“If There Were a Hell on Earth”: Katabasis and Representations of Hell in Contemporary American and America-centred Fiction

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All nights, all days too, dark Dis's portals lie open.
But to recall those steps, to escape to the fresh air above you,
There lies the challenge, the labour!

Virgil, *Aeneid,* VI. 126-128

Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscribed
In one self place, but where we are is hell,
And where hell is, there must we ever be.

Christopher Marlowe, *Dr. Faustus* (2.1.118-120)

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ABSTRACT

“If There Were a Hell on Earth”: Katabasis and Representations of Hell in Contemporary American and America-centred Fiction

Katabasis, from the Greek ‘to go down’, indicates a journey down into the underworld in order to retrieve a boon and to ascend back to the surface triumphantly. Homer’s *Odyssey* and Virgil’s *Aeneid* are the most famous versions of the mytheme, which was later popularised in mediaeval times by Dante in his *Inferno*. The trope has consistently been used in literature since its beginnings, and as such a core framework has been developed from these key examples and others like them, identifiable for the presence of a descent, the aid of a guide, and the separation of the underworld or Hell from the primary upper world. This thesis discusses the presence of katabasis and the representations of hellspaces in six contemporary Anglo-American texts: Ursula K. Le Guin’s *Earthsea* trilogy, Shirley Jackson’s *The Haunting of Hill House*, Bret Easton Ellis’ *American Psycho*, Jeff VanderMeer’s *Veniss Underground*, Angela Carter’s *The Passion of New Eve*, and Mark Z. Danielewski’s *House of Leaves*. Drawing from previously established patterns of katabatic journeys both old and new, this thesis aims to analyse the way in which katabasis and its requisite underworlds or hellspaces have been transformed into modern, experimental textual allusions. It suggests that for these texts and others like them, katabasis, the journey involved, and the representation of Hell become forms of routine metaphors that the authors wield as reminders of their origins in order to establish new patterns from the old. This thesis analyses not only the descent into the underworld in terms of how it has taken on a more metaphorical or horizontal approach due to increasing industrialisation and experimentality, often changing the parameters of descent as laid out in the pattern, but the space of Hell takes on a greater importance. Due to increasing secularisation, the space of Hell also takes on new forms, and why it is still closely linked to past associations despite this is at the centre of the discussion on the novel’s chosen spaces of representation.

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INTRODUCTION

When fabled Odysseus freed his ancestral ghosts to aid him in his quest, Homer solidified what was already a long-standing tradition of accessing the underworld into the epic corpus. Centuries later, when Virgil wrote of Aeneas's descent into the underworld, he transformed Homer's instance of a nekyia —a ritual of summoning the spirits of the dead —into what would become known as katabasis. The term signifies the mytheme of the downward journey into the underworld in order to gain or retrieve a boon, knowledge or fame, after which a subsequent anabasis ('ascent' or 'an expedition up from') renders it cyclical. Present in literature for over four thousand years, it is no wonder that Margaret Atwood, in *Negotiating with the Dead* (2002), states that '*all* writing of the narrative kind, and perhaps all writing, is motivated, deep down, by a fear of and fascination with mortality - by a desire to make the risky trip to the Underworld'.[1] Since the beginnings of literature, there has been a deep magnetism with communicating, accessing, and traversing the world of the dead, out of which has arisen a set of parameters that codify both katabasis and the space of the underworld that is visited on its course. From Homer through Dante and right up to the present, the theme has millennia worth of retellings and persists in modernity, with these parameters being used to varying degrees. A large body of adaptations of katabasis has emerged in recent years across a range of genres which depict descents and the underworlds in new contexts, configured to meet new modes. How closely, then, do these modern works link to past frameworks, and how are modern katabases and the spaces of the underworld visited on their course now codified? The mythic tradition, as will be shown, remains in modern literature as an allusive presence despite increasing secularisation. Through the analysis of six texts, all but one American and the latter set in the USA, the presence of katabasis will be analysed for their approaches to descents and underworlds not only for how they depict them in new, contemporary forms but how indebted these depictions are to the old framework, showing both its persistence and transmutation in modernity.

The historical tradition of katabasis in Classical myth is widely researched. Works such as R. Deryck Williams's analysis of Book VI of *The Aeneid* and Gregory Crane's reading of the heroic quest theme in *The Odyssey*, for example, focus on a close reading of the texts, and Raymond Clark's *Catabasis: Vergil and the Wisdom-Tradition* (1979), which details the importance of the acquisition of knowledge, focuses on the human experience found within the epic. The field's proliferation of close readings of Classical texts means that a definite pattern of the topography, events, psychology, character presence and overlapping themes within katabasis has emerged, which modern receptions and adaptations must utilise in some form to signify its presence. It usually begins with an initiation or

[1] Margaret Atwood, *Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 156.

impetus that acts as a 'call to action', a requirement for the hero's participation and a justification for the coming dangers of the journey.[2] The sole figure of the katabatant, heroic or otherwise (with gods, demi-gods and humans all having taken up this role) is identified from this as the individual who will undergo the descent to a position that is more often than not below the earth, into a space that constitutes a realm of the dead in the myth's requisite traditions. Contrasting the distinctly Homeric horizontal axis of the nekyia,[3] katabasis usually — as Virgil's founding myth and Dante's mediaeval Catholic cosmology solidify — involves a distinct downward trajectory, with a clear transition occurring between the world above and the underworld. The journey is also constituted by the requirement of a goal that must be reached outside of simply exiting the underworld. In such a way, the quest framework is essentialised, the goal of which taking on many forms, with such examples as the founding of a dynasty, the retrieval of a lost lover or other boon, the acquisition of a new identity through amelioration, or knowledge to further a goal that requires katabasis for its completion all having been previously established. Additionally, the quest is often achieved through the aid of a guide, emblems of safe travel who lead the traveller through the perils of the underworld. Since the *Odyssey*, they have been present as figures who join the traveller either through providing information, a joint descent, or found within the underworld and are often more immune to its dangers. Through their aid, and with the traveller having completed the goal, all that is left in the framework is the anabasis, a required return without which the katabasis would be incomplete.[4] Once out of the underworld's constraints, the traveller is then free to continue their quest based on their experience, leaving the space and its torments solidly behind. This return effectively creates a round trip, allowing it to be used as it has in the form of an isolated vignette, separate from the narrative proper, or as a complete narrative with anabasis as an ending in either form. Just as with the descent, there must be a clear movement upwards outside of the plane of the underworld and back towards the upper, often living world. Thus, in its simplest form, the sequential pattern is one of descent, followed by a challenge or retrieval, and ending with a triumphant ascent.

The requirement of a transition from upper to underworld is one that, much like katabasis itself, has been given a framework that allows for its identification, and is important to outline here due to the fact that this thesis focuses not only on the act of descent but equally on the presentation of the space that is descended to. Generally, the underworld exists within a lower realm of the earth that

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[2] Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (London: Fontana Press, 1988), p. 30.
[3] Charles Travis, 'Joycean chronotopography: Homer, Dante, *Ulysses,*', in *The Routledge Handbook of Literature and Space*, ed. by Robert T. Tally Jr. (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 323-336 (p. 326).
[4] Stephen Dickey, 'Beats Visiting Hell: Katabasis in Beat Literature', in *Hip Sublime: Beat Writers and the Classical Tradition*, ed. by Sheila Murnaghan and Ralph M. Rosen (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 2018), pp. 15-37 (p. 18); David L. Pike, *Passage Through Hell: Modernist Descents, Medieval Underworlds* (Ichaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 2.

is underneath the world of the living, inhabited by a dead populous and overseen by a ruler. For Greco-Roman thought, it is the Halls of Dis or Hades, ruled by Gods unassociated with meting out punishment or organisation and merely there to administrate. It is a space that has consistently been considered as recognisably apart from the known, living world, one that is often depicted as oppositional through fear, disorder, or an alien landscape. It is often accessed through a specific barrier that acts as a container for the threat within, with Classical examples being caves, rivers or seas. Additionally, the space is further fragmented into separable areas depending on the punishment or safety received there (Tartarus for ultimate punishment, the fields of Elysium for heroic bliss, Asphodel for endlessly wandering mortal souls), which provides a definite segmentation, a distinct barrier, imaginary or otherwise, between the main overall space, its requisite sub-spaces, and the upper world of safety. Crossing the thresholds both to and within the space on a downward trajectory signifies both the katabasis and its movement from the known and safe into the unknown and treacherous.

In 1314, Dante wrote his reinterpretation of Virgil's katabasis in *Inferno* in which the epic poet acts as a guide through a labyrinthine Hell of punishment for sinners. *Inferno*, considered the most emblematic of Western katabatic tales,[5] reveals not only the extent to which the framework is used and solidified in mediaeval writing, but again its insistent prevalence as a literary trope. Throughout mediaeval history, katabases are found in the works of those such as Milton and Spencer, and the Christian canon is often enmeshed with the Classical mythic past to provide tales of saintly descents and pilgrimages, retaining the overall fascination with journeys to the land of the dead. Each of these more often than not contains the key components that have been defined above, albeit with slight changes due to its different religious systems. The guide figures, for instance, as an important component by serving as a protector who 'enlighten[s] the soul' of the traveller, often retaining its role as informant or companion.[6] However, while the core tenet of descent and return remains, what changes the most is the space of Hell. The term itself signifies a change from the Classical 'underworld', but they are, in effect, synonymous to each other. Though issues with the terminology are discussed later, what is important is how mediaeval understandings of katabasis and depictions of underworld/Hells inform modern interpretations. Notions of Hell as a space of horrific torture are centuries old and pre-date Christianity (Tartarus, for example, being seen as the first form of Hell in Hesiod's *Theogony*[7]), and one of the most prevalent images is that of a space of suffering, punishment and fear. In mediaeval, Christian thought onwards, Hell is barred from the upper world not only by

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[5] Rachel Falconer, *Hell in Contemporary Literature: Western Descent Narratives Since 1945* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), p. 2.
[6] Eileen Gardiner, *Visions of Heaven & Hell Before Dante* (New York: Italica Press, 1989), p. xvi.
[7] Walter Burkert, 'Pleading for Hell: Postulates, Fantasies, and the Senselessness of Punishment', *Numen*, 56.2/3 (2009), 141-160 (p. 148).

being beneath it, but inaccessible to those who have not died as sinners, lending it therefore less a state of physicality and more associated with the transcendence of souls to be punished. Above all, the Hell of Christianity depicted in Dante's *Inferno* and the one most accurately solidified in Western thought is a Hell of 'everlasting fire', a place of eternal damnation to house sinners and ruled over by Lucifer, a fallen angel with control over the entire domain.[8] However, while Dante's Hell is seen as 'frequently idiosyncratic to the point of being heterodox', what is clear is the idea of Hell as a 'tangible and concrete' space in Christian and mediaeval thought,[9] and its depiction is one that remains stalwart throughout modern adaptations, persisting despite increasing secularity.[10]

The focus here has been on the three prime examples — *Aeneid* VI, *Odyssey* XI, and Dante's *Inferno* — that are most often used in modern criticism as key texts for katabatic adaptations. Though examples are not limited to these, they are useful in providing an overall framework of Western descent narratives both old and new. Against a backdrop of historical understanding, many works of fiction have emerged that draw on its influence to varying degrees and across a wide variety of genres and contexts. The Classical and mediaeval framework established above is largely unchanged in modern applications, albeit, as will be shown, without the mythical systems. The call to action, descent, and subsequent return with a boon all mark contemporary works as having the qualities of the mytheme. However, the adaptation of and acknowledgement of the mythic past has seen a change in the framework to more secularised spaces and goals of descent, which sees the trope feature more as a form of textual reminder, present despite this increasingly distanced approach but adapted to fit new requirements. Its scope has allowed for modern reimaginings to use it in a more culturally and socially conscious way whilst still retaining the hallmarks of the tradition. Katabasis in modernity is no longer that of a literal descent into an underworld but into spaces that can be categorised as forms of Hell in relation to the narrative's spatial choice, often dependent on its genre. In this way, the 'underworld' element is transmuted to fit narrative requirements, and even the authenticity of the downward trajectory may be changed towards the metaphorical or even negated, an important point that this thesis will maintain but one that nevertheless goes against the core definition of the term. Instead, a kind of 'common vision' informs the presence of such narratives, and the typology associated with the mytheme is instead mapped onto 'essentially non-underworld stories' of modernity.[11] Underworld spaces—or those that are constituted as such—and difficult journeys can be seen in a mythological light whereby the differences to the myth serve as the very thing that allow them to be defined both

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[8] N. Wyatt, 'The Concept and Purpose of Hell: Its Nature and Development in West Semitic Thought', *Numen*, 56: 2/3 (2009), 161-184 (p. 162).
[9] Teodolinda Barolini, *Dante and the Origins of Italian Literary Culture* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), p. 87, p. 92.
[10] M. Franklin Vance, *The Blackness of Utter Darkness* (United States Xlibris Corporation, 2011), p. 19.
[11] Erling B. Holtsmark, 'The *Katabasis* Theme in Modern Cinema', *Classical Myth & Culture in the Cinema*, ed. by Martin M. Winkler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 23-50, p. 58.

socially and culturally. In this way, the key features of the pattern are often adapted to reflect a more contextual approach. The figure of the guide, for instance, is transformed; it can act as a more canonical secondary figure, the protagonist, or even the author themselves.[12] The latter can be utilised in the case of the protagonist being stated to move downward, around a certain corner, or made to follow a path, with the author effectively guiding both the reader and protagonist through the narrative, echoing the author's voice to impel action. Authors may similarly use more canonical forms of the guide, such as T.S. Eliot's Tiresias, and transform it to suit the modern reimagining. What may also occur is the lack of a guide, which is specific to modern adaptations to reflect the new dangers fraught by the novel's chosen Hell, one which sees the protagonist having to face them alone and without protection. This latter configuration allows for the alteration of the retrieval or attainment of identity upon ascent which is often inherent to the prior pattern, as well as the components of the quest itself, to be centred more fully around the protagonist.[13]

One of the largest and most significant changes to the mytheme is the space of the underworld or Hell. What remains of past configurations is the overall significance and representation of the space in modernity as one able to hold a plethora of mythological and folkloric values while still entrenching itself within the novel's own generic standing. With the increasing rise of agnosticism and atheism, Hell has taken on a new definition, one that is found as a place or spatial form entirely connected to the protagonists' lives. However, not only has it changed due to increasing secularisation, but increasing exploration of the space meant to signify it. The emergence of a new underworld has been traced to the advent of industrialisation and the construction of underground railways, which means that the underground, or underworld, has become, as David Pike states, a 'more explored and exploited ... physical space' closer to the surface of Western Culture particularly since the nineteenth century.[14] A significant body of writing centred around underground spaces has existed since the Enlightenment, and those from the late nineteenth century onwards have centred particularly around underground cities, with industrialisation opening up new avenues for their literary exploration and demystification through the creation of undergrounds not populated by the known industrial world fully, but not free of any man-made structures. Issues of proximity and increasing familiarity lead questions to arise as to how this dichotomy is now presented. As Kiera Vaclavik asks, to "what extent can hell be 'brought closer' and remain hell" when underground locations are seen as no longer mystical but facets of 'everyday life as places of work, scientific endeavour, tourism, and

[12] Ibid., p. 55.
[13] Falconer, *Hell in Contemporary Literature,* p. 5, p. 27.
[14] David L. Pike, *Metropolis on the Styx: The Underworlds of Modern Urban Culture, 1800-2001* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 2007), p. 3.

transportation?'[15] The boundaries previously discussed in relation to entering the space and traversing its possible sub-locations become negligible or at the very least more easily accessible (though in comparison to the quote which opens this thesis, Hades has always been a space far easier to enter than to leave). As a result of this change, modern narratives often skew, as with the rest of the framework, the extent of the strength of thresholds between these worlds, even sometimes having them exist on the same plane entirely. The requirement of a solid boundary between the upper and lower worlds is somewhat waylaid, largely due to the lack of horror or mysticism associated in modernity with the space of the underground. Though the Hades of Classical works was not associated with horror to the extremity, modern katabases tend to combine it with a more Christian association of fiery torture, and as a result, the Hells of these narratives by and large become horrific spaces with no sense of safety. A sense of fear and horror associated with the traditional requirement of punishment remains,[16] out of which arises a trepidation surrounding both entering and exiting that reveals the importance the space holds in the narrative and how central it is to katabasis as a whole, but any notion of guilt or sin is largely removed in favour of a more secularised association which retains only a ghostly memory of such fears.

Contributions to receptions of katabasis in modern literature largely utilise either canonical or newly genred forms to show not only an awareness of but a transmutation of the mytheme. A growing body of work surrounding descents into the underworld has arisen in recent years, many of which analyse the way that texts follow the explicit frameworks established above. In this regard, works such as Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949) and *The Power of Myth* (1988) are useful for providing an in-depth analysis of classical mythology in terms of characterisation and recurring narrative motifs that are useful not only in providing an overview but that are used widely in the context of intertextuality, bridging the gap between these ancient traditions and their views in modernity. Though the works do not discuss or analyse specific texts, they provide a useful basis for comparative frameworks, which this thesis sometimes relies on for discussions on configurations (and later transmutation) of heroic journeys detrimental to katabases of the past. The textual debt of katabasis in modern retellings is also the focus of Judith Fletcher's *Myths of the Underworld in Contemporary Culture* (2019), which analyses contemporary works of literature explicitly referencing canonical underworld narratives. She specifies a concern with the extent to which contemporary works can relate to what she defines as one of the 'oldest stories in our narrative tradition',[17] detailing canonical descents and returns, heroism, and transformed identities, rather than focusing on those

[15] Kiera Vaclavik, *Uncharted Depths: Descent Narrative in English and French Children's Literature* (London: Modern Humanities Research Association and Maney Publishing, 2010), p. 37.
[16] Alan E. Bernstein, *The Formation of Hell: Death and Retribution in the Ancient and Early Christian Worlds* (London: UCL Press, 1993), p. 3.
[17] Ibid., p. 1.

which combine 'less overt structural or psychological features'.[18] Including works that adapt *Odyssey* 11, Vergil's *Fourth Georgic*, Ovid's Metamorphosis, *Aeneid* 6, and the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, Fletcher details the overt allusions found in her chosen texts. Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman* (1989), Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* (1977), and Salman Rushdie's *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999) all feature for their inclusion of homages to the literary past and the paradigms of katabasis. Focusing on such readings as gendered katabasis in girlhood and the experiences of the diaspora as a kind of threshold crossing, she argues that the underworld itself has taken on a kind of 'archival quality' and used as a literary space for ghosts awaiting reanimation, a process which inherently provides a sense of self-reflection and engagement between 'author, reader, tradition, and text'.[19] Her chosen texts 'preserve the literary footprints of their Greco-Roman predecessors' for their depictions of Hell and its use in modernity as a space to examine psychosocial matters 'above ground',[20] combining old, established frameworks and explicit allusion with modern understandings and uses, forming a connection between the literary past that can be traced through canonical retellings. This approach is also taken by Vaclavik in her work *Uncharted Depths* (2010), which focuses on canonical katabases in children's literature from the nineteenth century onwards. She raises questions in regards to generic understanding and intertextuality and focuses on the differentiation between the previously discussed singular, vignette katabases and those that encompass whole works, a distinction that almost all modern analyses and texts forgo largely due to the nature of modern literature which allows for the trope to extend across multiple points in the narrative, and for the reworking of the quest itself outside of various stages.

Many readings of katabasis focus less on the canonical and more on how it changes in modernity due to genred or contextual requirements. Evans Lansing Smith's *The Myth of the Descent to the Underworld in Postmodern Literature* (2003) provides an in-depth analysis of nekyia, wherein he defines a set of 'necrotypes' that signify its presence within the literature he analyses.[21] Smith does not use the term katabasis to describe the journeys to the realm of the dead he analyses, instead substituting it for nekyia without outlining the difference. These differences, however, are vital in understanding the complexity of underworld journeys not only in their traditional sources but to trace these roots to modernity, with the distinction of the trajectory and physicality retained throughout this thesis and maintained across most readings of the trope's Classical sources.[22] Nevertheless, Smith

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[18] Judith Fletcher, *Myths of the Underworld in Contemporary Culture: The Backward Gaze* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), p. 9.
[19] Ibid., p. 9-10.
[20] Ibid., p. 4.
[21] Evans Lansing Smith, *The Myth of the Descent to the Underworld in Postmodern Literature* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2003), p. 3.
[22] Raymond Clark, *Catabasis: Vergil and the Wisdom-Tradition* (Amsterdam: Gruner, 1979), p. 77; Falconer, *Hell in Contemporary Literature*, p. 33.

links Babylonian, Classical, Biblical and Arthurian mythology together to provide a wider view of the way in which necrotypes are not only connected to the tales of Odysseus and Aeneas, but that postmodern texts often use a variety of different mythological images that link the concept of labyrinths, thresholds, and journeys together. His analysis of his chosen works — such as Christa Wolf's *Cassandra* (1983) and *Medea* (1998) for their use of counterworlds and reworkings of myth, and Alejo Carpentier's *Lost Steps* (1953) for its use of the heroic journey cycle — is largely based on tracing the presence of necrotypes within them, establishing how, since Eliot, postmodernist works have utilised his enduring legacy of the 'mythical method' in order to portray a post-world war era of desolation,[23] with a conscious use of mythological imagery as part of postmodern authors' 'poesis' used to highlight their relevance to the human condition and their inherent role in literature. He notes that postmodernism suffers from an 'imperative need' to revise ancient katabatic (or nekyiatic) images,[24] and his analysis shows that texts with both explicit references to mythic sources and those more loosely linked to his concept of 'necrotypes', whereby the inclusion of certain geographical or symbolic markers, serve as indications of the pattern.[25] Smith's work is more concerned with the motif of descent and return and less with the spaces in which these occur, detailing the extent to which katabasis is entrenched in contemporary literature due to the fascination of heroic journeys. As such, Hell or the underworld does not constitute a major element of his analysis, with the focus more on the details of the quest and its associated trajectories, and any notions of secularisation for either the trope or Hell are waylaid in favour of closely reading necrotypes in his chosen works.

Approaches such as Smith's and Fletcher's are useful in providing an overview of how modern readings utilise a core understanding of the framework in their criticisms, but of greater concern to the approach taken in this thesis are those which are less explicit. These works often detail the greater extent to which modern texts change the core framework while still providing an acknowledgement of the mythic past that formulates their narrative workings. In this regard, Rachel Falconer's *Hell in Contemporary Literature* (2007), a formative text utilised widely throughout this thesis, details the importance that katabasis still holds in Western literature after 1945, a date she categorises as one which changes the descent into Hell due to new historical contexts. Its infernality is entirely recognised and understood, embedded in both historical and social consciousness, and the journey acts as a form of recognition for the familiar. Her foundation of katabasis in modernity is one that unveils the mysteries of Hell and its associations to show that the space and the quest are already understood to be infernal. For Falconer, Hell still retains a sense of torture through a qausi-religious belief and acknowledgement despite its secularisation, again revealing the embedded nature of the

[23] Smith, *The Myth of the Descent*, p. 1.
[24] Ibid., p. 31.
[25] Ibid., p. 3.

pattern. The work is organised by genre, with specific focus on how each one conceptualises Hell within its own bounds. Capitalist and marxist readings, the Holocaust, and mental illness memoirs all feature, all of which twist descents and underworlds to fit the parameters of the texts. Works such as Alastair Grey's *Lanark* (1981) for its take on a capitalist Hell or Rushdie's *Ground Beneath Her Feet*, which hybridises Eastern and Western myth for a take on the Orpheus-Eurydice tale, are analysed in order to show how contemporary literature's awareness of the mythic pattern is informed by the real world issues of war and late capitalism. The questing motif is a specific and crucial aspect of Falconer's study; she focuses mainly on how modern katabases retain the quest for selfhood on journeys through infernal Hells, either imaginative or physical, and these narratives are often far more concerned with identity than space or descent. Falconer's later work alongside Madeleine Scherer, *The Underworld in Classical and Modern Literature: A Quest for Remembrance* (2019), continues this trend through a collection of essays that connect the quest narrative more closely with memory, either through recovery of memories from the protagonists' past or as a modern memory of a mythic past. The quest for the self is shown as being concerned more with memorialisation, aided by an analysis of the representation of shades that inhabit the underworld and the protagonists' interactions with them.

While Falconer's study is useful in that it serves as a basis for how katabasis has transcended into modern literature, with her focus on a kind of new, secularised framework imperative to retaining the foundation of the myth, the view is rather limited to a one-size-fits-all pattern for modern narratives across the genres that are featured. The organisation of Falconer's work indicates the importance of how the established pattern is often skewed by the parameters of contemporary novels' status and genre. Genre is a fixture of most current analysis of katabasis in modern literature, whereby its parameters become an important facet of its reading. Due to their own set of expectations, method and style, and against the backdrop of the established pattern, genres form a secondary framework which, given the scope of the subject, offers a discernible approach to such a large and historic field. Melville Cooke, for instance, analyses the trope of the descent into the underworld in selected works of Modern Black Fiction by American, African and West Indian writers, detailing the extent to which isolation and disorientation are entrenched into their respective protagonists. He notes how katabasis is a way for African-American literature and authors to directly associate themes of race and belonging within their own work, often being reflective of a hopelessness of any salvation that comes from experiences of being black, as well as having a stronger cultural or spiritual meaning to representations of underworlds and descents in the novels.[26] The world of the characters is presented

[26] Melville Cooke, 'The Descent into the Underworld and Modern Black Fiction', *The Iowa Review*, 5.4 (1974), 72-90 (p. 83).

as Hell itself, reflecting modern black consciousness and experience, and can be represented as either physical or mental, with the torment inflicted often making the space unlivable. Cooke's analysis is again based on previously established patterns, and though he does not explicitly use the word katabasis to define his meaning, the canonical depiction of a descent into a space recognised as Hell is clear. Similarly, Stephen Dickey's analysis of the trope in Beat literature sees the living traveller in distinct contrast to their spectral surroundings.[27] By establishing the parameters of katabasis within classical narratives whilst allowing room for more modern interpretations — such as the atomic bomb as the new God of Hell — in the same way that Cooke explores the authors' black experience on their work, Dickey writes that for the Beats, the mytheme takes precedence in the creation of the narrative whole, with the authors often summoning shades from the literary past, similar to Falconer and Scherer's discussion on katabasis as a narrative memory which sees new narratives emerge from reimagining. The use of narcotic underworlds and labyrinthine cities of debauchery and decay see the space associated with descent transformed into a movement away from social norms, with protagonists often afloat between society.

More genred readings are found in Erling B. Holtsmark's exploration of katabasis in modern cinema, which dissects western, detective, science fiction, and war films for their use of mythic patterns, each one directly relating to the genre's own frameworks in its representation of descent and hellspaces.[28] In Holtsmark's work, descent is configured instead as a means of going 'under' cover or infiltrating enemy terrains, the underworlds of which are again spaces of danger or criminal lawlessness. What Holtsmark's work in particular emphasises is a major issue in the debate on modern katabasis. As with many of the works discussed here, he categorises katabasis as 'a displaced trek into such emblematic hells' as those found in the genres he explores, such as criminal underworlds or the outerworlds of space,[29] plays on the spatial terms associated with the mytheme whilst still evoking its previous associations. Similarly, Dániel Puskás's work on descents to the underworld in twentieth century and contemporary poetry, which focuses on the modern retelling of the Orpheus myth and the way in which the underworld is replaced and represented by the underground station, as well as how the katabatic myth is interwoven with other mythological narratives, details the transition from Classical notions of descents into literal underworlds instead to ones that are either modernised through industrialisation or as psychological descents. The underground in particular is noted as not only a place of intense myth-making potential, but as a 'perfect symbol or urban alienation',[30] a key notion in this thesis's discussion both in terms of movements from social, understandable norms and

[27] Dickey, p. 16.
[28] Holtsmark, p. 34.
[29] Ibid., p. 35.
[30] Dániel Puskás, 'Orpheus in the Underground', *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Philologica*, 7.1 (2015) 45-54 (p. 48).

one that is an alienating or fragmenting psychological and physical experience. Inward descents are also the focus of Warwick Frost and Jennifer Laing's analysis of travel fiction, in which modern katabasis is established as a quest for the self, and they note that both travel and travel writing are ways in which the self can be found and expressed.[31] They stress that katabatic travel is both seductive and dangerous, with the underworlds within these narratives being ones of shadowed and steamy corners for 'sun, surf and sex'.[32] This aligns with Dickey's view of katabasis as changing to reflect a social outlook, this time being that associated with the trials and tribulations of the journey itself in real life. They trace the use of sea journeys, the requirement of a (travel) guide, and the idea of wildernesses and islands as a kind of Hell both figuratively and literally through the use of criminal underworlds — a spatial term implying a society beneath the lawful upper world — and the dangers associated with travelling through such spaces.[33] For Frost and Laing, travel is inherently katabatic in its quest for selfhood through dangerously changing circumstances, and how these changes may in fact be paradoxically pleasurable.[34] After completing the journey, the narrator may be led to further questing due to the knowledge found on the first one, where the pull of such a desire stems from its seductiveness.

Another strand prevalent in the literature surrounding modern katabasis is the body of writing on psychoanalytic interpretations, which will similarly run through this thesis and showcases the extent to which the framework can be transmuted. Psychological readings of both (largely Dionysiac) myths and modern works such as those of Allen Ginsberg, Theodore Roethke, and Sylvia Plath are found in Lillian Feder's *Madness in Literature* (1980), where 'psychic underworlds' arise out of madness,[35] and Vanda Zajko and Ellen O'Gorman's *Classical Myth and Psychoanalysis* (2013), in which myths are connected to psychoanalytic theory. *The Descent of the Soul and the Archaic* (2023) details the extent to which the original myths concern depth psychology and the difficulty of re-emerging into society after descents, and in particular Jonathan Shann's chapter on Freud's 'Katabatic Metaphors' sees routine understandings of descents and pathways as part of his theories.[36] Puskás's and Cooke's works also represent descents of a more internal nature, implying a psychological sense of torment to the experience. The issue of descent is also configured into psychological metaphor by C. G. Jung as part of depth psychology, and Falconer's chapter on mental

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[31] Warwick Frost and Jennifer Laing, 'Travel as Hell: Exploring the *Katabatic* Structure of Travel Fiction', *Literature & Aesthetics,* 22.1 (2021), 215-233 (p. 216).
[32] Ibid., p. 218.
[33] Ibid., p. 228.
[34] Ibid., p. 231.
[35] Lillian Feder, *Madness In Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 270.
[36] Jonathan Shann, 'Raising Hell: Freud's Katabatic Metaphors in *The Interpretation of Dreams*', in *The Descent of the Soul and the Archaic: Katábasis and Depth Psychology*, ed. by Paul Bishop, Terence Dawson and Leslie Gardner (London: Routledge, 2023), pp. 147- 182 (p. 147).

illness memoirs configures the descent as one into the mind. For these types of reading, space and place lose their fixed, traditional meaning, and instead protagonists are often bewildered by stranger environments, as will be shown in the chosen texts of this thesis, or by the imaginings of their own minds.

The studies above have largely focused on the act of undertaking a descent into forms of the underworld in modern contexts. However, what is equally important for the chosen texts of this thesis, as well as previous interpretations, is conceptions of Hell. The fact that there is a clear framework not only for the narrative of katabasis but the space that it occurs in shows that there is an important distinction in how they are treated. Often, the spatial element of the pattern is taken for granted; most previous works on katabasis have tended to underestimate the location of Hell, taking it as an inherent part of the theme, with the focus as above being largely on the protagonist and their actions. Studies of modern Hells in isolation, on the other hand, are found in works such as David Pike's *Metropolis on the Styx* (2007), which views the modern spaces of cities and underground railways as forms of Hell with little mention of katabasis, Scott G. Bruce's *Penguin Book of Hell* (2018), which traces representations of Hell from Hesiod's theogony to the Vietnam War, and Isabel Moreira and Margaret Tosano's *Hell and its Afterlife* (2010), which links Hell's associated Christian and Classical motifs of thresholds and spaces of extreme terror with modern works.[37] The presence of Hell in the texts analysed by critics above and in this thesis means that the space, largely due to increased secularisation, is being used differently, or sometimes not even worked with at all. These notions are again found in Puskás's work, with modern retellings of Orphic myths involving a replacement or representation of the underworld as an underground station, and echoed in Pike's previously discussed work, which details the newly physical proximity of the underworld stemming from the increasing use of underground spaces for mining and railways, which make it more visible and more easily accessed. The lack of mythical systems associated with Hell and katabasis as a whole is also the focus of Bent Sørensen's work. His exploration of katabasis in Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* (1985), in which the novel is shown to de-mythologise and re-mythologise the American West in light of katabasis, provides a reading in relation to both Classical and Biblical narratives,[38] an approach that is particularly useful given this thesis's analysis of such processes in secular, contemporary Anglo-American literature. Returning to Falconer, she too establishes the image of Hell in modern katabases as one which invokes an understanding and awareness of past configurations and representations of mythic and religious spaces of torture. However, despite her statement that 'Hell is

[37] Margaret Toscano and Isabel Moreira, 'Introduction: Holding Ajar the Gates of Hell', in *Hell and its Afterlife: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. by Margaret Toscano and Isabel Moreira (London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 1-6, (p. 6).
[38] Bent Sørensen, 'Katabasis in Cormac McCarthy's Blood Meridian', Orbis Litterarum, 60.1 (2005), 16-25 (p. 18).

embedded in twentieth-century history and consciousness',[39] the analysis of her chosen works focuses more on the concept of katabasis rather than the space that it occurs in, presenting it as an almost entirely personal, inner and metaphorical journey, where the psyche itself becomes the main facet. In this regard, despite her introductory outlines of the space, as with many other katabatic readings, Hell is sidelined in favour of the journey and descent, remaining instead as a stalwart, granted presence in the background.

These differing definitions and representations of underworld, underground and Hell show that they, along with katabasis, contain within them multiple meanings, out of which arises an issue of language. As a major signifier of the mytheme's presence within contemporary literature, the language used by the author can denote the specific feelings or locations of characters, evoking a sense of spatial awareness whilst also describing their inner turmoil and becoming an invaluable signifier of their position within the narrative. Words such as 'descent','hell','underworld' and 'upper world' evoke certain meanings and associations, and with them a series of routine metaphors that correspond to allusion. In particular, these terms have relative or common spatial meanings or metaphors. There is a sense of spatiality and hierarchy to ascending and descending that is difficult to shake, and connotations of Hell are, as established, deeply rooted, but their use has become a kind of routine in which any implications are often seen as an assumed part of the process of reading katabasis. This kind of underestimation comes as part of increasing secularisation, whereby the requirement of depth or even a descent becomes nullified, instead being defined by the parameters of the space that is provided as the narrative's requisite 'Hell',[40] or as more metaphorical. This configuration of descent arises from a need to define Hell as something different to its associations with true mythological or religious underworlds, and issues of capitalisations and colloquialisms see hell or Hell used interchangeably to often connote a certain meaning. The idea of a genuine Hell is one lost to the past,[41] and as such requires a change in order to encompass this new understanding and association, now far more associated with a 'mere exclamation' than any threatening sense of eternal damnation awaiting beyond death.[42] 'Hell', capitalised and non-colloquial, signifies an explicit process and acts as a clear identifier, and is still largely associated in the twentieth and twenty-first century with Sheol or Hades.[43] However, words such as 'underworld' and 'underground' signify a position untenable in modern narratives, colloquialised in certain instances in both fiction and reality from their association with industrialised, constructed spaces and even criminality. The setting of Hell,

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[39] Falconer, *Hell in Contemporary Literature,* p. 5.
[40] James Hillman, *The Dream and the Underworld* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), p. 188.
[41] Jerry L. Walls, *Hell: The Logic of Damnation* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), p. 2.
[42] Fritz Senn, 'James Joyce's Ulysses: Hell, Purgatory, Heaven in "Wandering Rocks"', *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies*, 19.2 (2013), pp. 323-328 (p. 325).
[43] Charles Seymour, *Theodicy of Hell* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Press, 2000), p. 16.

therefore, is coupled with a paranoid sense of agency, problematised by its modernity. In this sense, the word itself loses its means of descent, and katabasis must correspond differently, particularly when considering the notion that many of the locales that would be considered as Hell in a Classical or Christian sense do not fit a modern way of thinking or have already been explored. In this regard, the term ‘hellspace’ is used to categorise a requisite area acting as a locale for katabasis, but much like with the language used to signify katabases, quests, and descents, it is done so out of a need to encompass multiple definitions. Therefore, the capitalised ‘Hell’ is used throughout this thesis except when used as a colloquialism (often by the texts themselves) in order to encompass all previous notions of the space and its current use as a requisite location.

So too does the focus on questing in the works above go against the notion established here that it provides a sense of acknowledgement or agency to the actions of protagonists that is in fact often left missing from modern katabases. As established, the quest is an inherent part of the pattern, coming as part of the overall framework, a single vignette, or its entire purpose. Even while katabasis in its simplest form is just 'to go down', the fact that anabasis is always an 'expedition up from’, and the establishment of most prior classical frameworks being associated with the figure of the hero and as part of a quest narrative, essentialises the overall questing nature of the mytheme. However, this association is problematised when transitioning the mytheme to modernity. ‘Quest’ signifies a deliberate action that implies a clear sense of agency and destination. Many modern katabases instead waylay this in favour of a trajectory by the traveller that is neither voluntary or conscious, thus creating a sense of insecurity to the narrative as a whole. This, in turn, mimics a more modern sensibility. As such, the word journey is used in this thesis — despite at some points being analysed in the more Classical sense for its association with impetuses or goals (as with Chapter 1) and its more complex implications of continuity, with no clear beginnings, ends, or even destinations. This use goes inherently against the established formation of katabasis, and yet aids in the kind of abstract use in the modernised versions that this thesis focuses on whilst explaining or providing a format for their entry into metaphorical or adapted Hells.

In regards to the decision of what texts to use in this thesis, the endless modification of katabasis and hellspaces means that narratives abound which contain the mytheme of a journey into the realm of the dead or a similar space. There is an awareness in modern fiction and literature by contemporary writers of it as either a narrative device or as an indication of a metaphorical process, which results in a kind of crude adaptation that signifies a use of ready-made patterns and narrative sequences, and works have emerged with different degrees of allusion, all of which describe in some way a descent into Hell in its varied forms or showing an awareness for katabasis as a term and the meaning behind it. Texts such as Doris Lessing’s *Briefing for A Descent Into Hell* (1971) or Lucía

Estrada's *Katábasis* (2018) offer literal approaches to the trope and are plausible avenues, alongside traditional retellings of mythic tales such as the works of Madeleine Miller or Rick Riordan. However, they are discarded here for the explicitness of their allusions, as the term itself has become a form of mythical pastiche, symbolising a process that may not actually exist in the text itself, such as the works of Mark Teppo, Joseph Brassey and Ghengis Chase, which more likely utilise katabasis in terms of military motifs based on Xenaphon's *Anabasis*. In a similar vein, out of the new and varying definition of the word, new processes are being conveyed even outside of the confines of literature; for example, 'Katabasis' is used as a title for a journal of 'Hekatean Devotion', and, as mentioned, for depth psychology. The term and its approximations are used for a variety of different works and meanings, showing that it has known implications and can be used, as has been shown in the works above and for the chosen texts of this thesis, in a variety of ways. Above all, it conveys a conscious acknowledgement of a process being undertaken, as well as implying the universality of the trope and the difficulty in consolidating a collection of texts: if all writing, as Atwood states, is inherently concerned with such lines of inquiry, how is it then narrowed down?

In order to consider Hell as both a space of historic importance and as one that holds new understanding, only post-1945 texts have been chosen. This was done in order to discuss the use of katabasis and hellspaces in modernity with an awareness of its increasing secularisation and changing definitions, as with Falconer's work. As a result, a large amount of works discussed in this section fall under the category of postmodernism, which often lend themselves to a self-consciousness of narrative patterns. Similarly, a focus on American or America-centred fiction narrows down the geographical area, much like Sørensen's work, in order to encompass a process of demythologisation in the West through a shared attitude to modern thinking and thus modern katabasis, with a simultaneous awareness for the secularisation of Hell and the use of patterns to allude to past spiritual associations. The chosen works of this thesis all imply, in their own way, the existence of earlier works as either explicit influence or allusion, and as such the writers take on a rather experimental approach to the mytheme that often breaks the conventions of their own set genres. The analysis of each work involves a scrutiny of the conventions used and the extent of their allusions, and each chapter, moving through, takes on this increasing experimentality. The postmodern novel in particular is a perfect exploratory space for this due to its self-consciousness of narrative conventions, and though not all novels can be designated as such in this thesis, they are connected by their shared self-consciousness of genre, narrative pattern, and language. There is a sense again of approaches by other critics in which the genre is inherent to the trope's reading, and works such as Falconer's are inevitably drawn into endless generic arguments. Though useful for providing a sense of general explicitness and secondary connections, this thesis aims to avoid the premature generalisations that

arise out of concentrating on specific genres through a broader generic categorisation with texts that include a variety of genres or even allusions to other genres within the texts themselves in order to illustrate the conscious use of katabasis as another form of allusion, opting instead for a heterogeneous analysis. Thus, this thesis examines how the rules of convention and genre are set up only to often be broken, skewed or contradicted as part of this experimentality.

A reading of self-conscious writers requires a self-consciousness in and of itself, particularly in terms of the language or images being used to denote the presence of the mytheme in the narratives. Due to the nature of the chosen texts, each key component that makes up katabasis is questioned. The markers, associations and allusions in regards to journeys, guides, trajectories, and hellspaces are problematised by the authors' approaches. References are often less explicit than those provided in the literature above, and often only used as an allusion to signify a process of the narrative or even as a kind of intertextual reminder, and even then these allusions are often played with or questioned. The convention of the journey, for instance, is often unintended and unguided with characters moved by chance, but the process of movement in the text signifies an awareness of the pattern. Descent and ascent can be figured entirely metaphorically or spatially in a way that does not necessarily indicate a journey underground but one that could be to the depths of the mind, or even from a simple understanding of the hierarchical configurations of cities, whereby the traveller must access or bring awareness to the difference between the lives of those in high-rise apartments to the squalor of downtown. Alongside this descent is often a desire to see and to understand, and as such perceptions of the journey and hellspaces form an important component of the discussion. The old boon of knowledge and understanding is transfigured as more of an attempt to dissect the process of transition and spatiality, but even then there is an inherent sense of the accidental to the entire trope that arises not only out of the move away from the 'quest' and its association with goals but again from experimental reworkings. There is also an obsessiveness to the term itself and the processes involved, and for each text, while the action of the narrative is being observed, so too are the processes involved in its construction. For all of these texts, the idea of katabasis and the presentation of hellspaces takes on an increasingly abstract approach. Moving through the thesis is like moving further away from narrative convention and established patterns, but in doing so this brings a further awareness and self-consciousness to their use. By deliberately forsaking any attempt at genrefication, the thesis attempts to show that katabasis is at once specific and yet entirely interchangeable, found within not only explicit descents into some form of Hell but imbued into the language and associations of the traveller, built up on the expectations of the readers themselves in terms of their own understandings and associations. What also takes a larger focus than previous literature is the analysis of hellspaces in the texts in order to understand why they are seen as such spaces of torment, the minutiae of their

physicality, precise location, thresholds and perceptions all taking the forefront as a concrete component of the texts' use of the pattern. As the modern sense of Hell has shifted from previous configurations, the evocation of the space and exploitation of darkness are also done differently, and as a result some of the texts feature Gothic elements as a way of harnessing past allusions to horrific presentations, showing not only a play on genre conventions but to convey the sense of unflinching sublime that categorises Gothic fiction from the 18th century onwards.[44] Similarly, the greater onus on perception that arises out of the self-conscious depiction of Hell means that attention is also given to different forms of media; as such, uses of film and other focal elements provide another clue towards the inherent awareness of presentation.

This thesis offers a new reading of each chosen text in terms of their permutations of Hell and configurations of katabasis, most having never been analysed for the mytheme's presence previously. Chapter 1 begins with Ursula K. Le Guin's more canonically myth-inspired *Earthsea* trilogy, *A Wizard of Earthsea* (1968), *The Tombs of Atuan* (1970), and *The Farthest Shore* (1972), which follow the protagonists Ged, Tenar and Arren on their journeys to the realm of the dead to stop a great evil, analysed for its fantastical approach to katabasis and how it utilises and modernises the concept of a quest for self-retrieval.[45] A complication arises out of some pastiche narratives where fantasy writers present selectively mediaeval or classical cultures and worlds as inspiration, which largely disaligns with much of the secularisation of space and the idea of deathly realms for modernity. However, by starting with *Earthsea*, it offers a solid framework that then contextualises the other texts, with many of its chosen tropes being used in their known forms, from which the increasingly unstable and unfamiliar uses of latter texts can be based. Chapter 2 covers Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959), a Gothic horror centred around the assimilation of Eleanor into Hill House, an undomestic space that serves as the requisite Hell for its inhabitants. An establishment of Jackson's use of Gothic convention frames its breaking, and katabasis is viewed as a personal journey for Eleanor in which the descent is figured as both mental and spatial. The perceptions of Hill House as a kind of Hell, coupled with Dantean allusions, are analysed against the descriptions of architecture that are provided, and Eleanor's own notions of journeying and identity are questioned against established convention. Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* (1991) is discussed in Chapter 3 as a novel containing a katabasis that is entirely psychic in nature, with the concept of 'surface' and 'beneath'

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[44] Nick Groom, *The Gothic: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 85.

[45] Though *Earthsea*'s katabasis has been discussed in terms of a quest for remembrance in Frances Foster's chapter on 'Homer and LeGuin' in *A Quest for Remembrance,* no full tracing of katabasis across the entire trilogy, which takes into account the exact parameters of its descents and questions the location and makeup of its hellspaces has been done, and my choice to include Tenar's katabasis in *The Tombs of Atuan* and the use of the labyrinth as another form of hellspace allows for a reinterpretation of the trope in the trilogy as a whole, with a focus not only on its components but a full cartographical tracing of the realm's locations, boundaries, and perceptions.

being transfigured to facets of Patrick's identity and mentality that are swapped between as he navigates a kind of social Hell that he himself perpetuates. The city of New York becomes a playground of reflective spatiality that Patrick is able to control, and again perceptions become important to its formation. Chapter 4 focuses on Jeff VanderMeer's *Veniss Underground* (2003), a 'New Weird', science fiction tale of body horror that follows three separate protagonists and their journeys in and out of the city of Veniss and its underground counterpart. Each protagonist is shown to have a unique understanding and experience of their time in both spaces, and the effects that their environment has on their bodies and minds as they cross the thresholds between and come in contact with the strange, monstrous world beneath the city shows how connected they are to their own worldviews which are disrupted in the process of descent. Angela Carter's proto-feminist *The Passion of New Eve* (1977) is the focus of Chapter 5, which presents a protagonist suffering through multiple gendered katabases and hellspaces and establishes the extent to which the trope can be demythologised and still used as a core component of the narrative, highlighting many of the issues with the framework that appear more limitedly in previous chapters. Evelyn's role as a reflective narrator of their own internal descent and the connection between the self and understanding of space shows an awareness of previous construction that is then undermined to show the futility of its presentation in the first place. Finally, in Chapter 6, Mark Danielewski's *House of Leaves* (2000), a novel that has both a house and labyrinth presented as hellspaces through the lens of the mysterious fictive film, *The Navidson Record*, contains the most experimental, complex and self-conscious katabasis, acting as a kind of conclusive directory of the trope's transfiguration, bringing both mental, spatial, and even textual katabases to the forefront in order to dissect the very language involved in their previous constructions. With all aspects of the established pattern being questioned, revised, or modernised by the authors, katabasis will be shown to survive as a kind of textual memory beneath the narrative as a reminder of its relevance and continued use.

"CAN YOU CALL THE SPIRITS OF THE DEAD TO COME TO YOU, TOO?": URSULA K. LE GUIN'S *EARTHSEA* TRILOGY

Fantasy is a genre clumsily rooted in historical and cultural traditions.[46] It is often used, as Brian Attebery discusses, to 'construct new ways of looking at traditional stories and beliefs', offering 'a way of reconnecting to traditional myths and the worlds they generate'.[47] Its history, he writes, is the history of 'mythopoesis...not inventing but recreating that which has always existed'.[48] Fantasy texts can be seen to rework mythic elements both as part of their own stories—through the creation of religions or folklore within the world—and in a greater sense for the reader through the use of 'mythopoeia', first popularised by J. R. R. Tolkien: the process of creating a fictionalised mythic system.[49] Fantasy literature and mythological or folkloric tales share similar key features and tropes through particular settings, characters, and motifs,[50] and many examples of fantasy texts contain katabases, whether as an obvious part of the narrative or a more subtextual reference, and the proliferation of fantasy novels that contain the journeying element as a central motif is well remarked upon,[51] particularly those that depict quests or travelling to dark and deathly realms.[52] Le Guin herself was explicitly inspired and influenced by mythology, particularly that of Homeric tradition,[53] and by distinguishing between the practice of mythmaking and simple inspiration, she further complicates not only fantasy's relationship to the historical literary past by incentivising their inherent difference, but her own processes.[54] The importance (or lack) of home, the proliferation of sea journeys, and the depiction of the realm of the dead are all hallmarks of Classical mythology, and segment neatly into the katabatic tradition. However, much like Tolkien, what *Earthsea* does is use this influence to create its own form of mythological or fantastical tradition, one which exhibits the same richness of worlds

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[46] Dimitra Fimi, *Celtic Myth in Contemporary Children's Fantasy: Idealization, Identity, Ideology* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 2.
[47] Brian Attebery, *Stories About Stories: Fantasy and the Remaking of Myth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 3, p. 9.
[48] Ibid., p. 4.
[49] Michael Levy and Farah Mendlesohn, *Children's Fantasy Literature: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 136.
[50] Fimi, p. 5
[51] W. A. Senior, 'Quest Fantasies', in *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*, ed. by Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 190-199 (p. 190).
[52] Examples include the Undying Lands in Tolkien's *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*; Lyra's katabasis in Pullman's *His Dark Materials* (notable for its use of a child katabatant); and Cooper's *The Dark is Rising* sequence, which features many of the same narrative elements that are found in *Earthsea*, such as the battles between Light and Dark, and a sea journey that leads them 'under stone' to find mythic treasure.
[53] Oleksandra Filonenko, 'Magic, Witchcraft, and Faërie: Evolution of Magical Ideas in Ursula K. Le Guin's Earthsea Cycle', *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature,* 39.2 (2021), pp. 27-48 (p. 27).
[54] Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Language of Night: Essays on Fantasy and Science Fiction*, ed. by Susan Wood (New York: Perigee Books, 1979), p. 75.

filled with mystical pathways, gods, and heroes as the tales of old through the process of mythopoeia that involves not only the use of classical archetypes but of creating new ones.[55]

Despite the subsequent publication of *Tehanu* (1990), *Tales of Earthsea* (2001) and *The Other Wind* (2001), the focus in this chapter will be on the novels which comprise the first trilogy: *A Wizard of Earthsea* (1968)*, The Tombs of Atuan* (1970), and *The Farthest Shore* (1972). While Le Guin's other writings serve to cement the geography and mythology that she creates for the world of *Earthsea*, what follows in this chapter is an analysis of the initial journeys — and the worlds traversed due to them —for the way that they follow traditional katabatic frameworks. Due to the treatment spanning three separate novels, different readings are possible: either each novel separately completes the mytheme with the intended hallmarks of initiation, descent, and anabasis; or, Ged's journey in particular can be taken continuously from *A Wizard of Earthsea* (henceforth *Wizard*) to *The Farthest Shore* (henceforth *Shore*), with the latter ending in the journey to the realm of the dead to complete the mytheme in its entirety. This multiplicity is not unique to *Earthsea*: in fact, the heroic quest narrative—and by extension the katabatic vignette(s) within— can occur multiple times over the course of the adventure as its nature allows for extended sequences that sees the hero undergo multiple trials.[56] Thus, the journeys of the three protagonists in each novel — Ged, Tenar and Arren — are taken as one continuous narrative with Ged as the link between. It begins in *Wizard*, with the child Ged undergoing a quest to capture and return a shadow he has let loose after performing a necromantic ritual to the realm of the dead. In *Tombs*, Tenar, as the child sacrifice responsible for acting as a conduit between the old gods and the Tombs of Atuan, meets Ged in the underground Labyrinth, who is on a second quest to search for the Ring of Erreth-Akbe and bring peace to the world. Finally, in *Shore*, Ged, now known as the legendary Sparrowhawk, after the rising of a dark wizard named Cob who threatens to disrupt the boundary between the living and the dying forever, must travel to the realm of the dead to defeat him with the aid of Arren. The proliferation of katabatic motifs and journeys are the focus of the first section of this chapter, covering Ged's encounters with the realm of the dead and the shadows within, Tenar's quest for selfhood, and the defeat of Cob by Ged and Arren in the only physical journey to the realm of the dead. The second focuses on the geography of the world created by Le Guin, mapping its boundaries and their ownership in order to understand the position of the realm of the dead and how journeys are constructed. It is also worth noting that not only does *Earthsea* differ from the other textual choices in this thesis by nature of its genre, but also in the details of the world itself, which will therefore transform the discussion that will

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[55] Kirstin Johnson, 'Tolkien's Mythopoesis', in *Tree of Tales: Tolkien, Literature and Theology,* ed. by Trevor Hart and Ivan Khovacs (Texas: Baylor University Press, 2007), pp. 25-38 (p. 26).
[56] Norris J. Lacy, 'Foreword', in *The Grail, The Quest, and the World of Arthur*, ed. by Norris J. Lacy (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2008) pp. xv-xviii (p. xv).

occur thereafter. Unlike the other texts in this thesis, *Earthsea* exhibits no obvious influence from other genres outside of its own, and the setting itself differs by being pre-industrial or more mediaeval in presentation, lacking certain architectural features of the other texts that form the basis of their hellspaces. *Earthsea* is therefore the closest of the texts to its original influence, both in terms of the presentation of the journey itself and the realms in which that journey occurs. The trilogy offers a more canonical depiction of the mytheme, with the focus here on the extent to which Le Guin's methods of mythopoeia show the continued relevance of the pattern (though sometimes disrupted), providing a basis for its later subversion.[57]

I. "The Greatest Voyager": The Journeys of Earthsea

The narrative of *Earthsea* heavily concerns one of the most fundamental elements of katabasis: the journey. As the lynchpin of many fantasy texts, it becomes a way to explore the mythopoeia of the world and to establish a connection between the adventurer and the landscape, as discussed by Tolkien in his essay 'On Fairy-Stories' (1994).[58] In her own essay collection *The Language of Night* (1979), Le Guin acknowledges that *Wizard* and its subsequent instalments are grounded in the narrative of the journey, stating that 'the book is essentially a voyage'[59]—not, notably, that it *contains* one, but that it *is* one, so central to its development that without it there would be no story. She conceptualises this voyage as 'a pattern in the form of a long spiral',[60] an interesting analogy that not only insinuates a Dantean sense of journeying but one which consolidates the requirement of an end goal. As a result, the trilogy is categorised by a continuous sense of movement, one which Michael Cadden discusses as a form of resistance by Le Guin against the 'stasis of closure',[61] towards a pre-destined ending. From the opening of *Wizard*, Ged's future heroism as the legendary Sparrowhawk is laid out, as well as the path that he will take from Gont in the first novel to Selidor and the realm of the dead in *Shore* to achieve it. By following such an explicit pattern, the journeys of *Earthsea* are afforded a sense of certainty that provides security to the narrative. Rather than play with the mytheme in a more experimental or postmodern sense like the other texts will be shown to do, which sees the katabases within them (and the hellspaces in which they occur) become

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[57] As a result of this depiction, despite the complications of the term as discussed in the introduction, Le Guin's pastiche presentation and utilisation of allusion mean that 'quest' is fitting here to describe the actions of Ged as Hero and the presentation of katabasis that will follow. Similarly, Earthsea's realm of the dead will be referred to as such due to its naming in the text, rather than the insinuated Hell or hellspace of other examples.

[58] Sergio Arlandis and Agustin Reyes-Torres, 'Thresholds of Change in Children's Literature: The Symbol of the Mirror', *Journal of New Approaches In Educational Research,* 7.2 (2018), 125-130 (p. 127).

[59] Le Guin, *Language of Night*, p. 51.

[60] Le Guin, *Language of Night*, p. 51.

[61] see Michael Cadden, *Ursula K. Le Guin Beyond Genre: Fiction for Children and Adults* (New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 50. *Shore* does, however, neatly tie up at the end, as expectation would have. Both Ged and Arren return from the realm of the dead and Arren journeys on to Havnor to be crowned, thus completing the journey fully.

increasingly unstable and often absent of any anabasis, Le Guin's work is rather formulaic in a way that best serves to preserve the katabatic tradition and provide a foundation for her adaptation. As such, she builds *Earthsea* around a sense of rules and rituals not unlike the established pattern, and any instances of the framework are therefore bound to them. The figure of the traveller, the use of the guide, the configuration of descent, and restoration or rebirth as part of the anabasis all feature as an underlying familiar narrative structure, and the hero quest in fantasy reinforces a sense of reassurance that the journey will be completed in some way, particularly given the concept of a destined ending. Each katabasis in the trilogy is also built around oppositional motifs, involving at their centre an underlying battle between the dark, disordered forces of shadow and the ordered power of light, with the vanquishment of the former as part of the restoration of the latter being their main goal. This stability, however, does not diminish the power of Le Guin's katabases, but merely enforces the dexterity with which she handles her mythopoetic approach, and it serves as a strong contrast to the disordered selves and worlds that will be explored later on in this thesis, establishing the way in which a katabatic journey that relies more solidly on past considerations can be transformed in a modern text.

Off and away

As the pattern indicates, the journey requires a traveller who is able to wield the correct power and inner strength to capably restore balance to the world. As the primary protagonist in *Earthsea*, Ged is provided mythic status by his journeying and is characterised by Le Guin's sense of restlessness through a consistent call to adventure, reflecting Cadden's earlier analysis on movement: before him lies 'not rooms and books, but far seas, and the fire of dragons, and the tower of cities, and all such things a hawk sees when he flies far and high'.[62] This 'greatest voyager' (p. 13)— one who cannot be stilled, wishing for glory and willing to act (p. 32)— has a natural impetus that sees him fit the parameters of what would be constituted as a Classical heroic katabatant.[63] However, his impetus also arises out of his initial disruption of the world's equilibrium, breaking the rules and setting off a current of disorder in the narrative, when he sets out to prove his mage powers and summons the spirits of the dead. In the beginning, Ged (as Duny) is apprenticed to the mage Ogion on the isle of Gont, who teaches him the powers of magic and the divide between the living and the dying. New to his training and eager to further his mage powers, Ged is asked by a girl, Serret, to perform a spell to raise the dead. In order to do so, he must read the spell books in the cottage of his master, and it is through this reading that he is first introduced to the powers of the dark and the disorder he will later

[62] Ursula K. Le Guin, *A Wizard of Earthsea, Ursula K. Le Guin's Earthsea Trilogy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1979), p. 70.
[63] Campbell, p. 23, p. 30, p. 101.

unleash, in this case in the form of a 'shapeless clot of shadow' (p. 30) crouching beside the door. Ged reads the necromantic summoning spells without light, as though darkness is a requirement for their success, and as the dark grows and distinguishes itself from the natural darkness of night, Ged completes his first ritual meeting with the realm of the dead and that which lies within. It is not until two years later in the magical school on Roke that Ged uses the spell again, once more out of a naive attempt to impress another child mage, Jasper, through which he summons the spirit of Elfarran, a legendary and beautiful figure of the past.[64] Much like the Eleusinian mysteries or mythological rituals of the past associated with the underworld, Ged must perform forbidden necromantic magic to access the realm, solidifying its requirement in later attempts and outlining Le Guin's use of world rules. The summoning is also suffused with the language of descent, with the hillroots 'going down and down into the dark' beneath him (p. 62). It is important to note, however, that this moment would be considered more of a nekyia; rather than going down into the realm of the dead, Ged brings the realm to him. He rents a hole in the space before him, 'ripping open the fabric of the world' through which an antithetical and 'terrible brightness' blazes (p. 63). Already, there is a sense of trepidation and an understanding of the danger associated with travelling to the realm of the dead or summoning from there. Ged has not accessed the realm of the dead by any traditional means, instead using magic to create an entrance for himself. It is at this moment that Ged lets loose the gebbeth, the product of shadow who's vanquishment will become his main goal, his action of releasing something unwanted effectively setting up the subsequent katabases that occur in order to restore the world from his misdeed.

