Liminality and Bachelardian Space in Herbert Mason's *Gilgamesh*

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Gilgamesh is often read as an epic poem that relates Gilgamesh's quest for immortality after suffering the loss of a friend in terms of 'a hero's journey.'[1] The objective of Gilgamesh's quest, given that he is a hybrid figure, can be seen in terms of his gaining a sense of humanity. If human nature has a propensity toward egoism, we can see his transformation from unwieldy tyrant of Uruk to fortifier of the city as a way of bringing his humanity into proper balance with his society. At the same time he is in part divine, and if this leads him on an untenable search for immortality, we can see his prioritization of material legacy by the end of the epic as a way of bringing his divinity into balance with his humanity. In terms of a hero's character, Gilgamesh exemplifies a concordance between inner virtue and outward manifestation that much later thinkers, such as Plato and Confucius, elaborate in their own writings—a notion of justice rippling through the heavens, bringing the earth into planetary harmony, down to the organization of the state and physical body. The hero in this sense is not someone who merely embodies virtues; he is a microcosm of the virtues felt throughout the universe. In this sense virtue lives in two spaces—the space the individual body inhabits, and the larger space that belongs to the social order and beyond.

Yet, the tried and true explorations of *Gilgamesh* as an epic poem about a hero's journey—social and historical interest notwithstanding—tend to overshadow the project of examining the poetic language necessary to convey the character's fractured psyche—a project having its own merits in view of the fact that *Gilgamesh* has continued to speak to humanity for over a millennium. Thus, the present paper is less concerned with exploring the changes Gilgamesh's character un-

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[1]The most complete version of the epic was composed during the Middle Babylonian Period (c.1600–c.1155 BC), and concerns the exploits of a historical Gilgamesh, the posthumously deified ruler of the ancient Sumerian city-state of Uruk in the Early Dynastic Period (c.2900–2350 BC.) (Black and Green, 1992). I will assume that the reader is already familiar with the epic and its intriguing history; the main focus of this paper will be its poetic and existential themes.

dergoes that round him out as a hero, but with the prior question of how it is possible for poetic language and image to express such changes given the instability of the subject, and how he is able to survive the tremendous loss of his friend. Arguably, poetic image flexes between particular and universal, and often in the case of elegiac image, individual grief and communal sympathy. The image of Gilgamesh sailing naked across the river of death comes to mind. Elaborating *how* poetic image and word does so in the epic of *Gilgamesh* is the task of this paper.[2] Drawing on the work of Gaston Bachelard, I argue that *Gilgamesh* provides a case study of the way in which poetic image—even when stripped entirely of its particulars, facilitates the transformation between the two 'kinds' of spaces that Bachelard elaborates in *The Poetics of Space*: external, physical space and interior, psychological space. In particular, if we consider Gilgamesh as a liminal figure[3] navigating the loss of his friend Enkidu, we can see some of the ways in which Bachelardian spaces are expressed through poetic word and image in *Gilgamesh*.

Since the intensity of this expression arguably depends on the character of the personal loss involved, the paper will 'begin with a few remarks characterizing the relationship between Gilgamesh and Enkidu. Their relationship can be seen as one founded in Hegelian recognition. It will then 'turn to a prominent anthropological view of what it means for a liminal figure such as Gilgamesh to proceed through a liminal state. Describing these characters in a way that is existential and anthropological at the outset will help ensure that we do not psychologize the poetic lyricism Herbert Mason[4] brings to his rendering of the text, as is important to a Bachelardian interpretation of

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[2] I do not draw a firm distinction between poetic word and image; after all, any image, used in poetry or not, is always somewhat abstract.

[3] I use the terms 'liminal figure' or 'liminal persona equivalently to refer to any being who passes through a 'liminal state,' where 'liminal state' is a term I later define following the anthropological work of Victor Turner. Likewise the term 'liminal passage' is partly defined in terms of 'liminal state,' as it can be envisioned as a sequence of liminal states that the liminal figure passes through. Finally I use the term 'liminal space' to signify the relations that the liminal figure stands in who is part of an as-yet incomplete liminal passage.

