilating it, and yet it is "stripped" naked, refined to its foundation. In its refusal to be contained in any hierarchy produced by linguistic or intellectual forces, the darkness corresponds with Bataille's base material. Bataille uses body parts to exemplify the base, especially the big toe, which is the dirty foundation upon which being (and thus hierarchy) depends, yet pretends not to. Conrad similarly treats parts of bodies as dirty materials that both enable and defy hierarchy, as I will show. For Conrad, these body parts tend to mark the thresholds past which control of language—even a voice—offers no guarantee of stable truth. These thresholds both attract and repel Conrad's characters; they tempt with knowledge that can only be gained through an encounter

with baseness. Freedman compares Conrad's ambivalence toward the unveiling of truth to a "dance [. . .] an alternating attraction and revulsion, eagerness and failure of will that urge him toward and then away from what he anticipates or glimpses" (12). This is the same contradictory reaction that Julia Kristeva attributes to the "abject," which "beseeches, worries and fascinates desire, which, nevertheless, does not let itself be seduced. Apprehensive, desire turns aside; sickened, it rejects" (1). The knowledge of hidden truths—truths which manifest in Conrad as base material—possesses these abject characteristics. It entices characters, as *gnosis* motivates the participants of liminal rituals, yet renders itself inaccessible to language. Rather than viewing Roussel's "darkness" as an autonomous obstacle to expression, I view it as the base material ground in which truth finally rests, a foundation Conrad's characters attempt not to overcome but to encounter at face value.

Like Freedman, Ella Ophir has recently shed light on Conrad's treatment of truth and knowledge. In *Heart of Darkness* and Conrad's other novels of that period, Ophir locates a nineteenth-century notion of "sincerity," the most essential feature of which is "articulate expression that is congruent with actual feeling" (342). Conrad affirms sincerity in the Preface to the *Narcissus*, when he calls for art both to approximate the artist's lived experience (his "truth") and to temporarily awaken the reader to the forces, "the stress and passion," which compose that experience: "[t]he [creative] task approached in tenderness and faith is to hold up unquestioningly, without choice and without fear, the rescued fragment before all eyes in the light of a sincere mood. It is to show its vibration, its colour, its form; and through its movement, its form, and its colour, reveal the substance of its truth—disclose its inspiring secret: the stress and passion within the core of each convincing moment" ("Preface"). Over the course of Conrad's literary career, claims Ophir, his concept of sincerity lost its moral and social value;

what remained was the revelation sincerity entails: self-knowledge and its articulation. Lacking its Victorian moral and social connotations, the self that is known in this gesture need not be virtuous or beautiful. On the contrary, the selves Conrad reveals are often ugly, detestable—base. The famous “horror!” of Kurtz’s self-knowledge throws into sharp relief the other horrible selves throughout the text, including Marlow, who has also participated in Kurtz’s horror. In this instance and others, I suggest that Conrad’s sincerity is not diminished, but refined: free of moral concerns determined by external, hierarchically social forces, the self as it exists when divorced from convention—a hidden, base truth—reveals itself. This is the “defrocked” self, the amorphous base material upon which all form depends. An encounter with the base is ephemeral, as is any revelation brought about by art. Conrad refers to the instant of revelation as the "moment of courage," the "convincing moment," and most tellingly the "moment of vision" during which the artist and his reader briefly find "solidarity" through sensuous, not intellectual, identification. The artist's appeal "must be an impression conveyed through the senses [. . .] because temperament, whether individual or collective, is not amenable to [rational] persuasion" ("Preface"). Conrad's moments of vision, at their most sincere and least conventional, are insights into what Freedman calls "spots of unknowing," moments or phenomena that attract and repulse by their resistance to rational language. The remainder of this chapter will expand on Freedman’s and Ophir’s arguments, using Turner and Bataille especially to further understand the nature of Conrad’s spots of unknowing and his strategy for communicating encounters with such “spots” to others. This strategy involves the ritualization of narrative, and the treatment of the protagonist as a primary participant.

In both "The Secret Sharer" and *Heart of Darkness*, a subject that has been temporarily ripped from his conventional role participates in a liminal passage, but only the protagonist's

doppelgänger completes those passages, generating a profound yet necessarily incomplete glimpse of truth for the protagonist and reader. The nature of this temporary doppelgänger-subject, for Conrad, reflects the element—earth, sea, or a combination of the two—that most characterizes the narrative’s setting. Conrad’s earth and sea are more than landscapes, however; they are excessive, powerful forces in his universe, and Conrad’s doppelgängers, like golems, seem to derive their substance from the most primal matter. The emergence and withdrawal of these doppelgängers has the character of birthing: sucking mud and bioluminescence. This is the base material from which the rational, social world emerges and to which it must return in the end. In Conrad, reason’s domination is always ephemeral, though it is not simply replaced by liberating sensuality or intuition. The massive, empty, hungry forest of the Congo and the devouring maw of Koh-ring represent the limit of reason, which are both threats and potential sites of transformation.

Conrad converts his narrative to a rite of passage by reimagining the self as base material, represented by the sea in “The Secret Sharer” and by the earth in *Heart of Darkness*. Their doppelgängers arise from the narrative’s basest substance, its shit—or, the narrators descend into it. Each narrator experiences this descent not just vicariously through his double, but as if his double was his own base reality, the repulsive matter supporting their conventional, rational subjectivity. This temporary state in Conrad’s narrative serves the same function as Van Gennep’s rite of passage: to facilitate transformation from a childish identity to a role of wisdom and authority. For Conrad, however, the *gnosis* understood outside a rational, conventional context does not necessarily remain with the narrator after the double disappeared and left its trace: after the reassertion of the conventional self over the base-material self, the experience of *gnosis* is no longer accessible. And, Conrad seems to suggest, perhaps this is often for the best.

Knowledge can be dangerous: hence, his narrators approach it by proxy, willfully participating in a ritual that allows them temporarily to approach *gnosis* before turning back to the illusion of civilization. This approach must be a voyage. It is a physical movement away from the forces determining conventional social hierarchy, through the base avatar that manifests where traces of *gnosis* have been left, and then back to safe harbor. For Conrad, transportation is transformation.

Geoffrey Harpham notes that Conrad's ocean, like Freedman's attractive yet repulsive knowledge, is at some times a reflective surface, but at others an occlusive space. The ocean is an unrestricted field of exploration in which to explore self-doubt and erotic desire, but also one that must be traversed within a bounded, claustrophobic vessel (83-4). This vessel can never reach a resting place in this free space. It must approach a threshold, the boundary beyond which rational knowledge is impossible, and turn back. Early in "The Secret Sharer," Conrad ridicules the notion that we can know everything about our personal narratives: he does so through the person of the first mate, who

"liked to account to himself" for practically everything that came in his way, down to a miserable scorpion he had found in his cabin a week before. The why and the wherefore of that scorpion—how it got on board and came to select his room rather than the pantry (which was a dark place and more what a scorpion would be partial to), and how on earth it managed to drown itself in the inkwell of his writing desk—had exercised him infinitely. (19-20)

This sailor's effort is fruitless, and Conrad emphasizes his folly: the task "had exercised him infinitely" (19). The scorpion, a creature partial to "dark" or occluded places, abandons its habitat to make a disturbing appearance before sinking again into the "inkwell," a blackness similar to that from whence it came. This image, though seemingly a minor detail, is perhaps one of the most direct manifestations of Roussel's "ominous, amorphous" Conradian darkness that retreats as quickly as it advances, repels with its ugliness but seduces with its mysterious promise of a basic truth. In typical Conradian fashion, this event is terrible, yet strangely comic: the scorpion's

invasion of the mate's quarters, though dangerous, is hilarious in its absurdity—much like the mate's philosophy of "accounting." Accounting implies inscription, made possible by ink; the scorpion merges with the vehicle of language, the mate's primary tool, as if to suggest that language is inseparable from arational forces. He exercises this tool by discoursing, as the narrator makes clear: "His dominant trait was to take all things into earnest consideration," and he makes a "pronouncement" about the *Sephora* anchored in a group of islands (19-20). This mate is driven by reason, but the scorpion's appearance defies rational explanation. The presence of such a rational man surrounded by the chaos of the sea is almost as absurd as a scorpion in an inkwell. Reason, Conrad suggests, has boundaries.

The scorpion episode is made stranger by the fact that the scorpion is already dead upon its discovery, having "drown[ed] itself in the inkwell." Leggatt emerges in much the same way as the scorpion—seemingly from nowhere—but he is described as virile, and the danger he represents isn't immediately apparent. The already-dead scorpion is the trace of *gnosis*: it is knowledge in the form of a confrontation with base material left behind by a living being. This cadaverous material is no longer living, but retains the form of its threatening past existence, thus forcing the mate to encounter it directly rather than symbolically. Again, Kristeva clarifies the nature of this revenant:

A wound with blood and pus, or the sickly, acrid smell of sweat, of decay, does not *signify* death. In the presence of signified death—a flat encephalograph, for instance—I would understand, react, or accept. No, as in true theater, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. (3)

Kristeva shares Bataille's focus on encounters with the base that don't apologize for it or try to assert its place within a hierarchy. The corpse *is* (does not symbolize) what Bataille describes as existence without a "mathematical frock coat," the semblance of rationality. To encounter the

corpse is to experience the subject-as-waste, a once-living body that could no longer “extricate itself” from death. Since the living subject depends on this borderless “elsewhere” for its existence, when it encounters the corpse, it recognizes that “the impossible constitutes its very *being*, that it is none other than abject” (5). Imagine the retrieval of the scorpion corpse from the inkwell: an inexplicable encounter with death, saturated and dripping with ink, a vehicle for written language now appearing as Roussel’s “darkness, amorphous and opaque.” This pool of black ink reflects reason and chaos in quick succession, seducing and repulsing, and by expelling a corpse, threatening. The episode is both a joke and an omen.

Threshold People

Conrad’s ocean is not only a rich environment for narrative, but it is also an extremely complicated space. By allowing the ocean’s spatial qualities to influence the unfolding of “The Secret Sharer”’s ritualized narrative and its subjects, Conrad treats the ocean as an agent within that ritual. To illustrate the way in which a vast space such as the ocean informs subjectivity, I turn to the “maritime model” of smooth and striated space offered by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guatarri. A Lacanian subject recognizes itself as such by orienting itself, through socialization processes beginning at birth, to various public spheres, and engaging with those spheres by using language. This model of the subject assumes a stable social environment from which to distinguish itself; it learns to understand itself as a unique point on a grid. Smooth space, the space of the nomad, offers no such stability: it is “occupied by intensities, wind and noise, forces, and sonorous and tactile qualities, as in the desert, steppe, or ice” (528-9). Given the instability of points within smooth space, there are no permanent lines; instead, there are “vectors,” movements that constantly shift along with their endpoints (528). These vectors are not dimensions, but directions, intervals that pause at temporary points before striking out again. Lacking permanent points by which to triangulate subject and object, smooth space is populated

by haecceities—innate, affective forces or events not distinguishable as subjects or objects—rather than by phenomena perceptible with the senses or intellect. Striated space, such as that of the city, is gridded, measured and divided by permanent structures. For example: a farm is an established, perceptible point in striated space such as that of a village; a collection of such points defines the form of a striated space. In smooth space, materiality and affect precede form; a nomad's movement toward a temporary oasis shifts suddenly as the landscape changes; this change of mind, a haecceity, is among the forces that compose smooth space. Smooth space renders any orientation temporary at best. The ocean is the smooth space par excellence, but also the first to be striated. Navigation striates it: by finding one's bearings, using latitude and longitude to orient oneself, one prioritizes points over lines, dimensionality over directionality (529). The liminal space of ritual is necessarily smooth, nomadic space even if it occurs as a transformation within striated space: the liminal is that which is betwixt and between conventional space, and smooth space is similarly defined by intervals rather than points. Orientation, therefore, is difficult in liminal as well as smooth space. This raises two challenges. The obvious question: how can one orient oneself in a space defined not by coordinates, but by travel in a direction? The less obvious but perhaps more crucial question: how can the liminal self orient itself in the world at all? Conrad's answer: with the help of other travelers.

“The Secret Sharer” begins with the captain's description of his surroundings at the head of the Gulf of Siam. His language illustrates the smoothness of ocean space even more effectively than Deleuze and Guattari's maritime model. By detailing this seascape's smoothness and intimating the freshly-minted captain's initial loneliness within it, Conrad marks the Gulf's threshold as the entrance to a liminal space:

On my right hand there were lines of fishing stakes resembling a mysterious system of half-submerged bamboo fences, incomprehensible in its division of the domain of

tropical fishes, and crazy of aspect as if abandoned forever by some nomad tribe of fisherman now gone to the other end of the ocean; for there was no sign of human habitation as far as the eye could reach. To the left a group of barren islets, suggesting ruins of stone walls, towers, and blockhouses, had its foundations set in a blue sea that itself looked solid, so still and stable did it lie below my feet; even the track of light from the westering sun shone smoothly, without that animated glitter which tells of an imperceptible ripple. And when I turned my head to take a parting glance at the tug which had just left us anchored outside the bar, I saw the straight line of the flat shore joined to the stable sea, edge to edge, with a perfect and unmarked closeness, in one leveled floor half brown, half blue under the enormous dome of the sky. (17)

The man-made features of this landscape are not anchoring points (as in striated space), but traces of ephemeral human events. The “fishing stakes,” like “fences,” show an attempt to measure and divide the “domain of tropical fishes,” but in the ocean’s vastness this effort appears pointless. The captain speculates that these stakes may have been left by a “nomad tribe of fisherman” who have since traversed the ocean. This passage subtly points to the absurdity of imagining the ocean as a space to be fully traversed: such a circumscription would be as fleeting as the fishing stakes, briefly useful (perhaps) but now “mysterious.” The Gulf is not a space in which one travels from point A to point B. It is more similar to a hole: upon entering, one travels continuously in a direction and encounters events, ephemeral phenomena, along the way. However, interventions in this space are pointless only if we assume that any impermanent alteration to a landscape is meaningless, an assumption that trivializes the forces and events (haecceities) of smooth space. Although smooth space’s weathering forces have robbed the stakes of their original, stable forms, the captain’s encounter with them is one of countless contingent events that form this space’s fabric: it is a trace of the nomadic fishermen’s vector, and it marks the threshold of the space the captain will share with his double. Conrad’s fishing stakes suggest both the futility of attachment to transient objects, and the all-encompassing nature of the smooth space into which objects always return.

The captain further highlights the impermanence of human intervention by mentioning the “ruins of stone walls, towers, and blockhouses.” Despite their solid composition, these manmade structures are more ephemeral than the fluid ocean, which “looked solid, so still and stable did it lie.” The ruins do not serve as points for orientation, but as temporary apparitions. The seascape’s only unchanging feature is the sea. “Even the track of light from the westering sun shone smoothly”: even light, which enables visual perception, is absorbed into the sea’s timeless immensity, becoming smooth and undifferentiated from the water’s surface. This smooth space is the appropriate setting for what Turner calls an “anti-structure,” a practice or event that dissolves conventional social structures as it erects its own transient (dis)order. Turner writes, “[I]iminality or [. . .] liminal *personae* (‘threshold people’) are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space” (95, *emph. original*). It is evident here that smooth space exists apart from “cultural” or social space, the space of conventionality and stable orientation. As he ponders his loneliness at the head of the Gulf, the captain notes the “perfect and unmarked closeness” of sea and sky; he prepares to cross a threshold beyond which dualistic subjectivity is transformed.

Both “The Secret Sharer” and *Heart of Darkness* illustrate the processes by which smooth, liminal space dissolves conventional subjectivity before transforming it. In liminal space, subjects transform first into Turner’s disoriented “threshold people” who’ve slipped through the public sphere’s “network of classifications.” Threshold people are no longer subjects in the conventional sense of being distinct from objects; they are the liminal selves who participate in the haecceities of smooth, liminal space. After a voyage through this ambiguous space—often a rite of passage—the threshold person re-enters the public sphere and assumes an

identity determined by her participation in the voyage and its outcome. Because the vectors that compose smooth space are constantly changing course, any intrusion in its processes by a conventional subject—any attempt to locate and stabilize points, subjects and objects—is ephemeral. Accordingly, the Gulf of Siam resists striation; the fishing stakes' utilitarian form disappears amidst the sea's vastness. A similar image appears in *Heart of Darkness* when a non-plussed Marlow observes a man-of-war firing aimlessly into the vast continental jungle:

There wasn't even a shed there, and she was shelling the bush [. . .] In the empty immensity of earth, sky, and water, there she was, incomprehensible, firing into a continent. Pop, would go one of the six-inch guns; a small flame would dart and vanish, a little white smoke would disappear, a tiny projectile would give a feeble screech—and nothing happened. Nothing could happen. There was a touch of insanity in the proceeding, a sense of lugubrious drollery in the sight; and it was not dissipated by somebody on board assuring me earnestly there was a camp of natives—he called them enemies!—hidden out of sight somewhere. (79)

Conrad's texts are full of smooth spaces, of which the ocean is but one example. Here Conrad emphasizes the near-blending of immense horizons: "earth, sky, and water" are a single "immensity." This echoes "The Secret Sharer"'s image of "the straight line of the flat shore joined to the stable sea" (17). Both plateaus, Africa's shore and the Gulf's water, are "empty" smooth spaces unoccupied by discernible subjects. In *Heart of Darkness*, subjects' bodies are often obscured by dense fog or jungle, while their voices or other forces emanate from an ambiguous, nomadic source. In the quote above, "somebody" on the man-of-war—an unnamed, unranked silhouette—declares that there are "enemies" hiding "out of sight somewhere." Neither the speaker nor those he wishes to identify are locatable in the space of the Congo River. The reader hears voices floating free of bodies. Similarly, Marlow describes Kurtz as "very little more than a voice," his memory "like a dying vibration of one immense jabber, silly, atrocious, sordid, savage, or simply mean, without any kind of sense" (57-8). Marlow, too, is "no more to us than a voice"; he and his audience lose their bodies as darkness descends upon the Thames

(Conrad 32; Engel 25). Ivan Kreilkamp, noting Conrad's anxiety over Edison's invention of the phonograph in 1877, reads Kurtz as a synecdoche rather than a unified subject: the voice stands in for the man (Kreilkamp 235). But this movement from part to whole fails. Kurtz's voice seems not to have a bodily referent, and thus he becomes like the floating phonographic voice, a groundless entity that may once have had a source but is now strangely autonomous. In this way Conrad leads readers through two false levels of Kurtz's state-of-being before settling on a representation that is unsettlingly ambiguous at best. Kurtz is not a whole material body, nor is he is a voice that substitutes for a whole (Engel 24). He is an autonomous, bodiless voice no longer traceable to a subject or stable point in space. During his tenure at the heart of the Congo, Kurtz becomes the untethered voice of a threshold person, a force, one of the jungle's shifting vectors. Hence Kurtz, an "initiated wraith from the back of Nowhere," provides Marlow's unstable yet imperative sense of direction through this space: "[W]e crept on, towards Kurtz. [. . .] Sometimes I would pick out a tree a little way ahead to measure our progress towards Kurtz by, but I lost it invariably before we got abreast. To keep the eyes so long on one thing was too much for human patience" (127; 110). Through Kurtz, Conrad demonstrates the dissolution of subjects into forces within liminal space, and the influence of those forces on ritual participants.

As a vector, Kurtz's influence on Marlow persists in his absence and after his death. Kurtz has entered the liminal space of the jungle, participated in its rituals, and transformed accordingly. However, his dissolution is so complete that he will never regain subjectivity and reenter the public sphere. Rather than completing his ritual, which is not the detailed rite of a specific culture but a disorienting voyage through the smooth, liminal space of the jungle, Kurtz remains an element of the jungle's ritual structure. Though Kurtz's actions seem erratic, Marlow twice describes him as "initiated" (125, 127). Kurtz has been "initiated" though his intimacy with

the forest, as Marlow makes clear while describing his appearance: “[The wilderness] had caressed him, and—lo!—he had withered; it had taken him, loved him, embraced him, got into his veins, consumed his flesh, and sealed his soul to its own by the inconceivable ceremonies of some devilish initiation” (125). The Congolese jungle, like the Gulf of Siam, attains agency via the influence of its spatial qualities on Conrad’s ritualized narrative. Both jungle and ocean are smooth spaces, ripe for liminal experiences. By dissolving the hierarchies determined by subject/object dualism and converting participants (temporarily or permanently) to forces, these spaces also serve as manifestations of base material. This is evident in Marlow’s treatment of the jungle not as a subordinate setting for Kurtz, but as his material equivalent: the jungle “caressed” and “embraced” Kurtz like a lover, “consumed his flesh” as if to add Kurtz to its own composition, and finally “sealed his soul to its own,” erasing any subjective distinction between man and landscape. Marlow further suggests Kurtz’s identification with the jungle’s base material by insinuating that Kurtz has already died before their encounter: “They say the hair goes on growing sometimes,” he remarks, and he casually refers to Kurtz’s body as “disinterred” (125). Marlow also describes Kurtz as “*from* the back of Nowhere” and “*from* some ghastly Nowhere” (127, 152, emphasis added). Marlow’s language suggests that Kurtz is no longer traceable to the civilized, striated space of his bodily origin; the “voice” whom Marlow meets arises from and returns to the base material of the jungle which, like Bataille’s big toe, underlies all being despite its repulsiveness. Marlow’s description of the pilgrims’ disposal of Kurtz’s body again suggests the departure of Kurtz’s conventional subjectivity before his death: “The voice was gone. What else had been there? But I am of course aware that next day the pilgrims buried something in a muddy hole. And then they very nearly buried me” (154). But they do not

bury Marlow. Kurtz, by dissolving into the jungle's field of forces, is able to point Marlow back from his voyage into liminal space.