This gebbeth, however, is more than it would seem. It is both a solitary being capable of exerting will but also a shadowed part of Ged — an image of his own death — and as such its power is inherently Ged's to wield.[65] In this way, the gebbeth takes on the form of a double, and a shadowed, 'second self' is one found in both Classical katabases and fantasy as a 'dark, sinister figure' who 'often stalks the unsuspecting hero, driving him to what feels like murder, but is really a kind of suicide',[66] with Thomas Nortwick referencing this to Aeneas's journey as a quest that involves facing his own past. The shadow, that which stands on the threshold between 'the conscious and the unconscious mind', met in dreams or as other individuals in one's surroundings, is, according to Le Guin, 'beast, monster, enemy, guide'.[67] This latter identification again links to the katabatic

[64] Similarities can be found to Dr Faustus's summoning of Helen of Troy in Marlowe's *Faustus*, also considered a nekyia.
[65] Le Guin further disrupts the powers of associating the traveller with antithetical darkness from the beginning when Ged uses the power of the dark to defeat Kargish swordsmen even before his initiation (p. 22)
[66] Thomas Van Nortwick, *Somewhere I Have Never Travelled: The Second Self and the Hero's Journey in Ancient Epic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 5-6.
[67] Ursula K. Le Guin, 'The Child and the Shadow', *The Quarterly Journal of the Library of Congress,* 32.2 (1975), 139-148 (p. 143).

framework, but in this case shows an instance in which she reconfigures the notion of the guide in order to suffuse *Earthsea* with an undertone of complex instability, unbalancing the solidified narrative on the surface. *Wizard* is defined by a lack of conventional guides, and instead Ged must follow this shadow, which acts as the traditional bridge between the realm of the dead and the traveller. Though his friend Vetch is present as a companion—'I was with you at the beginning of your journey. It is right that I should follow you to its end' (p. 146)—he shows no prior knowledge of the realm of the dead and is only there for assistance. Ged must instead finish the 'evil course' (p. 146) the same way it began: alone. It is only a part of himself that he follows, an entirely personal quest that he is guided on by the shadow of his own death. Even his boat, *Shadow*, sees him travel solitarily on a construct named for the goal (p. 34). Again, Le Guin writes of the shadow as the 'guide inward and out again; downward and up again...The guide of the journey to self-knowledge, to adulthood, to the light',[68] outlining the familiar configuration and yet further insinuating the inherent quest for selfhood that suffuses modern katabases, as established by Falconer in the introduction.

In order to restore both the balance within the world and his own self, Ged must interact with the realm of the dead and perform multiple katabases across the course of *Wizard*. One such interaction occurs in Low Torning, the first stop on his journey to find the gebbeth. Presented as the most complete katabasis in *Wizard* and providing the fullest picture of the realm of the dead until it is finally visited in *Shore*, Ged chases after the spirit of a dying child in an attempt to bring him wholly back to the world of the living. The fact that his attempt fails, however, proves that Ged's magic is not yet strong enough to upset the world's balance between life and death, especially as he struggles with his own balance between light and dark. Unlike his first nekyia, however, this vignette involves a more typical framework; Ged undergoes a clear descent—'down a dark slope, the side of some vast hill' (p. 103)—as well as a difficult anabasis—'It was hard to turn back' (p. 80)—to reach the realm of the dead. Possibly due to the plaguing of the gebbeth upsetting the balance of both the world and the narrative, which is set up to require Ged's final descent in *Shore*, he 'follow[s] the dying child too far' (p. 80) and passes an invisible boundary that is difficult to cross back again. It is during this moment that he first glimpses the low wall of stones that marks the boundary to the realm of the dead, a familiar site each time the realm is accessed in *Wizard* and *Shore* hereon. On the other side of that wall lies a shadow that 'st[ands] on the side of the living, and [Ged] on the side of the dead' (p. 81). The realm is already categorised as a 'vast kingdom' (p. 81) of darkness, and the shadow, which is actually the same gebbeth he follows, is near invisible against it, a dark product of the realm it belongs to. Ged's anabasis involves the momentary defeat of the shadow through a white, blinding light. What this reveals is not only the connection between Ged and the realm of the dead — seen by his

[68] Ibid., p. 144.

positioning on the other side of the wall, overtaken by the shadow in life — but the use of light as a component for his katabasis and the momentary vanquishment of the dark, after which he 'f[eels] himself fall' (p. 81) and return to the side of the living. It is an interesting anabasis in that the ascent is categorised by oppositional movement; though after turning around and following the boy he is seen moving upward, climbing up a dark hillside (p. 80) to reach the wall that marks the boundary between life and death, it is through another descent that he returns.

Ged's journey is continuous throughout the rest of *Wizard*, and though vignettes such as the one above are framed as solitary, the rest of the narrative involves an extended 'descent' which sees Ged follow and be followed by the gebbeth across the sprawling lands and waters of Earthsea. This descent, however, does not always contain an explicit downward trajectory, and there is in fact a distinct lack of a direction and destination in the later katabases of the novel, reflecting Ged's loss of self and place: 'It began to seem to him that he had walked forever and would walk forever beside this silent being through a silent darkening land' (p. 101); 'He walked as in a long, long dream, going no place' (p. 101). The sixth chapter, 'Hunted', is marked by Ged's frantic attempts to locate the gebbeth, in which he again enters the deathly realm. When the gebbeth possesses Skiorh and Ged finds himself alone in an alien, snowy landscape facing the dark, he runs. What follows is a strange moment in which Ged's escape from the shadow sees him '[labour] on, struggling up a long, dim slope' (p. 102) towards a voice that calls to him. Joining the voice is a pale light, which 'shines through a gateway straight before him' (p. 102). Though no stone wall signals his location or a boundary, the architectural reference to the gateway and a 'faint-shining door' (p. 103) sees him plunge into darkness again. This moment is categorised by the same falling sensation as before, as well as a solid boundary between the living world and the dead, the movement towards the light of it being enough to render him unconscious. Though it is not clear in the moments before, it can only be guessed that the shadow had actually managed to take Ged closer to the realm of the dead by its proximity to him. The 'vast dusk land' (p. 102), marked before only by a possible tree or tower, is indistinguishable and unnamed, but is still connected to the realm of the dead by its matching description.

Having faced the gebbeth multiple times already, Ged must make preparations for the final battle with the darkness within and without himself, visiting the Court of Terrenon and mastering the power of a dark stone before returning to Gont and to Ogion, who tells him much as his path was set previously by a metaphorical road, the danger and evil that drives him and 'chooses the way' must instead be driven out by Ged (p. 120). Hunter thus turns into hunted, and this change directs Ged towards the final katabasis of the novel, one which requires the ultimate sacrifice through the death of the hero. This time, Ged wishes to meet the gebbeth at sea, as he 'had a terror of meeting the thing

again on dry land' (p. 125). There is no clear reasoning given for his fear, but given that previous journeys to the realm of the dead or altercations with the shadow have occurred on land and have seen him narrowly escape, avoiding land entirely could bring him more success. The words also presage the Dry Land in actuality, another name for the realm of the dead. What the sea offers, then, is no place to descend and is therefore the safest environment on which to face it. Beforehand, he comes to understand the sacrifice that must be performed as a requirement of the shadow's defeat after his failures. This final moment is, in a way, an inevitable outcome of naively playing with the rituals of death. He must 'go where [he is] bound to go, and turn [his] back on the bright shores' (p. 154), accepting both the status of the shadow that he birthed as himself and thus accepting his own death, which in turn frees him. Singularly, the katabases of *Wizard* end on an anabasis that sees the binding of Ged to the shadow broken, releasing him on to the next stage of his adventure rather suddenly, and thus leading to the next novel in the trilogy.

Tombs introduces the reader to Tenar, a child who was taken from her home to be offered to the Old Gods as a keeper of the underground Labyrinth on Atuan. She has been read both in identity and action as a female parallel to Ged's male,[69] and the novel is often treated to more gendered readings than *Wizard* or *Shore* due to Tenar's point of view, contrasting Ged's own rather sexless and celibate, male dominated world.[70] Le Guin herself discusses her attempt to alleviate many of the gendered issues in *Wizard* through her later writing,[71] and both *Tombs* and *Tehanu* are products of this. However, there are inherent similarities to Tenar and Ged's narratives, and thus their katabases, outside of their gender. Firstly, they both involve a struggle against a source of darkness, using the same formulaic notions as *Wizard*, and secondly, they occur when they are children, acting as a fundamental moment in their maturity. The latter element is distinctive to *Earthsea*'s katabasis, containing the only child protagonists in this thesis, and is important due to how this status is used by Le Guin to reconfigure the formulation of the pattern. The topos of katabasis is used to express the process of maturity not only through the difficulty of coming of age, as expressed by Elizabeth Hale in her analysis of childhood katabasis,[72] but through notions of rebirth and the claiming of a new identity upon anabasis as their adult self. In this way again, identity is at the core of the journey's goal. Much in the way that Ged struggles with his inner shadow and the extents of his immature magic in

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[69] Millicent Lenz, 'Ursula K. Le Guin', in *Alternative Worlds in Fantasy Fiction*, ed. by Peter Hunt and Millicent Lenz (London: Continuum, 2001), pp. 42-85 (p. 56).
[70] Ursula K. Le Guin, *Tehanu* (New York: Atheneum, 2012), p. 276; M. O. Grenby, *Children's Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), p. 157.
[71] John Lennard, *Of Sex and Faerie: Further essays on Genre Fiction* (Penrith: Humanities-Ebooks, 2010), p. 229.
[72] Elizabeth Hale, 'Katabasis "Down Under" in the Novels of Margaret Mahy and Maurice Gee', in *Our Mythical Childhood...The Classics and Literature for Children and Young Adults*, ed. by Karazyna Marciniak, pp. 256-266 (p. 257).

Wizard, so too does Tenar struggle with her identity throughout *Tombs* and the way that her sense of self is so closely bound to the space of the Labyrinth that she inhabits, and it is this struggle that forms her own personal journey. Tenar's identity and thus narrative are constantly in flux; at first, she is stolen from her homeland to become a vassal of the Old Gods, subsuming the identity of 'The Eaten One' and revoking other names. Greer Gilman argues that prior to her release from the Tombs, Tenar has no sense of self,[73] and if the underlying reason for Ged's first katabasis is the retrieval of the self that he lost to the shadow, then Tenar's is another form of rebirth, found through her exploration of the island of Atuan and the labyrinth beneath it. Having lived her entire life cloistered in the surroundings of the Tombs, she is naive to the outside world and sees everything through the eyes of her keepers, Kossil and the other women, on their solitary isle. Her role as priestess of the Old Gods sees her as a quasi-ruler of Atuan, including the underground Labyrinth that houses the mysterious Undertomb. Her identity as the Eaten One is imposed on those around her and acts as a shackle from which she must be released, and in order to do so, she must undertake a journey underground through the dark and twisting caverns of the Labyrinth. Unlike both Ged and Arren, and going against the rather stringent framework that Le Guin uses for their katabases, Tenar's journey is not associated directly with the realm of the dead, but rather contains a reflective, inner journey through the Labyrinth that she sees as home, and it is this navigation that makes up the crux of her quest.

During her first foray, only the Undertomb is accessible to Tenar, and she must notably descend into the hill and into the dark,[74] with Kossil at her side as she first learns the rules of the domain that she is mistress of. No light is allowed in the tombs, and no door must be tried unless the way is known. She learns that any men who enter searching for treasure are to be punished and given over to the dark. After her initial excursion with Kossil, however, Tenar goes it alone. Just as Ged was unguided for most of *Wizard* outside of the role afforded to his shadow, so too is Tenar without a guide during these excursions. Any figures—that of the eunuch Manan or Kossil—who would act as such merely stifle her and offer no teachings in the way Ogion or the masters of Roke afforded Ged that allowed him to undergo (though sometimes disastrously) his journey alone. She becomes Atuan's resident Ariadne, even going so far as to take a ball of yarn with her to navigate her Labyrinth, and soon enough she knows by heart all the ways of the Undertomb and the Hall of the Throne, and the entrance to the Labyrinth becomes easier to cross over every time (p. 273). What still remains a mystery, however, is the Labyrinth proper, the entrance to which she longs to plunder but restrains herself until she is fully assimilated with its earlier corridors (p. 211). Tenar's identity and position

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[73] Greer Gilman, 'Girl, Implicated: The Child in the Labyrinth in the Fantastic', *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, 19.2 (2008), 199-203 (p. 199).
[74] Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Tombs of Atuan, Ursula K. Le Guin's Earthsea Trilogy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1979), p. 200.

allow her a deeper understanding of her katabasis; her explorations of the Labyrinth are that of an equal, a means of understanding her domain, rather than a place of fear and unknown (as, indeed, they are for Ged). Each time Tenar enters the Labyrinth, she undergoes a descent and a return, adding to her mental map of the place. She has the benefit of acclimatisation, understanding, and knowledge, and it is only the requirement of confidence and maturity that pushes her towards the centre that she knows she will eventually reach, and with it hoping to master all that the Tombs hold. At the centre of this Labyrinth, however, lies not a monster but man, and with him truth.

The revelation of Ged's own paralleled katabasis, in which he searches the depths of the Labyrinth for the Ring of Erreth-Akbe, acts as a catalyst for Tenar. The understanding that she has cultivated throughout her time in Atuan and through the teachings of Kossil and Thar is dashed upon Ged's intrusion into Tenar's world, which allows for the revelation of her own naivety and misconstructions. With him comes an entire upheaval of the world rules that she has lived by so far; he is, above all, a man, of which she has no understanding of outside of her eunuch caretaker Manan, who has entered the deepest part of the domain which has so far only allowed access to the priestess and her female keepers. Secondly, he is a mage, representative of a different kind of power unknown to Tenar and bringing with him another broken rule: the presence of light in the dark tunnels. It is again through a clash of this dichotomy that change occurs and the katabasis can move forward, with Ged representative of the light bringing change, and Tenar at first of the dark. When she first comes across him, she is struck by the 'spell of light' (p. 226) that he brings, a 'forbidden' (p. 225) power that disorients her; the sight that she receives as part of Ged's power reveals the Labyrinth itself, and while she first rails against him, believing that Ged has come to the end of his journey and will die in the Tombs (p. 256), she eventually comes to an understanding that in front of her lies a kindred soul, though one who knows the dark and death even better than her (p. 249). Until Ged's arrival, Tenar's excursions in the Labyrinth were merely an exploratory task, the goal at the end simply being to complete her mental map and widen her understanding of the world. With Ged's arrival, however, this worldview is dashed, and the boundaries of the Labyrinth and Atuan are no longer all that seems possible.

Ged's presence in the labyrinth entirely disrupts the rules and rituals that Tenar has grown accustomed to, his masculinity and magic allowing both his survival and Tenar's own transformation. Through the weaving of allusions to the realm's keeper and the use of light magic against the dark, Ged is able to show Tenar that which she has never known, kept in the proverbial dark by her keepers and failed guides. Again, in parallel fashion, Ged acts as a guide for Tenar's internal transformation—'To be reborn one must die, Tenar. It is not so hard as it looks from the other side' (p.

273)—and Tenar becomes an external guide to lead Ged and herself out of the Labyrinth: 'She realized that she must lead him. Only she knew the way out of the Labyrinth, and he waited to follow her' (p. 275). What Ged's light reveals is the possible truths of what lies in the dark reaches of the Labyrinth; just as in *Wizard, Tombs* is pervaded by a greater sense of sinister darkness, what is believed to be the power of the Old Gods. At first, it is a darkness that Tenar believes herself to understand, a naivety which she believes Ged's light spells trap her in (p. 226). She has, until now, obeyed the unseen and unknown powers of the dark, and yet with Ged comes a reversal of this world order, seeing her eventually come to fear it (p. 272), an echo of the words of her friend Penthe who is said to fear the unnameable powers of the dark and is therefore unable to become the authority that Tenar is (p. 210). Through Ged's intrusion and an upheaval of her understanding, Tenar undergoes a reversal of her world order and thus she rejects her identity as the Eaten One, a young, virginal and sacrificial figure who believed fully in the ultimate powers of the dark Old Gods, to carouse with Ged and the light he brings. Though Ged guides Tenar away from her dark life in the Kargad Isles, his anabasis from the Labyrinth would not have occurred without her prior knowledge, and thus their katabases are bound together. During her underground conversations with Ged, she is given her final identity and true name of Tenar, which she takes with her during their anabases, effectively bringing herself out of the dark both literally and figuratively. Like Ged, she is given a 'more stable, meaningful identity'[75] on ascent.

The affirmation involves the awakening of Tenar not just as an individual but one that is clearly sexed; the Labyrinth and its explorations, so often associated with the penetration of female anatomy,[76] become mastered by the female herself. After all, *Tombs* is, as Le Guin writes, 'in one word, sex'.[77] Having come to a sexual awakening on meeting Ged in its halls, who himself was the penetrator into her female space, she is able to be free of it, much like Ged's acceptance of his own shadowed self. It is an anabasis that occurs very literally, with them both fleeing towards a 'glory of light' (p. 280) and eventually cresting the brow of a hill, leaving the collapsing Tombs behind them. They move forward to the obligatory sea journey, and with it the discovery of new lands, at least for Tenar, and yet she still carries the darkness within her, just as Ged does. She is still a child 'looking up into the dark' (p. 296) and yet now the darkness has become something other, separate from the contained darkness of the Labyrinth. Now she sees part of the darkness that Ged sees, the natural darkness of the world, which she has never touched as he has. Even now, Ged moves both beside her and apart from her on this precursor for the final journey: 'He was as far beyond her as the sea. Where

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[75] Meghann Cassidy, 'Who Is There? Subjectivity, Transformation, and the Child's Journey in Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Tombs of Atuan*', *Mythlore,* 39.138 (2021), 65-88 (p. 65).
[76] Gaetano Cipolla, *Labyrinth: Studies on an Archetype* (Ottawa: Legas, 1987), p. 30; Bettina L. Knapp, *Women, Myth, and the Feminine Principle* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1998), p. 167-168.
[77] Le Guin, *Language of Night*, p. 55

was he now, on what way of the spirit did he walk? She could never follow him' (p. 293). Where he travels will be revealed in *Shore*.

Through darkness and shadow

Shore, the last novel of the trilogy — 'a work of genuine epic vision'[78] — contains the most complete katabasis, a fitting end to the trials and tribulations of Ged's previous forays in *Wizard* and *Tombs* that will see him journey far over land and sea to reach, in actuality, the realm of the dead and with it the locus of the dark that now resides within it; the dark mage Cob, who has opened a permanent boundary between the living and dying, changing the workings of magic across the world and letting loose the spirits within. The introduction of Arren as a child protagonist on a route to a destined end reworks Ged's role in his own narrative, with Millicent Lenz noting that Arren's joint quest with Ged is 'the traditional heroic one, wherein the external voyage mirrors an internal growth towards maturity, self-knowledge, and acceptance of personal mortality.'[79] Just as Ged and Tenar's katabases occur simultaneously in *Tombs*, and as Tenar's is a reflection of Ged's in *Wizard*, Arren's too is a later reflection of Ged's. It has, in a way, come full circle; Ged has become older and wiser, now at the tail end of an almost cyclical narrative that will only come to a close with the vanquishment of the final evil at the trilogy's end. As such, the world of *Shore* is much changed to that of *Wizard* and *Tombs*. While *Wizard* saw a very personal, introspective journey that only slightly seeped into the outside world through momentary possessions by the gebbeth, it ends with equilibrium inside and outside as Ged restores his identity and thus the temporarily opened boundary he had created between life and death. *Tombs*'s narrative is largely isolated at the beginning, with Tenar undergoing a katabasis of little consequence other than to her sense of self, and the vanquishment of the Labyrinth and the falsities of the Old Gods couples with the restoration of the Ring of Erreth-Akbe to restore a prophesied time of peace. That peace, however, is not found in the later narrative of *Shore*. With Ged's ageing, enough time has passed between the events for a new threat to appear.

The narrative begins as *Wizard* does, this time with a young Arren arriving on Roke Island not to be a mage initiate but with a message. Much as Ged's arrival on Roke signalled a moment of magical and personal maturity with a heedless and natural impetus, so too is it for Arren: 'the first step out of childhood is made all at once, without looking before or behind, without caution'.[80] Once within the walls, Arren is immediately initiated onto the course of investigating, and possibly

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[78] George Edgar Slusser, *The Farthest Shores of Ursula K. Le Guin* (Maryland: Wildside Press, 2006), p. 33.
[79] Lenz, p. 60.
[80] Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Farthest Shore*, *Ursula K. Le Guin's Earthsea Trilogy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1979), p. 309

vanquishing, the strange malaise that plagues Earthsea. In typical heroic fashion, Arren is offered up the quest by Ged, one that will take him further than any narrative of *Earthsea* before: 'Thus I offer you...an unsafe voyage to an unknown end...For I am tired of safe places, and roofs, and walls around me' (p. 327). The nature of their journey and previous state of blissful inertia is commented on by Ged and acts as the heroic call to action as well as hinting at the descent that will occur: 'We have enjoyed the sunlight too long, basking in that peace which the healing of the Ring brought, accomplishing small things [...] Tonight we must question the depths' (p. 312). Ged's same self-initiated wandering marks his desire to fulfil his role as the destined hero, and what follows is a similar pattern to the multiple katabases of *Wizard*, though this time fraught with even more danger and a significantly more impactful descent. Ged and Arren will journey across both land and sea to reach the farthest shore, the boundary between the living and dying, in order to close the breach and restore Earthsea to its former state. Having never physically travelled there, it is a destination unknown to Ged despite his prior awareness. However, his understanding of the realm of the dead from previous forays is so thorough that only he would be able to guide Arren and be equal to Cob. Arren's presence fills the role of the guided traveller, exhibiting the same ignorance as Ged: '[Arren] was not permitted even to understand the nature of their quest. He was merely dragged along on it, useless as a child.' (p. 385). With his presence, Ged finally becomes the guide, once more revealing the extent to which the journey is culminating.

The journey begins linearly, building on the knowledge gleaned in *Wizard* and providing further dimension to its workings in the world of *Earthsea*, following a similar framework by having multiple interactions with the realm of the dead before the finale. Arren's first encounter with the realm occurs during their visit to Hort Town, a markedly changed place to what was found previously in *Wizard*. The bustling market has become a sickened, hazia-filled landscape, and it is here that they meet Hare, who gives the first hint to the source of Earthsea's problems and shows them the way to access the realm of the dead through induced dreams. This is Arren's first katabasis; he enters the realm — though not over the stone wall as previous, but through a new, hidden way accessed only through dreams — to meet Cob, who beckons him forth. As with Ged's previous forays, it is upon the return that more stereotypical topos are used: Arren 'plunges' into the blind dark to escape the apparent murder of his companions, fleeing into the night. Though he is plagued by dreams of the realm after his exit (p. 389; p. 392), Arren's second katabasis does not occur until later on in the novel, when at last they reach Selidor, the farthest point known in Earthsea (the position of and significance of which is discussed in Section II) and find themselves surrounded in the dark by the spirits of the dead (p. 447). Between his first and second katabasis, Arren and Ged journey across the ruined planes of Earthsea, fraught with dying magic and possession. It is a lengthy quest, one that the

earlier darkness simply foreshadows and is importantly imbued from the beginning with the second component of the mytheme: anabasis.

The certainty of Le Guin's narrative and world means that the presence of a return is something that the reader can take for granted. The certainty of such a complete anabasis is reflected in the Doorkeeper, who keeps the doors to the Great House open against his lord's return (p. 431), the smile in his eyes and the light within a reflection of his assurance, and the expectation provided by previous discussions on the danger of return, or the faltering of Ged himself, all lead to the same outcome. The importance of the return provides the novel with a sense of finality that was lacking in *Wizard* and *Tombs*, and at the beginning of the journey, despite all the previous and survived dangers, the return is questioned in *Shore*: 'So when one stands in a cherished place for the last time before a voyage without return, he sees it all whole, and real, and dear, as he has never seen it before and never will see it again' (p. 449). What Arren's role in *Shore* does, besides providing Ged another companion to undergo his final katabasis with, is reveal the extent to which the narrative surrounds return. *Shore* is far more concerned with its inclusion than the other novels of the trilogy; for the first time, there comes an understanding of the true perilousness of the journey and the possibility of a *lack* of return, revealed by Ged's words on its unknown nature and end, as well as the stage of maturity he undertakes it in. Ged's role is not only that of the guide but as a legendary mage with the authority to access the realm of the dead in actuality, and above all return from it. Though non-mages are able to access the realm through dreams, as revealed by Arren and Ged's experience in Hort Town, it is only through magic that anabasis can occur, once again confirming the world's rituals and the distinct requirements of access. The world revolves around the concept that only a mage may 'go among the dead in the dark land and return' (p. 317).

It is not only Ged's role that symbolises return; Arren must fulfil his own prophesied 'return of the king' trope, another hallmark of fantasy literature,[81] and depends on Ged for this to be so. It is not unusual for katabatic journeys to figure this kind of hero — parallels to the trope lie in Arthurian legend, but there's no mistaking the connections to the Classical leaders of Odysseus and Aeneas — and many other fantasy novels see the restoration of peace and the vanquishment of evil with the placement of the rightful ruler on the throne.[82] Maharion's prophecy, spoken to Arren upon his arrival on Roke, claims that 'He shall inherit my throne who has crossed the dark land living and come to the far shores of the day' (p. 317), and though no distinct mention of magic occurs in this prophecy, it no doubt links to Ged's own. Arren is, above all, the prince promised to rule Havnor and restore peace to

[81] Edith L. Crowe, 'Integration in Earthsea and Middle-Earth', *San Jose Studies* 14 (1988), 63-80 (p. 74).
[82] Examples include the return of Rhaegar Targaryen in George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* and Aragorn II Elessar in *The Lord of the Rings*.

the realm of Earthsea, a duty he is only able to take up fully upon his vanquishment of true darkness with Ged in *Shore* and to notably return from the land of the dead alive. Ged is not, however, the only guide required, and though he serves as a guiding authority to Arren, he too requires aid at multiple points of the journey, proving the overall difficulty of their task and the elusiveness of the realm's location. However, these guides prove less worthy and serve only to move the journey on incrementally rather than monumentally as Ged does. Sopli and Hare's use of hazia and the dreampath it produces give them a certain sense of authority, but the act has left them mad, and when Arren questions Ged's choice of Sopli as a guide, Arren asks 'A guide—to more madness? To death by drowning or a knife in the back?', to which Ged replies 'To death, but by what road I do not know' (p. 385). It is only in the dragon Orm Embar that they find a more solid guide (p. 419). Why, then, can Ged act as both guide and not-guide, as both student and authority on the ways of the dead, and what is the purpose of the complexity of depicting the traveller as a guide? Until now, Ged's journeys to the realm of the dead have occurred through magic or dreams; they are never physical, and thus he does not know the true way to the realm, and his methods are discussed more fully in Section II. Having previously undergone the same journey, though not to the same extent, in *Wizard*, Ged is given the authority to guide both himself and Arren to the furthest point that he will ever go. They become something less than guide and traveller but more than companions, as Ged and Vetch were. Though Ged can guide Arren down into the depths once the boundary is found, he himself has no way of knowing where that boundary truly lies. It is a rare moment of uncertainty offered up by Le Guin which raises the question of the extent of Ged's power and the possible outcomes of the journey, and yet is still imbued with the sense of destiny provided by both Arren and Ged's prophesied ends.

The journey to the realm of the dead is the destined and unavoidable 'point of no return'[83] for katabases, imbuing certainty through its status as the final destination. Its location is revealed through its similarities to *Wizard*, with an archway or a gate leading to a 'long slope of darkness going down into the dark' (p. 453), an undefinable space that is immediately associated with the required downward movement, and much like the passages of Ged in *Wizard*, so too does *Shore* evoke the same sense of descent: 'It seemed that they walked down that hill-slope for a long way, but perhaps it was a short way; for there was no passing of time there, where no wind blew and the stars did not move' (p. 456). Both Ged and Arren are fully aware of the possibility that they may never return from the land of the dead despite the trope's given assurance — Arren perhaps due to his lack of magic, and Ged in understanding that the fulfilment of the quest will result in a loss of his own magic as a sacrifice for being able to return, if he will do so at all. It is within Ged's own understanding of the journey that the certainty of the narrative hangs precariously in the balance for the first time; Ged

[83] Barbara Graziosi, *Homer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 117.

notes that he cannot guide Arren back from the underworld and that Arren must return alone. Arren, however, insists on returning with Ged (p. 448) and cannot accept the real possibility of death. Arren is Ged pre-*Wizard*, naive of the sacrifices that must be made and the changes in identity that must occur due to the extent of the katabasis that they undertake. When they are deep within the realm, however, Arren begins to question their return, exhibiting the full effect of the space for the first time:

> '...now Arren never thought of returning, or of how they might return. Nor did he think of stopping, though he was very weary. Once he tried to lighten the numb darkness and weariness and horror within him by thinking of his home; but he could not remember what sunlight looked like...' (p. 459)

The realm forces directional questions on its inhabitants; the concept of no way out, the dark landscape stretching further downward ahead of them, sees return tempting them through the proximity of the wall of stones (p. 457), and yet destiny, equilibrium, and certainty all force them to continue to the journey's natural end. Its finality—'The long descent was over: this was the end; there was no way further, no need to go on' (p. 459)—lies in the area being reached, but not yet what must happen there. Ged's — and with him Arren's— final katabases in *Shore* cannot occur until Ged's defeat of the shadow and the completion of his initial katabasis in *Wizard*. It is the events of *Wizard*, which sees him come to defeat himself, that have given him the power of self that allows him to defeat Cob.

Katabatic narratives offer the perfect permeable boundary for the interaction between the individual and the shadowed self, whether physically or mentally. On this, Falconer writes: 'In such texts, the boundary between normal and underworld selves is often represented as extremely unstable and permeable.'[84] To return to the image of the doubled shadow, Le Guin sees it as 'the other side of our psyche, the dark brother of the conscious mind...It is Vergil who guided Dante through hell, Gilgamesh's friend Enkidu, Frodo's enemy Gollum'.[85] Unlike the gebbeth, however, the dark threat and double of *Shore* has both identity and name from the start; the mage Cob, who has managed to master the dark arts that were so disastrous for Ged in *Wizard*. Just as Ged could be said to have become lord of light, master of restorational magic worthy of the title of Archmage, Cob has achieved mastery over the powers of the dark; however, he is differentiated from the gebbeth by being a self separate of Ged outside of his physicality and mentality, a dark mirror that reflects the other half of desired equilibrium which can only be found fully upon the journey into the dark land. The opening of the rift by Ged in *Wizard* is the precipitation of Cob's permanent entrance to the realm of the dead in *Shore*, an opening which will allow Cob to live forever and for the spirits of the dead to leave,

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[84] Falconer, *Hell in Contemporary Literature,* p. 119.
[85] Le Guin, *The Child and the Shadow*, p. 143.

completely removing the required element of death from Earthsea's equilibrium. It is his power that is responsible for the upheaval of equilibrium that scourges *Shore*, and so alike are they, so marred by the shadows of their lives and their abilities to traverse the realms of the dead, that they are mistaken for one another, both seen by others as a 'King of the Shadows', 'Lord of the Dark place', and 'Great One in the darkness' (p. 377). It is only through Ged's assurance that no man may come back and live forever after a journey to the realm of the dead that differentiates them on the surface, but Ged's association with the dark has long been overtaken by the light.

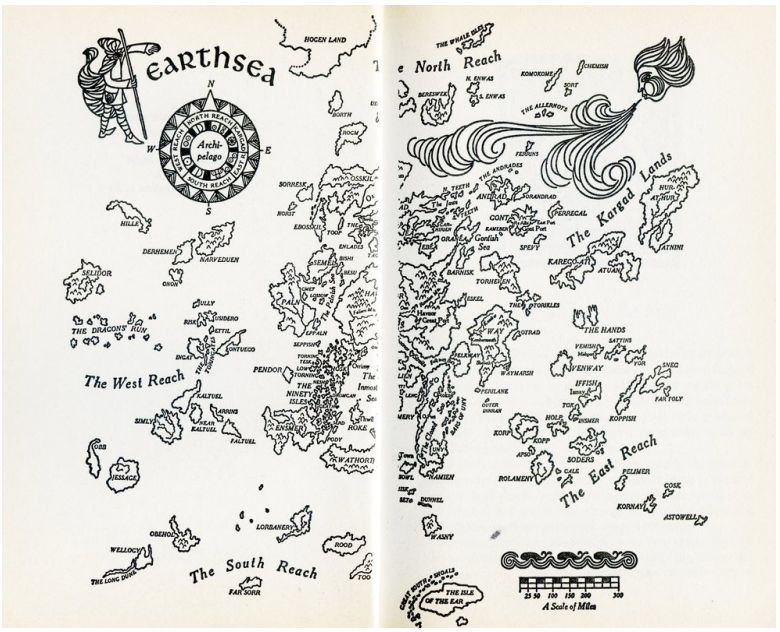
Just as Ged's defeat of the gebbeth resulted in the death of the self, so too does Ged's defeat of Cob act as a form of suicide, one that will see him released from the hold of the dark that this second self has on him.[86] Ged and Arren must travel to the heart of Earthsea's underworld to meet him, a destined end that is precipitated by Cob's own guiding voice: 'Come, he said, the tall lord of shadows. In his hand he held a tiny flame...held out to Arren, offering life' (p. 351). Cob's association with the greater shadow, darkest of all dark, shows him as the antithesis to Ged's light: 'What is light?' | 'Darkness!' (p. 462). This empyreal dichotomy forces Ged to make the ultimate sacrifice and to abolish the power that provides him and Cob with the ability to traverse the underworld. It is a natural end to the cycle that began with Ged's first unleashing of the shadow and the introduction of the underworld and its forces, one which costs Ged everything; he is, after all, one individual bound and open to the power of Earthsea's balance, one which requires the vanquishment of evil and, above all, a return. It is a return that leaves Ged bereft of magic and thus his sense of self. Though returns are featured in both *Wizard* and *Tombs*, they are not full anabases; Ged's vanquishing of the shadow does not see him return anywhere specific, and rather he lies inert, basking in his freedom on the open sea, and Tenar's katabasis ends with her leaving the hellspace she has occupied for most of her life, rather than returning to a home or predetermined destination. Instead, it is the return of peace and the bringing of the Ring of Erreth-Akbe that acts as the anabasis. Though the katabases effectively end, it leaves a route open for the events of *Shore*, which comes full circle to finally complete the journey in its entirety. Again, in a way that follows the framework, the return is more difficult and more disastrous than the entry; Arren struggles to carry Ged up the slopes of summits, two black peaks that they had passed previously through their forays across the cityscapes of death, beyond which the darkness goes on 'forever', and yet over the edge of that darkness, far below, lies the shore before the realm of the dead (p. 469). The journey, at least there and back again from the dead lands, ends in sea and fog, with both Arren and Ged spent of energy and power, requiring the help of the dragon Kalessin to reach the final end. Arren is free to pick up the crown of Havnor, fulfilling his destiny, but Ged's ending is less than certain. The opportunity that the ending of *Shore* provides in not allowing

[86] Nortwick, p. 5-6.

Ged to fully return anywhere is fitting. Whether he came to the crowning of Arren, or whether Arren went to find Ged again, shows the restlessness which Ged has been characterised with in *Wizard* and still holds now, even at the end, out of which arises the possibility of Ged setting sail out into the ocean, never to be heard from again. The image of him sailing on *Lookfar* 'from harbour and from haven, westward among the isles, westward over sea' until 'no more is known of him' (p. 477) is fitting to pre-katabasis Ged. However, now bereft of power, having accepted his last 'death' as that of his magic and mage status, the requirement of his own survival being through its destruction, Ged has restored the final equilibrium to the world and trilogy of *Earthsea*, sailing at last to his final destination and greater kingdom, completing the circle: home.

II. "What Lies That Way?" / "It May Be a Way Without an End": The World of Earthsea

When writing 'The Word of Unbinding' and 'The Rule of Names', Le Guin gave little thought to the true nature and full topography of what would eventually become Earthsea.[87] Beforehand, its world was far less populated and not at all like the sprawling archipelago it would become by the publication of *Wizard* —and even this would undergo further changes by the publication of *Shore*, extending the world beyond each time. There was no sense of the way in which islands connected to each other, or where they were positioned if they were to be mapped out until, eventually, they were:



[Figure 1] *Map of Earthsea*[88]

[87] Le Guin, *The Language of Night,* p. 50
[88] Ruth Robbins, 'Map of Earthsea' 1968, in Le Guin, *Ursula Le Guin's Earthsea Trilogy*, pp. 6-7

Offering a visualisation of the lands, cities, and settlements that are visited along the course of the katabatic journeys of Ged, Tenar and Arren, this map allows an easy reading of movement and a degree of certainty to location that echoes the narrative's own certainty as discussed thus far.[89] Maps conceptualise space; being one of the oldest methods of dividing land, they show the categorisation of yours and theirs, inside and outside boundaries, safety and danger, and known and unknown. Additionally, the fantasy map — often categorised as an important facet and mainstay in fantasy literature — 'brings up questions about other divisions, such as those between presentation and representation, text and image, and fact and fiction.'[90] They are, in a way, representations of opposites, creating division and barriers, the traversal of which offers the greatest opportunity for discovery and transformation.[91] What follows is an analysis of the spaces visited along the journeys of the *Earthsea* trilogy and how they are performed, what they reveal about the world, and how they affect and are perceived by those within them. As established, the trilogy acts as a set of continuous journeys; the characters barely stop in one place long enough in the timeline of the narrative proper,[92] and the displacement of Ged, Tenar, and Arren is clear to see through their progression. Ged is never limited to a single place for an extended period of time, and though he has a foothold in Gont and on Roke Island, there are no true 'homes' for him until the end of *Shore*. Tenar, similarly, has lived in Atuan, out on the Eastern stretch of the Kargad Islands, for most of her childhood life until she is displaced by Ged, and *Shore* surrounds a journey involving the rightful crowning of Arren in Enland that sees the ultimate displacement of him and Ged from the realm of Earthsea entirely. Though the details of the journeys themselves were discussed in Section I, what is important here is its parameters, how the journeys occur and in which way they travel.

Along this broad, bright road

Paths are intrinsic to journeys; symbolic of the task undertaken and the direction gone, the way forward and the way back, they act in their own way as impetuses, providing motivation for the traveller, whether clear or otherwise, to reach their destination. The road, as Cadden writes, 'is ubiquitous in Le Guin's novels',[93] providing a concrete element of continuous movement, and the motif in fantasy literature as a whole acts as a symbol for the journey, a pathway, destined or

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[89] Though Shirley Jackson loosely mapped out the architectural drawings for the exterior and interior of Hill House, *Earthsea* is the only example of space within the chosen novels that has such a clear and definite picture, with various editions of the novels providing a canonical map.
[90] Stefan Ekman, *Here be Dragons: Exploring Fantasy Maps and Settings* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2013), p. 11.
[91] Tom Pettitt, 'Darkness on the Edge of Town: Life at the *Flurgrenze* in Medieval and Traditional Narrative', in *The Edges of the Medieval World*, ed. by Garhard Jaritz, Juhan Kreem (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2009), pp. 82-91 (p. 85).
[92] Discounting Dunny's childhood on Gont and Tenar's in Atuan.
[93] Cadden, p. 52.

otherwise, that leads to its end goal.[94] The routine metaphor of the road is one wielded throughout *Earthsea* to show that Ged's path is already laid out. His future course is one he cannot help but follow; entirely at the mercy of his heroic status, he begins his journey in magic and the hunt for shadows on a 'broad, bright road' (p. 16). On Roke, Ged is told that the more knowledge he earns and the stronger he becomes, 'ever the way he can follow grows narrower' (p. 73); his actions precipitate his destined end as the great Archmage Sparrowhawk. However, though he travels along roads in a more literal sense— the broad, bright road being both metaphorical and literal— these are not the main method of travel. Rather than typical pathways of dirt, Le Guin's katabatic journeys and the world of *Earthsea* are defined by the presence of seaways, and it is the world's geography that allows for this: being made up entirely of islands, which offer opportunities in fiction for transformation, especially in the fantastic,[95] they are representative of the novels' placelessness, offering motivation for characters 'to set off on the world roads they travel'[96] and essentialising the sea journey. The motif of sea and river journeys is at the core of early katabases: Odysseus sails from Circe's isle to ascend the river Okeanos, moving on to 'unknown water expanses' unexplored hitherto,[97] and underworld journeys or philosophies often reference the space's rivers and Charon's boat, used as a method of travel to ferry across the souls of the dead to their resting place.[98] Water, as an impermanent pathway to the underworld, offers a transitional space between the realm of the living and dying. The presence of seaways also conflates the notion of trajectory. While the underworld is accessed via a descent in the Virgilian sense, this is not the sole direction a katabasis can take. *Earthsea* manages to balance both Classical and mediaeval notions by having the majority of the journey occur horizontally—naturally, as it occurs mostly over sea, of which there is no down without going below the surface—whilst coupling it with occasionally explicit downward trajectories that are inherently connected to the realm of the dead. The sea is defined entirely by a lack of pathways and direction; though islands or other landmarks may be used to navigate, the trajectory is entirely up to the sailor. There is a distinct lack of land to Earthsea's world, and each katabasis that occurs has a marked moment on the ocean, rivers, or waterways, particularly in terms of their potential for anabasis; Ged's defeat of the shadow in *Wizard* occurs on the open ocean, Tenar's rebirth and departure from Atuan

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[94] Nina Mikkelsen, 'Strange Pilgrimages: Cinderella Was a Trickster — and Other Unorthodoxies of American and African-American Heroic Folk Figures', in *A Necessary Fantasy? The Heroic Figure in Children's Popular Culture*, ed. by Dudley Jones and Tony Watkins (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc, 2000), pp. 21-50 (p. 30-31).
[95] James Kneale, 'Islands: Literary Geographies of Possession, Separation, and Transformation', in *The Routledge Handbook of Literature and Space*, ed. by Robert T. Tally Jr. (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 204-213 (p. 204-207).
[96] Cadden, p. 52.
[97] Rhys Carpenter, *Folk Tale, Fiction and the Saga in the Homeric Epics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1946), p. 109.
[98] Richard Hunter, *Critical Moments in Classical Literature: Studies in the Ancient View of Literature and its Uses* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 187.

sees her undertake a sea journey to restore the Ring of Erreth-Akbe, and Ged and Arren's method of travel in *Shore* is largely by boat, this time the fittingly named *Lookfar*, which will see them take the seaways to their very cessation.

Movement itself is not, however, as important as it may seem; despite the emphasis on the journeying motif in the previous section, it need not necessarily involve a physical relocation. In fact, the vignettes occur without Ged physically moving. Due to its fantastical roots, *Earthsea* exhibits katabases that are purely magical in nature. The journey is often marked by a distinct non-physicality that provides an extra dimension to travel, particularly in *Wizard*. In fact, it is only in *Shore* that Ged physically enters the realm of the dead through more conventional means, and Ged's descent after the shadow does not even touch the space and occurs largely over water. When the Archmage Nemmerle begins speaking to Ged in a tongue previously unknown to the boy, Le Guin writes that he 'was not laying a spell and yet there was a power in his voice that moved Ged's mind so that the boy was bewildered, and for an instant seemed to behold himself standing in a strange vast desert place alone among shadows' (p. 42). From its later description in *Shore*, this desert landscape of shadows is identified as the realm of the dead. Ged has not been required to journey there, or labour in some way to enter; rather, magic has offered him a non-physical path. Whether he is only able to perceive the realm or enact some kind of physical presence there is unclear, but it is still accessible without a journey or breached threshold by crossing through magic—again, the rule and ritual required for its entry. It is also the case for the gebbeth, who is able to follow through Ged's opened portal to the realm of the living. Katabasis in *Earthsea*, or at least in *Wizard*, becomes something both physical and non-physical, and possibly mental. Though unlike the mental descent of Patrick Bateman in *American Psycho* as discussed in Chapter 3, which occurs within his own mind and only impinges on the physical world the way his mind views it to, Ged's katabasis sees him enter the realm in his mind but view and interact with it as a physical space, as though he is there in actuality. Even the use of sleep as a pathway to the dead provides another element of non-physicality. In *Shore*, the presence of hazia, a drug that numbs the mind and who's users enter dark stupors, as well as dreaming, both offer ways of entering the dead (or the dead entering the primary world) non-physically:

> 'I sleep sometimes. Sleep comes very close to death...The dead walk in dreams...They come to you alive, and they say things. They walk out of death into the dreams. There's a way. And if you go on far enough there's a way back all the way. All the way. You can find it if you know where to look.' (p. 344).

What the presence of non-physical journeys and the mapping of Earthsea prove is the importance of boundaries to Le Guin's imagined world, with the journeys almost always involving a

crossing in some way. The proliferation of boundaries in fantasy is second nature, with almost anything, as John Clute and John Grant write, being enterable, from bodies and books, forests and islands, otherworlds and labyrinths, to rabbit holes and portals,[99] and proven by the nature of some journeys to the underworld, methods of entering in *Earthsea* are fantastically nonconventional. One of the most fundamental thresholds, barring that of the entrance and exit to the realm of the dead, is the door to the magical school on Roke. It signifies liminality and harkens back not only to the twinned Gates of Sleep in Virgil's *Aeneid* through the doubled face of ivory and horn,[100] but those of Homer's *Odyssey*, associated less with the underworld but with the deceptive nature of dreams,[101] which in turn is reflected through the duplicitous nature of entering the realm of the dead through dreaming or hazia in *Shore*. The transmissible boundary to the underworld through dreams being reflected on Roke makes for an interesting connection due to its position as one of the most secure areas of Earthsea, and therefore largely insusceptible to Cob's transformation of the world in *Shore,* as well as being the centre of magic, the main requirement for journeying to the deathly realm. Thresholds largely exist in Earthsea as protection from dark or evil forces, rather than simply entrances and exits. Roke's spell walls (p. 65), for instance, offer a magical, unseen barrier that protects Ged from the gebbeth, and Serret discusses Terennon's 'mighty walls' in *Wizard* (p. 105). The Island is further barred by the Gatekeeper, who, much like the statues of Janus or the Sphinx, does not allow potential mages or visitors through without an answer to a question, usually one that involves names, the main component of *Earthsea's* magic (p. 39).

Patricia García, in their work on space in the postmodern fantastic, discusses the use of boundaries in fantasy as meaning 'as much a departure 'from' as an access 'into'', the crossing of what should be impenetrable a narrative schema inherited from heroic mythical narratives.[102] Threshold crossings are representative of a moment of conflict within the heroic journey and the fantastical narrative in general. Though the narrative of *Wizard* introduces the concept of a gateway or a doorway to the dead, and *Tombs* is more concerned with the breaking of the boundaries of the self and Tenar's release from the prison-like environment of Atuan, the true crossing, and the true nature and importance of boundaries in the world of Earthsea as a whole, is revealed in *Shore*. The breaking and mending of them form a major element of the narrative's conflict, and questions arise as to what a lack of boundaries would do to Earthsea. The walls that have been built up in *Wizard* and *Tombs* are

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[99] *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, ed. by John Clute and John Grant (London: Orbit, 1999), p. 586
[100] M. Teresa Tavormina, 'A Gate of Horn and Ivory: Dreaming True and False in *Earthsea*', *Extrapolation* (1988), 29.4, 338–348 (p. 338).
[101] Catalin Anghelina, 'The Homeric Gates of Horn and Ivory', *Museum Helveticum,* 67.2 (2010), pp. 65-72 (p. 65)
[102] Patricia García, *Space and the Postmodern Fantastic in Contemporary Literature: The Architectural Void* (New York: Routledge, 2015), p. 27-28.

dismantled or weakened in *Shore*, and Le Guin begins the narrative by showing how disastrous this would be for the world. Magic and the name of things are being forgotten, and the lack of a boundary between the living and the dead causes a threat to the safety of the inhabitants who, without both, may end up shades of themselves. The boundary to the realm of the dead is established in *Wizard* as being marked by a wall, one that is accessible either physically or magically. Though only a mage may cross it and return alive, *Shore* breaks this convention by having Cob open up a permanent threshold between the living and the dying, and with magic being forgotten, so too are the rules and rituals of the world. In a discussion between the mages on Roke, Ged notes the closing of this breach as the goal of his last and fateful journey:

> 'One must guard the gates.'
> 'The Doorkeeper does that -'
> 'Not only the gates of Roke. Stay here ... and watch the wall of stones to see who crosses it and where their faces are turned. There is a breach ... and it is this I go to seek.' (p. 325)

Above all, the boundary between the living and the dying is consistently referred to as either a doorway or a wall, whether this be a magical rent in the earth such as that created by Ged or Cob, a more metaphorical entryway that is more hole than structure, or the physical stones that clearly define the boundary. The peace of mind that is reinforced through the distinct realms is lost in *Shore*, and with it the foundations of Earthsea crumble. It is only through the reinstatement of the wall and the closing of the doorway that equilibrium is restored, and Ged's sacrifice at the end of *Shore* allows for this. What these boundaries do, above all, is reaffirm the difference between the primary world and that of the other, whether under or otherwise, that exists as an opposite, and should be separated as thus. It is within these secondary worlds, across the boundaries, where Le Guin rests her pen for longer than a momentary stop off; a contrast to the abundance of spaces that serve as only momentary areas, these worlds become the locus of journeys, their destined 'centres', and spacial focal points for the narrative.

Beyond the boundary

At the edges of Earthsea is where the mystery lies. The journeys undertaken within the narrative constantly force questions to arise as to what lurks beyond the edge of the world and map, the boundaries of which have been afforded special significance in cartographical discussion. Particularly in the mediaeval world, peripheries are the spaces inhabited by 'wild, monstrous races'[103]

[103] Felicitas Schmeider, *Edges of the World—Edges of Time*, in *The Edges of the Medieval World*, ed. by Garhard Jaritz and Juhan Kreem (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2009) pp. 4-20 (p. 4).

or mythological creatures, places not only deemed dangerous but also sites or desired destinations of adventure and discovery, and narratives abound of boundaries being invaded by outsiders or insiders journeying beyond.[104] It is a concept that has transitioned into the fantastical tradition, with a plethora of fictional maps depicting mythological creatures and elaborate compass roses on the sides, such as the depiction of Smaug on Thror's map of the lonely mountain in *The Hobbit*. In Figure 1 above, islands such as Selidor and the Kargad Lands border the edges of the world of Earthsea, and each cardinal point has a landmark of some significance. However, there is no determining whether this map is a globe, and that Selidor and the Kargad Lands connect by sea. In fact, their treatment in the narrative suggests otherwise, and as such provides further mystery to the make-up of the world and the possibility of far off, unknown realms.

An age-old adage of both katabasis and fantasy is the link between the primary world and the world of shadows that is representative of the underworld,[105] which acts as both a secondary world in portal-quest fantasies or as a cordoned area of danger which often becomes the location of descent.[106] One such shadow realm, a place of darkness and death, is the Labyrinth in *Tombs*. At least for *Earthsea* (but not for *House of Leaves* or any other narratives that feature labyrinths either as a primary feature, a stopping off point, or using it for comparative purposes), the labyrinth and the realm of the dead or hellspace are two separate, distinct realms. For Tenar, the Labyrinth offers a mirrored space to the realm of the dead, or at least an interpretation of an underground hellish realm suffused with the dark, particularly when considering her dreams of the Painted Room, lined with the souls of the dead, and the grave clothes that she wears (p. 257). The mythological aspect and the near-reverence provided to the Labyrinth afford it a certain significance; the inhabitants of Atuan view it with fearful respect, acknowledging it as a reflection of the Old Gods and the dangerous powers held within. However, spaces are often provided a significance by those who dwell near or within them that may not necessarily represent its nature or intended purpose accurately. Edward Casey discusses the idea of spatial reflection in *Fate of Place* (1998), in which he writes that the 'more we reflect on place ... the more we recognize it to be something not merely characterizable but actually experienced in qualitative terms', [107] and similarly, Christina Gschwandtner insinuates that place

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[104] Pettitt, p. 85.
[105] Françoise Létoublon, 'Theo Angelopoulos in the Underworld', in Homer in the Twentieth Century: Between World Literature and Western Canon, ed. by Barbara Graziosi and Emily Greenwood (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2007), pp. 210-230 (p. 226).
[106] Categorisations of fantasy including portal-quest, immersive, intrusive and liminal all feature forms of boundary-breaking, and it is tempting to view katabatic narratives as portal-quests given their involvement with entering a world different to that of the primary (see Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn, 'Introduction', in *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*, ed. by Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 2.)
[107] Edward Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p. 204.

requires a certain level of interpretation to provide it with meaning.[108] In terms of the Tombs and its Labyrinth, its significance may just be something that is put upon by inhabitants, and neither have any special meaning. When the Tombs collapse and Tenar escapes with Ged, its true (and underwhelming) nature is revealed to have been bred from those who inhabit it: 'where men worship these things and abase themselves before them, there evil breeds; there places are made in the world where darkness gathers' (p. 266). Even Kossil, gatekeeper of the Tombs and of Tenar's obedience and worship, sees the temples as 'mere show', the tombstones as 'rocks', and the Tombs as 'dark holes in the ground, terrible but empty' (p. 220). To all intents and purposes, the space of the Tombs and Labyrinth are merely a collection of geological features associated with old powers that provide it with significance, without which it would mean nothing. It is not so far removed from the Classical association of cave mouths or river sources as entrances, locations inspired by the fear of the dark unknown beneath the earth.

The description of the Labyrinth that Le Guin provides offers little in terms of information on the way that it is set out or how it appears. In fact, the darkness associated with and ritually required by the Labyrinth is necessary to this lack. Though Tenar in her movements through the tunnels, passageways, and corridors attempts to develop a mental map that she utilises throughout her visits, there is never a full picture. Rather, the only description received is through the narrative consciousness of the protagonist. In terms of rulership or architectural significance, it is impossible to tell whether the Labyrinth was created by someone or not, and though it is simply a place beneath the earth, a 'great maze of tunnels... under the hill', it raises the issue of a constructed space through its likening to a 'great dark city' and the ambiguity of its tunnels as natural formations or man-made creations (p. 196). It is this very ambiguity that allows Tenar to claim ownership over the domain without having created it. The presence of tombs and underground corridors suggests that at least parts were physically built by someone or something, but it could just as easily be natural. The only explanation as to why the Labyrinth is created is given by Kossil when Tenar asks her when and why it was made: 'For the hiding away of the treasures of the Tombs, and for the punishment of those who tried to steal those treasures' (p. 213)—an ambiguous answer that only reaffirms the Labyrinth's potential significance in the minds of the inhabitants. The walls are 'raw' and 'blank' (p. 212), and areas are referred to as tunnels and caverns which could suggest either a natural or built place—certainly, the presence of 'rooms' implies a sense of architectural involvement, and yet the pressing darkness means that its true appearance will remain unknown, and even though Le Guin

[108] Christina M. Gschwandtner, 'Space and Narrative: Ricoeur and a Hermeneutic Reading of Place', in *Place, Space and Hermeneutics*, ed. by Bruce B. Janz (Switzerland: Springer 2018), pp. 169-182 (p. 170).

teases a description later on, it is still rather abstract:

> 'But down underground, nothing ran straight. All the tunnels curved, split, rejoined, branched, interlaced, loped, traced elaborate routes that ended where they began, for there was no beginning, and no end. One could go, and go, and go, and still get nowhere, for there was nowhere to get to.' (p. 231).

She also comments on the fact that the maze, as it is also called, has 'no centre, no heart' and that 'once the door [is] locked, there [is] no end to it. No direction [is] right' (p. 231). By providing the Labyrinth with no key details, Le Guin allows for Tenar's own perception of the space to take over for the reader, and with the accompaniment of the dark as a barrier for said perception, no questions as to the nature of the place are ever answered, and yet, *Tombs*, at its core, is a narrative of exploration, of the self and of space, and of pushing beyond unknown boundaries, the blank space of the physical negated more for the goal of acquired identity. With its destruction at the end, and the pervasive darkness throughout, the labyrinth will always retain a sense of mystery, even from those who believe themselves to be in control of it.

As the central preoccupation of the narrative,[109] *Earthsea*'s realm of the dead is what provides the novels such strong katabatic association, and it becomes the definitive endpoint of the trilogy and of Ged's journey. Given its status as a place of mystery and unknown, on the edge of the map or beyond it and accessible only by ritual and requirement, questions that began in *Wizard* and returned to more fully in *Shore* involve where the end of Earthsea actually lies, and, above all, where the realm of the dead is. On their journey across Lorbanery, Sopli muses that 'if the dead come back to life in the world there must be a place...where it happens' (p. 388), and yet nowhere on the map is the realm of the dead pictured, only a possibility of the farthest shore at the edge of the south reaches with the similarly named Far Sorr. The old Isle-Man in *Wizard* mentions an area called Lastland (or Astowell), where 'there is no land beyond. There is nothing but water till the world's edge' (p. 158), which lies at the very eastern edge. When Arren and Ged discuss Arren's vow to follow Ged beyond reason, Arren mistakenly names Lorbanery the edge of the world, to which Ged replies 'This is the edge of the world? No, that is further on. We may yet come to it' (p. 385). Answers, however, lie in the oft repeated phrase 'as far away as Selidor', which is used to describe the unreachable, an area, at least on the map, which lies right on the western edge, the furthest point that any inhabitant can conceive of. In the Hall of Berila lie old maps which confirm Selidor's status as a last land; Arren traces the geography of Earthsea, over the empty sea 'on and on; until the very edge of the wall, and the end of the map, and there was Selidor, and beyond it, nothing' (p. 442), this wall edge becoming a literal end

[109] John Rosegrant, 'The Four Deaths of Ged', *Mythlore: A Journal of J. R. R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature*, 39.2 (2021), 103-123 (p. 104).

of the map and a proverbial one for the world. *Shore*'s journey is one that sees Ged and Arren sail to and off the edge of the known world into this nothing, moving beyond the map's boundaries in search of an illustrious edge. It is a space farther away than human knowledge and imagination can allow and that no true maps exist of,[110] and understanding that one may stand at the very precipice is difficult to judge. Selidor itself, as the dragon Orm Embar says, is where Cob resides, and yet even this destination is not the true 'dark land' that he and they seek (p. 448). Selidor itself is merely the last shore to the next destination.

