

Salem State University

The Graduate School

Department of English

Journeying Through the In-Between: An Exploration of Liminality in José Saramago's

Blindness, All the Names, and The Cave

A Thesis in Literary Studies

by

Evan Miller

Copyright 2022, Evan Miller

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts in English and Master of Arts in Teaching English

May 2022

Abstract

This thesis focuses on the concept of liminality and the presence of liminal states in José Saramago's trilogy of novels, *Blindness*, *All the Names*, and *The Cave*. Defined by qualities of disorientation and ambiguity, liminality speaks to being in a state of "in-between," which, I argue, is applicable to the central characters in each of these texts. Specifically, I examine how Saramago's characters experience these liminal states, as well the qualities of the liminal states themselves, which share many - though not all - of the same characteristics as labyrinths and caves. To that end, I trace the liminal journeys of the central characters in each novel, the actions required to successfully complete their journeys, and how the culmination of these journeys manifest as an achievement of change engendered by realization, epiphany, and clarity of consciousness.

This thesis is divided into three chapters, bookended by introduction and conclusion. In the first chapter, I detail the history of liminality and define the "liminal state" and "liminal subject." I also discuss how Saramago's characters can be considered liminal subjects, and the events that precipitate the characters' entrances into their respective liminal states. The second chapter features the analysis of the beginning stages of the characters' liminal journeys - the "descents into darkness and the "confrontations with death" - and introduces the concept of "concentric liminality," as well as the parallels between liminality and symbolic existence. The third chapter explores the final stage of the liminal journey, the "ascension to light," and the processes by which the characters can achieve their transformations and exit their liminal states.

Contents

Abstract ii

Introduction..... 1

Chapter 1: Entrance..... 6

Chapter 2: Descent(s) Into Darkness / Confrontation(s) with Death 23

Chapter 3: Ascension to Light / Exit..... 49

Conclusion 79

Bibliography 82

Introduction

In 1995, Portuguese author José Saramago published his book *Ensaio sobre a Cegueira*, which translates in English to *Blindness*. Two years later, Saramago published *Todos os Nomes*, or *All the Names*, and four years after that, he published *A Caverna - The Cave*. What is striking about these three novels - apart from the closeness of their releases, which is impressive in and of itself - is that each, while different in character, setting, and plot, possesses similarities that are impossible to ignore. Indeed, even Saramago himself referred to these three works as an “involuntary trilogy” (Atkin 30).¹

In his essay, “Some Remarks on a Phenomenological Interpretation of Saramago’s *Cave*,” Giuseppe Menditto offers a further description of the similarities between what he calls the “triptych”:

In each of these three novels, an imaginary element breaking into real circumstances highlights the dehumanization of reality itself. This takes place in a mental hospital, an archive and a city described as they were forms of a *panopticon*. The crisis of social, cultural, and economic identities manifests itself through a symptomatic paradigm: its visibility is made possible by a temporary lack of material vision such as that caused by an epidemic of blindness, by the discovery of an invisible biographical index card or by the darkness in a cave. (110-111)

In each novel, the settings - what Menditto calls the *realities* - are never named, nor are we ever given the exact moment in time. Through this anonymity, Saramago unmoors his narratives and thus implies that these cities could be anywhere, or perhaps, *are everywhere*. But this also

¹ In her book, *Saramago’s Labyrinths*, Rhian Atkin notes that Saramago himself referred to these three texts in this manner on several occasions

detaches these societies from the rest of the world. Though the trilogy was written in the 1990's, and there are offhand mentions of modern technology throughout, what we are never given is any hint of what is happening outside of the cities and their outskirts. Moreover, in each novel, the characters are in many ways generic. In *Blindness*, they are literally nameless, referred to only by their most surface-level characteristics: “the doctor,” “the doctor’s wife,” “the first blind man,” “the girl with the dark glasses,” etc.; in *All the Names*, the protagonist is only called Senhor José (we are never given a surname); and in *The Cave*, the primary players *are* named (Cipriano Algor, Marçal, Marta), but the names are, again, common and indistinctive.

However, it is another throughline in these three texts that is of most interest to me. In each novel, the protagonists - and to an extent, secondary characters - seem to be lost, seem to find themselves in some personal or psychological limbo from/through which there is no clear path or exit. Menditto underscores this idea with his mention of that “temporary lack of material vision.” The characters are at once blind (symbolically, literally) and blinded; at once unable to see and unable to be seen. This dual notion of disorientation led me to the central theme of this analysis, the lens through which I chose to examine these novels, and the concept I argue is present in each: that the central characters exist in states of *liminality*, and moreover, are journeying *through* these liminal states.

I had always intended to write this thesis about these three novels, though I had not originally considered liminality as a lens. Originally, I was considering the idea of “potentiality,” and how Saramago’s societies – especially that of *Blindness*, in which they are facing a global pandemic - reflect a possible state of existence for our world. *Blindness*, it seemed, prophesized the potential chaos we might face should things truly devolve. Though I still believe there are some possible parallels (and dire ones, at that), I came to realize this topic might be challenging

to fully flesh out. How, exactly, do I analyze the *possibility* of bedlam? Still, I could not shake the feeling that there was something about Saramago's nameless cities and characters that portended a dystopian version of our *real* existence. Maybe, I thought, the answer lies in the characters, their journeys. In each novel, the central characters are not only lost, but are searching for something, are pushing back against oppressive societal forces that seek to smother them into subservience and anonymity. If, then, the characters are representative of the average citizen, of quotidian existence, of society, then *this* must be the link between Saramago's texts and liminality, the possible explanation for those vertiginous states of limbo: in each novel, the characters are *between*, between a world with sight and without; between the knowledge and ignorance of an unknown, unnamed woman; between life in a cave and the sunlight above.²

When the idea struck me, I only had a cursory understanding of liminality as a concept. First introduced by Arnold Van Gennep in 1909, and taken up by Victor Turner and others, liminality speaks to existing in a place and time of "transition." It is a space defined by qualities of disorientation and ambiguity in which the "liminal subject" is, to quote Victor Turner, "betwixt and between" (93). As I continued my research, what began to pique my interest was that to be "betwixt and between"—to be "between" stable states of existence—is to be in some way "invisible." But this only led to more questions: to what extent, I wondered, could a person be "invisible"? How does one experience this liminal state of invisibility? In reading Turner and Bjorn Thomassen, I realized that these limbos were not infinite; rather, they were distinctly *finite*. As Turner notes, liminality is not only spatial, but temporal: it is a "period" of time, not an everlasting state of ambiguity. It is, I learned, a journey.

² The plot of each novel will be more thoroughly detailed in the following Chapter.

Therefore, not only do I think that liminality can help us understand Saramago's texts, but, reciprocally, an examination of these texts can elucidate certain aspects of liminality as a concept and the experiences of those who find themselves in liminal states. Specifically, this can be done by analyzing Saramago characters, who, throughout these narratives, attempt to navigate these states of disorientation and ambiguity en route to a new status of being. To complete the liminal journey is to experience a transformation, one achieved through agency and action, and characterized by epiphany, realization, and enlightenment. And, by scrutinizing these transformations, this new clarity, we can perhaps divine Saramago's own acute observations of life and existence, his own portentions for what we will face as a society should we succumb to those very forces which seek to subvert, oppress, chain, and blind.

In this thesis, I contend that each of the central characters in Saramago's "involuntary trilogy" are on their own liminal journeys, and it is only through their successful navigation through the liminal space that they can achieve apotheosis, their ultimate moments of clarity of consciousness, a new understanding of the world, of life, of their very existence. In each novel, the characters in some way, "disappear." For assorted reasons (that will be explicated subsequently), they find themselves lurched from states of relative stability to states of distinct instability. The people they once were have vanished, and there is no reclaiming those previous identities. All that is left is to venture through the liminal space before them, to seek and embrace the *newness* waiting on the other side.

What is remarkable of Saramago's characters is that, though they find themselves in untenable states, they are resilient. Though symbolically (or literally) blind, though unsure, even, of what they are heading towards, these characters soldier on. Saramago's characters do not choose their liminality, their ambiguity; nevertheless, the characteristics of the liminal subjects

are, I believe, pivotal to their ability to succeed in their journeys. Notably, this does not necessarily imply uniqueness; rather, it is the relative normalcy of the characters that is important. Indeed, I might suggest that, insofar as these characters are representative of society, Saramago would rather see if a “normal person,” as opposed to an exceptional one, can survive these journeys. To that end, I posit that a crucial aspect of successfully traversing the liminal space – of completing the liminal journey – is *choosing action*: it is not necessarily *how* or *why* these subjects are chosen, but how *and* why they react to the situations in which they find themselves. In addition, I argue that the liminal journey consists of three distinct sections: a descent into darkness, a confrontation with death, and a subsequent ascension to light which marks the successful achievement of the liminal journey and exit *out of* liminality into a new, stable state of existence. I also suggest that these liminal journeys are not singular; rather, they are comprised of “concentric” liminal journeys whose routes feature, in miniature, all the same characteristics of the greater liminal journey.

In the pages that follow, I will trace the liminal journeys of the characters in each of these novels. I will describe the liminal states, and by doing so, enumerate the challenges Saramago poses to his liminal subjects, the ones they must overcome to achieve their newfound stations in life. Further, I will not only describe the physical journeys, but the emotional and psychological ones. In short, I will attempt to define the liminal state, trace the liminal journey, and by sketching the topology of each, locate the liminal subject within this heretofore indescribable place of “betwixt and between.”

Chapter 1: Entrance

Liminality

To assess the liminal states in each of Saramago's novels and the liminal journeys of the liminal subjects within them, we must first define these terms. Of "states" in general, in his essay, "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in *Rites de Passage*," Victor Turner writes the following:

By "state" I mean here "a relatively fixed or stable condition" and would include in its meaning such social constancies as legal status, profession, office or calling, rank or degree. I hold it to designate also the condition of a person as determined by his culturally recognized degree of maturation as when one speaks of "the married or single state" or the "state of infancy." The term "state" may also be applied to ecological conditions, or to the physical, mental, or emotional condition in which a person or group may be found at a particular time...State, in short, is a more inclusive concept than status or office and refers to any type of stable or recurrent condition that is culturally recognized. (91)

A comprehensive understanding of Turner's interpretation of states is crucial to understanding the liminal state. Turner's essay deals primarily with *rites de passage*, the liminal rituals first laid out by Arnold Van Gennep, of which Turner claims "[such rites] indicate and constitute transitions between states" (90). Though there are ritualistic elements at play in Saramago's narratives, the liminal state is not solely linked to rituals; however, all liminal states, by definition, must be in some way transitory. As such, in nearly all cases, the time spent in a liminal state is finite. Eventually, the journey must end, otherwise, can it be considered a journey at all? As the liminal state is defined by both spatial and temporal elements, in "The Uses and

Meanings of Liminality,” Bjorn Thomassen lays out the different combinations of subject, space, and time in this helpful model:

Time	Subject	Individual	Group	Society
Moment		Sudden event affecting one’s life (death, divorce, illness) or individualized ritual passage (baptism, ritual passage to womanhood, as fx. Among Ndembu)	Ritual passage to manhood (almost always in cohorts); graduation ceremonies, etc.	A whole society facing a sudden event (sudden invasion, natural disaster, a plague) where social distinctions and normal hierarchy disappear. Carnivals. Revolutions.
Period		Critical life-stages Puberty or teenage	Ritual passage to manhood, which may extend into weeks or months in some societies; Group travels.	Wars. Revolutionary periods.
Epoch (or life-span duration)		Individuals standing “outside society”, by choice or designated. Monkhood. In some tribal societies, individuals remain “dangerous” because of a failed ritual passage. Twins are permanently liminal in some societies	Religious Fraternities, Ethnic minorities, Social minorities, Transgender Immigrant groups betwixt and between old and new culture Groups that live at the edge of “normal structures”, often perceived as both dangerous and “holy”	Prolonged wars, enduring political instability, prolonged intellectual confusion; Incorporation and reproduction of liminality into “structures” Modernity as “permanent liminality”?

As shown above, Thomassen divides the temporal dimensions of liminality into three categories:

1) moments (sudden events); 2) periods – weeks, months, or possibly years; and 3) epochs -

decades, generations, maybe even centuries (ibid). In the “Epoch” section, one notices examples

of “permanent liminality.”⁴ In his essay, Thomassen addresses some of the questions surrounding

⁴ There are myriad analysis and ascriptions of liminality as a permanent state, which include those in the “Epoch” category of Thomassen’s graphic (pictured above); the archetypal figure of the trickster (Robert Pelton in Young-Eisendrath and Dawson); the psychology of Carl Jung (Homans); and, in some contemporary societies, those who identify as bisexual, intersex, transgender, or those of mixed ethnicities. There is certainly merit to these arguments, and the

this idea. He suggests that these applications of the concept have “become applied as a position from which to think without recognizing what van Gennep has indeed made clear: that liminality needs to end somehow” (18). Indeed, he writes that “without reintegration liminality is pure danger” (22). Moreover, he cites Árpád Szakolczai, who suggests that “‘Liminality becomes a permanent condition when any of the phases in this sequence [of separation, liminality, reaggregation] becomes frozen, as if a film stopped at a particular frame’” (23). Thomassen also notes Szakolczai’s three types of permanent liminality, which include “monasticism (with monks endlessly preparing the separation) ... Bolshevism (as exemplifying a society stuck in the final stage of a ritual passage)...and communism...a regime in which the Second World War never ended” (ibid.).

However, while I agree that liminality can indeed be permanent for societal *concepts*, for the individual, it must end. An individual *cannot* exist in permanent liminality. An individual *can* be wayward or lost. They can be “stuck” in a personal limbo - “between” jobs, relationships, stages of life, etc. But eventually, this “between-ness” must end, resolve, and only when it does, can the previous “in-between” state be considered *liminal*. Should it not end, then that person who thought themselves “between” jobs, relationships, etc., is simply jobless or single. They are not “between”: they just *are*.

purpose of my analysis is not to disprove these; however, I would suggest that insofar as liminality can be ascribed to the individual, it cannot be permanent. To identify as bi- or transexual is only “between” as it is between the nodes of an artificially constructed binary, which implies a parentheticality, bookends *between* which all others exist. However, if one considers identity to exit on a continuum and to be indissoluble (unless one chooses to themselves change it), then I believe it should not be considered a state of “in-between.” At any moment, a person is what they say they are. I do concede that an exception might be someone who considers themselves to be “transitioning.” As a cisgender person, I will not attempt to relay the feelings of a person who identifies as such; my argument is simply that no person/individual should be considering “between” anything, for that implies a parenthetical superfluity that no individual deserves.

In *Blindness*, *All the Names*, and *The Cave*, Saramago recognizes the “danger” Thomassen suggests, and that danger is not becoming “stuck” in liminality, but failing to become “reintegrated,” failing to recognize one’s new place in society, failing to achieve that moment of clarity – the new definition and recognition of self. But for Saramago, the realization of purpose is more than just exiting out of a liminal state, it is the navigation of the liminal state and all its perils that *allows* one to achieve this new state. For Saramago, one may enter a liminal state by chance, but to exit requires bravery, will, agency, action.

But what, then, is the spatial-temporal nature of these liminal states? For the temporal element, one might consider Turner’s description of the “liminal period”: “during the intervening liminal period, the state of the ritual subject (the passenger) is ambiguous; he passes through a realm that has a few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state” (91). These states then are marked by that quality of “transition,” which implies a measure of progress, of “forwardness.” This forwardness follows the straight path of time insofar as we consider time to be always moving inexorably forward; however, the liminal period is timeless, or perhaps, *atemporal* - without time. In other words, there is no temporal delineation of the liminal state: it will last as long as the subject needs to complete the transition. For our discussion, however, as we are analyzing liminality in the context of literature, the liminal state does indeed have temporal delineations: the beginning and end of the narrative.

But though Thomassen clearly charts the dimensions of the liminal space, what remain undefined are the conditions within these liminal spaces: within the confines of these borders, whatever, wherever, and whenever they might be, what are the actual spaces like? What are their physical natures, their obstacles, their temperature and luminosity, their atmospheres and terrains, their pitfalls and boons? Are they wastelands, inhabited by none other than the liminal

persona, or can there be life, others? Are there shepherds or Charonic ferryman? Beasts of an unknown origin and nature? And of the journey through these liminal spaces, what is the nature of the progress? Can one simply pass through, or must one navigate, overcome, vanquish? What are the conditions, if there are any at all, necessary for one to take that step across? Is it mere agency, or are there demons to conquer? And finally, do these liminal spaces, these thresholds, areas, zones, regions, only exist in the corporeal world, or can they also exist in the psyche? The subconscious? The mind?