Kurtz has become the force that will deliver the *gnosis* ("the horror!") Marlow needs to complete and return from his own ritualized voyage. In this way, Kurtz inadvertently acts as Marlow's directional guide. Even after Marlow reaches Kurtz's station, the latter changes locations—first by running away, then by dying—and alters Marlow's course as well. Shortly after Marlow reaches Kurtz's station, he wakes to find that Kurtz has already fled his corporate followers. Kurtz will not allow himself to be "taken away," as his Russian follower in harlequin clothes twice puts it. To be "taken away," back to Europe, would be to reinstate Kurtz as a fixed subject capable of fulfilling the Company's lofty capitalistic expectations. For Kurtz, to be "taken away" is not to move at all, but to be restrained. Marlow repeatedly reminds the reader that "restraint" is not Kurtz's strong suit. Although this lack of "restraint" is typically read as moral restraint, I suggest that it is also physical. Kurtz, who has exchanged his subjectivity for sheer force (manifested as "voice") by dissolving into the jungle's smooth space, cannot be permanently contained or triangulated. As a vector, Kurtz's flight is a change in direction, an event in smooth space, and a component of Marlow's initiation into that space. Kurtz appears to Marlow as a base manifestation of the jungle: as Leggatt in "The Secret Sharer" emerges from the sea, Kurtz emerges from the ground: "[h]e rose, unsteady, long, pale, indistinct, like a vapour exhaled by the earth" (148).

In *Heart of Darkness*, as in "The Secret Sharer," a boundary of stakes appears to mark the threshold of liminal space. As I've previously suggested in "Talking Heads," this in-between state and the often violent fragmentation of subjectivity it entails manifests concretely and grotesquely when Marlow approaches Kurtz's station. From a distance, nothing seems amiss:

“near the house half-a-dozen slim posts remained in a row, roughly trimmed, and with their upper ends ornamented with round carved balls. The rails, or whatever there had been between, had disappeared. Of course the forest surrounded all that” (63). Marlow, nearing the wondrous goal of his journey, sees not a fence but the remnant of one, a barrier that has partially fallen. As he draws closer, the truth becomes clear:

These round knobs were not ornamental but symbolic [. . .] food for thought and also for the vultures if there had been any [. . .] They would have been even more impressive, those heads on the stakes, if their faces had not been turned to the house. Only one, the first I had made out, was facing my way [. . .] there it was, black, dried, sunken, with closed eyelids, —a head that seemed to sleep at the top of that pole [. . .] smiling continuously at some endless and jocose dream of that eternal slumber. (70-1)

These heads compose the final physical point of Marlow’s journey down the Congo River and seem misleadingly simple. Marlow misreads them as “symbolic” of Kurtz’s power over the Congolese, signs of “uncomplicated savagery [. . .] something that had a right to exist—obviously—in the sunshine” (71). These signs, however, point to the deeply complicated boundary between life and death and to Kurtz, who straddles this border and lacks such an obvious right to exist. The heads are “sunken” yet elevated on poles; they are dead, yet seem to be “smiling” in their “sleep.” Conrad places these containers of contradictions at the crucial point between the Congo River, the material site of Marlow’s travel, and Kurtz’s station, a shrine containing the being who embodies death. The contradictions run deeper still. The heads are physically extreme—“black, dried, sunken [. . .] with the shrunken dry lips showing a narrow white line of the teeth,” a radiographic vision of a decaying body—yet wrapped up in metaphysical images of infinity. The dream is “endless” and slumber “eternal.” The heads do not merely signify the end of Marlow’s journey. They signify the end of physical travel and the beginning of movement within the metaphysical, atemporal realm of death. Although several characters move in and out of Kurtz’s house, demonstrating that it is possible to pass this limit in

a literal sense, it is impossible for a living being to cross it in its symbolic sense and remain alive. The heads' most striking contradiction lies in the direction of their gaze. All the faces point toward Kurtz, but one points away from him, toward Marlow. The faces warn Marlow away from an attempt to transgress the life/death barrier, an attempt made successfully yet fleetingly by Kurtz, but also—almost coyly—invite him to follow in Kurtz's absurd footsteps. This foreboding invitation toward knowledge parallels the captain's inexplicable and dangerous attraction both to his doppelgänger and the land-mass of Koh-ring in "The Secret Sharer."²

Flirting with the Base

For the captain in "The Secret Sharer," who is participating in a liminal ritual of passage, the ship has a complex, seemingly paradoxical set of roles. The ship is a point (a set of coordinates) on the sea, and as such it is a stable setting in which ritualized narrative can unfold. This point, however, moves: it is the unsettling setting of a voyage, a journey through liminal space in which conventional orientations are dissolved or reversed. But for Leggatt, who is a nomad in the smooth space of the sea, the ship is more simply an ephemeral stopping point between movements. He has moved in lines before and after this point at which he's temporarily arrived, lines with direction but without clear, stable endpoints. This focus on Leggatt's directionality, his movement, rather than the content of what happens before and after his arrival on the ship is highlighted by the narrator's nonchalance concerning Leggatt's violent departure from his previous ship: "I knew well enough also that my double there was no homicidal ruffian. I did not think of asking him for details, and he told me the story roughly in brusque, disconnected sentences. I needed no more. I saw it all going on as though I were myself inside that other sleeping suit" (26). Leggatt's coming and going are more integral to his character than the murder he's committed. By emerging from the sea and merely standing beside the captain, Leggatt shares secret knowledge; hence his "disconnected sentences" more than suffice to

explain his expulsion from the *Sephora*. This is radically different from Conrad's treatment of the titular character of *Lord Jim*. Like Leggatt, Jim abruptly leaves his previous ship in disgrace. But while Jim's jump haunts him throughout the long novel, Leggatt's greater crime is almost instantly accepted by both Leggatt and the narrator. This different treatment suggests that while Jim is a fully human character, Leggatt is something beyond human: rising from the depths, he embodies base material that cannot be held to moral standards legitimized by rational hierarchies. Leggatt's violent past cannot catch up with him, because he never occupies a fixed space on the ship; he is a liminal being forever in transition. The captain and Leggatt, therefore, have an inverse relationship to the ship. The captain treats his ship as a shifting, ambiguous ground yet to be mastered; it is a platform that anchors him as he moves through liminal space. For Leggatt, the ship is not a ground at all but another fleeting force passing through liminal space. Leggatt finds temporary cover within the ship as if he were possessing it, rather than traveling on it.

Liminal and smooth spaces overlap: smooth space, depopulated of rational hierarchies and subject/object dualism, can be a setting for liminal rituals that culminate in encounters with base material. In narrative, therefore, smooth space can be a richly sensuous venue for the articulation of ritual's transformative experience. In "The Secret Sharer," Conrad treats the ocean as smooth space in order to allow the narrator to gradually submerge his subjectivity, a process that begins with the emergence of Leggatt. The captain, unfamiliar with his ship and its protocol, tries to steady himself on its deck by conforming to his crew's expectations. Shortly after embarking, he realizes that his early dismissal of his officers has left the anchor watch improperly set; the rope ladder had not been hauled in. The captain worries that this blunder "made me appear eccentric. Goodness only knew how that absurdly whiskered mate would

'account' for my conduct" (22). Before the captain can begin assuaging the crew's doubts, however, Leggatt emerges, disrupting the illusion of potential stability by challenging his sense of subjectivity and sanity. Leggatt's emergence casts the disruption of convention in a particularly unadorned light:

I saw at once something elongated and pale floating very close to the ladder. Before I could form a guess a faint flash of phosphorescent light, which seemed to issue suddenly from the naked body of a man, flickered in the sleeping water with the elusive, silent play of summer lightning in a night sky. With a gasp I saw revealed to my stare a pair of feet, the long legs, a broad livid back immersed right up to the neck in a greenish cadaverous glow. One hand, awash, clutched the bottom rung of the ladder. He was complete but for the head. A headless corpse! (22-3)

As in *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad uses body parts to mark the threshold into smooth space. After Leggatt's appearance, the captain's journey changes from one of simple mastery of a new role, defined by rationally intelligible codes, to a series of concealments and self-denials, and ultimately an approach to death. Leggatt signals the smoothness of the Bay of Siam, and by encountering his double and realizing his social displacement, the captain enters the liminal phase of his ritual passage (Turner 47). Leggatt's body parts mark this beginning, the journey's threshold, and so they both attract and repel. Foreshadowing the bulge of Koh-ring, Leggatt's body interrupts the sea's smooth surface. The captain first notices "something pale and elongated floating very close to the ladder." The body is unidentified at first; it may be a fish, an appendage, or a creature we'd expect to find in Lovecraft's *Necronomicon*. Like Kurtz, who is also "long, pale, [and] indistinct," Leggatt's body is pale and passive, "floating" rather than struggling (*Heart* 148). This shared imagery generates an aura of death. Before the captain notes any indication of life, a vital flash of light emanates from the body and flickers "with the elusive, silent play of summer lightning in a night sky." As in *Heart of Darkness*, where he uses it to represent civilization's resistance to encroaching darkness, here Conrad uses the flicker as an

image of ephemeral vitality. Like Kurtz's floating voice, this moment of light can sustain itself outside of a body, but only temporarily.

The sudden illumination is "elusive" and "silent" like "summer lightning in a night sky," attributes that mirror Conrad's description in the *Preface* of the "moment of vision" sought by the artist. The flicker briefly "reveal[s] the substance of [the rescued fragment's] truth—disclose[s] its inspiring secret: the stress and passion within the core of each convincing moment." During Leggatt's emergence, this "substance" of truth that contains the ineffable "stress and passion" of a passing moment manifests as base material. The flicker reveals the fragments of Leggatt's body one-by-one in order to emphasize the contingency of his subjectivity within smooth, nomadic space. First "a pair of feet" resolves; as in *Bataille*, the toes underwrite all material beings who stand erect. Next "long legs" and "a broad livid back" become visible: the narrator voyeuristically guides the reader's imagined gaze up what he already knows to be "the naked body of a man." The narrator then notes "[o]ne hand, awash," clutching the ladder's bottom wrung. Again, Leggatt remains as calm as a "resting swimmer" as his "awash" hand, just breaking the water's surface, holds the ladder, a bridge to the ship, at its lowest point. As a nomadic, directional force within smooth space, Leggatt can freely arrive at and depart from points such as the ship. This potential for movement allows him to guide the captain to the threshold of dissolution and back. After rising above the water's surface, the narrator's gaze is foiled in its expectation of a head: "[a] headless corpse!" Conrad doubly disturbs the narrator's certainty about the nature of the object emerging from the sea. First it is an ambiguous shape; next it is a living body that seems to manifest one part at a time; then it is an incomplete cadaver; finally Leggatt turns to reveal the silhouette of his "black-haired head," alleviating the captain's dread. For *Bataille*, the head signifies the lofty seat of reason that pretends to exist independently

from the dirty big toe. In this moment, the length of a flicker, Leggatt initiates the narrator into liminal space by giving him his first fleeting taste of the ambiguous base material that will so compel him throughout his voyage: first the base foot, then the connecting body, then the insinuation of a gap where the head should be. In an inversion of their typical relationship, the foot seems for a moment to exist without the head, suggesting the persistence of base material after the disappearance of reason, and even after death. Like Conrad's artist, the narrator briefly holds rescued fragments of this revelatory moment—here manifest as fragments of Leggatt's body—in the light for all to see.

In smooth space, it is difficult at best to get one's bearings. The only possible navigation depends on the directional forces that occupy smooth space, which serve as signposts for traveling subjects. Though in no need of bearings himself, Leggatt acts as a compass for the captain, furthering him on his ritual passage to a new authority. Like everything else in smooth space, Leggatt's signs are not straightforward. To complete his passage, the captain must depart from his crew's logical expectations of how a captain should behave. The signs of this departure from logic both excite and horrify, attract and repulse, the captain.³ Facial hair, for example, receives a conspicuous amount of the narrator's attention. Leggatt has "no growth on his cheeks" but sports "a small, brown mustache" that compliments his other boyish good looks: he has "a well-shaped, round chin," is a "well-knit young fellow of twenty-five at most," and has "white, even teeth" (25). These virile features, more than his incomplete explanation of his crime, seem to garner the captain's trust and protection. After describing Leggatt, the captain interrupts his retelling of Leggatt's justification for his murder as if their physical resemblance renders it irrelevant: "'But what's the good of talking? You know well enough the sort of ill-conditioned snarling cur—' He appealed to me as if our experiences had been as identical as our clothes. [. . .]"

And I knew well enough also that my double there was no homicidal ruffian. [. . .] I needed no more" (26). Leggatt sums up the captain's frustration with his entire narrative: "what's the good of talking?" I've mentioned the captain's disdain for the ship's mate, who speaks in hackneyed "ejaculations" and is driven by his desire rationally to "account" for all of the ship's events. This mate's facial hair inspires anything but trust. Each time he encounters the mate, the captain's attention (and the reader's) is drawn to his whiskers: he has "a simple face, overcharged by a terrible growth of whisker" (19). Here, "simple" does not imply a lack of intelligence, but an overdependence on "simple," rational explanations. Since the captain would never be able to explain Leggatt's concealment, the mate's "frightful whiskers" are a frustrating sign of his bounded movement on the ship. Just as one look at the handsome Leggatt dispels all mistrust, a single thought of these whiskers is enough to deter the captain from confiding in his crew. While considering Leggatt's crime, the captain thinks "suddenly of my absurd mate with his terrific whiskers and the 'Bless my soul—you don't say so' type of intellect" (26). At the same moment, Leggatt chimes in: "My father's a parson in Norfolk. Do you see me before a judge and jury on that charge?" Sharing a thought, the men tacitly agree that the captain's role is not to expose Leggatt's crime, but to help a man who would be misunderstood by all others. Leggatt's mustache is mentioned only briefly, but it parallels the mate's obtrusive whiskers, providing the captain with a purpose—concealment of that which is unaccountably familiar and attractive—while remaining unseen. Every element of Leggatt's body, which the captain views as his "own reflection in the depths of a somber and immense mirror," is a signpost that motivates the captain to continue his transformative passage (25).

The captain, uncomfortable with his divided subjectivity, feels compelled to hide Leggatt from his crew, unwitting participants in the captain's ritual passage. During a particularly

mysterious episode, the captain hides Leggatt in his bathroom to avoid the steward's notice. To placate the steward, the captain bathes while the steward cleans, leaving him to inspect the premises. The scene would be nearly slapstick if not for the pervasive presence of the captain's fear, which is felt from the start: "It was very much like being mad, only it was worse because one was aware of it," he reflects (37). Here Conrad at once discounts insanity as a motive for the captain's behavior while also evoking a sense of dangerous loss of control. This sense of danger is quickly made palpable by the captain's whispered warning to Leggatt: "'All's well so far,' I whispered. 'Now you must vanish into the bathroom.' He did so, as noiseless as a ghost" (37). Though the situation could be humorous, a nervous silence hangs in the air. While the captain does his "dressing, splashing, and whistling," Leggatt stands "drawn up bolt upright in that little space, his face looking very sunken in daylight, his eyelids lowered under the stern, dark line of his eyebrows drawn together by a slight frown" (37). The captain's detailed description of Leggatt's face and posture suggests that he is watching Leggatt as he bathes, though he mentions no interaction between them. This voyeurism contains not only fear of discovery, but also sexual tension: a man washes in front of another with inches between them while a third curious man works outside. The captain reminds us of his fascination shortly after this incident: "I saw him back there [behind the writing desk], sitting rigidly on the low stool, his bare feet close together [. . .] I was fascinated by it myself. Every moment I had to glance over my shoulder" (38). Again, the captain first draws the reader's attention to Leggatt's "bare feet" as he sits on a "low stool"; the same exposed feet that touch the dirty deck, the same feet he's compelled to place "out of sight of the door," compel his gaze. Conrad never provides a rational explanation for this. The bathroom is a foggy spot in Conrad's tale: the reader observes but doesn't share the space of the bathroom with the narrator and Leggatt. Through Conrad's tedious yet sensuous portrayal of the

captain's non-rational compulsion to hide his doppelgänger, the reader gains insight into his simultaneous attraction and repulsion to knowledge of the base.

The captain's final approach to Koh-ring makes sense not from a rational standpoint as crew or captain of a commercial vessel, but as the final approach to the truth buried in liminal rituals of passage. From the captain's perspective, it *must* be approached: "It was now a matter of conscience to shave the land as close as possible—for now [Leggatt] must go overboard whenever the ship was put in stays. Must! There could be no going back for him" (58). From his perspective as narrator, however, doing so with language is tricky:

The black southern hill of Koh-ring seemed to hang right over the ship like a towering fragment of the ever-lasting night. On that enormous mass of blackness there was not a gleam to be seen, not a sound to be heard. It was gliding irresistibly towards us and yet seemed already within reach of the hand. [. . .] Such a hush had fallen on the ship that she might have been a bark of the dead floating in slowly under the very gate of Erebus. (59)

Although this language has a striking poetic quality, a "fragment" of "night" and an "enormous mass of blackness" reduce to the same substance: a negation that can't be fixed in space. By comparing Koh-ring to Erebus, the Greek underworld, the captain tries to bring Koh-ring into the realm of discourse. It is a failed attempt to fix Koh-ring within a rational structure. "*Erebus*" is a Greek word meaning "deep darkness," and so the captain's allusion, like his metaphors, is circular. Koh-ring does not resolve into its hypothetical settlements, but remains a "great black mass" even when the ship is closest (60). The only disturbance to this blackness is the reappearance of the captain's floppy white hat, which he had given to Leggatt: "All at once my strained, yearning stare distinguished a white object floating within a yard of the ship's side. White on the black water. A phosphorescent flash passed under it. What was that thing? . . . I recognized my own floppy hat" (61). As when Leggatt emerged, now a flicker of light seems to mark the last moving sign the captain needs to depart from liminal space. Even here, rational discourse fails: "What was that thing?" could refer to the "flash," the "hat," to Leggatt, or to none

of these. In any case, however, it refers to a "thing," an unknowable mass like Koh-ring. The narrators in *Heart of Darkness* and "The Secret Sharer" surrender first to the attraction, then to the repulsion of such things: they must approach and retreat from truth, and they must be satisfied with traces of it retrieved by temporary forces that manifest as their doppelgängers. When Conrad's narrators attempt to explore his foggy spots, they engage in flirtation with the base.

The ending of the captain's ritual passage, the approach to Koh-ring, seems violently to subordinate the crew to the captain, rather than reaffirm their bond with him. Why does he risk their lives? By nearly colliding with Koh-ring, the captain subjects himself to the same stresses that led Leggatt to murder, and he resists them. "I caught [the mate's] arm as he was raising it to batter his poor devoted head, and shook it violently," the captain recounts, and proceeds to vocalize each of his movements: "'You go forward'—shake—'and stop there'—shake—'and hold your noise'—shake—'and see these head-sheets properly overhauled'—shake, shake—shake" (60). This repetition of "shake," like the bathroom incident, would be comical if it didn't occur during a tense crisis. In this moment, Conrad invites us to laugh grimly at the captain's completion of his ritual passage. If he had murdered his crewmate, the captain would likely have ended up awash and naked—he would have fully merged with Leggatt, and would not have returned. Instead, after passing Koh-ring, the captain declares that "[n]othing! no one in the world should now stand between us, throwing a shadow on the way of silent knowledge and mute affection, the perfect communion of a seaman with his first command" (61). Foregoing his relationship to the smooth sea and to Leggatt, its avatar, the captain fully inhabits his role within the striated space of the ship, a piece of floating civilization. Because the ship is always referred to as female, this is also a turn away from the homoerotic tension evinced by Leggatt's virility, toward heteronormative relations. To complete Conrad's rite of passage, the captain had to

approach the base material underlying his body and ship, let a doppelgänger touch that base, and then turn back. Conrad chooses to return his narrators to their social hierarchies in the end; as I will show in later chapters, other authors make different choices about how to complete their ritual forms.

To participate in ritual passage as understood by Turner is to enter liminal space, to relinquish one's role in social and ontological hierarchies, and finally to encounter Bataille's base material, which rises from the earth or sea where it had been ignored by rational subjects. Conradian base material manifests as fragments or duplicates of the traveler's own body. The traveler's doppelgänger is composed of base material, but so is the part of the traveler that remains conscious, individual, and able to narrate while approaching the event horizon of subjective dissolution: the liminal self reflected by the doppelgängers in "the depths of a somber and immense mirror." The liminal self, the self that "stands outside" in the Greek sense of *ekstasis*, can glimpse *gnosis* and transform the social role to which it returns. Leggatt is a station on the narrator-captain's voyage toward *gnosis*; he dissolves as Koh-ring appears. As in *Heart of Darkness*, when Kurtz envisions "the horror" and bequeaths an inkling of it to Marlow just before dying, so Leggatt's final sign, the captain's hat, allows the captain to peep over the threshold of dissolution and return (155; 61). Leggatt, like Kurtz, alters the narrator's course, helping the narrator to complete his rite of passage through smooth, liminal space despite his gradual merger with that space. Conrad uses the form of a ritual passage to articulate this experience more vividly, rather than elide it. Where mere rational description would fail entirely, Conrad deploys liminal space to express something of the traveler's abject experience with the foundation of his being. In the texts of Virginia Woolf and David Lynch discussed in the next chapter, this foundation manifests not at a moment of climax, but as an ubiquitous background agency—food—that promises both danger and transformation.

CHAPTER 3: THE LIMINAL SHARED MEAL IN VIRGINIA WOOLF'S *TO THE LIGHTHOUSE* AND DAVID LYNCH'S *TWIN PEAKS*

"Form in action is ritual. Ritual is very important for us because it is through participating in form that we can experience intimacy."

—Dainin Katagiri, *Returning to Silence*

"[The adventure of] telling the truth about my own experiences as a body, I do not think I solved. I doubt that any woman has solved it yet."