[4] This paper relies on Herbert Mason's 'verse narrative' of the epic of Gilgamesh for two reasons: a) It finds Mason's translation to be the most lyrical version of the epic, even if not the most historically accurate, so in this way Mason's version coheres with the paper's overall supposition that lyric poetry as such can mitigate forms of loss, and b) this version of Gilgamesh carries a sense of the translator's own personal loss as he indicates in the afterword of the text.

any text. With those pieces in place, some ways might be considered in which 'Gilgamesh's journey is expressive of Bachelardian spaces.[5]

Much ink has been spilt over importing Hegel into the service of literary analysis, but some of the ideas relevant to this paper have been explained here. One such idea is that the self cannot exist in complete separation from the other; one's sense of consciousness is only understood in relation to other consciousnesses: 'Self-consciousness exists in and for itself inasmuch, and only inasmuch, as it exists in and for itself for another, i.e. inasmuch as it is *acknowledged*' (Hegel 178). Following Charles Taylor's explication of Hegel, two ideas will be useful for our purposes. First, Hegelian recognition is a relational expression. It always means 'recognition as human,' where humanity is perceived as a culturally specific concept. Second, Hegelian dialectic concerns how 'recognition' with the other is the basis for self-identity—in both constitutive and epistemic sense. Discussing 'recognition' in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Taylor describes the process by which self-identity is informed by recognition:

> Here we come to the basic idea…that men seek and need the recognition of their fellows. The subject depends on external reality. If he is to be fully at home this external reality must reflect back to him what he is. In the dialectic of desire, we are faced with foreign objects which we then destroy and incorporate; what is needed is a reality which will remain, and yet will annul its own foreignness, in which the subject can nevertheless find himself. And this he finds in other men in so far as they recognize him as a human being (Anerkennen) (Taylor 152).

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[5]The paper revolves around the assumption that in order to first understand the depth of Gilgamesh's loss we need to understand the depth of his friendship with Enkidu. This relationship is characterized in specifically Hegelian terms for two reasons. First, as indicated already, paper utilizes Bachelard in analyzing Gilgamesh's liminal passage, and any Bachelardian analysis eschews explaining the poetic in terms of the psychological. So to proffer, say, a contemporary theory of friendship with its psychological baggage to characterize the relationship between Gilgamesh and Enkidu would be out of place. Moreover, the notion of 'recognition' that Hegel develops is existential in character and if the existential is a more fundamental explanatory notion than the psychological then this approach is arguably less anachronistic than other alternatives. Secondly, the text of Victor Turner is meant to introduce the notion of liminality in the anthropological sense that arguably applies to cultures like that of the historical Gilgamesh, and—as we will see—provides a tangible model upon which the character of Gilgamesh can become 'invisible' and which aptly complements the development of Bachelardian space in Mason's poetic treatment of the epic.

Recognition, in this sense, as it forms between human beings, is the first step on the way to achieving a 'total state of integrity' in which human beings see themselves as living in and part of a universe that is an expression of themselves. It is important to bear in mind that the dialectic of control is not one that arises out of psychological need; it is rather existential in character, pertaining to the conditions for the formation of a unified self or 'self-consciousness.' In *Gilgamesh,* arguably both shades of recognition manifest: recognition between Gilgamesh and Enkidu as approximating a state of total integrity, and recognition between them as a meaningful construal of Babylonian social norms.'