At the edge of Selidor they come to a headland, a 'shore which faced no other land', where they find the spirit of the old king Erreth-Akbe amongst a house of bones, a doorway guarded by a human skull, images of the dead that mark the space as what it truly is (p. 451-452). The shore of Selidor stands as the final barrier between the living world and the dying, and shorelines in and of themselves hold importance given Earthsea's geography and the makeup of its katabases. Earth and sea, much like the dark and light, are opposites, though not completely binary, and it is because of this that shorelines form an important geographical location for Earthsea and hold symbolic significance. *The Farthest Shore* is, importantly, named after this piece of land. The shore of Selidor stands as the final barrier between the living world and the dying. The farthest shore itself holds echoes in *The Aeneid*, in which Aeneas watches the unjust lot of the dead long for the farther shore.[111] It is here that Ged and Arren will walk through the archway made from an apparition of Cob's arms and enter the Dry Land — another Virgilian reference —and down into the dark. At this final moment, yet again, the physical journey is negated. It is a literal and proverbial water's edge, after which may truly lie nothing, and yet Ged and Arren still move forward, perhaps to somewhere else entirely. The presence of the portal does not answer the question as to where on the map, if at all, the realm lies, and they must move even further on, so far, in fact, that they may have moved to another world entirely. The allusions to the realm of the dead being a separate world accessible through the primary one are apparent from the first novel. During *Wizard'*s second katabasis where Ged follows the spirit of the boy, 'the stars above the hill were no stars [Ged's] eyes had ever seen' (p. 80), and once Ged and Arren reach the Dry Land in *Shores*, the stars above 'were no stars that [Arren] had ever seen' (p. 455). A transition has therefore occurred that has moved them to some other space entirely. The presence of different constellations dismantles any view of Earthsea as a definite, closed geographical space, whether spherical or otherwise —especially considering just how much of Earthsea's geography Ged has seen on his travels. In fact, Le Guin toys with the idea of multiple universes or worlds. Characters look up towards the vast sky and constellations and wonder what is beyond: 'there

[110] Odysseus' underworld similarly appeared on no map (see Bernstein, p. 25).
[111] Virgil, *Aeneid*, trans. by Frederick Ahl (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 138.

are worlds beyond the world. Over these abysses of space and the long extent of time' (p. 365), and the realm of the dead may be one such secondary world.

The realm of the dead itself is the only canonical underworld in this thesis, stringent in its presentation as a space to house the souls of the dead. However, unlike the Labyrinth and other depictions of hellspaces, it is not underground. Though Ged and Arren must undergo a downward trajectory to arrive there, it does not appear that the sky above them is blocked in any way, and rather they descend to the bottom of a sloping hill. This time, Ged and Arren journey well past the wall of stones to find a realm that is oddly empty. The narrative of *Shore* means that the open boundary has allowed the spirits of the dead to leak out into the primary world, which has left the already desert-like landscape even more barren. Much like the labyrinth, the realm of the dead is also referred to as the 'City of the Dead'. There are no doubt allusions between Dante's *Inferno* here and the City of Dis that comprises the sixth to ninth circles of Hell, and countless depictions both antiquated and modern describe Hell or hellspaces as a city space. Buildings are depicted, albeit empty of any life, and whether these are meant to house the spirits of the dead, or are left as a suggestion that the realm was not always the place it has become—the dried up river and roadways would certainly be elements of prior inhabitation, perhaps by those living—still provides the realm as containing built architecture. Benjamin Stevens notes that ancient 'underworlds are frequently described on the model of architecture, but it is relatively rare for them to be described as built by human—or humanoid—hands',[112] such as the frequently referenced *house* of Hades or *gates* of Hell, and just as the Labyrinth's architect is not mentioned, so too does the realm of the dead remain architect-less. The realm is described as a vast landscape, a mix of natural features and built architecture just like those in Earthsea itself, and yet despite its vastness a clear path is followed by Ged and Arren towards Cob, the way lit only by what remains of Ged's power, an antithetical light to the realm's darkness. When Arren asks what lies beyond their trajectory and sight, Ged answers 'I do not know. It may be a way without an end' (p. 458), showing that the realm itself is not a closed space, and therefore is provided no full and definite perception or understanding. In fact, the perception of the realm is further complicated by the very lack of the dead that provide it with its title; what does this space become, if it is empty? Alongside its lack of an architect, this blank status allows for Cob to take root and to provide, like the labyrinth, his own special significance.

Despite the land's pervading darkness and sinister emptiness, Ged's and Arren's fear is not for the realm itself, nor the spirits (or lack thereof) within; rather, their fear is only for Cob, who threatens

[112] Benjamin Eldon Stevens, 'Ancient Underworlds in J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit'*, in *Classical Traditions in Modern Fantasy*, ed. by Brett M. Rogers and Benjamin Eldon Stevens (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 121-144 (p. 129).

the certainty of the narrative by displacing the world order. In fact, Le Guin's realm of the dead is comparatively lacking in nightmarishness precisely due to the certainty of her narrative. At no point does the reader truly believe that Ged or Arren are in danger, and rather the section is one of a more profound significance in being representative of the possibilities facing Earthsea if this certainty is lost. After a continuous downward trajectory, they come at last to the end of all things. At the centre lies Cob, standing at last on flat ground. They chase him along what appears to be a dry riverbed to reach the source of the river, a dark void that is the barrier he opened. The lack of water is a stark contrast to the rest of Earthsea's geography, reminiscent of the four rivers of the Greek underworld, its dryness a further symbol of death. It is here, effectively, that Ged and Arren reach the end— at least in their own perceptions— and the final standoff between light and dark. After defeating Cob and drawing the Rune of Ending, thus closing the doorway forever, they must travel through the Mountains of Pain to return to Selidor. No portal provides them with access back, and yet they still end up on the same shoreway, having left the realm in a more conventional manner. Is there therefore a difference between the entrance to and the exit of the realm of the dead? Does this mean that its position is in fact just beyond Selidor? The Mountains act as another wall of stone, a place Ged himself only reached through magical means in *Wizard* and again involve the suspension of actual travel. Perhaps this final restoration and closing of the last rent allows for such a conventional anabasis, and Ged, having effectively 'died' in the realm of the dead, is free to leave it fully behind. They awake again on the shores of Selidor, this last vestige of land, having scaled the Mountains towards the waking world. And yet, no mountains are seen from Selidor, which is simply a shore. The realm, now closed entirely, will remain off the map forever, and its position essentially unknown, thus opening up more opportunity for further discovery.

Conclusion

Ursula K. Le Guin's *Earthsea* trilogy offers a complete modern katabasis, one that reveals the extent to which the trope can be used in actuality, replete with a canonical realm of the dead that is accessible through descent and questing heroes with clear goals that must be actualised through their journeys. These descents, however, are not always simply downwards, and in the process of her own myth-making, Le Guin creates a world of journeys that are complex, both internal and external, and both physical and non-physical. Reading *Earthsea* is a process of unravelling the boundaries that are put on the world by its inhabitants, revealing the stringent use of rule and ritual that composes the makeup of the world in terms of its understanding and use, which are entirely dependent on perspectives. When the locus of the world changes, new possibilities, pathways, and areas are opened up. What lies on the tip of each cardinal point becomes the ultimate world end for those who view it as such, just as the way Tenar views the world unrestrained after her removal from Atuan, which until

that point was her whole understanding. The edge and end of Earthsea may all be a matter of perspective, and though the realm of the dead is the final destination of Ged's long katabases, one that began as a budding young mage on Gont in *Wizard*, which first revealed the importance of the balanced powers of light and dark, there is a sense that something still lies beyond. There may be a chance that whatever it is is only so mysterious because no one has yet to set foot there, and therefore the journey towards it may be possible. It is, in a way, similar to the interpretation of the Labyrinth and the significance of spaces: faraway places are provided a significance and mystery that is removed once their truth is revealed. Where, then, *is* the end of Earthsea? Is there a farther shore than the farthest shore? Does a boundary even exist if beyond it cannot be imagined? If this is the way that the world of *Earthsea* operates, then there are no destined ends, or final points to be reached, at least geographically. There will always be a consistent sense of movement and discovery, and of other worlds beyond the far and distant shores.

"HOLDING DARKNESS WITHIN": SHIRLEY JACKSON'S *THE HAUNTING OF HILL HOUSE*

Shirley Jackson's fifth novel, *The Haunting of Hill House* (henceforth *Hill House*) suffers from issues of classification. Consistently listed with ghost stories and haunted houses, the novel has been read as a supernatural haunting and a psychological tale to different degrees, eluding frameworks whilst simultaneously forcing them upon the reader through Jackson's deliberate inclusion of genrefied markers. As Jackson herself writes, 'no one can get into a novel about a haunted house without hitting the subject of reality head-on; either I have to believe in ghosts, which I do, or I have to write another kind of novel altogether.'[113] When the filmmakers of the 1963 adaptation, which drops the novel's full title in favour of *The Haunting*, tried for a more psychological telling, Jackson insisted that the novel was entirely of a supernatural nature.[114] Its resistance and elusiveness both from the nature of the novel itself and Jackson's own treatment of it only serves to heighten its ambiguity. It is emphatically not a ghost story, though it is one of a haunted house, therefore at least in part being supernatural or at the very least preternatural. In her own words, it is 'a serious novel',[115] one which holds within it elements of genre (particularly the Gothic) through an amalgamation of both psychological and supernatural hauntings. *Hill House*'s engagement with the expectation of Gothic convention is teased through its association with the Victorian Era's craze for spiritualism, eking out possibilities with its frayed protagonists, blood spattered walls and moving planchettes, connecting the paranormal and psychological to play on its archetypes.[116] The depiction of the house's haunting, which in one basic way can be seen as a literal haunting by its previous inhabitants (though, of course, never proven and never actually seen), and the portrayal of Mrs. Montague, complete with her ouija board and apparent ability to sense the supernatural all point towards an explicit use of anachronistic events and tropes specifically chosen to invoke this very comparison. By harkening back to cultural formulae, Jackson imbues her text with an 'important aspect of the Victorians' intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and imaginative worlds' that took place 'in the domestic centre of their daily lives'.[117]

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[113] Paula Guran, 'Shirley Jackson and *The Haunting of Hill House*' (2006), DarkEcho Horror, archived at <www.darkecho.com> [accessed 08 June 2020].
[114] Nelson Gidding and Tom Weaver, 'Nelson Gidding', in *I Was a Monster Movie Maker: Conversations With 22 SF and Horror Filmmakers*, ed. by Tom Weaver (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2001), pp. 61-77 (pp. 64-65).
[115] *The Letters of Shirley Jackson*, ed. by Laurence Jackson Hyman (New York: Random House, 2021), p. 401
[116] Linda Bayer-Berenbaum, *The Gothic Imagination: Expansion in Gothic Literature and Art* (London: Associated University Presses, 1982), p. 38.
[117] Nicola Brown, Carolyn Burdett, and Pamela Thurschwell, 'Introduction', in *The Victorian Supernatural* , ed. by Nicola Brown, Carolyn Burdett, and Pamela Thurschwell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 1-22 (p. 2).

Reportedly inspired by nineteenth century spiritual narratives,[118] Jackson set out to write a book that is not necessarily a ghost story, but still a form of haunting, one that deliberately plays with readers' implicit familiarity with the Gothic whilst still rendering it something other.

If katabasis is so inherently connected with the concept of historical experience which aligns 'mythic timelessness with the lived experience'[119] of those both past and present, then the mytheme can be read in *Hill House* due to the essential analysis it is given by Eleanor herself. Jackson writes that 'the genesis of any fictional work has to be human experience',[120] and it is Eleanor's own experience of Hill House, her journey to, through, and eventually, disastrously out of it that is the novel's matrix. It is through Eleanor's perspective that the house and its explorative inhabitants are viewed and, ultimately, it is down to her to trace the trajectory of the narrative. The novel appears to share little with the established pattern; after all, Eleanor is hardly represented as a hero, there are no direct allusions to a downward journey into the realm of the dead, and there is certainly no anabatic return to the surface. The ways in which Jackson weaves her protagonist's journey, however, and the configuration of Hill House itself as a representative hellspace, offer an intriguing case for the presence of modern katabasis in the novel alongside its associated motifs and configurations. The inclusion of literary markers such as the guide and the impetus for the journey, the direction of travel, and the way in which Hell itself figures are mirrored against a decidedly modern take on a failed katabasis, whereby Eleanor's lack of anabatic completion and her own personal relationship to the hellspace show no triumphant rebirthed return. It is a journey, much like the other texts will show, and as *Earthsea*'s preoccupation with equilibrium introduced, from order to disorder, with Eleanor having left her routine home life for what she believes to be better pastures at Hill House only to find that the space becomes a mirror to her own disordered thoughts about her domesticity. By tracking Eleanor's movement around the house, her subsumption into the architecture and her mental disintegration, followed by her failed anabasis, Section I details the linear features of her katabasis. Section II explores the composition of Hill House itself as a space for this to take place in, a space of torment and un-domesticity deliberately connected to an explicit depiction of Hell.

I. "I am going, I have finally taken a step": The Journey To and Through Hill House

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[118] Judie Newman, 'Shirley Jackson and the Reproduction of Mothering: *The Haunting of Hill House'*, in *Shirley Jackson: Essays on the Literary Legacy*, ed. by Bernice Murphy (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2005), pp. 120-34 (p. 120).
[119] David L. Pike, *Metropolis on the Styx*, p. 1.
[120] Shirley Jackson, *Come Along with Me: Part of a Novel, Sixteen Stories, and Three Lectures* (New York: The Viking Press, 1968), p. 196.

In *Danse Macabre*, Steven King writes that 'it is Eleanor ... that [*Hill House*] is vitally concerned with'.[121] As the protagonist of *Hill House*, Eleanor Vance— a 33-year-old woman with a fraught relationship with her mother and sister, no place of her own, and a sense of flighty romanticism—acts as narrator for the time spent in the mysterious house, her interactions with the space and individuals within forming her narrative voice. Jackson is noted to have had a fear of losing herself to domesticity, and the 'themes of Jackson's work were so central to the preoccupations of American women during the postwar period'[122] that she reflects them in many of her female protagonists. Eleanor is oppositional to the American Woman of the 1950s: her unhappy home life, lack of marriage prospects and children see her fail to assume any semblance of a typical housewife life at the beginning of the novel, and her presentation is directly affected by her maternal circumstances. Above all, her status as a woman, typically American or otherwise, provides an angle to her role as traveller — as with Tenar in *Earthsea* and Evelyn in *Passion* — in which the exclusively male viewpoint of heroic initiations or katabases is switched.[123] The change and distinction, as Vaclavik remarks, sees the female traveller often prescribed with largely passive behaviour towards their own katabasis.[124] Wilfully ignorant of the world and the house, naive to her treatment by Theodora and Luke that borders on both sexual and abusive, Eleanor's behaviour exhibits precisely this. While neither Luke nor Dr. Montague suffer the same paranormal events or horrific experiences that Theodora (though to a lesser extent) and Eleanor do, and therefore do not have to deal with the consequences or effects on their own journeys, Eleanor never once becomes fully aware of the nature of her surroundings or the true effects that they have on her; rather, she flails throughout the narrative as the House assaults her with events that trigger a personalised mental response, seemingly only to her.

Journeys end in lovers meeting

The opening of Jackson's novel is centred around the action of Eleanor travelling towards Hill House at the behest of Dr Montague, whose letter serves as her call to action. Detailing a certain form of exploratory escape, the letter asks for Eleanor to 'observe and explore the various unsavoury stories which had been circulated' around Hill House, avoiding openly stating its possibly haunted status.[125] The sense of mystery is a lifeline for Eleanor, who cannot otherwise remember a moment in her life of true happiness. Hoping to escape her own unhomely surroundings and to achieve more from her life, Eleanor answers the call which serves as the impetus of her onward journey. She describes herself as

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[121] Stephen King, *Danse Macabre* (New York: Berkley Books, 1983), p. 234.
[122] Ruth Franklin, *Shirley Jackson: A Rather Haunted Life* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2016), p. 1662.
[123] Lowell Edmunds, *Approaches to Greek Myth* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2014), p. 426.
[124] Vaclavik, p. 67.
[125] Shirley Jackson, *The Haunting of Hill House* (London: Penguin Books, 2009), p. 5.

having waited for something like Hill House all her life, her acceptance of the invitation providing a way of satisfying this desire and escaping her own unsatisfactory life (p. 7). The fact that her impetus requires an agency outside of herself to facilitate a change shows the extent of her free will in the novel, as well as Jackson's reliance on the figure of the guide. The letter, and by extension its sender, provide the reason for her journey, though vague enough to be misconstrued by the already naively presenting Eleanor, and the guide in this sense becomes a double-edged sword: they simultaneously offer Eleanor a clear path towards her goal whilst also weakening her own personal resolve to face the true nature of it. Dr. Montague's— a doctor of what, exactly?—authority over Eleanor's actions asserts itself from the beginning, as his proverbial voice sends Eleanor to Hill House via letter (p. 23), deliberately 'guid[ing] Eleanor here' (p. 60).

Until this point, she has lived a rather sedentary life, but at the behest of her guide Eleanor begins her journey with an immediate sense of importance. The prior lack of movement makes the call to action all the more stark, and in contrast her acceptance sees the narrative provide obsessive attention to the movements that she makes towards Hill House. There is a constant focus on the motif of the journey; repeatedly, Jackson represents Eleanor in an excitable state, with continuous references made to travelling. The movement between one state of being towards another, or one unpleasant landscape into an — unknowingly more unpleasant — other, is emphasised by her preoccupation with the act itself: 'I am going, I am going, I have finally taken a step' (p. 15). Eleanor swiftly leaves her life in the city —of which little spatial detail is provided — and the change in her surroundings is highlighted by her arrival in the countryside: 'she turned onto the highway and was free of the city' (p. 16). Despite the word 'free' implying that the city itself, not only her mother and sister, was somehow responsible for her trapped state, it ironically establishes Eleanor as the sole figure on this part of the journey and her belief that she has unburdened herself from the responsibilities of her life, despite her already having negated it due to unconsciously following Dr. Montague's instruction, without which she would never have left her city dwellings and embarked on such a journey to begin with. Her journey is not entirely her own, however in her naivety she believes herself entirely in control. Having left the shackles of false domesticity, she becomes 'a new person, very far from home' (p. 27), believing herself a woman who has moved away from the expectations set up for her in regards to her failed status as a housewife. She is able to transform herself into the traveller, forming a new sense of self that only exists as a product of the journey she is undertaking and exhibiting a level of control and understanding that only exists here at the beginning, before her entry into the House. Through the act of journeying, Eleanor naively believes that she has undergone a fundamental change to her identity, relinquishing her past self for a new one so early on. However, the construction of the journey as a passage of moments, each one 'carrying her along with them, taking her down a path of

incredible novelty to a new place' (p. 16), provisions it with a childlike novelty shown in the fantastical fairytale gardens and cups of stars along the way, which harken back to her romantic, childlike self she has not left behind. The fact that the journey 'carr[ies]' her shows that she does not take her own positive forward actions but is rather buoyed along by a force, in this case being the journey itself, which holds greater importance than her own will, to which she unconsciously submits herself to its pull and effect.

To travel to Hill House, Eleanor must drive down motorways and winding country lanes. The road figures symbolically as an essential element of the journey, a marked way that is both part of and emblematic of it, reflecting folkloric and Classical associations of the importance of travelling, choices, and destiny. Though discussed in relation to fantasy in Chapter I, there is little difference to the way that the road is seen in such narratives as *Hill House*. In American literature, roads hold a certain significance, constituting an entire genre, one which stems from a long tradition of travel literature and, importantly, quest or journey narratives. Ronald Primeau writes of the road as a sacred space, one which provides a new start to travellers, a route to self-discovery that is given the importance of a ritual.[126] The road is a pathway to freedom from a previous life, often one of monotony, a space between knowledge of what is left behind and trepidation or excitement of what is to come. It is a motif that has often been masculinised, as Alexandra Ganser notes, with female travel transitions occurring more often between a domestic realm to something outside of it, whereby moving away becomes a form of resistance.[127] It is not exactly a destination, but a limbo space that leads to it, treated as a separate component of the journey whilst simultaneously *being* the journey. Eleanor's journey along the roads that eventually take her to Hill House aligns with both Primeau and Ganser's comments, with her excitement and departure from a domestic space, albeit to just another one of supposed domesticity, providing her a supposed sense of freedom and destiny. The road itself is given a sense of destined importance which provides the narrative with a sense of inevitability: 'no other road could lead her from where she was to where she wanted to be' (p. 17). Eleanor sees her journey as a metaphorical path, immediately invoking associations of following and direction that again allow for her to suspend any authority over her journey, entirely forsaking any sense of control that she has to the journey and its direction. The act of journeying itself and the movements she takes become more important than the destination itself, described, despite its known end at Hill House, as 'vague, unimagined, perhaps nonexistent' (p. 17). Its significance frames it as a miniature version of the journey that is undertaken across the novel as a whole. Her naive faith in the road, however, is

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[126] Ronald Primeau, *Romance of the Road: The Literature of the American Highway* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1996), p. 1.
[127] Alexandra Ganser, *Roads of Her Own: Gendered Space and Mobility in American Women's Road Narratives, 1970-2000* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), p. 69, p. 73.

immediately and horrifically contrasted with her arrival at the gates of Hill House. The forward momentum that she has hitherto been buoyed along on is difficult to halt (p. 35), but before her car finally stops she is given a last chance to turn back, one that she does not take (p. 30). She has a preconceived notion of confidence and determination, perhaps a foreshadowing of her actual inability to return to the world outside the gates of Hill House at the end.

By acknowledging the nature of the journey until this point, it lays the groundwork for the investigation of Hill House as an adventure, with an end goal of exploration until the point of free and unhindered movement, a full acquisition of knowledge about their only destination. It is an exploration that requires further interjection, and having led Eleanor to the house and as leader of the experiment, Dr. Montague also acts implicitly as a director for the action in the house proper. He is responsible for bringing the characters together, of informing them of their purpose, and in a way acts as a secondary director of the action outside of Jackson herself as writer. He is often shown leading them through the house or suggesting a particular action or response to an event. His arrival at the house before his invited guests allows him a certain degree of spatial awareness above the others, even more so than Luke, the supposed ancestral owner. When Dr. Montague is first introduced, Luke notifies Eleanor and Theodora that the Doctor is inside, gloating over his haunted house (p. 58), the degree of authority and even ownership unmistakable. His ability to traverse the house which provides him the knowledge required as a guide is clear in his assertion that he has ‘studied a map of the house’ (p. 60). Notably, he does not provide this map to the other guests, and he himself is the sole figure that is able to fully understand the parameters of the space. When Theodora expresses that someone ‘is going to have to lead [her]’ (p. 60), there is no doubt that it is Dr. Montague who will take up the mantle. However, Dr. Montague’s self-congratulatory proclamation — ‘I have led you to civilization through the uncharted wastes of Hill House’ (p. 64) — shows that not only does he presume Hill House holds spaces unknown and untrodden for those present in its confines, but that his role as a guide is complete now that his ‘students’ are able to follow the geography of the house from his instructions and safely traverse them. It is at this moment that he forsakes his role, believing the knowledge that they have, despite still being faced with the confusing architecture and relative unknown, is enough for them to complete the required anabasis that he should have guided them towards fully. For the rest of the narrative, Dr. Montague sequesters himself in his own room, and dismisses Eleanor’s experiences as fabrications — despite, of course, orchestrating a paranormal investigation as the very purpose of their presence in the house. There is no clear indication of Dr. Montague’s own end goal and no way to tell whether he is pleased at the direction of events, and his praising affirmation merely points to the innocence of the house’s inhabitants and their ignorance of

events to come. When compared to Eleanor's own lack of free will and personal ingenuity, his neglect of the guiding role furthers her own disastrous katabasis.

Dr. Montague's own naivety and failure as a guide when it comes to the forces that reside within the house and the exact nature of the space destabilise his authority within the narrative and strengthens the authority of the space against Eleanor. As a result, she is forced to find refuge in her other compatriots as a way of sharing the house's horrors. She turns to her closest confidant, Theodora, who represents Eleanor's own desired acquisition of a new identity. Fashionable, beautiful, and mature, Theodora represents the woman that Eleanor wishes to become, and their movements in the house are linked to one another—at least until Eleanor's separation from the rest of the party towards the latter stages of the novel. Theodora is repeatedly shown moving ahead of Eleanor; in one of their excursions outside the house, she offers Eleanor encouragement on her trajectory: 'Hurry...I want to see if there's a brook somewhere' (p. 50); 'Over here...a little path' (p. 51). She provides teasing clues as to their next directions through subtle guidance, taking advantage of Eleanor's fascination with her. 'Follow, follow' (p. 51), and 'Don't look back' (p. 177), she beckons, reflecting the ghostly wanderings of Eliot's 'Four Quartets' and its own garden echoes, as well as Orpheus's katabatic excursions, hinting at Jackson's layers of expectation and convention. Eleanor's relationship to Theodora has been read as homoerotic, her fascination with the other woman less idolisation and more of a sexual awakening,[128] again providing an element to Eleanor's own pliability and desperation for new beginnings that still see her as the inferior. There is a certain sense of physicality to their relationship as they cling and reel together through the house and grounds (p. 175), and their connection is represented through their similar shared experiences of the house; it is Theodora and Eleanor's rooms that are vandalised, and together they experience the more supernatural, ghostly occurrences, such as the dreamlike garden picnic and hand-holding in the dark. They are joint assailants, driven on by the ministrations of the house and its inhabitants, following together down a path with no clear goal.

Dr Montague's forsaking of his role as the guide and his own false confidence, coupled with Theodora's similar position to Eleanor in the hierarchy, show a general lack of agency akin to what Eleanor herself has been shown to hold. While it is clear that they view their excursions around Hill House and its grounds as an adventure (p. 70), there is not a great degree of exploration. It is true enough that they initially explore the house and grounds based on Dr. Montague's map (one that is,

[128] Jill E. Anderson, 'The haunting of *Fun House*: Shirley Jackson and Alison Bechdel's queer Gothic neodomesticity', in *Shirley Jackson, Influences and Confluences*, ed. by Melanie R. Anderson and Lisa Kröger (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 142-159 (p. 147); Andrew Smith, *Gothic Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), p. 142.

like his role, abandoned early), but the house is not an endless space. What occurs instead, however, is a continual sense of misdirection and disorientation that comes from the exploration of the house, one who's difficulty moving around is discussed more fully in Section II but for now pertains to Eleanor and her companions' journeys through the house proper. The four of them are, as Mrs. Montague points out, 'poor souls' who 'wander restlessly' (p. 217) through its confines, unable to find a path; their movement within are directionless, filled with a languidness that leads to temptation, as though their only desire is to alleviate their flighty tales of ghosts to regale the dark, firelit hours. Their movements are sporadic, befitting a narrative that relies on no clear goal. Their purpose in the house of exploring its insides or surroundings does not even end up fully as such— as the journeys of *Veniss Underground* and *House of Leaves* will be shown to devolve into— and any investigations taken do not move them further on in their discoveries. Having a clear layout of the house, Dr. Montague is already in possession of what would appear to be complete knowledge of anything they would wish to explore, and it is rather a narrative of dealing with the domain itself and the situations that present themselves due to its actions. Without a clear goal, the journey and narrative must descend into something more in order to further movement, out of which arises the need to address the increasingly confusing and often supernatural events that occur in the house, and above all, the question of its haunting.

"Eleanor is House"

Modern katabases subsist on multiple levels; alongside the traditional, physical descent occurs one of an entirely different nature, parallel and reflective. As the protagonist descends on a physical trajectory and navigates the hellspace(s) that they encounter, so too does their mind and body react to these spaces. The physical descent is often mimicked or even taken over by that of a mental one. Eleanor exhibits a descent that occurs parallel to that of her journey proper as she believes herself to be assaulted by the architectural force of the house. Jackson did not aim for just one method of interpretation or symbolic meaning to Eleanor's time in Hill House; she has laid the groundwork for the house, and Eleanor, to hold multiple meanings that coincide and coalesce into a succinct, if often deeply complex, whole. By setting up the novel as a ghost story that intends to harken back to Victorian cultural associations with the Gothic and the supernatural, Jackson waylays expectation by having the haunting and the object of madness be the traveller, the intruder in a space that may be nothing more than a simple domestic setting provided significance only because she has set it up to be so, again providing significance, as with *Earthsea*, where there may be none. What this does is raise questions about the reality of the events that occur in the house and Eleanor's own understanding of her mentality. Jackson chooses to weave the insights of Eleanor's gradual mental disintegration into

the prose itself, forcing this naive individual against a horror that is consistently unexplainable. No illicit clues as to what lies in Eleanor's own mind and what is simply a product of the narration are provided, and thus her katabasis is doomed to fail from the beginning, her obsession with becoming a new self and her own past she tries to leave behind being the catalysts of this failure.

The new self she becomes is one markedly changed, warped by the supposed horror that she believes the house to hold and yet is still entirely ignorant of. It is horror that is largely subdued, one that sees the blurring of the boundaries between reality and fantasy 'invariably lean[ing] more towards the subtly uncanny than to the overtly grotesque'.[129] *Hill House*'s horror exhibits none of VanderMeer's liquifying, dissected bodies, and none of the obtuse or obsessive, blood gushing and skin tearing physical violence of *American Psycho*; here, the blood may not even be blood. Rather, the narrative's concept of reality becomes progressively unstable through Eleanor's own perception of what occurs in the house, built up against the backdrop of her own personal and psychological descent. A series of almost stereotypically horrific events, from the appearance of bloody/painted writing on the wall to the ghostly garden picnic and the Book, are waylaid in terms of their effect by being provided no rational explanation, making them both horrific and yet not. The realness of the writing on the wall is emphasised almost ironically in a way that not only serves to quell the assumption that it is not, but to highlight the almost parodical nature of the house's horror (p. 145). Dr. Montague's attempts to scientifically rationalise said events do little to comfort or offer answers, derailing the narrative further. Thus Eleanor, having no true guiding figure and forced to confront her own floundering sense of self, falls into the trap that the House appears to have set up. Of her own accord she begins to break down the boundaries between the real and the unreal within herself: nothing 'was real except her own hands white around the bedpost' (p. 203); 'I could say...All three of you are in my imagination; none of this is real' (p. 140); 'is it possible I am not quite coherent at this moment?' (p. 155). Difficulties arise, however, from her companions' awareness of the sinister qualities of the house; they comment on the uncanniness of the architecture and the supposed paranormal activities, strengthening the reality of Eleanor's own katabasis through their shared perception of events. Despite this, Eleanor questioning her own sanity still serves to further destabilise the narrative, and too many opposing moments cast doubt on the nature of the horror and the perception of the inhabitants as a whole. Jackson's deliberate ambiguity allows the questioning of every event in the house, particularly when coupled with Eleanor's own explanation of it being a conjuring of her own imagination.

[129] Hyman, p. xx.

The other inhabitants do not stay on the same side as Eleanor for long. Though their reactions somewhat consolidate the actions that occur, Eleanor's mental descent sees her cut off, mired in her own mentality as she is abandoned by both 'friend' and authority. When the house begins to become personalised to her and her alone, her companions become of little use to her. It is their neglect of Eleanor that sees her sacrificed to her own agency and pushes her unheeded down the path of a different sort, one that will see her fail in the acquisition of the new self she desires in favour of a more sinister identity, reflecting the House and its workings on her mind. Her new self is reflected through her changed dynamic and authority as she begins to integrate into the House more fully. Beforehand, her hierarchical position was stressed as one lacking authority due to her external position, and this still largely remains the case not only in terms of the house's internal and external boundaries, but her position within the group. She is constantly preoccupied with the concept of fitting in, of folding herself into the new domesticity she has falsely found. Her actions to further this integration reveal that she is not the excited Eleanor that journeyed so naively; after one of her strange outbursts, she falsely apologises in order to subdue the other guests and expresses a desire to integrate herself 'back in the fold' (p. 148), performing social machinations unthought of by the self that was presented previously. More often than not, Theodora becomes the central outlet of Eleanor's changed behaviour, largely due to Eleanor's apparent connection and idealisation of the other woman. When Theodora's room is ruined by red paint, Eleanor, without hesitation, takes charge of the situation, a strange role reversal that momentarily sees her waylay her lack of free will and passivity in favour of some fleeting semblance of authority. The moment sets Eleanor and Theodora against each other, with Eleanor comparing Theodora's reactions to her own calm demeanour (p. 154).

This discomfort in her hierarchical position may be an expression of Jackson's own discomfort with the boundaries of the life of an American housewife. Eleanor does not fit into any discernible category in the House's dynamics, and despite her attempts, will always remain outside of the group and more in line with the supposed mentality of the House itself: 'I am outside, she thought madly, I am the chosen one' (p. 147). Thinking of herself as the protagonist that she is, the narrative reflects her thoughts as one with the story itself. From her name appearing on the walls and her moments of amnesia, Eleanor integrates herself outside of the real world and of the group dynamics, and inside that of the House and all that it supposedly holds. That is not to say that she is fully forsaken, and moments of lucidity do occur within her descent that reveal a complex, almost Cartesian battle with her own sense of self which sees her split between her mind and this other identity that performs the actions in the house. She reveals within herself the process of this disassemblage, aware of the katabatic potential of her descent and unable to stop its trajectory: 'I *hate* seeing myself dissolve and slip and separate so that I'm living in one half, my mind, and I see the other half of me

helpless and frantic and driven and I can't stop it' (p. 160). She believes herself able to escape by surrendering (p. 160), a concept that she cannot seem to fathom, along with Luke, Dr. Montague and Theodora, but which will figure in the novel as her metaphorical assimilation with the architecture of the house and eventual death because of it. Unable to cope with the horror of the house and her own mind and the changes that occur to her because of them, she isolates herself from the others, again personalising her experience. Her isolation, however, quickly turns into violence, and her thoughts begin to reflect her desires to cause physical harm to the other inhabitants (p. 158; p. 159). The innocence which Eleanor set off on her journey and arrived at Hill House with has been quashed by the events that have occurred during her time there, and she becomes something entirely other, born directly from her time in the space itself, and, having done so, reflecting it.

When drafting the novel, Jackson wrote in her notes that 'Eleanor *is* House',[130] a statement plethoric in meanings and questions, and what Jackson meant by this is not entirely clear — indeed, in another note she writes 'theo *is* eleanor', as though alluding to the possible twinned reflection of the two women. This is never extrapolated on, and much of 'Eleanor *is* house' is left unsaid or only alluded to, teased out amongst the lines of the novel that hint at a semblance of psychological similarity between Eleanor and Hill House but never truly, much like all of its horror, solidify into anything. It is reasonable to read into the note, however, as others such as Darryl Hattenhauer have, as being succinct proof of Eleanor's subsumption,[131] but if one takes both notes as truth, and the House is Eleanor and Theodora is Eleanor, then she is doubly doubled. There are instances of Eleanor and Theodora's thoughts mimicking each other, and there is a definite kinship between the two women and their shared experience within the house. However, to suggest that Eleanor *is* either the other woman or the House itself fails to account for her own solitary self, a core part of the identity both previous to and during her journey that frames the other self she will become, and part of the struggle in coming to terms with this identity involves a form of fracturing and finding the self in other individuals or constructs. Perhaps more fitting, then, would be Eleanor *becomes* House, or at least Eleanor becomes closer to. There is merit to this conundrum; Tricia Lootens argues that 'the greatest horror of Jackson's haunting is not that the house seduces Eleanor into literally sacrificing herself for the sake of belonging, but that having done so, it still does not let her go',[132] and the control that the house exerts on the manipulatable Eleanor sees her subsume its fractured identity. The 'new person' that she has become, the identity that she has assumed, is one entirely more sinister than her previous

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[130] Darryl Hattenhauer, *Shirley Jackson's American Gothic* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003), p. 162-164.
[131] Ibid., p. 159.
[132] Tricia Lootens, '"Whose Hand Was I Holding?": Familial and Sexual Politics in Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*', in *Shirley Jackson: Essays on the Literary Legacy*, ed. by Bernice Murphy (Jefferson: McFarland and Company, 2005), pp. 150-68 (p. 167).

presentation would allow, one that matches the supposedly sinister nature of the house itself, and the act of this change is reflected in her own loss of self that is voiced through Nell and the planchette, in which she repeats ‘Lost, lost, lost’ (p. 193). When Eleanor suffers from shock after a particularly calamitous moment when the House’s pounding intensifies and threatens to pull the whole place down, her internal thoughts are a reflection of her mental state: ‘we are lost, lost’ (p. 203-204). Eleanor has consistently referred to herself in singular third person until she is deeply within her descent, and this new identity of ‘we’ could refer to the old and new Eleanor that coexist within the confines of the house, or her and the house itself, which she is gradually becoming a part of.

What this issue raises is the identity of the other self that has come to being through the original’s submersion into the novel’s categorised hellspace. The issue of whether ‘lost’ would relate to their geographical location or situation is negated by the fact that at this point in the novel, Eleanor and the other inhabitants are aware of the majority of their surroundings. At this point, the house has been mapped, and no mysteries remain in regards to its architecture, only its nature. The status of ‘lost’ is therefore entirely given over to her mental workings. She complains of her self ‘disappearing inch by inch into this house’ (p. 201), and yet vows to ‘relinquish my possession of this self of mine, abdicate, give over willingly what I never wanted at all’ (p. 204), slowly breaking down the very bounds of her own identity whilst being almost fully aware of it. This breakdown allows her to move unhindered through the House, with no guide or even a strong identity to bar her. Now, she moves ‘in the churning darkness where she fell endlessly’ (p. 203) and wanders around notably unburdened by boundaries or any navigational problems, a visceral and physical description of what is simply an emotion, a dreamlike unconscious or psychic disturbance that is a reflection of the darkness that Hill House holds within it, a lack of light that allows for irrationality to occur and creates the image of a continuous, torturous descent. She moves even further away from her companions and closer to the house itself, watching in the very way that the House is professed to have watched them from the beginning, waiting for something to happen (p. 34; p. 85). In her flight through the house in the novel’s penultimate scenes, she is shown being able to ‘hear and see [Luke] far away in the distant room where he and Theodora and the doctor still waited’ and ‘from a great distance, it seemed, she could watch these people and listen to them’ (p. 233). Her separation is further accentuated by the reference to the inhabitants as ‘people’, rather than the names she has known and referred to them as all along. When running around wildly as the others are locked in their rooms —again, there is an ease to her travelling through the house and a lack of architectural boundaries — her internal thoughts are separated by the strange conflagration of pronouns: ‘Poor house, Eleanor thought, I had forgotten Eleanor’ (p. 229).

Each of these moments builds to a crescendo of identifying questions that will buckle under the weight of their own assumptions, and the exact identification of the 'I' is again unclear. The new sense of self that emerges from the corruption of her isolation and the space of the house wars against her past nature, subverting it through her continued occupation. It is represented by a very literal change to her demeanour and her interaction with the space around her but preceded through signs of her own pervasive presence, as well as being a physical marker of the descent that she has and continues to undertake. The house provides Eleanor with the ingredients for her own disintegration, playing on her desires and motivations that are clearly laid out in the opening pages, and yet her own agency, or lack thereof, is more responsible than the space ever could be. Her acquisition of the new self is actually thwarted by her own passivity and lack of direct movement in the house— she is, after all, a soul wandering restlessly, grouped together by Mrs. Montague and yet set entirely apart. Eleanor's warring selves are represented by the planchette and the writing on the wall, both objects in the house that reflect her own entrapment and her desire to go home (p. 192), harkening back to her own war on domesticity and her place within it. As she continues to reside within the house, this other self has gradually taken over, and this struggle is represented by the physical turmoil that is exhibited by her body: 'I will never be able to sleep again with all this noise coming from inside my head; how can these others hear the noise when its coming from inside my head?' (p. 201). The knocking on the walls that was once part of the horror of the house itself has become localised not in the space, but as something internal within Eleanor's own mind, fragmenting her sense of self in the process as she joins with the force of the house, an action that provides her with a new awareness and further consolidates her outward position in regards to the rest of the inhabitants, a moment which lends itself to the '*Eleanor is House'* conundrum.

Her descent, then, becomes one of not only personal but environmental discovery and subsumption; the more that is revealed about the space, the more Eleanor appears to connect with it and eventually become it—if, indeed, she was not always so, and the house is a manifestation of her own troubled mind. It will therefore be assumed that, despite what Jackson's own thoughts were when she scrawled those ambiguous notes, 'Eleanor *is* house' may be taken in the literal sense in so far as to say that Eleanor gains a kinship with the space of the house, whether by sheer accident or a larger, more sinister force of hand, by becoming the space of her own transformation. The narrative traces a trajectory that, at least symbolically, sees the fruition of 'Eleanor *is* House' and the merging of space and inhabitant, conceptualised through the enigmatic wall writing, which reflects Eleanor's self through her name, and her first entrance to Hill House's interior where she watches 'the wavering reflection of her hand going down and down into the deep shadows of the polished floor' (p. 37). Her integration into the house is marked by the allusion to descent; the image of another Eleanor within

the house, a reflection of the self, not only foreshadows her later transcended architectural state but the separation of the self that existed outside to the one that will be created as a product of her time within. She insists on the removal of the wall writing, as though by scrubbing the bloody words off she can render them unreal and absolve her association with them. The words themselves— 'HELP ELEANOR COME HOME' —can be read in multiple ways; instructions for Eleanor to return to a semblance of haunted domesticity, or one that could be read as a plea by the house or whoever/whatever wrote the message. Once again, no answer is given, and Eleanor herself refuses to provide one and rather expresses her terror at being known (p. 146). With the arrival of Mrs. Montague and the planchette, the connection that has been created between Eleanor and the House is furthered, and the apparent voice that speaks through Mrs. Montague professes a desire not only to go home, but to be home, a place that she is waiting for (p. 192), confusing the minimal backstory that Eleanor is provided with whilst furthering the insinuation that Hill House is supposedly home to her. Even Dr Montague insinuates Hill House as her home destination (p. 192), and the space therefore in no way has to link to her past place of family torment. It is a moment that raises questions in Eleanor about her desires, her past and her current position, all while providing it with a supernatural undercurrent that imperceptibly links her to the ghostly happenings. Rebecca Munford's analysis of Eleanor notes how 'neither fully present nor fully absent, material nor immaterial, the spectre not only troubles the stability of the subject but renders categories of identity...uncertain and undecidable'.[133] As such, Eleanor has assumed the role of the House's own horrific force, proving that by becoming Hill House, she must also become its haunting, and it is this act that causes her question of identity.

Indicated by the crescendoing of horror and the lack of clear direction, the action must end somewhere. As she slowly begins to lose her mind within the space of the house, destroying her past and new selves together, her only option is to flee. The house and the culmination of her journey there by the guiding hand of Dr. Montague are not entirely what Eleanor envisioned, and her lack of personal authority sees her sacrifice her own identity. Dennis Perry and Carl Sederholm note that Eleanor's 'journey is not really a quest so much as an escape, and her goal is anything but heroic or clear'.[134] Not only does the impetus and initiation of her journey become a form of escape, as Perry and Sederholm define, but the return is by its very nature the tale of escape, a final desperate attempt to flee the confines of the space and definitively end her katabasis. The anabasis, however, is distorted in *Hill House*; the narrative provides a form of escape that is never truly complete, either through the complete breakdown of the protagonist or their death, or an endless entrapment in the designated

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[133] Rebecca Munford, 'Spectral Femininity', in *Women and the Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. by Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), pp. 120-134 (p. 121).
[134] Dennis R. Perry and Carl H. Sederholm, *Poe, "The House of Usher," and the American Gothic* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 92.

hellspace. Eleanor herself, true to form, must return home, effectively undoing the entire purpose of the journey. She is left desperate and distressed, unable to understand how her situation evolved to this point. Just beforehand, she is markedly absent for a brief period of the narrative, watching from the shadows (p. 222). She does not reappear until Luke repeats the mantra 'Journeys end in lovers meeting' and comments on her clothing (p. 222), moments which harken back to her old self. She is not mentioned by Theodora when she lists characters in the book that will depict the events of Hill House (p. 220), effectively being removed from the narrative metafictionally. By becoming its haunting, the narrative relinquishes Eleanor even in the retelling, and due to this almost complete subsumption, only one act remains: her disastrous anabasis.

Eleanor has identified her own end destination as that of the tower, and just as before she situates herself within it, solidifying her presence narratively and physically; 'come inside...I am home, I am home, she thought; now to climb' (p. 232). Not only does this reaffirm that she sees Hill House as her permanent domestic dwelling, but she echoes her first steps towards Hill House and her affirmations, attempting to convince herself of the validity of her anabasis: 'I am really really really doing it' (p. 245). However, she is told by the other guests to come down from the stairs that lead to the trapdoor, a threshold that may in fact lead to safety and life, and realises that her own feet have taken her where she did not will them to go (p. 237). It is a moment weighted with confused anabatic language; Eleanor ascends the stairs (p. 232) up the tower, climbing higher and higher to a goal unknown (but guessed at), and yet Dr. Montague wills her to come *down* to safety (p. 233). Though she does descend the stairs, her actions that culminate in this extreme moment cause the other inhabitants to force her departure, again imbuing this important moment of the journey with the same lack of free will that she began with. Counter to the pattern, she is fully aware of her entrapment within the house and even, in some way, relishes it, making no attempts to actually escape through the course of her stay: 'But I can't leave' (p. 238); 'I want to stay here' (p. 239). Her own desires are confused until the very last; the conditions that force her to stay are never revealed, nor are her true desires for wanting to fully realised. The house itself appears to desire her presence, or at least Eleanor believes it to be so, and seems to watch the inhabitants as she stands outside the doorway (p. 240). Like the round trips of katabases old, Eleanor 'must come back the way she came' (p. 243), from outside to inside to outside again, back into her old world, words spoken no less than by her original guide giving her last instruction. It is noted that she will be herself again once away from Hill House (p. 240), but due to the annihilation of the old self in the House, the Eleanor that now steps on the last threshold that marks the passage to the real world is an identity that is not compatible with it. For Eleanor, there is no sense of homecoming, 'no home' at all (p. 239), with Hill House having taken over the title for Eleanor and therefore becoming the space that she wishes to belong to. *Hill House*'s

ending is, above all, a shocking cessation of movement and the journey; though it is a round trip that she takes by car, leaving on the same path on which she arrived, the dark confines of Hill House rising up and supposedly behind her, an errant tree cuts short the continual action she has taken, much like how the house ceased her movements to begin with. In the end, Eleanor is left lost, bereft, and without a home, turned away by both the space and its current inhabitants back out onto the road from whence she came, but finds that upon leaving, the journey must end in its entirety, and though her death is not explicitly mentioned, she remains while the others leave, walking alone, trapped in both a place she reviles and loves, finally one with the space entirely.

II. "It watches every move you make": Hill House as Hell

Just as the nuanced horror of *Hill House* reveals more through its quiet uncanniness than any overtly spectacular and gruesome display, Jackson's power of writing lies more in what she does not write and what is therefore implied because of it, and Hill House's status as a hellspace to couple the katabasis of Eleanor is insinuated with the same subtle hints and clues as her journey and the possible nature of the horrors she finds on its course. The paranormal influence and generic standing of Gothic and horror narratives see the house's own creation based around ghostly imaginings. The building itself may have been loosely based on that of Winchester House, which Jackson writes is a 'good type of house for haunting'.[135] Built by Sarah Winchester, a figure mired in the occult, the house rallies against the square blandness of New England homes which Jackson casts aside for their lack of ghostly opportunity.[136] With no hidden dark spaces for questioning, no complicated or confused architecture, Jackson builds Hill House from the influence of one that shares many similar traits; Winchester House has an enormous amount of windows, one of which is installed inside so that no light comes through it, as well as stairs that lead to nowhere and an air about it that comes solely from the knowledge of the supposed events that happened within. What this reveals, as discussed previously in Chapter I, is the importance of perception in the makeup of spaces, and thus the following section discusses the parameters of Hill House itself and the insinuations of the space as a Hell for Eleanor and those who reside within, based entirely on their own viewings of it and Jackson's clever use of architecture.

Hell house

[135] Hyman, p. xxvii.
[136] Ibid., p. xxvii.

Mapping the space through the narration reveals a haunting, twisted architectural territory that is given a life of its own. For *Hill House*, the house becomes a character in and of itself, personified in the way of Gothic tradition. Akin to Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher*, or even the House on Ash Tree Lane in Danielewski's *House of Leaves*, Hill House is given a narrative presence that shows its pervasive corporeality and reliance on convention. When planning the geography and architecture of both the interior and exterior of the house, Jackson sketched the outlines for the building. The drawings, found amongst Jackson's papers at The Library of Congress,[137] reveal the inherited architectural eye from her father and grandfather.[138] Her early imaginings, which appear to reveal at least a hint of the Queen Anne style shared by Winchester House, are shown in the diagrammatic drawings below:

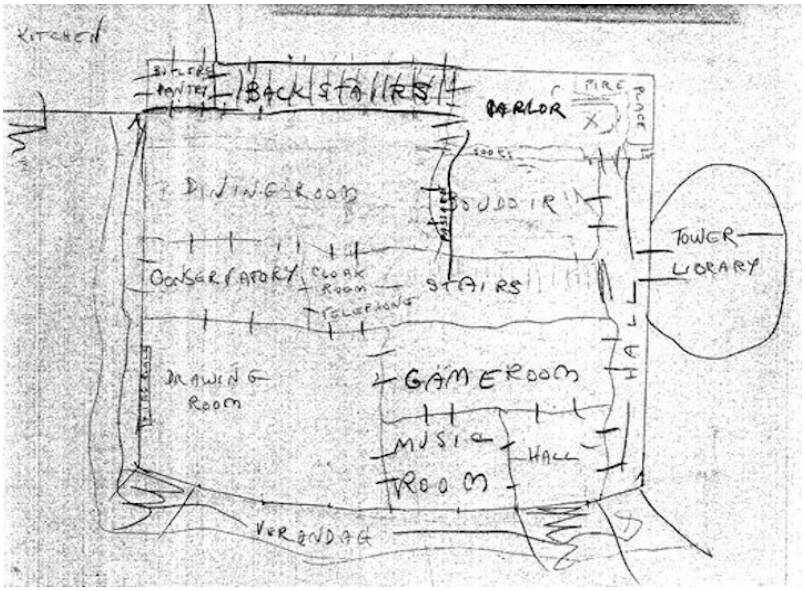

Figure 2: Shirley Jackson, plan of the ground floor of Hill House, ca. 1958. [Image via Library of Congress][139]

[137] Lootens, p. 167.
[138] Franklin, p. 1666.
[139] Library of Congress, *Shirley Jackson papers* <lccn.loc.gov/mm78052522> [accessed 10th September 2021].

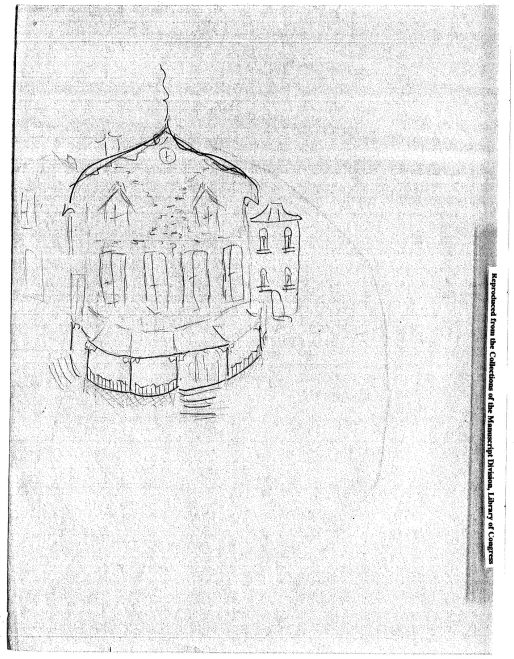

Figure 3: Shirley Jackson, drawing of the exterior of Hill House, ca. 1958. [Image via Library of Congress][140]

It is difficult to miss the allusions that she so cleverly weaves on the novel's first few pages that are echoed in the sketch: the house appears to watch, and the face itself is clear. The porch or crenellations at the bottom even look like little teeth, curved slightly in a smile. To the right side is the tower Eleanor frantically climbs, and though the back of the house and the garden are missing, there is a glimpse of the left side, presumably where the kitchen lies, only lightly shaded. The interior itself reveals a hashed collection of doors, a strange mismatch of rooms, less than ten in all. The plans of Hill House provide an idealised, abstract view from above, a bird's eye of the maze. The viewer can clearly see the exits and entrances and trace a line through the routes taken. When faced with the author's true intent of what is usually only imagined, the impression of following Eleanor and the others through a series of unconnected rooms, of a space far more labyrinthine than the quick, straight lines allow, is entirely lost. The diagrammatic drawings and the narratological movement are at odds with one another; not only does it show only one floor, but the mysticism the space is imbued with is far too codified. When the plane changes to Eleanor's own lived experience of the house, Jackson's drawings simply do not corroborate; the sketches lack the circular, Dantean structure that the narrative appears to provide, and whether these drawings simply do not reflect a later draft of the novel or that the impossibility of the narrative did not translate to paper, the two-dimensional renditions still lack

[140] Library of Congress, *Shirley Jackson papers* <lccn.loc.gov/mm78052522> [accessed 10th September 2021].

any mystery. Hill House, then, becomes a sort of architectural enigma, a space constructed of both physical and mental parameters which vie for existence in the viewer's own perception. The only other similarly mapped space in this thesis comes from Le Guin's *Earthsea*, which aids in understanding the journey Ged embarks on whilst still not revealing all the world has to offer, such as the hidden pathways to the realm of the dead. It provides the reader with knowledge of the world's structure in order to construct for themselves an image of the protagonists' surroundings, and despite the confusion of having some realms hidden, it is vital as a visual aid. In comparison, Jackson's own map serves to confuse and confound the reader, just as the house and its nature are meant to, and yet something is still lost in the process of its reveal. The drawings are an unveiling, a revelation of a nature that does not quite match up with the expectations that are provided by the novel. Unlike *Earthsea*, however, this 'map' is not provided to the reader — and in fact is only insinuated by Dr. Montague as existing, if indeed it does at all—and it may have simply been a way for Jackson herself to conceptualise the space during the early stages of her writing, to create the bare bones of a beast that would soon become far bigger than her, Eleanor, or the reader could imagine.

In *The Architectural Uncanny*, Anthony Vidler declares a connection between an uncanny depiction of architecture and the inhabitants within[141]; a shared body and mind of building and individual is found not only in the house's human attributes, its chimneys and facades of expression and its mad, watchful face, but by simply being a reflection of the viewer's own imaginings. Rather than using the map to codify the space, it is built up entirely from the expectations and perceptions of those who view it themselves. Falconer notes that Dante is an observer of Hell,[142] an individual who traverses the hellish realm but never directly acts or is acted upon by the space or its denizens; for Eleanor, Hill House, as a form of Hell, unequivocally affects her personal perceptions of both the space and herself. Eleanor's own reactions and interactions form the reader's worldview of Hill House and the inhabitants, and she is the sole gaze through which the space is viewed (aside from Dr. Montague's enlightening opening letter, which already sows the seeds for discord). The House, which is stated to fly together under the hands of its builders and as a place without kindness and without concession to humanity (p. 35), also forms itself out of the feelings and perceptions of its inhabitants: to Dr. Montague, it is an equation to be solved (though one he shows no particular drive to elucidate); to Theodora, a hideaway alone with her thoughts; to Luke, a necessary precaution to protect his ancestral home from rumour and speculation. To Eleanor, it is all at once her dream, her new home, her world, and her nightmare. The space seems to pray on Eleanor's un-domesticity and her desire for a home by simply being a house, one which at first presents itself to be what she desires, but only at

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[141] Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1992) p. 68-71.
[142] Falconer, *Hell in Contemporary Literature* p. 63.

the very beginning, notably before she sees the House in person. Its haunted qualities, never really proven, are imbued into the house by the descriptions provided; the House, defined as ‘insane’ and ‘deranged’ (p. 70), is ultimately ‘something alive’ (p. 128). Eleanor believes the evil that they feel within its presence is ‘the house itself. It has enchained and destroyed its people and their lives’ (p. 82), and aims to destroy theirs also.

These perceptions are warped, however, by the mechanism of the gaze, employed by Jackson yet again to discomfort and discombobulate. Viewing the house is closely connected to its understanding, tying in with the view of the eye like the lens of a camera, focusing on individual sections or corners of rooms and in particular the use of light and its absence, which formulates what can and cannot be seen, and with it skews interpretation. Both the difficult perception of the house and its navigation are emblematised by the darkness that pervades it, which serves a dual function. Not only does it set up the house as a sinister vessel for evil, a symbolic darkness imbued within, but in a literal sense changes how the house is viewed. One of the recurring perceptions of the house is that it has a lack of light. Darkness is what allows for Jackson to raise questions about the mental state of Eleanor and the nature of what she sees — or does not see — in terms of the realities of the events that occur in the house, but it also serves another purpose. The connection to reality is less about Eleanor’s mental state and more concerned with the simple convention that a lack of light allows for wider imaginings. It is a view that is pressurised from the beginning, with Hill House’s wide, dark entrance, a mouth-like void, and its walls that hold the darkness within providing a sense of trepidation. The inside of the house is stated to be dark, even when the lights are on (p. 162), and the novel’s most horrific moments — the origin of the lettering on the wall, Eleanor holding a hand in the darkness, the gurgling voices (p. 162) — occur under the cover of darkness. The distinct lack of light similarly allows for no clear picture of the interior of the house to be provided, at least one that is not free of the associations of its nightly terrors. Furthermore, the darkness supplies the house with its horror and allows the horror to be created. No light is shone on the origins of the evil within or whether it is simply an imagining, and no dark, hidden corners or rooms are explored; the answer to the question of ‘what nightmares are waiting, shadowed, in those high corners’ (p. 40) is never found. Despite the proclivity of its perception as something evil and vile, Hill House has a way of avoiding any visual or originating acumen; Eleanor finds herself unable to view the house in any way, unable to tell its colour, size or style, and notes only that it is enormous and dark (p. 35), and though Theodora does see the house, it rises within her a desire for arson (p. 45). In doing so, the gaze is disrupted even further by the inhabitants themselves.

Regardless of its supposed properties, there is no mistaking the view that the house offers a space of torment for the inhabitants, and the fact that it is in and of itself a house, a place associated with domesticity and safety, provides an interesting and unique conceptualisation of a hellspace. Houses '[constitute] a body of images that give mankind proofs or illusions of stability'[143] and offer an ideal environment to explore the otherworldly, unhomely components of katabasis in a single, closed space. Unlike sprawling cityscapes or underground systems, houses represent a solitary, separated realm contained within four walls, and stairs offer easy and often obvious conduits for descending and ascending movement. Houses in particular provide 'a site for endless representations of haunting, doubling, dismembering, and other terrors in literature and art',[144] and also perfectly reflect the epitome of American Gothic motifs that Jackson is emulating.[145] Hill House as Hell, or at least *a* hell, is alluded to with a near-sardonic self-awareness. Dr. Montague's speech on houses as described in 'Leviticus as 'leprous', tsaraas, or Homer's phrase for the underworld: *aidao domos,* the house of Hades' (p. 70) not only reveals the House's possible innate nature— or, more accurately, the reflection of insidious architects, a personality provided to the house 'by the people who lived [there], or the things they did, or whether it was evil from the start' (p. 70) — but specifically references the Classical realm of the dead and its association with houses. Ruth Padel discusses this in terms of the view that the house of Hades becomes a paradigm that connects houses, and thus the underworld, to a symbolic interior image for mentality in Greek thought.[146] This idea of the underworld as a reflective space of the mind is similarly discussed by James Hillman in *The Dream and the Underworld*, whereby the underworld house is constructed dream by dream.[147]

The explicit mention of Hell appears in one other moment of the novel, again with the same allusive nod when the inhabitants find a mysterious book that the House's architect, Crane, provided to his daughters. The book further reveals the dangerous, almost occultish situation that they find themselves in. Images of snakes, eternal damnation, and blood writing (p. 168) all point towards a particularly Christian form of hellish torture. The book itself serves to provide a Dantesque contribution to the novel's overall horror; unlike the strange, unseen noises or happenings in the house, this — along with the architect's vampiric statue — offer more obvious hints at the true meaning of what lies within. The book itself neatly reflects the same staged journey that the protagonists find themselves on, as well as being a sort of proto-postmodernist gesture towards the

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[143] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. by Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), p. 17.
[144] Vidler, p. ix.
[145] Sorcha Ní Fhlainn, 'Screening the American Gothic: Celluloid Serial Killers in American Popular Culture', in *American Gothic Culture: An Edinburgh Companion,* ed. by Joel Faflak and Jason Haslam (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2016), pp. 187-202 (p. 187).
[146] Ruth Padel, 'Making Space Speak', in *Nothing to do with Dionysus? Athenian Drama in Its Social Context*, ed. by John J. Winkler and Froma I. Zeitlin (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp. 336-365 (p. 346).
[147] Hillman, p. 133.

nature of the novel form: Luke states that ‘next comes hell’ (p. 168), as though turning the page also furthers the protagonists’ own journeys. To this, Eleanor immediately replies ‘I think I will skip hell’ (p. 168); it is easy to view this statement as an expression of Eleanor’s fear towards the book’s images, however the importance of the architect’s mind and the House’s own supposed personality reflect upon the inhabitants, making it impossible for Eleanor to simply ‘skip’ over her surroundings despite this occurring through their lack of description. However, Crane’s own interests and the mystery surrounding the events within the house are what imbue it with its horror, not the house itself. The horror that Eleanor experiences, as well as her own mentality and trauma, is but a reflection of this, with the space becoming its conduit. However, the connections all add up to create an image of Hill House as an explicit form of Hell, or at the very least hell*ish*, most of which coming from the observations of its inhabitants across the various stages of their exploration — an exploration which is notably hindered by the architecture itself, and the presentation of the space not just as a Hell, but one that is labyrinthine.