—Virginia Woolf, "Professions for Women"

Although Virginia Woolf's novel *To the Lighthouse* (1927) and David Lynch's television series *Twin Peaks* (1990-1) are somewhat distant in time, Woolf's treatment of food as an active participant within the liminal space of the shared meal informs Lynch's representation of consumption as a shaper and motivator of subjectivity—especially female subjectivity. Both storytellers find an ancestor in Joseph Conrad, who portrays confrontations between material forces and isolated subjects with unstable identities. In this chapter, I focus on the ritualized tedium of shared meals and dinner parties in these related works of twentieth-century literature and television. Mrs. Ramsay's dinner party in Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* acts as centerpiece for a spread of instances in which troubled relationships and repulsive materiality irrupt into the dining space. In Woolf's novel, ritual form acts within the family structure that it animates. As an animate network of forces temporarily replaces the characters' stable familial hierarchy—as she stares into the *boeuf en daube*—Mrs. Ramsay reevaluates her relationship to the food that, as a woman, she is expected to serve but not savor. Post-WWI authors use the form of the dinner, a social ritual, in their narratives for the same reason that Conrad uses rites of passage: to find a linguistic vehicle for experiences that would otherwise be incommunicable, and to broaden language's potential beyond its rational applications. At the dinner table, as at sea, conventional

hierarchies are transformed. They are not replaced by a new hierarchy, as in Conrad, but revealed to their participants, opening the possibility for changing relationships between individuals: tensions and forces, often manifest as food, burst through the dinner party's would-be-placid social veneer. This trend of food's interjection into a narrative's conventional surface continues in *Twin Peaks*. Both poles of *Twin Peaks'* suburban landscape, the stable world of the nuclear family and the profane liminal space that is the Black Lodge, are haunted by tedious dining scenes. From cherry pie to creamed corn, Lynch uses food to highlight the body's dependence on (often grotesque) consumption, a dependence which results in violent, disturbing challenges to bodily boundaries. To deny the human need to consume, a denial especially common in Victorian paradigms of femininity, is to ignore a foundational aspect of selfhood (Angelella 174). This bodily component of the self precedes the Lacanian symbolic order and will persist with or without any order whatsoever.

Gazing into the Boeuf

In Conrad, the arc of the narrators' voyage through liminal space is the form that animates the narrative, moving the ships forward. Form also acts in Woolf's text, but it acts within the structure—here not a ship but a family—that it animates. The family and its hierarchy in *To the Lighthouse* don't move in a line; instead, they gradually disappear. This gradual vanishing of stable hierarchy, and the animate network of forces that replaces it, is most evident at Woolf's dinner table. Several critics agree that the dinner (especially for Woolf) is a social ritual, but they are not in agreement about its efficacy. In her discussion of *The Waves* (1931), Vicki Tromanhauser suggests that Woolf's novel "documents the formal meals and ritualized gatherings that sustain friendships and that function, more broadly, to define human society through its opposition to other forms of creaturely life that it strategically organizes, subjugates, and even consumes" (73). Sociologists Nickie Charles and Marion Kerr write that "Food

practices can be regarded as one of the ways in which important social relations and divisions are symbolized, reinforced and reproduced on a daily basis" (2). Janine Utell, also discussing *The Waves*, continues to paint a picture of the shared meal as a grounding, uniting space. She claims:

[Woolf's characters] seek to come to terms with grief through ritual moments which bring them together. [. . .] As they join for meals, however, they are made solid even as the slipping away of the self in death is made visible; a connection is forged and reaffirmed in the face of impending death. Meals provide the ritual moments, the ritual spaces, for these instances of awareness and community. (2)

I agree that shared meals can function as spaces of communion, especially in liminal settings during which social roles are equalized. However, to read Mrs. Ramsay's dinner as an efficacious ritual to reaffirm social bonds is to ignore the unruly role played by the food. Woolf embeds the dinner's form into her narratives for the same reason that Conrad embeds rites of passage: to use that form as a linguistic vehicle for experiences that would otherwise be incommunicable—to broaden language's potential beyond its rational applications.

Writing after the First World War (1914-18), during which violent experiences often found no language for expression outside the context of battle, Woolf finds motivation to experiment with liminal space. Of the millions of soldiers who lost their lives during the War, nearly one million were British; nearly five million more returned wounded (Keegan 7, 423). These deaths often left no corpse behind for families to view, since countless bodies disappeared in battle (Booth 29). Allyson Booth distinguishes between the meaning of "[m]issing" for a medical officer in a soldier's division and for that soldier's mother; the former witnesses a shell eradicating all traces of the body, but the latter regards "[m]issing" as a hopeful alternative state to death (29-30). These disappearances, coupled with the British government's 1916 decision requiring soldiers to be buried at the front, rendered corpses invisible to civilians (24). Those soldiers who did return from the Western Front were often unwilling or unable to help civilians gain a more realistic image of war due to a newly recognized mental illness: post-traumatic stress

disorder, then known as shell shock. The resulting invisibility of death widened the already substantial experiential gap between those who fought at the Western Front and those who remained at home, especially women. Allyson Booth elaborates this problem of communication as it appears in the texts of wartime authors such as Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon:

The sheer noise of trench warfare flummoxes the orderly progress of plot [in combatants' novels] by flummoxing language itself: characters speak but we can't hear them. For all soldiers know, crucial explanations disappear into noise that is simultaneously meaningless (in terms of verbal import) and fatally meaningful (in the noise that signals shells, machine guns, grenades). (117)

Although Woolf did not directly experience battle as Owen and Sassoon did, she did experience the gaps—both experiential, as a lack of communication, and material, as a lack of male bodies—left by the War in English culture. During and after the War, the conventional, mannered family dinner becomes a microcosmic model of the conflict's strain on the English psyche. In *To the Lighthouse*, the War is a virus acting on Mrs. Ramsay's family, and in the dinner, we see it coursing through their collective veins. As the liminal sea surrounds and influences Conrad's ships, which represent fragments of civilization, so the dinner is not free of hierarchy, but has its own temporary structure influenced by the War's destruction. It is a setting for the acting out of tensions that bubble up beneath these conventions, the playing out of forces. When Mrs. Ramsay disappears from the narrative after "Time Passes," she merges with these invisible forces (much as we will see Mrs. Moore do in Forster's *A Passage to India*) and continues to bring characters together as she did with her boeuf. Woolf creates a setting, the Ramsays' seaside house, in which Mrs. Ramsay's presence and the lingering memory of her material (as opposed to linguistic) power to unify individuals through food persist. In this way, Woolf renders the family's relationships vulnerable to transformation, usually in the form of increased intimacy. The War's tendency toward silence is overridden (to an extent) not by a return to social normalcy, but by the material mediation of shared food produced by a shared

loved one.

This transition to more intimate relationships is not without obstacles. Each participant's cognitive dissonance is displayed as she strains against her own manners, conventions challenged by the War. This is evident in Lily Briscoe's observation of Mrs. Ramsay:

“Did you find your letters? I told them to put them in the hall for you,” she said to William Bankes.

Lily Briscoe watched her drifting into that strange no-man's land where to follow people is impossible and yet their going inflicts such a chill on those who watch them that they always try at least to follow them with their eyes as one follows a fading ship until the sails have sunk beneath the horizon. (84)

The dinner's texts have at least three layers: characters' voiced dialogue, their inner monologue, and Woolf's narration. In the latter two layers, foils to the superficial speech, Woolf represents the family's relationships as vectors that spark across the table and transmit affect. Lily's impression of Mrs. Ramsay's words is not a simple, emotional response; Woolf gives us her impression as a space, a “no-man's land.” As Marlow watches his doppelgänger Kurtz cross the threshold of death but cannot follow, so Lily cannot follow Mrs. Ramsay into the “no-man's land” she perceives behind her banal conversation. Lily's spatial sense of Mrs. Ramsay's movement toward danger is reinforced by the contemporary connotation of “no-man's land,” which described the ground between trenches at the Western Front. To set foot in this space was to risk one's life. By thinking about Mrs. Ramsay's conversation in this way, Lily not only judges her, but empathizes with her. She follows Mrs. Ramsay's movement through the metaphorical conversation-space “with her eyes” rather than ears, implying an effort to see beneath the dialogue's surface. Lily's image of watching the “fading ship until the sails have sunk beneath the horizon” conjures a sailor's patient wife, but since this attention is “inflict[ed]” by “a chill,” a sense of dread at the departure, it may be morbid fascination as well as compassion. Taken as a whole, this moment in Lily's mind recalls the “fragmented components

of frozen imagery and sensation” which Judith Herman attributes to stories of trauma. Woolf’s “horizon,” like Conrad’s, is a point-of-no-return, a threshold to be crossed only by proxy. To approach it is to encounter experience that can’t easily be stored in narrative memory. Though a table replaces the sea, the space is smooth and liminal, a temporary departure from social normalcy. Woolf shows us that liminal space’s radical shift in convention can be a tightening rather than a loosening, though with a similar effect: the expression of experience—here, that of compassion for an extraordinary woman absorbed into the tedious realm of banality—that is impossible to articulate using ordinary language and rational, linear narrative.

Mrs. Ramsay’s dinner party takes place over a great expanse of text, as Woolf savors every detail of the food’s texture, flavor, and odor, as well as every nuance of her characters’ thoughts. The descriptive passages in this section (the conclusion of “The Window”) vacillate between images of stasis and fluidity, of the unity implied by order and the fragmentation implied by change. Following other critics, Utell describes the serving of the boeuf en daube as a “moment of communion” (3). According to Utell, when the eight candles on the table are lit and the boeuf arrives,

[O]ne sees a language of transformation, of change making a moment different. The moment is performed through the body, which is why the taking of food is so crucial to Woolf: the body can enact such transformations beyond language. [. . .] The melding of scents and flavors and ingredients—the olives, the oil, the juices—in a profusion of color and taste signifies the blending of the subjects in the house, a moment of shared community and harmony. (4)

Utell then notes that this scene is directly followed by Mrs. Ramsay’s death in “Time Passes,” “perhaps the the most devastating parenthetical in English literature” (4). For Utell, the dinner is a proleptic death ritual: it allows the characters “to mourn in advance of the death of the loved one”:

Death ritual reveals a heightened knowledge of the inevitability of the death of the other, as well as a heightened sense of being as the dissolution of that being is made visible.

Part of Woolf's consolation occurs when the characters in her works look backward at the ritual moment that was initially not seen to be so, and learn how to read it as such. (5)

Utell maps Van Gennep's and Turner's tripartite form of the rite of passage—separation (which involves communal mourning), limen, and aggregation—onto *To the Lighthouse*; the novel's elegaic form mirrors these stages. But in all its complexity, the dinner party is more than a high point in the family's life to be understood during a retrospective catharsis. While the boeuf's candlelit arrival is certainly *one* harmonious moment, the dinner's many moments move among a variety of emotional registers. Even with the boeuf present, anxieties remain at play in the characters' inner monologue and in Woolf's narration. These anxieties manifest as concerns about food: its qualities reflect on both individual and national identities. Woolf's intense moments of focus on the dynamic between bodies and food reveal the instability of social relationships even while they appear most solid. Woolf's candles, like Conrad's, flicker.

Although Utell reads "The Windows" as a separation, "Time Passes" as a limen, and "The Lighthouse" as an aggregation, recent posthumanist readings of *To the Lighthouse* lead me to challenge this mapping. Although "Time Passes" is undoubtedly liminal in its tone and placement, Woolf already enters liminal territory during the preceding dinner party. Liminal spaces are characterized by the levelling of conventional ontological hierarchies, as well as by communion among the newly and temporarily equal participants—the initial separation phase of a rite of passage is not the only phase that can include communion. Mrs. Ramsay's dinner party entails not only communion among human subjects, but also among humans and the food that they see, smell, and consume. Tromanhauser suggests that "The textures of Woolf's narrative attune us to the sentience of a nonhuman world that suffuses and interfuses our being" (74). To elaborate, she cites feminist theorist Elizabeth Grosz's understanding of individuality "as a kind of dynamic integrative absorption of an outside that is always too much, too large, to be ordered

and contained within life alone" (Grosz 28). In her discussion of women's consumption, critic Lisa Angelella concurs:

The eating body is active not only in the sense that it is moving but in that it is constituting itself and reconstructing its world. It is active in making decisions in a realm of biology outside of culture. Such a means of activity is particularly important for allowing subjectivity to women denied action and choices in other areas of their lives. (174)

The notion of a world in which things, including our body and the food with which it merges, demonstrate pervasive agency arises again in political scientist Jane Bennett's work. Bennett defines "thing-power" as the ability of things to exert complex forces upon other bodies, thereby distinguishing themselves from the subject/object binary (xvi). Mrs. Ramsay's boeuf resists objectification even as it revels in its materiality. It is saturated with sensory detail, "too much, too large" to be consumed all at once, so characters instead perform a "dynamic integrative absorption," lingering over its textures as the mingling company and food produces not one, but countless subtle transformations of subjectivity. As Angelella claims, the dinner represents a particularly opportune setting for women to refashion their subjectivities: consumption allows for decision-making "outside of culture," and so outside the patriarchal symbolic order which necessitates that women fit into its rational paradigm. In its sensuous flux, the dinner party is more of a liminal space than a space of shared loss, as will be evident after a closer look at Mrs. Ramsay's meditation over her boeuf en daube.

Mrs. Ramsay denies neither her own agency nor that of the food she serves. Rather, her repeated glances into the pot reveal a sense of creative power: "And she peered into the dish, with its shiny walls and its confusion of savoury brown and yellow meats and its bay leaves and its wine, and thought. This will celebrate the occasion" (100). Mrs. Ramsay inwardly revels at the "shiny," clean walls of the dish and its flavorful contents as if it were her own work of art, an accomplishment on par with Lily's painting-in-progress. When she begins plotting to bring Lily

Briscoe and William Bankes together, her musings become a flight of fancy that recalls Gerard Manley Hopkins'

dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon, in his riding
Of the rolling level underneath him steady air, and striding
High there, how he rung upon the rein of a wimpling wing
In his ecstasy! then off, off forth on swing [. . .] ("The Windhover" 2-5)

Like the falcon, Mrs. Ramsay's inner monologue circles upward in exhilaration before, "like a hawk which lapses suddenly from its high station," she dives back into the banality of dinnertime chat (Woolf 105). All the while, she serves unwitting William an excessive amount of boeuf.

This moment's frenetic emotional energy is mediated by food, the material agent that comes between Mrs. Ramsay and William:

Everything seemed possible. Everything seemed right. Just now (but this cannot last, she thought, dissociating herself from the moment while they were all talking about boots) just now she had reached security; she hovered like a hawk suspended; like a flag floated in an element of joy which filled every nerve of her body fully and sweetly, not noisily, solemnly rather, for it arose, she thought, looking at them all eating there, from husband and children and friends; all of which rising in this profound stillness (she was helping William Bankes to one very small piece more, and peered into the depths of the earthenware pot) seemed now for no special reason to stay there like a smoke, like a fume rising upwards, holding them safe together. Nothing need be said; nothing could be said. There it was, all around them. It partook, she felt, carefully helping Mr. Bankes to a specially tender piece, of eternity; [. . .] there is a coherence in things, a stability; something, she meant, is immune from change, and shines out (she glanced at the window with its ripple of reflected lights) in the face of the flowing, the fleeting, the spectral, like a ruby[.] (105)

There are two levels of inner monologue here: the parentheticals represent Mrs. Ramsay's interactions with her material surroundings and so focus on sensual detail (audible speech, textured food, and visible light), while the rest of the monologue is an attempt to process ineffable emotions. This textual barrier between her material world and her emotions is permeable, and like the boeuf's juices, they mingle. With her first parenthetical, "(but this cannot last)," Mrs. Ramsay immediately belies her newfound "security." The doubt surfaces in the same parenthetical as her "dissociati[on]" from a discussion about "boots." As Bataille notes, feet bring

to mind the dirty, grounded material foundation upon which existence rests. At first reading, it may seem as though Mrs. Ramsay is retreating from a materialistic discussion in favor of an ethereal, imaginative space more appropriate to the feminine "servile subjectivity" Angelella describes (175). However, by figuring herself as a hawk in flight while serving an excessive amount of excessively sensual food, Mrs. Ramsay exhibits Bataille's materialism: she brings together the low and high, again "peer[ing] into the earthenware pot" while afloat on the "smoke"-like "element of joy" that is "rising upwards." Despite its acrobatics, a hawk is a material creature; while Hopkins' hawk symbolizes the kernel of immaterial, divine grace in all material, Mrs. Ramsay's hawk reverses this, pointing toward a material, gem-like "stability [. . .] in the face of the flowing, the fleeting, the spectral." She envisions her "joy" not as an intangible feeling, but as an "element" that both buoys and pervades her. In Woolf's liminal dinner setting, Mrs. Ramsay presides over ritualized consumption, crafting rather than performing her own subjectivity and that of those who eat her food.

Angelella, noting that Mrs. Ramsay never eats the boeuf, claims that this scene represents "a servile subjectivity, in which the woman is alienated from her own bodily needs and desires and does not incorporate her external world, but rather serves it" (175-6). Although Mrs. Ramsay does seem alienated from her bodily needs, her distribution of the boeuf need not be read as servitude. By doling out the meat, Mrs. Ramsay creates not only a transformative moment, but also a comedic one: we know she intends to stop serving William, yet we witness her distraction as her thoughts soar to sublime heights, and she continues. She finally assures William, who has not asked, that "there is plenty for everyone" (105). Although she doesn't consume, she controls others' consumption. While her thoughts fly like Hopkins' falcon, she forces a man (one whom she suspects desires her) to confront heaps of her excessive, sensuous, material food. This

interaction, like the others during the dinner party, brings two characters' complex relationship into focus: "Of such moments, she thought, the things is made that endures." Yet Mrs. Ramsay herself does not endure; she is dead when the narrative resumes after *Time Passes*. As in Hopkins' "Windhover," the disappearance of Mrs. Ramsay's material form allows the full scope of her agency over the narrative to manifest. Like Mrs. Moore in the discussion of Forster to follow (whose name persists as a religious chant), Mrs. Ramsay's absent body is replaced by the reformed relationships she leaves behind.

Something's Fishy in Twin Peaks

Although seemingly innocuous, food in David Lynch's *Twin Peaks* epitomizes the dangerous temptation of enjoyment. Sherryl Vint notes that Lynch uses both dialogue and camera angles to suggest Federal Agent Dale Cooper (Kyle MacLachlan)'s moral superiority relative to the other characters (72). As Lorna Piatti-Farnell claims, however, Cooper distinguishes himself from other lawful protagonists by his eagerness to indulge in bodily pleasure—especially the pleasure of eating (89). The Double-R Diner's cherry pie may be "damn fine," as Cooper remarks, but its consumption comes with a price. In *Twin Peaks*, as in Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, shared meals are spaces in which identities are in flux, and the dynamics of relationships manifest in tangible ways, generating an abundance of tension. Unlike Mrs. Ramsay's dinner party, during which most detail reaches the reader through inner monologue, Lynch's meals are punctuated by unsettling external interruptions. In the isolated town of Twin Peaks, to open one's mouth is to open one's body to various external forces—some decidedly unsavory. By attending to the infamous "fish in the percolator," an encounter with the Log Lady, dinner at the Palmer residence, and the Black Lodge's demonic diet, I will show that Lynch treats the shared meal as a space in which relationships and subjectivities are sharply altered. Much like Leggatt irrupts into Conrad's captain's isolated world, so manifestations of base material

irrupt into the small town of Twin Peaks, often using food—and its association with waste—as a conduit. Lynch treats the meal as a vulnerable, open moment in an individual's daily life, and this openness parallels the act of eating: as a bit of the external world enters the body and is digested, so external forces invade the communal body of participants in the mealtime ritual. Digestion often entails unforeseen discomfort; similarly, the forces at play around food in Twin Peaks often suggest hidden malevolence. This subtle evil finds its ultimate manifestation when it moves from food, which becomes part of one's body, to doppelgängers, complete body doubles who usurp their original subjects. In this way, Lynch is strikingly Conradian: unsettling moments in which knowledge is both tempting and destructive form the connective tissue of *Twin Peaks*' mythos. As the Black Lodge's demons and doppelgängers underlie the deceptively placid suburbs, so dangerously seductive food lurks beneath the show's detective narrative. And, as the Black Lodge makes a mockery of logic and language, so Lynch's food highlights the impossibility of Cooper's quest fully to understand Laura Palmer's murder.

In my previous chapter on Conrad, I raised the following question: how are we to conceive of the self as it navigates liminal space? If the liminal self temporarily loses its conventional subjectivity, what remains in the interim? Whatever remains is not intelligible, and so Bataille's base material became a helpful concept for envisioning this liminal remainder. Bataille's big toe reminds us that our anthropocentric privileging of the head and its ideas is arbitrary: the filthy toe is the ultimate foundation and substance of all matter, and Leggatt's naked emergence from the depths signals this. Although she locates her work in a tradition of vitalist philosophers, Jane Bennett shows an affinity with base materialism. In *Vibrant Matter*, Bennett argues that objects are only objects insofar as subjects perceive them as Other. She joins W. J. T. Mitchell in describing a pre-human, "never objectifiable depth" from which objects "rise

up toward our superficial knowledge" (2). Mirroring William Freedman's interest in Conrad's knowledge-resistant "foggy spots," Bennett notes the limitation of our superficial knowledge; she cites Hent de Vries' notion of the "absolute," that which is "loosened off" from the human intellect and thus marks its boundary (3). Bennett departs from Freedman, de Vries, and her vitalist predecessors (primarily Spinoza and Thoreau) by focusing her inquiry not on the nature of this limitation and the intellectual gap it presents, but on "the moment of independence (from subjectivity) possessed by things, a moment that must be there, since things do in fact affect other bodies, enhancing or weakening their power" (3). Independent from subjectivity, objects are no longer objects, but rather "things," "vivid entities not entirely reducible to the contexts in which (human) subjects set them, never entirely exhausted by their semiotics" (5). Here Bennett borrows from sociologist Bruno Latour, who claims that stable objects as such do not exist. Instead, drawing on the Icelandic etymology of the word "thing" as an assembly to address matters of concern, Latour analyzes malleable gatherings of actors and elements (39). Both Latour and Bennett acknowledge the recalcitrant stuff that remains—and acts—despite our failure to grasp it with the intellect. When this anthropocentric curtain of the object's dependence on the subject falls, both humans and their former objects are revealed to be ontologically equal. This equivalence is "neither a smooth harmony of parts nor a diversity unified by a common spirit," but is rather a Deleuzian smooth space without fixed points by which to triangulate subject and object (xi).