Saramago's Liminality

Considering the constructs and definitions above, it is indisputable that the characters and societies in Saramago's trilogy exist in states of liminality. Before delving into their liminal journeys, we will first examine how Saramago's characters can be considered "liminal subjects." In *Blindness*, we encounter a society rendered blind. Crucially the affliction - which is characterized as "white blindness," and thus different from the true medical condition - does not befall all society at once; rather, it is first "caught" by an otherwise nameless man. From here, it spreads, and the contagion is slow but indiscriminate. All, save for one person - who we shall return to shortly - are rendered blind by this malady. As the nature of this blindness is unknown - except that it is highly contagious - all those who are initially infected are rounded up and shipped to a now-defunct mental institution, which becomes the setting of the first half of the novel, and through its disorienting, *labyrinthine* qualities⁵, the first liminal space the subjects inhabit. Eventually, these detainees will escape the carceral asylum, though this will not mark an exit from liminality; rather, they will instead find themselves wandering through the husk of their now squalid and disordered city, its excrement covered streets, ransacked homes, and looted

⁵ The labyrinthine qualities of liminal spaces will be discussed in much greater detail in the coming pages.

businesses. It is an equally - if not more - “disorienting” space, both caused and exacerbated by the blindness. However, one need not be blind to be affected by the lawlessness and disorder, and this is elucidated through the experience of the only exception to the incipient disease, the one person in the novel who does not become blind. This character is known only as “the doctor’s wife.”

While “the blind” certainly can be analyzed as liminal subjects, so too can the doctor’s wife. The irony of her liminal status is that, though she does not become blind herself, the plague of the white blindness surrounding her has an analogous effect. Not only is she also affected by the societal decline - the pandemonium, the descent of humanity - but she is rendered obtuse to the phenomenology of the sightless. To their experience, she herself is blind: all except she experience the world one way; she experiences it another. The effect of this, for our heroine, is that very same disorientation and ambiguity that defines the liminal experience. Though she can see, she is alone in her lucidity, and, because of her oaken morality and will, accepts the task of the shepherd and leads her party across the liminal landscape. To this end, the doctor’s wife will be the primary focus of this study, whose experience will come to represent the entire society’s liminal transition.

The protagonist of *All the Names*, Senhor José, works in an (other) unnamed city’s Central Registry of Births, Marriages, and Deaths, a place tasked with recording and preserving records of the aforementioned events of every person, living and dead. Reminiscent of Nikolai Gogol’s Akaky Akakievich from “The Overcoat,” Senhor José is an unimportant man whose existence is marked by duty, regiment, routine, and relative insignificance. Senhor José lives alone and is getting on in age. His home is connected to the Central Registry, and is the last of the “simple, rustic dwellings built outside, along the side walls, like defenceless chapels clinging

to the robust body of the cathedral” (8). It is the last of these adjacent homes, which, save for Senhor José’s, were all torn down due to “a change in municipal thinking” (8). His remaining in the house was “neither punishment nor prize, for Senhor José deserved neither one nor the other, he was simply allowed to continue living in the house” (9). There is, though, a final significant feature of the house, which is that the house has two doors: “a normal door that opened onto the street and an additional door, discreet, almost invisible, that opened onto the great nave of the archives” (8).

The relevance of this proximity lies in the circumstances concerning Senhor José’s entrance into liminality. Senhor José has a hobby, which is to track, collect, and organize news items pertaining to famous people in his country. One day, Senhor José realizes that no collection of salient information pertaining to these celebrities would be complete without copies of their birth certificates, which reside in the proximal Central Registry. Now, though his collection is not untoward, he desires to keep it a secret; he cannot, therefore, be caught obtaining the information on these birth certificates during working hours. Instead, he decides, in the dead of night, to venture through the dividing door and seek out these records. It is on one such expedition that the main thrust of the narrative begins. Upon returning one evening, Senhor José discovers that there was a record card stuck to one of the other cards he liberated, that of a person only called “the unknown woman.”⁶ It is Senhor José’s obsession with this unknown woman that drives the plot and narrative of this novel, but, unbeknownst to our protagonist, it also denotes his becoming a liminal subject and the beginning of his liminal journey.

⁶ This is another example of Saramago leaving his characters nameless, which here, as in *Blindness*, de-emphasizes the individual, making it easier for this person’s aura and persona to be ascribed to “the many” as opposed to “the few.”

Senhor José's liminal journey might be the most complex. In the following pages, I will elaborate on the nature of this liminal journey - and those of the other novels - but here, it is worth noting *how* he enters this liminal state and how he becomes this liminal subject. As previously stated, the liminal space can be something as simple and defined as a threshold, which, once crossed, represents a full transition from the aforementioned pre- and post-liminal states. In *All the Names*, Senhor José does indeed cross a threshold himself, the one dividing his home from the Central Registry. Importantly though, the Central Registry is not itself the liminal space of the story (although it will constitute an important part of the liminal landscape that Senhor José traverses). The threshold Senhor José crosses when he steps from his home is more than a simple doorway into the Central Registry: it is a doorway into the transitional space separating his past from his future that he will have to navigate.

Interestingly, this "entrance" is both similar and different from the "entrance" in *Blindness*: the difference lies in agency, the similarity, in chance. Like the poor souls in *Blindness* upon whom the affliction falls, Senhor José's life changes by accident. Should the record card of the unknown woman never have become stuck to the card he retrieved, Senhor José's life *might have* continued its otherwise flaccid trajectory. However, there is, between the two tales, an important distinction, and that is that Senhor José's entrance into liminality is precipitated by action. In *Blindness*, society is struck blind at random, by a stroke of exceedingly bad luck.⁷ In *Names*, Senhor José, by choosing to skirt convention and sneak into the darkness, initiates his own transformation. As the story progresses, few of Senhor José's actions are reactive, but are instead the proactive choices of a person determined to see a journey to its end.

⁷ There is an argument to be made that Saramago is implying that this blindness was a symptom of society's scant morality, and was thus less a product of luck than the ill effects of its own immoral actions. However, for the sake of this argument, we will suggest that, at the very least, their entrance into liminality was passive.

More than anything, Senhor José's venture is one of agency, that very agency necessary for a successful transition through the liminal state.

The final novel in the "trilogy" is entitled *The Cave*. In this text, nearly all of the characters we meet are in some sort of transitional stage of life. The focus of this argument, though, will be on the story's protagonist, Cipriano Algor. A man approaching retirement age, at the story's onset, Cipriano Algor is continuing to run his business of producing crockery, but with the cancellation of his contract with The Centre - the physical, economic, and social monolith that seeks (and by and large achieves) ubiquitous control over society and its citizens - he is lurched into a state of helplessness, confusion, and instability, embodying the disorientation and ambiguity central to liminality. Cipriano is, as the colloquialism goes, "between jobs." And, as he is a man of old standards and pride, considers his job - his ability to earn a living - inseparable from his self-esteem, self-worth, and masculinity. In other words, his professional and personal selves are inextricable. He must, therefore, find a new way to provide for his family. What he does not realize, of course, is that it is only through his failure to transition professionally that he is able to achieve the personal growth necessary to lead his family out of their collective liminal state towards salvation. Incidentally, in addition to his professional liminality, he is - though he does not realize it - in a state of romantic liminality: Cipriano Algor is a widower, who is bound, over the course of the narrative, to fall in love. And of course, as is often the case with the stubborn and proud - characteristics often marked by staunch individuality - it is through the relationship with others that insight is achieved. Indeed, though the internal and external realizations of Cipriano's journey - his final steps through the liminal state - are experienced alone, his desire for escape, exit, and epiphany are driven by his love for others, as well as, perhaps more importantly, the love he receives in return.

However, Cipriano Algor is not the only liminal subject of this story. Early on in the story, his daughter, Marta, becomes pregnant, and so exists in the state between being childless and giving birth. Marta's husband, Marçal Gacho - who, by the same event, enters into a state of parental liminality, though without the physical transformation undergone by his wife/women - is, like Cipriano, in a state of professional liminality. Marçal works for The Centre as a security guard; however, he believes himself to be on the precipice of a promotion to resident guard. This promotion would not only come with a raise in status and pay but would mean that he could bring Marta, the baby, and his father-in-law to live with him at the Centre. Importantly to the narrative - and the ultimate achievement of Cipriano's liminal journey - Cipriano does not want to live at the Centre, nor does he want to leave their family home in the village on the outskirts of the city (again unnamed) of which the Centre presides. Cipriano's recent unemployment, however, makes staying untenable, as he will be without income whereas at the Centre they would lack for nothing, or so Marçal believes. The confluence of these impending events - Cipriano's penury, Marçal's prosperity - adds to the family's ambiguity, blurs the future, and by doing so, further disorients.

Though these are the three primary characters, there are two ancillary characters who deserve mentioning. The first is Cipriano's love interest, Isaura Madruga, who is a widow herself, and thus in the same romantically liminal state as Cipriano.⁹ The second is the dog Found, who, through his ardent companionship and understanding of the human emotional state, becomes an essential guide to all members of the family as they navigate this new terrain. Incidentally, Found - when Cipriano meets (finds) him on his property, ragged and vagabond -

⁹ There is a fascinating and touching aspect to the notion of a romantic liminal state, the entrance to which - whether by death or disavowment - may be marked by grief, and the exit, by love. Unfortunately, we do not have time to further explore this concept here.

may be, by this meeting, *exiting* his own liminal state, one in which he is between two owners, families (the first of which is never discovered). However, as he becomes an integral part of the family, it seems only right to consider him alongside the central players in their individual - and collective - liminal journey.

What is perhaps unique to *Cave* as opposed to *Blindness* and *Names* is that, while the individual characters' liminality is, in almost all cases, *chosen*, there is an obscured liminality into which this group of characters is unknowingly thrust, whose beginning is much harder to define, if it can be defined at all. These characters - these people - exist in a society dominated by a nearly-omniscient structure, whose presence and influence is so vast and far-reaching that it almost assumes the identity of a sentient being rather than an object, the *icon* symbolizing its controlling forces. Though we are not privy to the beginnings of the Centre's domination, we understand - through his constant repudiations of the Centre and his wistfulness for his Pre-Centre existence - that Cipriano Algor once experienced a time before the Centre. Moreover, though we cannot pinpoint the moment the Centre fully monopolized society, that moment - that period - marks an entrance, for the denizens of this society, into a liminal state. In Thomassen's terms, it is not that "whole society facing a sudden event" (17), and cannot therefore be categorized as a "momentary" liminal experience. No, this liminal period is more prolonged. In analyzing the liminal state of the society in *Cave*, underscored by social and economic upheaval, it becomes clear that Thomassen's grid begins to somewhat break down, and indeed, Thomassen himself acknowledges this phenomenon: "sometimes, however, liminal experiences become intensified as the personal, group, and societal levels converge in liminality, over extended periods of time, and even within several spatial 'coordinates'" (17). This is undoubtedly the case

in *Cave*: while Cipriano Algor is the “protagonist,” and the central liminal subject, his experience comes to represent and symbolize that of *everyone*.

Though there are myriad complexities present in examining and identifying the liminal subjects and periods of Saramago’s three novels, what has yet to be addressed is the actual *experience* of the subjects *within* these liminal states. How, exactly, do these subjects exist within their respective liminalities, and what is the nature of the liminal *space*? In the following chapters, I will argue that the liminal spaces in these novels possess many of the same characteristics of two corporeal structures that are defined, like liminality, by their abilities to disorient those within them: the labyrinth and the cave.

Rhian Atkin, in her book, *Saramago’s Labyrinths: A Journey through Form and Content in Blindness and All the Names*, presents a compelling and comprehensive analysis of the labyrinthine qualities of these narratives, both for the characters within the novels and for the readers themselves. Within these novels, Atkin posits, there are myriad examples, references, and allusions to the original Cretan myth; some are quite bald, like Senhor José’s use of an actual Ariadne’s thread in *Names*, while some are more subtle, such as the maze-like bowels of the asylum in which the blind refugees find themselves in *Blindness* (which becomes all the more difficult to navigate in the literal and metaphorical dark). In keeping with the original myth, Atkin also notes the presence of the “Minotaur,” the beast said to have been contained at the labyrinth’s center, which, for Atkin, represents the symbolic beast of Saramago’s stories.

Atkin’s analysis, however, departs from the myth in the “escaping” of the labyrinth. She claims that, in *Names*, “it is only by following the various paths to their natural end that he [Senhor José] is able to discover that he will never arrive at the Centre of the labyrinth” (Atkin 56); and “the characters of *Ceguira (Blindness)* must look insides themselves and re-evaluate

their perception of the world in order to find a way of the labyrinthine blindness” (56). Indeed, Atkin insists that the journeys of these characters is representative of a search for truth, but that this truth is “usurped in favour of a demonstration of the multiple possibilities of knowledge” (57), and, that what Saramago’s characters learn on these journeys is that “the enhanced knowledge that no knowledge can ever be the full knowledge; only by accepting and embracing this can we reach satisfaction in ourselves and in our relationships with others” (58). Ultimately, Atkin posits that the labyrinth serves to elucidate for those traversing it the meaning of the journey rather than the destination, a maxim which, despite its relative banality, is undoubtedly accurate.

It was in reading this text that my analysis of Saramago’s liminal spaces began to take shape. Atkin does wonders in describing and analyzing the labyrinthine qualities of the texts, the settings within them, and the experiences of the characters navigating these settings. However, though the following sections will draw heavily on Atkin’s analysis of these labyrinthine qualities, in considering the idea of the liminal space - defined by that “betwixt and between”-ness - I will argue that Saramago’s characters do in fact complete the entire journey through the labyrinth: an initial entrance, a navigation of darkness, an encounter with and conquering of the metaphorical Minotaur, and a successfully achieved exit. Moreover, I will argue that this *exit* marks the subjects’ individual and collective transitions out of liminality into their post-liminal states. However, despite the departure in my analysis from Atkin’s regarding the *physical* navigation, I will concur with her suggestion of the internal and psychological discoveries of truth, and will maintain that this internal enlightenment exists symbiotically with the external escaping: the success of the liminal transition is inextricable from, and indeed reliant upon, enlightenment.

Liminality as Labyrinth and Cave

To be able to effectively examine the labyrinthine quality of Saramago's liminal states, it is important to first note that labyrinths and liminal states bear a number of striking similarities. In *Saramago's Labyrinths*, Atkin describes labyrinths thusly: "traditionally a place designed and constructed by humans, and with definable limits; its structure causes confusion and disorientation for the explorer trapped within it" (2). The resemblance in definitions is immediately noticeable: the labyrinth, like the liminal state, inflicts upon its "explorers" a measure of "disorientation," which is a key characteristic of liminality. Moreover, while the phrase "designed and constructed by humans" may call to mind a physical structure, it is perhaps only a syntactic byproduct of the word "construct," which evokes a physicality that can, but need not necessarily, apply. Indeed, in addition to a physical space, both the labyrinth and liminal state can also exist as a mental maze, a "construction" not of the physical world, but of the mind. Importantly, though, when considering this mental labyrinthine liminality, it is worth noting that these spaces are usually "designed and constructed" by others, as is often the case with rituals; however, as Thomassen writes, "they (liminal experiences) can simply happen, without anyone planning for it, as in natural disasters or the sudden disappearance of beloved persons" (18). As explored in the previous section, randomness and chance are endemic to the liminal states present in Saramago's works, both in the entrances of the subjects into liminality and to their journeys through.

There are examples of labyrinths from myriad histories, cultures, and regions. The most salient to Saramago's work and our conversation here is the one derived from Greek mythology concerning the story of Theseus. Joshua Mark describes the legend succinctly: "(the) labyrinth was designed by Daedalus¹⁰ for King Minos of Knossos on Crete to contain the ferocious half-

¹⁰ After the completion of the labyrinth, it is said that King Minos imprisoned Daedalus and his son, Icarus, in a tower to prevent them from revealing the secret of the design. This

man/half-bull known as the Minotaur.” King Minos, reticent to send his own people to the Minotaur – who fed only on human flesh – taxed the city of Athens, by forcing into “sending seven young men and maidens to Crete every year who were then released into the labyrinth and eaten by the Minotaur” (ibid.). Naturally, these sacrifices were deplored by Athens, and thus Theseus, son of King Aegeus, vowed to end this suffering and sailed to Crete to kill the Minotaur. Upon arriving, he met Ariadne, the King’s daughter, who subsequently fell in love with him. Ariadne also despised the Minotaur and her father’s sacrificial practices. To assist Theseus in his quest, she provided him with a sword to slay the beast and a ball of thread that Theseus could attach to the entrance to the labyrinth and could, after killing the Minotaur, follow to find his way back out. In the myth, Theseus succeeds in his quest: he finds the beast at the labyrinth’s center, slays it, follows Ariadne’s thread back out, and sails off with Ariadne by his side.¹¹

The idea of labyrinth as liminal state strengthens when considering Theseus himself to be a liminal subject. One does not need to know every detail of his story to appreciate the metaphor. Theseus – and, by extension, society – is one way before he enters the labyrinth, and another when he leaves it. His journey is marked by challenges, from the maze itself to the monster in its depths, and it is only through conquering these obstacles that he can achieve his transition. Indeed, Mark, in his article, references the labyrinth as a symbol of change: “The labyrinth in the story serves as the vehicle of Theseus’ transformation from a youth to a king. He must enter a maze no one knows how to navigate, slay a monster, and return to the world he knows.” In the

imprisonment is what led to the famed attempted escape by father and son, during which Icarus flew too close to the sun, which melted the wax holding together his makeshift wings, causing him to fall into the sea and drown.