Navigating the labyrinth

As ‘a masterpiece of architectural misdirection’ (p. 106), the space of Hill House is a quagmire of confusion, its Dantean geography deliberately designed (by Jackson, Crane, his builders, and by the thoughts of those within) to confound. There is only so much that Dr. Montague’s knowledge and his map can provide, and Hill House must after all be explored, as that is its very purpose in the narrative. Though the house is largely unchanging in terms of its structure — no walls or rooms move about, no large hidden spaces previously unseen — Hill House’s strange, inward and circling architecture facilitates the need of multiple thresholds, and the fact that the novel is rich in doorways, windows, and separated spaces serves to compound the labyrinthine illusion it creates. Perry and Sederholm remark that Hill House ‘is a vision of a Dantean Hell spiralling downward’ with all the doors to salvation ‘sensibly shut’.[148] For a space to have such a close connection to the epitome of hellspaces and katabatic narrative in Western thought, there can be no doubt that Dante, and indeed Hell, were in Jackson’s mind when composing *Hill House*. Just as Dante’s own hellspace is separated by each circle, so too do the thresholds present in Hill House create the semblance of a space that is markedly compartmentalised, though they occur on the same unilateral plane. The house, the grounds, and the thresholds within all represent parts of a larger hellspace in which depth is a real and felt sensation, even if at times mentally. It is a supposedly mapped space that evades concrete cartography. The sense of graduality that Jackson imbues her work with allows small details to reveal themselves slowly, almost like a path unwinding towards the truth; it is not about the immediate revelation that

[148] Perry and Sederholm, p. 100.

movement would bring, but rather the slow dissection of what can occur in an already, previously-thought explored space.

The confusion of exploring *Hill House* is aided by the design of the house itself; closed doors repeatedly block their path, the house evading understanding through its mired history of family hauntings and suicide, holding within its darkness all manner of secrets that its wanderless inhabitants find difficulty in dissecting due to their languid behaviour. The inhabitants of the house profess a desire to draw guidelines, arrows and signs that would point the way through the house's uncharted wastes, and use the more domestic, firelit settings of bedrooms and drawing rooms to plot their courses through each section, and though they still explore unchanging environments with no clear purpose, they purposefully plan their movements within. However, it is when this physical movement begins that the difficulty of Hill House's architecture is revealed. Not only do the doors bar their way, often closing of their own accord, but the rooms themselves are never where they think they will be. The inhabitants are often left confused by their surroundings even after exploration; despite the mapping, the house persists in convoluting its own architecture for the inhabitants. When Eleanor and Theodora first decide to explore the grounds, Eleanor remarks on the heaviness of the door, noting that they will 'have to find some easier way to get back in' (p. 48). The large, wooden front door of the house, the most easily accessible threshold bar the gate, is closed not by the unknown force of the house, but by Mrs. Dudley once Eleanor and Theodora are outside. The gate and the forest beyond reference Virgilian and Dantean motifs and reaffirm the notion of barriers which bar the view of Hill House and mire any possible impressions.[149] It acts as a separation from the rest of its surroundings, marking it as a different world from where they come from; despite not being far from Hillsdale, Jackson gives the impression that the inhabitants are alone for miles, barred in by the same gates and forest that previously kept them out. The 'thick oppressive trees' (p. 27) immediately signify the move into a new zone, insinuating the horrors that will lie past their branches. When Eleanor comes across the gate to the house itself, she finds it barred not only by its ominous darkness, locked by chain and padlock, but by the house's caretaker, Mr. Dudley (p. 28). This gate is the largest and most definite threshold that Eleanor or anyone else passes. All other thresholds encountered thereafter are mere passages from one part of the House or its grounds to another, separate spaces within the larger whole. Her negotiation at the entrance proves Hill House to be 'as hard to get into as heaven' (p. 28), from which can only be concluded the same improbability of getting out. There is a sense of finality to Eleanor's status outside of the gate, and though she debates turning back, once set on the road she does not revert, and when Eleanor comes up to the steps that lead to the House proper, she remarks on

[149] Aeneas enters a forest in order to find a bough for the Sybil before passing through the gates of Dis, and Dante's first canto opens in a forest (see Canto 1, Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, trans. by Robin Kirkpatrick (London: Penguin Books, 2013)).

their ‘no escape manner’ (p. 35). Stairs often signify anabatic removal from the hellspace, leading up and out —fleetingly seen, for example, with the winding stairs of the confounding tower. Their intrinsic role as a reversed katabasis into the house is implied, and the house itself cuts a sinister figure above her, absent of the light and freedom associated with ascent. Stairs do, of course, figure in other sections of the house, and the tower and the library are both areas that are associated with the deepest parts of Eleanor’s psychological breakdown, her movements up them likewise signalling katabasis rather than anabasis, trapping Eleanor in an endless cycle of misdirection.

Once within Hill House, Eleanor is surrounded by more traditional architectural features, and yet ones that hold a variety of potential. Windows and doors are often figured as passages into other worlds, offering a modern counterpart to the rivers, forests, and caves of katabases past. Though they are viewed in this manner in other chapters of this thesis, for Hill House, these entryways and lookouts serve other purposes whilst still containing the same provision of thresholds, this time ostensibly shut. While they still offer boundaries between rooms and the exterior and interior of the house, they hold a direct power over the trajectory of the inhabitants’ directions; any thresholds they might navigate are opened or closed by those other than the main explorers, therefore confining them to a specific path. When assessing the architecture of the house, Eleanor finds that all of the doors within her line of vision are closed (p. 37). Not only does this provide Hill House a sense of claustrophobia by narrowing her perceived spatial boundaries, but raises the question, when already presented with the house’s sinister nature, of what lies behind them. As closures between the known and the unknown, Hill House’s doors are able to control the perception and awareness of the space for those who enter it. Theodora desires to leave every door she finds open in order to offer herself a clear path (p. 63), however the inhabitants find that any door they open soon winds up closed (p. 97): the residents have no jurisdiction over their own movements. When discussing whether to lock the doors, Dr. Montague insists that it would make no difference, and when Eleanor asks if someone were to break in and questions their safety, he casts her a strange look (p. 89). Again, Dr. Montague exhibits a higher degree of governance within Hill House that sees him police thresholds, and yet by deciding against locking the doors themselves, they give up another degree of control. Similarly, just as the shut doors provide a sense of entrapment, so too do Hill House’s strange ‘inside rooms’, which contain no ‘windows, no access to the outdoors at all’ (p. 64). Though both windows and doors act as entrances to otherworlds, windows ‘relate the outside world to the interior’;[150] they are less claustrophobic, and represent a sort of looking out towards a further plane. Though used as thresholds

[150] Gillian Beer, ‘Windows: Looking in, Looking Out, Breaking Through’, in *Thinking on Thresholds*, ed. by Subha Mukherji (London: Anthem Press, 2011), pp. 3-16 (p. 3).

to other (often mirrored) worlds in katabatic narratives,[151] they appear as nothing-spaces in *Hill House*, and corroborate the notion that thresholds within the novel offer no anabatic potential.

All thresholds are used to strengthen the sense of the uncanny in the interior of Hill House and create a sense of hellishness for the inhabitants. Alone in her bedroom, Eleanor locks her door — a rare display of control — and believes herself safe from the other inhabitants and the unknowns of the house. The bedroom itself, in its all-blue strangeness, is unsettling. The faulty, chilling design and dimensions, with the walls in one direction 'a fraction longer than the eye could endure, and in another direction a fraction less than barest possible tolerable length' (p. 37), provides a sense of uncanniness and un-belonging which stems from the dimensions of the walls themselves, an unsettling illusion that signifies wrongness. This room, as Eleanor questions, is where 'they want [her] to *sleep*' (p. 37), as though emphasising the very notion as impossible. When considered in terms of the architectural inward spiral, the bedroom is the safest domain within the house, the most personal, signified by the closeness of the space with identity and the control the inhabitant has over the door's closure.[152] The unease with which thresholds are treated, however, provide the locked door of Eleanor's bedroom no sense of the safety it is typically associated with. Eleanor becomes paranoid, lapsing into the beginnings of a self-doubt that will later be unleashed through the encouragement of the architecture:

> 'She shivered and sat up in bed [...] and went, barefoot and silent, across the room to turn the key in the lock of the door; they won't know I locked it, she thought, and went hastily back to bed [...] she found herself looking with quick apprehension at the window, shining palely in the darkness, and then at the door [...] and looked again over her shoulder, compulsively, at the window, and then again at the door, and thought, Is it moving? But I locked it; is it moving?' (p. 91)

Here, the gaze is unsettled, constantly moving around and further confusing the perception of space. There is a sense of being under observation, and it is unclear who Eleanor's repeated comment of 'they' refers to, whether that be Dr. Montague, the Dudleys, or some believed other force. There is a sense of anxiety provided by the very architecture of the house, and the uncomfortableness with which the inhabitants reside in the house is also expressed in a room of Dr. Montague's choosing, which has an unpleasantly high ceiling, a fireplace that shows no warmth, light shades which cast shadows into the corners of the room, and chairs that offer no comfort (p. 59). Domesticity, as noted, has no place in Hill House, and the architecture and furniture go out of the way to exasperate this. Dr.

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[151] Evans Lansing Smith, 'Framing the Underworld: Threshold Imagery in Murnau, Cocteau, and Bergman, *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 24.3 (1996), 241-240 (p. 243).
[152] Bachelard, p. 136.

Montague checks off each traditionally comfortable domestic feature — fireplace, chairs, lamps — to tease the imagination through unpleasant associations with shadows and slipperiness, a play on opposites that reaffirms the notion that nothing in Hill House is as it seems, adding to the overall discomfort. Unpleasantness is matched with comfort (p. 91) which inevitably leads to a sense of strange un-belonging and of never settling. Vilder explains this sensation as a process in which 'first the house, haunted or not, that pretends to afford the utmost security…[opens] itself to the secret intrusion of terror'.[153] This process is subtle; the House slowly lulls the characters not into a false sense of security —as the inhabitants are aware of its haunted nature from Dr. Montague's letter— but a sort of acquiescence that allows for the house to hide its possible hellish nature whilst almost flaunting it, with the house itself 'stead[ying] and locat[ing] them' (p. 58). The strange conditions that surround movement in the house, the unspoken rule of being as quiet and unobtrusive as possible, heightened by the pervasive sense of fear of the house's appearance and history provides, shows that even after the initial lull, Eleanor is still overtly aware of her presence within the house and is unwilling to disturb whatever force lies within, as though her silence will allow her easier navigation (p. 41).

The strange sense of vertigo that stems from the house's uneven architecture is similarly found in its exterior. When staring up at the enigmatic tower, Luke warns Eleanor that, despite standing solidly on the veranda, she will fall (p. 113). The trees and the lawn seem to tilt, as though the house affects some kind of dizziness, destabilising any assumption of stability. Dr. Montague notes that this strange sensation is 'not so bad when you're *inside* the house' (p. 114), as if the surrounding walls somehow protect the inhabitants from it despite the architecture reflecting it. The intrinsic properties of the tower imply the possibility of a view that would explain the architecture of the house, and yet again Jackson limits the inhabitants' and the readers' perceptions in a way that further confuses the overall structure. At one point, Eleanor is found by the other inhabitants leaning over the railing of the veranda, observing the mysterious tower. She sees the veranda itself holding Hill House together, creating its own world (p. 112), and the tower itself as the imposing standing structure of the House, the last feature to remain if it were to burn down (p. 113). The veranda, like Eleanor, is both inside and outside the House, a part of and apart from the structure, a conduit between both spaces: the liminality of the veranda is reflective of Eleanor's own liminality. It is in this moment that Eleanor sees a vision of death in the House, viewing herself as the 'slight creature' (p. 113) that will enter the tower, that place so suffused with tension and rife with a self-aware foreshadowing. As always, the image and its connotations are short-lived, and Luke tears Eleanor away before either she or the reader can dwell on its deeper meaning. Eleanor's frantic ascent of the tower at the end simply

[153] Vidler, p 11.

consolidates what the reader already knows; once the gates closed behind her, there was no method of escape from the house proper. The stairs to the tower would, after all, simply lead to the roof, and Eleanor's departure from the house must mimic her arrival. The tower serves as a central architectural point that is provided a certain mysterious significance not only due to its location but as a possible route to freedom, its perceptions again pushed on by the inhabitants.

Another such central space in the house is the library, which is at the very heart of the novel both in terms of the space itself adjoining the tower and the novel's preoccupation with its own written form. In a book that already contains another book as its key component of mystery, it is a narrative in which books themselves hold the key to the machinations of the house, and it is no surprise that Eleanor's eventual downfall occurs in the confines of the library, a cold, dark space that reflects the architect's own interiority. It introduces a strand of the self-conscious through various references — Dr. Montague professes a desire to write a book (p. 59) and Theodora discusses the four of them as characters, a notion repeated by Luke (p. 57) — all of which compound the narrative as a story. This is again reflected the most through Eleanor, whose journey to the house is infused with fantasy imaginings and her discussion with Theodora where she believes to have been to the river and the garden before 'in a book of fairy tales' (p. 52). What the library, the narrative references, and the tower do is confirm Eleanor's own naivety and susceptibility to the space of the House and its supposed machinations, all of which reflect her own sense of self that see her subsume herself deep into the space, in a way confirming that 'Eleanor *is* House' but also that the House is Eleanor, built up by her own understanding.

What this does is set up the House as a void which Eleanor is able to fill. García writes that holes, or void-spaces, denote 'an ontological and epistemic uncertainty...a domain that has not been codified yet',[154] and there can be none other than Eleanor who will assume the role of codifier. García goes on to detail the concept of a 'cannibal space', one which is able to devour the human subject that resides within it. The house's depiction as a dark, void-like space, alive with the sinister possibilities of devouring the subject, is felt by Eleanor immediately: 'I am like a small creature swallowed whole by a monster' (p. 42). The connotations of 'monster' speak for themselves. This comparison effectively emphasises the hostility of the House to its inhabitants; the house, or the monster, has the capability of swallowing travellers like a dark void, subsuming their identities and aligning with García's 'cannibal spaces' which sees Eleanor's eventual, real consumption by the house that concludes with complete suffusion. As such, to be inside something is to be something. That is not to say that 'Eleanor is House' can be read entirely in this way; Eleanor's subsumption by the house may

[154] García, p. 38.

not involve a complete transformation into the architectural space, and rather she becomes a complex Other that encompasses all of her past and present experiences in a space that is specifically designed to prey on her anti-domestic sensibilities and upbringing. The deep shadows on the floor of the house when she first enters create the image of a void within the architecture, a dark, blank space that, with Eleanor's presence, may now be filled. The unsettling experience of the void, an 'utter no-place', is described by Casey as being intolerable,[155] and voids are often locations of bodily appearances — in this case, the body being the shadow of Eleanor, and her ensconcement reveals the pervasive claustrophobia that lays over the inside of the house, heavy with the containment of its horror. Whether from the pressing architecture or the sense of impending consumption, the walls are imbued with a sense of closure. It holds darkness within its walls (p. 3) — either through its nature or the simple fact of it containing inside rooms with no windows —and on more than one occasion the house's ability to maintain control over the inhabitants is remarked upon. When Theodora suggests an excursion outdoors, Eleanor claims that they 'can't go very far from the house' (p. 48), as though the same force that causes claustrophobia and doorways to close has a power outside the bounds of the house proper that succeeds in keeping them within its grasp. Though Eleanor notes the brightness of the fading sunlight outside in comparison to the darkness within (p. 48), everything beyond the gated confines is still within the bounds of its cannibalistic force. However, the pervasiveness of the House still casts a pall over Hillsdale too; the horror comes not from the barring of the protagonists inside, but of its unbarred nature.

The House, however, becomes the whole world for the inhabitants in the form of a deliberate claustrophobia intended to completely break off the traveller from their previous locations and selves, paving the way for their disintegration and thus the assumption of their new identity. Once within the confines of Hill House, the outside world becomes an almost forbidden subject; Theodora refuses to provide more than a simple answer about her life, and little is expressed by either Dr. Montague or Luke of their own. Once firmly within the hellspace that is the House, it becomes all. The outside world increasingly diminishes the longer Eleanor remains situated in Hill House. 'Is there still a world somewhere?' (p. 150), she asks idly, a question which implies that not only is Hill House a separate domain, but that it is one of entirely different worldly connotations to the cities and towns she knew before entering. All that can be remembered of the outside world is that 'there is no other place than this', and she cannot picture 'any world but Hill House' (p. 151). Not only does this suggest that Hill House, despite being a simple built structure, is able to encompass and be referred to in such planetary terms, but confirms its existence in the mind of the inhabitants as a separate space. They have become ghosts with no worldly identity other than their hellspace selves, reminiscent of Homer's husk-like,

[155] Casey, p. 6.

anonymous dead who have no care of the world above or their position within it.[156] Hill House lulls its inhabitants into false senses of security, presenting a form of a twisted, comfortable Hell. The revelation of the space as Hell is slow and deliberate, involving a breakdown of boundaries that coincides with the length of Eleanor's stay within; the longer that she remains, the more the outside world diminishes, and the more her own mentality slips due to the horrific ambiguity of the events which follow. Against the backdrop of a deceptively domestic setting, Eleanor loses herself to become the very haunting that she fears it to hold, a haunting described by Julian Wolfreys as 'nothing other than the destabilisation of the domestic scene, as that place where we apparently confirm our identity, our sense of being, where we feel most at home with ourselves'.[157] The 'haunting' of Hill House, then, is not the strange, demonic force that appears to possess it; rather, it is the destabilisation of its inhabitants when presented with the bare bones of the house as a home that is adamant at keeping domesticity out, imagined as such through the gaze. Any domesticity that is presented is an uneasy one, quickly dissolved. Houses are spaces of torment for their inhabitants, regressors of memories, and their purpose as Hell is to extract the identity of the inhabitants from the very walls that are imbued with their adolescent traumas, and yet despite home for Eleanor being seen as a space she 'inhabits [with] a ghostlike state of weariness and despair',[158] plagued by the ministrations of her sister and late mother, Eleanor's past does not amount to anything and is not discussed heavily beforehand. All that matters is what occurs in the House, and her thoughts and actions within are mere reflections of her time there. This pervasive space of un-belonging allows her own shadows to heighten and for the space to be simply perceived as an ultimate, torturous Hell because of how it makes her feel and what she thinks she sees.

Conclusion

The representation of katabasis arises in *Hill House* from Jackson's destruction of convention; by building up expectation only to quash it, the reader's implicit familiarity with the pattern of the mytheme and even the Gothic are played with. Through the use of Dantean motifs and geography to the twisted configuration of Eleanor's journey and the guide, associations to the pattern and to Hell serve as implicit reminders of the methods used to convey a sense of horror and narrative trajectory. The novel's importance, however, lies in what it does not do with convention; symbols, motifs, language, character roles and narrative events are all relied on due to the supposed significance that they provide, and yet go against their basic representations. By disregarding or playing with the

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[156] Carol Zaleski, *Otherworld Journeys: Accounts of Near-Death Experience in Medieval and Modern Times* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 17.
[157] Julian Wolfreys, *Victorian Hauntings: Spectrality, Gothic, the Uncanny and Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), p. 5.
[158] Munford, p. 126

Gothic, setting up the importance of supernatural events, and by providing such significance to places such as the library and the tower only to have them be insignificant and entirely useless to Eleanor's escape, Jackson is able to build a novel that relies entirely on playing against custom in a way that paradoxically provides little and yet ultimate significance to the motifs, symbols, and language that she uses. She removes any element of authenticity to the role of the guide, building upon an expectation of protective figures, and casts it in a more destabilising light. By building up a perception of space by the inhabitants, Hill House is automatically provided an instability by simply being made up of the ideals and ideologies of its protagonist and other inhabitants, and yet ultimately the house is just a house, and any perceptions of it supplied, any hauntings it may possess, is simply a product of the outsider, filling the space with their own insecurity. In this way, no emotion, sight, or understanding can fully be taken for granted. The mystery of Hill House's nature is never revealed, nor the truthful extent of the events that occur within. The presence of katabasis, then, is made up from the narrative reminders that Eleanor is undergoing a kind of descent in a space reminiscent to Hell, with all the hallmarks present and yet playfully misrepresented.

"SOME KIND OF EXISTENTIAL CHASM OPENS UP BEFORE ME": BRET EASTON ELLIS'S *AMERICAN PSYCHO*

American Psycho, Bret Easton Ellis' 'boundary-breaking' novel,[159] has been the subject of many previous readings; from a satirical commentary on consumerism and capitalism to a fetishistic portrayal of misogyny or a modern Gothic horror, criticism abounds regarding Patrick Bateman as a symbol of 1980's yuppie culture and the sociopolitical state of New York. The novel has also been closely associated with the rise of serial killing in America, from which came a period of heavy appropriation in the form of slasher fiction that the novel is meant to emulate with its designer-clad, overtly masculine killer of women.[160] It is also referenced briefly in terms of a capitalist Hell by Falconer, who reads Bateman's katabasis as a descent into the workplace but not one which necessarily damages his own slick vapidity. Here, however, it is argued that *American Psycho* offers a distinctly internal form of the pattern both in terms of the presentation of its protagonist, a descent into the psyche, and New York as a form of Hell. This association and reading of katabasis as such is nothing new: again, Falconer's work contains a chapter on descents in mental illness memoirs and the destabilising effects of PTSD in terms of war katabases; Hillman's *The Dream and the Underworld* connects the concept of madness with the evil associated with the underworld; and both Feder's *Madness in Literature* and Hershkowitz's *The Madness of Epic* (1998) provide readings of madness in the ancient world, solidifying it as a possible component of the Classical pattern. Despite *American Psycho*'s explicit interactions with Classical or mediaeval associations of Hell and katabasis being limited to the use of Dante's *Inferno* in its opening lines, the allusions and language used in regards to both Hell and descent see it present in a different form.

American Psycho offers an almost entirely mental katabasis, more so than any other text in this thesis. While other texts are discussed in regards to psychological implications in a way that renders the traveller mentally destabilised as a result of their ordeals, *American Psycho* differs in that it offers up a protagonist that is already unstable; rather than the mind being affected by descent or warped by the spaces occupied, the connection between Patrick and his own katabasis is more synonymous. As such, rather than having a specific goal, destination or impetus, the katabasis lacks any of the actual drives of the journey in so much as to actually negate the concept of 'journey' entirely. There is a distinct lack of any clear trajectory which completely transforms and disfigures its alignment with the parameters of katabasis; no physical journey occurs on a downward plane to a space explicitly categorised as Hell. Instead, the novel presents a protagonist who not only creates his

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[159] Philip L. Simpson, *Psycho Paths: Tracking the Serial Killer Through Contemporary American Film and Fiction* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), p. 155.
[160] Brian Baker, *Masculinity in Fiction and Film: Representing Men in Popular Genres 1945-2000* (London: Continuum, 2006), p. 72.

own hellspace, but suffers solely due to his own actions. The journey, if it can be constituted as such, is construed so that the formulation of the hellspace is figured as the actual mind of the protagonist, rather than simply a reflection onto the space around them, and the navigation therefore involves mapping the trajectory of that instability. Section I covers this trajectory through a discussion of the way that surface and beneath and the movements between align with Patrick's own psychopathy and identity, as well as how that identity is doubled. Section II focuses on the space of New York not only as another facet of Patrick's personality but as an actual controllable plane which is used to reflect the mental katabasis as it is set out, compared against the backdrop of the literal city as it is presented. The term katabasis itself will be questioned in terms of the novel's use of movements and the descriptions of the hellspace that are provided. The chapter also deals with the novel's use of cinematic language and the way in which it figures as a destabilising element, as well as a reflection of the slasher film culture, which aids in continuing the relevance of perceptions and the gaze to the construction of the pattern.

I. "My Life is a Living Hell": The Mental Katabasis of Patrick Bateman

American Psycho is a novel in which the protagonist is all: there is no narrative and no text without Patrick Bateman. Due to this focus on identity, the katabasis is personalised as a product of his own actions, and the representation of Hell comes to align with his own individuality. The pattern has already been established as a trajectory that involves the questioning of identity and the possible disintegration of the self, a process which arises out of a difficulty of consolidation. Patrick's self, however, is unstable from the offset, made up of allusions, a being of stereotype and inference, all of which presaging the catastrophes of consolidation that are to come. He cannot be thought of as an autonomous creation; he is, above all, an imitation or collection of stereotypes into one individual — such as being a facet of Norman Bates, with the title and his name being an allusion to Hitchcock's *Psycho*, along with his psychosis—and to narrow him down to simply a consumerist yuppie reflective of Wall Street culture, or a reflection of slasher serial killers both real and fictional, is a disservice. Rather, Patrick is a reflection of nearly everything in the novel, including the other individuals he encounters, figuring as both a parody and a stereotype of the American serial killer craze of the 80s and 90s and the rising trend of slasher films around the time of the novel's conception and publication whilst simultaneously connecting his violent consumption to that of his Wall Street persona. Sorcha Ní Fhlainn, who tracks the trend in depictions of American serial killers in popular culture versus the background of the American Dream, notes that 'serial killers in fiction and film tend to be the product of deeply destructive psychological fractures: madness that masquerades just below the surface of

everyday normalcy'.[161] The events of serial killer narratives 'are contained within an individual consciousness',[162] from which the state of the mind and identity can be extrapolated. It is through his individual consciousness that the narrative unfolds, a struggle for identity within the world around him that he is intrinsically a part of, his attempts to both differentiate and assimilate becoming the whole of his katabasis.

Surfaces

Ni Fhlainn's comments on serial killers as masqueraders of violence beneath the surface reveals the configuration of *American Psycho*'s katabasis; rather than being informed on the basis of spatial categorisations to conceptualise a journey into a literal underground space, the usual parameters of surface and beneath instead become personas and parameters within Patrick himself, and the concept of movement between instead becomes the difference between his outward presentation and inner psychopathy. In this way, the katabasis is inherently more informed on the basis of the protagonist's identity than any other in this thesis, with any language used to notify a form of descent linking less to anywhere physical (in fact, Patrick does not enter anywhere markedly below level except, as discussed later, an underground bar named 'Tunnel') and more to both mentality and personality. On the surface, Patrick is a narcissistic, misogynistic consumerist, no different to any of the other multitude of faceless, Christian Dior-clad stockbrokers who roam the streets of New York in search of new dining experiences and sexual conquests. This identity is one presented entirely outward, largely through his clothing and conversation, surface-level and vapid descriptors of identity - even his job could be any kind of stock broker, investment banker, or other financial role, all merging together and as indifferent from anyone else he dines and drinks with. However, this is not the true Patrick, as he himself acknowledges: instead, he is 'a fucking evil psychopath'[163] who, beneath the surface of this false persona, masturbates to torture porn, commits murder, and attempts to cannibalise his victims. It is a state of mind that is hidden, at least at the beginning, in the same way that he closets a knife in the pocket of his Valentino jacket (p. 5): behind the veneer of his consumerism hides the killer. His insults and comments on serial killers and the depraved acts he wishes to commit to those around him are peppered around discussions of luxury goods or in high-end restaurants. The way in which Patrick keeps the disembodied vaginas of his victims in his gym locker is symbolic of this separation — in a way, of his 'inside' and 'outside' selves: the evidence of the violence which occupies his nights is locked inside a small, dark space, for which only he has the key.

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[161] Ní Fhlainn, p. 188.
[162] David Seed, 'The Culture of the Spectacle in *American Psycho*', in *Hitchcock and Adaptation: On the Page and Screen*, ed. by Mark Osteen (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), pp. 279-295 (p. 298).
[163] Bret Easton Ellis, *American Psycho* (London: Picador, 2015), p. 19.

It is precise and meticulous, wrapped up neatly in a bow, to be taken out and looked at or to remain hidden depending on his desires.

The dichotomy between these selves is at the crux of Patrick's katabasis. Specifically, his inability to consolidate both parts of himself into a succinct whole and the increasing difficulty of hiding his beneath self are often the cause of his descents. In part, the need for this consolidation arises out of the erasure of his sense of surface self. Not only does this occur by having his character based around vague stereotypes (and even his beneath self being the imitation of other individuals whether through real life serial killers or popular fictional characters), but is mimicked in the novel by his constant misidentification by those around him. His surface self, designer-dressed and hardbody-appreciating, is a clone of everyone else. His associates are all similar, their business cards just a difference of font size or infinitesimal shading, and due to this any sense of a differentiating surface self is easily erased, and in fact due to this misidentification Patrick is consistently ignored by almost everyone in the novel at one point or another. Conversations that appear to be fully comprehensible suddenly turn as the other individual appears to mishear, or simply talk over him. In these moments, Patrick's sensibilities, his anger and instability, surface. His continued avoidance or lack of acknowledgment by others see his comments that reveal the other self occur on the periphery. He appears to admit 'You are an ugly bitch' (p. 57) and 'I'm utterly insane...I like to dissect girls' (p. 207) in full hearing, and yet these comments go unremarked. By being ignored by those who he is supposed to use for validation, Patrick's surface identity becomes less tangible than his beneath self, which is able to take over through the element of anger that this process of erasure causes, his inability to showcase who he actually is setting up the torment in the novel and becoming its Hell. It is a state and status that he is fully aware of; 'my life is a living hell' (p. 136), he mourns, the exact phrase later repeated (p. 333). Both times it is uttered, he is ignored. Though colloquial, it points towards his viewing of his life as a torment specifically designed for him, revealing the suffering he believes himself to be under; Hell, for Patrick, is something different, something inherently connected to his personality more so than his physical locale. It is a social Hell, one that combats and contrasts against the mental descents that occur in tangent.

Despite this different formulation of Hell, there is still an element of traceable descent to the novel that follows the trajectory of his increasing difficulty at consolidating both parts of himself, made all the more difficult by the ignorance of those around him. Rather than a formulaic descent, the novel contains a collection of vignettes which all together serve to provide a generalised sense of mental descent, each one representing a point in the narrative when Patrick's surface self disappears entirely and his beneath self emerges, in which he wreaks the most havoc and violence. Extreme

moments of disorder that gradually grow in extremity are interspersed around Patrick's surface life, a series of manic killings and dazed street wanderings markedly different from the general undercurrents of the novel that prove his periphery comments to not be a simple quirk, as believed by his associates when they are actually acknowledged. These moments, interspersed by relative lucidity, if not anabasis, all point towards his eventual failure of consolidation and contain within them more typical associations of the pattern, though newly formulated. They contain within them an inherent sense of movement, though manic, and a clear point in which the surface self effectively disappears from the narrative. The chapter 'Glimpse of a Thursday Afternoon', a manic and fast-paced episode in which Patrick suffers from a psychotic mental breakdown that sees him winding through alleyways and entering and exiting spaces rapidly, is one of the first of such moments. It both begins and ends mid sentence, a narrative of discontinuity and never-ending movement contained within a chapter interspersed by visits to gigs and bars (though even these show glimpses of this slippage through discussions of *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, the consumption of drugs, and the dream-like bonding moment with Bono). His confusion between a delicatessen and a high-end restaurant and how he buys an axe and acid instead of a teapot merge his surface and beneath self together through their representative identifiers just as the luxury mousse in his hair seeps into the panicked sweat of his face. In 'Chase, Manhattan', which not only sees Patrick visualise the events and his actions in cinematic, story-board format, a switch occurs between narrative viewpoints. Having previously only occurred once before when the novel begins in Price's point of view, seamlessly transforming into the first-person pronoun 'I', 'Chase, Manhattan' sees Patrick move entirely outside of himself into third person in a way that allows for the subject to surface, as Alice Gavin notes, as 'less than a speaker and person',[164] furthering his own destabilisation. It is a scene that sees Patrick descend and ascend the narrative and his own katabasis in a matter of pages. Having spent so long inside Patrick's own head, the reader is left buoyed by a sense of separation, one which forces them to be faced with the reality of their protagonist; here is a man so outside of the world and outside of himself that he forces his own mind from the narrative, and the beneath self entirely takes over. It is a scene that can neatly be packaged into the established pattern. Patrick descends into madness and out of the first person narrative, flying through the streets of New York and participating in a near-farcical chase scene. When he enters his own building, Pierce and Pierce, he is said to move towards a beacon of light, and the elevator rising out of the darkness, slowly revealing not only his return to first person but to himself and his own mind, is an anabatic ending. The vignette is near perfect in its katabatic conception; Patrick himself descends into the narrative, and also further into his own madness, and

[164] Alice Gavin, *Literature and Film, Dispositioned: Thought, Location, World* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 14.

only surfaces again through an anabatic elevator journey, returning to a place that is hallmarked by his previous, more solid identity.

Due to the extent to which Patrick's katabasis relies on his own sense of self, it is one that occurs entirely of his own accord, and as a result he is the sole proprietor of a Hell which occurs on his own terms. He becomes both its product and producer, responsible for the horror and suffering that such a space usually expounds upon its inhabitants whilst also being its victim. As with the proprietors of Hellspaces in other texts (Cob, Hugh Crain, Mother, and Quin), he is responsible not only for its creation and representation but above all its control, at least as far as his own perspective dictates. The dynamics between Patrick's surface and beneath self reveal, however, the difficulty he has in maintaining this control, and as such he must resort to a method of consolidation to do so, one which links to the novel's use of both violence and the conspicuous consumption of the 1980's yuppie culture that he emulates. As John Freccero writes, Hell's structure is 'patterned on that of the human appetite', and as the realm of the depraved, it is Patrick's appetite which maintains it.[165] Patrick uses consumption as a way of validating and positioning himself within his own katabasis as an attempt to explicitly control it as the barriers between surface and beneath become increasingly tenuous. It occurs both at a surface level, through his obsession with skincare, fashion, and music, all part and parcel of his outward personality, and deep within his own mind, a constant reminder of his attempts at solidification. What this consumption involves, however, is a transference of Hell onto those around him — specifically women, homeless people, and homosexuals — who can be identified as antithetical to Patrick in an attempt to solidify his own identity, a coping mechanism for a crisis and a way for him to grasp at the elements of himself that are so apathetic to him. In line with this narrative, David Seed argues that the homeless man in particular 'resembles an inverted self-image for Patrick, hence his angry insistence to the other: "I have nothing in common with you" (126). In other words, the attack functions as a confirmation of Patrick's own status through his attempts to erase his victim's humanity'.[166] Similarly, his torturing of Bethany sees 'her life reduced to a nightmare' (p. 237); he has the ability to change the lives of those around him through his violence, an outward projection of his psychopathy, with which he infects them and the space that surrounds them. The depravity of his mind is revealed through the extent of his acts, ones which have an element of the horrific fantastic to them. By using others as an outlet for his inner violence, he is able to transfer his inner Hell onto them and attempt to remove it from himself. The acts he commits are a form of attempting to solidify his identity and to subsume his victims' own otherness within him - literally, as is the case when he resorts to cannibalism. The lines between himself and the bodies of his victims, however, begin to

[165] John Freccero, 'Dante's Firm Foot and the Journey Without a Guide', *The Harvard Theological Review,* 52.4 (1959), 245-281 (p. 273).
[166] Seed, p 293.

blur; when he uses the mouth of his victim's decapitated head for fellatio in 'Tries to Cook Girl and Eat Her', for instance, her own body consumes his as a precursor to her own consumption. It is, however, a consumption that fails; his attempts to cook and eat her, as the chapter title suggests, simply lead to more frustration, as though he cannot fully commit to the personality that he believes himself to have.

This failure is similarly reflected in his use of sex as another method of confirming his self and identity. Acting as a means of consumption within the novel and evoking the perception of the 1960s-80s serial killer as being a crazed sex fanatic and reflecting a 'consumerist and consumption-driven American nightmare',[167] Patrick's sexuality is also an important facet of his identity; repeatedly, the novel features discussions between him and his peers on the bodies of women or their sexual conquests. 'Hardbodies' become a commodity to analyse and trade, a way of confirming their masculinity, prowess, and sense of self. Women, to Patrick, are Other figures that he is both reviled by and drawn to. They are the object of his torment and a manifestation of his desires— desires which, notably, never turn towards erotic or romantic. Sex for Patrick largely fails if it does not include elements of violence, and a vast majority of Patrick's killings and tortures are sex-related, whether heterosexual or homosexual. His own failures at sexual release with 'real' women lead him towards a grotesque, fetishistic, sadomasochistic treatment of them, another element of frustration. A moment such as him turning to masturbation after failing to have sex with Evelyn, in which he thinks of a faceless model instead of an actual human, prefigures his later turn towards violence (p. 23). It is a scene which hints at the extent of Patrick's Otherness, and one of many moments in which he not only fails at the prospect of mundane sexual relations, but transfigures the real and unreal in terms of sexualisation. In fact, at times they act as a kind of barrier, a real-world anchor against the vast extent of his psychosis; 'I know I won't have enough time to masturbate over the scene where a woman is getting drilled to death... since I have a date with Courtney' (p. 67). Courtney serves only to get in the way of Patrick's true desires, and the one scene that explicitly shows their sexual interaction is disastrous; Patrick is near scrambling amongst bottles of prescription drugs and arguments about spermicide, all the while focusing on the movements of his own body and his reflection in the mirror, using Courtney's makeup to fix himself (p. 101). His own infatuation with his perfect, masculine form intersperses the narrative of his sexual acts towards women, who serve only to solidify his yuppie status and identity, a confirmation of the fact that he is capable of having sex with them simply because of who he is. Mary Harron's adaptation similarly showcases Patrick participating in a sexual act with two prostitutes in which he focuses solely on his own reflection in the mirror before them, going so far as to flex his muscles, pointing towards his own image in a

[167] Ni Fhlainn, p. 187.

self-congratulatory manner, preoccupied with himself rather than the naked women in front of him. The camera he uses to film this interaction serves as a further lens that he can use to view himself, not only by placing him within the realm of pornography that he himself uses, but as an extension of his own eye which he repeatedly tells them to 'look into'.[168]

His reliance on his sexuality as a method of consolidation is similarly shown through his Othering of homosexuals, which reveals an undercurrent of discomfort. Patrick's possible homosexual tendencies are debatable; while moments such as his interaction with Bono, which leaves him with an erection, his confrontation with Luis in the restroom, and the discussions held on the AIDS epidemic reveal an undercurrent of homosexuality, it is somewhat unfitting to read Patrick as a 'closeted homosexual' who refuses to acknowledge his own tendencies, as others have.[169] Though he participates only in sexual acts with women, the same violence and 'othering' that occurs is also passed on to homosexuals: his attempt to strangle Luis in the bathroom, who misconstrues the intention of his advances, and his murdering of the homosexual individual align with their treatment, however they do not culminate in the same sexual acts as his treatment of women do. Rather, they are a way in which Patrick further alienates himself from society. Evelyn's previous comments and his own self-obsession point towards an individual who uses sexual gratification as an outlet for his own violent desires and as a way of stabilising his fractured mind, however in reality he shows no true or latent sexual drive that is not paired with violence. His methods of solidification are gruesome and abhorrent, but no kill gives him lasting satisfaction or in any way precedes an anabatic event that would see him resurface (indeed, the resurfacing, if it can be said to occur at all, must wait for the reemergence of Timothy Price into the narrative, as discussed later), yet again proving another failure in terms of consolidation.

The overall katabasis of the novel, represented through these vignettes and attempts at transforming himself, is mapped by his continual failure. Patrick's attempts at differentiating himself only serve to solidify his own mental breakdown as the barriers between these identities blur and are ultimately found to not exist at all, whereby his sense of self is erased so entirely that he becomes nothing. Towards the end of the novel, Patrick's sense of self is lost to the point that his katabasis becomes mentally aligned with void-space imagery: 'Some kind of existential chasm opens up before me' (p. 172); 'really on the brink' (p. 227). He is entirely self-aware yet at the same time still portrayed as a largely unreliable narrator due to the extent that his actions can be and are questioned,

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[168] *American Psycho*, dir. by Mary Harron (Lions Gate Films, 2002).
[169] Zachary Snider, 'The Wall Street Businessman Goes Metrosexual', in *Merchants, Barons, Sellers and Suits: The Changing Images of the Businessman Through Literature*, ed. by Christa Mahalik (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), pp. 204-218 (p. 209).

again showing an element of lucidity amongst the disorder. Patrick is able to self-analyse in a way that perfectly sums up his own psychopathy: 'I had all the characterizations of a human being - flesh, blood, skin, hair - but my depersonalization was so intense, had gone so deep, that the normal ability to feel compassion had been eradicated, the victim of a slow, purposeful erasure' (p. 271). He presents himself as the void before descent; rather than it being a space as occurs in most physical katabases, this void is one entirely composed of the mental images and associations of the self, and depth becomes entirely internal. It is a void that is actually widening throughout the course of the novel to the point that he is not there at all, entirely consumed by nothingness (p. 308, 329). When dining with Evelyn at a surprisingly unnamed restaurant—as though he has missed his usual detailing —he begins to hallucinate. Beforehand, Evelyn insinuates his inhumanity, terming him a ghoul, and as Patrick suffers from the same misidentification and amalgamation of individuals in regards to her current partner, he experiences a moment of extreme mental instability in which he imagines 'blood pouring from automated tellers' and 'women giving birth through their assholes' (p. 330). Patrick scrambles against the eddying flow of his own disintegration in a way that actually pushes his own self further away, attempting straight afterwards to cook his victim, which ends disastrously.

Reflections

The dynamic between surface and beneath, alongside Patrick's attempts at consolidating the self through the consumption or destruction of oppositions, reveals *American Psycho*'s involvement with doubling. It is a concept that reaffirms both Patrick's loss of identity and his outward projection of separate selves, not only aiding in further blurring the boundaries of surface and beneath but identity as a whole. In other chapters, the double has and will be discussed as a reflection of the self, a reflection of the space occupied, or a reflection of the Other within the two, an inherent part of katabasis that involves the consolidation, renewal, or rebirth of traveller's identity after their journey. In regards to *Veniss Underground*, 'the double' is discussed in terms of self and space reflected in the physical and literal doubling of twinship, and for *Passion* the double figures not only in the form of the 'Other' force of Lilith, but in the doubly gendered Eve/Evelyn. Though *Earthsea* featured Ged's splitting of the self into the gebbeth, it was still a secondary form. For *American Psycho*, however, the double is a form of splitting that is not biological but psychological, akin to Eleanor's in *Hill House*. Katherine Burkham discusses the way in which psychological doubling is in itself a reflection of another process, one which has 'the capacity to test reality, to distinguish that which is within the body from that which is without',[170] again linking to this attempt at reaching a conclusion as to which

[170] Katherine Burkham, *The Drama of the Double: Permeable Boundaries* (Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016), p. 14.

self is the truth. For the case of Patrick, doubling is an attempt to reinforce his sense of identity, the impossibility of which consistently reflects the status of his own mind. It is, in a way, like the navigation of a mental labyrinth, one which is a reflection of the mind itself but also must be traversed physically in order to (possibly) escape. Rafail Nudelman writes that the labyrinth itself is symbolically connected to the Double and the mask,[171] an interesting dichotomy which is undeniably found in *American Psycho*; not only does Patrick wear the mask of his Wall-Street-Yuppie-Consumer self, but navigates a maze in reaffirming any sense of self he actually has. Through this he unknowingly projects his (possible) true self on various surfaces; first, in a literal and figurative sense through mirrors (which in turn reflect the connotation of the mask as a reflection of the plastic, yuppie culture that provides everyone an identical veneer for the sake of 'identity', hiding the double life that he leads that sees his yuppie mask slip at night to reveal the psychotic serial killer beneath), secondly through the figure of Timothy Price, and finally on the space of New York.

Mirrors often feature as an element of the battle with the self. Discussed in *Veniss Underground* in terms of the reflected double—similarly here, too, with Timothy Price —and in *Passion* as a space or container of the Other, *American Psycho* uses the physical object of reflection as a method of stabilisation, as the surface of the mirror in actuality reflects the surface self at the time of viewing. Patrick's narcissistic perfectionism is expressed through the sheer amount of reflections that occur in the novel that not only become symbolic of his self-absorption but of consolidation. His view of himself is consistently shown through reflected surfaces, either in mirror form or through the space he occupies. The argument for centring the self surrounds the consistency of Patrick's psychosis and the disintegration of his identity, and if there is a method for Patrick to somehow stabilise the concept of his persona, it would be through viewing himself; take, for instance, the moment before the detective enters to confront him about Paul's murder when he checks his reflection as though to ensure he is both presentable and present. For a novel centring around a culture of narcissistic consumerism, the inclusion of such mirror imagery is apropos to the whole setting. However, when rendering it in light of katabasis, the mirror becomes something Other. In fact, it is a reflection of the Other that is Other, a kind of mirror of a mirror. In her apartment, after Patrick acknowledges his own attractiveness in her mirror (p. 10), Evelyn 'pouts' into the same mirror, 'looking at [him] in its reflection' (p. 17),[172] the mirror here being used not by Evelyn to reflect herself but as a way of looking at Patrick. Ruth Helyer similarly discusses the scene in which Patrick visits his mother in her hospital room, the only point in the novel to feature her, pointing towards the extent of his reliance on

[171] Rafail Nudelman, 'Labyrinth, Double and Mask in the Science Fiction of Sanislaw Lem', in *Learning from Other Worlds: Estrangement, Cognition, and the Politics of Science Fiction and Utopia*, ed. by Patrick Parrinder (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), pp. 178-92 (p. 182).
[172] A moment which echoes *Passion*'s Evelyn and Lilith, in which he watches her watching him.

the object to admire and identify himself.[173] These reflective surfaces are not even restricted solely to mirrors. After killing Bethany, he watches his reflection in a pool of her blood. The original poster for the film shows Christian Bale's Patrick brandishing a knife with his reflection in it, a way of showing that the suave and sophisticated Wall Street idol may actually be a psychotic serial killer. When Patrick and Price visit Evelyn's house for dinner, he sets down a platter of food and catches 'a glimpse of [his] reflection on the surface of the table' (p. 11). The nature of the reflective surface, its size or shape or the actual object, matters nothing here. What actually matters is that Patrick's view of himself is almost entirely constructed through the use of mirrored surfaces; more often than not, he is focused on himself, rather than the space around him. He becomes one with it, and the reflective surfaces are not construed as objects with any other purpose other than to reflect his image back at him. Ultimately, mirrors and mirrored surfaces allow Patrick to centre himself as the semblances of his control slip, lost amongst the multitude of moments that go horribly, sometimes comically, wrong for him. However, despite their presence, much in the same way as his cannibalistic consumption and increasingly horrific violence fail, they do little to cease the sense of the inevitability of his descent.

Another form of doubling, this time outside of the self, comes through Timothy Price. The inclusion of Price and the direction of his narrative throughout the course of the novel is an intrinsic element to mapping Patrick's katabasis, however possible that may be given its non-linear presentation. The novel begins with Price on the streets of New York (p. 3), commenting on the surroundings from his viewpoint. He becomes the momentary first protagonist, one who quickly dissolves in favour of Patrick's voice. The similarities between the two are echoed through their shared perspective of the city; Price notes the same poster of Éponine from *Les Misérables* that figures in Patrick's later panic attack, and the comments on the walkman mirror the scene in which Patrick throws his own away (images that appear during 'Glimpse of a Thursday Afternoon', one of the more extreme vignettes). Price 'grumbl[es] about how he forgot to return the tapes he rented' (p. 7), a clear constant in Patrick's own narrative. Facets of Patrick's life appear within the eight or so pages before his appearance as the protagonist, after which he 'surfaces' and a 'slow dissolve' (p. 7) reveals Patrick's voice as Evelyn comes down the stairs of her apartment. It is a seamless integration, one which occurs without pause. The connotations surrounding the 'dissolving' of Price are multitudinous; a hint at the use of cinematic language, the concept of his 'descent' into the narrative for Patrick's own 'ascent', and a harkening to the dynamic of surface and beneath. Words such as these cannot be used lightly in discussions or readings of the katabatic; their connotations provide an idea or a notion of trajectory, with obvious elements both symbolically and colloquially. As with his

[173] Ruth Helyer, 'Parodied to Death: The Postmodern Gothic of *American Psycho*', *Modern Fiction Studies,* 46 (2000), 725-46 (p. 735).

descent signalling the beginning of the katabatic narrative, Price's reemergence at the end signifies the trope's often cyclical nature, however to construe Patrick's arrival on the page as an 'ascent' into Hell is far too simple a reading. Despite Price and Patrick sharing their narrative comments on Éponine, the walkman, and video tapes, they view the same streets of New York differently; their interactions with the space, and in turn the space's interactions with them, are markedly separate. What this moment does do, however, is solidify that New York itself is a concrete backdrop, one with the same people, posters, and pavements no matter from who's eyes it is viewed by. It lays the groundwork for what will be discussed in Section II in regards to the city as a facet of Patrick's own personality, but does not deny the existence of a core space without his narrative presence.

Patrick's psychosis, though hinted at in the pages before Price's second disappearance through references to his doubled, psychotic lief and self, does not truly come to the forefront until the portentous chapter aptly named 'Tunnel' in which Price runs down a dark cavern in an underground bar. The language of Price's descent — 'I...am...leaving' he states (p. 58), his destination unspecified, his location from then on unknown — echoes Patrick's hallucinatory dining experience with Evelyn before his own final breakdown (p. 329). This moment is one fraught with ambiguity. The 'tunnel' itself, nestled underground in a bar of the same name, is a void within space in which Patrick tries 'to find the point where the tracks come to an end, find what lies behind the blackness' (p. 57). If this moment is figured as both Price and Patrick's katabasis, the space that Price descends to is markedly dark, blank and empty and endless. It is a familiar trope of hellspaces and katabasis in general, as has been shown previously, but here it is not as straightforward. It is not the novel's protagonist who descends, but rather his double. It is also debatable that Patrick 'ascends' further into the narrative at this moment. Price's 'disappear[ance] into blackness' (p. 60) does, however, foreshadow Patrick's own trajectory, one which continues to spiral until Price's reappearance; once Price disappears, Patrick's thoughts become increasingly violent. Though the beginning of the katabasis is difficult to pin down, the cyclical nature of it that often ends in anabasis is not so slippery. When Patrick returns to the site of this descent, it is given less significance; no bouncer guards the entrance, 'no one guards the stairs that lead to the basement' (p. 76), and the space is completely deserted, the dance floor vast and strange. Returning to such a space of importance and finding it less than so sees a lack of revelation and more an insinuation that both Patrick, and thus the reader through expectation, are providing significance where there may be none. Yet, a sense of strangeness remains; it is another moment of narrative slipperiness, of exaggerated, heightened emotion and tension within Patrick that provides more meaning to events and which allows him to view such moments as 'Chase, Manhattan', in which it is entirely unclear as to who is chasing him and why, as such dramatic escapades. Towards the end of the novel, Price is stated to have 'resurface[d]' (p. 369), again providing no detail as to

where he actually was. Patrick concentrates on a smudge on Price's forehead, which seems to detract from the questions of his whereabouts (p. 369), blocking his own thoughts and thus the reader's understanding of the situation in full and disallowing any kind of revelation to occur. This moment figures as a quasi-resolution which sees the violence committed by Patrick stop upon Price's resurgence, but despite this, the novel's ambiguous ending and the overall dichotomy between the real and unreal throughout make it once again difficult to ascertain the exact cause for this termination. Patrick's katabasis, much like his movement during his vignettes, simply halts.

What the presence of Price as a double does is raise questions about the entire narrative outside of his disappearance and reappearance. As shown, a common element of the modern configuration of the pattern often involves a destabilising presence of the unreal, particularly in those texts that take more experimental approaches. Most often, the real is figured as the traveller and the unreal as their surroundings (or at least the way in which they view them) and the course of the trajectory often involves the complex process of them coming to terms with their situation. There is often a tryst between unconscious fantasies and real life circumstances in the narratives that this thesis discusses, which aids in providing another element of uncertainty and instability. *American Psycho*'s narratives, as with all other texts, has a slipperiness to reality that makes any actual arguments about the real rather tenuous, but it is a slipperiness that is self-conscious, with an awareness of the methods of its creation. As such, reality itself is seen as a narrative creation. There is no doubt that Patrick is the narrator of his own life and therefore capable of transforming reality to match his inner thoughts and psyche, which then raises questions in regards to the nature of the reality that is presented in said narrative. Particularly when taken with the concept that Hell for Patrick is being ignored, there is a conscious use of such instability through the institution that the conversations he has with others are not simply ignored but that they never happened in the first place. Patrick even goes so far as to ask Jean if he is dreaming as he dines with her in Arcadia during a moment in which his dissociation sees him flit between concentrational focuses (p. 252), the atmosphere oppositional to the peace of the space's name. Much on the same lines as Danielewski's *House of Leaves*, the reader cannot take for granted any of Patrick's actions or the perceptions he has of events and the spaces he occupies. Ellis himself, in answer to the question of whether or not the killings were a fiction of Patrick's imagination, says 'Could be ... but I'd never commit myself on that. I think it is important that fiction is left to the reader'.[174] The question of reality also reveals the novel's connection to roots of the Gothic, particularly in the work of Poe, which echoes the ambiguity of *Hill House*. Perry and Sederholm discuss this connection in regards to psychological orientations, where dreamlike

[174] Julian Murphet, *Bret Easton Ellis's* American Psycho*: A Reader's Guide* (New York: Continuum, 2002), p. 49.

atmospheres are created through the construction of a fear that 'erase[s] spatial and temporal boundaries'.[175] This connection is also corroborated by Helyer's article 'Parodied to Death', which suggests that the 'Gothic suggestion to fear what is hidden behind locked doors'[176] which pervades the scene in the hospital room can stretch to the entirety of the novel. James Giles goes so far as to suggest that *American Psycho* parodies the Gothic through its 'extreme focus of blood', which sees Patrick figure as a modern-day vampire, one who terrorises the night and consumes the blood and bodies of his victims.[177] His sexual exploits fixate on oral orifices, and the near-comedic scene of him moving through the streets, coat streaming behind him and acting like a banshee all aid in this reading. Above all, *American Psycho* utilises the sense of an unstable reality and the permanent presence of fear to create a locus of unmistakable Gothic tension whilst not actually claiming itself to be a 'Gothic text'. As such, the formulation of the novel's horror, and thus its katabasis, relies on the extent of reality to Patrick's actions.

The reader's perspective of Patrick can change the narrative entirely; one can choose to accept that before them lies a misogynistic, psychotic serial killer who has committed terrible atrocities and somehow managed to get away with it, or to commit to the narrative of instability as it is presented, where the killings are skewed as mere fantasies of a mind broken by his cultural and societal surroundings. It is more, however, that the reader must accept all and nothing, the parts of Patrick that may exist, the ones that certainly do, and those that most probably do not. Again, Seed notes that Patrick is 'the dominant consciousness that the reader cannot escape',[178] a dominant consciousness which is notably Other. Whether or not the acts actually happened in the context of the narrative, there is no avoiding the fact that they were thought of by Patrick's own mind, and therefore through the process of forced imagining for the reader, they may as well have occurred. There is therefore a multitude of readings within the novel, all of which point to the same questions for which the answer is never given; who really is Patrick Bateman, and did any of the narrative actually happen? What is certain is that a form of descent, and a form of living Hell, have occurred for Patrick, which he in turn sees as a personal torture designed by others around him that he simultaneously reflects back onto them, a frantic and heedless exertion against a world that ignores him and where he finds some semblance of comfort with himself and his own reflections. However, if Patrick cannot stabilise himself or his actions both resulting from and in katabasis, as well as stabilising the narrative that they are relayed in, then how can anything be taken for truth?

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[175] Sederholm, Perry, p. 17.
[176] Helyer, p. 737.
[177] James Giles, *The Spaces of Violence* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2006), p. 167.
[178] Seed, 'The Culture of Spectacle', p. 290.

II. "Right in the middle of Nowheres": On the Reflection and Control of Hell

The city

There is no denying the presence of hellish undertones to the novel; whether through the mental torment of the protagonist or the obscene violence perpetrated by him, hell abounds in *American Psycho*, but when it comes to the space of Hell associated with katabasis, the novel again contains a more experimental form: the city. Much like *Veniss Underground*, and to a smaller extent in *Passion*, the space of the city comes to represent Hell, and despite its inherent industrialisation and modernity, reflections are still found in the original frameworks, at least in its mediaeval workings that *American Psycho* follows in its opening line: 'Abandon all hope, ye who enter here' (p. 3). In *Mapping the Underworld*, John Kleiner states that Hell 'is revealed as a coherently organized space articulated according to a clear plan' in Dante's Inferno.[179] The very name - City of Dis - provides a spatial term and a clear articulation of its structure. Cities are also representative of both Heaven and Hell in Christianity,[180] a place both of depravity and divinity. They are spaces of opposing forces; order and disorder, emptiness and fullness, and they contain within them a smorgasbord of antithetical symbols. They are, 'by their very nature, a breeding ground for violent insurgency' [181] — an insurgency that is shown through its inhabitants, in this case Patrick most of all. As with *Hill House*, *American Psycho* specifically connects the protagonist to the perceptions of and reflections of the space occupied on the course of the katabasis. The ordered nature of the city versus the disorder of Patrick's selves and actions reveals the connection between psyches and spaces, as discussed by Debra Shaw, who connects the rise of psychoanalysis with such discourse: 'the ordering of the psyche' is contrasted with or reflected by 'the disordered and uncontrolled 'primitive' within the ordering of both the body and social space'.[182] Though any space within a katabatic novel may be transformed into that novel's hellspace— as long as the katabatant must traverse through it, suffer in some external or internal way, and actually view the space with hellish connotations — the city is one that combines, much like its denizens, a plethora of interpretations, perceptions, and symbologies.

The entirety of *American Psycho*'s narrative (save for one moment outside its boundary within the Hamptons) occurs in the space of New York, and in particular Manhattan. New York is made up of neat square blocks and bisecting lines of streets. If one looks at an aerial map of the city, it

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[179] John Kleiner, 'Mismapping the Underworld', in *Dante Studies, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society*, 107 (1989), 1-31 (p. 9).
[180] Burton Pike, *The Image of the City in Modern Literature* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 7.
[181] Debra Shaw, *Posthuman Urbanism: Mapping Bodies in Contemporary Space (London: Rowman and Littlefield Ltd., 2018),* p. 3.
[182] Ibid., p. 112.

is so clearly a space of architectural engineering that there are no elements of organic nature left at all. Every corner is clearly mapped and measured. The same connotations and routine metaphors, the same allusions to hellish imagery discussed here so far and throughout the rest of this thesis, are invoked in a way that unmistakably equates the modern grid-like city to Hell. The immediate opening echo of Dante's words scrawled above the entrance of the City of Dis and on the walls of New York not only serve as a metafictional notice to the reader of the desolate landscape they are about to endure at the hands of the novel's protagonist, but also to immediately categorise the novel as one which does, at least to some extent, interact with conceptualisations of Hell. As usual, the word 'hell' is one that requires careful analysis in terms of its use in the novel and the exact parameters of its occurrences. While allusions such as the opening serve as signposts to the reader of a greater subtextual or metaphorical use, 'hell' itself appears only a handful of times, all of which colloquially: 'My life is a living hell' (p. 136), 'I'll see you in hell' (p. 172). These two instances are the only times the world itself is referenced in a spatial sense. It is safe to assume that for Patrick and those around him, the word serves the stylised function of denoting a quasi-religious space connected to torture. However, neither instance is capitalised, and therefore is not afforded those connotations automatically; the allusion lies beneath its colloqualisation.