Bennett's "thing-power," the ability of things or "actants" to manifest traces of independence by exerting force upon other bodies, is similar to Deleuze's haecceity, an affective force not distinguishable as a subject or object (xvi). However, unlike Deleuze's paradigm, in which the smooth spaces of haecceities exist independently from the striated spaces of subjects

and objects, Bennett's thing-power always underlies the forces of human agency: "[t]o note this fact [that things and persons constantly exchange properties] explicitly, which is also to begin to *experience* the relationship between persons and other materialities more horizontally, is to take a step toward a more ecological sensibility" (10). As I've argued in the previous chapter, if a person inhabits a smooth space that lacks subject/object division, that person also inhabits liminal space; one cannot retain one's subjectivity without objects. Bennett's argument, in which thing-power is ubiquitous, implies that we are always poised at the threshold of liminal space. Therefore, by attending to *things* in liminal space, we also attend to humans. By bringing together Bataille's notion of foundational base material and Deleuze's notion of nondualistic space, Bennett provides a model for understanding the many interlocking liminal spaces and forces of *Twin Peaks*.⁴

The things of *Twin Peaks*—especially the food—appear in a smorgasbord of liminal landscapes. The Double R Diner is a nostalgic break from modernity, One-Eyed Jack's is a temporary retreat from the town's conservative values, and the Great Northern Hotel, set apart atop a waterfall and steeped in the occluded aesthetic of the forest, is treated as a transient space for negotiation. I'll begin at the Great Northern, where we may attend to a misplaced fish. Like the scorpion in the first mate's inkwell in Conrad's "The Secret Sharer," Pete (Jack Nance)'s "fish in the percolator" not only resists, but also mocks attempts to understand it rationally. And, like Bennett's things, it exerts affective force over other bodies in the narrative. The scene, part of the second episode ("Traces to Nowhere"), begins by fading into a close-up shot of a chopping block. Three small silver fishes rest on the block, and two green bell peppers rest at its side. We see Pete's hands gutting one of the fish for a few seconds before the scene cuts to Pete standing in profile, all but his hands and the block visible as he works. Josie Packard (Joan Chen) wanders

leisurely into the room in her nightgown, and Pete corrects Josie's "on-top-of-the-morning-to-you." Sheriff Harry Truman (Michael Ontkean) buzzes the intercom to tell Pete that he and Agent Cooper have arrived to question Josie about Laura Palmer's death. Josie looks unsettled for an instant before she recovers and offers to go make a fresh pot of coffee. During the ensuing discussion, Josie offers nothing of substance except Laura's last statement to her, "I think now I understand how you feel about your husband's death," of which Josie says: "I can't help hearing it in my head, like some haunting melody." Just before Truman is about to sip the coffee—and just after Cooper's first sip—Pete abruptly announces: "don't drink that coffee! You'd never guess, but there was a *fish* in the *percolator*!" For Cooper, who takes his coffee quality quite seriously, this fish is not easily forgotten: in the next few moments, we see his mouth working as his expression is uncharacteristically blank and sickened. This fish is itself a "haunting melody," a visual, olfactory earworm: Cooper mentions the coffee's fishy taste in the next scene, and Lynch never resolves the titillating mystery of its source for the viewer. Josie may have placed the fish to ward off further investigations by Cooper, but this is speculative at best. We soon see Pete scrubbing the percolator, but when he sniffs it, his face tells us that the fishy smell persists. In all of these ways, this scene's fish exert thing-power over Cooper, Truman, Pete, and the viewer. Despite its triviality, no one can get it out of his or her head, nose, or palette. Lynch is a disciple of Conrad: this dead fish rises from the blackness of the coffee just as Conrad's scorpion rises from the inkwell. And although it is a trivial food item—what we would readily call an "object"—this fish is a cypher for Laura's corpse, the recalcitrant mystery that drives the series. We might say that in *Twin Peaks*, something is fishy from the beginning.

Shortly after the fish incident, a memorable mealtime encounter occurs at the Double R Diner. Before his food is even served, Cooper sets an anxious tone for what should be a casual

meal at the Diner's counter. After suggesting that Cooper would enjoy the cherry pie, Truman makes a request of Shelly Johnson (Madchen Amick): "Can you ask Norma to stop by a second, Shelly?" When Shelly replies with a clipped, unthinking "Sure," Cooper interjects: "Nothing's a sure thing, Shelly." The camera turns to Shelly's face, which undergoes a subtle shift from impassive to bemused as she turns away. Cooper's ominous and out-of-place intrusion would provoke surprise in most contexts, but Shelly's reaction is closer to flirtatiousness than fear. Cooper then deepens the subtle sense of dread by evoking the fish-in-the-percolator incident: "Damn, I still can't get the taste of that fish-filtered coffee out of my mouth." Although the Double R's coffee is damn fine, the taste of fish persists. As Cooper and Truman begin to talk shop, the camera pans to the Log Lady (Catherine E. Coulson), who hunches over her log (played by itself) in a nearby seat. Her mystique is palpable. "Hi," says Cooper in her direction. She glances up in brief reproach before turning back to her log. Cooper asks Truman if he can inquire about her log, to which the Sheriff replies, "many have." But before he can, Norma (Peggy Lipton) arrives with the pie. Norma confirms that Laura had been an organizer and volunteer for meals-on-wheels, "delivering hot dinners to elderly shut-ins." Truman asks Norma to find the names of those on Laura's route, suggesting an association between the arrival of food and murder. Cooper orders two more pieces of pie, and at that moment, the Log Lady approaches and addresses him:

"For your information, I heard you speaking about Laura Palmer. One day, my log will have something to say about this. My log saw something that night."

"Really? What did it see?"

"Ask it."

When both the Sheriff and Federal Agent hesitate, the Log Lady makes a frustrated face, declares "I thought so," and leaves. This exchange not only interrupts Cooper's enjoyment of an

excessive amount of pie, but seems provoked by his order. Cooper's initial, verbal salutation to the Log Lady is fruitless, as is his silence. The characters will learn that to communicate with the log and gain vital knowledge about the murder case, they must not only suspend their disbelief, but also suspend logic and accept a paradigm in which non-human materials have agency. Like large quantities of donuts, coffee, and cherry pie, the log occupies a central yet obscure place in *Twin Peaks*' narrative. Lynch treats mealtime, during which the body is open, as a liminal space in which engagement with these material actants is possible. Cooper's hesitant yet curious reaction to the Log Lady's interruption echoes Shelly's earlier reaction to Cooper's mysterious interjection: "Nothing's a sure thing." Both characters are tempted and pleased by these interrupting forces, yet do not embrace them—yet.

The disruptive emergences of material agency in *Twin Peaks* begin gently; the surprising appearance of a fish, the oracular log, and the distractingly fine cherry pie harm no one. But as the series moves toward its climax—the revelation that Leland Palmer, possessed by BOB, raped and murdered his daughter—the material incursions grow increasingly violent. Non-human materials, especially foods, abruptly exert force over participants in shared meals; material actants take advantage of the vulnerability that attends consumption. One could claim that to "take advantage of" a situation requires human agency, not unmotivated thing-power. However, as Bennett shows with a variety of examples, material often exploits both its environment and agents with which it interacts: a current follows the path of least resistance not because it desires to, but because it is *able* to. The same logic applies to material actants' exploitation of the open, vulnerable, changing bodies that inhabit the shared meal space. As we've seen in Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, dinner parties are liminal rituals: within a dinner's space and allotted time, participants' conventional roles are clarified and altered. Instead of moving between characters'

inner-monologues, Lynch externalizes the traumatic disturbances that simmer beneath the suburban dinner party's polite surface.

Lynch's violent externalization of turbulent material forces is evident during the inaugural meeting of the Hayward Supper Club, hosted by Donna Hayward (Lara Flynn Boyle)'s youngest sister Gersten (Alicia Witt) in their family's dining room. The episode, "May the Giant Be with You," is the first of season two and occurs shortly before we learn that Leland is Laura's murderer. The scene begins by drawing our attention to food, as Donna (investigating her friend's death) calls Norma to adopt Laura's old Meals-on-Wheels route. She asks to "use the Double-R's station wagon," setting a nostalgic tone by referencing both a classic American diner and classic American car. Beneath the nostalgia, the dark opening chords of "Laura Palmer's Theme" add a dimension of dread and impending violence to the scene. As Donna hangs up the phone and looks pensively downward, a shadow falls across her face, mirroring Laura's leitmotif. If left to play a few more seconds, the first few notes of "Laura Palmer's Theme's" simple piano melody would have broken through the synthesizer's looming minor chords like beams piercing a dark mist. Instead, Lynch cuts to a shot of the Hayward's dinner table, and the leitmotif fades into long, quiet, nondescript major chords. This frustrates the viewer's expectations, since composer Angelo Badalamenti uses Laura's theme frequently throughout the series to build from a moment of despair or tension to a moment of hope, relief, or redemption. Instead, we're presented with Gersten's monologue: her "good news" is that she's landed the part of "fairy princess" in her school play, and that she "got the highest scores in mathematics and English this midseason term, just as my sisters Harriet and Donna did before me. So now I don't have to worry about being ashamed anymore." All that Gersten brings to the table, including her predictable classical music, is regurgitated. Perhaps most egregiously, she fetishizes the pink

costume she wears (complete with wand and tiara) by calling it her "special dress." She unknowingly plays the Trickster in this mealtime ritual, parroting convention to such a degree that convention is revealed to be groundless.⁵ This insipid monologue, following Donna's nostalgic promise of diners and station wagons, and underwritten by musical frustration, initiates the dinner's tedium. It is through this tedium that material forces make their violent entrances.

As Harriet (Jessica Wallenfels), the Hayward's middle child, begins to recite her poem about Laura, Gersten's opening notes on the piano do not harmonize with the non-diegetic music. The effect is an unsettlingly dissonant setting for lines that are already eerie: "It was Laura. And I saw her glowing. / In the dark woods, I saw her smiling." The second line evokes Ghostwood Forest, the site of Laura's murder, although Harriet couldn't know this. This allusion jars the viewer; it slips past the listening characters, though the cryptic imagery and sparse piano do seem to unsettle Mrs. Palmer. While Gersten's monologue is banal but appropriate, Harriet's poem is emotional and deeply personal. She hesitates and stutters as she reads, and her refrain, "it was Laura," grows more insistent each time she utters it. Harriet is sharing her "dreams" in poetic form, and her poem's surreal logic—"the woods was our sadness, / the dance was her calling"—further disturbs Mrs. Palmer, whose face contorts in a mixture of pain and exasperation. What is presented as a family-friendly dinner performance becomes another link to Laura's murder. Defying dinnertime expectations of cleanliness and neutral conversation, Laura's corpse—and the woods into which her living body disappeared—arises from Harriet's dreams to exert force over the assembled guests. By participating in the liminal ritual of the shared meal, the characters expose themselves to the intrusion of dreams, food, and music: all material actants.

One of *Twin Peaks'* strengths is its ability to skirt the line between realistic and metaphysical causation. Lynch creates bizarre situations, such as the fish in the percolator, but

leaves the viewer to determine what agencies were at play (and whether said agencies were human). However, Lynch does not merely create a binary between the human and spiritual (angelic or demonic) realms. The ambiguities he leaves in his narrative, like Conrad's "spots of unknowing," do not present the reader with such simple choices. Rather, human bodies, non-human materials, and metaphysical entities are all potential participants in the narrative. Moreover, Lynch blurs the boundaries between these actants: humans are interpolated with the demonic, but also with their own non-human bodily functions, as is apparent in the rest of the Hayward Supper Club scene. After Harriet's poem, the scene jumps ahead: dinner has been served, and Gersten is playing Mendelssohn, generating tension by making the guests uncertain about whether they should speak. The guests deepen the tension by clinking their silverware reluctantly over a classically American yet bland-looking meal of red meat, mashed potatoes, and vegetables. Donna whispers her investigation's latest development to Maddy (Sheryl Lee), while Doctor Hayward comments aloud on Leland's newly silver hair. Leland replies that he "woke up this morning, looked in the mirror, and there it was," and that he "physically felt like a great weight had been lifted from his heart." This may have been the weight of remorse. Leland's silver hair signifies his spiritual occupation by the demonic entity BOB, but that isn't all. Like the fish in the percolator, Leland's striking hair emerges without warning or context. This material change in Leland's body belies Agent Albert Rosenfield (Miguel Ferrer)'s later speculation that "BOB is just the evil that men do." It is reductionist to attribute the influence BOB has on Lynch's narrative to purely human agency. Rather, BOB is a demonic version of Thoreau's Wild as Bennett describes it: "a not-quite-human force that addled and altered human and other bodies" (2). Like the Wild, BOB tends to inhabit the wilderness, away from human constructs. But when BOB enters the civilized realm, he does more than addle bodies; he inhabits them,

doubles them, and ultimately destroys them. Like an all-consuming grief or anger given physical form, BOB has been dissolving Leland's identity from within. But is Leland consumed by emotion, by BOB, or by both? Perhaps BOB's presence and precise nature isn't the point. Instead, Lynch draws attention to the emotionally tortured body's attack on itself: Leland's silver hair worries his doctor, and his cheerful reaction to it disturbs his peers. Leland's behavior during the rest of dinner reveals the increasing intensity of Leland's bodily material's attack on its human subject. To express his newfound lightness of spirit, Leland insists on singing "Get Happy" with Gersten's accompaniment. Although the song starts out well enough, Leland quickly gets carried away, rushes ahead of the piano, and finally collapses on the floor. Even in his weakened state, he refuses to acknowledge his body's resistance; "'Begin the Beguine'!", he insists from the floor as Doctor Hayward examines him. Rather than dispel this dinner's mounting tension, Leland's ironically happy song makes it clear to everyone that the influence of Laura's death has not run its course. On the contrary: just as Laura's body unexpectedly emerges from the lake in the pilot episode, so the material factors and products of her death continue to surface through the town's other bodies. The eruption of Leland's silver hair during a ritualized shared meal is a warning: "the evil that men do" is certainly at play in the town of Twin Peaks, but so are the non-human, not-necessarily-metaphysical forces that surround and inhabit humans.⁶ The unappetizing food, uneaten and forgotten in the wake of Leland's awkward interruption and collapse, reminds us that materials are not inherently subordinate to human will. Food is not always our friend.

Leland's abortive performance associates food with dancing, as do Audrey Horne (Sherilyn Fenn)'s trance-like dances in the Double R Diner and *The Man From Another Place* (Michael J. Anderson)'s dances in the Black Lodge. More specifically, Lynch associates eating—by Bennett's account, the consumption of vital bodies by other vital bodies—with movement.

Citing nineteenth-century philosophers Nietzsche and Thoreau, Bennett describes eating "as a series of mutual transformations in which the border between inside and outside becomes blurry: my meal both is and is not mine; you both are and are not what you eat" (49). Eating, then, is always a liminal act, an act that begins to dissolve subjective boundaries and allow movement across them. The act of eating does not have this effect in isolation (only on the eater), but on all bodies involved: "[i]n the eating encounter," continues Bennett, "all bodies are shown to be but temporary congealments of a materiality that is a process of becoming, is hustle and flow punctuated by sedimentation and substance." In the episode following the Supper Club, "Coma," Donna takes over Laura's Meals-On-Wheels route and experiences one of the most literal, yet metaphysical, movements of food in *Twin Peaks*. This moving food undermines the verisimilitude of Donna's world, exposing its many permeable boundaries. The scene in question opens with Donna walking slowly toward the camera, down a gently-winding paved path, carrying a closed silver cloche atop a tray. She's just entered a yard that is apparently surrounded by a high wooden fence, visible behind her. The high fence and its ruggedly ornate entryway (including a hanging log) mark Donna and her food's passage from the world of the Double R's Landrover, parked outside, to a space insulated from the Double R's cheery American normativity. Although she is in a residential area, Donna has entered what Northrop Frye calls a "green world," a liminal space where social conventions are temporarily suspended, allowing stymied elements of a plot to play out and resolve themselves before a return to normalcy. It is useful to describe Donna's stroll down this path as a passage into the green world rather than merely into liminal or smooth space. "Liminal" describes the transitional middle phase of a process, and Deleuze uses "smooth" to distinguish liminal spaces of fluid identity from "striated" spaces of fixed, socially determined identity. The green world is a liminal (and often smooth)

space, but it is unique in its propensity not only to suspend convention, but to harbor radically unconventional events—as Donna discovers, it is a magical space. Lynch's three-layered mise-en-scène underscores the sense that Donna is moving between worlds: in the center of the shot we see, through the entryway's rectangular cut-out, the outermost layer in which the Landrover waits; closer to us, we see the fenced yard with its well-tended lawn, flowers, and path; and closest to the camera, the corner of a house dominates the shot's left side, as if we were peering around it to watch Donna. A menacing drone of low brass plays as Donna makes her way toward the camera, glances nervously around, and rounds the corner to the doorway. In the twenty seconds it takes for Donna and her food to cross two boundaries and reach a third—the car's threshold, the yard's threshold, and the house's threshold—Lynch associates the approach of food with the approach of danger. This scene's framing, its music, and Donna's slow, uncertain gait defamiliarize the conventionally safe suburban yard, capturing in a moment one of the series' major themes: that evil can lurk behind the appearance of convention. This change of perspective prepares the viewer for a more unorthodox movement of food in the next scene.

As Donna knocks on the door, the scene cuts to the interior of Mrs. Tremond (Frances Bay)'s apparently one-room house. Mrs. Tremond, an old woman with her frazzled gray hair in a bun, sits upright in a bed against a window. Facing her, a child of about six dressed in a tuxedo lounges on a chair. The camera lingers on this view for a long moment as Mrs. Tremond stares at the door but says nothing. Finally, she announces: "enter." This belabored and formal invitation to cross her threshold recalls the oddly ceremonial entryway to her yard. Like Conrad, Lynch marks significant thresholds—such as those between worlds—with material signposts that influence those whom encounter them. In Conrad's "The Secret Sharer," the narrator encounters "lines of fishing stakes resembling a mysterious system of half-submerged bamboo fences,

incomprehensible in its division of the domain of tropical fishes, and crazy of aspect as if abandoned forever by some nomad tribe of fisherman" at the Gulf of Siam's threshold (17). Similarly, in *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow recounts the row of shrunken heads on stakes that marks the threshold of Kurtz's house, noting one in particular: "there it was, black, dried, sunken, with closed eyelids, —a head that seemed to sleep at the top of that pole [. . .] smiling continuously at some endless and jocose dream of that eternal slumber" (71). In both instances, the material boundary of liminal space disorients and repels a narrator. The captain finds the fishing-stake-fence "mysterious," "incomprehensible," and "crazy." Though Marlow calls the shrunken heads "impressive," his language makes his impression clear: they are "black, dried, sunken." Like her Conradian predecessors, Donna reacts with confusion and a little fear to the markers of liminal thresholds, though she doesn't rationally grasp their significance. For her, these markers are the log-frame entryway and Mrs. Tremond's frail yet forceful voice: "enter."

Donna enters. She places the tray on a stack of old newspapers beside the bed. The camera cuts to a close-up of Mrs. Tremond having a coughing fit into her handkerchief. Although the food hasn't yet been revealed, this reminder of bodily expulsion initiates the "series of mutual transformations in which the border between inside and outside becomes blurry" that Bennett associates with eating (49). The dapper child gets Donna's attention to announce "sometimes things can happen just like this" (he snaps his fingers). As Mrs. Tremond opens the cloche, which holds a piece of fried chicken, rice, and creamed corn, her face registers surprise and indignation. "Do you see creamed corn on that plate?" she asks Donna. The camera cuts to a close-up of the meal, the corn an unappetizing, glistening blob. "Yes," Donna replies. "I requested no creamed corn," continues Mrs. Tremond, her voice trembling: "do you see creamed corn on that plate?" At first the repeated question seems meant to chastise Donna, but when

Donna glances down at the plate again, the corn has vanished. "No," she says, as a bass drum booms softly in the background. Mrs. Tremond's question moves from a rhetorical to a literal register: she is asking Donna whether she actually acknowledges the corn's material presence. The camera cuts to the child, who is now holding the creamed corn in his cupped hands. It then cuts to a close-up of the boy's exposed hands, and again we see the corn in uncomfortably fine detail, this time as it touches the exposed hands. Like Mrs. Tremond's coughing fit, this shot draws the viewer's attention to the permeability of the human body. As Bataille and Bennett argue, humans tend to imagine that they occupy a superior position to base material in an ontological hierarchy. And, as Julia Kristeva claims in her essay on abjection, humans are repulsed by reminders of our identity with nonliving material, our proximity to death—hence our commonly held fear of corpses (*Powers of Horror*). When a subject encounters material that is to become part of her, she would rather this merger be invisible, maintaining the semblance of distinction between the consuming subject and the consumed Other. But in this scene, the nourishing creamed corn's relationship to the body is not buffered by plate or utensil. We see it in the boy's hands, and though it was destined for a human stomach, we are repulsed. That no one actually eats in this scene reinforces the sense of food's independent agency; rather than serve the purpose arbitrarily assigned it by humans, the corn travels off its plate (beyond its boundaries) and across the room. This common food item, like the suburban yard outside, has become unfamiliar to Donna, and—in its movement across the room—magical.