¹¹ The tale ends sadly, as Theseus abandons Ariadne on an island called Naxos and proceeds to sail home without her.

context of the Cretan myth, the labyrinth becomes the liminal space, that transitional area through which the subject (Theseus) must traverse in order to achieve the change Victor Turner suggests. However, Mark also notes the following: “He [Theseus] accomplishes this but still retains his youthful flaws until he is changed by the loss of his father and must grow up and assume adult responsibility. The labyrinth presented him with the opportunity to change and grow but, like many people, Theseus resisted that opportunity until change was forced upon him” (Mark). Here, we notice the same departure from the liminal experience as in Atkin’s analysis: while Theseus does achieve a physical escape, it is no guarantee of psychological enlightenment.

While the liminal state and the labyrinth share similar characteristics, there is also a strong connection between labyrinths and caves. Rhian Atkin refers to these as “complementary symbols” (30), and the link can be observed in both the common understanding of their symbolism as well as their presence in Saramago’s texts. Just as the literalness of the “descent into darkness” manifests itself in the plot of *Blindness*, so does the concept of the cave become salient in the eponymous novel. Nevertheless, it is the intersection of liminality, labyrinth, and cave that is most striking: through the analysis of this intersection, we begin to understand the way the qualities of the liminal journey and the way the liminal subject experiences this journey.

Liminality, then, is not simply the point of subtension between cave and labyrinth; nor, really, is it a triangulation. It is more so a superimposition of the three concepts, a nesting of ideas with one another. Just as with labyrinths, the cave represents a place of transition, a journey into the unknown signified by a confrontation with some chthonic nadir and a reemergence into the well-lit world above¹². It is, in many ways, the longitudinal equivalent to the labyrinth’s

¹² There is also, of course, a further connection between the symbols of labyrinth and cave. The labyrinth derives from the Cretan myth, and the cave is best known symbolically from Plato. However, the symbolism shares more than just their Grecian backgrounds: both involve a

procumbence, a y-axis to the labyrinth's x. Together, I argue, cave and labyrinth form the topology of the liminal state. A disorientating darkness, a descent to some waiting evil (or perhaps, simply, the unknown, which is often the root cause of fear), and should that evil be overcome, an ascension back to light. These are the characteristics of a successful transition through liminality

However, as mentioned above, this is where Saramago's texts – his subjects – transcend the solely physical achievement of labyrinthine and/or speleological escapism. The goal for Saramago of his subjects is not to simply “get out” of the labyrinth, to climb up from the depths of the cave; rather, to achieve some form of enlightenment, to gain clarity of purpose. Indeed, as it is the successful navigation of these *spaces* that engenders change, it is the *realization* of the change, of the new state of being, that allows the liminal subject to complete their liminal journey and exit into their new, post-liminal state.

reemergence, a movement from darkness to light, which parallels a moment of internal realization. I will further explore this link to Plato in the “Ascension to Light” chapter.

Chapter 2: Descent(s) Into Darkness / Confrontation(s) with Death

In Chapter 1, I describe the liminal characteristics of Saramago's characters and the novels themselves, as well as how the characters become liminal subjects. This chapter is devoted to defining the liminal spaces present within *Blindness*, *All the Names*, and *The Cave*, and will explore how the liminal subjects in these novels navigate these liminal spaces. Specifically, I will examine the "middle" stages of the journey: the descent(s) into darkness and the confrontation(s) with death.

Moreover, I will introduce the idea of "concentric liminality," which I believe to be crucial to the understanding of the liminal journey. Like a narrative, though the liminal journey may have a "climax," – a *pivotal* moment where the baddest beast must be conquered and the journeyer may begin venturing outward, upward, back – in analyzing Saramago's texts, it is evident is that there is not a singular beast. Instead, they are multiple. And to that end, there is no one way down and back; instead, there are myriad checkpoints, smaller – though often still deadly – obstacles to be overcome en route to the "big bad."¹³ Therefore, though there is an "overarching" liminal journey, often, embedded within, are tighter, more compact liminal journeys, which are defined by the same qualities, though somewhat less potent and extreme. These "mini" liminal journeys are what comprise "concentric liminality," and will be central to the analysis of liminality in Saramago's texts.

(Descending Into) *The Cave*

Endemic to all liminal states is that quality of "disorienting darkness," and to that end, there is perhaps no better symbolic metaphor for an entrance/descent into darkness than a cave.

¹³ I cannot help but comparing this to the story/quest of so many video games, in which there are "levels" one must pass to proceed. Indeed, each of these "levels" often has an obstacle or "bad guy" that must be defeated before "moving on." It is perhaps a reductive metaphor, though I feel an apt one.

Though *The Cave* is chronologically the third text in Saramago's "trilogy," I begin with it here, as it best represents the speleological aspects of the three works. In the following pages, I will explore the connection between liminality and cave in *The Cave*, and how its protagonist, Cipriano Algor, is a liminal subject spelunking through his own liminal journey.¹⁴ Moreover, I will begin my analysis of the connection between *The Cave* and Plato's *Allegory of the Cave* (of which there is a clear relationship), as well as the parallel between Plato's allegory and liminality. This parallel extends beyond the physical – the speleological elements of the liminal space that will be delineated thusly; it also applies to the prisoners within Plato's cave, how they exist and can be considered liminal subjects themselves. Furthermore, I will explore how the experience of these "subjects" – their imprisonment, their eventual emergence into the light – mirrors the journey of the liminal subject, the voyage from darkness and disorientation to enlightenment and understanding.

Throughout the course of the novel, Cipriano Algor exists in a state of liminality. Moreover, like the protagonists/liminal subjects in *Blindness* and *Names*, he is thrust into this state unwillingly. After his final attempt to salvage his business is rejected, Cipriano succumbs to his daughter's wishes, and agrees to live with her and Marçal at the Centre. It is a painful choice: not only does Cipriano loathe the idea of leaving his comfortable, country home, but he is loath to live at Centre, the very place that has come to symbolize, for Cipriano, the decompensation of society as he once knew it

But though the Centre – its ideologies, its presence, its influence – represents the Minotaur in Cipriano Algor's labyrinthine/liminal journey, the *physical* Centre represents the labyrinth itself. Atkin notes that the Centre is "a building which is disorienting and complicated

¹⁴ These pages will be discussing the climax of the novel, as a warning to any who might not have read it.

in its structure” (131). Though it is, to borrow from Hemingway, a “clean, well-lighted place,” its light is artificial (as Marta notes, “these people never see the light of day” [241]). The state of ambiguity and disorientation that Cipriano Algor finds himself in is only exacerbated by his new residence within the Centre itself. The many apartments – one of which Cipriano and his family will be living in – are described in the text as being “arranged like cells in a storage battery or honeycombs in a beehive” (Saramago 241). The beehive metaphor is apt, as what could be more symbolic of ambiguity than a bee in a hive, an unidentifiable being within the countless masses?¹⁵ In the text, Marta describes living at the Centre as “taking off one set of clothes and putting on another, a sort of masked ball,” to which her father responds, “Yes...it’s a bit like that, but contrary to what people have generally believed and unthinkably affirmed, the cow really does make the monk and clothes do make the man, you might not notice at first, but it’s only a matter of time (244). Here, Cipriano is acknowledging that, by taking up residence in the Centre, they have, no matter their intentions, begun a transformation into a new identity, have begun a transition, have entered into a liminal state.

But what of the cave? To this point in the novel, the only cave is ancillary – the one Cipriano hides the then unwanted crockery in. However, there is also – perhaps more significantly – the cave of Cipriano’s dream. This dream, which comes on the heels of a frank conversation with his daughter about joining them to live at the Centre, is both allusory and augurous. That it is foreshadowing will become presently clear, but as an allusion, to those

¹⁵ I acknowledge that apiologists might disagree with the metaphor; in the hive, they contend, every bee, no matter the role, is essential. Here, however, I believe Saramago is not questioning the importance of the singular bee, but is implying that, to the Centre, the individual does not matter. To the Centre, each person is like a bee to those ignorant of the beautiful synergy of a beehive: they are just one in the countless masses, insignificant and easily replaced.

familiar with Plato's allegory – which might be top of one's mind throughout the novel given its title – the dream is a clear reference to the Plato's cave:

Cipriano Algor dreamed that he was inside his new kiln...What is odd...is the presence of a stone bench...turned to face the rear wall and is positioned barely five spans away from it...anyone sitting there would have their nose almost pressed against the wall...A voice from outside...his shadow [*sic*] cast briefly on the back wall...[Cipriano] started to turn around...but he could not turn his head...his body felt like a lead weight...so heavy that it could never be lifted...tied to the back of the bench, tied without ropes and chains, but tied nevertheless. (163-165)

By describing Cipriano as one of the prisoners in Plato's allegory, Saramago positions his protagonist to represent the greater society surrounding him. And additionally, through this connection, we begin to understand the link between the liminal journey and Plato's cave.

Just as in Cipriano's dream, in Plato's allegory, prisoners are chained in front the wall of a cave, unable to turn their heads. Behind them is a fire (perhaps as in a kiln), in front of which puppeteers enact puppet shows, the shadows of which appear upon the wall that the prisoners face. For Plato, the shadows – which are the only thing the prisoners can see – represent a shade of reality, and illusion of real truth and knowledge, which, for the detained, will only be realized should they be dragged from their place of ignorance to the daylight (knowledge, truth) above. Cipriano's fear of becoming one of these prisoners is represented in his dream, and this fear will be central to his decision at the novel's climax to *act*, to break free of these metaphorical chains. We know already that the Centre symbolizes both the labyrinth and the Minotaur, but in this analysis, the Centre's influence – the way it seeks to and largely succeeds in controlling society -

represents those very puppeteers, the agents who intentionally deceive the detained, who in this case, are society, its inhabitants.

Giuseppe Menditto cites an interview in which Saramago acknowledges the connection between Plato's cave and the real world:

I think the most disturbing similarity...is the confusion between reality and appearance.

Today we are not faced with shadows anymore; instead, we are surrounded by images.

True, images are there in order to show us reality, but they end up hiding it from us.

Virtual reality is a contradiction in terms: if reality is real, it cannot be virtual. We live in a kind of virtual cave where we gather willingly (Borelli 2014).

It is this "virtual reality," embodied by the Centre, that Cipriano is fighting so ardently against, and it is this desire to escape the suppression of the Centre that precipitates the novel's climax and Cipriano's paramount moment as liminal subject. Soon after their arrival at the Centre, Cipriano notices something odd beneath him: "it feels as if the ground was vibrating beneath my feet" (243). Marçal claims that these are most likely normal goings-on: "they're going to install some new cold-storage units...they're always building something here," a comment that is at once dismissive yet portentous (243). However, we as readers learn soon after that the diggers who were (allegedly) installing these subterranean cold-units, have found something – which we learn is a cave – whose contents are to remain unknown to Marçal and the others tasked to guard it. Noticing a change in his demeanor, Cipriano presses his son-in-law for details, and soon wheedles out of Marçal the knowledge of how to reach the entrance to this newly discovered cave, unearthed "down below, thirty or forty meters underground, (where) you would not notice the difference between night and day, (and) there would be nothing but darkness" (278).

This discovery represents, for Cipriano, an essential crossroads of his liminal journey. To act or not to act? His choice here – his decision *to act* – will signify his agency as a liminal subject, his decision to pursue truth as opposed to submitting to suppression. Moreover, this agency is what ultimately separates and detaches him from Plato’s prisoners, a notion explored by Menditto, which he describes as a “reversal of Plato’s account” (Menditto 113). Menditto continues by arguing that “whereas Plato’s prisoner is obliged to live in an immediate relationship to the world, Saramago’s character is capable from the very beginning to imagine otherness” (114). Here, we observe that very distinction between Saramago’s liminal subjects – who journey through liminality and eventually achieve transition and transformation – and those trapped in liminal states, described by Saramago above as those who “gather willingly,” are connected to Plato by the idea that his prisoners, though indeed chained, know life only to be what they see of the shadows, and are thus reticent to be exposed to true *reality*.

Furthermore, if Cipriano is already, at this point, in a state of labyrinthine liminality, his imminent foray into the cave is representative of what I call “concentric liminality.” In all three novels, the characters find themselves in overarching liminal states, delineated by their first entrance into liminality and their ultimate exit/transition/apotheosis; but within this journey, the liminal subjects also experience smaller liminal journeys, nested within the larger one, and defined by many of the same labyrinthine and speleological characteristics. However, these “smaller” journeys, though shorter in duration, are often denser and more dramatic and emotionally charged for character and reader alike.

Of this concentric liminal journey into the cave, Saramago writes, “Cipriano Algor’s plan could not have been simpler. He would go down in a service elevator as far as floor zero five and

then abandon himself to fate and to chance” (289).¹⁶ He rides the service elevator to the excavation site, the entrance to the newly discovered cave.¹⁷ Here, he finds Marçal, on guard alone, who allows Cipriano to proceed. What follows is paradigmatic of the inextricable analogy between liminality, labyrinth, and cave. “Very cautiously, touching the wall with his left hand, Cipriano began to descend” (291). We see here in this one sentence the characteristics of all of the above: the agency of the liminal subject choosing to descend into the speleological and labyrinthine unknown. He could stop, turn back, succumb to fear; but he does not – and this is an important distinction of the liminal journey as it relates to the metaphors of labyrinth and cave. The explorer of the labyrinth/earthly cave (as opposed to Plato’s allegorical one) need not proceed. They could simply follow Ariadne’s thread back up and out of the darkness (though Theseus, in the myth does not), and choose safety and complacency rather than risking¹⁸ self-destruction. It is as Marçal explains of life at the Centre: “(it) is not like living in exile, people aren’t imprisoned there, they’re free to leave whenever they want” (246). But it is this very distinction that severs liminality from labyrinths and caves. The liminal subject does not have the luxury of turning back: once entered into liminality, they can no longer retreat, can no longer choose not to transition. Their only options are to proceed, to act, to continue navigating the liminal space in hopes of coming out alive – of achieving the transition they have been ushered into; or, to become trapped in a state of permanent liminality, of endless disorientation and

¹⁶ Notable here is a slight departure from the Labyrinth myth, in which Theseus is aware of the quality of the beast waiting for him. Cipriano, on the other hand, recognizes only that there is a beast that must be conquered, though he does not yet know what that beast is.

¹⁷ One might argue another concentric liminality here. The cave itself that Cipriano is about to enter is nested within the Centre, which, as we have already seen, is labyrinthine. Cipriano must first “descend into darkness” to reach this cave; thus, the cave becomes, in this new liminality, the Minotaur, the beast sought after; and the journey beneath the Centre, the labyrinthine descent.

¹⁸ I will further explore the concept of “risk” in Chapter 3

ambiguity. This decision – this crossroads – is engendered by the spatial-temporal nature of liminality: within the liminal space, one can move *physically* in any direction, but the arrow of time only points one way. One cannot retrace their temporal steps; once in a liminal state, one cannot return to their pre-liminal existence. Thus, no matter how labyrinthine the route down/up/through/across, there is only one direction to the liminal journey: forward. And should a liminal subject choose not to proceed, they will be conscripted to exile. This is the fate that would await Cipriano Algor should he yield to the paralysis of fear; but fortunately, he presses on.

What Cipriano finds at the nadir of the cave signifies his confrontation with death. It is described in the text thusly:

There appeared before his eyes what seemed to be a stone bench...the tremulous light from the torch...moved upward to reveal a human body sitting there. Beside it, covered in the same dark fabric, were five other bodies, all sitting as erect as if a metal spike had been put through their skulls to keep them fixed to the stone...three men and three women, he saw the remnants of the ropes that had been used to keep their necks from moving...identical ropes were around their legs...the ground was scorched, as if a fire had burned there for a long time. (291-293)

It is Plato's very cave, but much more viscerally terrible, and much more terribly real.

Saramago's characters, who live in a world where Plato once existed, go so far as to acknowledge that this is what they have found without directly alluding to it: "Do you know what it is, Yes, I remember reading about it once" (293); but they equivocate as to what the cave and its contents *really* are: "And do you know that, since that's what it is, what we saw there has no reality, cannot be real...It wasn't an illusion, it wasn't a dream" (293).

What was it then? The final words of the novel, an advertisement by the Centre to buy tickets for “Plato’s Cave, An Exclusive Attraction,” (307) suggest two options: either this really is Plato’s cave, and the Centre, in all its manifest centrality, ubiquity, and omnipotence, presciently constructed itself upon— what turns out to be— the real, actual Plato’s cave; or, it is a giant ruse, and the cave, so real to Cipriano and Marçal, is nothing more than a well-constructed exhibit, paradigmatic of that very concept of “virtual reality.” But for Cipriano, what this cave *actually* is does not matter; all that matters is what he perceives it to be, and as such, how it allows him to understand the truths pertaining to the world and himself, both. Turner asserts that “liminality may be partly described as a stage of reflection” (97); indeed, he writes that “during the liminal period, neophytes are alternately forced and encouraged to think about their society, their cosmos, and the powers that generate and sustain them” (97). For Cipriano, observing these corpses and reflecting upon them— what they are, what they symbolize— is essential to his journey.