Katabasis by its very definition must involve a downward journey, and yet *American Psycho*, despite being categorised as such by Falconer and here, offers something of a conundrum when it comes to linking it with such a narrative outside of the mental sphere. By nature, a 'descent' is a physical movement, and with a text that provides little to no movement in terms of geographical placement or changes in trajectory, the term katabasis therefore becomes rather tenuous, particularly when taking into account its almost complete lack of underground spaces. The mentality of Patrick's descent as a metaphorical spiral into the abyss of the mind, one that sees him gradually lose sight of his identity and position within the world around him, contrasts with any notions of spatiality and physicality; not only does Patrick's katabasis occur on a mental level, but it must inherently connect to the novel's hellspace, as with all other texts. It is, however, a narrative markedly free of underground spaces; despite the subway of New York spanning the entire level below the city, Patrick's traversing occurs almost solely on a level plane. Perhaps to reflect his higher class status, Patrick does not appear to use the subway, preferring taxis, limousines, or walking. What occurs instead, alongside the concept of moving 'down' through Patrick's mental depravity, is the use of city metaphors to associate a certain level of descent to the narrative. Instances of going downtown, areas more associated in the novel with nightclubs, prostitutes, and murders, negate the requirement of trajectory in terms of their hellishness through the routine metaphor of the word itself and its placement as a lawless section of the city. In terms of ascents, it is more often linked to the idea of moving up in the world, a succession

of reaching for higher planes in terms of capital and fame — hence Patrick's high rise apartment and Pierce and Pierce's skyscraping offices. Space, therefore, is figured differently in terms of both perceptions and uses, and yet is still provided a sense of the disordered confusion that hellspaces invoke in the other narratives of this thesis and those similar to them. For Patrick, the space of New York is figured as a labyrinth not only in lack of street names and signs, but in terms of reaching for his arbitrary goals. His movements are obsessively repetitive, and whilst he is not heading towards any ultimate goal, he is driven on by gaining access to certain areas of the city, such as his nightmarish task of booking a reservation at Dorsia, an almost mythical and unattainable goal for his social sphere. By having the entirety of the katabatic narrative of *American Psycho* occur in one place with no planar differentiation, what can and cannot be categorised as hellish within it is forced to present itself differently, oftentimes forcing the self to act as the Other force to contrast the space.[183] Therefore, Patrick's consistent presentation as the 'Other' from the beginning aligns with the idea that the space offers no alternative; by forcing himself to create Hell on the streets of the city through his actions, he in turn sees the city as hellish for him in thwarting his desires of entry not only to physical spaces but to realms of success.

Andrew Thacker, in *The Routledge Handbook of Literature and Space* (2017), forces a distinction between place and space within cityscapes that is helpful in explaining the lack of a journey or a clear mapping of the city space that occurs in *American Psycho*:

> 'One significant geographical idea informing literary analysis is the opposition between space and place, which is often employed to understand how writers engage with urban landscapes, broadly distinguishing between an alienating sense of the city as an abstract space and a more attached belonging to particular places within cities, such as rooms, cafes, or restaurants.'[184]

Areas of the city that Patrick enters, such as cafes, bars, shops, and other's apartments, are therefore compartmentalisations of the city as a whole, but these areas themselves consist only of the names of random bars, which ironically hint towards a lack of space (Nowheres, Raw Spaces). Lieven Ameel goes on to note that for city novels, 'specific locations can be singled out as thresholds that frame the shock inherent to ... multiple distances being crossed',[185] and the entire novel exists on a basis of jumping from one space to another each chapter, with barely any attention or detail provided

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[183] Jennifer Brown, *Cannibalism in Literature and Film* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 173.
[184] Andrew Thacker, 'Critical literary geography', in *The Routledge Handbook of Space and Literature,* ed. by Robert T. Tally Jr. (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 28-38 (p. 30).
[185] Lieven Ameel, 'The city novel: measuring referential, spatial, linguistic and temporal distances', in *The Routledge Handbook of Space and Literature,* ed. by Robert T. Tally Jr. (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 233-241 (p. 236).

as to how other than a few moments in which Patrick is seated in a car with other individuals. More often than not, Patrick appears suddenly between chapters in a different restaurant, or back at his apartment. The moments in which he discusses musicians or other items of popular culture simply float on the periphery of the narrative, segmented between.

Cities are naturally spaces of compartmentalisation, ones which Alan Reeve argues can be categorised as 'the domestic space' (i.e the family home), the 'public domain' (streets and pathways), and 'third places' (areas of entertainment or worship).[186] They state that space is formulated through a complex relationship between the individual, their own mental perceptions, the architect, and the space's own representation in maps and discourse.[187] What happens, then, when the individual that occupies and formulates the space is of such a character as Patrick? James Giles, in his work *The Spaces of Violence* (2006), an exploration of the way in which American writers have conceptualised the emergence of violence in connection to the spaces in which this violence occurs, writes that 'the text pays very little attention to the New York, and indeed the world, that do, of course, still exist outside the raw space [Patrick] inhabits.'[188] The materialisation of space in the novel becomes something that is entirely derived from Patrick's own impressions. Similar to Kwasu Tembo's idea of what they term 'psychetecture',[189] the inhabitants of the city and the architecture reflect one another, and therefore the spaces occupied in *American Psycho* are almost always a direct reflection of Patrick's own mentality. In fact, the main way in which space figures in the novel is as a reflection of Patrick's inner psyche in a way that sees him both become the hellspace through this mirroring, but the hellspace also becoming the Other that Patrick is. Simply put, the space is a mirror of Patrick, and Patrick too is a mirror of the space. They are both reflective tools that, in the end, appear to reflect the same thing: an increasingly disintegrating vessel.

It is a reflection that often occurs literally. In the way that the poster of *Les Misérables* reflected the later doubling of Patrick and Price, the walls of New York become another way of Patrick reflecting himself, with words often written on them to reflect a moment or image. The word 'M E A T' is scrawled behind a prostitute, and the blood red lettering of 'Abandon all hope ye who enter here' signifies that 'here', the space of New York, is Hell. After murdering two women, Patrick writes 'I AM BACK' (p. 294) on the walls in their blood. Not only does this show him marking the

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[186] Alan Reeve, 'Exercising Control at the Urban Scale: Towards a Theory of Spatial Organisation and Surveillance', in *Surveillance, Architecture, and Control: Discourses on Spatial Culture*, ed. by Susan Flynn and Antonia Mackay (Switzerland: Springer Nature, 2019), pp. 19-56 (p. 25).
[187] Ibid, p. 27.
[188] Giles, p. 166.
[189] Kwasu D. Tembo,'"Staying Awake in the Psychetecture of the City": Surveillance, Architecture, and Control in Miracleman and Mister X', *Surveillance, Architecture, and Control: Discourses on Spatial Culture*, ed. by Susan Flynn and Antonia Mackay (Switzerland: Springer Nature, 2019), pp. 57-76 (p. 64).

space as his own, but the wording itself is curious. It causes a very pertinent question to arise: back from where? Before this moment occurs, Patrick suffers from one of his more disintegrating chapters that sees him struggle to contain his disordered self (p. 289). In fact, Patrick has such a difficult time of containment that it spills into the space around him. The city becomes the playground for the Hell he creates and is a part of, but the reflections both within himself and on to the space show a confusion of boundaries both mental and physical. There is only one occasion in which the city's physical boundaries are breached; in an attempt to remove himself from the site of his breakdown, he takes a trip to the Hamptons. However, due to the inherent mentality of space and Patrick's connection to it, the actual location is not necessarily a barrier for him. He is not confined to the streets of New York (though he may be barred from certain locations, such as Dorsia), and neither is the hellishness that he creates within them. On the one occasion that Patrick leaves the city, he claims after an exposition on romantic summer events that 'some nights I would find myself roaming the beaches, digging up baby crabs and eating handfuls of sand' (p. 270). Though he commits far more atrocities in New York and uses the Hamptons as a way of recentring himself, there are almost no distinct places of safety within the novel. He carries the space within his own mind; his katabasis is incredibly personal, and therefore no matter what space he occupies, his own mentality is espoused with it. In fact, the boundaries in the city simply become obstacles for him from one place to the next. There is a lack of permanency to them, just in the way that they have in other explored hellspaces, that sees them unable to contain the self. Hell, therefore, becomes less of a container for Patrick in physicality, and more a container for his own social means.

Patricks's psychosis is often marked by his extreme lack of empathy or general emotion, and there exists a void within himself that he has already attempted to fill through his murderous and cannibalistic acts to no avail. As discussed previously, voids are extremely relevant in any discussions of katabatic narratives, and just as with every other facet of *American Psycho*, its void space is a direct reflection of Patrick and his identity. Here, this void acts as a secondary space that is conveyed against that of the city, and often symbolically reflects Patrick's associations with people, events, and the spaces that he occupies. At times, he is lost 'in [his] own private maze' (p. 329). Not only does this reference the space within and around him as a labyrinth, but the privatisation of his space is something that seeps outside of the boundaries of his mind and accurately represents his actions discussed so far. The novel's actual labyrinthine hellspace is within his own thoughts, but is still inseparable from the space around him due to the way he uses said thoughts to control it; they are directly reflected, a parodic take on Nudelman's previous discussion. Though void spaces do occur in terms of actual architectural or physical features (the tunnel in Tunnel, the locker space), the yawning chasm inside his own mind is representative of his psychosis and his personalised space. He

comments that he is ‘empty, devoid of feeling’ (p. 266), and again, ‘I feel empty, hardly here at all’ (p. 288) - here being not only the physical space of the zoo in which he murders a child, but present in his own mind. In the middle of one of his more fragmented moments, he imagines a hole widening in the sun (p. 288), the void inside him ‘actually widening’ (p. 308). At times he retracts into the ‘void’ space of himself, his mind occupied within itself while events and movements occur beyond his narrative vision (p. 231; p. 239). When the detective comes to question him, a moment which hints both at him being discovered as the culprit of the murders but also to the idea that they may not be real, Patrick’s perception of his space wavers. He notes that the air in the office seems ‘fake, recycled’ (p. 260), and his repeated use of the word ‘office’ shows him zeroing in on the space in panic, as though in an attempt to centre himself he must ensure that his surroundings exist (p. 264). The landscape of his mind is a desert, the locus of his world a dry and empty space; he pointedly notes that it is this geography ‘around which [his] reality revolve[s]’ (p. 360). It is notable that the reality— a word that has already proven so tenuous in relation to the novel—that Patrick actually relates himself to is the desert space. The spaces that actually do exist are then imbued with this same voidness: ‘the door closing sounds to me like...a vast emptiness’ (p. 266). The threshold space here reflects the very lack of any threshold that Patrick has between the spaces he occupies and the mental perceptions he has of them; everything to him has become a void. Since the narrative so directly reflects him, the space around him is imbued with the same emptiness. It is a conundrum that is markedly associated with the vapidity of Patrick’s consumerist, yuppie culture, one which allows the narrative to be viewed in terms of the mental disintegration that has occurred to an individual who has so thoroughly subsumed themselves within it to the point of reflecting said vapidity and emptiness. Each space visited by Patrick offers the primary function of fulfilling some form of consumptional requirement, either through the literal consumption of food or drink, the use of money to buy expensive or lavish gifts or personal items, or the gyms to hone the body that reflects the general desires of the population. In turn, he attempts to fill such emptiness by repositioning these spaces as a Hell for those who suffer from his ministrations, thus reflecting his own suffering.

Its sights

As previously discussed in Chapter II, the nature of a space is often a reflection of its architect, a raw void on which the mind can transfer its nature. While *American Psycho*’s hellspace — i.e the city of New York — was not built or designed by Patrick Bateman, he still exhibits a degree of control over his surroundings that see him align with the role of domain ruler, a primordial architect connected to the space that he occupies. Not only does he transfer his own Hell upon others, but he can warp his gaze and vision in order to construe or reflect parts of his inner self. He is able to control

and build the space primarily in terms of reader or viewer perception simply due to the narrative being so entrenched in his own selfhood. No change he actually creates, however, affects the wider narrative, or has any physical bearing on the space in the novel; they are solely products of his own actions and affect only his own perception, and therefore the reader's. Despite stating that Patrick transfers his Hell onto other individuals, there is no concrete proof that any of his abuse, both verbal and physical, actually registers in a significant manner; again, he puts his own Hell onto others in a way that he believes to be real, and to directly affect his own perception of the world and those around him, but never is another angle shown in which these consequences actually, truly mean anything. As with all other texts, the construction of the novel's hellspace relies primarily on the presumptions and gaze of the protagonist. For *American Psycho*, however, the closeness of the link between Patrick and his katabasis means that the gaze figures in an entirely different manner. Rather than the gaze itself being affected by the space, the space itself affects the gaze. Though effects of controlling the gaze are discussed in *Veniss Underground*, where VanderMeer deliberately has his characters look away from the horrors so that they are not construed, and in *House of Leaves*, where darkness obscures the gaze for major parts of the novel, Patrick's gaze is never deliberately hindered by outside forces. In fact, his obsessive attention to detail provides moments which may have otherwise been glossed over or hinted at with a near-grotesque level of violence and pornography.

As stated earlier, Patrick's gaze is largely centred around himself. To him, everything is a kind of construct, a reflection of some inner sociological or psychological thought and directly relates in some way to his identity. It is also a method of control, a way in which these constructs are forced upon the reader in order to design a space that inherently has him in mind. The other katabatic texts in this thesis have been viewed for the way in which they construe the hellspace as somewhere which has a ruler; an often demarcated boundary with some form of 'architect' to harken back to the idea that Hell is not only a construct in terms of mythological, social, and historical implications, but that all unnatural spaces must stem from a root designer. While Patrick is not the architect of the space, he is the architect of its construction in his own mind's eye, and therefore the readers' through his first-person narrative perception. Unlike in *Veniss Underground*, which sees the bodies and selves of Nicola, Nicholas, and Shadrach become reflective of the various stratified levels in a posthuman sense, *American Psycho* takes it a step further by actually showing Patrick capable of personalising the space around him. Though it is true that domesticity has been connected to the initial falsity of hellspaces as a way of offering comfort (see *House of Leaves* and *Hill House*), the way in which Patrick populates the space around him is different; it is a direct reflection of his interior thoughts, which tend towards the destabalised. Patrick has the ability to 'dissolve' and warp the spaces around him in moments of anger or panic, honing in on specific details that negates any other surroundings. It

is a distinct method of controlling the gaze that focuses solely on what is important to Patrick, and therefore to the narrative. Not only does it portray the viewing of a hellspace from a very personal vantage, but it distinctly narrows down the perception that is received. The space itself is never really separated from him; he is one with the space and the space is of him, much like Giles' earlier comments.[190]

This level of perception inherently involves a higher degree of destabalisation, one in which the creator wrestles with the responsibility of control in terms of how events or spaces are viewed. Though the typical representations of New York in both fiction and reality show it to be a space of distinct claustrophobia and a teeming populous, the New York of *American Psycho* is largely void. No grand, sweeping descriptions are provided — in fact, without naming it as such, Ellis' New York could in fact be any city with an amalgamation of restaurants, shopping districts, and offices. New York exists so fragmentally in *American Psycho* that Patrick often exists in a world entirely apart; he 'hallucinate[s] the buildings into mountains, into volcanoes, the streets become jungles' (p. 83). Due to his self-centred characteristics, he formulates his world-view around his immediate surroundings and that which pertains only to him: 'I have no patience...for events that take place beyond the realm of my immediate vision' (p. 231). Not only does this wording construe his surroundings as a 'realm', but it points towards the way in which Patrick controls his gaze himself, rather than an outside force — such as darkness[191] or deliberately confusing architectural or monstrous features — doing so for him. Due to this conundrum, the narrative is paradoxically both impersonal and yet entirely personal. He does not care about the space around him; it is raw, nowhere, and all that matters is his own perception of himself and his direct vicinity. The people who populate his space are typecasts, able to be narrowed down into a set of personalities that are interchangeable, ironically reflecting others' perception of Patrick throughout the novel. Despite this, there are still moments that hint at the wider world and of Patrick's sensibilities in general; when Evelyn comments on his emptiness, she notes that they 'look at the world differently' (p. 328) from each other.

What this reveals is the novel's preoccupation with sights. Viewing and viewership have previously been shown to be an inherent part of construing a katabatic narrative; the gaze of the protagonist often reveals or hides the hellspace from the reader, and seeing is paramount to understanding. While references are made to cinema, watching, or forms of media in general in both *House of Leaves* and *Passion*, *American Psycho* is utterly enamoured with the concept of watching. It

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[190] Giles, p. 166.

[191] Nighttime, rather than being associated with darkness in other katabatic novels and as a way of blocking the gaze, offers Patrick freedom of self and expression, becoming the time of day in which, at least at the beginning, his persona comes out in full force. It is not a necessary requirement for most of the novel, and darkness instead becomes a more routine metaphor for sinisterness.

is, in effect, an extension of Patrick's own obsession with being viewed. The clothes that he and his associates wear, the body and skin and hair he cultivates in order to be looked at and paid attention to, and the women that he attracts by doing so all serve to create a narrative that is entirely aligned with the construction of the gaze and its centring on the protagonist — a protagonist who is, notably, obsessed with viewership in general. Patrick's videotapes and fascination with the Patty Winters show (and, to an extent, his drawls surrounding certain famous musicians and singers), are an inherent part of the narrative. A traditional, American mindset is being portrayed through this complex; American fiction 'remains deeply informed by television', David Foster Wallace notes, 'particularly those strains of fiction with roots in postmodernism'.[192] There is no ignoring *American Psycho*'s proliferation of media references. It is a novel, a product of printed word, made up of a narrative that is inherently obsessed with forms of media (albeit, ironically, anything other than novels themselves). Above all, what *American Psycho*'s preoccupation with the use of media motifs does is change the reader's experience of the novel and the written form in general. A closer concentration on the exact nature of the gaze and the construction of vision within the novel is supported by *American Psycho*'s use of technical terminology and effects. While concepts of film are portrayed similarly in *House of Leaves* through the use of cinematic motifs and the construction of the novel itself as a film reel, Ellis forces the reader here not only to confront the falsity of what they are actually seeing, but to change their perception of the novel and of Patrick himself. Words and visual media form arbitrary relationships for the viewer or reader; visual images are more direct, offering an immediate relationship to what they depict, whereas reading is informed more by the process of teasing out meaning from the symbols received. This symbolism, therefore, has a deeper meaning that is conflated in both *House of Leaves* and *American Psycho* by connecting the two together. All forms of media consumption are simply a transference of images, and Patrick's preoccupation with media in general furthers this dynamic.

'Right from the start', Seed writes, 'Ellis depicts the city cinematically by stressing the fluctuations in vantage point, motion within the observer's visual field, and by using cinematic terms like "slow dissolve" that invite the reader to approach the novel as a film in prose'.[193] The novel is replete with cinematic language and techniques, with both Patrick and Ellis as directors of the action. 'Smash cut', 'Exit', and 'scene two' (p. 10, p. 191, p. 227) embed themselves into the text, revealing the way that Patrick views and constructs the events around him. Even moments in terms of the opening blood on the walls and the scrawling of 'M E A T' behind the prostitute indicate a use of the cinematic, whereby the background is used to emphasise, foreshadow, or subliminally point towards

[192] David Foster Wallace, *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again: Essays and Arguments* (London: Abacus, 1998), p. 34.
[193] Seed, 'The Culture of Spectacle', p. 219.

an element of the narrative.[194] In *Passion*, it will be shown that cinematic language is used to destabilise the narrative through a provision of a theatrical veneer and it is tempting to assume the same for *American Psycho*, but rather than the theatrical veneer, the cinematic language instead reveals the mental state of Patrick by questioning reality entirely, rather than it serving as a simple symbolic feature. The line is once again blurred between the real and unreal, but furthered by the blurring of the boundaries between media through the way that Patrick views his own life:

> 'I am so used to imagining everything happening the way it occurs in movies, visualizing things falling somehow into the shape of events on a screen, that I almost hear the swelling of an orchestra, can almost hallucinate the camera panning low around us, fireworks bursting in slow motion overhead the seventy-millimeter image of her lips parting...I realize, at first distantly and then with greater clarity, that the havoc raging inside me is gradually subsiding and she is kissing me on the mouth and this jars me back into some kind of reality.' (p. 255)

Patrick already construes his life as something he is not really living in, and in the same way as dreams, cinematic language serves to destabilise the narrative while reflecting Patrick's psyche. In fact, both dreams and cinematic language collide towards the end, where he references his dreams as an 'endless reel' (p. 356); even his unconscious fantasies are part of the cinematic creation that is his life, and there is no boundary between reality, film, and dream in the entire novel. It is, of course, a film that, due to Patrick's direction, centres himself as the protagonist even further. The extent to Patrick's narcissism has already been discussed, however by formulating the 'camera' around him, yet another level of gaze is formed that sees him as the core element. The definitive statement 'I'm in a movie. I'm an actor' (p. 376) occurs at the end of the novel, when Patrick's construction of the world is falling apart. He goes so far as to reinforce his own reality, this dreamy, film-like existence that he himself is able to manipulate: 'This is my reality. Everything outside of this is like a movie I once saw' (p. 332). By trying to enforce the reality of his psychotic murder sprees and identity as a cannibalistic serial killer, Patrick only succeeds in revealing, towards the end, the extent of his own self-deception. Even this self-deception and the possible reveal of the truth is gilded in cinema. In the chapter 'The Best City for Business', Patrick revisits Paul Owen's apartment, the site of his torturing. Patrick muses that the news of the prostitutes that he murdered is 'like in some movie' where 'no one has heard anything' (p. 352). The presence of the Real Estate agent, there being no evidence of any of Patrick's previous deeds in sight, and the reference to cinema all provide the scene with a veneer of falsity, of dismantling the reality that Patrick himself had been propping up until now. A dichotomy between what is considered 'real' to others and 'real' to Patrick is therefore created in the separate

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[194] Michael Betancourt, *Beyond Spatial Montage: Windowing, or the Cinematic Displacement of Time, Motion, and Space* (New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 7.

worlds that exist between him and others, following on from the previous discussion on Othering that occurs due to having a protagonist that is a psychotic, cannibalistic serial killer. Ní Fhlainn again notes the cathartic act of visualisation that has partly been responsible for the popularity of serial killer narratives in general: it 'enables a fictional construct of containment, which cannot be applied to the real world. Victims on-screen represent us, but are not us, and so we can 'survive' the limited experience of such encounters'.[195] Similarly, 'we' can be construed as the reader of *American Psycho*, whereby we 'watch' Patrick murder women, homosexuals, and homeless people, who are Othered due to their difference from him. The act of reading, or watching, furthers the action that is taking place. It is an action, above all, that is contained not only in the space of Manhattan, but within the mind of its rampant killer. It is a reminder of consumption in the narrative itself; consumption through reading and visualising are self-consciously reflected through the emphasis in consumption itself as a means of building up Patrick's identity, without whom there would be nothing.

Conclusion

American Psycho's psyche-katabasis is not a straightforward, downward 'journey'. In fact, it is not really a journey at all. Throughout, Patrick shows a complete lack of any markings as a katabatant: no clear goal and no hope of anabasis. Even the defining feature of having a space that is descended to being figured as Hell is lacking. Instead, the pattern is construed as a series of vignettes that reveal the inherent difference between Patrick's inner and outer selves and his difficulty in consolidation, and New York is still transformed into a hellspace through Patrick's own methods of viewership and inherent connection to the space. In the afterword, Ellis writes that 'everything meaningful' in the novel is 'wiped away in favor of surfaces'. (p. 385); by transfiguring the concept of katabasis as a surfacing of personas, the physical descent is negated in favour of a more mental depiction, the Hell that arises from it being one entirely of the protagonist's own making. Space instead becomes a mere extension and exacerbator for it, a playground on which a continual sense of disorder to his thoughts and movements can be reflected. The ending chapters are a return to normalcy, rounding out the narrative from Price's submerging at the beginning to his reemergence at the end - but this is no true return. In the midst of Harry's, which in fact could be any club or bar in New York, or anywhere in the world, conversations happen around him about women, accounts, and random tidbits of information no different to any other conversation in the rest of the novel. He clings to the question of 'why' - why did he do it, why did he imagine/dream it - and the answer is, after all, because 'this is what being *Pat*rick means to me' (p. 384). Even now, at the end, despite Price's return and the cessation of Patrick's killings, he must still carve himself a way out from the same

[195] Ní Fhlainn, p. 191-192.

conundrums of ignorance that he has faced in the entire narrative. Though there is some semblance now of self-understanding, there is a sense of continual hellishness, of the same problems reiterating themselves - a neverending attempt at an anabasis that may never come, and no sense of an exit.

"TO FIND THE LIGHT YOU MUST DESCEND INTO DARKNESS": JEFF VANDERMEER'S *VENISS UNDERGROUND*[196]

Jeff VanderMeer's *Veniss Underground* centres itself around the concept of the 'New Weird', a genre he himself defines as a 'type of urban, secondary-world fantasy that subverts the romanticized ideas about place [...] by choosing realistic, complex real-world models as the jumping off point for the creation of settings that may combine elements of both science fiction and fantasy.'[197] The 'New Weird', coined by John Harrison in 2003, is a mutation of classical or 'Old' weird that emerged in the 1980s,[198] and its definition, much like the genre itself, is ever-mutable. Deigned 'a blend of science fiction, Surrealism, fantasy, magical realism, and Lovecraftian horror'[199] by Sherryl Vint and that which contains the 'sensibility of welcoming the alien and the monstrous as sites of affirmation and becoming' by Benjamin Noys and Timothy Murphy, the genre is connected, according to VanderMeer, to a distinctly Lovecraftian sense of body horror and its inherent viscerality.[200] As a synthesised exploration of the alien Other,[201] *Veniss Underground* engages with concepts of the monstrous and its inherent connection to the human body and mind, pushing the boundaries of the world that contains them. The novel follows the tale of three protagonists, Nicholas, Nicola, and Shadrach, on their travels through the various spaces of Veniss, which consist of a futuristic, skyscraper filled city that and its underground counterpart, Veniss Underground, where all manner of monstrous denizens (both human and non-human) lie. They each undertake a journey that sees them come into contact with the underground realm and those within, all overseen and apparently influenced by the novel's antagonist, the creator-god Quin, who acts as requisite overlord. Nicholas attempts to make a living in the city of Veniss through the hobby of 'Living Art' (a form of bioengineering that involves modifying and splicing organic matter to create new creatures) and is driven towards Quin in desperation, while his twin, Nicola, is a programmer high above the city's ground level who encounters the underground on a search for her lost brother. Shadrach, Nicola's former lover and denizen of Veniss Underground, is forced to travel back to his home in order to rescue Nicola when she is captured by Quin.

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[196] This chapter is adapted from the article published in Exclamat!on (see Hannah Latham, '"Underground with the Mutties": The Katabatic Other and the Monsters Below in Jeff VanderMeer's *Veniss Underground'*, Exclamat!on, 5 (2021), pp. 25-40).
[197] Jeff VanderMeer, 'The New Weird: "It's Alive?"', in Jeff VanderMeer and Ann VanderMeer, *The New Weird: It's Alive?* (California: Tachyon Publications, 2008), pp.ix-5 (p. xvi).
[198] Benjamin Noys and Timothy S. Murphy, 'Introduction: Old and New Weird', *Genre,* 42.2 (2016), 117-134 (p. 120).
[199] Sherryl Vint, 'Introduction: special issue on China Mieville', *Extrapolation*, 50:2 (2009), 197-199 (p. 197).
[200] Jeff VanderMeer and Ann VanderMeer, p. xvi.
[201] Jonathan Harvey, 'The Wild West and the New Weird in K. J. Bishop's "The Etched City" and China Miéville's "Iron Council"', p. 91.

The novel is a loose retelling of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, a tale of returning a lost lover from an underground realm that includes all the thematic markers of the mythic model. Despite this explicit allusion, however, katabasis has not been previously applied to *Veniss*. At its core, much like *Earthsea*, *Veniss*'s katabasis is about binary opposition: above versus below, us versus them, human versus nonhuman, here versus there. Because of this, the novel interacts with mainstays of Othering that align not only with psychoanalytical tradition but with the New Weird and the posthuman, which utilise alien Othering to respond to the breakdown of typical Descartian anatomy and Cartesian dualism.[202] By reading the novel through the lens of the katabatic, the way it interacts with the hallmarks of the Other and New Weird criteria becomes more specified and aligns with certain categorisations entirely dependent on the merging of these genres. What emerges, therefore, is the concept of the 'Other' in these forms as a way of constructing the katabatic. When paired with katabasis, the Other still retains this oppositional effect by having everything that is considered as Other under the banner of either a separated realm used to contain it—such as in *Earthsea*— or as anything that has seeped through said realm into the real world. It is a product of hellspaces and only emerges when the journey is undertaken. The following chapter shows, however, that these boundaries so inherent to the established pattern are rather unstable for narratives such as *Veniss*; as a result, katabasis takes on a different quality, one in which questions are raised about the extent of its explicitness and its reliance on perception. As such, Section I focuses on the journeys undertaken by the three protagonists and how closely their understanding of themselves and the spaces visited are guided by their own preconceived notions, and Section II focuses on the deeper connection between the mind, body and self with the spaces that are occupied and that come to represent them.

I. "Underground with the mutties": The Journey and The False-city of Veniss

Both *Earthsea* and *Hill House* have established that modern katabatic narratives contain within them a set of archetypal formulations akin to those of their predecessors. VanderMeer himself is aware of such formulations as 'shorthand to guide the reader to the right set of precepts for what the writer intends',[203] and by categorically linking his own protagonists' journeys to a classical katabatic myth, he guides the interpretation of Veniss as a form of Hell. This interpretation is also led by the formulaic notion of a narrative in which characters move from A to B, coupled with a clear use of the mythematic foundations discussed in previous chapters (such as the impetus or the use of the guide). However, what would appear at first as a relatively linear narrative is in fact destabilised through

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[202] Neil Badmington, *Alien Chic: Posthumanism and the Other Within* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 3-8.
[203] Jeff VanderMeer, *Entry Points Into Fiction: Text Shows You How To Read It* (2012), <https://www.jeffvandermeer.com/2012/05/12/entry-points-into-fiction-text-shows-you-how-to-read-it> [accessed January 2021].

VanderMeer's use of description and perspective, and instead the novel's katabasis is dependent on a certain degree of nonlinearity and ambiguity, represented by the inherent connection of the novel's hellspaces with the protagonists. The novel leads Nicholas, Nicola and Shadrach through a variety of topographical spaces whereby the journey becomes less about achieving a goal and more about an unravelling of personal and physical understandings on its course. The three protagonists' perceptions formulate space itself in a way that reveals the identity of the protagonists and their own connection and understanding of the spaces they occupy. Veniss and Veniss Underground become constructs of a particular character at a particular time, and thus the interpretation of the space(s) as hellish is one that is personalised and as a whole becomes rather ambiguous. The initial delineation of an above-ground and below-ground space is one that is broken down on the course of the journey, and having the novel split into three distinct parts means that they must be taken together to understand the whole. Nicholas and Nicola, birthed from a synthetic womb and raised by the god-like creator, Quin, exist primarily in the city of Veniss before the events of the novel take place, and their understanding of the city informs its construction as well as their misunderstanding of its underground counterpart. Shadrach — named so after the biblical figure in the Book of Daniel who is thrown into a hellish, fiery pit—grew up in the underground realm and acts as one of the many bridges between the concepts and beings of monster and human in the novel, as well as being the core individual through which the underground is traversed. The city of Veniss and its underground counterpart serve as the sites for these three separate and yet intertwined journeys which emerge through a gradual unravelling of the spaces' topographies, whereby the previous perceptions of above ground change after contact with below, forming a personal Hell that sees everything that is taken for granted about location and self be destabilised.

As above

In his work on the concept of the city in literature, Pike writes that as a spatial form, it 'presents both the image of a map and the image of a labyrinth' where 'characters orient, but can also lose, themselves.'[204] As a manufactured space, by nature cities should have no area unnavigable or unknown, and yet the connotation of a map — though inherently codified — invokes notions of exploration and the labyrinth itself with a process of both confusion and unravelling. By connecting the city so inherently to these concepts, it forces the notion of a space that is difficult to traverse and understand, and for the New Weird, it becomes further confused by the multitude of meanings that are provided to its base architectures. The publication of Anna Kavan's 'Our City' in *I Am Lazarus*, one of the first instances of New Weird, contains a metropolis described at once as judge, trap, and octopus, and reveals much about the representation of the city itself in the genre. There is no doubting

[204] Pike, *The Image of the City*, p. 121.

the connections between a city like Veniss and that of Kavan's, echoes of which can also be found in VanderMeer's *City of Saints and Madmen*, where the city of Ambergris takes on a life of its own, built up on the bloody history of its 'gray cap' inhabitants in a way that seeps into the souls of those that live there. What these cities are, above all, and as Pike's comments corroborate, are labyrinths; perhaps not exactly by structural design — though both are architectural constructions — but most certainly in meaning, able to hold an array of interpretations depending entirely upon one's position within it, and corroborated through exploration and understanding. The city of Veniss becomes a place of contradiction and falsity, constructed entirely through the perceptions of the characters, and their journeys within the confines of its realm become the beginning of their individualised and revelatory katabases whereby the multitudinous means of construction reflect the protagonists' own sense of selves. As the location where all of their katabases begin, the space of the city forms the first understanding of the world, and though typical katabatic frameworks would have this space be one of inherent order and stability to contrast the latter chaos of katabasis and hellspace(s), it is not so here. Rather, from the beginning the city of Veniss is foreshadowed as a space of instability that is later revealed through its close connection to its underground counterpart.

As a space comprising smaller spaces, of labyrinthine alleyways and multitudinous methods of ascent and descent, the importance of Veniss's construction in terms of its architecture and its katabases lies in its thresholds. Established in *Earthsea* as a requirement for the separation of the land of the living and the dying, they signify a demarcated boundary between opposites that is breached on the course of the journey. Here, the largest boundary lies between the above and underground spaces of Veniss and Veniss Underground, and the dynamic set up by their differences allows for a concrete separation of the spaces in the minds and the literal positions of the inhabitants, providing peace through the creation of a solid boundary between life above and the initially unseen horrors of below. The ordered world of the city on the surface, of bright lights and arranged streets, is antithesis to the dark, mutated one below their feet, the proximity of which offers further opportunity for destabilisation through their close presence, as discussed later. There is supposedly a clear delineation between these two spaces, a process which is maintained by the inhabitants of the city outside of the bounds of the narrative. This separation of the monstrous, horrific, and otherworldly from the known has historical precedence; marginalisation, especially when connected to katabatic narratives, can be seen in Homer's *Odyssey*, in which Odysseus's nekyia forces him to journey beyond the confines of the known world on the advice of Circe,[205] and has been discussed previously in terms of the delegation of monsters and otherworlds to the margins of the known, mapped spaces of the narrative in *Earthsea*. Underground caves, the dark recesses of the forest, and, fittingly, the bowels of the cities

[205] Carpenter, p. 109.

have always been places steeped in monstrous tradition.[206] These spaces are deliberately designed as far apart from the known and the safe as possible, a marker of the complete separation of the realms travelled to on katabatic journeys. It takes a deliberate infringement of these boundaries to make such journeys possible.

The crossing of the boundary, however, creates a change in viewpoint not only in the protagonist's current location but for the world they previously occupied. The knowledge gained as a result of katabasis acts as a destructor for all previous perceptions of the city, and, as a result, a fuller understanding emerges through an initially constructed perception that is later deconstructed due to an understanding of what lies below. The breaching of the boundary that occurs disrupts the recognisable order of the city, and everything beneath is shown to be uncontainable. Historic and literary boundaries are in fact permeable and tenuous, and modern katabatic narratives, especially those connected to the posthuman (which further disrupts the boundary between human and nonhuman[207]), often surround their fear of the katabatic through the use of proximity, whereby the supposed safety that the boundaries afford is completely eroded through their crossing, heightened by the ironic insistence of separation that is maintained from the very beginning. It is an insistence that confuses the world's structure and order; it simultaneously shows the fear of Veniss Underground seeping out into the city whilst having the horror be within the city all along. The unveiling of this horror is at the crux of the katabases in *Veniss*; at the centre of the labyrinth is the figure of Quin, a ruler, whether acknowledged or otherwise (no overt political authority appears in the novel), that has complete control over both domains and thus their perceptions and that lies within a space known as his Shanghai Circus.[208] He emblematises the constructed fear and proximity of the underground to the city, and each katabasis begins with an interaction, whether physical or otherwise, with him, one which gradually reveals more about his character, the city, and the underground. His presence as the magnanimous and mysterious mastermind behind the city and its changing architecture sees him as the originator of this undermining; the boundaries that are supposed to keep the monsters in are shown to do little at all, as Quin himself is behind their control. His presence 'surrounds the city',[209] despite his domain being underground; his nature and position are a constant paradox that only serves to further heighten the instability of the novel and its katabases as a whole. The protagonists' interactions with him involve a dissolution of their previous perceptions of the city and result in a breakdown of

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[206] Manuel Aguirre, T*he Closed Space: Horror Literature and Western Symbolism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), p. 2.
[207] Shaw, p. 52.
[208] The space and figure are allusions to Edward Whittmore's *Quin's Shanghai Circus* (1974), a novel of horrific grotesquery which VanderMeer notes he was inspired to use for its name alone (see Jeff VanderMeer, 'Quin's Shanghai Circus: a short story', *Interzone Science Fiction & Fantasy*, 124, (1997), 38-47)
[209] Jeff VanderMeer, *Veniss Underground* (London: Pan Books, 2017), p. 71-72.

known thresholds, revealing him as the presence around the corner, at the end of the alley, and at the core of everything.

Part I opens from the viewpoint of Nicholas while he attempts to eke out a living for himself in the city, and his section immediately deconstructs the concept of Veniss as a concrete and understandable space before it can even be formed. The city's initial description and perceptions are provided by a paranoid man who spends his life surrounded by illusory ideas through his Holo-artist lifestyle that reveal a biased hatred for the city as a space he longs to both escape from and yet be a part of. To him, the city is a cliché performance of 'cardboard and painted sparkly colors' used 'to disguise the empty center - the hole' (p. 5), a space specifically leading to his failure. He has always seen Veniss as something disordered and intent on mocking him and his position within it. Due to his sense of detachment and scorn, he deconstructs the name itself by revealing the mocking hiss of its latter syllables as a reason for his hatred, as well as the name's inherent associations with Venice in terms of the Italian city of canals (this Veniss too is built on canals) or that of Venice Beach in Los Angeles, hinting towards the use of the real-world connections utilised by the New Weird whereby the cities become building blocks for construction and fictionalisation. For Nicholas, the city becomes a place of torment and the negative perceptions that he has of it and his begrudging willingness to leave it for the horrors of the underground reveal the impact of the space on him. Above all, it is a place that he wants to escape from in order to find his true self within his art, and his impetus sees him instigate a descent into the bowels of the city proper and eventually Veniss Underground itself in order to do so. He is aware of the void-space at the centre of the city, a surface-level darkness that destabilises the entirety of the cityspace, and his view of the city itself as a false performance intrinsically lessens any sense of concrete perception and understanding by highlighting the space's masquerade from the beginning. Even its real name, Dayton Station, reveals that 'Veniss' is a mere cover for something more.

Rather than viewing the underground as a necessary element to his journey, he feels as though it is somewhere he has to go begrudgingly. As Nicholas' time in the city and his various failures at Living Art becomes too much to bear, he falls into a paranoia that stems from his increasingly unstable perception of the space meant to be considered as safe (p. 12). His fear manifests in changes to the space that he occupies; his apartment is a closed space with no windows (p. 44), a form of protection instilled against the surroundings of the city. It is not, however, just the city that he protects himself against. Living in the lower levels of Veniss proper, Nicholas is closer to the underground than comfortable, and the lack of windows offer a forced barrier and skewed perception of the horrors held within and underneath the city. If windows and doorways offer habitual thresholds to hellspaces, then

by blocking them up the threshold is effectively closed and the other/underworld is kept apart.[210] The fear and unease of Veniss Underground has seeped into the ordinary space of Nicholas's city life, which sees him create this barrier for himself; the centre that he professes to be empty may not be so, and yet his own perceptions of the city as a place of mockery skews any possible reality. It is only when his self-perpetuated, arrogant enterprise for belonging leads him to Quin's Shanghai Circus that he forsakes his previous remnants of the stability of Veniss and acknowledges the true possibility of the horrors that lie within. This forsaking comes with a change of perception; gone now are the empty centres and clichés, replaced with something deadly and deathly that leaves Nicholas's spine tingling with fear when the threshold between the city and the underground is crossed (p. 21, p. 16). This first breaching of the boundary between Veniss and the underground reveals the abstraction of movement and the slipperiness of narrative as a whole from the very beginning; through a hologram in the wall— a thin voile— lies the locus of horror and the centre of the labyrinth, which Nicholas has reached without having journeyed further than across a wall in a dark, 'dead-endish' alley (p. 16). Here sits Quin himself, a grotesque creature of nightmares, transformed into a literal part of his Shanghai Circus, at one with the counter-space. As a master of Living Art, Quin's unequivocal otherworldliness makes him the figurehead of the uncanny underworld and mystery within *Veniss Underground*; no full description or information is provided about him, and no one knows 'anything concrete about [his] past' (p. 15). Why he rules Veniss and its underground counterpart from the darkness through the production of synthetic Ganesha and meerkats that will eventually overtake humanity is not a question that the novel ever answers, and Nicholas's part ends abruptly on his reveal, providing no more information about the city or Quin other than that Nicholas is now under his command. Both dead-like and puppet-like, a horrific, serpentine mass and a conglomerate of horrific concepts, Quin takes control of Nicholas, blackmailing or terrifying him into work and transforming himself into a similar form of living art, thus resulting in his changed perception of the city as he disappears underground and from his own narrative viewpoint.

A different understanding of the city is provided through Nicholas's twin, Nicola, in Part II. Nicholas and Nicola's opening views of the city are entirely oppositional to each other; whereas Nicholas at least partially understands the city's tenuous construction and the role Quin takes in controlling it, Nicola sees the city as a place of stability, a vertically linear cityscape. Surrounded by a two-hundred-foot, mile deep border that acts as a visible and solid portrayal of a protective force against the unknown threat outside of the city, for Nicola, it is a space of visible and safe reasoning with clear differentiations between above and below ground. A form of border control that sees the influx of denizens from Veniss Underground policed before their entry to the city furthers her notion

[210] Smith, *Framing the Underworld,* 241-254.

of the city's safety; the walls that surround the city keep off-world or on-world threats separate and its divisive, districted nature ensures a sense of compartmentalisation to its vastness (p. 39). At no point in the narrative, however, is the world outside of Veniss explored; it exists, on its own terms, in a sort of containment, and the hesitance in description of outside provides no chance for reader or inhabitant to understand. In fact, this hesitancy stretches to inside of Veniss itself, which is described in Nicola's section in liminal terms; no clues are provided as to the political situation, other inhabitants, or geographical location. Nicola's naive and distanced worldview is one associated with her higher position within the city, her high-rise apartment and her profession on the 120th floor of the Bastion providing her a sense of levity and increased separation from below. Due to her civilian job, she is the protagonist most aware of the city's topography; in her possession is a digital map, one which she is able to study and, at times, rewrite (p. 35). It is a clear codification of the space, and she professes a desire, just as the other two do, to explore it and to know it, something that is by and large an impossibility due to its consistently changing parameters. Her almost Daedalean view of this labyrinth is still limited, however, and it is through her katabasis that she must confront the unknowns of the city. By having her positioned so high above the city and emphasising the vertical heights of the buildings she occupies, it serves as a greater contrast to the depth later felt underground, all of which create a dynamic of extreme differentiation in perception and positioning, as well as emotion. However, by having Nicola's section come after Nicholas's, her perceptions are immediately undermined by his; any attempts at solidification are already collapsed, and though Nicholas does not fully reveal the extent of horror as Shadrach later does, he paves the way for Nicola's own growing understanding of the city's falsity, which will come as part of her katabasis. Galvanised off her own brother's katabasis and its outcome, Nicola must travel through the confines of the world in order to find her synthetic half, a drive that sees her push aside her own world order, forsaking her higher plane of existence in Veniss to explore the deep underbelly of the city.

Unlike Shadrach and Nicholas, whose dealings with Quin and prior knowledge of the underground allow them to view Veniss more clearly, Nicola does not understand the truth about the city's representation until she herself is forced to view it differently on being led underground to find her brother. Nicola's perceptions are assaulted by the appearance of Quin's synthetic meerkat Salvador and the ganesha who appear at the door to Nicholas's apartment, which Nicola has taken over as her own and in which she descends into a dreamlike state in order to face her changing concept of the city upon her brother's disappearance (p. 60). This enforcement is represented by Nicola's movements; while it is clear from Nicholas's language that his impetus is largely his own, Nicola's movements see her relinquish any sense of control that she appears to have, giving in to the guiding pull of Salvador. She exhibits the same fear and paranoia surrounding the tenuous threshold of Veniss as Nicholas does,

presented as she is with a new understanding. By following in the footsteps of her brother, his own vision of the city plagues her perception; soon she sees the disorder that Nicholas has festered, so oppositional to her ordered life far above. The city she had previously memorised becomes overwhelming to her; despite having a holographic mapfinder (p. 76), she loses Salvador — who she believes is involved in her brother's disappearance — in its streets, which become an infinite 'maze, a crystal mirror' (p. 77) so at odds with what she believed to be its axiom, revealing its inherently labyrinthine nature and hinting at the duality within that is explored further in Section II. The ordered city becomes chaotic (p. 78), her previous perceptions falling apart further as she realises the civil strife both within the government and off-world means that border patrols actually do nothing to keep the true antagonist of the city at bay (p. 35). Her previous preoccupation with the city's borders, which keep even pollution and the sea out, is quickly abandoned upon her first understanding of the underground and interaction with Quin, at least by proxy through Nicholas's disappearance and her interactions with Salvador, Quin's creature.

For Nicola, more of the city that was previously hidden to her is revealed when the presence of the underground becomes more apparent. The flimsy barriers and the instability of the connection between Veniss and the Underground are further revealed when she falls through a hologram at the end of an alley (p. 78), succumbing to Quin's world. The language associated with the journey to Quin's realm and the underground is specifically associated with the act of 'falling', despite no literal descent being felt by Nicola. Nicola's world is turned upside down (quite literally, as it is later revealed the realm she has entered is part of Quin's underground complex [p. 80]) and she mentally combats to make sense of the sight in front of her, a replacement of her previously recognisable and familiar home world. Despite being surrounded by meerkats and ganesha on her own plane and using holographic technology for pleasure, Nicola struggles with the concept of a holographic gate that hides a separate world that houses these familiar beings, one which includes a fairy-tale-like white bridge and forest, a space of great contrast to the industrialised, constructed city of Veniss (though even these pastoral scenes are constructed by Quin). For her, 'this space never existed in the city' (p. 80), and she is unable to understand how this place came to be, having not seen it on any of her blueprints. Though the space may not exist above ground, it is not a separate, otherworldly realm that she has travelled to. The hologram merely acts as a portal that takes her momentarily below level. Interestingly, the holograph negates the classical desire for a downward journey, despite the protagonist being in the underground realm of Veniss; Nicola has not travelled through so much as moved aside her familiar above-ground world in favour of the katabatic hellspace she travels through, akin to the non-physical descents of *Earthsea*. What this does, however, is clearly delineate a difference between Veniss and Veniss Underground as separate spaces, at least for Nicola. Having

momentarily faced the horrors of Veniss and the machinations of Quin, Nicola returns to her apartment, clinging to the corporeal and unable to fully relax in her own space now that she is more fully aware of Veniss Underground. The city becomes unreal to her in comparison to the 'reality of the vast forest' below (p. 85), and she crouches in the dark, unable to face the city she once knew and further surrendering herself to a dreamworld of her own making. At this point, her perception of the city changes and she is unable to assimilate with the new knowledge of below ground she now possesses. Just as with Nicholas, the city and her apartment become a place of paranoia carried within her, a fear that seizes her body and mind and from which she finds no solace in her usual programming or holograph-aided sex, associated now with her new map of the world and the holographic entrance to its horrors (p. 85). Nicola's section ends in a momentary anabasis upon Nicholas's return, which sees her 'ascending, carried in another's arms' (p. 90) towards the light, but it is a descent that she is undertaking, stolen away by her brother to the depths of the underground, only to wait for her rescuer and the novel's final protagonist, Shadrach.

Unlike Nicholas and Nicola, Shadrach is a former denizen of Veniss Underground and has previously worked with Quin, a status which gives him a certain authority over his perception. The beginning of his section serves as a memory of his journey from below ground to his life above, where he meets Nicola, his eventual lover. No description is given as to the reasons that denizens of below level may choose to travel to or be allowed to enter the city of Veniss. The levels are not completely barred to each other and travel between is possible, as the border guards show, but Shadrach's disgust at his life below level is evident, his desire to flee above to escape the 'nightmare' (p. 105) evidence of the underground's horrors. For Shadrach, the city is a 'wall of light' (p. 9) — again, a solid boundary — a new world in comparison to the darkness of his origins, one which exists not only on a physically higher plane but symbolically. His stint in the city, at least descriptively, is brief. He sees the same initial order as Nicola, a flipped worldview of the disorder and terror of below ground. However, his perceptions are not a gradual unveiling; though he sees the underground for all it is, the perception of the city is fed to him by Nicola, who acts as his initial guide and influences his own view with hers. In fact, even the description of a wall of light is provided not by Shadrach himself, but by Shadrach through Nicholas. His positively fed perception of the city is short lived in his own section, as each section before him has already stripped Veniss of any veneer, and with the disappearance of Nicola, he is able to cement his own realisations. The disintegration of the city begins far quicker for him than his counterparts; there is no slow unravelling to his understanding, but one that happens almost immediately through the horror of realising that Lady Ellington is found to have the body parts of Nicola attached to herself, a moment that serves to catapult him on his katabasis to find the rest of Nicola's body. Despite paradoxically being weakened by Nicola and

Nicholas, Shadrach's section solidifies the inherent difference between Veniss and Veniss Underground that is a known rule of their world. He 'attacks' the streets, easily walking through the hologram to Quin's Shanghai Circus that provided Nicholas and Nicola so much difficulty, understanding immediately that he must 'plunge' underground to find his lost lover and leaving the city, at least for now, behind (p. 97).

These three contrasting —though converging— views of the city sow the seeds of an opposition between order and disorder and perceptions and reality in an introductory section that reveals the prospective horror of the narrative early on, and emphasise the tenuous link between the horrors below and the supposedly ordered world of which all three protagonists stand at the border of. Though Nicholas's opening description of Veniss comes across as a spurned artist's anger, the truth of the statement lies within its ability to strip Veniss of any sense of urban identity. Notions of posthumanist theory arise through the close connection between the city and its human and inhuman inhabitants, and by the 'blurring of conceptual boundaries' Veniss's instability is brought to the forefront.[211] It is a parody of perception, a theatrical, architectural mould that forces a lack of solid interpretation. It serves as a contrast to perceptions of the Underground, and each narrative segment reveals areas to Veniss, new and revisited, that gradually peel away the surface. By using both literal and conceptual boundaries, VanderMeer tears away at the city until the streets of Veniss come to mirror the disorder of the underground realm whilst revealing it to always have been so. What these barriers do, however, no matter how weakly, is keep the stability of Veniss on hold, to be breached only by those who have seen it for what it is, and it is Shadrach that must do this. He requires no perception of the city properly as he is not from there, and his section is far more concerned with the underground space which lies more fully in his own understanding and where the katabasis unfolds itself more completely until the novel's ending. He must enter the space of Veniss's full horror, a realm which lies directly beneath the city proper, made up of varying striated parts, a labyrinth of downward, circling spaces akin to Dante's Inferno and the full localiser of the novel's main katabasis, in doing so finally and entirely forsaking any stability to the above ground realm.

So Below

The underground has 'long possessed an unsurpassed power to evoke the negation of whatever has been defined as normal and belonging to the world above'[212]; it is the ultimate space in which to contain everything Other, as it has always been so far from the known and quantifiable. This position has still largely been maintained even with the advent of industrialisation, which trends towards the

[211] Shaw, p. 7.
[212] Pike, *Metropolis on the Styx*, p. 1.

demystification of the underground in contemporary literature through its continued exploration and exploitation (such as underground railroads).[213] For *Veniss Underground*—only the second novel in this thesis to have a canonical, horrifically presenting underground as a container for hellishness— the intrinsic connection to the katabatic myth means that the underground maintains the same level of Otherness that it has historically been associated with, transformed to meet the parameters of science fiction and the New Weird. European folklore specifically tells of a world beneath the ground 'peopled by demons and monsters,'[214] one which is clearly separated from the real, above ground world inhabited by the non-Other, non-monstrous human population. For *Veniss Underground*, the solidity with which the underground space is connected to Hell is supported not only by the mythological retelling of Orpheus and Eurydice, but by the established depiction of Hell as a place of monstrous sinners and demons, ruled over by a requisite overlord. Once below level, it is difficult to ignore the Dantean sense of grotesque bodily torture. Shadrach in particular does not hesitate to invoke the use of 'Hell' to describe the dark and narrow tunnels filled with mentally and physically unstable inhabitants (p. 95; 106; 176), and he specifically ascribes his journey as that which will take him to Hell (p. 95). VanderMeer does not capitalise the word in every instance,[215] but Quin's Shanghai Circus and the majority of the underground represent a separate space of torment for the inhabitants, who all fear the eventuality of their travelling there, akin to real world connotations. The fact that the space is markedly underground, filled with dead or dying bodies and controlled by a ruler, sees the term associated not only with the physical and mental torture of the protagonists but with the overall space of Hell itself.

In general, Veniss Underground is categorised as a cordoned off space accessible via manhole covers, holographic portals, and an area of monitored border control meant to keep the unwanted denizens out of the city. It is a world of disgusting, maggoty darkness, described by Shadrach as a place which still haunts him through nightmares even above level (p. 12). It is associated with the fear of both what lies within and what it will do to the self. The deeper one travels below ground, the more monstrous the surroundings and inhabitants become (p. 36). The many access points and sections of Veniss Underground, all sealed off or converging via separate pathways, provide a sense of instability to the space, and the ease with which one gets lost is indicative of the slow unravelling of Shadrach's reality. Much like Nicola, he is unable to imagine the existence of such a place and therefore it becomes unreal to him, despite his prior knowledge. He transforms the real into something unreal in order to quantify his fear and to continue with his journey, just as Nicola does with her dream-view of the city. As a child, he did not believe below level existed when he left: it was a space that belonged in

[213] Ibid., pp. 3-6.
[214] Carpenter, p. 149.
[215] The instances on p. 106 and p. 176 are capitalised and afforded spatiality.

a nightmare (p. 105). It is a Hell that is personalised for Shadrach, explicitly stated as so (p. 106), and evoked by his intense fear of travelling below level; he too suffers with crossing the threshold, not through a hologram this time but through a far more solid manhole cover. The true depth of below level is felt through its traversal, and the plethora of thresholds, alleyways, and industrial structures all serve to further the notion that the underground, though a twisted labyrinth filled with monsters and mutations, confusing enough to warrant a living map known as the Gollux to understand its pathways, is above all another sectioned city space, not at all unlike its above ground counterpart. As such, Shadrach's descent, despite the space's strange presentation and perception, is grounded in humanly constructed contraptions that are used by him to move both intentionally and unintentionally downward. Elevators, trains, ladders, and sloping railways are all used to reach the lowest level of Quin's domain, all of which aid in the notion of the underground and hellspaces in general being constructed places as discussed in *Earthsea* and *Hill House*, one that is increasingly associated with a purpose and architecture that is not natural. However, despite this construction and the generalised linearity of Shadrach's trajectory and goal, his descent is rather ambiguous and allusive. Elevators should offer clear distinctions and access points between 'upper' and 'lower' sections, however those found by Shadrach are suffused with ambiguity and the same horror of all other thresholds to the underground. One, glowing confusingly green, 'had gotten stuck between floors, halfway to the bottom of the open elevator door [...] Below it lay the abyss.' (p. 107), and another is noted for its old, industrial shakiness which 'hurl[s] down through the darkness, lit only by red emergency lights, his fellow passengers' faces subsumed in blood' (p. 110). The elevator is, above all, a method of travel that will 'plunge into the heart of Hell' (p. 110), and by imbuing the journeys on them with blood, darkness, and the abyss, they become suffused with horrific movement. Similarly, the underground railroads offer no consolation of safe travel down into darkness; used by prospective suicide victims and filled with more mutations, the entrances are not doors but holes that drop down into the deep (p. 166). Shadrach's journey on them is cut short when he is pushed off by Nicholas, who intends not only to kill Shadrach but to kill himself by falling from their heights.

Just as with above level, perceptions are important to the configuration of and understanding of the underground, and as with *Hill House* and the use of shadows in *Earthsea*, the dark becomes an important and resolute element of Veniss Underground that acts as an effective method of distorting the gaze. VanderMeer himself states the New Weird provides a 'visceral, contemporary take on the kind of visionary horror', using body transformations and dislocations — which the Underground is full of —to distinctly move past 'Lovecraft's coyness in recounting events in which the monster or horror can never fully be revealed or explained.'[216] What VanderMeer choses for Shadrach to see or not see forms the novel's horror as part of the journey, and yet despite the author assuming the

[216] VanderMeer and VanderMeer, p. x.

position that modern novels have moved past Lovecraft's diffidence and entire otherworldliness of its monsters, the way the gaze is utilised sees it as another barrier, one which protects the protagonist until the last moment, whereby the coyness merely becomes a part of the horror itself. Contrasting the dreamy world of light above (p. 17), the darkness of the underground is so pervasive that Shadrach comes to believe it infiltrates his mind while above ground to the point that he feels there is little left to do 'in the light' (p. 102). Continual reference is made to the darkness that lies below, a deep abyss that continually gives way to deeper darkness (p. 174). VanderMeer not only uses the dark as a way of forcing the protagonists and the reader to confront— or not confront— what lies before them, but to bar any full understanding, further highlighting the horrors that lie within. It is a way of simultaneously blocking the gaze whilst drawing attention to the very lack of sight it professes, making any consolidation of location, identity, or concept impossible. Despite making out the features of the train station, tunnel entrances, the body of the leviathan and the underground sea, Shadrach is repeatedly assaulted by the darkness of below level, and his mind even goes so far as to remove gaps of time in which he is unsure of his position, never fully perceiving his own travels and surroundings (p. 110). This further confuses the parameters, definition, and truth of the underground on what is meant to be a revelatory journey. Characters are continuously unable to adjust to their surroundings throughout the novel, and as such no stability or reality is provided to their situations. On multiple occasions, alleyways and corridors are used in *Veniss Underground* as a means for characters to move from A to B. As methods of movement, they are associated with possibility and of being led towards something, a goal at the end of one of many doors. These corridors, linear and open on both ends, should provide the novel's journey with a sense of continual, onward movement and a clear sense of the character's gaze, allowing no space to question the reality of their situations. However, as proven, these corridors and alleyways often demarcate towards holographic thresholds, turn sharply to reveal another way forward, or are shrouded in darkness, making it difficult to discern what the spaces hold. It also aids in the presentation of Veniss Underground as labyrinthine, which once more creates a connection between requisite spaces of horror and confusion akin to the Tombs of Atuan, Hill House, Beulah, and the labyrinth on Ash Tree Lane. As previously discussed, the underground itself has long been associated with the labyrinth, mythologically connected to Othering as part of its separation from above ground.[217] It is a space that spirals down into great depths, at the centre of which lies its greatest evil, and the presence of multiple access points and thresholds, most of which are difficult to see or traverse, aid in it becoming a form of a transitional, Dantean Hell, whereby each subsequent space holds more horrors than before.