In the space beyond Mrs. Tremond's threshold, food's unmotivated agency (Bennett's "thing-power") manifests as a mimicry of consumption. After the creamed corn moves instantly and invisibly from the plate to the boy's hands, it vanishes entirely. Creamed corn's later reappearance in the series as "garmonbozia," the sustenance of the Black Lodge's demons,

suggests that its initial disappearance is a digestion. It moves through the narrative's layers—the socialized realm of the suburb, and the base material realm of the Black Lodge—as if through bowels. Like Conrad's Kurtz, who begins as a rumor, manifests as "little more than a voice," and continues to exert force over the narrative after his burial in the muck, Lynch's food embodies the thing-power that radiates outward from his liminal interiors, crossing and unsettling subjective boundaries (57). Donna came to Mrs. Tremond's house not to be a good Samaritan, but to seek knowledge about her friend's murder. Without being asked, Mrs. Tremond points Donna toward her next clue (Mr. Smith's house), but the child offers extra, undesired knowledge. Despite Donna's drive rationally to grasp Laura's death, its causes are irreducible to reason: "sometimes things can happen just like this (snap)."

Conrad's characters tend to explore spaces that are liminal in their vastness, openness, and distance from civilization. They clearly begin and conclude their journeys through liminal space, and they are able to leave it behind. Lynch takes a different approach to embedding liminal spaces within his narratives. His liminal spaces tend to be interiors, close at hand but sealed off from the external world. Lynch's liminal spaces are never far away, and threaten constantly to reemerge. Mrs. Tremond's decor—faded red curtains, pinkish bedspread, and faded red carpet—evokes the Black Lodge, home of BOB and *Twin Peaks'* liminal space par-excellence. Though the Black Lodge manifests in Cooper's prophetic dreams, and other rooms (like Blackie's room in One-Eyed Jack's) bear a resemblance to it, the Black Lodge never explicitly appears in the same material world as the characters. Even in the final episode ("Beyond Life and Death"), when Cooper gains entry to the Lodge at the sycamore tree grove in Ghostwood, the Lodge hasn't physically manifested. Instead, an immaterial red velvet curtain fades slowly into view, and as Cooper walks through it, he is absorbed into the Black Lodge and

disappears until the camera cuts to the Lodge's interior. The names "Black Lodge" and "White Lodge" are ironic; as Cooper reminds us, "nothing's a sure thing," and nothing in Twin Peaks is simply black or white. Instead, Ghostwood Forest becomes a nexus for Conradian "spots of unknowing." But unlike Conrad's typical narrative arc, in which a character travels out (to sea, or into the jungle) to encounter tempting, dangerous foggy spots, Lynch's spots function less like the Bermuda Triangle and more like an earthquake: they begin at an epicenter—an interior space—and move outward. The series frequently hints at Ghostwood as this epicenter of dangerous force: Laura's mother has a vision of her daughter's heart necklace buried in the woods; the final episode shows various characters' hands trembling as they feel the Black Lodge's influence; and a recurring shot of a traffic light at Ghostwood's edge changing from yellow to red betokens danger in following scenes. Like the forest in *Heart of Darkness*, Ghostwood exhibits a complex agency that predates human influence. Like Bennett's vibrant material, the forest acts despite its lack of human motivation. It opens the Lodge to Cooper, but it also provides the owls that serve as BOB's eyes. It allows Cooper to escape the Lodge, but as Lynch reveals in the series' final shot, he has become BOB's newest host: Cooper looks into a mirror, and a malicious stranger stares back. In *Twin Peaks*, as in Conrad and Woolf, the transformative potential of a liminal space depends upon the dangerous, tempting knowledge hidden there: knowledge about the nature of the demons—perhaps psychological, perhaps real—involved in Laura's death. *Twin Peaks'* uniqueness lies in its representation of this knowledge as a force that is not distant, but locked away and simmering beneath the surface of everyday life.

Sheryl Vint notes the false binary of an insular suburban paradise and an external corrupting influence. Laura's life and murder belie that fiction. Not only was her life unaligned with nostalgic American ideals, her actions and motivations also can't be explained in binary

terms. Laura isn't a pure homecoming queen who Fell (capital F) into corruption. She is a human, never an angel. Twin Peaks' nostalgic narrative, supported by Cooper's vocal love of the town, actually points up the dangers of nostalgia not only to individuals, but to civilization. Lynch appeals to American viewers' desire for illusory ideals—as Vint says, "a past that never was"—only to demonstrate the complexity and pain inherent in Laura's actual past. Idealistic nostalgia obscures the sources of current social problems: the investigators want Laura's death to be a simple, sterile mystery with an intelligible answer whose discovery leaves the community intact: "the evil that men do." Instead, it is the culmination of a muddy network of material forces, all constantly at work within the community. Nostalgia in Twin Peaks manifests as Laura's body—each episode ends with credits rolling over a framed photo of Laura as homecoming queen—but also as food. Laura's haunting of the narrative is not distinct from food's ubiquity in it. Through food, Lynch warns that despite the idealized stories subjects craft for themselves and others, material forces—consumption and expulsion—still motivate them. Vint claims that Twin Peaks' central ethos is "the longing for a stable, virtuous moral universe and the impossibility of finding anything that does not fall into corruption." I add that this ethos is not only the failure to find a bastion from corruption, but the recognition that what appears in binary logic as "corruption" is actually a field of forces, especially consumption, inherent to any community. For this reason, Lynch portrays BOB and the other Black Lodge spirits as consummating their murders by eating "garmonbozia"—creamed corn, the food that appears and disappears so unexpectedly in Mrs. Tremond's house. Twin Peaks, like anywhere else, is driven by material forces: though these are often uncontrollable and unintelligible, they don't disappear when ignored.

Mrs. Ramsay and Laura Palmer are both women who drive the narratives in which they appear before and after their absence. The narrative becomes a series of their traces. Like the

thing-power of Bennett's vibrant material, these women's agencies persist after they become lifeless material. Cooper and Donna try to follow those traces to their end, which they imagine to be knowledge that will end Laura's posthumous hold over their lives. They discover that this knowledge is not the cathartic end of a linear path, but an ubiquitous force—perhaps an affect—that can be encountered, but not contained. Both before and after death, consumption is a force through which human bodies constantly reconstitute themselves. *To the Lighthouse* and *Twin Peaks* ritualize subject-formation through consumption by placing their characters in liminal settings. The tedium of shared meals arises from the forced interaction of unstable subjects: food clashes and merges with other material under a veneer of civility. The resulting fireworks mark the futility of repressing these forces and the opportunity for women to resist oppressive, conventional expectations.

CHAPTER 4: FRAGMENTS OF MEMORY IN THOM GUNN'S *THE MAN WITH NIGHT SWEATS*

“These fragments I have shored against my ruins”

—T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*

Thom Gunn's poetry chronicles transition. His poems are in constant motion, traveling from Britain to America, from safety to danger, from intimate physical presence to memory, and from life to death. Gunn lived much of his early life in a liminal state. Bruce Woodcock describes him as a "chameleon poet," moving between social roles without fully actualizing any of them (61). These various facets persist throughout Gunn's career, though the later poet is less inwardly focused. In *The Man with Night Sweats* (1992), Gunn recalls the early spread of HIV infection, when AIDS, the syndrome caused by the HIV retrovirus, became a deadly stigma for gay men. In the early eighties, methods of HIV transmission were unclear, and the FDA didn't release the first antiretroviral drug until 1987 (aids.gov). Gunn preserves fragments of deceased friends' memories while lamenting their twin killers: the epidemic and the complicit, misinformed, or homophobic public discourses that surrounded (and continue to surround) it. A drive to preserve these friends' disintegrating bodies in memory—finding safety for them *after* their death—runs through Gunn's poetry. Whereas Janine Utell describes the dinner party in Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* as a "proleptic elegy," mourning Mrs. Ramsay before her passing, Gunn reverses this gesture, seeking a postmortem refuge for his loved ones. As Deborah Landau notes, Gunn's poetry about AIDS contains "a brief, reluctant concession about the possibility of regeneration," but this is not to be mistaken for the "epiphany" of earlier modernists like T. S. Eliot and Wallace Stevens (198). In Eliot's *Four Quartets*, regeneration is not a possibility but a

promise: the last poem, "Little Gidding," acknowledges death but prophesizes that "the end of all our exploring / Will be to arrive where we started / And know the place for the first time."

Although death ends "all our exploring," we still "arrive" somewhere and "know" something, implying that death is not annihilation but a new mode of existence. For Stevens, especially in *Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction*, imagination exerts force against reality, and this transformative force is manifest and communicable in poetry's playful abstractions. Unlike Eliot and Stevens, who lived through the twentieth century's World Wars without serving on the front lines, Gunn directly witnessed the decimation of his community by HIV. The result is poetry bereft of most abstraction, containing and insulating the details of particular lives and bodies against destructive rhetoric. Though not a soldier, Gunn fits into a tradition of English war poetry begun by the likes of Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon, a tradition that diverges from the modernist current and distinguishes him from his postmodern contemporaries: he resists reality not by turning to religion or imagination to transform it, but by embracing the material body's instability and surviving in spite of it.

Gunn's work in the early nineties exemplifies his vision of the unstable self as it exists, thrives, and grieves in liminal settings. Unlike Conrad, who flirts with the dissolution of the self but retreats, and Woolf, who uses temporary liminal settings to bring the shifting contours of the self into clearer focus, Gunn commits to inhabiting liminal space. In *The Man with Night Sweats*, Gunn's characters encounter deceased friends in dreamscapes situated between consciousness and annihilation. Unlike Conrad's Marlow, they do not bury these apparitions and move on; instead, Gunn's dreamers touch, speak with, and share the suffering of these embodied visions. The ironic contrasts—and overlaps—between dream and reality render legible the illusory, politicized, and often destructive barriers between bodies. This recognition entails the acceptance

of intimacy despite bodily risk. Bodies are never perfectly safe, but for Gunn, loss of intimacy is a terrible consequence of, not the solution to, the HIV epidemic.⁷

The Problems of Safety and Containment

Though he misjudges the function of Gunn's poetic personas, Bruce Woodcock (writing in 1993) is among the first critics to note the thematic search for safety in Gunn's work, and his interpretation of the young Gunn's poetry is foundational to an understanding of the older Gunn's characters. Woodcock finds a defensive posture in Gunn's Beat poems of the sixties that their American counterparts, notably Allen Ginsberg's "Howl," reject. Woodcock explains that "[Gunn's] best poems of this period achieve a play-off between explosive subjects and tight-lipped formal concentration. Their veneer of rebelliousness is contained in a formal poetic practice which American Beats had already overthrown" (62). This statement has a troubling implication. By framing the decision not to use formal verse in the sixties as a matter of forward progress, Woodcock assumes that verse can contain—but never fully express—repressed desire. He goes on to confirm this:

Desire, fantasy, bodily energies—all fascinate [Gunn] and are clothed in the rebellious subcultural poses of the rock-'n'-roll decade. But their subversive implications are then resolutely contained by the controlling will of the verse form—as if, despite the freedoms of America, Gunn were as yet incapable of confronting the implications head-on or in the open. (63)

There is truth to the notion that verse forms exert a "controlling will" over the content of poems; however, there is no reason to assume that forms are masks, poses, or barriers to authentic expression. It is also true that Gunn, up to this point in his career, lacked the "explicit homoerotic poems like [Ginsberg's] 'Many Loves'" (62). But Woodcock falsely equates fullness of expression with explicitly homoerotic content. Indeed, by portraying sixties Gunn as lacking the chutzpah to confront desire's implications "head-on or in the open," and by denigrating the use of formal verse to tackle "explosive subjects" as "rather like John Dowland singing Presley's

'Jailhouse Rock' to lute accompaniment," Woodcock reenacts the macho trope which he reads as a "vener of rebelliousness" in *English and American Beats* (63, 62). Despite this, he raises a crucial point: "Tailored into verse, the leather-clad Beat imagery is expressed *and* made safe. It allowed Gunn to explore experiences which touched on hidden sexual fascinations, without having to come out from behind the pose" (63, emphasis original). I agree that Gunn's "fascinations," elaborated as "images of leather, straps, whips" and "an obsession for soldiers, warriors, heroes," are made "safe" by their ambiguity and form. But a combative "pose" rendered in formal verse need not be a hiding place for a more authentic voice. Rather, Gunn's steadfast forms provide structural support for the expression of content that is not only socially "explosive," but also deeply, lyrically painful.

Gunn's early macho poses (like the "flesh" that "was its own shield" in the later "Man with Night Sweats") are transitory protective devices, yet they are not fearful or passive. Poems like "On the Move" celebrate the poet's ability to contain (and only then express) the suffering that attends movement between identities. In this context, to "resolutely contain" the implications of desire is not to negate them, but to circumscribe and preserve them. For example, in "On the Move" (*The Sense of Movement*, 1957) Gunn compares the movement of passing bikers with that of birds, and finds instinct to be a prominent drive for both. Though the bikers enact what Woodcock would describe as a macho pose, Gunn does not portray them as invulnerable. The bikers wear "gleaming jackets," icons of the pose Woodcock notes, but they hold their motorcycles, representative of the human will, "by calf and thigh" (lines 14, 12). This tenuous grip on an "imperfectly control[led]" will propels the bikers into an indeterminate "future from the taken routes" (25-6). Echoing the "uncertain violence" of the birds' movement in the first stanza, the bikers "strap in doubt—by hiding it, robust— / And almost hear a meaning in their

noise" (15-6). Rather than eliding their "doubt" about their destination, value, and purpose in favor of stereotypical bravado, Gunn portrays the bikers with their insecurities strapped to their bodies. Though they are made "robust" by hiding "doubt," it is transparent to the reader, as is the "almost" that qualifies the "meaning in their noise." Neither Gunn nor his characters hide behind poses. Instead, Gunn creates surrogates rich with strengths and weaknesses. Each identity helps the poet express a particular mode of anxiety or suffering (here the existential worry over life's direction, and later the more immediate destruction caused by HIV); and, each is temporary, meant to play a role and fade away. The bikers demonstrate this: "A minute holds them, who have come to go: / The self-defined, astride the created will / They burst away" (33-5). It is this openness to the body's frequently shifting boundaries that allows Gunn to respond to the AIDS crisis with *The Man with Night Sweats*, a book that affirms intimacy despite the body's inevitable dissolution.

"On the Move" is written in a variation of ottava rima: each of its five eight-line stanzas of iambic pentameter uses an ABACCDDB rhyme scheme. Rather than evoking Elvis Presley wearing a ruff, as Woodcock suggests, this formal choice provides structural support for the poem's sense of movement (appropriate for a poem published in *The Sense of Movement*). The original ottava rima form uses the ABABABCC scheme. Like the Italian and Elizabethan sonnet forms, this pattern alters its end-rhymes in the final couplet in order to introduce a new idea or invert the reader's expectations. In Gunn's subtly adjusted pattern, two new sets of consecutive end-rhymes (CC and DD) build the poem's momentum by propelling each stanza forward more quickly than the original alternating scheme. When this momentum peaks, each stanza's final line returns to B, an end-rhyme from the second line that barely remains on the reader's palate. While the original ottava rima form drives toward its concluding couplets as if willfully following a

predetermined path, Gunn's variation in "On the Move" reflects the poem's content: it "spurts" forward "astride the created will," yet circles back on itself, enhancing the poem's sense of forward movement despite frustrated desire (lines 3, 34). The poem's final lines render this tension explicit: "At worst, one is in motion; and at best, / Reaching no absolute, in which to rest, / One is always nearer by not keeping still" (38-40). Much is summarized in this final end-rhyme: the poem's form lends it a constant rhythm, a "will," that propels it forward despite its thematic treatment of uncertain direction, the threat of becoming "still." Gunn's use of form is not a decorative mask for "a submerged exploration of sexual identity"—it is an extension of that exploration, one which develops throughout his career.

Whether submerged or transparent, the exploration of sexual identity entails social and physical risk. Given the ubiquity of AIDS after the eighties, this risk drastically multiplies. George Piggford lays out the various forces composing AIDS not only as a disease, but as an unruly collection of discourses at the turn of the millennium:

[I]n theoretical discourses, "AIDS" tends to signify an overdetermined set of possible referents. These include a physical condition (overlapping with the notion of AIDS constructed through medical discourses); an American, politically conservative conspiracy to eliminate homosexuality; a threat to the singularity and uniqueness of one's own body; an opportunity to reconceptualize the significations of homosexuality and the homosexual community; an opportunity for large pharmaceutical companies to exploit economically those infected with HIV; fear; death; etc. (171)

The majority of these forces are threats to be neutralized. Piggford explains the distinction between the perspective of AIDS theorists and that of the medical community. Theorists like Lee Edelman, claims Piggford, have lost faith in the medical community and see it as their task to comprehend, contain, and perhaps redirect the various AIDS discourses (176). Eric Savoy rightly worries that with this focus on rhetoric rather than syndrome, "The distinction between body and text tends to blur" (Savoy 73; Piggford 177). Piggford solves this dilemma by noting that the "tropic" comprehension of AIDS-as-discourse and the "empirical" apprehension of AIDS as a

material, observable syndrome are not mutually exclusive (179). He offers an arena in which to approach the space between these paradigms:

[L]iterary texts can inscribe both discourses in an attempt to make sense of AIDS in a way that is not strictly scientific, theoretical, or rationalistic. The writing of literature, as a creative or imaginative endeavor, can inscribe what is often unwritable in more strictly organized and limited forms of discourse such as the medical text or the theoretical inquiry. In this way, literature provides a context in which one might attempt to read the illegible. (179)

Piggford is describing a liminal space, a cognitive gap experienced not only by persons living with AIDS, but also by those who witness their deterioration. Piggford notes the ability of authors including Hervé Guibert, Tony Kushner, and Gunn to navigate this space by writing "as close to death as possible," by approaching the "'threshold of revelation,'" the "moment of the apprehension of death" (180). Piggford's argument recalls Conrad's depiction of the approach to Koh-ring in "The Secret Sharer": in the liminal setting of the Gulf of Siam, the captain is able to approach the *gnosis* of a near-death experience and to contain it, albeit imperfectly, within his story. In Conrad, as in AIDS writers and especially Gunn, a fatal (or near-fatal) approach to the unknown allows a subject to relinquish its conventional boundaries. In the literary, liminal settings in which these boundaries are temporarily displaced, the reader can access, and relate to, the writer's suffering. As I will demonstrate, Gunn's dreamscapes in *The Man with Night Sweats* function as effective liminal spaces for dissolving subjective boundaries and containing the tropic and empirical experiences of persons living with AIDS. At stake in the successful expression of these experiences are the identities of the narrator, bereaved, and departed alike; all approach (if not complete) fusion in the dreamscape.

Containment is a word that connotes safety from a pervasive danger. To contain AIDS discourses in literature does not reduce the physical danger of HIV infection, but it does serve the affective function of preserving loved ones in memory without reducing them to the material

reality of their disease or its rhetorical implications. Literature also provides a safe space for persons living with AIDS to contain their suffering enough to communicate it. In this way, Gunn's AIDS poetry continues his earlier work's search for safety, and his formal verse is complimented by a more neutral, less gritty narrative aesthetic. The speaker of Gunn's poems in *The Man With Night Sweats* is similar to Christopher Isherwood's narrator of *The Berlin Stories*: not a leather-clad rebel but a self-proclaimed "camera," a nondescript (if not dispassionate) portrayer of life during a major urban crisis (1). Deborah Landau picks up the thread of safety in Gunn's work by noting that "[t]he question of *how to endure* is a crucial one for Gunn and for any poet writing about AIDS. The AIDS epidemic raises the stakes in the modernist crisis of belief and adds resonance to [Wallace] Stevens's dictum that the role of the poet is to 'help people to live their lives'" (198, emphasis mine). The impetus for the "modernist crisis of belief"—two World Wars of such violence as to defy containment in language and religious paradigm—is replicated in the AIDS crisis, but epidemics, unlike most wars, lack boundaries between home and military fronts. There is no physical space of respite in the San Francisco under siege by AIDS: citing Michel Foucault, Autumn Fiester and Lance Wahlert note that the medical clinic is

an intensely problematic space for queers because many of their identities and categories were born there. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, with the rise of medical disciplines such as sexology and psychology, there began the naming and diagnosing of various forms of sexual and gender non-normativity in a clinical context. (86)

The authors point out that this "naming and diagnosing" in the late nineteenth-century may have been intended to supersede obsolete categories such as "sodomy," but homosexuality had actually been "migrated into a *discourse of pathology*" under the umbrella of science and medicine (87). This historical moment, in which clinical terminology cloaked moral judgment, established a mistrust between LGBTQ persons as the clinic that, as Landau suggests, caused

many to lose faith in the medical community as their first line of defense against the AIDS crisis. In the landscape of *The Man With Night Sweats*, neither the hospital nor one's bed offer safety. This renders literary accounts of the crisis, especially poetry, all the more important as safe spaces for authors and readers to process, mourn, and preserve memories. The liminal spaces found within poetry are recuperative; the identities at stake are those of author, narrator, and reader, who do not transform (as in Conrad and Woolf) but merge into a shared identity.