Menditto describes this journey as “descending from the lights of the real world into the dark depths of the Centre... There he catches a glimpse of the truth of the human condition, where the only certainty is man’s ceaseless questioning regarding his own limitations and ability to act” (109). Further, of this “condition,” Menditto posits that “acknowledging that part and parcel of the human condition is a similarity between the dead and living” (117). For Cipriano, seeing the dead prisoners ignites in him an understanding of his dream. “Cipriano Algor saw himself going into the kiln again” (Saramago 292), and by doing so, he is able to distinguish the difference between reality and dreams; namely, that the *real* person always has the option of agency, of action. Cipriano’s confrontation with death, then, is marked by a recognition of himself in the corpses before him: he acknowledges himself as “dead,” discerning that his

passive acceptance of the Centre's ideologies (had up until this point) paralyzed him into a state of "blind obedience to 'the Corporate'" (Menditto 109)¹⁹; however, by acknowledging the cave and prisoner's "unreality,"— their "nonexistence" (Saramago 293)— he *chooses* life, and by doing so, becomes riven from the masses of the dead.

***Blindness* – The Disorientation of Sight**

For the characters in *Blindness*, the "descent into darkness" is both literal and swift. On the very first page of the novel, the nameless first character goes blind: "he is clearly shouting something, to judge by the appearance of his mouth he appears to be repeating some words, not one word but three...I am blind" (1). From here, the expeditiously virulent disease spreads rapidly. It infects the good Samaritan-cum-criminal who helps the blind man home (and then proceeds to steal his car), the man's wife, all the waiting patients at the local ophthalmologist office, and, naturally, the doctor himself. Eventually, it infects everyone, all except for one: the doctor's wife. As readers, we are not given the reason for this. Moreover, there seems to be nothing extraordinary about the doctor's wife. Though she is - and will prove to be - laudably kind and morally admirable, she possesses no specific quality that would suggest immunity.

Incidentally, her new uniqueness leads to experiencing a darkness of her own, one which, though she would never admit it because of her unblemished character, has a similar psychological effect as the "white blindness" that befalls society around her. The phenomenological effect of this optic disparity is analogous to someone who is blind existing amongst those who can see insofar as it is a simple matter of the anthropological necessity for inclusion. After being for only a short time at the mental institution where the blind (and exposed) are forced to quarantine, the narrator - who, though does not follow the doctor's wife

¹⁹ As Menditto notes, "The Corporate" was Saramago's first choice for this novel (109-110).

omnisciently, does narrate mostly *through her eyes* - gives us an insight into her exclusion: “and she serenely wished that she, too, could turn blind, penetrate the visible skin of things and pass to their inner side, to their dazzling and irremediable blindness” (58).

Though the entire society, as mentioned previously, can be considered to be in a state of liminality, it is the doctor’s wife who we will scrutinize. It is a testament to Saramago’s immense skill and brilliance as a writer that, in an analysis of the phenomenology of blindness, we would consider only the one person with sight. Though Saramago gives us plenty of examples of the challenges of the blind in the novel, it is through the eyes of the doctor’s wife that we see the dystopia and chaos of a society rendered sightless. Saramago could have penned a novel in which *every* person was blind, but to allow us to see through the doctor’s wife’s eyes, forces us, with her, to experience that engulfing darkness much more viscerally. However, it is not just that we “see through her eyes”; by allowing her to remain sighted, Saramago manifests, for the doctor’s wife, manifold moments of choice. Similarly to Cipriano Algor, the doctor’s wife can notice, unlike her blind companions in their waywardness, the many crossroads they are set upon, the many times they must *choose* to persevere rather than willingly succumb. By remaining sighted, the doctor’s wife is *forced* to choose. As such, she comes to exist as more than just a vessel for understanding: as society becomes blind, as the doctor’s wife does not, she enters into her own liminal state, one which she does indeed *choose* to traverse, for escaping this hell - despite its bleakness, despite the paucity of hope - is her/their only chance at survival.

If the sudden blindness - and her maintained sight - marks the doctor’s wife’s “entrance” into the labyrinth of liminality, the novel’s early pages suggest the disorientation of this new setting. Early in the novel, the doctor’s wife is attempting to lead her party through the halls of the asylum in an attempt to find the lavatories. Surrounded by darkness and unfamiliarity, the

group struggles to navigate their new home: “they could scarcely move in the narrow aisle, all the more since the doctor’s wife had to proceed as if she were blind...they advanced very slowly...groping in vain with their free hand, searching for the support of something solid” (49). This struggle is exacerbated by the fact that the doctor's wife must pretend to be blind as well, as she does not want to risk revealing her sightedness for fear of the responsibility that would be heaped upon her shoulders, which, ironically, she will nevertheless assume. With this description, one can easily superimpose the image onto the story of Theseus as he begins his journey into the labyrinth. The slow advance, the feeling hand - these are the actions of the unsure, the “disoriented.” In addition, there is a further link to the myth, lying in the multiple presences of Ariadne’s thread(s). In *Saramago’s Labyrinths*, Rhian Atkin notes these allusions: “the rope that guides the blind into the asylum...and the homemade rope with which the doctor’s wife binds her group together in the hope that they will be able to lead each other to safety (24). But Atkin also notes that “the physical cord is of little use if it is not backed up by the requisite emotions and cannot, on its own, lead the blind to renewed sight” (24). This analysis suggests that the drive to persevere through the labyrinth is fueled by more than a desire for personal safety. For Theseus and/or the liminal subject, it is not only the comfort of the thread, but the *person* at its other end that proves to be the ultimate guiding light.

However, to achieve redemption for herself and the society she has found herself queen of,²⁰ the doctor’s wife, like Cipriano in *The Cave*, must first face death. Though unlike her literary counterpart, who only “faces death” upon finding the chained corpses in the cave, the

²⁰ The proverb itself is alluded to in the text: “If only we had someone here who could see just a little, Well, he’d try coming up with some ruse in order to make sure he got the lion’s share, As the saying goes, in the country of the blind, the one-eyed man is king” (Saramago 98). The irony here, of course, is not only that there is one among them who can see, but that that person is a woman, and someone who has already proven that she will not abuse her newfound power.

doctor's wife must do so more than once. Here, we see this same concept of "concentric liminality," a multiplicity of liminal/labyrinthine/speleological journeys confined within the greater liminal journey. In *Blindness*, there are multiple descents to darkness and confrontations with death. It is as if these otherwise concentric descents - smaller and shorter, though with beasts no less savage - were stretched into a third dimension, a downward spiral plunging towards some ultimate, cumulative nadir.

In her analysis, Atkin refers to these as "false centres" (35), which she attributes to Saramago's authorial desire for narrative tension. She suggests that he "often leads both his characters and his readers to believe that the story is about to come to a close, causing further disorientation through the creation of 'false centres' to his labyrinths" (35);²¹ indeed, she notes the possibility - and does much to explore this - that "the centre of the labyrinth is often revealed to be only a temporary respite from the trials of the journey" (34). Nevertheless, in the journeys of Saramago's liminal subjects, these false centres offer no respite or break; rather, they serve as checkpoints, hurdles. Atkin also argues that "the characters continue to journey through the labyrinth without finding the centre they expect or hope for, and all while meeting dead ends and obstacles. The actual reward from their journey is to be found somewhere else: within themselves" (58). Though there is an element of personal change that will be discussed in Chapter 3, I will disagree with Atkin here. In keeping with the labyrinthine myth, Atkin posits that the characters are cognizant of the beast they seek to slay; however, I believe that the liminal journey is suggestive of a greater level of disorientation, one where the liminal subjects are not only confounded as to the journey itself, but of what they must do in order to successfully

²¹ The use of the word "disorientation" in regard to the reader as well as the character suggests an ascription of reader as liminal subject. There is certainly a meta-analysis that could be done of this concept, but we do not have time to explore this concept here.

achieve their transformation. This is apparent in *Cave*, when Cipriano *chooses* to not ask Marçal what lies in the depths of (what he learns to be) the cave. Here, he does not know what beasts lie before him, what he must eventually face and conquer. All he knows is that, to change, he must proceed. In *Blindness*, the doctor's wife similarly understands her predicament, and recognizes that continuing forward, no matter what lies ahead, is their own hope to survive.

The first descent and confrontation the doctor's wife must face is perhaps the most devastating. As the asylum fills with the blind, control is taken by a group of ruthless, morally vacant men, who demand the women of each ward report to them in turns to satisfy their licentiousness. The other choice in the ultimatum is a withholding of food, which has been seized by these hoodlums. Given this horrible choice, the women choose the former, for no matter how terrible the options, selecting agency is perhaps always preferable to passivity.

Seven women make the journey, led by the doctor's wife, "a grotesque line-up of foul-smelling women" (176), a detail included for the narrator to comment on the pure animalism of the hoodlums. This description also serves to confirm Atkin's analysis of the doctor's wife as "the key figure in the quest" (Atkin 33). And so they begin their descent into another level of darkness, "guided by the doctor's wife, each of them with her hand on the shoulder of the one in front" (177), an image that again evokes the navigation through both labyrinth and cave. The process is slow; the doctor's wife is in no rush. In fact, she delays them slightly: "the doctor's wife headed for the outer door, no doubt anxious to know if the world still existed" (177). Here, we notice that element of invisibility, of the liminal subject's acknowledgment of their entrenchment in liminality. There is a rivening here of subject and society, another symbolic crossroads. The doctor's wife could choose (real) death for her party - a choice that one of women suggests as potentially preferable than what they are about to endure ("that is how we

ought to be, all dead [177]); but the doctor's wife makes a choice, selects agency, though it's an agency that is aware of its limitations and that does not shirk risk: "Let's go," she says, "only those who have to die will die" (177). She does not know the exact nature of the beast she and her party are about to face, but she understands the imminent horror, and, despite this, still chooses this fate, for she knows that, in order to achieve eventual salvation, one must always continue forward.

What follows for the doctor's wife and her party is an experience of atrocious, savage rape and abuse.²² It is a level of trauma from which surely no one could ever fully recover; indeed it is an event that fully changes one. As a result of the trauma, one of the women dies. But of course she is not abandoned; the other women, broken and frail, still carry the corpse back to their ward, intent on burying her. It is a pivotal moment: observing the dead woman's body - described by Saramago as having "legs covered in blood, her abdomen bruised, her poor breasts uncovered, brutally scarred" (182) - the doctor's wife has the realization that "this is the image of my body...the image of the body of all the women here, between these outrages and our sorrows there is only one difference, we, for the present, are still alive" (ibid.). This acknowledgement of the self is more than just existential; for the doctor's wife, it is a realization that, despite the atrocities faced, her own decency, morality, and inherent goodness is indelible, and more than that, should they attempt to maintain themselves, they *must* maintain these qualities. The conquering of the beast, in this case, is not a physical one, nor is it even psychological - for these scars will surely be permanent - it is instead an achievement of realized consciousness. When asked by another women what they will do with the dead woman, the doctor's wife replies, "we

²² Though the reader will undoubtedly appreciate Saramago's attempts to portray the brutality of the scene, one might argue that the graphic nature of the scene is unnecessary to the narrative and in literature in general.

shall bury her” (182). To complete the ritual of burial - in spite of the manner of death, their condition, and the challenges of digging a grave while blind - is to prove one's maintained compassion, and this understanding is paramount for the doctor's wife as she chooses to continue her journey through this liminal state, as she knows now that nothing, not even the vilest evil, can efface her humanity.

To that end, the doctor's wife feels no remorse in killing the leader of the blind hoodlums, in slaying the beast, and she only feels guilt when she realizes, in a bout of overly-rational decency, that, after disrupting the “deal” between hoodlums and the rest of the blind, should anyone die of hunger, it would be her fault (194). However, she does acknowledge that, after committing this act, though it is for the good of the innocent and decent, her sin may lay in the shallows of the morally blind (read: corrupt): “Perhaps I'm the blindest of all, I've already killed, and I'll kill again if I have to” (191). But this is another example of her assumed leadership, and of her agency in her liminal journey. Despite the moral and internal threshold crossed in committing murder - no matter the cause - the doctor's wife does not fold into her own self-pity; rather, she uses this event as impetus for her continued perseverance, for her willingness to confront and conquer whatever may lay ahead.

In her text, Atkin notes that the men in the asylum represent the beasts - the Minotaur - at the labyrinth's center. She cites both Michael Ayrton and Robert Rawdon Wilson in writing “the Minotaur comes ‘to stand for the animal element in humanity. Its dual nature (the Minotaur is both man and beast) represents ‘the symbolic fusion of bestial appetite and reason’” (Atkin 32). Furthermore, that these man-beasts represent “death” or “the dead” is spelled out by the doctor's wife herself: “And when is it necessary to kill, she asked herself...When what is still alive is already dead” (192).

Atkin also acknowledges the second “Minotaur” the doctor’s wife will face, that of the darkness of the supermarket basement (31). After escaping the asylum, the doctor’s wife and her blind companions trudge through the devastation of the city and take refuge in an abandoned shop. With her party enervated and otherwise indisposed, the doctor’s wife resolves to find them sustenance, which leads her to a supermarket whose basement has remained to this point un-raided. Of these two experiences - the encounter with the hoodlums and the sojourn into the supermarket basement - if the former is closer to a labyrinthine experience, the latter is closer to a speleological one; moreover, if the journey towards the prurient hoodlums was that of a metaphorical darkness, this one is much more literal. In fact, the doctor’s wife makes the comparison herself: “I’m going mad, she thought...making this descent into a dark pit, without light or any hope of seeing any” (229). There is, of course, a none-too-subtle parallel here between this description and the surrounding white blindness of the rest of society (which the doctor’s wife also acknowledges, when she thinks “now I know what it means to be blind” [229]). Again, this experience is narrated to us through the doctor’s wife’s internal thoughts: “I’m going to scream...the darkness is like a thick paste that sticks to her face, her eyes transformed into balls of pitch” (229). This constricting, gelatinous darkness is even more excruciating than the snap-sudden blindness that befell the others, the pain of which comes, undoubtedly, from fear, but also from the choice to face it. It is akin to experiencing random pain as opposed to inflicting it on oneself: the latter is nearly always worse.

Of the three “beasts” that the doctor’s wife faces, this is perhaps the most harmless, and the easiest to defeat. Though the darkness is impenetrable, once she reaches the bottom of the stairs and her feet find solid ground, her rationality is potent enough to eclipse her fear. “Then her hand touched something, not the ghost’s viscous fingers, nor the fiery tongue and fangs of

the dragon, what she felt was the contact of cold metal...a set of shelves” (230). Here, Saramago contrasts the sturdiness of the corporeal world with the ephemeral beasts of the irrational mind, ones which the doctor’s wife, who has faced threats and violence in the real, has little trouble conquering. She has the realization that “here there is nothing but darkness, and darkness neither bites nor offends” (229). It is an important epiphany, not only for herself, but for the truths she will seek to impart to her companions. In fact, implied here may be one of Saramago’s overarching themes: it is not the darkness (the blindness) that causes the devolution of humanity, it is merely a symptom of our inherent evil; but that evil cannot be conjured out of darkness alone. Just as agency is crucial in the defeat of evil, so too is evil the product of action.

However, as Saramago contrasts here the difference between rationality and irrationality - between the real and the unreal - he also foreshadows the doctor’s wife's third and final confrontation with death. The doctor’s wife has returned to the same supermarket, this time accompanied by her husband and their new companion, the (wonderful) dog of tears. At this point in the narrative, they are at the true center of the maze, the bottom of the cave, the final hurdle of their liminal journeys. The confrontation with death begins with the smell. “There’s a bad smell in here...it’s another smell, of rotting. There must be a dead body somewhere” (312). The doctor’s wife, with the dog of tears (who can also see), proceeds towards the very same basement stairs, and here we have the final descent to darkness: “she went down the corridor, it became darker with every step” (312). The description that follows is another of Saramago’s more skillful portrayals of horror:

Filled with the stench of putrefaction, the air seemed thick...Confused by the nausea, she had not noticed that there was a tenuous shimmer of light down there. Now she knew what it was. Small flames flickered around the edges of the two doors, that of the

staircase and that of the goods lift...They are dead...I only saw the will-o'-wisps around the doors, they clung there and danced around and did not let go...I think it must have been the phosphorized hydrogen as a result of the decomposition of the bodies...They must have found the basement, rushed down the stairs looking for food, I remember how easy it was to slip and fall on those steps, and if one fell, they would all fall...the door was closed, Most likely other blind people closed it, converting the basement into an enormous tomb. (313)

The unfortunate reality of Saramago's liminal journeys - of the descent to darkness, the confrontation with death - is that these steps are necessary to achieve this transition. There can be no achievement of ultimate enlightenment without facing abject horror. The doctor's wife observes, at one point, ironically and astutely, that "It's a time-honored custom to pass by the dead without seeing them" (298), but should one hope to achieve apotheosis in Saramago's world, the dead must be reckoned with. And here, distraught - much more so than following the atrocities done to her by the hoodlums in the asylum - she blames herself for these deaths: "I am to blame for what happened," she says baldly (313). She begins to spiral, crushed beneath the weight of guilt, precipitated by perceived selfishness: "In a way, everything we eat has been stolen from the mouths of others and if we rob them of too much we are responsible for their death" (313). For the doctor's wife, this confrontation with death is the hardest to conquer, to overcome - but not because of weakness, because of her own humanity. The other beasts - the hoodlums, the darkness - were external, but this beast is internal. The dead, blameless, here, are dead by her doing, and her self-dispersions are the result of a searing, scarring guilt that she feels may never recede. As I will elucidate in the following chapter, the doctor's wife will indeed conquer this demon, and achieve (her version) of transformation and transition through her

liminal state; however, this achievement will not necessarily assume the form one might expect: like all the greatest heroes, success is not measured by personal gain, but by the well-being of others.