[217] Alison Gazzard, 'Paths, Players, Places: Towards an Understanding of Mazes and Spaces in Videogames' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Hertfordshire, 2009), p. 21.

The fact that the protagonists can never quite see in front of them means that they are consistently unaware and unprepared, and it is therefore never certain which stage of their katabases they are in. The holograms themselves, mere portals of light, provide another level of insubstantiality to both movement and space. Upon his intrusion into Quin's Shanghai Circus, Nicholas comes into contact with the otherness of the underground in a moment that clearly brings to mind VanderMeer's own comments on Lovecraft and the monstrous gaze: 'The cages, the smell, made me none too curious - made me look straight ahead' (p. 18). VanderMeer redirects the gaze away from the horrific cages that house now-extinct animals in a way that forces both Nicholas and the reader to hyper-focus only on what lies right in front of them – that is, Quin. The presentation of Quin himself evokes his sense of otherworldly dominance: 'Quin's head was half in dark, half in the glow of the overhead light', forcing Nicholas to 'move forward, if only to glimpse Quin in the flesh, in his seat of power' (p. 18). Strange, religious echoes of a divine figure lit from above, and the deliberate requirement of Nicholas's movement towards him, once more set up the importance of Quin as a strange, omniscient and orchestral figure, a conductor of action. The half-hidden figure is revealed to be a grotesque product of nightmares that provides the initial element of body horror in the narrative; Quin is presented as being one with the counter-space of his laboratory, a piece of Living Art moulded into his surroundings, but the half-glow of the lights and Nicholas's overall hesitancy to describe him fully mean that no concrete image is provided.

No space in *Veniss Underground* is more evocative of this visual dichotomy than the Cadaver Cathedral, a place which ironically performs unholy dissections and forcible organ donations to feed the demands of Quin and those who dwell in the city. It is the space where Shadrach will finally find Nicola and is one that again feeds into the association of Gothic horror as seen in Chapter 2 and 3, this time through a strange and sublime portrayal of a holy space. Another area under Quin's control, it also utilises the power of sight to warp perception and fear. The visceral body horror of *Veniss Underground* serves to further the notion that the human body is that which is most monstrous when accosted by the Other forces found on the journey. As Xavier Reyes states, body horror's 'emphasis on supernatural elements and its celebration of the transmorphic capacities of the body are normally in opposition to that of contemporary horror, which often depicts the body as a carnal prison.'[218] In *Veniss*, VanderMeer brings both elements together, transforming the body into a product of posthuman entrapment whilst leaning into elements of the monstrous and supernatural. The space itself reflects this fear and confusion; the size of the underground hospital is shown through Shadrach's gaze, with columns, gargoyles and archways providing a sense of dizzying height, another sense of depth. The space's ability to confuse is shown when individuals pass Shadrach with a gurney of body parts

[218] Xavier Reyes, *Body Gothic: Corporeal Transgression in Contemporary Literature and Horror Film* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2014), p. 57.

happens too quickly for him to register before they are ‘lost in the distance’ (p. 123) and when he walks around a corner only to find out immediately it is a dead-end (p. 124) — but what are dead-ends, in Veniss, if not possibilities of further exploration? Before coming to the nave, Shadrach walks through dark tunnels filled with dismembered, living bodies, all seeking to reach out to him in the blackness, separated from him by a gate (p. 115). He is able to use this gate to shut out the sight and thought of children playing with the dismembered parts. Again, just as Nicholas focuses ahead on Quin, Shadrach concerns himself only with his destination and avoids looking at the monstrosities around him. The nature of his surroundings is consistently kept just out of reach, a forced viewpoint that allows the question to be raised of what lies beyond. ‘Row upon row of bodies’ lie in the ‘bewildering proliferation’ of walls instead of saintly sculptures (p. 125), and those bodies that are whole are more monstrous here than those missing multiple limbs, their lack of deformity making them abnormal. The bodies no longer of use lie in a ‘writhing, seething pit of flesh’ (p. 127) which Shadrach must access through another tunnel of limbs until he can find Nicola within. The legs are ‘a forest, a tangle from which he built a ladder, a bridge, to get to the top’ (p. 128), a space being made entirely of discarded and disfigured half-alive bodies, a monstrous amalgamation made entirely of the human. The entire time, Shadrach’s gaze moves between objects and spaces but never settles long enough to provide a sense of stability other than scenes of fearsome carnage and decay, which even then is questionable given that the place has already been provided with a sense of otherworldliness as a means for Shadrach to cope. There is a chance he could merely be exaggerating, his fear amplified by the darkness; however, his overall perception – the only viewpoint afforded to the reader – is inconclusive. Shadrach must drag a dismembered and disfigured Nicola from a mountain of flesh, her destined final resting place, before he can move on. Despite the horrific nature of this one compartmentalised space, the Cadaver Cathedral lies only on the fifth level of Veniss Underground, and greater horrors lie further below. The only way from here is down, and Shadrach must embark on a twisted journey towards the centre of the labyrinth and the monster that lies within.

Deeper underground lies the true extent of Quin’s world. The Thirtieth level, the one in which Quin lives, is described by Shadrach as the novel’s ultimate hellspace: ‘if there were a Hell on Earth, it wasn’t in the wastelands between cities, but here’ (p. 176). This space, an in-between realm of fantastical imagination, the unstable boundaries of which and the creatures who inhabit it invoking both fear and disgust, is where Quin resides. The centre of his realm is the centre of all the novel’s hellishness. Just as Quin is a part of his own surroundings, so too are his surroundings made of his parts and the centre of his domain lies on and within the body of a giant leviathan. It lies at the epicentre of Veniss Underground, from which Quin ‘rules the world...like a god’ (p. 160), a world in which others, those most human, do not belong. Salvador, who guides Shadrach underground, tells him that ‘Quin made everything, even the sea. This is his laboratory. This is his world. Not yours’ (p.

179). Notably, the world *is* that of the meerkat, whose place as a synthesised, monstrous creation of Quin is solidified by his nature. Even the sea, however, is Other: it is 'the mouth of a creature that holds Quin' (p. 186), a space within a space, a creature within a creature, on top of which are fighting factions of his own creations vying for belonging and for the overtaking of their own world and the one above (p. 201). His Shanghai Circus is but a minuscule part of the entire whole, and the leviathan encompasses his, and the protagonists', whole world. If the leviathan were to close its mouth, that world would cease to exist and all of the creatures within it would be consumed. It is a world entirely dependent on its placement within the darkness; if light should ever fall on it, it would either 'shrivel and decay' or 'rise up to blot out the sun' (p. 191), an ending which, no matter which side it would fall on, would end in the disintegration of one of the main spaces. Quin is a being who encompasses all of his own monstrous creations, residing within the gullet of his beastly throne, but when he is finally revealed, the truth of the hidden gaze falls away. Rather than a giant emperor, Quin is but an amorphous ball of flesh, far smaller and more insignificant than his role allows (p. 207). The stripping away of all barriers is almost disappointing, and the lack of clear gaze or ideas that lead up to this point are meant to set up the monstrous as more than it is finally revealed as. Despite the horror that Shadrach witnesses both above and below level, his assassination of Quin is anticlimactic, proving that the perceptions of hellspaces and how they affect knowledge and understanding overtake any reality in the creation of the novel's horror. The ultimate monster and creator of monsters is underwhelming; the protagonists have suffered at the hands of a force that is, in the end, no greater than themselves, and its destruction leaves a trail of misery in its wake that the novel's conclusion does little to quell. Above all, what Quin's control and actions have done is paved the way for a new product of his monstrosity, an invasive and insidious presence that, much like the proximity between Veniss and its underground mirror, will be revealed to have been there all along, within the identities of the three protagonists.

I. "Did you ever truly know this city?": The Body, The Self, The City

On the course of her shattered perceptions and increased understanding, Nicola comes to understand that not only is Veniss Underground an unknowable and unnavigable maze, but one that is also a crystalline mirror (p. 77). What this links to is notions of doubling that have already been shown to inherently form a part of katabatic narratives, with above and below ground spaces, pre- and post-katabatic identities, and dynamics of the Other all part of the pattern as previously discussed in *Earthsea, Hill House,* and *American Psycho* both in terms of a second self that emerges along the course of the journey and in connection to space. The other self has been shown as the self in actuality (such as Ged, Eleanor or Patrick), or found in physical, other figures (such as Cob and Price). *Veniss Underground*, however, is a novel of three parts, a trilogy of protagonists and selves and spaces, but

despite this utilises the same configurations as doubled katabases. The sense of self held by the characters is defined through their linearity to spaces, which sees the understanding of them stem almost solely from the perception of the protagonist's self and body at the time, with space itself becoming a mere extension of the self. The protagonists all come to individually represent a part of Veniss, spatial reflections that are aided by literal, mirrored ones alongside symbolic connections which are used to portray the concept of the dualled self as something inherently within that is revealed on the course of the journey, and in this case their transformations align them more fully with their requisite spaces.

Three as One

Discussed previously in *Earthsea,* the second self appears as a shadow, closer to the self than previously thought.[219] *Veniss Underground* shares in this interpretation; here, the double is a less tangible version of the self, and by being so reflects the original self's own increasing intangibility, reinforced by having the double not only be just shadow but biological twin. There is a sense of a shared, symbiotic consciousness between Nicola and Nicholas – 'two as one' (p. 76) – through which their twinship transcends physicality. Grown from the same synthetic womb, they are in many ways each other, right down to the gendered forms of their names. She remarks that she 'sees Nick in the frown' (p. 27) that doubles and mirrors her twin on her own face, and mirrors themselves are used as visual representations of their twinship; when Nicola visits Nicholas's apartment after his disappearance, she stares into the mirror and causes a hologram to double her reflection. This hologram, a double of a double, represents the fractured nature of Nicola's own sense of self as a result of her changed perception of the city, and creates four Nicholases in Nicola's space. The Nicholas residing within Nicola seems 'more alive' than Nicola's own self and they both see a more 'ghostly' Other that represents their twin who is paradoxically both a dead-end shadow and a betterment of themselves, a warning of what is to come (p. 27). It is characteristic of the presage of identity loss as a result of katabasis, whereby the Other is given precedent: 'There is a shadow life here – you see it in mirrors, where your image does not quite match your form, your motions not quite synchronized with this other' (p. 39).

The doubled self creates an uncertainty in identity that the space of the city transposes onto the individual, and both Nicholas and Nicola struggle with their own identities as their realities are torn apart on the course of their katabases. Nicholas, having sacrificed his body to become another of Quin's Living Arts, laments to Shadrach in their meeting underground that he is 'a reflection of [his]

[219] Burkham, p. 2.

own failure' (p. 156) The body that he now possesses, a gruesome struggling lump best kept away from the light, is a mirror of this Other self he saw reflected and wished never to become, a poor attempt at assimilating with Quin's creations and his own godly power. When he explains his actions against Nicola to Shadrach, he states that it was like looking in the mirror and killing himself (p. 159). Any action or harm that Nicholas takes against Nicola extends to himself and just as Nicola saw Nicholas in herself, so too does Shadrach see Nicholas in Nicola. He is unable to bring himself to harm Nicholas, despite the threat he poses, due to the similarities in appearance to his former lover. It is by Nicholas's own hand that he eventually perishes in a suicide that sees him kill his reflected and true self. Inbar Kaminsky notes the inherent uncanniness associated with both the novel's twinship and use of the 'you' pronoun in Part II: 'recognition of the other as you is at the heart of the experience of the uncanny.'[220] Nicola or the unknown 'you' is not simply the Other that is formed as part of the descent into Veniss; rather, it is another being entirely, a personal identification and a physical form of the Other, which even here, during Nicholas's confession, cannot escape the confines of personal duality. Nicola's attempted murder by Nicholas effectively becomes a suicide of the self by the Other, one that leads to her fragmentation and his downfall. As Nudelman notes, the double is often reflected in the motif of the labyrinth,[221] a recurring connection across many of Veniss's layers, and Nicholas's and Nicola's own struggle against the monster at the centre – Quin – is extrapolated through their shared conjunction which serves only to Other themselves further from their known selves and each other. Even Veniss itself, with its darkened city walls and skyscrapers, is connected to twinship: 'you thought you could discern the faded, distant twinkle of Balthakazar, sister city' (p. 26). If twinship is compounded by both places and people, then it is further consolidated by the connection between the self and a cityspace, both of which are labyrinthine.

The mirrored narratological connections between Nicholas and Nicola are similarly joined by Shadrach, and between them they create a metaphorical tertiary bridge that sees the protagonists consociate not only with each other but the spaces around them. As such, they become representative of the very spaces they move around and between. Kaminsky states that the spaces of the city and the levels within it are 'examined in relation to their metaphorical function as an alternative body of the protagonists, who no longer view corporeality as a desirable means to exist and constantly seek to subvert it.'[222] The spaces of Veniss Underground are used as a way of subverting bodily desires and functions towards a more posthuman approach; the protagonists become fully connected to space itself in a way that provides a fluidity between the self, the body, and their occupied environment. The

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[220] Inbar Kaminsky, 'Urban Twinship: The Body of the Futuristic City in Jeff VanderMeer's *Veniss Underground*', in *Cityscapes of the Future: Urban Spaces in Science Fiction*, ed. by Yael Maurer and Meyrav Koren-Kuik (Leiden: Brill, 2018), pp. 13-27 (p. 20).
[221] Nudelman, p. 182.
[222] Ibid., p. 14.

trilogy is compounded by the representation afforded to the spaces by the protagonists, and if the three main areas can be categorised as the city (demarcating any space above level), the Underground (the world of Veniss Underground itself, from first level below ground to its questionable end), and between (the world of holograms, thresholds, and the unknown), then the trilogy is replicated neatly by Nicola, Shadrach, and Nicholas respectively. This diverges from Kaminsky's view of Nicholas representing above, Nicola below, and Shadrach between, and whilst this view serves a more posthuman reading of the novel, reading katabasis into the trilogy and narrative requires a different correlation – one that serves to highlight the nature of both self and space that has resided in the novel from the beginning, and is merely brought to light by their respective descents.

Nicola, as a programmer of the free market who lives and works in Veniss proper, a position that inherently involves control, is the representative of above ground. She is a fully assimilated participant in life above level, and to her the city is 'so methodical, so rational' (p. 27). The stability she has there is represented through her literal position above the rest of the city's geography and her tendency to occupy high level spaces signifies her own awareness. Her ability to splice and rewrite an abstract world of her own high above the glittering cityspace perceivably links her to Quin's own methods of creation (p. 35). Her entire corpus of spatial knowledge is delegated to the city of Veniss itself, knowing nothing of below level (p. 36). When she meets Shadrach, the two levels of the city collide in a way that sees them both be referred to as twins separated for too long, two halves of a spatial whole – Veniss and Veniss Underground -–with a shared sense of spatial identity and awareness. They are a levelled antithesis of each other: 'You knew the city and he did not […] Your knowledge and sophistication. His strangeness, his stories about a place that seemed fantastical, impossible, unreal' (p. 51). She has a degree of awareness and control over her actions within the city but when faced with the prospect of entering somewhere she has no knowledge of and cannot easily codify, she panics and loses her sense of mental and physical stability (p. 43). Her shaking hands represent the first stage of her body's fragmentation and as the narrative moves on she loses the corporeality afforded to her through her concrete knowledge of above ground, which is slowly being chipped away by the presence of the between space and her lover's association with below level. Nicola, as the clearest participant of above-level life, is unassimilated and unable to cope with the changes that occur both spatially and personally below level and in between. She is the most grounded, holding a stable job in the city, and only travels to the other levels by an outside force, seen when she follows the meerkat through the holograph, and is dragged down below level by Nicholas. Her struggle to familiarise herself with other levels represents her strict worldview and her inability to belong in the new planes she explores, representing the required separation of Veniss and its shadowy underground counterpart through the warning of her fate.

As Shadrach learns to navigate Veniss, he gains ‘a distinct advantage over [Nicola], who had never needed mastery to make the city work’ (p. 51). Shadrach is somehow able to manage traversing a space that Nicola has lived in and (possibly) originated in, a space that for her required no guide other than her digitally controlled maps. His presence, and the descent of Nicholas into the underground that leads Nicola to abandon her stable earthly plane in search of him, sees her own navigational abilities subverted by a member of the underground. Their own realities are torn apart on the course of their descents, and Nicola in particular suffers on this front. She is metaphorically fractured when her spatial knowledge and the identity associated with it are subverted by the presence of an in-between space and a deeper understanding for the incomprehensibilities of below level: ‘You feel as if you have found a secret room in a house long familiar. Did you ever truly know this city?’ (p. 79). Not only is her world brought into question, but by not knowing the city she does not know herself. She rationalises her own experience by forcing herself to believe that the impossible are dreams and, in doing so, she gains a semblance of control over her slip. When searching for a mapped and visible sign of the forest and the white bridge, she sifts through programmes and examines city plans, unaware of an absence that should be reflected in her anatomy: ‘Something has been deleted here. [She] [n]ever felt a corresponding emptiness in [her] heart’ (p. 79). Her assumption that her body should have detected this strange city anomaly is only one of multiple instances where her physical form and the space she occupies are affected by each other.

Once her awareness of the city increases upon the discovery of its below counterpart, she finds it difficult to consolidate herself with her previous connection, again reverting to dreams through her confusion at such changed perspectives: ‘you are waiting in a dream that is not your apartment. You are dreaming in a world that is not your world’ (p. 85). Nicola disconnects herself from the city that she is so inherently bound to once it is discovered as more than it presents, and her lived experiences become dreams as a way to cope. Shaw argues that ‘the accepted cartographies of both bodies and cities are brought into doubt’ when the criteria that distinguishes human, animal, and machine destabilise,[223] and Nicola struggles to quantify herself and the space around her when faced with the plans of Quin’s synthetic creatures to overtake the world of humans. Her literal fragmentation happens in the Cadaver Cathedral and, despite not being given a canonical description in the novel, her experiences are narrated by Shadrach afterwards. Loss of limb echoes loss of mind and serves as a symbol for her un-belonging; she resides in the mounted pool of dismembered body parts in the lowest point below level that she will reach, and for it she has been ruined. A breaking of the soul – or

[223] Shaw, p. 7.

in this case, identity – is essential to katabatic journeys.[224] Nicola's ordered world has become entirely disordered, reflected in the fragmentation of her own body in a world where bodies are synthetically constructed. Her transformation now sees a distinct absence of the human body, conforming to the looser constraints of the Other which leads to her fragmentation. Nicola forsakes her humanity and identity, metamorphosing towards the monstrous, and she is found below level comatose and 'a step before death' (p. 140). Her part of the novel lends itself to a certain lucidity, the 'you' a solid direction that, despite its impersonal impetus, provides stability that echoes her own relationship with the city proper. Once below level, however, this selfsame stability is lost, replaced by both a broken body and mind. Her section culminates in a destructive katabasis, and the only time she appears in the narrative again is through Shadrach's eyes. For her own personal narrative, the subsuming of her selfhood and the city is absolute and her new form, one with a fractured mind and a lost limb and eye and intrinsically connected to the experience of inhabitation, has no choice but to become a reflection of her new state of understanding.

Nicholas, denizen of neither city state nor underground labyrinth, like Quin his idol, metaphorically incorporates his own body with the space he represents: the between. He is neither fully assimilated to above or below, and his own crisis of identity that sees him venture towards Quin and his created worlds is a culmination of his already fractured self into something completely Other. His eventual demise below level allows him to completely subsume himself as one of Quin's creations and as an embodiment of the very Living Art that he strives for. His complete sense of un-belonging allows him to find solace and compatibility in the synthetic world of Quin's visible imagination. Despite Kaminsky arguing that Nicholas is representative of above ground and Nicola of below, and whilst it is true that Nicholas's descriptions of the city, unlike his sister's, are entirely surface-level, any connection he has to the world above is negated at the very beginning through his desires of absorption into the Other. Considering his own designation in Veniss' Tolstoi district in comparison to Nicola's own high-rise apartment and workplace, his position, accompanied by his own personal predicaments, solidify his middling status in the katabatic model. The images of the city that Nicola is so inherently connected to 'had torn their way from [his] mind to the holo, forever lost' (p. 6), and Nicholas's own impetus is present from the beginning. When he reaches Quin's Shanghai Circus, his self is effectively abandoned in the 'watchful "I"s of the purple-lit sign' (p. 16), tying his identity directly to the space he will come to inhabit. It becomes a representation of the metamorphosis his body is about to undertake to assimilate below level, the capital "I" unmistakably connected to the self, pluralised and electronic.

[224] Clark, p. 33.

Nicholas's section spans only seventeen pages and at the end of Part I his movements and whereabouts are unknown. When he resurfaces, he is a fractured version of the self that existed above ground; Shadrach 'r[uns] into the darkness' to find Nicholas, who has transformed into a grotesque, amorphous globule barely resembling his former self and body (p. 154). The 'trashfolk' of the underground dehumanise him and Other him in the very domain of the Other, and his complete absorption into the shadow partially merges him with below ground. The very nature of shadows, however, is their insubstantiality and non-corporeality. Despite his own desperate actions, he is still unable to fully become and assimilate with the space he occupies. He refuses to answer Shadrach's identifying question and he becomes a 'ghost' of his own self, one that exists in one space while the other part moves on: 'Nicholas sl[id] further down the wall, until he was sitting. And yet the shadow occupied the same space' (p. 155). Here, he twins Nicola, who begins feeling strange after she enters Veniss Underground and returns as a shadowed version of herself, almost as though a part of their beings are stuck in the space they previously occupied. The wall acts as a screen to project the image of the shadowed self onto the space, this second self that is currently breaking apart as a product of their bodily transformations and inability to adjust to below level. He reaffirms this separated Other from himself; 'I'm not myself, Shad. I'm just not' (p. 155). Having gone further than Nicola in his own bodily transformation, he cannot come to terms with his complete Othering and both his mind and body battle for an impossible existence. Nicholas's own double suicide sees him kill the self he sees in Nicola and his own destroyed being when he jumps from the carriage of a train and plummets deeper below level. Out of the trilogy of protagonists, he is the most to suffer from his trip below ground. His body is the most transformed and destroyed, and thus the extinction of the self and the body in this space is his only escape, lest he forever be trapped between identities and worlds.

As the final third, Shadrach represents that which encompasses below level. Just as Nicola associates with her sister-city of possible birth, so too does Shadrach become the companion of his own home. Raised in the rubble and ruin of below, he unmistakably associates, at least in katabatic terms, with Veniss Underground itself. Shadrach is consistently able to travel between above and below. As an intrusion in Veniss, he seeks solidarity in the love of Nicola, his above-world antithesis who will eventually send him back underground. From his prior affiliation to the spaces below level, he is able to navigate but never actually succumb to the struggles that Nicola faces; effectively, he belongs there. His own ability to be able to navigate relatively unscathed, and for him to fully assimilate with life above level, come from a former understanding that is characteristically oppositional to the pattern. In no Classical myth, and rarely in modern retellings, does the katabatant not only hail from the underground world but return there. For Shadrach, Hell is personal, intrinsic to his own being and development. If Hell as a space firmly represents something that is not the self and

a place on un-belonging, denoted a specific function when named as such[225]— as seen in both *Earthsea* and *Hill House*— then Shadrach becomes somewhat of an outlier. The hellishness of Veniss Underground, at least for him, does not come from the space itself but the way in which the space serves as a threat to his lover. For Nicholas and Nicola, Veniss Underground is associated with hellspaces through their fear of the unknown, represented by their literal bodily and mental destruction. For Shadrach, Hell is home and, perhaps ironically, for the denizens of Veniss he is everything that signifies and symbolises the Other without physically appearing as such. On his own journey back below ground, Shadrach does not suffer the same physical collapse as his counterparts – though he does suffer in terms of both mental and physical exhaustion, there is no literal evisceration of his bodily self. At the end of the novel when Shadrach helps Nicola ascend towards the city of Veniss, Nicola grows stronger and Shadrach grows weaker: they have subsumed the city levels into their identity so completely that only re-assimilation can reconvene their previous balance. Their complete Othering, however, means that this is impossible. In effect, the trilogy of protagonists all suffer from the same dissociation of the self in relation to the spaces that they occupy, each becoming their own form of the Other that directly aligns with their personal definitions and identified domains.

You and He

There is one last duality to couple that of Nicholas and Nicola, Veniss and Veniss Underground. The collision of two viewpoints, catalysed by the repetition of 'two as one' (p. 143) that previously linked to the twins, occurs in the moment when Shadrach enters Nicola's mind in order to save her from death, intersecting the concepts of dream and nightmare spaces, thresholds, and the three realms of Veniss Underground in one succinct part. With the help of the psyche-witch Rafter, Shadrach begins the process of bringing Nicola 'back from the dead' (p. 139), an unconscious and subconscious location that she has entered as a means of coping with the events and the torments that she has suffered below level. The comparison to Orpheus and Eurydice's myth, in this moment, is unavoidable, as the mythological connotation of bringing a dead lover back to life suffuses the aim of Shadrach's entire journey up until this point — even compounded by Shadrach looking back in his fear of being pursued by something, only to find that it is his lost lover that follows behind him (p. 129). In order for Nicola to reenter the world of the living, Shadrach must delve into the depths of Nicola's subconscious mind through her unconscious body in what is essentially a twisted, near-sexual mental katabasis; his entering the dreamworld is worked as a moment in which the self and the body are surrendered to the Other realm.[226] Though the hellscape and the dreamworld are not

[225] Falconer, *Hell in Contemporary Literature*, p. 18.
[226] Zaleski, p. 45.

synonymous, the connection to the Orpheus myth, and the presence of hellishness in the surrounding environment inhabited by Nicola and Shadrach at this moment create a common connection between the physical descent and the descent into dreams, whereby the journey into the deep subconscious is akin to the descent into the bowels of a labyrinth or hellspace, discussed later in *Passion* and *House of Leaves*, and previously in *Earthsea*. He mentally enters her with the aid of a technological device that allows the two of them to connect. In doing so, Shadrach momentarily forsakes his bodily connection for Nicola's. In essence, he *becomes* her: two are, in fact, one. Rafter states that the pain Shadrach thinks will be felt by Nicola will in fact be felt by himself (p. 142). The insinuation that Nicola and Shadrach are of separate realms is made when Shadrach fears the descent he is about to undertake: 'he found himself as afraid as he had been since entering below level. Did he know enough about this world to bear what he found in her world?' (p. 142). The divide between them will be breached through this mental connection, and the 'I lost in the you' (p. 142) sees the surrendering of the self for the connected Other; both representatives of below and above ground become seamless in this moment.

When Shadrach finally enters her, the text repeats the beginning of Part II, where Nicola talks of her connection to Nicholas (p. 143). He loses himself to Nicola's memories, their bodies becoming one through the divide, and in this moment, Shadrach's narrative viewpoint changes from the third person to the second; he becomes 'you'. Now, the 'you' is both Nicola within her memories and Shadrach as he traverses within them. Rather than Nicola simply talking of herself when she states 'you were two as one', the 'you' holds a doubled identity. Even memories are twinned alongside identity; Shadrach is now able to view and move through the spaces inhabited by Nicola during her section of the novel. He, however, has the advantage of prescience, and is therefore able to see 'as she did not the menace in the animals that peered out at her from the shadows' (p. 144). Shadrach is aware of the quality of Nicola's own journey despite her ignorance. If the navigation of the space and the mapping of areas is entirely dependant on the gaze and the mindset of the individual, then the places that Nicola inhabited during her point of view are provided with another set of eyes, ones that belong to a representative of below level and have none of the preconceptions of the stability of above ground. Spaces gain a new sense of availability to Shadrach through his viewing of Nicola's memories, and his journey becomes a sort of quasi-mirror to hers; he ventures underground willingly, where she does so unwillingly, and he visits the same white bridge and forest that Nicola herself entered through a hologram. They both ascend together, tying up their joint katabasis with its anabatic counterpart. Shadrach's journey is the willing counterpart to Nicola's forced one, even though their impetuses are the same. They both wish to save that which is close to them, the other half to their whole. For Nicola, Nicholas is her twinned self, less of a mirror and more a clone, whereas for

Shadrach, Nicola is one and the same, the above ground reflection to his below ground self. They both notably end up occupying the same spaces, and despite their methods of transportation and traversal being different, have descended and ascended as one whole. Their states and self are twinned — 'you/he disembodied/reincarnated' (p. 143) — and they become almost inseparable. The point of view, however, does not remain, and almost as soon as Shadrach subsumes the subjective pronoun 'you', he forsakes it again for his familiar 'he, and is able to discern his separability' (p. 143). Just in the way that Nicola dives into her own subconscious as an escape from what she faces below level, Shadrach surfaces from Nicola through the same experience of horror, in this case the realisation that he 'couldn't reach beyond himself into her' (p. 145). From this torn separation, he gains his new impetus, and new knowledge about the final space of Quin's lair.

By splitting up the novel into three parts, three protagonists, and three tenuous spaces, the self is actualised through the Other, and yet there is a sense of consistent separation, of furthering to the point where any actualisation actually becomes impossible. Having Nicholas's section begin in first person, the closest pronoun to the self, Nicola's in second, and Shadrach in third, there is a continued disassociation with identity throughout the novel. Each stage of the tripled journey reveals more about perceptions and the world whilst simultaneously stripping them away, and despite any belief in a separation between the three protagonists based on these binaries of identity and spaces, what they do in actuality is further them from everything except its core, which is actually another figure in the dynamic. As the underground's ruler, Quin is at the centre of perceptions of space and fragmentation of bodies, a strange amalgamation of puppet, human, monster, animal, and god, synthetic and yet natural. By being responsible for such a level of control and hybridity, he encompasses Nicholas, Nicola, and Shadrach's identities and the spaces that they represent. The poem that Nicholas has written that Nicola finds (p. 45) shows Quin as a representative of every dynamic present in the city and thus the protagonists; the first stanza could feasibly be Nicholas, that child in the dark with dreams of fleshy creation; the second, Nicola with her cybernetic connections, her movement from light to dark; the third, Shadrach, who's narrative sees the love of Nicola end the pain he feels above ground. Nicholas's affirmation that Quin is quintessentially unlike himself is true and not true; he is, in fact, like everyone, just as he is the whole of Veniss and Veniss Underground. The usual singularity of names that would separate individuals, however, is strained in *Veniss*; both Nicholas and Nicola are mere gendered opposites, Shadrach is code for biblical allusion, and Quin, in essence, signifies five. What this signifies is that everything means something, and every double or tripled meaning has its own multiple meanings. The associated ambiguity of space and boundaries in the novel is reflected in its characters, and by casting doubt on solidification, the katabatic becomes less concrete, more tenuous, and able to cross thresholds of both bodies and space.

Conclusion

'I needed to strip away the darkness of a subterranean land', VanderMeer writes in the afterword, to 'show, unflinchingly, what hid in that darkness.'[227] A phantasmagoria of holograms and light, a theatre show of horror, the katabatic in *Veniss Underground* is played with to the extent that its boundaries are stripped down to show that everything is a mere puppeteering. The novel informs a complex relationship between its protagonists and worlds, one which exposes the underbelly of the underground by bringing it to the surface, in doing so showing that it was not necessarily confined to the underground to begin with. No longer is the katabatic delegated to the sidelines, a thing glimpsed from the corner of the eye, never truly revealed; it is brought to the surface both literally and metaphorically through the journeys that are central to the narrative, along with its interactions with theories of Othering and posthumanism. No barriers exist between the real, above-world self and the horrific, hellish occupants below, and it is precisely this dynamic that corrupts the mind and body of the protagonists. Nicholas, Nicola, and Shadrach all suffer physically and mentally as part of their journeys in a way that causes them to mirror their experiences, and the gossamer dreams of Veniss as a safe city quickly give way to nightmare. VanderMeer's reliance on construction and ambiguity forces questions on to the presentation of everything from the identity of the protagonists to the spaces they provide, and with them any hope of anabasis is dashed. No true understanding of anything is gleaned, and instead everything is revealed as a construct of either imagined perception or Quin. Nicholas' death and a broken Nicola and Shadrach surfacing back to the city are movements not towards understanding or gain, despite the goal's completion of the lover's acquisition. They merely move 'from one darkness to another' (p. 226), breaking down in mourning over the loss of their former selves, having fully sacrificed their minds and bodies to the underground. Their grief is echoed in the revelation that the horror seen on the course of their katabasis is pervasively present both in the world that was previously thought to be known, and ultimately inside of the self.

[227] Jeff VanderMeer, 'Afterword', in *Veniss Underground*, p. 248.

"BODY, ALL BODY, TO HELL WITH THE SOUL": ANGELA CARTER'S *THE PASSION OF NEW EVE*

Angela Carter, critically proclaimed 'Fairie Queene' and folklorist,[228] has said of herself to be in the business of 'demythologising', an act consisting of discovering and dismantling 'what certain configurations of imagery in our society, in our culture, really stand for'.[229] She is, as Stephen Benson writes, 'rarely wholly speculative at the expense of a representation of social and cultural realities within which her characters function'.[230] Most of her works figure representations of mythological or folkloric inspirations and intertext, and *The Passion of New Eve* is no different. Previously considered a 'neglected Carter masterpiece',[231] the novel is her attempt at scripting a 'moral pornography' through a critique of mythologised notions of femininity alongside archetypes of sexual behaviour and ideals.[232] A tale of sadomasochism, surrealism, and feminism, the novel follows Evelyn turned Eve on a sweeping crossing of America on which they become subject to the whims of those around them, transformed by the figure of Mother from male to female in order to autonomously birth a new generation. The novel has been previously read in line with the generalised feminist critique of most of Carter's oeuvre,[233] as well as her own interest in the works of Sade, and whilst these are useful undercurrents with which to analyse the makeup of the novel's use of katabasis — particularly for its use of gendered katabatants and their impetus— it is a passing comment by Falconer that so neatly establishes the way it will be treated: it is a 'descent novel' which rejects myth altogether.[234]

So far, this thesis has set up a collection of representations of katabases both old and new, with mythic and historic frameworks adapted to the novels' own genres and narratives. What happens to a reading of katabasis, then, which so inherently relies on myth, if myth itself is rejected? Here lies a text in which the author self-consciously deconstructs and critiques notions of mythology and mythologisation as a whole, and in doing so this allows for the breakdown of the conventions that

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[228] Edmund Gordon, 'Angela Carter: Far from the fairytale', *The Guardian,* 1 October 2016 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/oct/01/angela-carter-far-from-fairytale-edmund-gordon> [accessed 3 October 2020] (para 16 of of 17).
[229] Angela Carter, 'Notes from the Front Line', in *Shaking a Leg: Collected Writings*, ed. by Jenny Uglow (London: Penguin, 1997), pp. 36-43 (p. 38).
[230] Stephen Benson, 'Angela Carter and the Literary Marchen: A Review Essay', *Marvels & Tales*, 12.1 (1998), 23-51 (p. 27).
[231] Jeff VanderMeer, *The Infernal Desire Machines of Angela Carter* ([n.p.]: Cheeky Frawg Books, 2011)
[232] Gregory J Rubinson, '"On the Beach of Elsewhere": Angela Carter's Moral Pornography and the Critique of Gender Archetypes', *Women's Studies*, 29 (2000), 717-740 (p. 718, p. 720).
[233] Anna Watz, *Angela Carter and Surrealism: 'A Feminist Libertarian Aesthetic'* (New York: Routledge, 2017), pp. 136-163; Merja Makinen, 'Sexual and textual aggression in *The Sadeian Woman* and *The Passion of New Eve*', in *The Infernal Desires of Angela Carter: Fiction, Femininity, Feminism*, ed. by Joseph Bristow and Trev Lynn Broughton (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 149-165.
[234] Rachel Falconer, 'Bouncing Down to the Underworld: Classical Katabasis in "The Ground Beneath Her Feet", *Twentieth Century Literature*, 47.4 (2001), 467-509 (p. 475).

have been laid out previously, thus affording an understanding of just how far the construction (and deconstruction) of the mytheme can be taken. This extreme self-consciousness of representation, as well as Carter's use of language and symbology, complicates the use of mythological images and references associated with katabasis as previously established. The journey itself will be shown, in Section I, to connect not only to gender but to perceptions of the self, with notions of descent being almost entirely internal. What happens to Evelyn and the spaces they travel to are all inherently connected to their perceptions of themselves at the time, which in turn controls the narrative subtextually and acts as the overarching component of a katabasis which provides all the gendered associations of heroic journeys and passive female characters discussed previously. Katabasis will also be shown to progress less through a concrete personal development and more an abstract progression in which the mytheme becomes a veneer for change, with physical transitions code for mental and bodily ones. Its general ambiguity will also be discussed alongside its accompanying intertexts and allusive references. Section II will analyse how space instead is shown as fluid and transitional alongside the protagonist, the very literal transitions from different places mere reflections, as well as a discussion of the further complication of representation through such means as the mirror and the inherent connection between self and space. What remains an undercurrent throughout is an expansion on the inherent instability afforded to katabatic narratives in the texts chosen, taken further here by the novel's inherent process of demythologisation.

I. "Who may not be resurrected if, first, he has not died?": The Journey of Evelyn to New Eve

The worlds of Carter's works, as Rushdie writes, are fairgrounds, ones controlled by 'the gimcrack showman, the hypnotist, the trickster, the puppeteer',[235] and yet rather than hide her methods behind such trickery, she uses their very notions to showcase them for all they are. At its core, this is what Carter's process of demythologisation entails. It is employed as the practice of setting up a recurrent motif, theme or concept —such as a mythic figure or fantastical land— in order to later undermine it through allusions that both modify and highlight its original representations. Carter herself defines myth as 'ideas, images, stories that we tend to take on trust without thinking what they really mean',[236] and unlike the mythmaking of Le Guin, whose katabasis is based entirely upon mythic components coupled with the process of fantastical creation within her genre, Carter's demythologisation goes against this notion by questioning the components of a work that is inherently

[235] Salman Rushdie, 'Introduction', in Angela Carter, *Burning Your Boats: The Collected Short Stories* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1995) p. xi.
[236] Anne Katsavos, 'An interview with Angela Carter', *The Review of Contemporary Fiction*, 14.3 (1994), pp. 11-17 (p. 12).

associated with mythological imagery as a means of its construction. As such, it becomes impossible to read Carter's work and its mythic associations and intertexts without them being undermined by a reading of their construction. The katabasis of *Passion* is therefore presented much in the same nature as that of *Hill House*, and all other texts aside from *Earthsea*; alluded to in terms of hellspaces and katabatic potential, but never directly referenced to as a method of myth-making for the textual world created (or mimicked) by the author.

Journeys, narrators and descents

If katabatic narratives must involve, as previous chapters have established, a form of descent (whether literal, metaphorical, or otherwise) into a space that can be deemed as a form of Hell, then Carter's work must employ such methods to be considered such, and in a narrative that sees the traveller journey across cities, deserts, underground labyrinths and caves, it would appear impossible to disconnect the overt sense of the journeying motif that is central to katabasis from such a movement. However, in comparison to *Earthsea* and *Veniss Underground*, or even to less conventional texts with descending motifs such as *Hill House* or *House of Leaves*, where movement and direction are so central to the storytelling that they become the main means of representation, the sheer self-consciousness of the allusions that are woven throughout *Passion* complicates its explicit use of the pattern. The narrative is hyperconscious of its own processes which in and of itself encourages examination. This is alluded to from the very beginning, when Evelyn self-critically comments on the 'external symbols' which are used to 'express the life within us with absolute precision'.[237] Not only do these refer to the performativity of gender, the use of bodies, and intertext, discussed further later, but also the archetypes and configurations that make up katabasis. These external symbols become in and of themselves a method of narrative construction, and by highlighting their use so early on, Carter presents an immediate awareness of the process being undertaken. As a result, this attention to detail is reflected in a narrative of mounting paranoia, in which each symbol, intertext, allusion, and even word pays obsessive attention to meaning. The creation of *Passion*'s katabasis is thus a process of establishment and dismantlement, and as a result its tracking must involve less of a literal trace through the trajectories of the traveller as has been done previously, and more an analysis of the complex amalgamation of its various forms.

Carter's self-consciousness and demythologisation imbues the novel with a degree of instability from the offset. Provisioned to the katabases of previous texts through a sense of gradual recognition, whereby the understanding of the mytheme's presence occurs in a moment of revelation

[237] Angela Carter, *The Passion of New Eve* (London: Virago Press, 1982), p. 2.

which then allows for the reconstruction of the text beforehand based upon changed perceptions, instability becomes reflective of the traveller's identity and the space that they reside in specifically as a product of the katabasis itself. For *Passion*, however, there is no chance of adjustment or any hint of a revelation to occur, and the mytheme and its methods of construction become unstable allusions from the beginning. The proverbial rise of the curtain occurs fittingly in a London cinema, where Evelyn, watching a performance of the alluring on-screen figure Tristessa in *Wuthering Heights*, receives fellatio from an anonymous woman. This opening serves as an implicit reminder of narrative consumption by an author who is deliberately playing on expectation and understanding. Carter foregrounds the scene in associations of representation and viewing, where Evelyn becomes a consumer of a visual narrative, particularly one of Gothic, ghostly undertones. From the very first episode, Carter forces attention towards representations and clues the reader in that subsequently, perceptions in particular should be paid attention to, and that these perceptions, as insinuated by the falsity of Trsitessa's cinematic image, may not be trustworthy. The concerns of the opening are the concerns of the rest of the novel, and having them so involved in allusion and meaning sets up the expectation of a narrative of falsehood and theatricality which directly correlates with Carter's own narrative methods.

As with the reminder of external symbols, there are conscious reminders that the details of Evelyn's journey come from a place of objective reflection in the narrative, aided by the instability and shadowy nostalgia afforded to the space of the cinema. Evelyn, retelling their story from some point in the future, is already aware of the culmination of events. Tristessa, an emblem and enigma of instability and illusion whose status is questioned from the start, is introduced in terms of a 'real but not substantial' goal (p. 2, p. 3), their eventual meeting and its outcome already insinuated by Evelyn as narrator. In her reading of the novel, Hope Jennings asserts that readers are provided 'no clear indication of where Eve might be journeying, or even from what location she might be narrating her story',[238] but this only pertains to the literal destination that Eve sails away to at the end of the novel. Rather, the course of the journey is given over to destiny — akin to Sparrowhawk's fated end in *Earthsea* — with the end of all journeys being noted as the beginning (p. 182). This fleeting intertextual reference to Eliot,[239] returned to later in more detail, not only condenses the entire events of the novel into one sentence but reflects the cyclicality of the novel in relation to anabatic returns and rebirths. The goal of Eve's journey is described in no clear way outside of an arbitrary sense of 'fatality', a destination that has already been chosen (p. 35). What this does is change the

[238] Hope Jennings, 'Dystopian Matriarchies: Deconstructing the Womb in Angela Carter's *Heroes and Villains* and *The Passion of Eve*', *Michigan Feminist Studies,* 21.1 (2007), 63-84 (p. 83).
[239] 'East Coker' opens with 'In the end is my beginning', in T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets.* New ed. (London: Faber, 2001).

configurations of the journey; aided by the self-conscious use of external symbology, it is narrated by a traveller that already knows what is going to happen. Elements that come as part of its course are therefore analysed beforehand, and rather than coming to a gradual understanding of the culmination of events or even a hope for anabasis, the groundwork has already been laid for its ending.

By changing the configurations of trajectory, the configurations of the traveller and their impetus also change. There is a possibility that a fated end-goal could forsake the requirement of an impetus, but Carter must first set up this pattern in order to break it down, particularly when considering the historic and heroic drives previously prescribed to it. The implication of gendered impetuses was briefly touched upon in Chapter 2, but here, in a novel so concerned with gender, the focus on the traveller and their impetuses is taken further, whereby the travellers are associated both with and against these previous notions. By beginning the narrative as a man, Evelyn is associated with the figure of the traveller not only through his initial movement towards another destination but historically by way of his gender,[240] and his depiction is one that exhibits an awareness of his own gender and sexuality. The male heroic katabatants of old are often active participants who 'demonstrate considerable initiative in the course of the katabasis',[241] emboldened with a sense of duty and destination, moved along by notions of a preconceived goal. The lack of descriptive journeys and impetus that Evelyn and the narrative exhibit, however, goes against the establishment of Evelyn as a male traveller. He is associated with none of their characteristics, and the overt masculinity that would have supplied him with a form of historical impetus instead becomes parodical. Evelyn's status as a spectator sees his masculinity given over to the same passivity as the other female travellers and his own future self. His abstract expression of attraction to a feminine figure of cinema, already destabilised as an impetus by her very status as a being of illusion and allusion, becomes his only goal, despite his general ambivalence towards all other women even as one anonymously provides him pleasure (p. 5). Throughout his journey, Evelyn forfeits himself to the desires and machinations of those around them, moved on by a force entirely outside of themselves — though at times ironically symbolised by the external image of his erection (p. 20)— that sees him abandon any form of male authority on his journey, with movement often described in terms of being 'dragged' down or around (p. 44), lacking any autonomy. Tristessa, Leilah, and eventually Mother act like calling sirens, lulling Evelyn towards the desired locations that presage the end destination. His impetus thus becomes an ironic, often unwitting draw to the feminine that he will become. This passivity even continues once Evelyn becomes female, subjected to stages of sexual abuse and impregnation. Unlike her male self,

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[240] Gigi Adair and Lenka Filipova, 'Introduction: Gendered travel and the genre of travel writing', in *Encountering Difference: New Perspectives on Genre, Travel and Gender*, ed. by Gigi Adair and Lenka Filipova (Delaware: Vernon Press, 2020), pp. xvii-xxx (p. xix).
[241] Vaclavik, p. 67.

however, she exhibits a rare moment of imperative in her escape from Beulah, which, given the destined end orchestrated by Mother, may simply have been allowed to happen. The closer she comes to the destined goal, the closer her movement becomes associated with fulfilling the prophecies prescribed in the beginning. Her transformation, meeting with Tristessa, and sea journey are all fated as per narrative instruction, so while she may have some form of will in this one moment, everything else is still largely involuntary in terms of trajectories, making them a reflective, passive narrator of their own katabasis.

Despite the passivity of impetuses and end-goals, as well as the setup of the journey as one that will play with its own allusions, there is still a traceable element that is required for its construction. This takes the form of an external and physical transition across the various locations in America that Evelyn moves through, with each stage pre-configured according to a place in the future that is, as Jennings stated, unknown. In total, there are seven clearly differentiated spaces visited on Eve's journey. Their proliferation is next to none other than in *Earthsea*, with all other novels containing within them a core space that acts as the location of katabasis or the representative form of Hell. These episodic elements allow for the suggestion of a sequence, with each one providing more clues as to how the ending is reached, fulfilling some element of the opening's reflections. The novel's practical details in regards to travel are concerned with the Americanised mythology of the road, introduced in *Hill House*, with novels focused on the country often haunted by the possibility of other places.[242] This offers the same trajectory of katabasis in that the descent must always couple an ascent into more knowledgeable, richer pastures. However, despite the fact that being able to trace the journey from point A (the cinema) to point B (the sea) fits the mytheme's original means, it is an oversimplification that problematises the actual process being undertaken by Carter, as the simple configuration of descent and ascent is far more complex and includes moments where the trajectory is difficult to understand entirely. Carter is uninterested in transitional sequences — which are only there for narrative purposes— and as such the journey becomes a means of charting the changes that occur both externally and internally, across the landscape of America and within Evelyn, which will see the journey and its associated movement align more with ambiguous representation. Each space in the novel becomes a means of charting the changes that occur to Evelyn rather than destinations in and of themselves, thus affording them a kind of abstraction. Of London, no details outside of Evelyn's sexual acts and the introduction of Tristessa are provided, and New York, though identifiable, is presented as foreign and chaotic, a reflection of Carter's own impression of atmospheric confusion that Europeans who travel to America receive.[243] In fact, all of Evelyn's experiences of America have

[242] Primeau, p. 3.
[243] Rosemary Carroll, 'Angela Carter,' *Bomb*, 17 (1986) <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/angela-carter/> [accessed 4 November 2022]

the tone of an outsider suffering from a form of culture shock, which sees each transition from place to place become continuously more abstract, where familiar, real-world connotations are quickly abandoned for more allusive means. The desert is mere liminality, and Beulah too becomes a heightened space of claustrophobia and fear, the central locale for Eve's transformation. Zero's homestead is a strange realm out of time, and Tristessa's glass mausoleum becomes the space of revelation that eventually leads Eve to the caves and the sea.

The journey described by the transition between locations and events instead comes to represent the changes that occur to Evelyn, with the stages of the journey being categorised more by what occurs in the static than they do in transition. Though transitional moments do occur — with references to methods of travel such as helicopters, cars, and motorcycles (which, despite the unwitting impetus described, are still driven by Evelyn)— there is instead a sense of transplantation to Evelyn's movements which provide them with a lack of significance in order to highlight their internality. Carter's lack of interest in describing such transitions shows the close attention she pays instead to this construction of katabasis and its associated movements; Evelyn appears to simply slip from place to place, one space merely given over to another, such as when she lands in New York with a 'plop!' (p. 5). Instead, what takes precedent are moments in space that signal a change within Evelyn themselves. Physical destinations, even though moved between and within, become less important than the changes that Evelyn undergoes within them, and it is these that come to represent the descent. Though Carter makes an imperative point of direction, the required element of transition becoming an inherent part of the novel's language and processes, its physicality instead represents a reflection of the journey's overall metaphorical arc. Both the journey and the traveller are thus oriented based on the repeated associations of the transition with downward movement in both physical spaces, such as Beulah - 'down, down an inscrutable series of circular, intertwining, always descending corridors' (p. 54), 'down, down, down into the dark' (p. 60) - or the glass mausoleum - 'down we plunged' (p. 112), and within the self: 'Descend lower, descend the diminishing spirals of being that restore us to our source. Descend lower; while the world, in time, goes forward and so presents us with the illusion of motion' (p. 36).

The configuration of katabasis as a descent into the self is seen in previous textual examples. The closest is the alignment of *American Psycho*, which forsakes most physical descending motifs for those that occur within the mind, and both *Hill House* and *Veniss Underground* showcase the effects that a more physical katabasis can have on the internal configurations of the protagonist. Carter uses the same language for her physical descent as she does for her internal, and Evelyn's understanding of her own narrative progress is exhibited as a form of katabasis that reflects an internal trajectory.

Though Evelyn talks here of internal destruction and reconstruction through self-examination, they accurately describe the literal and physical course of the journey they will undertake. Movement therefore becomes illusionary and allusive, all the while occurring physically, if on a more horizontal plane. These repeated notions of descent also provide the novel with a continual sense of being pushed towards something even when the physical details of the journey are negated, and the concept of moving below to a realm already beneath the Earth, coupled with such demonically-presenting figures as Mother and Leilah, is another mere tease towards a possibility of some form of Hell— sacred, mythologised, spacious, or subconscious— that aids in the narrative's katabatic presentation. Her transformation into Eve, in particular, is given katabatic qualities. In reference to the Jungian philosophies that Carter employs throughout her novel (which in and of themselves are employed with characteristic reminders of their effect),[244] the integration of the feminine is conceived as a 'long, perilous and labyrinthine journey', whereby the male traveller is both fascinated and afraid during the course of his penetration into 'the "unknown regions of the psyche"'.[245] Carter uses the anima/animus dichotomy to provide a physicality to the union between female and male, whereby the female in the male mind is given flesh. This act alone is notably compared by Jung, as María Pérez-Gil writes, as a quest in which the hero 'ventures into Hades and to the phase of the nigredo.'[246] The language of descent into the self and the confrontation with another force—in this case the gendered opposite of the original self—on the course of the journey is a nod to Carter's own alchemical take and one that mimics the destruction of the self as a part of katabasis.

This transformation, though lacking in initiative directions or destinations, becomes a way for Carter to figure the notion of rebirths, alchemical, physical or otherwise, into the narrative, a key component to katabasis in terms of its required anabatic endings. This sense of cyclicality, as Dickey writes, is provisioned to katabatic journeys in order to render it 'something other than death', after which the traveller may report the experience to the living[247]— which Eve does through their reflective narrative. Two forms of such rebirths occur in *Passion*. The middle of the novel contains within it a form of rebirth that is usually provided after full anabasis, whereby identity or bodily changes occur that see the traveller emerge anew, as seen in the other textual examples.[248] This is taken further in *Passion,* with Evelyn receiving an entirely new body and sense of self in a space

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[244] Despite critical association of Carter with Jung (see Pérez-Gil), she herself, usually transparent in her methods and inspirations, has little to say on the philosopher explicitly, and allusions made to his philosophies are simply taken as part of the narrative construction.
[245] María del Mar Pérez-Gil, 'The Alchemy of the Self In Angela Carter's "*The Passion Of New Eve*", *Studies In The Novel,* 39.2 (2007), 216–34 (p. 219).
[246] ibid., p. 219.
[247] Dickey, p. 16.
[248] Ged's defeat of the gebbeth and loss of magic in *Wizard* and *Shore* respectively are seen as a rebirth of a new self free of the shadows of katabasis; Eleanor believes a new version of herself to have formed upon entry to Hill House; and both Shadrach and Nicola emerge as new, fractured beings in *Veniss*.

associated with a womb. The second occurs during Evelyn's journey across the sea, pregnant with the child of their own body, return and rebirth emphasised here by Eve carrying new life within her and finally accepting her new gendered self completely. Whether Eve's anabasis will take them back to London, or indeed to the place of birth itself —a centre of some universe in an unknown location or time—is never answered. What is clear, however, is the association of ending the journey with water. Established in *Earthsea* as a katabatic marker and by Smith as a necrotype,[249] water becomes for *Passion* a symbol of rebirth, acting almost as a current of non-literal movement that further provides the journey with a sense of flow from the beginning that eventually leads to the sea. The 'amniotic sea' and the rivers of Mother's womb sweep Evelyn towards her ending (p. 181), and the 'primordial marine smell' of Evelyn's synthetic vagina and its ability to birth represent the capacity for the self to be rebirthed by harkening back to the ocean that is carried within (p. 144). The sea becomes the space of return and rebirth; a return to the pool of creation, evolution and consciousness, one which narrative itself arises from. Eve is a figure made up from other narratives, and this return consigns her to a future outside of that narrative and outside of herself. Carter's creation of a New Eve is one that will birth another created generation; in the final moments of the novel, Eve asks the ocean to 'bear [them] to the place of birth' (p. 187), which, again, could be taken for London (their presumed actual birthplace) or the sea of conscious narratives. Eve sails away, carrying the child inside of her own internal, amniotic ocean, alongside continual reminders of their previous ordeals, across the sea into the unknown. It provides the entire journey with a sense of cyclicality and inevitability: Evelyn cannot escape the presupposed finale that was laid out by themselves in the opening. The cyclical nature of the journey furthers the expectation provided through the preconfigured end destination, and provides yet another outside source to negate Eve's free will in regards to their trajectory. It is configured entirely as a destined anabasis and it occurs far more literally and explicitly here through a katabasis of double rebirths that, despite all of its allusory qualities that waylays any sense of stability, still has a very traceable trajectory that aligns with its original means.

The devil, names and looking glasses

Evelyn's return to the sea of conscious narratives is emblematic of Carter's construction and raises an awareness of the processes being undertaken. In terms of viewing the components of katabasis as part of this process through its allusive associations, their deconstruction is further problematised through her use of archetypes and intertext. The latter — described as 'voracious and

[249] Smith, *The Myth of the Descent,* p. 3.

often dizzying'[250] —is critical to the construction of the narrative whole, offering another element to the overall allusive nature of katabasis. References in her writing—such as the Gothic darkness of the city, the tabula (e)rasa, the nods to Eliot in both destinations as beginnings and the notions of descent — build up expectation. This expectation, however, leads nowhere. For *Passion*, both allusion and intertext become a means to an end to describe and understand a process of narrative creation. They lead to possibilities of discovery and further allusion that aid in complicating the overall unravelling of the novel due to the complexity of those she uses. Her reference to the looking-glass (p. 100), for instance, is not only embedded deep within a language of mirrors (as discussed later), but springs to mind a strange timelessness and Wonderlandish element, which in and of itself links to her later discussion of time in Zero's liminal homestead and the evolutionary flow of water into the sea. The novel is ultimately a narrative made up of other narratives, and her allusiveness has multiple purposes. Not only does it provide passing links that are conscious, if easily missed, but sets up the impression that the work is one of fiction, situated, as such, in other works. Coupled with the other uses of folkloric and mythic elements, katabasis becomes merely one allusion within many.

Her self-consciousness stretches not only to such modes and methods but to characters and places; built yet again on a backdrop of instability established by the form of the narrative, characters themselves become symbolic representations. Much like the elements that make up the journey and the narration, Carter uses character archetypes to destabilise notions of understanding in terms of the narrative whole, once more making an explicit, surface-level reference to her process. Archetypes, another Jungian philosophy, are described as part of the collective unconscious, a set of representational ideals that are 'symbolic expressions of the inner unconscious drama of the psyche', particularly in association to myth.[251] Archetypes for Carter are a collection of individuals who offer clear representations and become physical, visible forms of Evelyn's unconsciousness and, due to her role as the birther of future narratives, collective unconsciousness, as well as being part of Carter's process of destabilising mythic allusion. In an interview with Kasavos, who asks the extent to which she relies on traditional mythic figures in her writing, Carter replies that in *The Magic Toyshop*, published a decade before *Passion*, she transforms the image of swan that seduces Leda into a puppet, stating that these characters become 'artificial construct[s]'.[252] By then, the configurations of mythological characters had largely lost interest to her, and what occurs instead is this similar process of demythologising that characterises her later writing. These formulations of character archetypes

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[250] Christina Britzolakis, 'Angela Carter's Fetishism', in *The Infernal Desires of Angela Carter: Fiction, Femininity, Feminism*, ed. by. Joseph Bristow and Trev Lynn Broughton (Harlow: Longman, 1997), pp. 43-58 (p. 50).
[251] C. G. Jung, *The Archetypes And The Collective Unconscious: The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, ed. by Sir Herbert Read et al., trans. by R. F. C. Hull, 9 vols, 2nd edn (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), pp. 3-5.
[252] Katsavos, p. 12.

and mythological associations are useful in how they are able to be used for a certain representation which is later taken apart, a process of moving away from the 'semi-sacralized' way they have been treated previously.[253]

There is no denying the abundance of mythological, folkloric and religious references in *Passion*. The clue to their proliferation lies in the novel's title, a reference to *The Passion of Christ* which brings to mind tales of trial and suffering, reflected in Carter's own protagonist, as well as notions of the complexity of sexuality and desire, one of the novel's main preoccupations. By consciously superimposing over a cultural narrative in a heterodox fashion, she uses it for her own purposes to rewrite and demythologise the original context. Similarly, her choice of names become general indications of characters' makeups while acknowledging the past associations out of which they are built. Eve becomes the sinner thrown out of the garden and the first created woman. Leilah, born of night, or Lilith, is Adam's first wife, first tempter, but rather than Adam she tempts Eve herself, and they not only allude to the new beginning of humanity, one that they may usher in at the end, but Eve alludes too to evening, or a dawning of a new time of night. It is not a name at all, but a place of beginning, of in-between, a threshold between night and day. Names take on a multitude of meanings, creating characters out of association: Tristessa not only alludes to Karouak's novella of the same name, the woman within named after 'sadness' in Spanish but to Sade through Madame de Saint-Ange, associated with sadistic pleasure,[254] and Zero represents complete sterility, a void of masculinity. Even places become illusive; namesake of real US towns (in North Dakota and Wyoming), Blake's representation of a subconscious paradisiacal realm, and present in John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* as the place of preparation before the River of Death, Beulah is represented in *Passion* as a matriarchal, underground complex beneath the earth of the desert, whereby the union of the sexes becomes one in the same body through the transformation of Evelyn's male body into the feminine.