The Material of Memory

One recurring question throughout this study has been: if a person abandons the conventions by which she defines herself when she enters a liminal setting, what is the nature of the self that exists for the duration of the liminal experience? In chapter two, Bataille has offered the beginning of an answer with base materialism, but base material even as confronted by Conrad is still (ironically) abstract. Like Conrad and Woolf, Gunn recognizes the transformative potential of liminal settings, especially when embedded within a spiritual or social ritual. Indeed, many of his poems' narratives are ritualized remembrances of sexual encounters, characterized by communal transformative experiences much like the liminal phases of van Gennep's rites of passage. But while Conrad retreats from the darkest, most violent revelations liminal space has to offer, and Woolf focuses on the refashioning of conventional roles made possible in social ritual, Gunn observes—and doesn't turn from—the dropping away of all that composes the self, both socially and physically. This compassionate yet objective attention brings Gunn the closest yet to showing readers the liminal self. Gunn had an affinity for Christopher Isherwood, whose narrator begins *The Berlin Stories* by stating: "I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not thinking" (1). Considered together, the four sections of *The Man with Night Sweats* resemble a photo album or perhaps a documentary film. Although the first three contain gritty, playful portraits of characters Gunn knew in San Francisco, their taut forms seem to

anticipate tragedy; the fourth section begins in-medias-res, as the poet considers the plague's continuing devastation and confronts the inevitably dissolving boundaries of his own body. Rather than mirror their dying subjects by gradually moving toward free verse, the book's later poems maintain Gunn's signature formal control. Gunn's very English maintenance of formal verse even in the face of disaster is indicative of his association in the fifties with The Movement, a group of poets attracted to the pastoral images and precise, conventional forms of traditional English poetry. The Movement poets, who included Philip Larkin, Ted Hughes, Robert Conquest, and other English poets, saw their work as oppositional to the sprawling metaphysical explorations of modernists like Eliot (Lodge 9). But Gunn's work with The Movement didn't extend far beyond the sixties, and he is neither conservative nor nostalgic—if anything, like Lynch, he warns against nostalgia which obscures present problems. If Gunn admires Isherwood's "camera" narrator, he emulates the open shutter and passive recording, not the lack of "thinking." By confronting readers with both lived grief and *memories* of grief—grief that he has already begun actively to fit into his worldview—Gunn achieves the Owen-esque goal of communicating violent events that resist circumscription in the imagination.

Although Gunn's love of formal verse persists in his later poetry, and Landau rightfully claims that Gunn rejects Eliot's metaphysical promises, there is a kinship between Eliot's urban waste land and Gunn's disease-riddled San Francisco. *The Waste Land* features—or elegizes—vampire-like denizens of an "Unreal City," people who find themselves spiritually bereft in the aftermath of the First World War (Moody 87). Gunn's San Francisco is the Unreal City's material counterpart, populated not by vampires but their anemic, suffering victims. Like Eliot's denizens, the people with AIDS whom Gunn describes are betrayed by a manifestly fraudulent faith. As Eliot elaborates in the subsequent *Four Quartets*, this fraudulent faith (held by the Unreal City's

denizens) is in the expressive power of language at the expense of religion. For Eliot, the divine word (*logos*) transcends humanity's symbols, which (as defined by Coleridge in his *Biographia Literaria*) are material objects gesturing toward divinity (Parker 178). Gunn, in a similar vein, laments his characters' false faith in the material wholeness and consistency of their bodies. As the eponymous yet anonymous narrator of the title poem, "The Man with Night Sweats," recalls, "My flesh was its own shield: / Where it was gashed, it healed" (Gunn 461, lines 5-6). It is here, at a crucial junction, where Gunn's elegy diverges from Eliot's. Rather than reaching away from the failing material body toward transcendence in the form of divinity, or seeking refuge in the imagination, the poet frankly acknowledges his body's weakness:

I cannot but be sorry
The given shield was cracked
My mind reduced to hurry,
My flesh reduced and wrecked. (13-6)

Gunn, in a gesture more similar to Wilfred Owen's poetic reaction to the violence and futility of war than to Eliot's reaction to a spiritual dearth, confronts the revelation that the body, despite youth and virility, is in a constant state of flux and decay.

"The Man with Night Sweats" articulates the anxiety felt by a man who—whether ill or not—recognizes and fears his body's permeability. The poem's first line begins with a blunt, sensual observation, demonstrating the vitality inherent even in symptoms:

I wake up cold, I who
Prospered through dreams of heat
Wake to their residue,
Sweat, and a clinging sheet. (1-4)

Although "cold" is associated with death rather than life, this chill "wake[s]" the poet, rendering him conscious to experience his unease. In "dreams of heat," which may refer to a partner's body-heat, the poet has "prospered," or thrived materially—immediately, Gunn assigns value to

bodily pleasure, even if that pleasure is merely dreamt. Upon waking, only the "residue" of these valuable dreams remains. The poet doesn't tell the reader whether this remnant is material, psychological, or both; regardless, it appears in the same visceral catalogue as "sweat" and "a clinging sheet." Gunn insinuates here and elsewhere that memories, like dreams, do not merely mark the absence of what once existed. Memories are a material extension of bodies and their influence, yet another trace of Bennett's "thing-power." If "cold" is the vital yet worrisome force that awakens the poet, ambiguous "residue" greets him in place of the dream-companion. Poet, "clinging sheet," and "dreams" are wrapped up in each other, the material body dissolving between the brute reality of the sweaty sheet and the persistent echoes of memory.

After recalling the way his wounds would heal in his younger days, the poet continues reminiscing about his evolving relationship to his body and its boundaries: "I grew as I explored / The body I could trust" may refer to the poet's own body or lovers' bodies; the line's ambiguity highlights the permeable boundaries between the man and his lovers (7-8). Two lines later, "trust" finds a foil in "risk": the poet trusts his or another's body not to be an unbreakable shield, but to provide pleasure in vulnerability: it is "risk" that "made robust, / A world of wonders in / Each challenge to the skin" (10-2). A "challenge to the skin" may refer to sexual penetration, but it may as easily refer to the action of any external force upon the skin, which marks at once the circumscription of our bodies and the locus of contact with other bodies. David Gewanter views the body's gradually increasing permeability in Gunn's poems as a productive "adventure" with a frustrating end:

In Gunn's early poems, the self's expressions—flesh, vision, speech, imagination—reach outward, hesitantly, through the barricades and armor of its surface. In the 1960s, a willed recklessness of Gunn's poetic forms and of personal experiment begins to puncture and tear at these surfaces. New identities flower and die back into the self, which grows more ample and undefended with each adventure. In Gunn's later poems, the porous body becomes more fully open to passion, impulse, lust, and drug. Yet by now, the body's

welcomed hosts—its guests and enemies—have taken up residence in the body's lush and open environs. [. . .] this heralds the end of the body's adventure, as it becomes a necropolis. (258)

Gewanter's quote follows an interesting pattern. He begins by referring to the armored "surface" of the "self," a surface which poetic experimentation helps to "puncture." Like the man in Gunn's title poem, this repeated puncturing allows the self to "flower" and "grow," though in growing it becomes even more "undefended." But when Gewanter pivots to Gunn's later poetry (including *The Man with Night Sweats*), he replaces "the self" with "the body," eliding their distinction. Far from an oversight, Gewanter's diction is indicative of Gunn's valuation of the material body as identical with the self. Even when the "skin" is broken or faces dissolution after a "challenge," such moments of bodily merger with other subjects allow the self to overgrow its conventional, illusory circumscription.

Gewanter helpfully elaborates Gunn's valuation of the vulnerable, permeable body. By calling attention to the body's transformation into a "necropolis" at the end of its "adventure," Gewanter reveals Gunn's treatment of the body as "both person and place" (258; 267). In Gunn's "Lament," the body "let you down for good, / Its blood hospitable to those guests who / Took over by betraying it" (115-7). Gewanter reads this transformation, though lethal, as another stretching of the self, the ultimate "challenge to the skin" and thus a liminal "domain of ecstasy": "To make a life of your dying is, truly, to achieve a kind of ecstasy; however, it does not create a second, mirroring self. Other things take over. [. . .] In this ecstasy, the body becomes a home and garden-soil courteously welcoming the virus" (267). Although Gewanter aptly notes Gunn's tendency to compare the dying body to a "field of combat" or occupied city, the hostile virus is not all that takes up residence within the self as it faces dissolution. In Gunn's poetry, remembered visions of his friends and himself take on an immediate presence. In what Gewanter calls the dying body's "ecstasy," from the Greek word *ekstasis* meaning "to stand beside oneself,"

these memories don the flesh sloughed by the material self. This ecstatic mode is common in liminal settings: with the conventional aspects of the self suspended yet in reserve, new modes of the self seem to exist concurrently with old modes. For example, in Gunn's "The Reassurance," the lamented friend appears "fleshed out again" ten days after his death to embrace his former companions (Gunn 471, line 6). Although this cathartic event is possible only in "dream," the speaker's mental projection of his friend is not another betrayal but a significant aspect of his dying subjectivity:

And it *was* you, although
You were fleshed out again:
You hugged us all round then,
And gave your welcoming beam. (5-8, emphasis Gunn's)

This brief stanza gives much insight into the mindscape of the self at the poem's center, a speaker who may or may not be healthy but has reason to fear for his life. The speaker's italicized insistence that this vision "*was*" his friend reinforces the apparition's material presence in the poem, as does his "flesh," "hug," and "welcoming beam." Notable too is Gunn's use of the first-person-plural despite the "dream" belonging to one person: "You hugged *us* all round then," and in the prior stanza, "*we* saw you dead" (7, 2). This diction suggests a widening of the self beyond the individual as its borders stretch to accommodate not just a deceased friend, but a community of mourners who may or may not be living. The "welcoming beam" further blurs the speaker's subjective boundaries: to where are "we" (the mourners) being welcomed? Perhaps to Gewanter's "city of the dead," but perhaps instead to the liminal setting of memory, in which weakening subjectivities of the living find support from the remembered strength and compassion of the dead, whose identity is also at stake:

How like you to be kind,
Seeking to reassure.
And yes, how like my mind
To make itself secure. (9-12)

"[Y]es," the speaker acknowledges, this dream is his mind's attempt "To make itself secure."

Despite this seemingly cynical response to an absent critic, the speaker attributes the vision not just to his "mind," but to the friend whose nature is to be kind—again, death blurs the division between the individual's body (including the mind emerging from that material) and that of others, since the friend's kindness is now intrinsic to the speaker's dreamscape. Gewanter's body-as-place is not only a fertile ground for HIV, but also, if temporarily, a refuge for the lingering psychological influences of the dead. The body threatened by death does not merely become a necropolis, but a sanctuary, a place of final communion among equals in a liminal mindscape.

The Body in Gunn's Liminal Dreamscapes

Gunn often uses dreamscapes, set in the liminal state between consciousness and unconsciousness, to highlight his speakers' relationships to their bodies and others' bodies. In "Sacred Heart," placed two poems after "The Reassurance," the speaker recounts a friend's struggle to reconcile images of religious suffering with recent memories of his partner's painful demise. As in "The Reassurance," much of the poem is set within the speaker's dream, and both dreamscapes serve a purpose: while the former poem's dream soothes the speaker by revealing other bodies' lingering presences in his memory, the dream in "Sacred Heart" highlights this residual materiality in the dying body in order to belie the metaphysical, regenerative promise of Christianity. Much like "The Reassurance," this poem emphasizes sensuality in the waking and dreaming states. Unlike the twelve-line "Reassurance," this forty-eight-line poem's syntax and imagery moves between the addressee's tortuous, confused sensory input while he is awake, and

the sharply defined sensual images in his dream. The poem begins by describing a troubled sleep:

For one who watches with too little rest
A body rousing fitfully to its pain
— The nerves like dull burns where the sheet has pressed —
Subsiding to dementia yet again; (1-4)

The image of this man watching a body "rousing fitfully to its pain," its nerves "like dull burns," is viscerally painful, yet full of ambiguity. In line 13, when the speaker first addresses "You," it becomes clear that the poet is remembering a man who took care of his dying companion. However, in the earlier lines quoted above, the "one" who "watches [. . .] A body" could refer either the caretaker watching his friend, or the dying friend watching his own body. By waiting until later in the poem to introduce second-person point of view, Gunn creates an elision of the two companions' bodies. This ambiguous image, perhaps of a consciousness watching its body, recalls Gewanter's "ecstasy" of the dying body: the body stands beside itself. The body's "Subsiding to dementia yet again" further destabilizes it, since its memories (including the attendant dream) are untrustworthy.

But when the poet moves into the second-person and describes the dream of the man (whom I'll refer to as "the watcher") caring for his friend, the imagery sharpens. In the dream it is Christmas, the ritual celebration of Christ's birth, but the watcher has a vision of his partner "crucified / In his front room, against the mantelpiece":

Yet it was Christmas, when you went outside
The shoppers bustled, bells rang without cease,
You smelt a sharp excitement on the air,
Crude itch of evergreen. But you returned
To find him still nailed up, mute sufferer
Lost in a trance of pain, toward whom you yearned. (15-20)

Instead of the winding syntax and ambiguous pronoun of the preceding lines, the speaker begins recounting the watcher's dream with a series of direct assertions: "Yet it was Christmas," "shoppers bustled," "bells rang," "You smelt." This directness is compounded by sensory imagery: holiday adrenaline is a "sharp" airborne scent mingled with the smell of pine, a "Crude itch," while bells ring "without cease." These images, disguised as banal elements of the holiday season, are echoes of the "dull burns" in the opening lines: memories of his dying friend's suffering suffuse the watcher's dreamscape without reprieve. Hence, when the watcher goes back inside, he finds his friend "still nailed up, mute sufferer." Although the dying man's suffering renders him "mute" and "Lost in a trance," the dream becomes a conduit through which the watcher feels and finds symbols for that pain. A liminal space—the dream—becomes a realm in which watcher and watched (perhaps lover and beloved) begin to merge, sharing an experience of suffering. Not only would this experience resist articulation outside of Gunn's poetic container, but it would also lack a subject to articulate it: the poet refers to the dying man's "death" in the past tense shortly after describing the dream (25). The merger, however, is incomplete. In the last line of dream before the watcher awakens, the "mute sufferer" is a body "toward whom [the watcher] yearned." Although the watcher can access his friend's pain in the dreamscape, their reunion is both mysterious and temporary; a crucifixion is hardly the "fleshed out" hug of "The Reassurance," though it shares its visceral quality, and the watcher must still wake to the reality that his friend is dead. Yearning persists.

So far, I have been attending to two bodies and the merging of their pain and desire within the dreamscape in "Sacred Heart." All of this becomes more complex, and more liminal, when we consider the religious implications of the watcher's friend taking Christ's place on the cross. The poet coyly dismisses the watcher's cognitive dissonance as he tries to make sense of a

dreamscape that juxtaposes the commercial bustle of "shoppers" with the religious iconography of the "Dying God":

When you woke up, you could not reconcile
The two conflicting scenes, indoors and out.
But it was Christmas. And parochial school
Accounted for the Dying God no doubt. (21-4)

For the second time, the poet baldly states "But it was Christmas." In another ambiguous moment, "it was Christmas" may refer either to the date within the dream or the date on which the watcher awoke (or both). The preceding "But," like the former "Yet," hints at a sarcastic tone: of course people will go about their holiday business to commemorate the dead while the living suffer, the poet implies: it *was* Christmas. Gunn's addition of "no doubt" to the next line continues this undertone by asserting that a "parochial school" could simply "[account] for" the suffering of a mythical deity. Alternatively, this line may suggest that "parochial school" accounts for Christ's inclusion among the dream's symbols, the imaginative residue of a religious upbringing. Gunn teases out the connotations of the "Dying God," using capital letters to increase the ironic distance between mythical suffering and material, remembered suffering.

Like in "The Reassurance," the poet acknowledges the role of the watcher's consciousness in designing his dreamscape. But as the poem continues, the poet makes it clear that the religious skin which the watcher's imagination has imposed upon his dead friend's memory is not, as in Eliot, a gesture toward regeneration. Rather, the dream's religiosity and its figurative bleeding into the waking world belies the literal bleeding of material bodies. Gunn's treatment of religious imagery as a mask for material suffering is similar to what Woodcock calls the "poses" of his earlier work: temporarily inhabited, non-actualized social roles. But while Gunn's poses in poems such as "On the Move," in which a voyeur observes a gang of bikers, sublimate homosexual experience as Woodcock suggests, his use of a religious mask in "Sacred

Heart" has the opposite function. As evinced in the poem's second half, this mask doesn't stick to and obscure the poem's material bodies, but wavers in and out of the dying man's semi-cogent perspective:

Now since his death you've lost the wish for sleep,
In which you might mislay the wound of feeling:
Drugged you drag grief from room to room and weep,
Preserving it from closure, from a healing
Into the novelty of glazed pink flesh.

We hear you stumble vision-ward above,
Keeping the edges open, bloody, fresh.

Wound, no — the heart, His Heart, broken with love. (25-32)

As in the first stanza, Gunn plays with an ambiguous pronoun. Although the lack of capitalization in "his death" suggests the friend has died, the line directly follows a reference to the "Dying God," continuing the association of Christ with the friend. The watcher avoids sleep for fear of "mislay[ing] the wound of feeling," or temporarily losing the painful memory of his friend. This memory, "grief," manifests as a physical form without definition except for "edges" that are "open, bloody, fresh." Line 27, "Drugged you drag grief from room to room and weep," disturbs the cadence of steady iambic pentameter by adding a slow triplet to the rhythm:

"Drugged-you-drag." This rhythmic speed bump joins with the long "o" and "e" sounds in the repeated "room" and "weep" to add weight to the line, creating a dragging pace. The heavy, visceral language Gunn uses to describe "grief" renders it a wound without a body, an opening without an interior. Unlike Christ's mythical stigmata, traceable only to the teachings of "parochial school," the watcher's grief traces pain he witnessed personally, though its source no longer exists. To allow this grief-object to heal would be to reduce it to a "novelty," "pink flesh" that is "glazed" and finished like a clay urn—inert scar tissue rather than the affective memory

encountered in "The Reassurance." In this poem and throughout *Night Sweats*, Gunn affirms the "open, bloody, fresh" boundaries of the self, even when that self will inevitably dissolve.

Immediately after this affirmation of attachment to others (even if only in painful memory), the watcher recognizes his "wound of feeling" to be a visionary "heart, His Heart, broken with love." Unlike the earlier capitalization of "Dying God," which distanced myth from man, the capital letters here emphasize the sacred quality of the dead lover's envisioned heart to the watcher. The "Heart" may be Christ's, the dead lover's, or the watcher's; Gunn has triangulated a trinity of shared suffering. "[B]roken with love" suggests that the "open, bloody, fresh" boundaries the watcher has been defending are the remnants, the traces, of a love as sacred as Christ's. This line's rhythm—every word but "broken" is monosyllabic, and the line itself is broken after its second word, "no"—evokes a beating heart, a reminder of the material body even as the material blends with the divine. In this third phase of the poet's ritualized memory, the wound-without-a-body temporarily gains substance.

Like the ephemeral dream-image of Christ, the watcher's waking vision of a bleeding heart draws attention to reality's inescapability. Grief, a real yet intangible affect, has become the bleeding heart, an illusion that appears tangible. This crossing of sensory wires does not mark a return to the confusion of the first stanza. Instead, after recalling the dreamscape's moment of clarity, the watcher gains a new perspective on his present body. The reader hears this shift in the beating heart of line 32, but to the watcher, it manifests as "An unfamiliar ticking," a mechanical rather than biological sound (33). A vision ensues in which tangible falsehood, the hallucinated heart of Christ, clashes with intangible reality, the nothingness left by a lover's absence. In this vision, as in the prior dreamscape, the watcher's tripartite merger with his friend and Christ does not endure. Gunn's description of the watcher's chest as "a bright plate from an anatomy book"

contains ironic dissonance reminiscent the "patient etherized on a table" in the opening of Eliot's "Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (35; 3). But while Eliot ironically reduces a romantic evening stroll to clinical language, Gunn makes the same reductive gesture toward divine vision. The gesture continues in the lines that follow: the heart "In its snug housing, under the transparent / Planes of swept muscle and the barreled bone" is the same material heart that "glows" and generates "holy heat" (36-8). In "The heart of hearts transplanted to your own," "heart" is no longer capitalized, and the clinical word "transplanted" does not suggest miraculous transfiguration. Nevertheless, this visionary heart loses "rich purple drops with every beat": these lost drops of blood are more precious to the watcher, not less, for their materiality.

Gunn's replacement of religious solace with material affirmation (despite the chaotic, ephemeral nature of material) is traceable to his modernist and war-poet ancestors. Gunn extends the strategies of poets like Wallace Stevens and Wilfred Owen to challenge not just religion, but commercialism. The final eight lines of "Sacred Heart" descend from the visionary register in a gesture reminiscent of the sinking pigeons in Stevens' "Sunday Morning":

And, in the isolation of the sky,
At evening, casual flocks of pigeons make
Ambiguous undulations as they sink,
Downward to darkness, on extended wings. (117-20)

The pigeon, a member of the dove family and an ironic, earthly substitute for a symbol of the Holy Spirit, sinks into unknowable "darkness," but its "wings" are "extended," signaling confidence if not hope. The pigeons' travel is not the sacred progress of Eliot's *Four Quartets* but the "ambiguous undulations" of Gunn's watcher, who struggles to conceptualize his friend's descent into death, yet adores the pain this struggle generates—the "broken heart." Gunn renders the end of this struggle as deadening vision rather than a descending flight. As his envisioned heart loses "purple drops," the watcher's "vision alters":

The hallucination lighted through the skin
Begins to deaden (though still bleeding), falters,
And hardens to its evident origin
— A red heart from a cheap religious card,
Too smooth, too glossy, too securely cased! (40-6)

If Gunn is ambivalent toward the religious imagery in this poem, he more explicitly rejects the commercialization of both emotion and religion. As the glowing fusion of material and divine organ transforms into a greeting card, it "deaden[s]," "falters," and "hardens" into a "cheap" object. Its "smooth," "glossy" casing mocks the shared suffering Gunn has affirmed—it denies the "open, bloody, fresh" boundaries of the permeable body, much like the "shoppers" in the dreamscape do. This commercial representation of a heart is "still bleeding." This parenthetical reinforces the thread of pain that persists throughout the poem. Gunn's interjection recalls Wilfred Owen's use of parentheticals throughout "Maundy Thursday," another poem that explores the relationship between the tangible and intangible, the material and the divine. In each of Owen's parentheticals, the poet, who is attending a Christian service, describes what the physical cross means to the person kissing it: to the "men" it is "the emblem of a creed," to the "women" it is "the Body of Christ indeed," and to the children it is "a silver doll, immensely bright" (3-9). Each of these understandings is more material and less religious than the last until finally, the poet avoids the cross's metaphysical associations entirely by kissing "the warm live hand that held the thing" (14). For Owen, the hand is vital and warm, a better symbol of hope in a time of war than a cold, silver cross. For Gunn, who witnesses not war but the equally violent spread of HIV infection, vital material manifests not as a strong hand, but as a vulnerable heart that "falters." More so than religion, commercialism belies pain in Gunn's late twentieth-century United States. The watcher realizes that pain loses its transformative personal and political potential when it is reduced to empty, commercial sentiment.