***All the Names* – Symbolic Destruction**

As is the case with the protagonists in *The Cave* and *Blindness*, in *All the Names*, Senhor José finds himself a liminal subject by chance. However, it is chance precipitated by illicit action. Only when the record card of the unknown woman becomes stuck to a file does Senhor José begin his liminal journey, and as such, it was ultimately Senhor José's own *choice* to venture outside the confines of social norms that sparked the events that follow. Unlike Cipriano Algor and the doctor's wife, Senhor José's journey is very much a solitary one; however, little does he know that his achievement at the end of his journey will have a much greater impact on the rest of society than the protagonists from the other two novels.

In *Names*, present again is the concept of "concentric liminality." Senhor José's overarching liminal journey can be considered his search to find the unknown woman (and ultimately, discover himself). Within this greater journey, though, are several distinct ones, each marked by the same qualities this thesis has previously established: the descent to darkness, the confrontation with death, and the ascension to light. Rhian Atkin notes that there are in fact four labyrinths: "the archive of the dead in the Central Registry; the school; the General Cemetery; and the city" (20). Moreover, she argues the following:

The story as a whole constitutes a fifth, macro-labyrinth, as it encompasses these four Micro-labyrinths (along with several other challenges) through which Sr José must pass in order to reach what we are led to believe will be the Centre of the labyrinth - the unknown woman - but which actually becomes a search for himself. (ibid.)

This section will explore how Senhor José's navigation through these mini (concentric) labyrinths serve as his journey and transition through liminality. I will suggest that the "macro-labyrinth" Atkin refers to can be considered the overarching liminal journey, comprised of the concentric liminal journeys within it. Senhor José's journeys through each of the four labyrinths mentioned above mirror the original Cretan myth, as does the entire narrative. In each, there are distinct forays into darkness and clashes with various "Minotaurs" at the centers, which I will argue signify Senhor José's confrontations with death. The presence of the Minotaur - a beast to conquer - is foreshadowed in *All the Names*, according to Atkin, by the myriad direct references to Greek myth early in the novel. The labyrinth that is the novel, she writes, will "have a centre, which may house a 'Minotaur' or some other challenge that must be overcome before the explorer can find a way out" (25).

Moreover, the paths that Senhor José navigate towards these beasts - these "mini-labyrinths" - all share a similar, salient characteristic: darkness. In the city, Senhor José is often wandering at night. His break-in and burglary of the school also takes place at night.²³ While looking for the death certificate of the unknown woman in the Central Registry's archive of the dead - what Senhor José refers to here as the "kingdom of the dead" (Saramago 138) - he narrates that "the darkness here is absolute" (144). Finally, there is the General Cemetery,²⁴ where Senhor José goes to visit the grave of the unknown woman. Here, it is also dark, though tempered, at least, by nature's various lights: "The shadow of trees covered him immediately, as

²³ Atkin references this illicit foray in her analysis of the Minotaur. "Back luck is not always waiting just behind the door...there must be a treasure, even if, in order to reach it, it might still be necessary to fight the dragon. This one does not have furious, drooling jaws, it does not snort smoke and fire through its nostrils, it does not roar as loud as any earthquake, it is simply a waiting, stagnant darkness, thick and silent as the ocean deep" (Saramago 87). And in fact, she even posits here that "In this case, the beast is darkness" (26).

²⁴ A place referred to as "All the Names."

if night had suddenly fallen...The moonlight gradually spread over the field, slipped slowly through the trees like a habitual, benevolent ghost” (196-197).

But these darkneses alone, their oppressive palls, do not beasts make. Darkness, after all, is always prey to light, and can always thus be conquered, should light be available. And for Senhor José, in these cases, it is. In both the school and the Central Registry, Senhor José is armed with a flashlight; in the cemetery, at night, though he enters “despite knowing that he will often feel afraid during the night, despite knowing that the sigh of the wind will terrify him” (199), he “huddle(s) up in the shelter of providential hollow trunk...and prepares to wait for day” (200). For the liminal subject, darkness alone *cannot* be the beast. Darkness is only frightening as it disorients, and thus elicits fear of the unknown. Darkness alone cannot be the beast insofar as it is *only* darkness (and whatever fears one associates with it) that must be conquered; however, darkness *can* be the beast, if it is symbolic of something greater. For Cipriano Algor, the darkness of the cave within the Centre is the obscured vision of the future, society, and his role within it; for the doctor’s wife, the dark basement is an immersion in to the same blindness afflicting the rest of humanity; and for Senhor José, symbolized in and by the darkness is the concept of death itself.

What Senhor José does not know, as he traverses the manifold labyrinths in his search for the unknown woman, is that he is on a constant and inexorable march towards death. Indeed, just as he encounters darkness in each of his “mini labyrinths,” so too does he often encounter death in some form, and it is these confrontations that he must physically and psychologically overcome to successfully achieve the transformation waiting for him at the end of his liminal journey. Nowhere is this meeting more glaring than in the aforementioned foray into the archive of the dead. Here, Senhor José finds himself immersed amongst the dead. This confrontation

with death - exacerbated, here, by the darkness - flares in him panicked visions of self-destruction: "what paralyzes him with fear is the thought that he might die in this place, just as, all that time ago, he imagined that he might fall from that other ladder and lie dead here, undocumented in the midst of all the documents of the dead, crushed by the darkness" (148). In this moment, Senhor José recognizes himself not only as amongst the dead, but potentially dead himself. It is analogous to Cipriano Algor's dream within the kiln, as well as his experience in the cave. In both cases, the men must confront death, not only the demise of others, but their own deaths as well: only through the encounter with one's own death can the liminal subject successfully achieve their transformation.

In his essay, Victor Turner discusses that the ambiguity of the liminal subject can engender a symbolic ascription of death. Describing the symbols surrounding the liminal persona as "complex and bizarre," he suggests that the liminal persona is structurally "invisible" and that this "invisibility" has a "twofold character: They are at once no longer classified and not yet classified." Moreover, he writes that "In so far as they are not yet classified, the symbols that represent them are, in many societies, drawn from the biology of death" (92). Turner also suggests that an "essential feature of these symbolizations is that the neophytes are neither living nor dead from one aspect, and both living and dead from another. Their condition is one of ambiguity and paradox" (ibid.). The entrance into - and the existing within - a state of liminality, is signified then by a confusion of life and death. At once, these liminal subjects are alive and dead, visible and invisible. However, these ideas do not apply to biological life and death; rather, they are suggestive of a symbolic order.

Turner's discussion of liminality here evokes Jacques Lacan's symbolic order. Lacan's orders can be discussed as states in which we exist in the world, and lenses through which we

understand it: the “real” is defined by our tangibility and physicality, by our most base desires, our *needs*; the “imaginary,” by our conception of our “ideal self” as constructed by our ideal perception of ourselves, conflated with how we believe ourselves to be perceived by others - by *want*; and the “symbolic” by our entrance into language - or, simply, how we are identified by, and understand the world through, symbols and words. In applying Lacan’s orders to liminality, especially to Turner’s contention of the liminal subject as symbolically dead, one could identify two distinct analyses.²⁵ The first is, as Turner contends, that the liminal subject is “symbolically dead” (though obviously biologically alive).

Slavoj Žižek examines the concept of symbolic death in his book, *The Ticklish Subject*. To be symbolically dead is to inhabit a space conceived by Lacan as being “between two deaths,” which Žižek describes as the “pre-ontological domain of monstrous apparitions” (154). To elaborate, he references Lacan’s reading of *Antigone*: “Antigone effectively risks her entire social existence, defying the socio-symbolic power of the City embodied in the ruler (Creon), thereby ‘falling into some kind of death’ (i.e., sustaining a symbolic death, exclusion from the socio-symbolic space)” (263). In this instance, for Lacan and Žižek, is Antigone - or any other “symbolically dead” figure²⁶- not, by Turner’s assertion, a liminal subject? The ambiguous nature of the liminal subject is easily comparable to that of the symbolically dead, as are the states of “exile,” - that state of being “at once no longer classified and not yet classified.”

As soon as Senhor José enters into his liminal state, he symbolically dies. No longer is he the dutiful clerk, no longer is he a man resigned to his life’s station; instead, his search for the unknown woman leads him outside of that very same “socio-symbolic” space, characterized by what Žižek calls a “forced choice: in order to exist at all (within the socio-symbolic space) one

²⁵ One of which I will discuss in Chapter 3.

²⁶ Žižek also references Oedipus, King Lear, and Poe’s Mr. Valdemar (264).

has to accept the fundamental alienation, the definition of one's existence in the terms of the 'big Other,' the predominant structure of the socio-symbolic space" (262). However, for the liminal subject, it is not enough to simply symbolically die: the successful transition through the liminal state is signified by a final transformation - a "new achieved status (Turner 91) - and this transformation might be considered a symbolic resurrection.

But before we explore this concept of symbolic resurrection (which will be done presently in Chapter 3), we must first complete our analysis of Senhor José, and how his confrontations with death underscore his liminal journey. As we have noted, Senhor José's journey consists of multiple liminalities within a larger one, and to this end, the now-wayward clerk has found himself symbolically dead. But Senhor José's liminal journey is unique in that, unbeknownst to him for most of the novel, the woman he is searching for, is (biologically) dead.²⁷ Senhor José realizes this when he discovers that the unknown woman's record card no longer resides in the archive of the living, and, as there exists a (biological) binary of life and death, Senhor José reasons, and then confirms, that the subject of his pursuit has died. This realization denotes the "confrontation" most important to Senhor José's journey. Of this moment, Maria Aristodemou contends the following: "Shocked and devastated, Senhor José nevertheless does not abandon his search: his search continues, only from the opposite direction this time, instead of from life into death, 'from death into life'" (143). This moment will indeed prove pivotal. From this point forward, instead of descending through darkness towards death, Senhor José will be ascending the spiral circles of liminality towards his ultimate apotheosis, transformation, and exit from his liminal state.

²⁷ We do not know precisely when she dies, only that it is indeed *after* Senhor José begins his search for her. If she were dead from the onset of his journey, his infatuation/obsession with the unknown woman might be colored somewhat differently.

Senhor José's success, like that of his counterparts in *Blindness* and *Cave*, is defined by action. The final stages of these liminal journeys as written by Saramago include what I call an "ascension to light." It is the antithesis of the descent into darkness: the climbing out of the cave, the following of Ariadne's thread back out of the labyrinth, and, ultimately, the exit from the liminal state, the eclosion of the liminal subject into the new, transformed self. This final stage, I will suggest, is signified by realization, epiphany, and an understanding of some knowledge or truth.

Chapter 3: Ascension to Light / Exit

This Chapter will analyze the final stage of the liminal journey, the “ascension to light.” For each of Saramago’s three novels, I will not only discuss the events that symbolize the closing moments of the characters’ liminal journeys but will explore the processes by which they are able to complete these journeys. Specifically, I argue that these “completions” are defined by some form of epiphany or realization. Though there exist countless physical, philosophical, and psychological analyses of this process of “enlightenment,” here, I keep my analysis focused on those most salient to the novels in question. In *All the Names*, I continue my analysis of Lacan and Žižek, and how Senhor José (with a little help from his friends), is able to exit that “space between two deaths.” In *Blindness*, I will introduce Carl Jung’s process of “Individuation,” and how it can serve as a lens through which we observe one’s *potential* for individual uniqueness. And finally, in *The Cave*, I will return to Plato’s allegory, and trace how the knowledge Cipriano Algor gains through his discovery leads to his ability to unshackle himself from the Centre’s ideological binds. Lastly, I will offer a thought on Saramago’s intent for his liminal subjects, and an essential attribute of their actions, one which Saramago considers paramount for any character who wishes to transition out of liminality into a new state of being.

All the Names – Symbolic Resurrection

It is evident that, for Saramago and his characters, agency is essential. While there are elements of randomness and chance that insert the characters into their conflicts, once there, there are few, if any, moments of authorial intervention or Deus ex machina.²⁸ No, in this triad of novels, *acting* is crucial. The central figures we have discussed thus far – Cipriano Algor, the

²⁸ There are, however, several moments of narrative philosophical reflection, though these moments do not seem to affect the plot of the actions/choices of the characters.

doctor's wife, Senhor José – are indeed thrust into their liminal states. For each, situations of routine and relative comfort are disrupted by misfortune and chance – the loss of industry, a pandemic of blindness, a record card stuck. It is through these happenstance events that Saramago ushers his characters into liminality, but from there, they are on their own. They are spelunkers peering into a cavernous darkness, Theseus at the threshold of the labyrinth. What evils lie ahead (beneath) are unknown, save that they must exist. Cipriano Algor *chooses* to descend into the cave; the doctor's wife *chooses* to persevere in spite of the horrific trauma enacted upon her; and Senhor José, though he could very easily replace the record card of the unknown woman and return to his comfortable state of anonymity, *chooses* to continue searching. But, as these brave protagonists are liminal subjects, to what end does this agency matter? How does action – *acting* – affect the outcome, the successful transition?

Victor Turner contends that the liminal persona is a passive one. Let us for a moment reconsider the following quote: “The arcane knowledge of “*gnosis*” obtained in the liminal period is felt to change the inmost nature of the neophyte, impressing him, as a seal impresses wax, with the characteristics of his new state. It is not a mere acquisition of knowledge, but a change in being” (95). Turner follows this assertion with the claim that the neophyte's “apparent passivity is revealed as an absorption of powers which will become active after his social status has been redefined” (95). Saramago's characters, however, while they obtain knowledge “passively” throughout their journeys, are no mere sponges; rather, they are the agents of this epistemological acquisition. With that first step into the labyrinth, the first belay into the cave, the liminal subject is no longer a passenger; instead, they become the catalyst, and with each subsequent step or movement forward, they precipitate the events that lead to newfound

understanding and engender the change that will eventually befall them: Turner's "change in being."

To continue this examination of the role of action in the liminal journey, it is worth returning to Jacques Lacan and Slavoj Žižek. As I posit in Chapter 2, upon entering into the liminal state, the subject symbolically dies. Rent from what Žižek – citing Judith Butler – refers to as the "matrix of social existence" (262), the liminal subject occupies, throughout their liminal journey, that "domain 'between two deaths'" (154), the symbolic and the real. Lacan, however, offers a solution to this predicament – an exit, a way out, or through. As Žižek notes, "Lacan leaves open the possibility of a radical rearticulation of the entire symbolic field by means of an *act* proper, a passage through 'symbolic death'" (262). With Lacan, Žižek is suggesting that residence in this liminal domain need not be permanent but can in fact be successfully navigated and traversed. And the success of this transit, once again, resides in action, the "*act* proper."