In Mother, these multitudinous, mythical and alchemical allusions are clearest, through which Carter 'gives a narrative voice to several myths and archetypes associated with the Great Mother, while simultaneously deconstructing and subverting them',[255] and the mythicism associated with her figure is almost overbearing, described as both a holy woman and chthonic deity. Mother is the 'deepest cave' (p. 55), a space representative of a womb— the word for Mother and womb are the

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[253] Ibid., p. 13.
[254] Marie Mulvey-Roberts, 'Angela Carter's "rigorous system of disbelief": religion, misogyny, myth and the cult', in *The Arts of Angela Carter: A Cabinet of Curiosities*, ed. by Marie Mulvey-Roberts (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), pp. 145-165 (p. 156).
[255] Aline Ferreira, 'Artificial Wombs and Archaic Tombs: Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve* and Alien Tetralogy', *Femspec,* 4.1 (2002), 90-107 (p. 91).

same in ancient Greek—and she is the ruler of her own created version. She is the destination of all men, and therefore Evelyn, and a controller of their sexual release. She is associated with the waters of rebirth, the darkness of them hinting at her chthonic association with that of the Styx leading men to their own deaths (p. 56). Her association as a divine and holy figure is linked with the creation of a 'profane place' (p. 43). She is, ultimately, the 'Queen of the Underworld Empress of Demons', complete with her own 'hymn' (p. 58). In terms of katabasis, Western religious literature and iconography has made the connection between a devilish ruler and the space of Hell synonymous. Dante solidified the figure of Satan as the central element of Hell both topographically and overarchingly, and modern katabatic literature finds it difficult to separate the two. The role of this secondary figure in modern katabases is a strange amalgamation of the ruler of hellspaces in a traditional Luciferian sense, and that of a god-like figure within the narrative that has the ability to control the creatures within. It is not far removed from the events of the *Aeneid*, in which Aeneas states that his quest is involuntary and 'perpetually over-ruled by a somewhat unintelligible divine will' that sees him surrender his own will as a result,[256] much in the way that Evelyn and Eve forsake their own impetus for the trajectory of destiny, which in and of itself leads to Mother.

Mother is not the only hellish representation in the text. Though there are no explicit hellspaces in terms of representations of realms to hold the dead, and the word itself only appears colloquially right at the beginning (p 3) and in reference to the torture of Zero's habitual lifestyle ('the girls in hell outside his bed' [p. 104]), katabasis is alluded to multiple times throughout with reference to established trademarks. Some are mere moments, such as when Eve escapes Beulah and meets Cerberus guarding the threshold to her next destination, or towards the end, when she hands the anonymous woman a gold coin, payment for the ferryman Charon (p. 185). Others are much larger and encompass the whole of the text. One of the largest instances of mythic archetypes which has been connected to katabasis throughout this thesis is the image of the labyrinth. The ever-present element has so far been configured as a literal underground maze, a house, and an above- and below-ground city. For *Passion*, the labyrinth is code for everything; it joins all other allusions together and neatly comprises not only the katabasis itself but its representation. Nicoletta Vallorani comments on the labyrinthine nature of the text as a whole, fragmented and divided, requiring an unravelling to fully understand,[257] which the proliferation of intertext and consistent dead-end references aid in. It becomes a literal representation of space in terms of Beulah and the illusion-mirrors of Tristessa's abode, as well as in the city. As a space of twisting alleyways and

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[256] T. R. Glover, '"Aeneas" in *Virgil* (1904)', in *The Hero's Journey,* ed. by Harold Bloom and Blake Hobby (New York: Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2009), pp. 1-10 (p. 7).
[257] Nicoletta Vallorani, 'The Body of the City: Angela Carter's "*The Passion of the New Eve*"', *Science Fiction Studies*, 21.3 (1994), 365–379 (p. 370).

architectural significance, the labyrinthine image of the city serves to provide it with a sense of claustrophobia that creates a boundary between the interior of the space and the previously occupied outside world—furthered by the lack of description of any space prior to it— that sees New York become Evelyn's 'world', closing over his head entirely (p. 6). The unnaming in favour of describing the city in chemical and labyrinthine terms provides it no meaning outside of them, no concrete spatial significance other than symbols, and in doing so allows it to maintain the power of such an allusion. In Beulah, allusions are particularly strong; what lies within is a complex cavern, a technological labyrinth that is unmistakably categorised by mythical allusion, a 'brain-maze of interiority' within which Eve becomes resident Ariadne (p. 53). Evelyn is unable to discern the direction of movement between up and down, but as the corridors wind round and round, descending deeper, they become aware that the only direction possible is down (p. 53). Above all, however, the labyrinth becomes code for internality and bewilderment, as with katabasis. It becomes a representation of space in terms of within the self— a notion returned to both in Beulah and the illusion-mirrors of Tristessa's abode—the goal at its centre being the arrival at a place of understanding that can only emerge on the journey, which Evelyn must descent into in order to reach 'the core ... within' (p. 36). Evelyn's own journey is one through the labyrinth of the self, each corridor and twist, each dead end, just another allusion until the open sea can reveal the truth — but even then, it is a truth that must wait for the future, so the reader is still lost in its confines.

The fact that characters, journeys, and narrative modes are built almost strictly from allusions means that they do not exist without them, and yet Carter's business is of taking them apart to their basest forms.[258] The effect of this process means that the novel does not move towards any moment of clarity; if anything it provides a sense of induced caution, of advising against any literal or realistic reading— in a way, to surrender oneself to the flow of them. The end of the novel is a culmination of these; the reflective narrative, all the notions of rebirth, the possible end of a labyrinth that may never truly be reached, have hit a point where Eve ends up in the flow of narrative to be rebirthed anew, and in turn to transform herself into one such narrative allusion. Everything within this text therefore contains such a plethora of meaning, overlaid with historical, mythic and literary significance, that no sense of solidity or single interpretation is provided. Destinations are not just physical places but points within the journey through the self. Those met, and even the self, are not simply one dimensional archetypes but a collection. It is a journey that is constantly destabilised by allusion, one that sees Evelyn struggle to understand the changes that they undergo as the way to stabilise them is nullified through a lack of solid identification. Katabasis, as a result, is no less present, in fact may be

[258] Carroll, 'Angela Carter'.

even more present, despite not having occurred on a literal descent to a literal space categorised as Hell.

II. "A gigantic metaphor for death": Representations And Perceptions Of Space And Selves

Spaces, bodies and selves

As implied by the internality of descent, Carter's work is reflective of her aversion to traditional representations of cartography, and for her, setting is mapped less by the physical and more through a 'psychic, and imaginative' interaction with her characters' 'own locatedness'.[259] The requirement of a hellspace as a product of the katabasis has previously been established in *Earthsea* and *Hill House*, both of which provide a sense of physicality to it. This physicality, however, is waylaid in both *American Psycho* and *Veniss Underground*, and here it is taken even further, with the setting becoming a code that reflects the internality of the katabasis. This is aided by the general physical ambiguity of the novel and lack of descriptive trajectories in favour of a more bodily representation. The connection between bodies and space discussed previously is also present here, hinted at the beginning of the novel with an uncapitalised and colloquial exclamation that reveals the novel's preoccupation: 'Body, all body, to hell with the soul' (p. 2). However, the distinct ambiguity of the statement makes it difficult to determine the nature that such a space or projection would take in a novel like *Passion*. The focus on bodies, holistic images through which the physicality of the journey is understood, become more important than any reference to Hell (though uncapitalised) alongside broader spiritual, religious, or mythological analogues. As such, despite the clear sense of Evelyn moving between different settings, the settings in and of themselves become less important than what they represent for Evelyn at the time.

This connection between the traveller and the space (whether a form of hell or otherwise) that they occupy is not unique to Carter. All other novels in this thesis discuss the ways in which the traveller can become attached to or affected by their physical locations, largely in response to the effect of horror or discomfort that they cause. Carter's obsession with bodily sensations and manifestations is akin to VanderMeer's, which saw each of his three protagonists become representative of a certain space, with the novel's katabases stemming largely from their movement into unfamiliar territory. The language Carter employs to represent space appears, on the surface, to be describing external situations, and yet her vocabulary brings to mind notions of internality. Much like

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[259] Anna Kérchy, 'Psychogeography in the curiosity cabinet: Angela Carter's poetics of space' in *The Arts of Angela Carter: A Cabinet of Curiosities*, ed. by Marie Mulvey-Roberts (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), pp. 39-57 (p. 40).

the labyrinth of the self being a reflection of the city, Beulah, Evelyn's own mind and body, and the text, other narrative moments are configured as bodily sensations connected to physical space or movement; Evelyn's orgasm during her intercourse with Tristessa, for instance, is like moving through a series of rooms (p. 145-146). As such, rather than being mapped by a progression through space, or a series of spaces, Evelyn's journey is instead traced through an understanding of their own identity at the time, with space becoming a means of reflecting their personal position in a similar form to the 'psychetecture' discussed in Chapter 3. As such, given that Evelyn's narrative is one of increasing instability as they mentally and bodily transition between male and female, there is an increasingly abstract understanding of space and movements between that reflects the increasing instability of Evelyn's own perceptions of themselves, which in turn are what formulates perceptions of space. This works similarly to the dichotomy of order versus disorder as previously established, and as spaces are moved between and due to the changes Evelyn undergoes, these often switch and are used to reflect a sense of transition. Established for its Classical association in *Earthsea* and previously discussed in the other texts, here order and disorder become allusive representations based not only on space but on Evelyn's own sense of self and expressed through bodily or mental sensation. In addition to the establishment of space as reliant on gendered understanding, the places visited in the katabasis of *Passion* become incorporations, as with the katabasis itself, of internal construction and external reflective representations.

The city of New York, Evelyn's first destination, is described at the beginning — before the registering of any physical or mental changes — in orderly terms; 'clean, abstract lines, discrete blocks' and 'geometric intersections' (p. 12) set it up as a place of visible reason, with numbered streets and a regularity. When this description is provided, Evelyn's understanding of it comes from their own security in their male self. The order of the city mimics, in a broad sense, real-world associations of the city (largely aided by the naming of it, which serves to highlight for the reader prior connections which can then be played with) but Evelyn's time within becomes increasingly disjointed as the presence of cordoned off areas, the outbreak of war, and Evelyn's hypnotic introduction to Leilah transform the space. The 'hard edges and clean colours' give way to a 'lurid, Gothic darkness' (p. 6), the previous clarity becoming increasingly abstract and presaging the disordered self that Evelyn is about to become on the course of the katabasis that will occur upon his meeting with Leilah. The space becomes associated with 'immortality, evil and death' (p. 9), torn by conflict across an increasingly foetid landscape that quickly sees 'New York' as a title give way to 'chaos, dissolution, nigredo, night' (p. 12). Vallorani explicitly connects Evelyn's manhood with the city, with Evelyn's experiences connected to the 'awareness of the body of a European metropolis', an

inherently male *topos*,[260] and as a result, London comes to reflect this particular view of his identity at the time. For New York, however, the space becomes to Evelyn a 'gigantic metaphor for death', one that not only foreshadows the death of his male self from his fateful meeting with Leilah in its streets, but by a city haunted by the ghosts of metropoles past, 'shadowless inhabitants' outside of Evelyn's own understanding (p. 6). The presaged 'death' Evelyn witnesses in the city and acknowledges within their own body — all the while ironically emphasised by the sexual acts performed in both cities — acknowledges the change that is about to occur and the movement into unfamiliar territories both physical and internal.

The changing of New York from a recognisable, real-world landmark to one of abstractness signifies the increasing strangeness to the areas that Evelyn will travel to throughout the rest of the narrative, all of which become based less on real locations in America and more on strange, representational areas that reflect Evelyn's increasing instability. Beulah, linked to biblical allusion and to spaces of gendered harmony and realms before death, becomes, as expected, the space in which Evelyn undergoes her change into Eve. It is a space, much like those of Hill House and the House on Ash Tree Lane, associated with a feeling of claustrophobia and fear which largely provide it with a sense of hellishness. Notions of being buried underground (p. 51) and sealed tight between oppressively warm walls (p. 54) come to mimic the lack of room left for Evelyn's male self and their entrapment in a new female body. Ultimately, it is the space where Evelyn reaches journey's end as a man (p. 53). At first, Beulah is a place of confusion for Evelyn, a twisted labyrinth of descending corridors and white walls, but once they are transformed into Eve, the space takes on a new meaning; here, order and disorder switch places alongside their body, and Eve, as woman, quickly takes initiative of her own movement and mapping that see her take definitive action to shape her journey, as previously discussed. She is able to fashion an escape from Beulah largely due to her ability to discern for herself a plan of the labyrinth (p. 77), giving her a sense of control through the knowledge of its parameters. This control, however, is short-lived, and Eve quickly succumbs to anxiety as she travels further into the desert to places that lack any identifying names and are associated only with the figures who reside there. In the desert, at Zero's, and Tristessa's, she must adjust to her new identity, and the fraught connection between her male mind and female body reflects itself in the similar switch to ordered dichotomies. In Zero's, though she reads of an American in disorder, the contrast between the orderly life she now leads under his control shows the dangers of her confinement through their sense of a routine in which his wives take turns to satisfy him alongside a monotonous weekly rota of tasks. In Tristessa's, there is a sense of the frantic to Eve's movements, coupled with the animalistic behaviour of Evelyn's companions, that lend the space a disorderly

[260] Vallorani, p. 369.

nature that rallies against the supposed orderliness of the house as it is first presented, being as it is a sterile, glass mausoleum. In doing so, this serves to combine both elements in the space where revelation will occur. Evelyn cannot fathom out the space for herself, much like Beulah, without a map or guide, neither of which is she given. It is only within the caves that the dichotomy becomes stabilised, and Eve is able to move nearly unhindered through a series of interstices in the Earth towards the final destination, having come to understand her place and identity.

Due to these means of representation and the established lack of indicative journeys, thresholds, commonly used to convey sensation of being in a space and moving from or within it, are similarly used in *Passion* to reflect moments of change for Evelyn. Whilst many of the spaces do have clear, demarcated boundaries between and within them — such as the walls of Beulah, or the glass of Tristessa's house (in and of itself fragile) — they often become places of extreme instability of the self and reflect the uncertain dichotomies that occur in the narrative between the self and other, and in this case male and female. They reflect a visible stage of the journey as a tracking of movement from one place to the next, and yet more importantly become representations of changes that Evelyn undergoes. The threshold to Leilah's apartment in New York becomes a significant boundary that presages a change to Evelyn's identity, and much like spaces of pre-katabatic importance in the other texts, Evelyn shows an inherent fear of the threshold, the darkness inside where shadows converge said to be terrifying (p. 20). When she is newly-turned into Eve, the first man she meets in her new body rapes her on the threshold to his domain (p. 83). The glass of Tristessa's mausoleum makes boundaries negligible, almost difficult to determine any of them clearly, and what is provided is an impression of various floors stacked on top of each other (p. 123), each holding separate spaces. Eve must move through each one, until the highest point in the eyrie, where the truth of Tristessa's male form is revealed. Tristessa themselves are a threshold for Eve, this time of the self, and Eve exhibits the same sense of panic as they did upon entering Leilah's apartment when they meet (p. 107), once more having a body mimic the same representations of space. Finally, the caves are expressed as a space of multiple thresholds with each one increasingly represented as a womb, warm and internal. Eve must pass through them in order to come to a place of understanding, and the last space visited, much in the same way as *The Farthest Shore*, is that boundary between sea and land, an alchemical area of balance that invokes the restoration of the self or the creation of one anew.

What these representations of thresholds and spaces establish is a lack of concrete spatial stability. Instead, the original function of space becomes transformed as per Carter's cartographical aversions in a way that sees it used instead as a means of speculating ways of representation, being formed out of an amalgamation of ideas and relations. As such, not only is space represented by the

internality of Evelyn but by other individuals who themselves are reflective of the spaces Evelyn travels to. They offer a different mode of representation and perception, further destabilising any sense of concrete spatial constructions. Leilah represents the death of the city, and thus represents the death of Evelyn's male self. The sterility of the desert reflects Evelyn's own coming sterility upon his first foray, and Zero's in his own homestead, situated in its confines. Zero himself is like a caricature from a grotesque, feminist cartoon, masculine to the extreme, his home filled with a harem of identical wives, the liminality and emptiness of the desert a reflection of his named self and a satire of masculinity. Beulah, both labyrinth and beating womb of mother, is carved from Mother's flesh, taking the connection between body and space even further, her fingers becoming the scalpels that made it. It is she who is responsible for excavating the 'concentric descending spheres' with her own body (p. 43), and the space of inter-uterine softness deep below the earth (p. 66) becomes a bloody, pulsing representation of a womb in which Eve will be born, an example of katabatic unmaking.[261] The mausoleum of Tristessa and the fragility of its glass thresholds becomes a resting place for the female figure and the tenuous nature of their identity. Figures of wax and glass, birds and costumes make up its contents, and its presentation as a space of confused realisation for Evelyn is represented through the chaos of its movements. The caves, too, are womb-like, fissures in the Earth through which Eve must squeeze herself, a space of significance not only in the novel for being the last step of the journey but of katabatic potential given their canonical association with entrances to the underworld in Classical, Celtic, and Norse mythology[262] and their use in later literature (in particular Horror and Fantasy) as places of discovery.[263] Here, it represents a discovery of the true self of Eve that is symbolically rebirthed as a product of their journey through the confines, an entrance to a rebirthed self and world. Eve must travel through multiple cave systems, each consisting of separate descending vignettes where she must fold herself through interstices of rock, past small streams that warm and deepen as they are plunged into darkness (p. 176). They are continually pressed against walls of rock that contract them through the earth, a familiar red light, another intimation of a womb, guiding the way to the final threshold.

This notion of selves as spaces, much akin to *Veniss*'s use of the double reflected literally through mirrors and shadows or *American Psycho*'s obsession with reflective surfaces, serves as a reminder of *Passion*'s preoccupation with mirroring. Defined by Sergio Arlandis and Agustin Reyes-Torres as one of literature's 'most recurring thresholds of transformation',[264] the mirror is used in *Passion* as an explicit tool of viewing, reflecting and fragmenting the identity by offering a way for

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[261] Falconer, *Hell in Contemporary Literature*, p. 18
[262] Carpenter, p. 147; Bernstein, p. 88; W. Y. Evans Wentz, *The Fairy-Faith in Celtic Countries* (London: Oxford University Press, 1911), p. 451
[263] Aguirre, p. 2.
[264] Arlandis and Reyes-Torres, p. 126.

the changes that occur on the journey and wrought on their body to be reflected through visible physicality, each one marking a different stage within this transformation. Mirrors serve to reflect an externality to the katabases that occurs within whilst also succinctly representing everything that occurs on the journey, linking also to the concept of the second self that is discovered on its course. Katabasis has previously been defined in other chapters as a journey which 'leads the traveller to confront a radical Other'[265] either as a separate, secondary individual or within the self. On all terms, the confrontation takes the form of an interaction which causes the traveller to cross some kind of boundary and to acknowledge the existence of this second self which emerges through such actions. Not only does it come to symbolise the duality of the self, but the effect of inhabiting a hellspace, and as such the mirror is often configured as a secondary space or threshold for this reflection to occur. Returning to Nortwick's discussion of the second self as emerging on the journey and often representative of an inner darkness, he posits that the second self is often complimentary, if not entirely identical, to the first, one that embodies what the other lacks.[266] In the case of *Passion*, the use of the second self, as well as doubling that occurs due to its emergence, is multitudinous; it is represented by the literal embodiment of a second, gendered body within the first self and through notions of the alchemical marriage and connections to the mythic past, whereby the union of Evelyn and Eve, as well as the union of Tristessa and Eve, both two halves of the same whole and gendered opposites, become one.

For *Passion*, an interaction between the self and the self as Other results in an acknowledgement of identity, which, as Albrecht Classen notes, forces the revelation of truth in katabatic narratives.[267] The emergence of the self as Other links to the narrative of destructive and fragmented identity on the course of *Passion*'s katabasis, which is metaphorically echoed through the physical changes that Evelyn's body undergoes. Effectively, they take the form of a 'surgical' Other whereby their synthetic and symbolic rebirth is configured as the second self that emerges on the course. Evelyn views Mother's transformation of their body as a transformation from 'I into the other', a process which will 'annihilate' the self (p. 56), and Evelyn's startling first glimpse of themselves as Eve shows her association with the Other within them before their physical transformation, as well as the importance of mirrors as localisers of this transformation, when Sophia shows them dressed in women's clothing:

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[265] Létoublon, p. 210.
[266] Nortwick, p. 5-11.
[267] Albrecht Classen, 'Self and Other in the Arthurian World: Heinrich von dem Türlin's "Wunderketten"', *Monatshefte*, 96.1 (2004), 20-39 (p. 21).

> 'I saw Eve; I did not see myself. I saw a young woman who, though she was I, I could no way acknowledge as myself, for this one was only a lyrical abstraction of femininity to me, a tinted arrangement of curved lines. I touched the breasts and the mound that were not mine; I saw white hands in the mirror move, it was as though they were white gloves I had put on to conduct the unfamiliar orchestra of myself.' (p. 71)

The distinction between the self and the confusion it causes is mirrored in the reflected Eve as they explore the concept of their new body. The 'white hands' in the mirror are disembodied and disconnected from her own physical appendages, a foreshadowing of the future fragmentation that is to occur. The meeting between female body and male mind is a disorientating culmination to their current phase of the journey which requires visualisation through the mirror to render it understandable. The formation of an alternative, second self that is both a part of and apart from the former sees a physical subsumption of the double, but Eve suffers from an internal struggle to combine the two. As a result, they become attracted to their second self: 'I was the object of all the unfocused desires that had ever existed in my own head. I had become my own masturbatory fantasy' (p. 71). Echoing Carter's own comments in *The Sadeian Woman* (2001) in relation to the private, inward and often shocking nature of pleasure, this role reversal of man becoming woman and woman becoming man becomes an inherent masturbatory fantasy of the self as woman, which she links to pornographic imagery and the 'abstraction of flesh' that leads to its mystification.[268] The focus on Eve's new body and the now-abstract erection— 'the cock in my head...twitched at the sight of myself' (p. 71)— inside Evelyn's mind shows that despite its removal, they cannot disconnect themselves from their past identity and the boundary persisting within their mind, and their reflection mimics the male desire for their new female form. Eve is said to be a 'creature without memory' and a 'stranger in the world as she was in her own body' (p. 74); newly made, Eve suffers a disillusionment and an inability to adapt to the new female self that must match mentally to her physical form. This is exemplified—much like *Veniss Underground* and *American Psycho*— through pronouns; Carter uses 'Eve' in a secondary state during the scenes when Eve is newly created (p. 75), separating her from the 'I' of the novel's protagonist and the body they inhabit, and a period of adjustment occurs until Eve becomes subsumed into the 'I' rather than the distanced 'she'. Once Eve, they describe themselves in terms of the 'unfleshed other' (p. 79), and the old identity of Evelyn is shown warring inside them, the mental transformation as of yet incomplete (p. 81). They are two halves of one whole in the same body, a fragmented mind and self that is unadjustable at this stage.

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[268] Angela Carter, *The Sadeian Woman, An Exercise in Cultural History* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001), p. 144.

To reflect this dichotomy, the image of the mirror itself becomes fragmented. Roberta Rubenstein notes that the mirrors of Carter's narratives are 'frequently cracked, representing the distortions of image analogous to the mind's inevitable distortions of what is seen as well as what is imagined'.[269] Their broken status destabilises any notion or attempt at stability in the narrative, but nevertheless act as clear markers of the thresholds crossed by Evelyn both bodily and physically by showing the changes that occur across each separate space. The first of these occurs before Eve's transformation; in Leilah's apartment, Evelyn watches Leilah dance before a broken mirror. As such, mirrors are used not only to reflect Evelyn themselves but others that become representative of them. Leilah's dance in the mirror in New York shows how her character goes through the same dichotomy, representing both the feminised body that Evelyn is about to receive and the same warring within the self, a precursor to the events that occur. She is shown dancing for both herself in the mirror and for Evelyn, and the Leilah in the mirror appears as a separate self to Leilah's physical body (p. 24). Her entrapment in both the mirror and her own flesh provides a sense of confinement within her own body that the mirror serves as a boundary between. The reflective self evokes the notion of an-Other force or entity situated within the body of the character. Evelyn actively positions himself within this reflected world of Leilah, putting himself beside the Other as a witness, noting that the cracked mirror 'reciprocated her bisected reflection and that of [his] watching self' (p. 26). The cracked reflection, however, shows just how unstable this notion of a second reality or self is. Though the mirror reflects the fragmentation of the self that occurs, Evelyn's position as watcher is important to the narrative as a whole. The 'watching self' of the scene is yet another secondary form of Evelyn, a bystander for Leilah's otherness: she abandons herself to the mirror (p. 26), and he follows, trancelike, into the 'same reverie, the self-created, self-perpetuating, solipsistic world of the woman watching herself being watched in the mirror' (p. 26), which Evelyn recreates in Beulah as Eve. This mirrored space, however, whether from the presence of reflecting not only Leilah and her multitudinous self but the foreshadowed second self of Evelyn, strains to contain them (p. 26). At Zero's, Eve notes the broken mirror above the bar, in which they can 'barely make out New Eve's reflection' (p. 91). The mirror reflects her fragmented identity, where she is unable to make out her own self. When she watches Zero dance in it, it is both an ironically masculine reflection of Leilah and of Evelyn's own lost and broken masculinity. So too do the mirrors of Tristessa's home ironically reflect back at Eve a multiplicity of masculine Zeros in response to their own 'double drag', when Eve is dressed up in a 'mask of maleness' that allows them to refer to their old self in the 'inverted world of mirrors' (p. 129). However, their fractured self, body and mind struggle to contain themselves and the identity

[269] Roberta Rubenstein, 'Intersexions: Gender Metamorphosis in Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve* and Lois Gould's *A Sea-Change*', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature,* 12.1 (1993), 103-118 (p. 106).

they can no longer avoid, and the acknowledgement of a secondary mask, that of the female beneath the male, shows that by reverting, all they now do is masquerade a lost self.

There is, however, an attempt at regaining or at least consolidating the self through the use of another secondary self found in a separate individual. Much like Price's re-emergence in *American Psycho*, or Ged's defeat of Cob, the connection between the traveller and a separate secondary self emerges as a product of katabasis and in its own way acts as a form of anabasis, whereby the individual can regain some form of solidity. For Eve, the figure of Tristessa represents their other half, a similar double drag and boundary-breaking foil. The antithesis to her own transformation, Tristessa's alluring, Hollywood glamour is entirely false, and she, like Eve, hides a phallus (though still present) beneath. As an external woman within a man's body, Tristessa effectively crosses identity thresholds, and in doing so reflects Evelyn in opposite genders, becoming a displaced, multi-gendered being who is representative of the same dynamic. Tristessa suffers the same predicament and in a way offers a view of the divided self that Evelyn holds within their own mind. For Tristessa, this divide is physical. Evelyn remarks that Tristessa attempts to 'hide herself within himself, to swallow his cock within her thighs' (p. 124), offering a sentence with two pronoun switches that mimic the inner and outer turmoil of Tristessa and Evelyn's own previously warring gender pronouns. His phallus is the 'instrument of mediation between himself and the other' (p. 124) and, unlike Eve who has been rid of it, Tristessa struggles to become the Other they long to be. The mirror, an ironic anti-homecoming in connection to Tristessa, reflects Evelyn's own loss of identity and newfound gendered self in all of its confusion (p. 107) while all the more showing the truth of Tristessa's identity by shattering previous perceptions of beauty and womanhood. The premonition of loss that Evelyn feels upon seeing Tristessa indicates the forfeiture of Evelyn's pubescent fantasy of Tristessa upon discovering him a man, as well as the loss of self on behalf of Tristessa, and this meeting of doubles is configured as a miniature descent in which Eve falls into the void of Tristessa's eyes which become the void of the self reflected back at them (p. 122). What this loss also reinforces is the reminder of Tristessa as a facsimile of the sadism of de Saint Ange and the sadness of Karouak's self-destructive protagonist, and as such the premonition, through these links, becomes another method of intertextual reflection.

Evelyn and Tristessa attempt to overcome their estranged identities through sexual intercourse, an act of regaining the self that Alcena Rogan states sees the erotic object function as a consecutive link to fulfil the desire of the subject.[270] They project the modulations of themselves on

[270] Alcena Madeline Davis Rogan, 'Alien Sex Acts in Feminist Science Fiction: Heuristic Models for Thinking a Feminist Future of Desire', *PMLA,* 119.3 (2004), 442-456 (p. 442).

each other's flesh (p. 144) and Eve surrenders her body, a clear synthesised symbol of her new gender, to Tristessa: 'I had lost my body; now I was defined solely by his' (p. 145), an ironic reclaiming from such a figure of emblematic loss as Tristessa. It is, however, an attempt that is impossible and only serves to 'guarante[e] the subject's status as fragmented'.[271] The completion of the self and the regaining of identity is never fulfilled, emphasised in the moment where Tristessa is torn from inside Eve by an outside force which Eve reacts to with extreme distress. Having possibly recovered or realised a new form of identity within her own new body, that which is joined with Tristessa's, Eve is further fragmented when the connection is broken, reflecting the impossibility of completion in this way and reaffirming the destined end past the caves. The final mirror lies within, this time almost entirely broken; 'cracked right across many times so it reflected nothing' (p. 177). They can no longer see themselves in the surface that has reflected their many selves, both whole and fractured, during the rest of the novel. Now, in this final moment, she has forsaken her identity entirely to become something so Other it is nothing. Evelyn, as Eve, is never given the opportunity to fully assimilate into her own identity even to the very last moment; the final mirror encountered is unable to reflect even a modicum of the visible self. By remaining an illusion to her own self until the very end, their acceptance of this fact leads them to the anabasis of their whole doubly-gendered journey, an understanding that multitudes of selves can exist simultaneously, and may be sacrificed and rebirthed on the course of the journey.

Perceptions, falsities and light

As with other katabases, the perception of the self, journey, and space become important to its configurations. Carter's use of perception and the gaze in both constructing the spaces visited upon the course of the journey and for understanding the katabasis as a whole suggests a construction of uncertainty, with attention brought to modes of representation. The narrative and elements of the novel are further destabilised by additional elements of perception, all of which link to previously established methods of using the gaze as a form of understanding. By setting up the opening of the novel in the cinema, not only does it serve as a reminder of narrative consumption, but sets up Evelyn's almost directorial narrative voice as one which allows them to comment on events in a way that transforms them into a scene, similar to Patrick in *American Psycho*. As such, a form of estrangement occurs through reminders of cinematic representation which not only destabilises the narrative in terms of both reliability and setting, but foregrounds the focus on spectacle and spectatorship: 'The curtains swished open to reveal our audience' (p. 66); 'Prompt on cue, trumpets and cymbals crashed off-stage' (p. 73); 'sense of trompe 'oeil, of theatre, of a stage set for some

[271] Ibid., p. 442.

ghastly catastrophe and I myself as yet the only actor who'd appeared' (p. 164). When Eve recalls a memory of Evelyn, they note that the memory itself was not real, but like 'remembering a film I'd seen once whose performances did not concern me' (p. 89); their own sense of self becomes a memory of someone else's life which they can watch back in their mind. By providing the allusion that the narrative relies on Evelyn's own perspective and memory and by having that perspective be unstable, the katabasis itself and representations of hellspaces can only be as strong as those perceptions. There is an extreme sense of the subjectivity that features in other narratives here, whereby questions arise as to who sets up the spectacles and why they are seen as such — ones that are, of course, never answered.

The notion of remembrance also links to formulations of underworld journeys. Those who reside in the Homeric underworld without memory are those without identity,[272] and therefore by transcribing a memoric narrative of events that contain a journey to find identity, Evelyn rallies against this notion whilst still taking on the status of a metaphorical shade alongside Tristessa, becoming 'wraith[s]' living in the image of Platonic shadow shows (p. 107). However, how stable can these memories be when the sum of their parts are found to be inherently unstable? Tristessa too has taken on a shade-like status, unable to exist without her cinematic identity that allows her real self to remain behind a barrier, under some form of protection (p. 107). Tristessa's cinematic pictures symbolise that the particular glamorous illusion of the perfect woman exists, but the reality — of the being with a hidden, shamed phallus and cloaked femininity— is insubstantial without the element of cinematography that gives them life. She is a cinematic allusion, going beyond the boundaries of the flesh, as Eve has. In moments where the curtains lift on the set and the puppeteer's strings are shown, the illusions fall apart; as with the reveal of Tristessa's male self, Eve's final confrontation with Mother sees her ask if her flesh had been all this time 'a show, an imitation, an illusion' (p. 168). By stripping down the divine being into the sum of her cultural and historic parts, and having her status and reality questioned to such an extent, it provisions the novel with a sense of uncertainty, instability, and falsity, and like the previously explored katabases, skewed perceptions and unstable elements become key to exploring the extent of its presence, all while altering the reader to how effects and narratives are constructed. What this process involves is the recognition of the narrative as a form of memorialisation, akin to Classical katabases,[273] and as with the fated end, there is a reflective acknowledgement of this. However, it is an acknowledgement tainted by the sheer self-consciousness of the unstable elements involved in its construction.

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[272] Nannó Marinatos, 'The So-Called Hell and Sinners in the Odyssey and Homeric Cosmology', *Numen,* 56.2/3, (2009), 185-197 (p. 186).

[273] Madeleine Scherer, 'Introduction: The Long Descent into the Past', in *A Quest for Remembrance: The Underworld in Classical and Modern Literature*, ed. by Madeleine Scherer and Rachel Falconer (London: Routledge, 2020) pp.1-18 (p. 7).

Due to their reflective narrative, Evelyn views and processes the events that they live through in both present and future terms, and the gaze figures heavily in this dynamic; the present Evelyn of the narrative and the future narrator are unable to accurately describe their surroundings or events, a product of attempting to portray the panic exhibited on the journey and the lasting impression left by it. This occurs through the dynamics of blocked gazes and false perceptions (associated too with *Veniss* and *American Psycho*) and external destabilising elements. There are moments when Evelyn disrupts the gaze of both themself and the reader not only through implicit reminders of the consumption of narrative and reoccurring self-consciousness but by offering yet another boundary that allows Evelyn to separate themself from their current predicament in a way that actually destabilises the narrative further than it would if the hellishness was acknowledged. For the novel, spaces lack a certain acknowledgement and a degree of ignorance to their nature despite, paradoxically, being described in hellish terms; in New York, Evelyn explicitly avoids looking too closely at the space they themselves have defined as hellish. There are, however, clear indicators that inform this perception. Woven throughout the novel is an undercurrent of panic that presents itself at various moments, most often when moving within or out from a space. Indicative of the journey occurring, it also marks bodily reactions to the spaces inhabited and reveals the undercurrent of horror most notably associated with allusions to Hell. For New York, however, before Evelyn is fully initiated on their journey, the panic does not exist in the beginning; there is a marked boundary between the ordeal occurring and the body/mind it occurs to that is formed largely as a way of dealing with the repercussions of inhabiting such a space. Initially, the panic that New York provides is acknowledged but not given in to: ‘nobody knew how to express panic, in spite of an overwhelming sense of catastrophe; the victims seemed estranged even from their own fear’ (p. 7). Evelyn is shown detaching themselves from the horrors of the space that surrounds them, becoming a bystander to the chaos. It is not only Evelyn that this occurs to; when the hotel Evelyn stays at catches fire, panic only seizes the occupants after the all-clear, as though the horrors they experience are put on hold (p. 7), and Evelyn’s fear of the situation is markedly absent. They are a passive watcher of their surroundings, and though they note the panic of those around them, they themselves at this moment may not perceive those surroundings as hellish. Their ‘dazed innocence proved, in itself, to be some protection’ (p. 9), and Evelyn blocks out their own personal connection to the hellspace in order to cope with what is happening; the ‘terrors of the night’ — both in terms of literal time of day and the city itself, representative of night (p. 12) — can only be ‘acknowledged in the day, when they did not exist’ (p. 7). A boundary must lie between the city at night and the city at day, as well as between the city and the self, for it to be conceivable, the darkness a metaphorical form of ignorance.

There is a difficulty in categorising the nature of events that occur to Evelyn due to the fact that her vision is physically obscured at various moments. When Evelyn meets Leilah, she seems to teleport in some trick of the gaze, and 'nobody seemed able to see her but [Evelyn]' (p. 18). Within the darkness of the city streets, Leilah appears as a sort of guiding mirage for an Evelyn so consumed with desire that he can barely walk, his need for her a limn which skews his perception. When Evelyn is raped by Mother, he is blinded so cannot see what is happening (p. 61), and with Zero, Eve's vision is obscured and limited to what they can see by the torch (p. 82). In the desert, Evelyn suffers from a fever, his delusional state bringing into question the reliability of the events described there along with perceptions of the space (p. 40). During Eve's transformation in Beulah, perceptions are complicated to mimic Evelyn's own lack of understanding. Evelyn notes that 'I found it very difficult to see, in that abattoir light, and remember, now, an atmosphere rather than an event' (p. 66), but a moment later the gaze is cleared: 'I continued to see. I lay ill at ease on the operating table' (p. 67). What this does is create a difficulty in determining the true perceptions of the spaces occupied by Evelyn. Sensory loss, rather an exhibition of panic, actually cloaks the traveller from the true horror of the space or the event whilst simultaneously creating more horror due to the obscurity; events that may have been known thus become unknown — as with *Veniss*— and with them a greater mistrust of the narrator and the narrative that they weave.

Further mistrust is provisioned to the narrative through the presence of hallucinogens, which skew the perception of events and Evelyn's memory of them. The undetermined time that Evelyn spends with Leilah in her apartment is an experience made unreliable by the presence of drugs, and it is only after his brain had 'cleared of the hashish fumes' that he 'saw disaster clearly' (p. 32). Even the mirror dance, in which Evelyn sees the multiple Leilah's and his own confused self, is mired with the 'mauve exhalations of a joint' (p. 26). Due to these destabilising elements, it is difficult to discern whether what occurred actually happened in the dramatic way processed by Evelyn, or if it was simply a product of the substances he took. In Beulah, so too does the mention of hallucinogens destabilise the description of both space and events alongside Evelyn's obscured gaze (p. 54), and aids in the general confusion of the space. Beulah's description itself is doubly confused, however, with the notion that Evelyn's recollection may in fact have been fabricated as a way for them to 'soften the mythic vengeance' (p. 47) of the place in their mind. Much like the city, though perhaps even more so, Beulah's labyrinthine description and lack of clear architectural parameters make it difficult to categorise as a space. What is provided is a description of harsh, sterile walls and winding corridors beneath the earth of the desert, and yet even these are given an illusory quality; synthetic, lifeless, and unnatural, Evelyn cannot grasp whether they have exaggerated or not fully understood the exact nature of the place. In a moment of clear reflection, Eve states 'when I think of Beulah, I am not sure I

do not exaggerate its technological marvels, either make too much of them - or else my fallible and shell-shocked memory has invented most of them' (p. 47). The curious artifice of space, the connections to mythology, and the technological bodily horror may have all been a product of Evelyn's imagination or as a result of the substances their body is pumped with for their transformation. There are moments where Evelyn cannot recollect what has happened: 'And now my consciousness had such huge, random gaps in it I could hardly tell what she was doing or saying' (p. 63); 'And all remembered sense is lost in the reverberating celebrations of my annunciation' (p. 63). A reflective narrator that has issues with memory increases dramatisation and performativity of the narrative whilst aiding in the overall dynamic of unreality that coats the text, once again serving as a reminder of narrative construction.

Another method used by Carter to not only project a perspective journey but to destabilise the elements within it are the dreams experienced by Evelyn along its course. From her reading of Freud and Jung, Carter herself has an interest not, as she states, in dreams themselves but their formal imagery, the structure and symbolism of which she has studied extensively.[274] For *Passion*, they become another method of construction, in this case for time and place and transition. They become almost prophetic, a reading of them only aided by the novel's position of reflectivity. Figuring as another method of movement inherently connected with Evelyn's understanding of their own journey, they occur as a way of configuring the world around them and contextualising events, all whilst linking to the way said events and world are perceived and thus inherently connecting the body and mind to them. Hillman exemplifies an analysis of this dynamic from a more psychological and philosophical point of view; the dream (or the nightmare) becomes a form of the hero quest as seen in the works of Jung and Campbell, which integrates a psychological version of the departure, descent and return pattern of the katabatic journey into a mode of temporary psychosis.[275] Dream katabasis have been discussed in relation to Ged and Arren's travels in *The Farthest Shore,* in which they offer an alternate stage for katabasis to play out and aid in katabatic notions of self-discovery,[276] and for the way in which they represent a more psychological form of the mytheme through an internal progression.[277] For *Passion*, dreams are used to illustrate the mental and physical turmoil of Evelyn's current katabatic state by blurring the lines between fiction and reality and dreaming and waking,

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[274] The Terribleman, *Angela Carter talks to Lisa Appignanesi*, online video recording, YouTube, 21 Feb 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SrrEdWNP1rk> [accessed 9th November 2022]; Carroll, 'Angela Carter'.
[275] Matthew Fike, 'C. G. Jung's Memories, Dreams, Reflections as a Source for Doris Lessing's *Briefing for a Descent into Hell*,' *Journal of Jungian Scholarly Studies*, 11.1 (2016), 18-28 (p. 23).
[276] Philip Hardie, *The Last Trojan Hero: A Cultural History of Virgil's Aeneid* (London: I.B.Tauris & Co, 2014), p. 46.
[277] Hillman, p. 8.

creating a tension between these binary forces that gradually increases the uncertainty of the narrative and aids in the overall internality of the journey.

Dreams are used to highlight certain stages of the narrative and reflect Evelyn's emotions and perceptions on their journey, both foreshadowing and forewarning events and often occurring in extreme moments of distress in terms of identity and understanding. The first mention comes at the very opening of the novel, where Evelyn comments on his dream of meeting Tristessa and tying her to a tree (p. 3). This moment, meant to amplify Tristessa's mythological status in the mind of a pubescent Evelyn, echoes the later image of the alchemist watching while his wife is raped, tied against a tree in a forest clearing that is discussed shortly afterwards (p. 10). The overlapping of these dreams already weakens the boundary between reality and falsehood, and the exact recreation of the dream when Tristessa and Evelyn are in the desert at the end of the novel again reveals the reflective state of the narrative as one which actually reflects further uncertainty, and the presence of nightmares proves the horrific ordeal that Evelyn suffers from throughout the novel that bleeds into her dreaming mind whilst further destabilising any reality before it can form. In the desert, lost and alone, Evelyn moves 'from nightmare to nightmare' (p. 41), showing it as a transition, a physical experience rather than just a dream. When Evelyn is brought to Beulah, they describe themselves as stranded in the middle of a nightmare, making it a physical, waking condition rather than an unconscious one in which they eat, sleep and wake as they do in actuality (p. 65). While in Beulah, they 'dreamed continually of women with knives ... of blindness; I woke, screaming, many times and always in that black egg beneath the sand ... the barbiturates were in complicity with my dreams' (p. 65). Here, the dreams are a force of power that their captors can hold over them, both by being the weaponised figures within the dream itself, as well as being able to control Evelyn's dream state, aided by the use of drugs. When Eve travels with the soldiers in the desert, they awake from a dream that is afforded no particulars, but is nevertheless described in terms of the nature of the dream itself: 'the deathly dream, that aghast, entranced lapse of consciousness, that parenthesis in the substance of the world, the trance of love' (p. 156). Having witnessed the death of Tristessa, her symbolic other half, Eve is lost in a state of mourning-filled confusion. The 'parenthesis' indicates the separateness of the dream from reality, and yet they exist both on and apart from the 'substance of the world', directly affecting the protagonist and often indistinguishable from their real suffering.

Instances of light and dark are also present which inform perception on a level more associated with Evelyn's internal understanding, reflected in the physical or symbolic light associated with space that offer visual cues in regards to their knowledge at the time. The dynamic is set up in the beginning like that of Plato's cave, given katabatic significance in the literature surrounding the text

due to their awareness of nothing but the darkness of the cave and the anabatic moment of their exits.[278] The movement from darkness to light, much as with chaos and disorder, is present in other texts as a formulation of the pattern, and *Passion*'s follows this closely, having it come to represent an anabasis in a more metaphorical sense rather than an actual upward trajectory. Fittingly, the beginning of the novel starts in darkness; the darkness of Leilah and the city serve to heighten the space's horrific qualities and to represent Evelyn's own naivety and 'dazed innocence' (p. 9), and again instances of skewed perception and construction of space is mimicked by the 'unacknowledged' darkness of the builders (p. 12). The city's chaotic description worsens at night, with the light of day required for their acknowledgement (p. 7), and Leilah herself is described as a being of night, drawing Evelyn into the personified shadows outside of her apartment. In Beulah, despite the difficulty in consolidating accurate perceptions due to the presence of an obscured gaze and hallucinogens, the starkness of the white and red lights becomes representative of the transformation that occurs within its confines, a new stage on the journey towards understanding the self. There is a growing light that occurs alongside it that provides a sense of anabasis that somewhat alleviates the lack of goal as described in the beginning. Light, as always, must lead to anabatic truth; when they try Tristessa in their made-up courthouse, the room is brightly lit, making Tristessa's reveal all the more stark (p. 123), and in the caves, Evelyn follows a series of lightbulbs and red lights to reach the end. Allusions to the philosophical strangers of Plato's cave are again found in Tristessa's reference as a 'Platonic shadow' — its image of a playful show again referencing Carter's own awareness — with both her and the caves being moments of truth. Each section of the cave moves Eve closer to her ending, the first seeing Eve fold themselves through an interstice of rock, past a small stream that soon warms and deepens as they are plunged into darkness with the absence of their light source (p. 176), but another containing the artificial bulb that provides the cave the same mix of natural and unnatural as seen in previous texts. The final light leads to understanding, the site and sight of opening, with the emergence at the end leading to truth; 'like the antithesis of light, an immensity of darkness, the final cave' (p. 177) reveals to Eve her creator and ends her fraught journey through realisation, allowing her to sail away. The ending on the beach, a place of transition and transformation as previously established in *Earthsea*, sees the darkness and obscured perceptions lift, with Eve returning, as ordained, to the beginning in a cyclical journey that takes on a more literal form of katabatic rebirth and explicit use of knowledge— in this case of the self and its position in the universe both narratively and in total—as the boon.

[278] Andrea Nightingale, 'Cave Myths and the Metaphorics of Light: Plato, Aristotle, Lucretius', *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics*, 24.3 (2017), 39-70 (p. 43).

Conclusion

Reading katabasis into *Passion* is a process of teasing out a main thread of allusion from a twisted skein of others, whereby readers must wade through a mass of intertext or mere reference to understand that its katabasis is merely a sum of its parts. Carter's self-consciousness complicates its presentation, whereby the infernal elements and tropes discussed so far are confused by a narrative that is built up by a destabilisation that sees each possible allusion contain within it multiple meanings. The external symbols of representation serve to destabilise the narrative, and alongside the careful use of the gaze, which is consistently disrupted, Eve's own reflective narrative raises questions about the truth of events and their perceptions, coming from some far-off place and by a figure unknown. The near endless allusions to myth upon myth and symbol upon symbol means any attempt at unravelling them is mired in the possibilities of further allusions or narrative meanings. However, it is in such a disruption that meaning is found. Hell and its connected imagery are used by Carter knowingly, though not necessarily explicitly, to convey a narrative of cultural construction through which her own creation of folklore, one layered in the mysticism that is a prime factor of both Classical and modern katabatic tales, is woven. Meaning is built up— and katabasis along with it— through language used to connote feeling, understanding, and simple description, allowing for a careful construction despite being built on such tenuous foundations. *Passion's* narrative is one carefully organised on the very concept of deconstruction and instability, whereby the katabasis itself, the journey that it involves and the traveller who embarks upon it, is viewed through the lens of multiplicity, both physical and metaphorical, and teased out from beneath. The emphasis on continual renewal and the use of multiple spaces that figure as hellish provide an ultimate sense of uncertainty and a teetering on an edge of possibilities inherently connected to trajectory, whether that be physical or metaphysical. By showing the permeability between membranes of the gendered self, worlds, the Other, and life and death, ones which are consistently breached and re-breached through transformation, Carter utilises the long-held curiosity of the journey and the idea of crossing multiple thresholds to imbue her narrative with cyclicity, which sees Evelyn literally reborn on its course. The katabasis becomes an almost entirely mental, inward journey meant to reflect a more outward, physical one, and yet despite this, the novel's conclusion appears to deny any form of narrative finality, providing the impression that the katabasis, as with the allusions and constructions that represent it, is endless.

"DIRECTION NO LONGER MATTERS": MARK Z. DANIELEWSKI'S *HOUSE OF LEAVES*

In Ellis's praising statement of Danielewski's *House of Leaves*, he describes the novel as 'phenomenal ... Thrillingly alive, sublimely creepy, distressingly scary, breathtakingly intelligent — it renders most other fiction meaningless'.[279] Akin to Carter, Danielewski neatly illustrates this sense of 'meaninglessness' through his awareness of his choice of genre, subject, language, and associated symbols. The process of breaking down katabasis which began in simple adaptation with Le Guin's mythopoeia and almost entirely demythologised by Carter is taken even further here with the final treatment of the novel and with its most experimental and fundamentally self-conscious portrayal. Published in 2000, the novel follows the narrative of Johnny, who finds a manuscript by an old man named Zampano, in turn who writes about the Navidson family and the film that follows their time in the House on Ash Tree Lane, a home in which a mysterious dark underground labyrinth appears out of what seems like nowhere. The novel is a metafictional text that utilises techniques such as typography and imagery to weave a labyrinthine narrative of plot and meaning. First published on his personal website and as the product of internet forum sites, the novel is the modern equivalent of serialisation. Fragmented copies were reportedly circulated around Los Angeles during the late 1990s until it was eventually picked up for publication. In Andrew Lloyd's review of the novel, he states that its origins are 'like something from the book itself',[280] steeped in digital and literal undergrounds. A plethora of online forums — particularly those hosted by Reddit and Danielewski's own website — are dedicated to solving the novel's mysteries. An enigma is created even out of the Z in his name; the initial on his website is blue, much like the word 'house' in *House of Leaves*, or a dead-link. Some have suggested the Z stands for Zampano and others for nothing. The most plausible possibility is that it is simply a reference to his father's middle name, Zbigniew, but this insistence of multiple and contradictory meanings is at the core of Danielewski's intent with the novel and thus with its portrayal of katabasis.

A plethora of readings of the novel have emerged in recent years, all drawn towards its cult-like status. The house itself is the central figure of analysis for Magdalena Solarz and Ana Mateos, the former focusing on the space as an anti-home and the latter on Danielewski's use of Gothic influence. Steven Balleto's analysis shows how the novel is in a sense a phenomenon of non-referent scholarship and interpretation.[281] Joe Bray and Alison Gibbons's *Mark Z. Daniewski*

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[279] Bret Easton Ellis, back cover of Mark Z. Danielewski, *House of Leaves* (London: Anchor, 2000)
[280] Andrew Lloyd, 'House of Leaves changed my life': the cult novel at 20', *The Guardian* (2020) <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/apr/02/house-of-leaves-changed-my-life-the-cult-novel-at-20>
[281] Steven Belletto, 'Rescuing Interpretation with Mark Danielewski: The Genre of Scholarship in House of Leaves', *Genre,* 42.3-4 (2009), 99-117 (p. 111).

(2011) and Sascha Pöhlmann's *Revolutionary Leaves* (2012) offer fuller treatments of the author's oeuvre. As a result of the narrative surrounding an underground space and a descent into its depths, there is an explicitness to the katabatic motif, akin to *Earthsea* or *Veniss Underground*, out of which has arisen previous katabatic readings of the text. Connor Dawson's work connects katabasis to trauma, and analyses Johnny's narrative as a traumatic, drug-induced descent against the backdrop of Danielewski as an author who utilises his own method of myth-making to induce a form of personal horror.[282] Finn Fordham's chapter in Bray and Gibbons's work discusses katabasis in light of literary underworlds and language, with the novel's descent being one into literary tradition and 'underground writing'.[283] What all of these works tend towards is an analysis of katabasis that focuses on one aspect — Dawson's with Johnny's katabasis, or Fordham's with literary fiction and language — a segmentation which, when considering the novel's complexity, allows for a more definite approach and a certain singularity to its use of the trope. In regards to the way that the novel will be treated in this chapter, all three separate narratives will be combined to illustrate the true depth of Danielewski's use of the mytheme; the space of the house and the labyrinth below, the connection between the characters and the spaces occupied, and above all the use of perception and expectation as a form of construction all formulate a katabasis that will be shown to dismantle the trope and its expected patterns almost entirely. In Section I, the house as a space of non-domesticity and architectural confusion is discussed in connection to the spatiality of Hell through claustrophobia, and Section II covers the labyrinth and the deliberate misdirection of the descent within, further confused by the use of darkness and its twist on the established boon of gaining understanding.

I. "In my opinion, you just need to get out of the house": The Home As Hell

Though each work in this thesis since *Earthsea* has been shown to take a progressively looser or more allusive approach to katabasis, *Passion* showed the extent to which the mythic associations surrounding descents and hellspaces can be deconstructed. The pattern required for katabasis, however, was still present, and *House of Leaves* is no different. In a novel that contains the formulaic notion of descending into an underground space, previous considerations are at the centre of its construction. All symbols and language so far insinuated katabasis and the creation of a horrific hellspace through a process of dissemination; the texts are built up on allusion, and unravelling the katabasis is one that sees the fruition of various linguistic modes and thematic tropes that serve its

[282] Connor Dawson, '"There's nothing so black as the inferno of the human mind": Infernal Phenomenal Reference and Trauma in Mark Z Danielewski's *House of Leaves*', *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction,* 56:3 (2015) 284-298 (p. 285).
[283] Finn Fordham, 'Katabasis in Danielewski's *House of Leaves* and two other recent American novels', in *Mark Z. Danielewski,* ed. by Joe Bray and Alison Gibbons (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015) pp. 34-51 (p. 38).

original purpose against a new version. With *House of Leaves*, however, this association is already provided through an overt and obvious use of routine metaphor. As a result, what follows is a process of breaking down the very conventions that this thesis sets up; virtually every point made in the novel pays attention to expression and ambiguity. Danielewski's breakdown of language destabilises the notions set up in previous chapters, intent on narrowing down the way that the representative hellspace is perceived and built through the lens of three separate viewers, each one slightly more removed than the other from the events found in the Navidson record. The process of reading the novel forces continuous questions of language and expectation only to often subvert them, and Danielewski plays with ambiguity and uncertainty in a way that moves interpretation away from a definite categorical explanation. By raising awareness to and then toying with a textual contract formed between him and the reader, everything that can be taken for granted is subverted and deliberately incongruous, which creates a greater sense of instability than previous katabases based on the perception and constructions of space alone. Like Carter, this deconstructs the expectations surrounding katabases all while ironically, self-consciously following them, but the process is taken even further here, with close and obsessive attention paid to every detail involved in prior understandings.

The House

As with the bases of Le Guin's mythopoeia and Carter's demythologisation, the authors included in this thesis all take the elements of myth as the central requisites of their construction (or deconstruction) of katabasis in order to transform the underworld to incorporate all elements of contemporary thought and society but still connect it to its past associations, Classical and Christian alike. However, unlike Carter's demythologisation, which is closest to Danielewski's approach of undermining convention, his novel does not reject myth; rather, it embraces it with all its connotations whilst simultaneously revealing the process behind this embracing. There is a deliberateness to the way that Danielewski uses myth and mythemes. Dawson writes that Danielewski employs 'his own variant of the mythical method'[284] — which finds its roots in modernist works such as those of Yeats and Eliot and allows for narrative and symbolic expression of myth in the modern world[285] — in a way that provides significance to the narrative's horror. Drawing upon past considerations of the infernal, Dawson suggests that the psychological trauma experienced by Johnny within the narrative is its own formulation of a descent into Hell, with mythic associations at the centre of its creation. However, what this ignores is the deliberateness of formulating Johnny's descent against such

[284] Dawson, p. 285.
[285] Denis Donoghue, 'Yeats, Eliot, and the Mythical Method', *The Sewanee Review,* 105.2 (1997), 206-226 *(*p. 208).

previous constructions, and in limiting it to a linear and concrete katabasis that is represented in similar form to that of Bateman's internal descent in Chapter 3, it ignores the trap set by the depiction. Instead, the requisite symbology of katabasis is consistently alluded to with parodic scorn; 'Symbols shmimbols'[286], as Danielewski's Stephen King states in the transcript of Karen Green's 'What Some Have Thought'.

What this line does is reveal the way that readings of katabasis and its associated symbols and language are treated in the novel. *House of Leaves* is provisioned with a sense of having already been analysed, whereby any question in regards to its katabasis and the creation of the hellspace, as well as the use of any other literary symbol, has already been asked by the narrative itself. Zampano's voice, which provides us with the majority of the narrative through his own analysis of the Navidson Record, is that of a scholar, aware of the mythic and literary connections, symbols, and psychology of the Navidson record that he laboriously writes about. Reading the work requires a prior knowledge of construction, metaphor, and theme, and the effects of Zampano's voice vary from the comedic and confused to the ironic and detached, some in regards to individual symbols simultaneously. The novel's metafictional status puts meaning onto nothing, and yet provides nothing with concrete meaning; even the history and publication of the novel discussed earlier use the same techniques, lending it deliberately to the same treatment that the novel itself parodies, an obsession with analysis that leaks into every detail. As a result of Danielewski's awareness, there is therefore an element of taking the narrative for granted as it is referenced, and there is no mistaking the novel's naming of its requisite Hell. The word appears both colloquially and pedagogically at various points in Navidson, Zampano, and Johnny's narratives - 'the halls of hell' (p. 274), 'no sound way to determine where the hell I'm going, though right now going to hell seems a pretty sound bet' (p. 43) - to define a destination both in terms of torment and as an actual, physical space, linking the element of journeying undeniably to it, despite the lack of capitalisation designating it colloquiality. Danielewski even goes so far as to include a direct quotation from Book 6 of the *Aeneid* on the difficult nature of entering and leaving Hell. This explicit labelling serves what Falconer terms an 'apotropaic function', [287] and by naming the space, Danielewki has designated it a specific purpose and overlays it with an inherent sense of understanding and acknowledgement. This initial recognition forces the reader to acknowledge the struggle and to place upon it such cultural, historical, and personal experiences as to render it familiar. However, Danielewski's acknowledgement of the space in a narrative that relies on largely being a faux academic text — though many of the colloquial uses of 'hell' appear in Johnny's

[286] Mark Z Danielewski, *House of Leaves* (London: Transworld Publishers, 2000), p. 361.
[287] Falconer, *Hell in Contemporary Literature*, p. 18.

first-person narrative, only serving to reinforce Zampano's analysis through personalisation— forces the previously established meanings and constructions to be reimagined.