In the closing lines, the watcher meditates on the suffering the vision leaves behind: "Stopped in a crouch, you wearily regard / Each drop dilute into the waiting waste" (47-8). These lines present the watcher as a tired, immobile, possibly ill figure. His vision has left him wasted. The vital flow of blood from the glowing heart has become a tap left dripping "dilute into the waiting waste." Although it is unclear whether the watcher's vision has ended, the heart remains in its "cheap" commercial form. Unlike his predecessors, who leave room for regeneration if not religious salvation—in "Burnt Norton," Eliot laments "the sad waste time before and after" while affirming a transcendent, eternal present, while Stevens affirms the imagination's power to alter the present—Gunn embraces a crumbling, irredeemable present.

In *The Man with Night Sweats*, Gunn addresses the second question posed at the beginning of this study: what is the nature of the self as it exists in a space between identities? In his dreamscapes, Gunn fuses narrator, caretaker, and remembered friend, suggesting that while individual subjects are temporary, the shared identity possible in memory and dream persists—not forever, but long enough to generate meaning for those who have lost loved ones to AIDS or are witnessing their own bodies dissolve. Gunn's poems render each sexual act a brush with death, an opportunity poised between the greatest possible intimacy and the greatest possible loss. These repeated liminal encounters form a new body, one not limitless but with redrawn, more inclusive boundaries. Through the liminal dreamscapes in his poetry, Gunn provides a safe space for authors to communicate, and readers to access, the pain of disease and the pleasure of intimacy that renders every life experience worthwhile.

CHAPTER 5: LISTENING TO NOTHINGNESS IN E. M. FORSTER'S *A PASSAGE TO INDIA*

“Radical limitations on knowledge presented not so much barriers to be overcome in a striving for mastery as a sense that what lies beyond the knowledge of what is known must be honored and known—if known at all—only on its own terms.”

—Stephen Ross, "Thinking Modernist Ethics with Animals in *A Passage to India*"

“They are happy out there with their savage noise, though we cannot follow them.”

—E. M. Forster, *A Passage to India*

As I observed about Conrad's novellas, the approach to what William Freedman calls "spots of unknowing," events that defy rational conceptualization and thus cannot be inscribed using everyday language, is at once tempting and dangerous. For Conrad, this flirtation with the threshold of dissolution allows the body to take on a new, yet still socially circumscribed, role. E. M. Forster's characters also approach these epistemological dead-zones, but for Forster, this approach cannot be adjusted at the last instant. It is either completed, no matter the risk, or it is futilely aborted. Forster's passage through liminal space is not a round trip, and in this way his liminality has more in common with Gunn's than Conrad's and Woolf's. Gunn laments but accepts the inevitable dissolution of the self in death; he does not try to refashion the conventional self as do Conrad and Woolf. Moreover, while Conrad's characters' approaches to the terrifying unknown are punctuated by moments of dark humor that contribute to a sense of fear rather than relief, Forster's approaches place terror and humor on equal footing: both are appropriate reactions to that which cannot be fixed in rational paradigms. As is evident in the last section of *Passage to India* (1924), "Temple," Forster's humor signals that the rational self as circumscribed by convention has reached—and is crossing—the threshold of an ineffable experience. The bodies that emerge from these experiences do not neatly reintegrate into British

or Anglo-Indian society. Once the novel's cross-cultural friendships are established and consummated, each party's understanding of itself in terms of a racialized other begins to change. With that change comes the permanent, cyclical muddle represented by Krishna's birth-festival: not the straightforward sympathy of Forster's imperative "Only connect" (the epigraph to *Howards End*), but a collective self, a combination of individuals (as in Gunn) that elides colonial identity and that can only exist in liminal settings.

Shun Yin Kiang analyzes friendship in Forster's works and the spontaneous encounters that occur outside the influence of "colonial machinery" (133). He notes that friendship occupies "the liminal space between the eventful and the uneventful" in Forster's colonial politics: everyday events compose friendship and contribute to relations between the British colonizers and Indian subjects, yet such "small-scale and context-specific" modes of interaction do not impact colonial norms (146). As he analyzes friendships in *A Passage to India*, Kiang attends closely to the spatial settings in which spontaneous encounters occur and friendships form. Jonah Corne focuses less on people and more on the spaces in which encounters between them occur, claiming that Forster's ruined settings "ref[use] to be assimilated into a straightforward, pastoral Edenic narrative" in which the concern is to regain lost wholeness (41). Instead of the typical modernist anguish over fragmentation, Corne locates a "queer erotic energy" in Forster's damaged or empty spaces, "a [responsive] range that includes anguish but is not limited to it and where provisional compensations and even pleasures find expression in modes of queerness" (27-8). I propose to bring these two views together, arguing that in *Passage*, relationships outside colonial norms become possible during shared moments in liminal spaces. Departing from Kiang, I suggest that such ephemera do have the potential to impact norms of the broader colonial narrative, since the characters emerge transformed. This is especially evident in the

queer erotic energy unleashed during the collision of Fielding and Aziz's boats in "Temple," a passage I will discuss later: though the two men cannot navigate liminal flood waters of Mau without plunging into the medium that surrounds them, they nevertheless form a temporary bond outside the bounds of the power dynamic between colonizer and colonized.

Stephen Ross asks the question that lies at the intersection of ethics (understood as relations with others) and liminal space:

[H]ow do we engage with those aspects of alterity that are essentially other, radically alien, perhaps fundamentally inimical to existing epistemological frameworks? How do we preserve them as other, using "other" only as a placeholder for their inassimilable character, as a marker of the not-all that is at once in excess of the frameworks and yet integral to their coherence? (307)

Ross's desire to "preserve" alterity while rendering it recognizable—to engage with radical difference without depriving it of what makes it different—echoes the function of liminal space in each artist I have explored so far: Conrad crafts liminal encounters so that his characters may approach illegible knowledge; Woolf's and Lynch's liminal dining settings expose shifting dynamics among characters without destroying them; and Gunn deploys the liminal dreamscape to preserve fragments of others within a self that expands to contain them. Forster partakes in a similar preservationist strategy, using the temporarily equalized, unconventional dynamics between subjects in liminal settings to plant the seeds of relationships that wouldn't otherwise be possible. These relationships flourish within liminal landscapes rich with nonrepresentational sound and comic moments that defy rational hierarchy. I will focus specifically on Forster's description of the Marabar caves and the Hindu festival honoring Krishna's birth at the ending of *Passage*. Both are liminal settings occupied simultaneously by Indian and Anglo-Indian characters, people whose conventional identities render friendship difficult (if not impossible), but who may find common ground in liminal settings.

Nothing Lurks in the Marabar Caves

In the second segment of *Passage to India*, "Caves," Forster dwells on his description of the Marabar caves, marking them as ancient and hollow. The caves are empty of semantic meaning in a way that renders human activity invisible and irrelevant:

An entrance was necessary, so mankind made one. But elsewhere, deeper in the granite, are there certain chambers that have no entrances? Chambers never unsealed since the arrival of the gods? [. . .] Nothing is inside them, they were sealed up before the creation of pestilence or treasure; if mankind grew curious and excavated, nothing, nothing would be added to the sum of good and evil. (139)

The English characters' visit to these caves (and the disaster that ensues) presents a literal threshold experience, that of entering the caves and departing the bounds of human history, and the figurative threshold of experiencing a leveling of cultural difference. The sign of this latter threshold is the persistent echo that renders speech within the caves impossible: "[w]hatever is said, the same monotonous noise replies [. . .] 'Boum' is the sound as far as the human alphabet can express it" (159). When language, one of humanity's oldest institutions, loses its meaning in these ancient caverns, what is left to divide cultures? Unfortunately, this loss of divisive meaning is also a loss of fulfilling meaning, and thus the echo's elimination of semantic meaning results in Mrs. Moore's disillusionment with her faith: "[r]eligion appeared, poor little talkative Christianity, and she knew that all its divine words from 'Let there be light' to 'It is finished' only amounted to 'boum'" (161). But Forster does not allow the echo's resonance to end with Mrs. Moore's death. After being accused of rape, Aziz must depend on the law, a construct of human language, to defend himself. However, it is ultimately sound, a persistent echo, that signals to Adela Quested that she must correct her story. Forster draws on the sonic, comic qualities of repetitive ritual to demonstrate ways that people with vastly different backgrounds can share ineffable experiences in the same space.

Forster insists that the Marabar caves contain “nothing”; they are a liminal setting outside of historical concerns. This ungraspable nothingness, which would add “nothing” to “the sum of good and evil,” reflects Heidegger's nothingness: it is more primitive than the intellectual act of negation itself, and unrelated to human ethical concerns such as good and evil. To one like Adela Quested, who has never had a radical challenge to her identity, this space is impossible to process. Adela has only her rational, conventionally English epistemological framework in which to fix experience. She may encounter Indian culture as an Other, but not, as Ross suggests, preserve its alterity. Faced with the overwhelming presence of nothingness, Adela is overcome with Heideggerian anxiety. As discussed earlier, anxiety for Heidegger is the mood in which one encounters nothingness. One feels unease but is unable to point to a specific source, and this unplaceable concern dissolves the barriers we assume to exist between bodies in our everyday lives: “As a whole it is so for one. All things and we ourselves sink into indifference” (101). After her encounter with “nothing” in the ancient cave, the confused Adela convinces herself that she's been physically violated by Aziz. Although she eventually recants, and Forster deliberately obscures the event's true circumstances, a force has been exerted on Adela. But what does force her, and how? Adela is forced by anxiety, which she cannot anticipate, to encounter nothingness—to temporarily loosen the boundaries of her identity against her will. Her confusion in placing the source of her violation is characteristic of Heideggerian anxiety, and this confusion manifests as the echo that remains with Adela until she partially resolves it: partially in the sense that she clears Aziz, but can still never articulate the true nature of her experience. Its true nature defies articulation.

The interiors of the Marabar Caves are spots of unknowing, liminal vacuums in which distinctions between bodies become meaningless. This occlusion extends both to the characters

and the reader. Forster does not describe Adela's experience inside the cave after she is separated from Aziz. Instead, he presents Aziz's perspective as he ironically flees from his alleged victim's offensive question: "Have you one wife or more than one?" (164). After ducking into a cave to regain his composure, Aziz exits and struggles to find his guest, but every cave's threshold is identical:

Aziz, looking again, could not even be sure he had returned to the same group. Caves appeared in every direction—it seemed their original spawning place—and the orifices were always the same size. [. . .] When they had [shouted] for a while, the guide explained that to shout is useless, because a Marabar cave can hear no sound but its own. (165)

By comparing them to living beings capable of "spawning," Forster portrays the caves as vital, though not individual. They thwart Aziz's search by forming a collective vacuum into which language cannot penetrate. The guide's assertion that "a Marabar cave can hear no sound but its own" reinforces the image of the living vacuum, since it is the caves, and nothing within them, that "hear." This assertion also hints at the incompatibility between individual, conventional subjects and immersion in borderless nothingness. If, as Forster has insisted, "nothing, nothing" is inside the caves, then there is nothing inside them to produce their "own" sound. When a tourist like Adela or Mrs. Moore enters and makes noise, their sounds become the echo that overwhelms them. Having crossed this threshold into nothingness, their individual voices are subsumed into the cave's monolithic indifference. Like Conrad's jungle in *Heart of Darkness*, which nurtures Kurtz as if it were a living (if depraved) parent, Forster's caves have agency, and they act upon those who cross their threshold. This experience leaves a lasting mark on both women, who cannot completely retreat from it.

This reading does not present liminal encounters as lethal, but as radically challenging to identity. At this late stage in his career, Forster does not shy away from the difficulties that his mantra, "Only connect," presents. In his introduction to the Penguin edition of *Passage*, Oliver

Stallybrass notes a change in Forster's goal for the novel during the course of its writing. Forster initially intended *Passage* to be a "little bridge of sympathy between East and West," but later decided that this goal was naive (Forster in Stallybrass 15). As Stallybrass notes the growing cynicism in Forster's letters, he reveals the author's strategy for finishing his novel: focusing not on friendships, but on the spaces in which relationships are able to materialize. In a 12 April 1922 diary entry, Forster claims:

My practical experiences at Dewas have made me both cuter and stupider. I no longer make the emotional appeal that is necessary to call out the best from an Oriental, real or imaginary. The philosophic scheme of the fragment still suits me. Must try to recover my dormant sense of space. Earthy self-consciousness.

In a letter to former student and long-time friend Syed Ross Masood, Forster is more explicit: "I think that most Indians, like most English people, are shits, and I am not interested in whether they sympathize with one another or not" (15). Forster does not abandon the idea of connection, but refines it to account for the limits and spatial circumstances of friendship between individuals. The "Earthy self-consciousness" he desires is evident throughout *Passage*, but especially at the novel's beginning and end. Consider the opening description of the fictional city of Chandrapore:

Chandrapore was never large or beautiful, but two hundred years ago it lay on the road between Upper India, then imperial, and the sea, and the fine houses date from that period. The zest for decoration stopped in the eighteenth century, nor was it ever democratic. In the bazaars there is no painting and scarcely any carving. The very wood seems made of mud, the inhabitants of mud moving. So abased, so monotonous is everything that meets the eye, that when the Ganges comes down it might be expected to wash the excrescence back into the soil. Houses do fall, people are drowned and left rotting, but the general outline of the town persists, swelling here, shrinking there, like some low but indestructible form of life. (31)

"Earthy self-consciousness" suggests an awareness of one's materiality as contiguous with the physical qualities of the setting one inhabits. The Chandrapore landscape comments on human relationships without introducing a single character. The city used to occupy a valuable space

between rigid, socialized "imperial" India and the unclaimed "sea." Each "fine" aspect is qualified: despite its placement, it was "never large or beautiful"; rather than romanticizing the Indian past, Forster points out that the "zest for decoration" that produced the "fine houses" was never "democratic." The former fineries arose from imperialism, a hierarchical social institution, and the present mud-like, nearly featureless bazaars seem to be a natural extension of the land that has reclaimed itself from imperial embellishment. Again, Forster recalls Conrad (and Jane Bennett's "thing-power") in his attribution of agency to liminal landscape: all is visually "monotonous" and seems composed of "mud," though the mud evolves by "swelling here, shrinking there"; like Bataille's base material, this land is "some low but indestructible form of life," "some" emphasizing its ambiguity as a uniform, monolithic being, and "indestructible" emphasizing its foundational nature. Forster's presentation of this in-between setting mediates our understanding of India's role not only as a colonized territory, but as a physical space that predates and will outlast the colonial institutions that oppress its population. Thrust into such spaces, of which the Marabar Caves are the epitome, Forster's characters face radical challenges to their institutionally-formed identities. These confrontations with spaces outside of the Lacanian symbolic order—caves "sealed up before the creation of pestilence or treasure"—leave characters forever changed, and not necessarily in a way that restores hierarchy and facilitates social mobility.

It is strange to imagine a situation in which Conrad is more optimistic than Forster, but that is my point concerning the two authors' visions of the aftermath of liminal journeys. In Conrad's "The Secret Sharer," the unnamed captain returns from the shadow of Koh-ring—not only a near-death experience but a near-annihilation experience, threatening the captain as well as his entire ship and crew—relatively unscathed. With Leggatt's departure, the captain is able

fully to inhabit his hierarchical social role as ship's captain. Similarly in *Heart of Darkness*, Kurtz dies after crossing a liminal threshold, but Marlow, having skirted Kurtz's moral and physical peril, goes on to many more adventures at sea. In Forster's *A Passage to India*, Adela Quested and Mrs. Moore do not fully recover from their liminal encounters, or at least they do not return to their previous trajectories. After her experience in the cave, Adela abruptly departs Aziz's Marabar picnic and drives back to Chandrapore with her friend Mrs. Derek. The reader discovers this through the confused speculations of the remaining party, rather than via Adela's perspective. Aziz recounts immediately afterward that "'We were having an interesting talk with our guide, then the car was seen, so she decided to go down to her friend.' Incurably inaccurate, he already thought that this was what had occurred. He was inaccurate because he was sensitive" (168). Aziz does not wish to remember Adela's offensively ignorant question about Aziz's number of wives. He invents an alternative narrative to mask his embarrassment for both parties, and Fielding accepts this narrative, worrying that Adela and Mrs. Derek have been "impolite" (169). This manufactured narrative signals the start of Adela's dissolution after she encounters the nothingness in the caves. She cannot reintegrate her individuality. From this point onward, Adela becomes less of a character and more a discourse; she influences the narrative most by her accusation against Aziz and its rippling effects. Plagued by an echo, Adela becomes an echo for the reader, the tangible effect of fearful prejudice on the lives of colonial subjects. When she amends her story and her echo finally departs, Forster does not return her to her former role as a character. Instead, Adela breaks off her engagement to Ronny Hyslop, and we are not to hear from her again. This is not necessarily a moral judgment by Forster. Rather, it is as if Adela cannot recover the identity she was forced to relinquish in the cave, despite (and perhaps because of) the lack of referent for that force.

Mrs. Moore suffers a similar, albeit more literal, dissolution after her adventure in the Marabar Caves. She is consumed by anxiety, unable to restore a Christian epistemological framework that has been shattered by her encounter with nothingness. Peter Childs explains the source of her disappointment:

[Mrs. Moore's] is a vision in which the inconsequentiality of human life is envisaged, as well as its contingency: 'Everything exists, nothing has value' [. . .] What Mrs Moore has sought in the cave is some intimation of salvation, which has been a subject several times earlier in the novel, when the question of who is to be included in and excluded from heaven has been conjectured upon. Forster said that salvation features in all his work, but decreases in importance to the point that it has almost disappeared from *A Passage to India*. (32)

As in *Gunn*, the modernist impulse toward salvation recedes in the wake of war and mass tragedy. Salvation has not entirely disappeared, but *almost*. For Forster, salvation—the preservation of one's identity after death or some other experience of annihilation, such as an encounter with the Marabar's nothingness—is not guaranteed. Mrs. Moore's physical body wastes away after she visits the Caves, but her Christian faith has also atrophied, and she is not necessarily bound for a transcendent afterlife. As Childs notes, individuals are both inconsequential and contingent in Mrs. Moore's post-Marabar worldview. Rather than anticipate entrance into "Heaven, Hell, Annihilation—one or other of those large things, that huge scenic background of stars, fires, blue or black air," Mrs. Moore accepts that the path through life to death is a gradual dissolution of the self into the "monotonous noise" of "boum," the sound that follows her from the Caves (212). Mrs. Moore reforms her identity to accommodate "the horrors of the universe and its smallness," becoming like the "monotonous" animated mud of Chandrapore. This is evident when Adela asks Mrs. Moore to tell her the nature of the echo that afflicts them both:

"If you don't know, you don't know; I can't tell you."
"I think you're rather unkind not to say."

"Say, say, say," said the old lady bitterly. "As if anything can be said! I have spent my life in saying or in listening to sayings; I have listened too much. It is time I was left in peace. Not to die," she added sourly. "No doubt you expect me to die, but when I have seen you and Ronny married, and seen the other two and whether they want to be married—I'll retire then into a cave of my own." (205)

Mrs. Moore's former "Christian tenderness" has transformed into something that resembles cynicism (204). She speaks "bitterly" and "sourly." Her disgust is not with life writ broadly, but with language. She is tired of both "saying" and "listening to sayings," and thus she cannot translate the echo, a non-saying, for Adela. Both women have been forced into an encounter with nothingness in the Marabar Caves; while Adela still struggles unsuccessfully to integrate her experience into rational institutions like language, Mrs. Moore has allowed the echo to permeate her understanding of reality, overriding previous paradigms such as marriage, which she will see through as formalities before retiring from her social role. Mrs. Moore recognizes that the Marabar incident is a misunderstanding which will cause Aziz to suffer, but she refuses to testify, for the "[g]ood, happy, small people" like Aziz "do not exist, they were a dream" (210). All institutions, including socially-constructed selfhood, have evaporated for Mrs. Moore, and so ethical conventions premised on the existence of an Other are meaningless.

The remainder of Mrs. Moore's individuality exists in her decision not to testify, rather than to participate in the legal "machinery" Adela has set in motion: "I will not help you to torture him for what he never did. There are different ways of evil and I prefer mine to yours," she says to Adela. This acknowledgment of evil marks the remainder of Mrs. Moore as such, the component of her identity that has not yet been subsumed into the monotonous echo. It also recalls Marlow's "choice of nightmares" in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*: Marlow faces a choice between remaining loyal to the abusive, mechanical Company or to the depraved yet still-human Kurtz. Mrs. Moore chooses the evil of inaction over the evil of participation in the racist

institutions that create the conditions for situations like Aziz's. Unlike Marlow, she cannot reintegrate into her former institutions, and dies before reaching England: her inaction leads her to abandon social concerns altogether. She is similar to Kurtz, who has also crossed a liminal threshold and fades until his voice is his only remaining physical trace. Mrs. Moore's conventional values dissolve into the echo she hears, and this transformation prevents her from writing a letter to her children: "the universe, never comprehensible to her intellect, offered no repose to her soul [. . .] and she realized that she didn't want to write to her children, didn't want to communicate with anyone, not even with God" (161). As evinced by her failed letter and inability to translate the echo for Adela, Mrs. Moore cannot fully reenter the symbolic order after crossing the threshold past which language ceases to function. Mrs. Moore's similarity to Kurtz in their mutual failure to reintegrate their social roles after entering liminal spaces is significant: unlike Conrad's protagonists, who encounter temporary versions of themselves in liminal space (Kurtz for Marlow and Leggatt for the captain in "The Secret Sharer") and yet return without permanent alteration, Mrs. Moore has no foil for whom to serve as a cautionary tale. There is nothing mystical or literary about her dissolution, as Forster takes pains to show. "No one could romanticize the Marabar," Forster writes, "because it robbed infinity and eternity of their vastness, the only quality that accommodates them to mankind." The nothingness inside the Marabar Caves renders concepts like "infinity" and "eternity"—concepts of mathematical transcendence—as meaningless as the "divine words" of "poor little talkative Christianity"; all such language "only amounted to 'boum'" (161). To Mrs. Moore, reintegration into the English social order she has temporarily left holds no value, nor does remaining in India.