When Saramago plunges his characters into their liminal states – when he commits these acts of symbolic literary filicide – he is not only examining *how* they successfully navigate these states, but *why*. Why venture on these moribund journeys at all? Why face death and destruction? When given a choice, asks Saramago, what makes us choose that dangerous path of perseverance? No character's journey better epitomizes these questions – this quest – than that of Senhor José's in *All the Names*. A paragon of the acceptance of one's station in life, of his place in this socio-symbolic space,²⁹ Senhor José, upon discovering the unknown woman's record card, finds himself at a crossroads, and we know what choice he makes. But to answer the

²⁹ What is interesting is that, while his experience - his lifetime of professional mediocrity - suggests a dutiful characterization, given at the relative innocuity of the circumstance leading to his first illicit venture into the registry, one might assume that there has been, within the clerk, a percolating rebelliousness in need of only the simplest catalyst to spark it into existence.

question of “why,” we can again turn back to Žižek’s conversation with Lacan and Butler. Žižek cites the following questions posed by Butler:

What would it mean for the subject to desire something other than its continued ‘social existence’? If such an existence cannot be undone without falling into some kind of death, can existence nevertheless be risked, death courted or pursued, in order to expose and open to transformation the hold of social power on the conditions of life’s persistence? (Butler, cited in Žižek, 263)

For Senhor José, this “continued social existence” is the other choice, the choice to remain outside the labyrinth, to not voyage ahead. However, what each path of the crossroads shares is the concept of *risk*. To Butler, a continued and continual performing of the norms of one’s “social existence” creates a “domain of risk” (ibid); if one, she insists, “fails to reinstate the norm ‘in the right way,’ one becomes subject to further sanction, one feels the prevailing conditions of existence threatened” (ibid). Yet Senhor José chooses to pursue the unknown woman, and by doing so, accepts the risks of socio-symbolic alienation. Saramago does not explicitly tell us *why* Senhor José accepts this risk; at no moment does he offer any definitive reasoning. Perhaps his quotidian existence was that brittle: all it took was one chance event to break him from his routine. Or, maybe it was sheer curiosity. I, however, choose to subscribe to Maria Aristodemou’s theory. She writes, “This chance encounter with an unknown woman of 36 (whose name we never find out) sets in motion one of the most touching love stories in contemporary fiction. As we know, and as countless poets have recorded, where there is love there is an insatiable thirst and a search for knowledge about the beloved.” (143). It is a bold claim, yet a conceivable one, and frankly, what better reason could there be for “risking” our symbolic existence than attempting to slake the thirst of unquenchable love?

Nevertheless, once Senhor José decides to choose this path, it is not as if he throws caution to the wind and ignores the potential professional and social consequences of his derelictions; rather, he still very much fears scrutiny and admonishment. Shackled for most of his life by these ideological impositions, Senhor José struggles throughout his journey to blunt the fear of eschewing social and professional norms. And this fear manifests itself in Senhor José's relationship with his boss, the Registrar: "something far more serious than a simple reprimand was about to take place, or so he judged from the severe expression of the Registrar's face, at least that was what a terrible fear was beginning to scream at him inside his head" (179).

However, Senhor José's drive for knowledge concerning the unknown woman supplants his fear of remonstrance, which, as noted above, he is subject to on multiple occasions throughout his journey. This drive – his *active* navigation through his liminal state – is what Lacan, refers to as the "*act(s)* proper" that may allow him to pass through symbolic death, to achieve symbolic resurrection. Žižek asserts that, to Lacan, this space 'between to deaths' is the space of "pure death drive," (Žižek 263). Moreover, Žižek writes the following: "For Lacan, there is no...act proper without taking the risk of such a momentary 'suspension of the big Other', of the socio-symbolic network that guarantees the subject's identity: an authentic *act* occurs only when the subject risks a gesture that is no longer 'covered up' by the big Other: (263-264). With every threshold crossed, every descent into darkness, every beast confronted, Senhor José assumes this risk. To pass through this "space between deaths" (read here as liminality), Senhor José must risk self-destruction, a permanent exile from the socio-symbolic order.

As I state in Chapter 2, Senhor José's journey through liminality includes several concentric, smaller liminal journeys, replete with the characteristic processes of descent,

confrontation, and conquering. However, what Senhor José – and perhaps the reader- does not realize is that there is a distinct pivot in his overarching journey, a moment where he is no longer descending, but has arrived at a nadir upon which his confrontation with, and conquering of, death delivers him back upwards towards the light. As I mention at the end of Chapter 2, this is the moment when he realizes that the unknown woman is dead. I return here to Aristodemou's analysis, which provides a perfect encapsulation of this turning point: "Shocked and devastated, Senhor José nevertheless does not abandon his search: his search continues, only from the opposite direction this time, instead of from life into death, 'from death into life'" (143). Here, Senhor José is no longer descending into the depths of the liminal space, but instead begins his ascension back through the labyrinth and up towards the light. Proof of this lies in his shift in mood and attitude when confronted with darkness and death. When searching for the unknown woman's grave in the General Cemetery towards the end of the novel, Senhor José sleeps overnight in said cemetery. Unlike the crippling fear and paralysis he felt in the archive of dead, here, he faces death much more stoically: "the normal response would be to feel afraid, fearful of the places, the hour, the rustling trees, the mysterious moonlight, and, in particular, of the strange cemetery surrounding him, an assembly of suicides, a gathering of silences that, from one moment to the next, might begin to scream" (198). This tranquil embrace of his surroundings suggests that Senhor José has come to understand something of death, some heretofore unknown aspect or quality.

Moreover, Senhor José demonstrates this newfound understanding in one of the novel's final scenes, Senhor José enters the apartment of the unknown woman, which might be considered the final liminal space he passes through.³⁰ Here, he has his closest, most affectionate

³⁰ Indeed, it possesses many of the traits: "He slipped quickly into the apartment, very carefully closed the door, and found himself the midst of a dense, almost pitch-black darkness" (Saramago

interactions with the unknown woman: “he sat on one of the small sofas...felt his body sinking the soft concavity left by another body”; “the answering machine came on, a female voice said...’I’m not at home right now””; “he bent towards (the dresses) until he touched them with his face, the smell they gave off could be described as absence” (231-233). The description of this scene, more than any other, is suggestive of the ultimate truth Senhor José has learned. In fact, the reason, perhaps, the he is not affected by the same fear and paralysis as earlier in the novel is that he has already begun the process of understanding this truth, this “acquisition of knowledge” that will be central to his enlightenment: that while the unknown woman may be dead in “the real,” so long as she exists in his mind – in his heart – she lives. Here again, we allude to Lacan, whose orders seem to foreground both action and realization in this novel. But before we delve further into the Lacanian orders, it is worth considering the role of the Registrar in Senhor José’s liminal journey.

Early in his search of the unknown woman, Senhor José speaks of his superior while conversing with a woman who turns out to be the unknown woman’s godmother:

My boss, for example, knows by heart all the names that exist or ever have existed, all the names and all the surnames...the Registrar’s brain is like a duplicate of the Central Registry...Since he’s capable of making every possible combination of name and surname, my boss’s brain knows not only the names of all the people who are now alive and all those who have died, he would also be able to tell you the names of all those who will be born from now until the end of the world. (46-47)

The verity of the Registrar’s suggested omnipotence is unconfirmed, but as there are no other fantastical elements in the novel, one might infer this reverence to be either true or a product of

230) (darkness); “Here lived a woman who committed suicide for unknown reasons” (231) (death).

Senhor José's indelible respect and fear for this figure, a man who he claims "knows all there is to know about the kingdoms of the visible and invisible" (107). With this ascription comes several readings of the Registrar's role in Senhor José's liminal journey. Rhian Atkin suggests that the Registrar represents another Minotaur for Senhor José to conquer (28). However, she also acknowledges that he is more complex than an obstacle to overcome. Atkin describes the Registrar as "a paradoxical figure who insists on the use of Ariadne's thread in the archive, but at the same time threatens to impede Sr. José's search" (ibId.). Further, she suggests that "Rather than see the Registrar as Sr. José's foe...we might also see him as a Daedalus figure, responsible for the labyrinth and able to view it from on high (and oversee activities within it)" (29).³¹ These descriptions/ascriptions of the Registrar- Minotaur, Ariadne, Daedalus-- suggest that, for Saramago, the Registrar exists as a conflation of these roles in the Greek myth. He is both omnipotent and omnipresent.

There is, however, another reading of the Registrar's role, one that more neatly fits into the analysis of Senhor José's liminal journey. Both Atkin and Aristodemou note this reading, and that is of the Registrar as God. In reference to his Daedalian role, Atkin calls him a "godlike figure" (30), and Aristodemou takes the symbolism further. She references the same quote I cite above and theorizes that "the implication is that you cannot keep secrets from such an infallible Being like the Registrar, any more than you can keep secrets from God" (137-138). How, then, does the Registrar's divinity factor into Senhor José's liminality? In his article, Victor Turner describes the role of the ritual elder, an "instructor" who takes on a divine presence: "and often

³¹ This analysis of the Registrar as overseer alludes to Giuseppe Menditto's assertion of the "panopticism" present in this society, as well as those in *Blindness* and *The Cave*. This becomes all the more apparent when considering the links between the Registrar, the Centre, and the government in *Blindness* "overseeing" the blind detainees. Unfortunately, we will not be able to explore this concept further here.

the people themselves see this in terms of bringing neophytes into connection with deity or with superhuman power” (93). Moreover, “between instructors and neophytes,” he writes, “there is often complete authority and complete submission” (94). This is the relationship between the Registrar and Senhor José: an unquestioning adherence to the infallibility of the authority figure— a “complete submission.” In the context of the liminal journey, that the Registrar perhaps “know(s) all there is to know about the kingdoms of the visible and invisible,” suggests an ability to *see* Senhor José, even amidst his liminal “invisibility” (Turner 92); it is more than a Daedalian viewpoint, it is that very omnipotence that suggests that, despite Senhor José’s agency, he would not have been able to complete his journey without the Registrar’s allowance. The Registrar is not simply *allowing*, but *enabling*, Senhor José to complete his journey. And indeed there is a purpose to this enabling, one that I will elaborate upon shortly.

Though it is incumbent on the liminal subjects to navigate the space successfully, they are not necessarily charged nor expected to do so with complete, isolated independence. In fact, in that the Registrar has become here that ritual leader,³² to achieve that successful transformation and exit, Senhor José *must* gain the Registrar’s approval, must receive his blessing, his symbolic baptism. As much as the “godlike” Registrar is an overseer, he is also a guide. Throughout the narrative, there are clues that the Registrar is involved in Senhor José’s journey, that he is watching, observing, interested. When Senhor José becomes ill, the Registrar takes an unprecedented interest in his health. During the search for the unknown woman, when Senhor José’s work performance begins to suffer, the Registrar grants him (an again unprecedented) vacation. And when Senhor José returns from his journey into the darkness of the archive of the dead, upon leaving, “his excitement was such that he did not hear the door of

32 While Cipriano Algor and the doctor’s wife both have others who aid them at various points throughout their journeys, in the three novels, this is the only instance of a ritual leader.

the Central Registry closing, as if someone had just left the building” (150). These clues could be interpreted according to what Atkin proposes, that the Registrar may be trying to impede Sr. José’s journey, but it soon becomes apparent that, instead, the Registrar is not only “enabling” Senhor José, but is *guiding* him towards a specific end.

This end is explained to Senhor José and his coworkers (though at the time, not entirely understood) when the Registrar dictates that, instead of continuing to separate the records of the living and the dead, the files will be integrated into one “historic archive” (177). The Registrar references a “double absurdity of separating the dead from the living...in the first place from the archivist point of view, when one considers that the easiest way of finding the dead would be to look for them among the living...but it is equally as absurd from the mnemonic point of view, for if the dead are not kept in the midst of the living, sooner or later they will be forgotten” (176-177).

This final line is the one most central to our analysis, to the central objective of Senhor José’s journey. It will take the remainder of the novel for Senhor José to understand that it was his actions that not only precipitated the Registrar’s revolutionary ideas for reorganization, but sparked, for the Registrar, his newfound understanding of the nature of existence, of life and death. In the novel’s final scene, Senhor José returns to his home to find the Registrar waiting for him. Here, the Registrar suggests to Senhor José “the only logical conclusion to everything that has happened up until now...make up a new card for this woman...but without a date for her death...Then go put it in the archive of the living, as if she hadn’t died” (238). They also converse about the unknown woman’s death certificate, which Senhor José previously endeavored to find in the archive of the dead. Senhor José was not able locate the death certificate, and when he tells the Registrar this, the Registrar responds by saying, “As long as it

remains lost, that woman will be dead.” Senhor José responds with, “She’ll be dead whether I find it or not,” to which the Registrar says, “Unless you destroy it” (*ibid.*). In these words, we realize the Registrar’s ultimate plan. Aristodemou analyzes this scene thusly: The effect of the Registrar’s “daring archivistic plan” is to widen and perpetuate the gap between what Lacan calls the space between two deaths, between the real and the symbolic: although death in the real has unavoidably and irrevocably happened, symbolic death, thanks to the Registrar’s intervention, is infinitely postponed.” (144)

Here, the record card of the unknown woman becomes a corporeal manifestation of her symbolic existence. It is the apotheosis this novel has been working towards, the truth towards which Senhor José has been venturing. When in the bowels of the archive of the dead, Senhor José recognizes “the miracle worked by your Central Registry, transforming life and death into mere paper” (149). Moreover, this symbolism is elucidated in the conversation had between Senhor José and a mysterious shepherd he encounters in the Cemetery:³³ “The person lying here, said the shepherd, touching the mound of earth with the end of his crook, is not the person you think.” Senhor José then asks, “Do you mean that the number is wrong,” to which the shepherd replies, “a number is a number, a number is never wrong” (204). Senhor José does not immediately understand the shepherd’s justification for this;³⁴ at the time, he only accuses the shepherd of “profaning the dead”: “people come here to remember their relatives and friends, to meditate or pray, to place flowers or to weep before a beloved name...and now it seems the person lying there has another name entirely” (205). Paper, numbers, names— when ascribed to

33 Helpfully to our analysis of the labyrinthine nature of this novel, here, the shepherd and Senhor José have an explicit discussion of how the Cemetery is a labyrinth: “It’s the General Cemetery, It’s a Labyrinth” (204).

³⁴ “If I believe, it’s true that people who commit suicide do so because they don’t want to be found, these people here...are now free forever from importunate visitors” (205).

people, these things, simply, are symbols. Thus, we finally understand the true function of places like the Central Registry and the Cemetery: they are places that house the symbolic signifiers of life and death. And yes, the Cemetery also contains the biological remains— “imagine the work involved in disinterring all these people and identifying them,” says the shepherd, “many of them are nothing more than dust now anyways” (206)³⁵ - but what they do not contain are memories, remembrances, and reminiscences, that which remain in the hearts and minds of others, and what are, ultimately, the manna of symbolic existence.

Aristodemou, discussing the role of the Central Registry and the indelibility of things “on file,” cites Lacan:

Lacan was clear that this is the determining effect of the signifier, whether it is on a file, in a library, or, more radically, on the subject’s unconscious: only an ‘imbecile realist,’ as he puts it, would fall for the fact that just because something is not in its place, it must be missing. A book mislaid in a library, he illustrates, is no more ‘hidden’ or absent since the signifier ‘by its very nature, is the symbol of but absence.’ The signifier then, being part of the symbolic, can change places. The Real, by contrast, cannot shift or be shifted. (137)

This is the truth Saramago is suggesting in this novel, the truth that Senhor José arrives at, guided by the Registrar: so long as a being exists in the mind of the living, they remain, symbolically, alive. Unneeded for symbolic life is some ephemeral icon, such as a record card, gravestone, or even name; no, our symbolic existence is much more enduring.

³⁵ There seems to be a clear allusion here to Act V of Hamlet, when Hamlet is contemplating the role of our remains upon identifying the skull of his former caregiver, Yorick. Though the processes are nuanced, both Hamlet and the Shepherd ultimately suggest the same notion: our living bodies, and our dead remains, are different.

And so, though she has (biologically) died, Senhor José does not only “find” the unknown woman but resurrects her. Atkin notes this as well, adding that the “resurrection” “gives meaning to a life that had so little significance that the woman committed suicide” (137). And so what does Senhor José and the Registrar— and by extension, Saramago— achieve here? Aristodemou asserts that “By cancelling death in the symbolic, the Registrar cannot cancel death in the Real, but does cancel the space between two deaths” (145). I might suggest, however, a slightly different interpretation: by this process, the space between two deaths— the liminal space, as it were, between the symbolic and the real— is not “cancelled”; rather, it is redressed, re-delineated, redefined as, to reference Lacan’s original orders, *the imaginary*.

While this imaginary space between two deaths might have been canceled for the biologically dead, for the biologically living, I maintain that it still very much exists as a liminal space inhabited by those “outside” or “in-between.” But Senhor José does not remain in this space. As noted, when Senhor José replaces the unknown woman’s record card in the archives of the Central Registry, he is performing for the unknown woman a symbolic resurrection. By doing this, Atkin suggests, “Senhor José is able to find a sense of purpose for his own life” (137); indeed, she insists the following: “life, which is symbolised by the explorer’s journey through the labyrinth, the death at its centre, and the subsequent rebirth which is symbolised by explorer’s exit from the labyrinth, ultimately lead...to a more fulfilling life” (138). We have seen throughout our analysis of Senhor José’s liminal journey— and those concentric liminal journeys within it— this voyage from life to death to rebirth; but we have also noted the Registrar’s roles as overseer and guide, as the liminal ritual elder. At the end of the novel, when Senhor José and the Registrar speak, Senhor José is still in a liminal state, is still, himself, symbolically dead, outside of that “socio-symbolic” space theorized by Lacan and Žižek. But Senhor José’s

epiphany about the nature of life and death creates a parallel between himself and the unknown woman: just as he is able to resurrect *her*, by doing so, he himself becomes symbolically resurrected. This moment when the Registrar allows— *encourages*— Senhor José to reenter the Central Registry and replaces the unknown woman’s record card might then be considered Senhor José’s baptism. The “risk”— as suggested by Lacan— has paid off: by granting Senhor José the ability— the *power*— to “resurrect” the unknown woman, he is granting Senhor José the achievement of the completion of his liminal journey and welcoming him back into socio-symbolic space, the “kingdom of the visible.”