Despite undermining conventions, the katabases that occur in the novel are largely linear in order to show the initial, basic process of their construction and presence. There is a simplicity to their categorisation at the beginning; they can be split into three parts, all of which progress at similar rates over the course of the narrative. Johnny's narrative, which follows his gradual breakdown upon the discovery of the Navidson record in Zampano's apartment, sees him descend more mentally, believing that the text haunts both his dreaming and waking world. Zampano's death and the strange, clawed destruction of his house detail a (possible) katabasis already undertaken, hinted at in his compilation of the Navidson Record itself. Finally, the Navidsons themselves appear in the record which details their life in the House on Ash Tree Lane, in which Will and outside travellers descend into the dark labyrinth that has appeared beneath the house, accessed from inside. However, *House of Leaves*'s descents are metaphorical, literal, mental and physical all at once. They are representative of a descent whilst also mirroring a very literal one, which complicates their presentation. The narratives' simultaneity in terms of meaning and characters meshes together footnotes, scholarship, and film commentary to provide a unique view of katabases that are constantly reflecting each other. Unlike *Veniss Underground*, where the katabases are segmented into three distinct parts and cover the same topographical areas, *House of Leaves*' multilayered narrative still stretches the motif across three separate and distinct narratives, all relying on the same central element of space, but in a space that is able to transfer itself across dimensionalities in the text to affect those that have never set foot there. Additionally, there is no clear goal outside of an understanding and exploration of this space, and much like the other texts, the shared trajectory is set up from the offset as one of searching, with curiosity as a means of moving it forward. Containing within it elements of horror and mystery, there is an inevitable gradualness to the narrative, and yet, just as with all meaning in the novel, so too is it apparent from the beginning. Johnny's narrative opens up with warnings from him as to what to expect from the novel, compiled somewhere in the future much like the reflective narrative of *Passion*. His voice is filled with paranoia, a steadfast presence that surfaces in the footnotes as interruptions to Zampano's retelling of the Navidson's story, each time revealing a deeper fall into disillusion. Zampano's character, fate, and position in the narrative are mostly deduced from Johnny's twisted narrative, as his voice in his own writing is concerned entirely with the dissection of the Navidson record. The Navidsons act as the main narrative thread throughout the novel, in which the descent occurs more literally through a penetrative exploration of an underground labyrinth beneath the surface of a house.

The House on Ash Tree Lane is that which informs all three katabases, becoming, as with other spaces explored in this thesis, the locus of the narrative and at the same time giving rise to traces of the Gothic, which Danielewski weaves into the narrative as one of many interpretations and historic acknowledgements. In the same vein as *Hill House*, *House of Leaves* acknowledges the prolific tradition of the Gothic in its use of houses as horrific spaces,[288] in this case with the increasing presence of an immutable and mysterious labyrinth beneath its foundations which sees the space of domesticity transformed outside of its traditional formulations. The Gothic 'has consistently recognized a quality invested in domestic space' to torment inhabitants,[289] often given a life of its own that impresses itself upon those who dwell within — Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher*, and Hawthorne's *House of the Seven Gables*, for instance, with the former revealing the ambiguous play on 'house' not only as an architectural form but as a family dynasty,[290] another core Gothic feature which appears in both *Hill House* through Luke and the Navidsons in *House of Leaves*, as discussed later. Both Jackson and Danielewski play with genres to suit their liking, splicing the hallmarks of Gothic un-domesticity to further confound the dynamic between *heimlich* and *unheimlich* which Vidler notes are so rooted to the environment of the domestic in a way that links together identity in terms of 'the self, the other, the body and its absence.'[291] The domestic space of *House of Leaves* is both like and unlike that of *Hill House*; they both reveal a house that is more than what it seems, but just as with every other fictional convention, Danielewski's novel breaks the confines to suit its metafictional nature. The house is provided with the dimensions, flexibility and spatiality to transform into a Gothic space. There is an acute sense of awareness of the house, whether haunted or otherwise, which provides it a certain standardised and often stereotypical character that is personified, and its use becomes deliberately linked to Gothic, horrific convention in order to — much like the apotropaic function of 'Hell'— raise certain notions of association. True to form, there are various references scattered throughout the novel's pages towards the Gothic; Poe himself is referred to both in reference to a separated configuration of the word 'Poe t', to Danielewski's own sister Anne, who names herself after the writer, and on a stamp that figures in the pre-text graphics of the Pantheon edition. Any discussion about the house itself, therefore, is entrenched in Gothic understanding, and Danielewski deliberately emphasises the notion of the house's sentience, much like *Hill House*, which in and of itself raises an awareness and expectation of how the novel will play out. However, Danielewski does not limit himself to one discourse or genre only, nor even one mode of text. The trope of the found

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[288] Nele Bemong, 'Exploration #6: The Uncanny in Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves*', *Image & Narrative*, 5 (2005) <http://www.imageandnarrative.be/inarchive/uncanny/nelebemong.htm> [accessed 2 December 2021].
[289] Ana Isabel Ávila Mateos, '"This is not another haunted house tale": considerations about horror in Mark Z. Danielewski Novel *House of Leaves*', *Research Journal on the Fantastic*, 6.2 (2018), 103-122 (p. 108).
[290] Anne Williams, *Art of Darkness: a Poetics of Gothic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 45.
[291] Vidler, p. x.

manuscript has been embedded in the Gothic since its beginnings, and yet despite using it as a framing device,[292] Danielewski's text on text itself gives way to film and metafictional methods of transcription as a way of suggesting multiple meanings. As such, to confine the House and even the text to the parameters set by the Gothic would be an injustice. Rather, notions of the Gothic serve as implicit reminders to the reader of expectation and allusion, which in turn inform the way in which the space — and katabasis — is constructed and construed.

Just as Danielewski acknowledges his use of symbols and associations, so too does he have an intense awareness of space, and his quantification of the House as part of a long history of genre similarly owes a debt to the theories of space that he utilises. His use of Gaston Bachelard's *Poetics of Space* (1958) — a work which discusses houses as spaces of homeliness and personalisation, imagination and dreaming, and above all stability, and one of the numerous works referenced in *House of Leaves* (here in relation to the opening card of the Holloway tape [p. 333]) — once again shows the academising of the House on Ash Tree Lane to encompass all manner of scholarly forebears. Danielewski himself wrote the foreword to the Penguin Edition of *Poetics* (2014), complete with hallmarks of twisting, turning typography, bordering spaces and the stress on 'house' each time it appears, in which he writes of Bachelard's work 'it has everything to do with how our comprehension of space, however confined or expansive, still affords an opportunity to encounter the boundaries of the self just as they are about to give way'.[293] It is exactly this that *House of Leaves* explores; the complex relationship between the self and the space occupied (and its textual representation), the way in which one plays off the other, becoming and undoing in the course of their relationship, while taking all notions in *Poetics* and tossing them aside to reveal a home that is unstable, insidious, and a place of nightmares. The katabasis in *House of Leaves* contains a level of spatiality not unlike those seen previously, but taken even further in its explicit breakdown of the space and self connectivity, and thus its goal of understanding the space that is occupied is also one of understanding the self.

Heimlich explicitly implies ownership and familiarity, and as with previous discussions of how hellspaces come to affect or mimic the protagonist, so too is this present in *House of Leaves*. The relationship between the Navidsons and the House on Ash Tree Lane is complex; it is both symbiotic and parasitic, a dynamic which begins with inhabitation on behalf of one party and ends with it by the other. It begins much in the way of typical horror narratives with the classical trope of a nuclear family moving into a seemingly normal house to begin their new life of domesticity and 'people stuff'

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[292] Timothy C. Baker, *Contemporary Scottish Gothic: Mourning, Authenticity, and Tradition* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 54.
[293] Mark Z. Danielewski, 'Foreword', in *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard, trans. by. Maria Jolas (New York: Penguin, 2014), p vii.

(p. 8). There is an initial difficulty in construing the House as anything but what it appears on the surface, with Navidson indicating that he knows nothing of the 'impending nightmare' they are about to face within, and the true nature of the house — whatever that could possibly be— 'lies beyond his imagination let alone his suspicion' (p. 8). In the beginning the house is presented — at least to the Navidsons — as largely average, a standard family home imbued with a sense of *heimlich* from their occupancy and its initial presentation. The house is expressed with all of the typical markers that constitute it such a space, which Navidson considers a 'cozy little outpost' — here, however, already raising issues of future military-style assaults of the space— from which he can drink lemonade on the porch (p. 9). The rooms are given a personal texture through the addition of each family member's furniture and possessions. These initial descriptions are more concerned with the integration of the Navidsons into their surroundings, and little is offered in terms of a pointed physical description of the house itself aside from its exterior architectural style, and the pristine nature of the surrounding neighbourhood. The image of the house, then, is made up entirely of the inhabitants, and it is taken for granted that the space contains within it rooms that most houses do; glimpses are provided of bedrooms, a living room, and a kitchen, but the image of a blank vessel is glossed over for important details of the pastoral move, the action of making a house a home, and in doing so blurs the distinction between the owner and the house itself.

The house, as not only the dynastic associations of the Gothic suggest, implies a sense of familiarity, comfort, and domesticity to the family, providing them with a sense of owned totality and safety behind closed walls, and yet the descriptors associated with presenting the house in a relatively cohesive manner in regards to its initial appearance and presentation occur against the backdrop of the unstable. In a katabasis that centres itself around spatial representation, the notion of having the space itself be an unstable representation further complicates any concrete perception or understanding. The typographical insistence on skewing the word 'house' each time it appears functions as an implicit reminder to the reader of its irregularity in comparison to the Navidsons' initial impressions and provisions a supply of knowledge that already taints any perception of the house that comes afterwards. As a result, the Navidsons' impressions quickly give way and further reveal the dynamic between self and space occupied. The longer they remain in the space, the more their own identities, in particular their fears and their issues, come to the forefront. The house is nothing in the beginning if not a space for the inhabitants to live and to attempt to make their mark, but the changes that occur within are less about Karen's additions of bookshelves and feng-shui furniture organisation and more about what happens to their psyches, changes that are triggered or revealed by their presence in the space. Will's guilt, Karen's trauma, and the children's own psychological problems in response to the events that occur become the foundations of their representations and identity once in the house, and

the beginning of the Navidson record, that which focuses entirely on the House itself and not what lies beneath, is a narrative of increasing instability on behalf of the inhabitants as they react to the House as it changes around them.

It is when they are absent from the space, however, that the changes to the house first occur: 'In their absence, the Navidsons' home had become something else, and while not exactly sinister or even threatening, the changes still destroyed any sense of security or well-being' (p. 28). A small, dark room connected by two doors has suddenly appeared, and with it the first sense of unease to their surroundings. This unease, however, is not categorised as definitively threatening, making the novel's horror ambiguous. Further questions arise in regards to why the changes occur; do they happen now that the house is free of the inhabitants, even momentarily, or do they represent the house assimilating more to them? What this does is set up the same associations of meaning and assumption as all other hellspaces have before it; the House serves as hellish due to the fear it provides, becoming the site for the beginnings of a katabasis that relies entirely on the space itself providing it the means. It is, above all, a space that seems 'capable of being transformed',[294] one which is constantly being revealed as something other than what it is and that challenges the very definition of spatiality itself, just as those within it are capable of the same transformation. As such, there is no permanency to Danielewski's use of space or its perception by the inhabitants, no sense of stability, from the outset. Whether the house exists as such a space without inhabitation, a blank vessel—or even page— on which to draw the psychological conclusions of its inhabitants out to the forefront, or whether it is a more 'traditional' form of evil, one which relies only on its own nature, is not a question that the novel ever answers. In fact, the very idea that it could be both, either, or none is just another layered dilemma presented by the novel, one which furthers the notion that nothing can be taken for granted and that no symbol is as simple as it is being shown, once more raising the issue of complexity in meaning, problematising the desire for a single answer.

The Trap

One of the main threads of discussion that has been woven throughout this thesis is the idea of Hell as a container, able to hold a world both physical and psychological within and often marked by clear boundaries and access points that separate spaces within and without. Hillman, when discussing the parameters of Hell in reference to the dreamworld and mind, writes that a human's response to the notion of Hell is an explicit understanding of it as a contained space, even, as he writes 'if the limits

[294] Mateos, p. 106.

are shrouded and undefined'.[295] For Falconer too, Hell's primary feature in both modern and pre-modern interpretations is spatial confinement,[296] and the boundaries of Hell are clearly defined in Classical literature through the use of physical distance and access points. Echoing similar notions of confinement and claustrophobia as those in *Hill House* and of general patterns of containment previously discussed, *House of Leaves* presents the requisite hellspace as an enclosure, and yet as with all other symbols or methods of construction, Danielewski clues the reader in to the notion itself. Rather than simply being presented as a claustrophobic space in terms of its literal and physical presentation, the House is a multitudinous container; one for inhabitants, for other spaces, for hellish connotations or representations, and for the psychological issues of said inhabitants. It is also a container of ideas and stereotypes, a container for itself. As a product of its metafictional status, the House is further contained within the confines of the novel, the front and back covers enveloping it: *House of Leaves*, the house of pages, the house within a novel, and the novel itself a house. These fictive notions even transfer to the title's own acknowledgement of James' *House of Fiction* (with its similar use of windows as thresholds and spaces of perception) and Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* (with its boundlessness and similar materiality of fiction). Reading the novel is therefore a process of unravelling the stratified and intertwined layers of space both as it is presented and as it has been in literary pasts that shows it as constantly mutable, with the narrative layers all bound within each other.

Long has the idea of containment been connected to the hellish and horrific. As Andy Merrifield writes, the idea of binding something is 'seemingly an inexorable human need: the need to restrict reality so we can cope, so we can comprehend.'[297] As established in the introduction and in each text, thresholds between the horrors of hellspaces and the outside world in Classical and Christian literature serve as a reminder of the space's separation from each other, and yet as with everything else in the novel, *House of Leaves* subverts the classical expectation, and the expectation of most criticism, that Hell *remains* contained, and in doing so it derails the psychological function of contained, architectural Hells discussed previously. In regards to the creation of the horrific and hellish as discussed in *Veniss Underground* and *Earthsea*, with definite, though weakened, boundaries between, *House of Leaves* goes against notions of explicit binding. For *House of Leaves*, and in fact for all the texts in this thesis, the concept of the safe space does not exist, with the hellspaces going against Merrifield's notions by consistently destroying boundaries that are traditionally set in place. There are no Elysiums or reprieves to the Hells of these narratives; the torment and torture is endless and entirely uncontained within — and sometimes without—the space, which is at the crux of its own

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[295] Hillman, p. 189.
[296] Falconer, *Hell in Contemporary Literature,* p. 19.
[297] Andy Merrifield, *The Politics of the Encounter: Urban Theory and Protest Under Planetary Urbanization* (Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 2013)*,* p. 22.

definition of Hell. Just in the way that the horrors of Veniss Underground seep out into the city and its people, and the strange malaise that threatens the town below Hill House, so too does the horror of *House of Leaves* spill forth. The Navidson Record is 'uneasily contained' and too many 'important things... jut out past the borders' (p. 3), and Johnny's introduction outlines the narrative of an intrusion into the supposedly safe space of the home and the untrustworthiness of boundaries from the offset.

Boundaries between the narratives themselves are also weakened; Johnny's narrative interrupts and intersects the Navidson record, reflecting much of the same emotions and motifs in a way that manages to paradoxically stabilise them as foundational to the narrative and yet destabilise them in terms of their effects. Johnny becomes the present voice through which all the spatial horrors of the Navidson narrative are explored. Having come across the manuscript on his search for an apartment, Johnny begins to form an obsession with the story within and the author who wrote it to the point that his own life begins to reflect it. He begins to fully believe in a connection between his own mental state and his reading of The Navidson Record (p. 25), going so far as to soundproof his home and to shut out all the light in case the horrors within bleed out. He undertakes an entirely accidental katabasis that sees him descend into disorientation, wherein he sees his mind as multiple doorways and dark corridors, again providing a sense of spatiality to his predicament (p. 149). Johnny points towards this claustrophobic conclusion in the novel's introduction, barricading himself in his own home, creating a 'closed, inviolate and most of all immutable space' (p. xix), an ironic antithesis to the House itself. His own claustrophobia and the overall claustrophobia of the novel is neatly mimicked by Karen's own fear that is specifically heightened by the House itself, which in turn becomes a reflection of her phobia of closed, dark spaces by becoming one. The story itself is treated much in the same way as spaces are, being able to both form and break the notions of enclosure that are placed upon them — even the book, once closed, acts as its own form of barrier, and Danielewski's varying use of the space of the page itself and footnotes, discussed later for their connection to textual mazes and direction, creates a tactile sense of acknowledgement for the physicality of the narrative itself. During one of Johnny's breakdowns, the narrator — presumably also Johnny from the use of his monospace font — asks the reader to focus and not 'let your eyes wander past the perimeter of this page' (p. 26). What follows is an exercise in the reader's imagination, the directions given through the second person voice much in the same way as Part II of *Veniss Underground*, in which the narrator guides them through the process of visualising the beast for themselves and once more reminds them of the physicality of textual space. The directions even go so far as to point towards the medium itself: 'you sure as hell should be getting rid of this book' (p. 27), complete with a colloquial and ironic assurance of 'hell'. As a result, the written word becomes a tenuous thing in *House of Leaves*, and there is no direct way of inferring what book is being spoken of

here. It could be the works of Zampano found by Johnny, the transcript compiled by the editors courtesy of Johnny, or *House of Leaves* itself in a moment where Danielewski speaks directly to you.

Just as there are no strict linguistic, stylistic, typographical, or symbolic rules to *House of Leaves*, so too are there no architectural guidelines. The house itself does not conform to the parameters set by its status, proving space as something mutable for the novel, and no boundaries within are fixed, a reminder of the delicacy and transience of *Leaves* as a title, which couples the incongruities of architectural stability and fragility to undermine consolidation. The changes within the house echo a change in the definition of Hell and serve to further the sense of estrangement, or in this case *unheimlich*, that the space forces upon the inhabitants. One of the most important notions of this novel is the fact that spaces are never what they seem; they shift, creating a distortion and disorientation of spatial knowledge. No architectural feature or marker can be taken for granted; at various moments, the walls or contents of the house change, and along with it the space 'assume[s] a new meaning' (p. 67). Not only does this assume that the space held a certain meaning beforehand, but that associations are able to change depending entirely on external forces, much in the way that both Casey and Gschwandtner define in Chapter 1. By creating a space entirely based on meaning, it is mutable according to its perceivers. There is therefore no sense of settling in, echoed not only in the discomfort of the inhabitants when at 'home' but through the impossibility of the architecture. An archway becomes a doorway and returns to an archway again (p. 68), and in one of the novel's more tense moments before the reveal of what lies beneath the house, Will measures the walls to find them 1/4 an inch longer inside than out (p. 30). These phenomena, as with many other features of the novel, are forewarned by Johnny at the beginning: 'you'll discover you no longer trust the very walls you took for granted' (p. xxiii), again taking the second-person narration literally, warning the reader that the boundaries of space are entirely unstable and adding another layer of elaborate undermining. The walls of the container themselves are fickle, and so whatever lies inside is not truly contained and is able to escape at any moment, becoming simultaneously colloquial, literal, and symbolic all at once. Danielewski disrupts the metaphor of the walls as a container of safety, and in fact the walls point to his own reference of the book itself as a contained space, surrounded by the walls of its covers. If this is the case, then nothing in the novel is to be trusted. This causes a conundrum within the inhabitants, one which they attempt to fix by reverting to characteristic actions; Karen 'set[s] her mind on familiar things', while Will searches for a solution (p. 39). However, their children, Chad and Daisy, are simply fascinated by it in the beginning and move on to ignoring it before the space can infringe on them directly. What follows is an interesting anecdote on the exact metafictional questions raised by Danielewski, and the way in which the language and knowledge of a certain image can conjure up meaning. The assumptions made due to the awareness stemming from adulthood mean that the

children ‘do not know the laws of the world well enough yet to fear the ramifications of the irreconcilable’ (p. 39); Will and Karen’s fear, then, stems from a deep-rooted understanding of the panic created by such unknowable, questionable spaces, and as the creators of domesticity due to their role as parents and the ‘owners’ of the house, this further serves to destabilise. The house is given new meaning based entirely on the personality of the inhabitants; Karen sees it as a tormenter based entirely on her own claustrophobia, Navidson as a mystery to be solved, and later, as more outsiders enter, the space becomes one of dark exploration, a mission to uncover its truth in all forms. The multiplication of perspectives induces an awareness of their subjectivity, a notion which has emerged in other chapters of this thesis and allows for the construction of the hellspace to be entirely dependent on such perspectives, adding, as a result, another layer to its complexity.

The house is, most importantly, a point of access leading towards the dark unknown; the space cannot simply be closed off automatically, or through distance, and therefore the idea of containment is extended to the boundaries of the interior. Once again, thresholds become an important distinguishing element between spaces both hellish or otherwise. A threshold acts as a space of access, a doorway between one place and the next, and as with all other features, *House of Leaves* treats them with an attentive obsession. The thresholds of myth fit well with those of the *unheimlich*, as previously explored (doorways, gates, rivers, and caves all act as barriers against the unsafe and unknown), and the novel connects the two concepts further by having the space traditionally designated as *heimlich* contain these thresholds. Rather than having the thresholds define the space as inside (safe) and outside (unsafe), the thresholds are within the safe space itself, blurring the definitions and constitutions of safety. Any reference to architectural features are not used lightly in the novel. Many comments are made on the presence of doors and doorways, a threshold that may be opened and closed at will. The front cover of the 2000 edition depicts a doorknob, a self-conscious illustrated reminder that the reader, upon opening the text, is entering it. Danielewski himself, again in *Poetics of Space*, writes ‘Doors— ajar, in-between, mostly open— wait for us’,[298] routinely personifying the space to the individual who is about to use it. They offer a possibility, a draw towards something beyond, a way of teasing what lies behind them for both the reader and protagonist. When considered as part of a novel which constantly suggests new and multiple meanings, thresholds take on a new significance. They are not simply access points from one space to the next, but something that stands alone, a space in and of itself.

The attention on thresholds within the text is mostly concentrated on the mysterious doorways that suddenly appear in the house, one in the parents’ bedroom, and the second, a doorless hallway

[298] Danielewski, *Poetics of Space*, p. xiii

—with a door eventually being built by Tom in a rare moment of architectural change by person rather than house (p. 61)— that will eventually grow to lead into the labyrinth. This last door acts as the main container and threshold of the space of horror that emerges within the house, serving to mark the difference between a safe and unsafe space, able to hide the horrors of what lies behind inside and away from the gaze of the inhabitant or whoever stands in front of it. The door is immediately waylaid as anything other than an opening into Hell: 'an unremarkable door ... but still a door to the dead' (p. xv). Without so much as stepping into the space of the house or the underground labyrinth beneath, Johnny once again forces the same preconceived notions of instability on its parameters (p. xxiii). For the House itself, thresholds are shown as constantly mutable, never truly stable, both within the house and on the other side of them. The home has become a place of horror not only by horrifying the space itself, but by insidiously insinuating the presence of another space, inhabitant, or force within it. The doorway closes off the space underground, but does little to act as an effective threshold against the horror that lies within. Its presence serves to actually wreck the imaginations and psychologies of the inhabitants in order to construe the actual house itself, that which stands on the land of Ash Tree Lane, as hellish, further confusing its intentions and definitions. By at first gradually revealing its (possible) true nature to the Navidsons, they are forced to make their own impetuses in regards to its exploration and explanation. The parasitic labyrinthine landscape that lies beneath the space of the home, which in and of itself has lost its homely status, becomes the site of the entirety of the novel's horror, multiplying all the notions discussed previously through its personalisation**.** When the home becomes unlivable, inhabitants are forced to move, and the trap that the house lays is having this door as a conduit, a teasing access to this otherworld that lies beyond.

II. "No sense of direction": Deliberate Distortion and The Labyrinth Conundrum

What the texts in this thesis have shown so far is the way that katabatic journeys are imbued into modern narratives through a movement from a known world into one that is other and yet not necessarily under this previously known, primary world. Thresholds have been shown to serve as entryways to these other/underworlds, and the major qualifiers of the novels' katabases have been these crossings from one place to another in a way that often mimics or alludes to descent. Katabasis is, and always has been, entrenched with underground spaces as the localisers of their Hells, and yet this has so far, outside of *Veniss Underground* and to a lesser extent *The Passion of New Eve,* been negligible in favour of the overall impression of hellspaces as something more familiar and often on the same plane, confused even further by the downward movement in *Earthsea*'s *The Farthest Shore* which manages to have the most canonical hellspace not be underground at all and yet still retain its exact parameters. For *House of Leaves*, the signifier of its katabasis is a very stringent descent into an

underground space that mirrors katabases of old, and yet is rooted in entirely modern ideals, ones that consolidate the notions of home as Hell discussed previously in Chapter 2. The space of the house and the labyrinth beneath become representative of the space descended to during katabasis. The imaginative image or dream of the house, according to Bachelard, is one dominated by the depth of 'surrounding cellars', and the mentality associated with situating oneself in the house is entirely concerned with a movement down, whereas a tranquil solitude can be found in ascending stairs to higher areas such as attics.[299] This perfectly fits into the dichotomy of katabasis seen thus far in the texts and as a whole, whereby dark, underground spaces are associated with often oneiric descents, and higher planes with anabasis and freedom. It also neatly mimics the kind of descent found in *House of Leaves*, which involves a downward movement into what could be considered a cellar-like space, though here being one of infinite dark corridors. Bachelard goes on to note that with the advent of industrial technology such as elevators, '*Home* (his emphasis) has become mere horizontality'.[300] As has been proven, modern katabasis somewhat waylay the concept of descent for mere association, presenting trajectories that are, at times, nearly entirely horizontal. What this means is that depth must be created less out of a literal, physical construction and more out of illusion, as with *Passion* and *American Psycho*'s internal descents. This confusion of movement and direction is taken even further in *House of Leaves*; the concept of direction is entirely muddled in a way that serves to highlight the self-conscious nature of its katabasis. The emphasis on a lack of direction provides it with the very horror that such traditional downward descents into Hell contain, all corroborated by the use of a familiar method of representation, an emblem of misdirection that is returned to again and again in katabases both old and new: the labyrinth.

The Maze

Labyrinth, or Hell? The differentiation between these spaces is a recurrent discussion surrounding locations of katabases, appearing each time both old and modern narratives insist on enmeshing the two together. Each potential hellspace discussed so far, and those they have been compared to, has been inherently connected to a labyrinth both in their interpretations and perceptions by the travellers as not only a maze of psychological misdirection but as a literal underground space of twisting corridors and dead ends. It is impossible to disconnect the two designated terms and spaces in scholarship and classical thought. In terms of geography and topography, the spatial landscape of Hell is varyingly associated with the wider mythological symbol of the labyrinth,[301] and yet these spaces differ in that Hell is often depicted as a steadfast, natural presence ruled by an individual who may not

[299] Bachelard, p. 20-25
[300] Ibid., p. 27.
[301] Zaleski, p. 17.

have necessarily built it,[302] whereas the labyrinth implies a creator (though this is confused in the conflagration of ruler as creator in *Veniss Underground* and *Passion*, or even in *Tombs*, with a mix of natural and constructed features which serves to confuse perceptions even further). Nevertheless, the labyrinth as a place of no return and a direct inference of the underworld is posited by both Clark and Smith to have been at the forefront of Virgil's mind in his composition of Hades.[303] Despite not explicitly being a hellspace in terms of mythic, katabatic alignments, it still is construed, especially in modernity, to an emblem of Hell, with the horror created less from acknowledgement of a deathly presence and more out of the experience of being lost in endless, dark corridors, ones that are most often and notably underground. Danielewski is not immune to this association of hellish interpretations to the space, and uses it for his own purposes. As with *Tombs* in Chapter 1, which saw the labyrinth provided with meaning and substance through interpretation, this meaning is often dependent on expectation and perception: if a labyrinth is present, we expect to be lost, and we also expect a beast.

It is the way that this expectation is played with—and ultimately thrown aside — that categorises *House of Leaves*' katabasis. The expectation of being lost is held firm initially: what happens in the underground labyrinth is near impossible to fathom or trace. Not only does the novel distort its architecture with its growing walls and sudden doorways, but confuses any sense of direction and movement, misconstruing the location of the goal as well as the goal itself. This largely occurs due to the complicated perceptions of the labyrinth that are provided by those who enter and explore it. The construction of the labyrinth as a space in the novel aligns with Gabriel Zoran's notes on spatial theory, whereby language —in this case the language of perception —is used to arrange items of information by linkage to movement through either a 'real route on an object or a transfer of the look or the thought from one object to another'.[304] The reader is only aware of the physical position of the protagonists through a description of what lies in front of them. What is presented initially is a stereotypical construct of a maze with winding, twisting corridors; however, there are no actual definable features with which to corroborate its construction. When it comes to the shifts in gaze and the true perception of the labyrinth, the labyrinth's very structure serves to confuse. As Penelope Doob states in her influential work on the labyrinth, in both *House of Leaves* and her true work, the individual within the labyrinth has a limited view, blocked walls, and no clear pathways, whereas whoever is viewing from above or has a plan of the labyrinth is provided the whole picture,

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[302] Details of how Hades was created vary. Tartarus may have originated from Chaos, as Hesiod writes, or as a personification of worldly elements. Most myths associated with the creation of the world (of which the underworld is a part of) do not detail its origins.
[303] Smith, 'Framing the Underworld', p. 241, Raymond Clark, *Catabasis*, p. 149-150.
[304] Gabriel Zoran, 'Towards a Theory of Space in Narrative', *Poetics Today*, 5.2 (1984), 309-335 (p. 314).

and can therefore discern direction and architecture (p. 113).[305] However, this dichotomy 'breaks down when considering the house, simply because no one ever sees that labyrinth in its entirety' (p. 114), and the same confusion is reflected in the space represented above ground. Clues are provided to its construction, such as stepping through thresholds and moving from one 'room' to the next, but it is done in such a way that no clear path can be followed. Moving through the labyrinth is a process of unwinding the connections between threshold spaces, one that is made impossible by its description:

> 'another windowless room with a doorway leading to another hallway spawning yet another endless series of empty rooms and passageways, all with walls potentially hiding and thus hinting at a possible exterior, though invariably winding up as just another border to another interior' (p. 119)

Its thresholds, which have already been proven tenuous, become spaces of further horror below ground, with windowless, empty rooms and endless doorways and passages and walls that hide or hint at exteriors but only border on another interior (p. 119), its use of 'spawning', 'leading' and 'hinting' all suggesting a process or movement that is inherently endless, as well as provisioning a form of personification or an odd sense of sentience by suggesting the house can perform these actions itself. The presence of an open window, a feature which Zampano notes 'offer[s] vision', becomes a way to 'behold something beyond the interminable pattern of wall, room, and door; a chance to reach a place of perspective and perhaps make some sense of the whole' (p. 464), but ultimately falls flat. Considered less of a threshold than doors by Danielewski in his introduction to *Poetics*,[306] the lack of windows underground serves to provide the space with an inherent sense of interiority and claustrophobia by offering, despite Zampano's words, no light or vision, defying their expected use.

This confusion of architectural perceptions is mimicked by direction. Rather than insisting the katabasis has an element of the downward journey to categorise it as such, whether literally or symbolically, direction is forced in a way that negates it entirely, and in its negation furthers the horror and confusion that is central to it. Throughout Holloway's section, the labyrinth is further revealed and further confused to those within and the reader without, offering tantalising clues as to possible main pathways, replete with methods of marking — such as arrows on the walls which implicitly offer directions and possible trajectories to follow— in an attempt to traverse this impossible space. Deeper within, on a journey that constantly changes to a downward direction, Holloway believes he begins moving uphill only to find that the trajectory has transformed back to downwards: 'It's as if

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[305] Penelope Doob, *The Idea of the Labyrinth from Classical Antiquity through the Middle Ages (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992)*, p. 1.
[306] Danielewski, *Poetics of Space*, p. xiii

I'm moving along a surface that always tilts downward no matter which direction I face' (p. 425). Navidson too suffers from directional confusion; the horizontal stairs rise through the ceiling, the entire house — note that house is still being used despite being so far below, as though the labyrinth is considered part of the overall structure and not something separate, completing the totality that it implies— rotating onto its side (p. 438). In his moment of falling, Zampano asks 'Is he floating, falling, or rising? Is he right side up, upside down or on his side?' (p. 465), but it is ultimately negated in offering meaning, as the film refuses to provide any coherent synthesis and any true perception. Distances are meant to contract with knowledge once the unknown becomes known (p. 166), and yet here the contraction merely offers further confusion. Even any hope of anabasis is thwarted, 'the proverbial light of the tunnel', an 'illuminated circle above' that sees the answer become clear (p. 286) falls away to further katabasis, after which Navidson sinks (p. 289). The act of sinking simultaneously implies no impetus, an action of slippage, the concept of a surface to sink into but one that is not described, and mental deterioration. These multiple, confusing meanings illustrate Danielewski's use of routine and rather innocuous language and metaphors. The whole labyrinth becomes a contradictory and confusing space, with pockets of interiority and architecture afloat amidst the unfathomable. Despite providing architectural markers and the possibilities of entrances and exits, the space is ultimately mired in confusion, dashing any possibility of perception before it can truly be gleaned. As a result, the depth of the novel is actually illusory. Wrapped up around confusing footnotes, a myriad of references to academic works, deliberate typographical erasures and mistakes, the descent that occurs in the labyrinth — which in and of itself aids in the confusion—has so little features to it that it requires other methods in order for it to be realised.

As a result of Danielewski's use of subjective viewpoints, the labyrinth, much like the house (of which it is part of), becomes what each traveller in turn sees it as, symbolising ultimately a journey into the unknown but imbued with personal preconceptions: for Holloway, it is seen as a military expedition, replete with motifs of base camps and assaults, mimicking Navidsons earlier view of the house as an 'outpost'; for Navidson, it is a place of redemption, of coming to terms with Dalia and ultimately gaining mastership of his house through penetration of the female space, in turn feared by Karen by her proximate femininity. The labyrinth's connection to images of genital voids and the vagina dentata is once again another parody of notions[307]; Danielewski's Paglia and Schemell, in Zampano's footnote, explicitly link both labyrinth and house to female genitalia (p. 358). Once more, both labyrinth and house are provisioned with an overflow of symbolism that provides a proliferation of meaning, and by providing that meaning in the voice of academic interpretation, Danielewski deliberately undermines it by suggesting, almost jokingly, that he knows what symbolism is meant to

[307] Bemong, p. 357-358.

be found. As a result, the novel's use of the labyrinth shows that the narrative has no choice but to become a Theseus-alluded journey, one which is built up entirely on symbology, whereby meaning and direction are crossed out and confused. This is corroborated — and exacerbated— by the novel being a textual maze not only in language and content but in its very typography. The reader must turn the text over at times to read it clearly, or hold it up into the mirror. They must circle back, chasing footnotes that lead to dead ends, or come across cryptic codes that send them spiralling off on largely pointless internet searches. Alison Gazzard notes that pathways of the real world maze are usually fixed, containing the experience within,[308] but the metaphorical, conceptual and textual maze of *House of Leaves* is entirely unfixed. The concept of a clear path is practically comedic; the novel laughs in the face of attempted interpretation, knowing there is no true way to unmask the beast when all clues and all roads lead to nothing. Trying to understand the nature of the maze and its appearance, of who built it and why, and what lies at its core, is impossible. Doob again discusses perceptions of it as a space and symbol as being inherently tied to the point of view of the traveller,[309] and yet the labyrinth of the novel resists codification without the inhabitants' own sense of self— complicated further by having no single traveller or narrator, giving rise to recurrent ambiguity throughout— and again with the reader's own perceptions of what a labyrinth should be, built up by mythological associations. This confusion and expectation is taken even further by presenting the labyrinth as a space that is ultimately dark and unnavigable; in doing so, there are no true perceptions, allowing it to simultaneously hold no properties of its own whilst housing all those of its trespassers, historical, protagonistic, and reader alike. Despite this confusion, however, a continual sense of depth and descent is still felt, and a metaphorical and physical trajectory is mapped by those who plunge ahead into the dark recesses of the labyrinthine hellspace in classical, though confusing, katabatic fashion. The katabasis arises less out of explicit association or description and more out of a general allusion and expectation. Whether vertically, horizontally, or otherwise, the katabasis becomes a journey through the vast landscape of the unknown, the horror and hellishness of it stemming from the torturous lack of solidity given to any interpretation or perception.

To Danielewski, the labyrinth is a 'complex ideation of design and construction' (p. 109), and he uses the space not only as a narrative device but to deliberately highlight the radical distortion of the novel as a whole. The symbol of the labyrinth simultaneously projects a notion of exploration whilst representing the process of reading the novel and the impossibility of navigating the textual labyrinth and the labyrinth in the text. In deliberately providing no clear origin to the space, Danielewski himself becomes its sadistic creator. Readers must wade through a maze of meaning and

[308] Gazzard, p. 71.
[309] Doob, p. 65.

preconceived notions which have been set up for a specific purpose, and yet one that is constantly undermined. It becomes the space for the curious explorer, the holder of horror, and the wider meaning of the novel itself, along with its various interpretations and symbology. Clues are offered towards a certain interpretation and a major symbol, complete with the legendary beast at its centre, that serves no other purpose than to play on the common associations of the reader to fill in the gaps in the darkness but to ultimately get as lost as the travellers. The fear that the possible presence of the beast and the impending loom of the labyrinth itself cause begins before the space is even breached, and the horror once again leeches beyond the boundary and provides the space with a premature horrific meaning. Just as with the skew of house, so too is any mention of the labyrinth and the beast within struck out, a blank space created instead which serves to point out the allusion even further in its obviousness, rather than hiding it. By constantly suggesting multiple meanings, all of which co-exist within the same textual space, reading the narrative is like moving through a labyrinth of depth, whereby that which is set up at the beginning is either added to or removed in favour of new and confusing interpretations. The textual contract with the reader implies an assumption of meaning in which everything is taken for granted, and yet is subverted by deliberate tricks, each pathway of the maze leading to further spawning hallways or dead-ends. The trap that the reader falls into is one that forces an obsession with language, of desiring to pour over every detail, and yet just as with the house, which teases the reader with a sense of totality that is immediately undermined, the labyrinth's endlessness becomes a metaphor for the text as a whole.

The Dark

Throughout this thesis, perceptions have been important to the construction of the novels' katabases and the formulation of their hellspaces, and what characters choose to see or not see become vital to the creation of hellish horror. In order to come to terms with the horror and unimaginability of hellspaces, the reader or character must 'construe [their] field of vision as a container' to separate the reality that is presented to the gaze.[310] It is an idea previously discussed in terms of *Veniss Underground*, whereby the protagonists are forced to look away from the hellishly presented realities they are witnessing, and so too must the reader remove their gaze, as though the peripheries of their own vision act as separate containers to bar them from truly perceiving where they are situated. In the opening pages of *House of Leaves*, Johnny reflects that 'Zampano writes constantly about seeing. What we see, how we see and what in turn we can't see' (p. xxi). The perception of the hellspace as it is presented is important to its construction. It is a vital element, an architectural tool which reflects both the protagonists' own personal connotations of Hell as well as providing that important blank

[310] Merrifield, p. 22.

space previously discussed, and despite the preoccupation previously on these perceptions both historically and personally, there is one further use of perception, as with all other texts: the act of seeing. It is an act that is inherently part of reading the book and realising that just as the house has multiple layers of perception, so too does the concept of viewing it; the horror suffered by Johnny is just an after-effect of reading Zampano's text, which in turn is simply a written account of a film in which the Navidsons occur in, which takes place entirely through the lenses of cameras. This fact alone means that the house is being consistently furthered from any true perceptions whilst distorting both movement and said perception. Stark reminders remain throughout that the novel is, above all, a rendering of a film, set up from the fixed point of view of the camera, with no way of seeing behind or around the lens. As a result, the view of the house comes less from the Navidsons themselves than from the cameras that are used to film it, with the camera itself not only being used literally as the device which Zampano bases his analysis from, but of the complex and often inaccessible techniques used by Danielewski himself.

What the use of the camera —or at least the allusions towards its use from the continuous filmic references and the fact that the narrative itself is a retelling of a film — does is imply a sense of hidden agency, therefore providing an ultimate and singular viewpoint to contrast the multitude. Yet even this we cannot trust. At the very beginning, the reader is told that 'we never actually see' Navidson. Navidson himself is 'not interested in showing all the coverage or attempting to capture some kind of Catholic or otherwise mythical view. Instead, he hunts for moments, pearls of the particular' (p. 10). All the clips are 'impartial renderings of a space. If the action slips past the frame, the camera does not care enough to adjust its perspective' (p. 344). If we do not see the action, did it happen? If we do not see Navidson, does he even exist? Coupled with Johnny's use of drugs and paranoia which make his own perceptions unstable, and Zampano's blind, possible madness, as well as the possibility that he wrote the Navidson record based on his own imagination, these all corroborate a no-view of the house and its horrors, a way of destroying its boundaries until all that exists is the idea of it. The house is made up entirely of the perceptions of the characters that possibly inhabit, write, film and read about it, and the fear of it, much like its architectural framework, bursts through borders to plague the outside world, and thus the reader is plagued by these same ministrations. The fact that the word house is skewed clues the reader into knowing something is wrong without even having to see it; the house is entered with preconceived notions of being horrific without requiring any explanation, just in the way that the labyrinth's own crossing out hides any hint of interpretation and yet insists on a sense of sinisterness. If space is constructed through movement and exploration, of piecing together sets of architectural or natural features to form a facsimile of somewhere, the difficulty in perception means that both destination and trajectory become confused.

As Johnny writes, it is equally about what we do not see, and if space is formed by the perception of the gaze and the knowledge of the actual parameters around the protagonist, then having protagonists blinded in some way means that the space itself is blank. Vision is consistently distorted through separation by some force — whether the dark, fear, or even actual camera lenses —and becomes an entirely unreliable way of defining space in the novel. It is, ultimately, a novel of distortion; the distortion of text, characters, and interpretation. The plethora of footnotes, the sudden change between viewpoints, and the pervasive presence of the house and its horrors forces you to consistently question the reality of the tale as it descends further and further, continuously confusing meaning. When it comes to the labyrinth, this skewed perception is more confounded than ever. When the gaze is so disrupted and unreliable, the space perceived by the reader may not necessarily be the space the characters are actually occupying. Any personal experience, connection, fear, or associations are immediately transferable onto it as it offers a blank space for perceptions, and therefore it becomes a construct less surrounding actual architectural features —though windows, doors, rooms and hallways do exist and populate the house and the labyrinth —and more about an idea of what that space should look like. But what happens when you cannot see?

The prevalence of darkness causes yet another conundrum in the novel's construction of reading and perception. Similarly to *Veniss Underground* and *Hill House*, darkness offers a way of distorting the perception of the characters and the readers, therefore distorting both their movement within and the overall construction of the hellspace. When what lies in front of them is an immutable darkness, difficulties arise in providing any concrete spatial construction, which in turn induces a sense of anxiety out of expectation. The association of horror, claustrophobia, and blindness, of not being able to tell what lies behind corners, is a concept that has cropped up in every novel as a technique used not only to hint at the sinisterness of the hellspace but to provide it with no clear understanding, where darkness is inherently involved in the creation of trepidation. The nature of the dark itself is all the more present in *House of Leaves.* While *Earthsea*'s darkness is linked both to that of nocturnal nature and magic, and in each other example darkness has been used to mean both a lack of electric light and nighttime, it is the difference between these kinds of darknesses that again plagues *House of Leaves*' use of language, simply because Danielewski makes a point of parsing out their differences and forcing the reader to think on the nature of darkness itself. Darkness is a granted element of the Gothic and horrific narratives that Danielewski employs, not only in its use as a literary device but as a sub-genre itself, whereby 'dark' has seemingly misplaced 'Gothic' in American literature.[311] Again, Danielewski raises an awareness of its genred use whilst also deconstructing its

[311] Teresa A. Goddu, 'Introduction to *American Gothic* (extract)', in *The Horror Reader*, ed. by Ken Gelder (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 268.

linguistic and symbolic meaning. If night is a time in which 'we can think in ambivalences and contradictions, entertain the invention of impossible worlds, and discover in spirit those realms that are foreign to our ordinary lives',[312] then darkness, though filled with the same connotations, is something else entirely. Light itself has a precedence in both mythology and cosmogony; across cultures, the forces of light and dark are representatives of facets of the human experience, personified as divinities, or presented as otherworldly forces. Susanne Bach and Folkert Degenring, in their work on the nature and language of darkness, discuss the ways in which they are reflected in the English language, suffused with our experiences and understanding of the world:

> 'language itself should bear testimony to light and darkness as vital and cultural forces ... there is a wealth of expressions that relate to light, darkness, and vision. An argument can be 'lucid' or 'opaque', 'I see' denotes understanding, and new knowledge is considered 'enlightening' while being 'kept in the dark' means being kept ignorant.'[313]

It is a dynamic that is also pertinent to hellspaces. Danielewski's play on language leaves no stone unturned, and these same associations are used to categorise his hellspace. Irrefutably, the Hell of Christianity is associated with darkness and evil, a space that is both metaphorically and literally blackened. In Homer, the realm of Hades is dark, but the extent to which the light penetrates is debatable; either the sun's rays never shine on it,[314] or it is a land of perpetual dusk, one which is not entirely dark.[315] They are spatial categories, the darkness of the land in and of itself a mutable thing.[316] Until now, the darkness of Hell is an element that has been taken for granted to aid in the creation of horror and to provide a blank space for presumption and possibility. Whether those possibilities are later revealed or not is detrimental to how the hellspace is construed. Both light and dark, true to their colloquial nature, play a role in *House of Leaves*, and there is a near obsessive attention provided to darkness. They are not equal to each other, and indeed much of the novel is spent in the darkness belowground. There is no distinct force of night and day, and rather the days are suffused with darkness: sunlight is barely present. Night and darkness do not necessarily equate; more often than not, there is a permanence of blackness, a lack of vision irregardless of the time of day. The way darkness is dealt with in relation to the space of Hell is intricate and complex, suffused as usual with

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[312] Elisabeth Bronfen and David Brenner, *Night Passages: Philosophy, Literature, and Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), p. xi-xii.
[313] Susanne Bach and Folkert Degenring, *Dark Nights, Bright Lights: Night, Darkness, and Illumination in Literature* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2015), p. 3.
[314] Homer, *The Odyssey of Homer,* trans. by Richard Lattimore (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), XII.15-19.
[315] Marinatos, p. 187.
[316] Efimia D. Karakantza, 'Dark Skin and Dark Deeds: Danaids and Aigyptioi in a Culture of Light', in *Light and Darkness in Ancient Greek Myth and Religion*, ed. by Menelaos Christopoulos, Efimia D. Karakantza and Olga Levaniouk (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2010), p. 15.

cultural assumptions but given a dimension that is something *more*, something other. The darkness of *House of Leaves* is all-consuming, not only in terms of its proliferation but in its nature. It seeks to draw in the inhabitants of the house, Johnny, and the reader along with them into a space that is entirely nothing, allowing for a construction of a void within the pages itself. An image of a frame from Exploration #4 found in the appendix is almost entirely black, a single orb of light in the left hand corner the only thing distinguishing it from an entirely nothing-space, eking out some tiny form of meaning against the wide void around it. Zampano's aim, at least according to Johnny, is to paradoxically capture 'the sight of darkness itself' (p. xxi). The term is loaded with impossibilities not only due to Zampano's blindness but to the nature of darkness itself forbidding any kind of light. It is absolute, but its absoluteness provides it with the means of being filled, and what else to fill it with but the connotations, symbols, and assurances of the mind? Johnny discusses the destabilisation of images, the shifting of things within the novel and the mind that forces the realisation that as you yourself shift, your inside becomes 'dark like a room' (p xviii). This reinforces the idea that a room is *supposed* to be dark, but no hint of night time or lack of windows actually corresponds to the darkness it presumes.

There are a multitude of dark spaces in the novel (dark hallways, a dark room between two bedrooms, the darkness inside the closet of the tattoo shop, the dark squares of Chad's drawings), and yet night is not an explicitly required factor in their darkness. Instead, the origins of darkness in the novel is specifically referred to as 'unnatural' (p. 61) in terms of the underground space, hinting at its possible architecturally-induced construction. Much like the architecture that contains it, and the novel which contains both, darkness too juts out past the borders, encompassing everything: 'Darkness below, above, and of course darkness beyond' (p.464). It has no boundaries, and the darkness of the Navidson record transfers into Zampano and Johnny's own lives. Zampano's blindness is emblematic of the way darkness is treated in the novel. It is something that cannot be taken for granted, an undeniable element of the way space and the gaze are constructed. Everything that is read by Johnny is written by a blind man with a personal connection to darkness. Are they simply a reflection of one another, the darkness that is navigated by the Navidsons being a facet of Zampano's own lack of vision, whereby the darkness is metaphorically within the perceiver rather than the constructed space? The dark is a space of unlimited possibilities, one which Johnny actually comes to fear. This fear, in turn, could be a reflection of the way in which Zampano is consistently warning against the dangers that lie in that void-space; 'I grew more and more disoriented, increasingly more detached from the world, something sad and awful straining around the edges of my mouth, surfacing in my eyes. I stopped going out at night. I stopped going out' (p. xviii). Johnny's fear of the dark, not unlike

Karen's, sees him become a self-professed agoraphobe, shutting himself in and closing the boundaries against the outside world, creating a dark, isolated space.

The word darkness itself has never simply been a single definable thing. While it undoubtedly has connotations of the void, the dark subconscious or unconscious mind, and mythological and cosmological associations, it is also nothing; 'Emptiness here has always just been another word for darkness' (p. 265), writes Johnny in a tirade about one night stands and the sex life of his friend Lude. It is a comment easily glossed over, a way of criticising the vapidness of their lifestyles; but as with everything, it cannot be taken for granted. It can once again be read as Danielewski, Johnny, or the editors simply warning us against looking too closely at the confines put on the definable. Later on, Johnny acknowledges his previous naivety towards the nature of darkness; 'there always will be darkness but I realize now something inhabits it. Historical or not' (p. 518). What Danielewski uses the dark to do is hide everything, and yet in doing so he is obvious; he deliberately chooses to obscure not only to create horror and the sense of something more but to provide significance to nothing, with the perception of the dark itself, the expectation of it being the ultimate void, still being something more. It provides the ultimate blank space by not allowing any possible perceptions to cloud its construction, allowing for complete and utter disorientation, a lack of direction, and above all the invocation of fear for what does, or does not, inhabit it. In this way, what darkness also does is hide the truth, with the ability to see clearly (both literally and metaphorically) tantamount to understanding, a routine metaphor previously established in *Passion* for its association with Plato's cave and light leading to realisation. In the novel's beginning Johnny hints that for the possibility of anabasis to occur, there must be a process of enlightenment (p. xxiii), and yet given the narrative's construction and preoccupation with the dark, there can be no consolidation.

Nothing at all in the novel can be taken for granted, and in the same self-conscious mode of all other dichotomies and symbols, there is a preoccupation with authenticity that links the text with the same issues of artifice versus reality as the rest in this thesis. The notion of descending 'into an illusion', (p. 86), and of the narrative being 'almost dream like' (p. 85) are corroborated by Johnny's insistence on the un-reality of the novel's events at the beginning: 'I mean how fake it is. Just sorta doesn't sit right with me.' (p. 15). The consistently false or confused perceptions, the slipperiness of definition, and even the deliberate use of incorrect words — such as Johnny's admittance of editing words and occasions to neatly mimic his own life with Zampano's writings, or those that would hint at an avenue of analysis that is ultimately pointless due to the extent of its explicitness, such as defining Karen as 'uninhabited' rather than 'uninhibited' (p. 105) — point towards a narrative that once more raises awareness of its own lack of authenticity. Moments even occur, much like the metafictional use

of characters and narratives in *Hill House*, that point towards the use of scripted conversations and film to lay out the narrative (p. 258). There is a metafictional acknowledgement that the work is one of fiction even within the fiction of the work itself. The truth is further complicated by Johnny's own instability and katabasis. Finding solace in substance and sex, buoyed forward on a momentum that eventually leads him to sleeping under an ash tree after hearing 'Five and a Half Minute Hallway' played by a band, the leaves (i.e the narrative) blowing away behind him an almost peaceful end, sees the fruition of his mother's words in The Whalestoe letters which profess his mental power to free himself from 'any hell' (p. 600), even one of his own (possible) making. As with Patrick in *American Psycho*, Johnny's narrative is laced with instability, and as it is by his own hands that the manuscript is compiled, out of which the narrative develops and the entire story unfolds, the trust that is placed on him is lacking. Just as the frequent references to sex and alcohol derail any sense of stability and coherence to his narrative voice, so too does his profession of mixing up words in both his own and Zampano's writing. These incongruities, when coupled with Danielewski's own obsession with language, show that no single scene, sentence or word can be taken for truth.

Even within the darkness — whether it be night or otherwise — there is still a sense of vision, a semblance of something in the obscurity. It allows the reader to fill the void for themselves, to personalise the Hell that is already personalised for the protagonists. Enough detail is provided to leave the narrative having discovered something; the horror lies in the unknown until it is dashed away, revealed to be something or nothing at all. For *Hill House* and *Veniss Underground*, darkness acts as a barrier that will be eventually lifted, and the abhorrence of the hellspace is unveiled upon whatever form the anabasis takes. *House of Leaves*'s katabasis, despite having a semblance of an anabatic narrative towards the end of the novel, does not provide the same fulfilment. Rather, the barrier — as with all other barriers imposed by the novel — remains up, and neither Johnny, Zampano, or the Navidsons shed light on what lies in the dark. There is a possibility that Johnny's own transformation is simply a reflection of what he has read and believes to be true in Zampano's Navidson Record, that the record itself never existed in the first place, or, indeed, that it is all in fact true. The same difficulty of conclusion is found in Zampano's own fate, which remains one of the novel's mysteries, revealed only by the possible claw marks left in his home that Johnny connects to the beast from the Navidson's house. The Navidsons themselves leave the house firmly behind, markedly changed by the events but clearly separated from the space by the end, only the trauma as evidence of their occurrence. This change, which occurs to all characters, signifies the major qualifier of katabasis, a visible, physical or mental tracery of events that have occurred. Much in the way that anabasis and revelatory truths have occurred in previous textual examples, the acquisition of some form of knowledge and freedom marks an end, becoming in and of itself a symbolic move towards

enlightenment or higher planes, and yet with *House of Leaves*, this enlightenment stays just out of reach, as though it could lie somewhere, amongst those infinite, dark corridors, if you just keep looking.

Conclusion

As Johnny writes, it is 'like there's something else, something beyond it all, a greater story still looming in the twilight, which for some reason I'm unable to see' (p. 15). The greater story behind *House of Leaves* is, much like many of its meanings, hidden. The final shot of the Navidson record is a road curving into the woods, darkness sweeping in 'like a hand' (p. 528), a stark reminder that the entire novel is only what we perceive, and what we find meaning in. The pearls of the particular can be cherry picked to tease out only a katabasis of possibility, which may not even exist at all. In fact, tracking the katabasis in and of itself has proven to be futile even with such explicit allusions that prey on expectation, and reveals the extent to which Danielewski's work has dismantled previous notions of construction. The barriers between safety and horror, the requirements of some form of descent, whether physical or metaphorical and yet still traceable, and a form of anabasis are all waylaid whilst still holding onto the definitions of the mytheme by its threads. Ultimately, the true katabasis of the novel is one of confusion and loss, whereby eking out any mention is not a reward, and tracing is a mere farce. *House of Leaves* is a narrative about assumption and perception, the way that the reader associates certain linguistic queues with mythological, symbolic and cultural preconceptions. Yet, how can Hell be defined in a place that is so undefinable, when its boundaries are so mutable and unstable? If it is simply a product of the protagonists and their reflective selves, does it even truly exist? Each text so far has culminated in the destabilisation of the inhabitants of their representative hellspaces upon confrontation with its possible true nature, but the true nature of *House of Leaves*'s underground labyrinth and the beast within are never revealed, and still the protagonists undergo complete katabases and anabases - though their entrance and exit occur on decidedly non-linear planes. The novel's metafictional status allows the naming of such a place as Hell to play with expectations; by offering a personalisation, a way in which the reader creates the monster for themselves, Hell becomes less of a physical place and one that is only in your mind, one that must be constructed and filled by yourself, and yet is still reflected overtly in the physical space that represents this very construct. The horror and the journey here are entirely connected to space in a way that they become it, and the goal of understanding becomes nearly impossible. The very purpose of the horror in *House of Leaves* is that it creates the hellspace around the individual, even going so far as to bring the reader in. We are expected to find that which lies beyond the boundaries of the work, the greater story looming in the twilight which straddles the cusp of light and dark and is frustratingly unreachable. We are warned, from the first pages, to keep going, but that ultimately there is nothing

there. Symbols and their meanings, spaces and their inhabitants, the very pages of the book and its narrative disintegrate as we move further through a twisted maze that unravels and re-ravels to show us nothing. The labyrinth is just a maze, and the house is really just a house, and yet everything must mean something, whether that comes as part of interpretation or truth: muss es sein.

CONCLUSION

In an interview for *Marxism Today*, Angela Carter states that the act of reading a book is also an act of rewriting: 'all fiction should be open-ended. You bring to a novel, anything you read, all your experience of the world. You bring your history and you read it in your own terms."[317] Modern katabasis has an ability of shaping itself outside of its Classical or mediaeval restraints, and yet an inherent knowledge of the tropes associated with its previous forms is required in order for it to be seen as such: the concerns of modern katabatic adaptations surround an awareness of formulaic processes and in turn how these may be transmuted to fit new modes. The texts in this thesis become increasingly explicit and yet paradoxically tenuous in their use of katabasis, showing that its construction and use is only as strong as its allusions, whether conscious or otherwise, but each novel has a distinct awareness of generic and mythic convention that the authors use for their own means. What is clear is that from the post-1945 sensibilities and awareness outlined previously, the modern traveller is one with no boons and no gains; instead, they are infused with only a multitude of losses. They become a reflection of a katabasis and hellspace that does not remain separated from the primary world once left, and often leeks out past its boundaries. Hell, more often than not, resides entirely in the protagonist, carried with them and often only reflected in physicality through the careful use of perception. As katabatic narratives rely on the instability of the environment and narrative direction that is echoed in the traveller, any space inhabited must represent the descent in a form that reflects this and relates to its original purpose. In the end, the parameters of Hell are changed so completely that horror is created only out of a thin association, a direct thread woven out of the name itself. What forces these novels to create such horrific hellspaces is not through the presence of the underground alone, or even a descent, but the mere allusive perception that a space could be configured as Hell if one sees it as such, and thus all of these texts are focused on the gaze, many in a filmic sense, with a high awareness of methods of viewing and spectatorship. This in and of itself implies a certain lack of agency to the traveller's own journeys, whereby they become less active participants and more accidental intruders into strange and disjointed worlds.

Long gone are the tales of explicit descents, crawling down through caves or even stairs, and with them the isolated world meant to hold the horrors associated with such a torturous place, which has also changed with the advent of Catholicism and even further with increasing secularisation. Katabasis instead becomes a trope that can be transfigured to fit the parameters of certain genres or modes of representation, with impetised journeys, direction, and the space of Hell all being changed

[317] Angelacarter.co.uk. 'Interview for Marxism Today's "Left Alive" | Angela Carter.' (2017) <https://www.angelacarter.co.uk/interview-for-marxism-todays-left-alive/> [Accessed 6 April 2023]

until all that remains is an implicit knowledge that its presence largely depends on a sense of awareness both by author and by reader of expectation and association. Tracing its presence becomes a descent in and of itself into language and meaning, out of which the anabasis becomes less of a form of enlightenment — despite many of the goals being understanding (and even these often failing in accomplishment)— and instead leads to further confusion. The narrative configuration of anabasis in particular has shown to largely be avoided in order to present the futility of the journey in the first place. The language surrounding its construction and association is used to build up, multiply, or even remove meaning entirely in order to present a formulation of katabasis that is both dependent on prior configurations and yet entirely destabilised by an awareness of and a later breakdown of known patterns.

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