Forster treats the incident in the cave as a Conradian spot of unknowing, a liminal space that defies existing epistemological frameworks yet exerts force on those individuals who cross

its threshold. Adela herself becomes such a spot of unknowing after traversing this space and finding herself unable fully to reintegrate her former sense of self. But even these dark areas of Forster's narrative are brightened by humor. A parallel to "The Secret Sharer"'s dead scorpion in the inkwell appears while Fielding tries to discuss Aziz's impending trial with Professor Godbole, a school principal. One subject after another preempts Godbole's attention as an increasingly frustrated Fielding tries to discuss their imprisoned mutual friend. The "queer vague talk" to which I refer concerns a "Russell's viper" that an unpopular master had found "nosing round his classroom": "Perhaps it had crawled in of itself, but perhaps it had not" (183). The viper is "so poisonous" that Godbole feels obligated to hear each staff member's theory about its origin, but like Conrad's scorpion, this is an unanswerable question. A threat with an unknown, unknowable origin has "nosed" its way into a social space and rendered that space dangerous. This threat is dangerous because of its death-bringing poison, but also comic because of its juxtaposition with the novel's more pressing occluded event: the Marabar incident: "Thus when his mind was bursting with other troubles, and he was debating whether he should compose a letter of appeal to Miss Quested, he was obliged to listen to a speech which lacked both basis and conclusion, and floated through air" (183). Unmoored by logic, this viper may be read as the inscrutable force that assails Adela in the cave, or as the racialized threat Adela invents. No matter what it represents, its presence inspires both fear and mirth. Unlike Conrad's scorpion, which is comic because it is disturbingly out of place and the Mate cannot account for it, Forster's viper is comic because of its multiplicity of origin theories. Conrad uses the black inkwell as a miniature version of Koh-ring, an image of the unknown and unknowable; Forster's scorpion doesn't arise from a black hole, but from a muddle of theories, and this muddle contains Forsterian humor. Some of the implied theories of the viper's origin, such as its deliberate

placement by a disgruntled student, suggest malicious acts. Others suggest randomness—the viper may have "crawled in of itself." The endless attempts to account for it, as in Conrad's story, are futile. But while Conrad's scorpion defies all explanation, Forster allows the possibility of an explanation for his viper, perhaps even a harmless one: humor need not play into fear of the unknown, but rather Forster suggests we laugh at the unknown—even if it proves deadly.

Navigating Liminal Waters

If, as Childs claims, the Marabar caves are "presented as a claustrophobic microcosm of that which the human mind cannot encompass," then the festival of Krishna's birth at the novel's end is an opposite space that accomplishes a similar end (25). "Temple," the novel's last segment, maintains Forster's sense of "[e]arthy self-consciousness," but unlike "Caves," the concluding segment is set in a spatially open realm reminiscent of Conrad's Gulf of Siam; as smooth, liminal spaces, these bodies of water are characterized by shifting vectors rather than permanent lines and objects. This navigational difficulty results in a boating accident. Water plays an especially important role in the novel's spiritual conclusion. As Childs notes, water suggests "a benediction as it suggests spiritual renewal in Eliot's *The Waste Land*. In opposition to the echo, which remains with Adela as the dagger adhered to the rajah, the water tank is an image of blessing [. . .] or friendship" (199). The imagery that begins with Mrs. Moore's comparison of the water tank in the mosque to the universe's cyclical refreshment culminates with a "climactic immersion in 'the great Mau tank'" during which Fielding and Aziz fail their final navigational challenge. The boating accident on the water in "Temple" reaffirms Forster's earlier claim about humanity's inability to persist without the "blessing" or "friendship" signified by water: "The annual helter-skelter of April, when irritability and lust spread like a canker, is one of [India's] comments on the orderly hopes of humanity. Fish manage better: fish, as the tanks dry, wriggle into the mud and wait for the rains to uncake them" (Forster 215). Mrs. Moore, the catalyst for the novel's

water imagery and a spiritual presence in her own right, has wriggled into the mud like a fish. Even before the reader hears of her death, her identity has dissolved into the monotonous "boum," like the monotonous mud with which Forster opens the novel. Shortly before her death is revealed, the reader witnesses a group of Indians chanting a variation of her name: "Esmis Esmoor" (228). Like the fragments of memories that Gunn preserves in liminal dreamscapes, Mrs. Moore's transition into death renders her a unifying force. The unity that Mrs. Moore's memory creates is not mystical, nor is it divine. It is closer to the the homogeneity suggested by Bataille's base material; Forster evinces this by using "monotonous" to describe both the mud of Chandrapore and the Marabar echo. No longer living and thus free from all conventional paradigms, Mrs. Moore is no longer subject to the difficulties that render friendship between Aziz and Fielding impossible, signified by their failed navigation through the "great Mau tank."

Forster begins the novel's denouement by juxtaposing the cyclical nature of India's seasons, with its long dry periods and monsoon seasons, with Aziz's cyclical attempt to befriend his English visitors. After treating Ralph Moore's bee stings and repeating his declaration that one who recognizes a friend in a stranger is "an Oriental," he thinks: "Never be friends with the English! Mosque, caves, mosque, caves. And here he was starting again" (306). By repeating the titles of the novel's first two segments as if it were a chant—similar to the earlier rendering of Mrs. Moore's name as a chant—Aziz highlights the monotonous nature of such cycles. Like the Marabar echo, the chants in "Temple" reduce all meaning to a single syllable. But unlike the echo, the chanting during Krishna's festival is associated with what Aziz calls "our monsoon, the best weather." As does Eliot before him, Forster uses water to represent spiritual fulfillment and salvation; and, as in Conrad, water is a liminal surface to be traversed. This set of associations seems paradoxical: water at once represents a journey's middle-stage and ending. However,

Forster solves this paradox in a way that Eliot has already hinted at in "Little Gidding," the final poem of *Four Quartets* and a follow-up to *The Waste Land's* quest for spiritual renewal:

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
Through the unknown, remembered gate
When the last of earth left to discover
Is that which was the beginning;
At the source of the longest river
The voice of the hidden waterfall

For Forster, as for Eliot, to break a cycle is to return to its beginning, but with a different perspective. This is exactly what liminal settings allow characters to accomplish. The "happy" chanting and "savage noise" underlying the rains are not simply a return of the Marabar echo, though the echo is contained within this noise. The water is consuming, yet welcoming:

Was the cycle beginning again? [Aziz's] heart was too full to draw back [. . .] Once on the water, he became easy. One kind action was with him always a channel for another, and soon the torrent of his hospitality gushed forth and he began doing the honours of Mau and persuading himself that he understood the wild procession, which increased in lights and sounds as the complications of its ritual developed. There was little need to row, for the freshening gale blew them in the direction they desired. [. . .] The strange temporary life of the August flood-water bore them up and seemed as though it would last forever. (307).

Here, my argument returns to where it started, yet with a difference. Conrad's Gulf of Siam, with its crazily arranged fishing stakes as boundaries, is a threatening space devoid of comfort. The captain's narrative is linear: he embarks without mastery, navigates around death, and emerges on the other side, secure in his conventional role as commanding officer. Forster converts the narrative of the navigational near-death experience from one of danger and recovery to one of humorous mishap and revelation. In this narrative, the water remains "temporary," but it seems to "last forever." Forster's liminal space is not to be traversed once, a traumatic experience to be endured and left behind. Instead, it is Eliot's "end of all our exploring" that is also "where we

started," a setting that seems temporary, but is also a space to which—as the echo insists to Miss and Mrs. Moore—all material inevitably returns. This hint of universal affinity, always underlying the narrative but not always visible, manifests vibrantly in the "wild precession" Aziz tries to comprehend. Forster treats the liminal self as the fully-integrated self, not devoid of its former identity but containing all identities.

The collision of Aziz's boat with the Fieldings' boat that ends this navigation, though violent, does not destroy the characters, nor does it end their liminal journeys. Instead of presenting collision with the unknown as annihilation, as does Conrad in his description of Koh-ring as the "gate of Erebus," Forster presents it as comic, using muddle as a path to temporary harmony:

[Aziz] entered the dark waters, pushing the village before him [. . .] Dark and solid, the little waves sipped, then a great wave washed and then English voices cried "Take care!"

The boats had collided with each other.

The four outsiders flung their arms and grappled, and, with oars and pole sticking out, revolved like a mythical monster in the whirlwind. The worshippers howled with wrath or joy, as they drifted forward helplessly against the servitor. Who awaited them, his beautiful dark face expressionless, and as the last morsels melted on his tray it struck them. (309)

Forster incants the word "dark": the "dark waters," "[d]ark and solid" waves, and the "dark face" of the idol—all against the backdrop of the monsoon's sheets of rain—highlight this space as a spot of unknowing, epistemologically opaque. Rather than rendering the space terrifying (as does the nothingness in the Marabar), this darkness is the ultimate connection between the English and Indian characters. It transforms the English "outsiders," each with a distinct identity, into a single "mythical" unity, a piece of India's folklore. The darkness similarly eliminates the distinction between the watching participants' "wrath or joy." Finally, the tray's landing on the struggling party can do nothing but cause the reader to laugh in amazement: a sacred object,

representative of divinity, has scattered melting food over the water. The material unites with the metaphysical. This moment in the liminal, ritualized reenactment of Krishna's birth is not devoid of danger—"wrath" is still possible, the collision's victims resemble a "monster," and they drift "helplessly"—but at his novel's end, despite his cynicism, Forster reveals the universal humor in liminality. To temporarily forego one's conventional role is frightening and dangerous, but it also enables one to elide power relations and connect with the Other over the comic revelation that all returns to a material foundation. All reduces to "ou-boum," a sound that is scary—yet funny.

Despite this cathartic climax, Aziz and Fielding are "aware that they would meet no more" while they chat on horseback during the novel's final scene (310). Only after all the English are driven from India, claims Aziz, can the two men be "friends" or, as Aziz's "half-kiss" implies, more (316). Ambreen Hai places the failed connection of Aziz and Fielding in the context of Forster's career-long focus on communication. Hai notes Forster's conclusion after his second trip to India that "there is no prepolitical body or psyche, that history cannot be washed away, that resentment, rivalry, exploitation, and mistrust are necessary components of any interracial exchange charged with the contexts and histories of colonialism" (155). Colonialism is not a spiritual burden to be lifted by poetry, as Eliot attempts in *The Waste Land*. It is instead a collection of material forces that exerts itself over both grand and personal narratives. Hai elaborates the nature of communication within a space influenced by colonialism: "[*Passage*] announces the failures of language and the impossibility of communication yet itself purports to communicate; if it cannot build a bridge to friendship, then it seeks to convey reasons for that failure and build a bridge toward understanding" (156). The epistemologically occluded, frightening, yet sometimes comic moments in *A Passage to India's* liminal settings generate such understanding. The sympathy between Aziz and Fielding may not be founded on shared rational

interests, but on a shared physical understanding that power and logic neither determine the boundaries of the self, nor do they circumscribe all relationships. But the same material forces—the caves, the echo, and the water—that bring the two men together also ensure that they will again be apart: "the horses didn't want it—they swerved apart; the earth didn't want it, sending up rocks through which the riders must pass single-file" (316). Like the menacing agency of Conrad's forest and the excessiveness of Woolf's and Lynch's food, Forster's material forces erupt into the narrative without cause or warning. Forster's characters take advantage of these moments outside of typical power structures to share intimate experiences. Though Aziz and Fielding may only connect for an instant, future friendship has been rendered possible, and that makes all the difference.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

“Through the darkness of future past
The magician longs to see.
One chants out between two worlds
Fire walk with me.”
—David Lynch, from *Twin Peaks*

In the previous four chapters, I have meditated on the functions of literary liminal spaces—settings, events, and physical landscapes. Conrad, Forster, Woolf, Gunn, and Lynch are all modernists in their curiosity about the nature of individuality, experimentation with temporary, fragmented, and communal subjectivity, and concern about the threatening rise of technology and global war. I have argued that all of these authors use liminal spaces as staging-grounds for the articulation of experiences that elude everyday language. My approaches to these artists' texts raise several more questions. Why do in-between spaces enable extraordinary communication? What sort of self exists in a space that is, by definition, between identities? The former question finds the start of an answer in Conrad, who presents the ocean as a liminal surface to be traversed via ship, a closed, isolated system. Only by nearing the threshold of death, the annihilation of this system, can the protagonist of "The Secret Sharer" inhabit his role as captain and relinquish his imagined or supernatural double. In *Heart of Darkness* Marlow similarly approaches Kurtz, an avatar of death who has all but left his body behind, yet returns to civilization. For Conrad, the interstices between worlds and ways of being present terrifying temptations to abandon one's conventional social identity and merge with the base material of one's surroundings. If braved, the thresholds of these spaces offer temporary knowledge of the self's permeable boundaries—thus allowing characters to share seemingly ineffable experiences.

Through his characters and their doppelgängers, Conrad shares the experience of isolation both at sea and in the heart of an inhuman wilderness.

The second question—concerning the nature of the liminal self, a body between identities—finds answers in Woolf, Lynch, and Gunn. Woolf departs from Conrad in choosing close quarters rather than a wide expanse as her liminal stage: the dinner table. In *To the Lighthouse*, unstable relationships are made manifest through intrusions of repulsive materiality into Mrs. Ramsay's orderly dinner party. As Bataille argues while describing base material, the material foundations of our bodies cannot be ignored, nor are they inherently inferior. Lynch picks up Woolf's dropped utensils in *Twin Peaks*, a story in which food is a subtle, driving force. The Hayward Supper Club hearkens back to *Lighthouse* in its evocation of tedious, forced social ritual, but Lynch goes beyond the table. The Black Lodge's demons subsist on the repulsive creamed corn that Donna unknowingly delivers to Mrs. Tremond (likely a demon herself), and the investigation into Laura Palmer's death is constantly distracted by an excessive amount of donuts, pie, and coffee. Woolf and Lynch highlight the inescapable materiality of the self, a materiality which is exposed rather than newly created in liminal space. Thom Gunn's liminal dreamscapes offer another portrayal of identity in liminal space: identity as memory. For Gunn, once the shield of the flesh has cracked and the body's boundaries begin to crumble, identity is no longer rigid, and intimate connection between people becomes a means of preservation as one self enters another.

E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* engages with both central questions, portraying the conditions under which one can express the seemingly ineffable, and also the nature of the selves who attempt such expression in liminal space. Foreshadowing Gunn, Forster stresses the importance of attempted (even failed) connection between people. He uses the chaotic setting of

a festival of a god's birth during a monsoon to stage a connection that has nothing to do with reason or social convention: a collision of boats. By highlighting chaos, emptiness, and repetitive sound as markers of the fictional boundaries between selves, Forster invites the reader to challenge these boundaries—no matter how long it takes, and how many failures there are along the way. Rather than focus on the nature of the singular liminal self, Forster examines the possibility of shared identities in liminal space, connections that could persist even after return to normalcy. A fear of isolation, perhaps uniquely potent in the twentieth century, runs through each of the texts I have engaged. But a potential for communion with others, even after the dissolution of the self, also persists, whether in transcendent or mundane form.

To end this study, I return to *Twin Peaks* and Lynch's cryptic poem, quoted above. The poem is recited by Mike, a Black Lodge spirit who used to join BOB on his killings, but has since retired. "Through the darkness of future past" recalls Eliot's speculation in "Burnt Norton" that "Time present and time past / Are both perhaps present in time future, / And time future contained in time past" (1-3). Eliot concludes his poem with a lament: "Ridiculous the waste sad time / Stretching before and after" (177-8). The "darkness" of a future containing the past, and the "waste sad time" that reaches before and after the eternity Eliot seeks, are both spaces to traverse: interstitial, liminal spaces. For Lynch, it is a "magician" who can see through the darkness, one who uses the materials around her to shape her reality. The magician's identity is subsumed before her chant can begin, however: it is an impersonal "One" who "chants out." This chanting, as in Conrad's ocean, Woolf's table, Gunn's dream, and Forster's cave, takes place "between two worlds." Repetitive chanting loses conventional meaning, but retains meaning in liminal space, as the echo does for Mrs. Moore and Adela. The chant in Lynch's poem is "Fire walk with me." Fire in Lynch performs a similar role as water in Eliot and Forster: it purifies

through destruction. Eliot ends "Little Gidding," the poem that ends the cycle begun by "Burnt Norton," by declaring that

All manner of thing shall be well
When the tongues of flames are in-folded
Into the crowned knot of fire
And the fire and the rose are one. (259-262)

This once again highlights a difference between Eliot and poets later in the twentieth century.

Eliot looks forward to a transcendent realm in which "All manner of thing shall be well."

Conrad, Woolf, and Forster face the unsettling possibility of the self's dissolving without such a transcendent realm to enter. Gunn and Lynch never expect such a world. Rather, they learn to embrace the transient world they inhabit: "Fire walk with me." Lynch's pronouncement indicates danger, temptation, and exploration. To cross the threshold into liminal space is to confront all of these possibilities, and to emerge—if at all—with shifted bodily boundaries.

ENDNOTES

¹The feeling of unease (*unheimlich*) one experiences during Heidegger's anxiety is similar to Freud's concept of the uncanny (also commonly translated as *unheimlich*). Drawing on the etymology of the German word, Freud suggests that the meaning of *heimlich* has over time changed from comfortable, familiar homeliness to homeliness as that which is hidden from strangers; *heimlich* and *unheimlich* are no longer antonyms. For Freud, the uncanny is that which feels as though it was once familiar, yet now inspires dread. Among his examples of objects with uncanny effects are "severed limbs," "a severed head," "a hand detached from the arm," and "feet that dance by themselves" (150). He emphasizes that uncanniness arises "when the boundary between fantasy and reality is blurred, when we are faced with the reality of something that we have until now considered imaginary, when a symbol takes on the full function and significance of what it symbolizes" (150). Similarly, Heidegger's anxious person is confronted with a more authentic experience of *dasein*, that person's specific historical moment of being-in-the-world. This new experience of one's being is at once familiar and threatening. Thus Heidegger builds on the Freudian uncanny by applying it not only to the world of objects, but also to the embodied experience of selfhood. This sense of the defamiliarized self will be important for understanding the function of ritual in both *Heart of Darkness* and "The Secret Sharer."

²This discussion of Kurtz' severed heads is adapted from Adam J. Engel, "Talking Heads: Bodiless Voices in *Heart of Darkness*, 'The Hollow Men,' and the First World War," *Conradiana* 45.3 (2013), print.

³Problematically, Conrad genders effective, stable signs as masculine, while unstable signs are feminine and partake in the darkness that obstructs language. Masculine signs (including base material body parts and facial hair) both attract and repulse the narrators. Feminine signs (which seem to include the entire bodies of women like the mate's wife, Kurtz's Congolese lover, and his Intended) seem only to repulse. Further research could address Conrad's use of gendered signs in liminal space, as well as the homoerotic tension that arises during crises such as "The Secret Sharer"'s bathroom incident and the groping of ears during the storm in "Typhoon."

⁴Bennett's claim that all things are substantially one and formally many is similar to Bataille's argument for base material. Both seem good candidates for the substance that underlies a person (or body) during liminal phases: neither vibrant nor base material depends on human constructs (reason, language, etc) for its subjectivity or *raison d'être*, because neither has conventional purpose. We can imagine vibrant and base material as occupying Deleuze and Guattari's smooth space, a fluctuating web of events rather than a chain of intentional, rational actors. For my purposes, the important difference between Bennett's vibrant material and Bataille's base material is the ubiquity of the former. While Bataille acknowledges the base in visionary moments (much like Conrad), Bennett locates vibrant material as an unavoidable, sometimes trivial set of forces with which we are always interacting.

⁵In his discussion of the black vernacular trope of the Signifying Monkey, Henry Louis Gates Jr. describes the Trickster as a "mediator," a disingenuous interpreter between humanity and divinity (687). Like the Signifying Monkey, known for "repeating and simultaneously reversing in one

deft, discursive act," Gersten (unwittingly?) performs suburban values to the point of reversal (686). The liminal space of the dinner provides a perfect platform for this performance, a subversive mediation between town's public veneer and the violent world within its houses' walls. For more on the Trickster's role in liminal space, see Gates, "'The Blackness of Blackness': A Critique of the Sign and the Signifying Monkey" (1983).

⁶Unfortunately for Leland, the warning comes too late, and his body's attack on his identity leads to his suicide after he's imprisoned by Cooper. In the next chapter, I will further discuss the disconnect and antagonism between the body and its subject in the context of the AIDS crisis.

⁷The Reagan administration was notoriously slow and misguided in responding to the AIDS crisis. To cite just one example, in 1987 the U. S. Senate adopted the Helms Amendment, which "require[d] federally funded educational material about to stress sexual abstinence and forb[ade] any material that 'promotes' homosexuality or drug use" (aids.gov). For a succinct history of the events and legislation surrounding the AIDS epidemic, see "A Timeline of HIV/AIDS" at <https://www.aids.gov/hiv-aids-basics/hiv-aids-101/aids-timeline/>.

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