Turner posits that liminal journeys— or *rites de passage*— “are not restricted, sociologically speaking, to movements between ascribed statuses. They also concern entry into a new achieved status” (91). Though Senhor José attempts to resign, the Registrar will not accept his resignation, but our protagonist will no longer simply be a mere clerk. By granting him the power of resurrection, the Registrar has bestowed upon Senhor José the same “godlike” powers he himself possesses. This is Senhor José’s “new achieved status,” and by obtaining this, he has been “initiated,” has found his purpose. Turner writes that “in the third phase of the “rites of transition” (the liminal journey), “the passage is consummated. The ritual subject...is in a stable state once more and, by virtue of this, has rights and obligations of a clearly defined ‘structural’ type, and is expected to behave in accordance with certain customary norms and ethical standards” (ibid.). In other words, Senhor José is expected to uphold the Registrar’s vision going forward, to become an assistant to, and an embodiment of, the Registrar, tasked with shepherding the dead back into the land of the living. Symbolically speaking, that is.

Blindness – Seeing Our Potential

In *All the Names*, Senhor José's exit from his liminal journey was ultimately determined by his new sense of self. For the doctor's wife in *Blindness*, the successful exit from her liminal state will be similarly defined, and can be understood through the lens of Carl Jung's process of "Individuation."³⁶ In his book, *Jung in Context: Modernity and the Making of a Psychology*, Peter Homans draws a comparison between liminality and the individuation process:

Jung's psychology portrays a form of liminality... This becomes clear if it is viewed as in essence describing the individuation process, and if that process is considered a cultural process... Individuation begins with a withdrawal from normal modes of social action, epitomized by the breakdown of the persona. Such a withdrawal activates the transference relationship, which is accompanied by the patient's intense desire to be encountered as a whole person. (207)

The individuation process is akin to liminality as both are marked by those same qualities of disorientation and ambiguity. Like the liminal subject, Homans describes those experiencing the individuation process as being "betwixt and between" - in transition from one order of reality to another" (ibid.). But there is more than just a simple correlation between these ideas; rather, I believe that, for the doctor's wife in *Blindness*, we can ascribe the process of individuation to the final stage of the liminal journey - that *ascension to light* - and thus examine the process by which the liminal subject enters the new state of being.

To this end, this section will examine Jung's individuation process in relation to the liminal journey, regarding the doctor's wife as the Jungian/liminal subject. The narrative of *Blindness* ends with the rest of the party led by the doctor's wife regaining their sight. Though it is not clear exactly how sight is regained, I argue that it is more than a mere reversal of fortune.

³⁶ While this process might apply to the liminal subjects in Saramago's other novels as well, it is, I argue, most applicable here.

The randomness of the onset of the white blindness - of the *entrance*, for the doctor's wife, into the liminal state - cannot apply to the *exit*, for too much of the later process, as has been discussed, is incumbent on the agency of the liminal subject. If, then, the end/exit of the liminal journey depends, for the blind in her party, on the return of sight, I will assert that this is a byproduct of the doctor's wife's own process of individuation. For Saramago, the doctor's wife is chosen, for one reason or another, to be the one who must achieve individuation in order to "save" the others. She must "pass the tests" - as it were - of the labyrinthine/liminal journey, and only through her success can the others regain sight; not necessarily because they too have achieved individuation, but because of the potential of anyone in humankind to do so, the very *possibility* of its achievement. In keeping with the theme of agency and action, we will focus on the events that take place within the narrative that represent the doctor's wife's individuation process. Indeed, insofar as the individuation process is comparable to the liminal journey (and, as such, the labyrinthine journey), we will investigate the parallels and conflation of exiting the labyrinth/liminal state with final stage of individuation, what the "formation of the self."

Homans defines Jung's process of individuation as the following: "a coming to self-hood or self-realization in which one achieved a definite sense of one's innermost, incomparable uniqueness" (103). But what makes the doctor's wife unique? How does she achieve this uniqueness? Or does she at all? Moreover, what, exactly, is the (otherwise obscured) goal for the doctor's wife? For liminal subjects, there must be a goal, an objective, a physical, emotional, and psychological end to the journey she finds herself on (and then, of course, *chooses*, to continue upon). Though survival often seems, for the doctor's wife and her party, untenable, survival alone cannot be her goal; if it were, the doctor's wife would not have experienced such psychological distress as when she discovered the inferno of blind bodies trapped in the

basement. Were she concerned only with perpetuating physical existence, she would have felt no guilt here, no remorse. That she does suggests that there is a greater objective here, one that reaches beyond physiological life and death: as is noted by one of the blind detainees in the asylum: “To be blind is not the same as being dead” (108). For the doctor’s wife, then, the goal is not only maintaining life, but a maintaining of morality, decency, and humanity, the ability to reconcile these traits in one’s consciousness, even amidst the most terrible chaos.

Unlike in *All the Names*, there is no dynamic of “instructor” and “neophyte” in this liminal journey. Nowhere in *Blindness* is there some omniscient “elder” guiding the doctor’s wife towards her apotheosis. Homans suggests that “the Jungian therapist serves the function of ritual elder” (206), but for the doctor’s wife, there is no ritual elder nor therapist, and what is fascinating about the liminal journey of the doctor’s wife is that her role as liminal subject is defined by her becoming this very “ritual leader.” When the doctor’s wife first joins her husband and the rest of the blind in the prison, she is content with being a passenger; in fact, she chooses to not divulge her sightedness for fear of the responsibilities that would accompany that burden. However, as living/surviving becomes more tenuous, in turn, the doctor’s wife begins to assume this role of guide/leader/instructor/ritual elder that comes to define her liminal journey. Indeed, her superintendence is inversely proportional to the surrounding chaos: the more humanity devolves around them, the more of a leader she becomes.

The first instance we observe of the doctor’s wife’s newly defined role is when the women return from their devastating night with the blind hoodlums. As I discuss in Chapter 2, after their brutal encounter with the blind hoodlums, a woman dies; but the doctor’s wife declares that they will bury her. Despite the manner in which she died and the challenges of completing a burial, the doctor’s wife ensures that human decency is maintained: “even if fetid,

even if polluted, she [the doctor's wife] wanted to wash the corpse of the woman...to deliver her purified to the earth" (183). It is a *ritual* cleansing, one that might be performed by a diener or nun in certain faiths, and that the doctor's wife assumes this role marks one of the first moments of her leadership.

The second instance of the doctor's wife performing the role of ritual elder is after she returns to her party following her first foray into the dark basement of the supermarket from which she brings food. Upon returning, she finds her party "lying on the ground, so still they might have been dead" (235). The doctor's wife resurrects her party, and her feeding of her meek companions is described thusly: "Holy water of the most efficacious variety, descended directly from heaven, the splashes helped the stones transform themselves into persons, while the doctor's wife participated in the process of metamorphosis by opening the plastic bags one after the other" (235-236). The biblical allusions here are plain: by feeding the hungry, the doctor's wife has restored their physical and emotional strength, has raised them back to life.

Finally, we get a moment of catharsis, for the doctor's wife, as well as for the two other women in their party. This is the moment where the three women wash one another on the balcony of the doctor's wife's apartment in the rain. They can, as the doctor's wife thinks, "clean a little, at least a little, of this unbearable filth of the soul. Of the body, she said, as if to correct this metaphysical thought, then she added, It's all the same" (279). And they do. "They soak their hair and wash each other's backs and they laugh as only little girls laugh when they play blind man's bluff in the garden before becoming blind" (282). Here again, action is crucial. These women eschew awkwardness and shame, forgo the insecurities of the body; to allude back to Lacan's orders, they embrace the ideal image of the self. It is indeed another ritual cleansing, a washing of both body *and* soul. However, essential here is not only achieving purity in the eyes

of God, but in the eyes of one another. In this moment, the three women affirm each other's beauty, and by doing so, begin the process of healing, of scabbing over the atrocities they together faced. This moment marks a return to - or perhaps reclaiming of - innocence, of a time before blindness, and whatever sins of humanity this blindness represents. Though her liminal journey has come to be defined by her leadership and her guardianship of others, as the doctor's wife chooses to wash and be washed here repositions her as equal. Though she has become their leader - has become *unequal* - she never desired this power, which allows her, in this moment and throughout the rest of the narrative, to forswear her preeminence while not undermining her uniqueness.

Through a Jungian lens, this might be considered a first step in discovering the "self" in lieu of the "persona." For Jung, the "self" is the archetype of totality, the culmination of the individuation process, marked by a "totality of wholeness" (Carl Jung Resources). The "persona," meanwhile, is the "Mask of the Ego," the conflation of repressed archetypes of our collective unconscious, the way others see us, and thus how we see ourselves (ibid.). Through this cleansing, the women are ridding themselves of their "masks," and their ablutions serve to dissolve their personas in search of their true selves, and what makes this scene all the more powerful - and indeed touching - is that only one of the women can see. Beauty, here, is outside the limits and limitations of sight, and the limits and limitations of language:

You were never more beautiful... Words are like that... simple in themselves, a personal pronoun, an adverb, a verb, an adjective, we have the excitement of seeing them coming irresistibly to the surface through the skin and the eyes and upsetting the composure of our feelings. The doctor's wife has nerves of steel, and yet the doctor's wife is reduced to tears because of a personal pronoun, an adverb, a verb, an adjective, mere grammatical

categories, mere labels, just like the two women, the others indefinite pronouns, they too are crying, they embrace the woman of the whole sentence, three graces beneath the falling rain. (282)

At this point in the novel, these blind women (and in her own way, the doctor's wife) are symbolically dead. The response to the quote above - "To be blind is not the same as being dead" - is someone replying, "Yes, but to be dead is to be blind" (108). Here, then, in the falling rain, the women are baptized back into the land of the living, and it is again the doing of the doctor's wife. Just as she resurrected her party with food, here, she is the ritual leader who initiates them to a new existence. Atkin explains the significance of this scene in *Saramago's Labyrinths*: "In *Cegaira (Blindness)*, the characters pass through symbolic death (the blindness) in order to achieve the resurrection that is implied by the way they come together to form a community, most poignantly symbolised when they wash each other, and by the eventual restoration of their sight" (42). In this way, the doctor's wife has assumed the same position as Senhor José in *Names*, that of the resurrector.³⁷

But what of the doctor's wife as the liminal subject? How does she, herself, achieve transformation? The answer lies, I believe, in her quest for wholeness, for the discovery of the "self." Though *Blindness* is a story about a society rendered sightless, it is just as much a story about one person's inward journey and transformation. In Jungian terms, this would be the division between the collective and personal unconscious (as well as collective and personal consciousness): the former is what Jung called "archetypes," the "universal forms of human experience," (Homans 98), whereas the latter builds over time. As the conscious ego forms,

³⁷ This baptismal scene - along with the bringing of food, that "holy water," - speak to the imagery suggested by Homans that link individuation and liminality, the "themes of birth and rebirth" (207). In each instance, those involved are indeed "reborn."

personal consciousness becomes differentiated from collective consciousness, and a personal identity begins to form as well - the *persona*. This persona is created through an internalization of collective ideals, the “collective consciousness of the community” (100). However, as Homans notes, “the persona could never constitute, of itself, genuine individuality. It was, as Jung said, ‘feigned’ individuality” (ibid.). The process of individuation is, at its core, the eschewing of the *persona* for the *self*, for that “innermost, incomparable uniqueness” (103).

In *Blindness*, the journey of the doctor’s wife traces this very individuation process. As readers, we are not privy to any background knowledge on this character; we know nothing of her life, her wants, her flaws. In the pages above, I discuss her uniqueness - but perhaps it would have been better put as *potential* uniqueness. Perhaps at the beginning of the story, the doctor’s wife is not unique; rather, she is an embodiment of the “normal,” the average, the unremarkable. In other words, perhaps Saramago is suggesting that - just as with the individuation process - her uniqueness can, and must, be *earned*, and must be done so through action. Perhaps the reason the doctor’s wife is never named - and is indeed only referred in relation to her husband - is akin to why Saramago also does not name his cities: just as the cities could be anywhere, and thus *everywhere*, the doctor’s wife could be anyone, and thus *everyone*. And what Saramago proves in his narrative is that, through action, effort, and agency, uniqueness - for anyone/everyone - *is* achievable.

Importantly though, as Homans writes, “Jung’s concept of individuation was not designed just as a psychotherapeutic strategy, isolated from social context. It was addressed with equal seriousness to the problem of modernity, understood as mass man in a mass society” (179). Homans also discusses Jung’s analysis of “the plight of the individual in modern society” (179), noting that “the modern man has succumbed to what Jung called ‘mass-mindedness’...’the blind

movement of the masses” (180). Here, we note a distinct parallel between *Blindness* and Jung’s analysis - a *literal* ‘blind movement of the masses’ - but we can also begin to more acutely trace the link to liminality. In *Blindness*, Saramago ushers the doctor’s wife into this (liminal) journey towards psychological uniqueness by rendering her *physically* unique, and this physical uniqueness is what precipitates the actions of the doctor’s wife throughout the narrative. Homans contends that the correlation between individuation and liminality lies in the subject’s withdrawal from “normal modes of social action” (207). In *Blindness*, Saramago catalyzes this scenario. What if there is no longer a “normal mode of social action”? What if one person is riven from the collective “blind movement of the masses”?

At the end of the novel, those in the doctor’s wife’s party (and it can be assumed, all of society) regain sight. As I contend above, this is a result of the regained and reclaimed morality of the blind (both collective and individual) but also a product of a degree of regained *potential* for moral goodness, as experienced by others but exemplified, epitomized, and led by the doctor’s wife. That is not to say that the others in the party do not also gain new perspectives: in addition to the mutual washing between the women, there is the newfound romance between the “girl with the dark glasses” and the “old man with the eyepatch,” whose love comes to define the power of inner beauty rather than superficiality.³⁸ Nonetheless, the doctor’s wife remains the focus, and it is ultimately through her success that the masses are saved, reborn.

Myriad lines in the novel speak to Saramago’s suggestion that “outer” blindness (physiological sightlessness) is reflective of “inner” blindness: “if you want to be blind, then blind you will be” (128); “love, which people say is blind, also has a voice of its own” (154); “it

38 There is an interesting link here between this attraction and that of Senhor José and the unknown woman, which was, due to his never actually meeting her, marked by a complete lack of superficiality.

used to be said there is no such thing as blindness, only blind people, when the experience of time has taught us nothing other than that there are no blind people, but only blindness” (324); however, perhaps the most salient to the doctor’s wife’s enlightenment comes in the novel’s penultimate paragraph. Here, the doctor’s wife and the doctor are conversing about their experience, and the doctor’s wife says, “Do you want me to tell you what I think...I don’t think we did go blind, I think we are blind, Blind but seeing, Blind people who can see, but do not see” (326). This is an encapsulation of the novel’s theme: blindness is omnipresent, and our physiological sight in no way represents our ability to truly *see*, to understand life’s purposes and meaning.

However, a reading of the novel’s final passage suggests a nuanced analysis of the doctor’s wife liminal journey and journey towards individuation. The following are the final lines of *Blindness*: “Then she lifted her head up to the sky and saw everything white, It is my turn, she thought. Fear made her quickly lower her eyes. The city was still there” (326). The brilliance of these lines are that they are ambiguous: in one reading, when the doctor’s wife lowers her eyes, she *sees* the city, which is why it is described as being “still there”; but conversely, in another reading, in this moment, the doctor’s wife herself goes blind, and that the city is still there speaks to the inexorability of life - the perpetual continuation of existence, as personified by the city - in spite of the blindness (the symbolic death) of the individual. While we, the readers, may certainly hope that the doctor’s wife has not gone blind, both interpretations are suggestive of a darker, unresolved thematic element. If it is the former, and the doctor’s wife does indeed remain sighted, these lines are perhaps a reminder, from Saramago, that the issues previously present have not been fully eradicated. Again, sight, I contend, was restored because

of humanity's *potential* for goodness, not their achievement of it. No, society will not so easily be scrubbed of its abominations.

The latter reading, however - that in which the doctor's wife does go blind - can be related to the discussion of individuation and liminality. Despite the myriad similarities between individuation and liminality, Homans also suggests a departure between the two processes. He writes that "According to Turner, all liminality must eventually dissolve...but (this does not) apply to Jung's system" (207), and the reason for this lies in subject's reintegration (or lack thereof) into the social order: "The individuated self of the committed Jungian returns to the social order only in an extremely instrumental manner...it is more correct to say that Jung's psychology presents the student of cultural change with a form of 'permanent liminality' in which there is no need to return to social structure or to generate a social structure internal to the community" (208). In this analysis, it is apparent that the individuation process is never fully completed. For Jung, "The individuation process referred, in its broadest sense, to all the life experiences of the individual, from earliest infancy to the encounter with death" (Homans 103). The doctor's wife, in spite, or perhaps *because* of her realizations, epiphanies, and enlightenment, cannot fully accept a realized self. That she understands the truth of humanity ("we are blind, blind but seeing") means that she cannot fully eschew her *persona* without also experiencing blindness herself; thus, her only route to a fully individuated self is through a continuation of, or perhaps another, liminal journey. Perhaps, then, this speaks to the nature of liminality as a concept. The two readings of the novel's final scene suggest a divergence in the analysis of liminality as well as that of individuation. The first reading (where the doctor's wife is not blind), would argue for a completion of the liminal journey (individuation notwithstanding). The second reading, though, might suggest that life is not comprised of liminal

states and journeys spread out across space and time, but rather that it is a continuation of cyclical liminal journeys, that there are no true relatively 'stable' states, as Turner notes, only varying degrees of relative instability and disorientation. In Jungian terms, this alludes to the idea of "permanent liminality," that we are always entrenched in ambiguity, always searching for psychological stability, that personal consciousness can never be fully differentiated from the collective. Nevertheless, the vagueness of the book's ending does not detract from its power, nor from the success of the doctor's wife's journey. The doctor's wife still resurrects her party, and she still helps them achieve moral enlightenment. Whether her journey(s) - individuation, liminal - continue, or perhaps begin cyclically anew, what is indisputable, I believe, is that there is a point of demarcation for her at this moment: maybe she will never know *all* of life's meanings, but she has indeed proved that, for (m)any of us there is, at least, the potential for goodness.

The Cave - Eclosion

In *The Cave*, Cipriano Algor's "ascension to light" lends itself most easily to the analysis of enlightenment, epiphany, and understanding. Indeed, the physical process of descending into, and ascending back out of, a cave is potentially what inspired Plato to use such a place for his allegory. As such, Cipriano Algor's liminal journey is fairly straightforward, though not without nuance. However, when considered in comparison to the two other texts in the "trilogy," certain throughlines begin to form that suggest a more pronounced, enlightened achievement.

When Cipriano descends into the cave beneath the Centre, which turns out to be (supposedly) Plato's *actual* Cave, he is a man deeply steeped in disorientation and ambiguity. Jobless and joyless, he is convinced by his daughter and son-in-law to join them in living at the Centre, the very place responsible for his unemployment and waywardness. Begrudgingly, he

abandons his home, his land, his kiln, his dog - not to mention Isaura Madruga, his newfound love interest - to move into a too-small apartment where he is forced to live with no job, direction, or sense of purpose. However, as is characteristic of Saramago's liminal subjects, Cipriano does not take this lying down; instead, he decides to *act*. He does not accept the explanation of the construction happening beneath the Centre, nor his son-in-law's silence when probed as to the nature of his new detail. This insatiable curiosity is what leads Cipriano to the cave and to his confrontation with death, which lead to his ultimate enlightenment and to the exit from his liminal journey.

Remarkably, the discovery Cipriano makes during his confrontation with the dead bodies in the cave is an affirmation of his own choices as well as a denunciation of society's failings; namely, that any shackles we find ourselves in are a product of our own doing - in the cave of our existence, *we choose to remain chained*. Giuseppe Menditto mentions this in his discussion of Cipriano's descent: "There [Cipriano] catches a glimpse of the truth about the human condition, where the only certainty is man's ceaseless questioning regarding his own limitations and ability to act" (109). By questioning the hegemonic forces surrounding him (The Centre), and by allowing those internal questions to spark action, Cipriano is able to divine the reality of the chained corpses, which he divulges to his daughter upon returning from his expedition: "Those people are us...me, you, Marçal, the whole Centre, probably the world" (294). But noteworthy here as well is Cipriano's use of the word "us," as opposed to "them" or some other non-inclusive pronoun. To this point in the novel, Cipriano has yet to achieve his ultimate apotheosis, in the sense that the *action* has not yet been consummated. It is clear, however, that his mind is made up, for only a few lines later, when Marta asks him what they are to do, he responds with "You must decide what to do with your own lives, but I'm leaving" (ibid.).

There is, of course, a clear allusion here to Plato's original allegory, in which the chained prisoners represent those in society for whom real truth is obscured. As Menditto notes, "seeing and not acting is the notion that leads Plato to consider the human being as such" (119). However, Menditto also illuminates in Saramago's novel a departure from Plato's myth. He writes, "For Saramago, the descent into the cave means a sort of reversal of Plato's dialectics: the tactile self-understanding through the contact with the world is foreshadowed by the protagonist's loneliness" (120). The primacy of loneliness in the liminal journey becomes apparent when considering the role of loneliness in this novel, as well as in *Blindness* and *Names*. Why, when facing situations of utmost despair, would a figure choose to act, to persevere, to continue forward? Is it not because of a desire for human connection? In *Blindness*, the doctor's wife seeks to maintain humanity long enough to recreate some form of normalcy, to return to a time of peace, quiet, and love; in *Names*, Senhor José searches for the unknown woman, who symbolizes (the hope for) companionship; and in *The Cave*, Cipriano Algor recklessly pursues answers at the risk of self-destruction. For the potter, catharsis is untenable if he cannot experience it with others.

Menditto notes that "Plato's philosopher as a liberated man is always alone: he is alone when he is released, he lives alone with his own "ascetic" experience, he makes a solitary attempt to impose his idea of politics on the other prisoners, and he risks being put to death for this reason" (121). In Plato's allegory, it is not clear, though, why the liberated man returns to the cave. Menditto cites Jan Patočka, who suggests that "the return itself is something comprehensible because it means life itself" (123) For Menditto, this connotes a political argument, one in which "risk and salvation belong to the same course" where the "struggle does not concern man and an absent transcendence but rather a transcendent movement of man within

his innermost immanence” (ibid.). Here, we observe a return to the parallels between liminal and speleological journeys, and in this case, *Plato’s* speleology. Upon ascending from the cave beneath the Centre, Cipriano resolves the tension with his son-in-law. They share an embrace, a moment that symbolizes Cipriano’s reconciliation of his own loneliness, but also one that marks the comparison between Plato’s liberated philosopher and the liminal subject. Just as the philosopher returns to the caves to liberate the still-chained prisoners, Cipriano, upon his exit, “frees” his family. By imparting upon them the truths of his realization, he unshackles them from the Centre's obfuscations, which allows them, in turn, to choose action, to quit the Centre’s confines and flee. Soon after Cipriano leaves the Centre, Marta and Marçal will *choose* to leave as well. They will, after collecting Isaura and Found, pile into a car and drive off into the sunset, in search of a different life. What life they find is unclear, as is whether that life is in any way improved. But what Cipriano realizes is that to remain is to remain chained, to be forced to face shadows on a wall, hollow shades devoid of any and all emotion. To remain, he believes, is akin to tying the ropes himself: to choose passivity is to conscript oneself to death, whereas salvation lies in action. There is, moreover, a connection between Plato’s allegory and the novel in the “risk” assumed by the philosopher and by Cipriano. For each, the risk is symbolic self-destruction. The philosopher jeopardizes his life and well-being by returning to the cave and attempting to free the others, and Cipriano endangers himself in the same way. Though he does not *physically* return to the cave from which he just ascended, by attempting to enlighten his family, he risks their detachment. He chances that they will ignore his divulgements, preferring the comforts of ignorance, their seats in the cave. For Cipriano at this moment, the stakes are similar to those of Senhor José: should his family choose not to believe him, Cipriano would be further exiled, banished from the socio-symbolic space where he currently exists. He could, should this

come to pass, symbolically die, would become one of Žižek's "monstrous spectral apparitions" inhabiting that "space between two deaths" (154). But instead, Cipriano's risk pays off. His family does believe him, and they do ride off into the sunset.

Nonetheless, I would argue that his family *choosing* to believe him did not actually have any bearing on Cipriano's successful exit from liminality. As I suggest in the discussion of *All the Names*, there is certainly a parallel between liminality and that "space between two deaths," but that is not the liminal space into which Saramago ushers his characters. As noted in both *Blindness* and *All the Names*, what constitutes the ultimate exit from the liminal space is not only the liminal subject's personal enlightenment and apotheosis, but their becoming a symbolic resurrector, who, *through* their newfound knowledge, reanimates others. This suggests that in Saramago's trilogy, the objective for our liminal subjects - the beast they must conquer to successfully navigate their liminality - must be more than a selfish, solitary act. No, the goal of the individual *cannot* be solely *individual*; it must instead be for the benefit of society (*Blindness*), family (*Cave*), or even just one other person (*Names*). For Saramago, selfishness is anathema, and while the "exits" from the liminal journeys of the protagonists the "trilogy" can be defined by a new sense of self, their ultimate *purposes* are not solely informed by personal achievements. For Saramago, enlightenment cannot just be for the self, it must be for the collective.

Importantly, though, while Saramago's subjects must breathe life into others to achieve their own "exits," it is incumbent upon those being revived to accept that breath. Saramago suffers no sheep; in his novels, there is a clear reciprocity between ignorance and passivity. Perhaps then, the "resurrections" performed by his protagonists are not full liminal evacuations; rather, they are a laying of the keys at the feet of those chained, a guiding to a crossroads at

which these resuscitated others must *choose* whether to remain chained, blind, and dead, or whether to *act*, and become liberated, sighted, and alive.

Conclusion

At many points, the construction of this thesis felt, itself, labyrinthine and speleological. In states of relative darkness, I attempted to navigate the vertiginous analyses of some of society's greatest thinkers, from Turner to Plato to Lacan to Jung to Saramago himself (and many others!). At various moments, I found myself lost, turned around, felt that drop in the pit of my stomach as I belayed into the heretofore unknown depths of anthropology, philosophy, and psychology. It was, in many ways, my own liminal journey. From the first word on the page to the final period, I was steeped in that very same disorientation and ambiguity, and the thesis itself floated for months in that murky space between conception and execution.

But to what end? In, "The Uses and Meanings of Liminality," Bjorn Thomassen writes, "Liminality does not and cannot 'explain.' In liminality there is no certainty concerning the outcome. Liminality is a world of contingency where events and ideas, and 'reality' itself, can be carried in different directions" (1). What Thomassen says is surely true: liminality cannot explain. But can it be explained? In this essay, I attempted to perform a bit of synchronistic analysis: at once, I hoped to examine the liminal state through the lens of Saramago's exquisite "trilogy;" and, by locating (or attempting to) Saramago's protagonists in their liminal journeys, I hoped to not only uncover the *terra firma* of the liminal state, but to define its role in literary analysis. What resulted often felt boundless: endless routes to investigate, countless people to cite, to scrutinize. As such, while I feel I was able to apply the myriad concepts surrounding liminality to Saramago's novels, I acknowledge that this was by no means a comprehensive examination of all that liminality has to offer. No, not only do I feel that the liminal map is still incomplete, but the opportunities to further explore liminality in other literary works are manifold.

Though there are many concepts that I feel are ripe for further analysis, two that I find myself still perseverating on are those of *concentric liminality* and *liminal invisibility*. For concentric liminality, I feel as though I still have not completely distilled the metaphor. I do like the idea of thinking of it as a spiral, yet my mind also seems to drift to forests, to the disorientation of the woods. If the forest and one's navigation through it denotes the overarching liminal journey, then the concentric liminal journeys must be the endless paths one may/must follow to find their way out, paths that inevitably crisscross and intersect – the circles one finds oneself walking in. Perhaps this is a more apt metaphor? Regardless, what I believe is undeniable is that, just as a narrative will often have multiple conflicts (surrounding a central one), so too will the liminal journey have multiple paths, multiple obstacles, multiple beasts.

Regarding *liminal invisibility*, though I feel I sufficiently explicated the connection between liminality Lacan and Žižek's "space between two deaths," I still wonder to what extent being in a liminal state denotes symbolic death. In *All the Names*, I believe that Senhor José sufficiently completes his liminal journey and escapes from his socio-symbolic exile, but what I am left wondering is what would have happened if the Registrar had never intervened? What would have happened if there were no guiding light or thread to follow out? Would Senhor José have remained "invisible," exiled? In Saramago's "involuntary trilogy," the characters do indeed complete their liminal journeys – but what if they had not? What if, as they came upon the crossroads, they decided to simply *be*, to remain at the nexus instead of choosing a path?

The answer lies, I believe, in the discussion of "permanent liminality." As I mention in Chapter 1, there are indeed cases of permanent liminality, but I do not think they can apply to the individual. And perhaps this is where the concept of liminality truly departs from our symbolic existence. For Senhor José, once symbolically exiled, were he to not complete his liminal

journey, I believe he would remain – like those other characters Žižek cites – in that space between deaths. However, I do not believe he would remain in a permanent state of liminality. As I also state in Chapter 1, for the individual, liminality *must end*. There can be no “in-between” if there are no spatial bookends, no temporal before and after. If you remain at the split of the crossroads, then that is where you are. You are in-between nothing; you are simply *there*. And likewise, if you begin a journey, temporally, it does not matter if you reach your destination, whether you make it out of the woods. When your journey truly *ends*, it does not matter *where* you are. You have simply ended one journey and have begun another. What I am ultimately arguing is that a liminal journey must involve both space and time. Perhaps this is why liminality can be “permanent” for something like a political movement, which theoretically could span generations, eras, “epochs.” But for a person, for an individual, nothing is permanent, as (physiological) life always ends eventually.

To this end, there is a final reading of Saramago that might shed light on our discussion of liminality. In his novel *The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis*, Saramago suggests a fascinating commentary on the liminality of entering and exiting existence. He compares dying to pregnancy, suggesting that, just as the gestational period separates conception from birth, there is a period of equal length separating the end of life with our true deaths. We do not fully “expire” when we “die;” rather, there is an anti-gestational period during which we slowly fade out of existence. As such, by delineating this “beginning” and “end,” one cannot ignore the possibility that, for every person, the “overarching liminal journey” is just life itself.

Bibliography

- Aristodemou, Maria. "Death by Representation: In Law, in Literature, and in That Space Between." *Saramago's Philosophical Heritage*, edited by Carlo Sanzani & Kristof K.P. Vanhoutte, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.
- Atkin, Rhian. *Saramago's Labyrinths: A Journey Through Form and Content in Blindness and All the Names*. Manchester University Press, 2012.
- Borelli, Francesca. 2014. "Tutti i personaggi agli ordini della mia volontà." Dialogo con José Saramago. <http://www.leparoleelecose.it/?p=15247i>. Accessed 9 April 2022.
- Butler, Judith. *The Psychic Life of Power*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997.
- Evans, Dylan. *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*. New York: Routledge, 1996.
- "Glossary of Jungian Terms." *Carl Jung Resources*. AROPA, <https://www.carl-jung.net/glossary.html>. Accessed 10 March 2022.
- Gogol, Nikolai V. *The Overcoat*. London: Merlin Press, 1956.
- Hemingway, Ernest. "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place." *Writing (As) Work*. 2nd ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin, 2010.
- Homans, Peter. *Jung in Context: Modernity and the Making of a Psychology*. The University of Chicago Press, 1979.
- Huard, Roger L. *Plato's Political Philosophy: The Cave*. New York: Algora, 2007. Internet resource.
- Kahane, Reuven, et al. *The Origins of Postmodern Youth*. Walter de Gruyter, New York, 1997.
- Machado, Cassiano Elek. "Saramago sai da caverna." *A Folha de São Paulo*, published online at <http://biblioteca.folha.com.br/1/04/2000111101.html>.
- Mark, Joshua. "Labyrinth." *WorldHistoryEncyclopedia*, <https://www.worldhistory.org/Labyrinth/>. Accessed 5 February 2022.

Menditto, Giuseppe. "Some Remarks on a Phenomenological Interpretation of Saramago's *Cave*."

Saramago's Philosophical Heritage, edited by Carlo Sanzani & Kristof K.P. Vanhoutte, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.

Salzani, Carlo and Vanhoutte, Kristoff K.P., editors. *Saramago's Philosophical Heritage*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.

Saramago, José. *All the Names*. Translated by Margaret Jull Costa, Harcourt, Inc., 1999.

Saramago, José. *Blindness*. Kindle Book, Translated by Professor Juan Sager, The Harvill Press, 1997.

Saramago, José. *The Cave*. Translated by Margaret Jull Costa, Harcourt, Inc. 2002.

Saramago, José. *The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1991.

Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*. Edited by G. R. Hibbard, Oxford UP, 2008.

Szakolczai, Árpád. *Reflexive Historical Sociology*. London, Routledge, 2000.

Thomassen, Bjorn. (2009) "The Uses and Meanings of Liminality." *International Political Anthropology*, vol. 2 no. 1, 2009, pp. 5–27.

Turner, Victor "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites de Passage." *Turner liminality*, edited by Wendy Fonarow, 90-99.

Young-Eisendrath, Polly, and Terence Dawson. *The Cambridge Companion to Jung*. Cambridge, Cambridgeshire: Cambridge UP, 1997.

Žižek, Slavoj. *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Center of Political Ontology*. Verso, 1999.