Abusch and Mandel have written extensively on just how various versions of *Gilgamesh* represent Enkidu's passage into civilization, Shamash' 'socializing' influence, and so on. But suppose we dwell a little while in Enkidu's pre-human state itself. Could it be envisioned as a sort of pre-lapsarian condition where Enkidu (or, at any rate, the animal part of his nature) already experiences a sort of total integrity? Considering how Mason renders Enkidu's enlightened simplicity:

> Enkidu was ignorant of oldness.
> He ran with the animals,
> Drank at their springs,
> Not knowing fear or wisdom.
> He freed them from the traps
> The hunters set. (Mason 16)

Here, a depiction of that 'blissful ignorance' which has always been the bugbear of philosophy can be seen, except that Enkidu's lack of wisdom is wedded inseparably to a form of solidarity with the animals—and this, in spite of his own nature as a hybrid being: 'Enkidu was an animal and a man' (Mason 15). Here, there is no perceived contradiction between 'man' and 'animal'; just as in a state of total integrity there would be no perceived contradiction between the 'Self' and the 'Other.' This is not to suggest an identification between abstract oneness with the universe and total integrity—'animal' and 'man' are still salient differences, even if they are as-yet unperceived for Enkidu.

But that Enkidu can see himself in the animals with which he shares his nature is indicative of his having realized partial integrity. Similarly, his is a nature that matches Gilgamesh's nature *as a hy-*

brid[6]—he is the meteor of Anu that Gilgamesh was unable to lift—but because his own nature obeys a liminal logic that lies beneath his self-consciousness it is not perceived as a 'problem.' It is not perceived at all. Only later, upon gaining a perception of that human part of himself, after the joint battle against the Bull of Heaven wherein he recognizes his own mortality, does he arrive at a terrible wisdom. In one of the more heart-wrenching sections of the text, as Enkidu is dying of his wounds, Mason echoes the initial life-rhythm of the Steppe:

> Everything had life to me, he heard Enkidu murmur,
> The sky, the storm, the earth, water, wandering,
> The moon and its three children, salt, even my hand
> had life… (Mason 48)

As is clear from the even placement of natural expressions in the second line, the difference between Enkidu's state of consciousness prior to the recognition of his humanity and after he has gained it, is a difference of valuation. The world is value-laden, presenting itself to an unformed consciousness in the first instance as animated. This is to some extent a Blakean idea—that the gods (the moon and its children) are stolen out of nature, and part of the poet's task ought to be to restore them to their proper place. So 'we see a desperate attempt in Enkidu's lyric murmuring to recall the gods and earth to being, or 'life.' But does the emphasis on Enkidu's mortality mean that he's been deprived in his short life of experiencing the better parts of humanity?

Having seen some indication of Enkidu's natural state prior to recognition, the paper moves on to underscore another passage that illustrates the kind of recognition Enkidu and Gilgamesh find through one another. The passage in question is the one where they meet in the marketplace (Enkidu goes on Shamash's request) and engage in a fight. We saw from our general discussion of Hegelian recognition that it isn't only a matter of an individual self-consciousness striving for higher levels of awareness (with the aim of total integrity), rather it is a dynamic between two persons who seek recognition as humans through one another, where 'human' is a culturally situated concept.

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[6]That is to say, even if the parts differ that constitute each of their hybrid natures. One could say that the two have a bond in that they can relate 'as other'—Enkidu differing in nature from the rest of the animals, and Gilgamesh differing in nature from the rest of his society. This difference in otherness is unperceived at the outset, but it is arguably still ontologically relevant to the recognition they later experience.

Since strength was seen as a chief virtue in the Babylonian world,[7] as well as most other ancient societies, it is reasonable to suggest that the Hegelian dialectic can sometimes work out on a purely physical plane.[8]

The context for Gilgamesh and Enkidu's meeting at the marketplace is that it is a place where brides and other goods are exchanged, and as King, Gilgamesh has a 'right' to sleep with the 'virgin' brides. So, there is a further layer of recognition at work between Gilgamesh and his own society—which recognizes him partly on account of the fact that no one challenges him regarding the aforesaid right. This is important to bear in mind, in connection with the broad, inter-personal notion of 'recognition.' Since Enkidu exists outside society—he has to be socialized, by degrees—from learning what to wear, what to drink with the shepherds, who may be seen as facilitating this process only because they themselves are closer to the animal world than others—his challenge to Gilgamesh represents a challenge to the meaningfulness of this particular rite, as well as an *alternative source* of recognition for the commoners of Uruk. Much could be made of this relationship, especially with regard to the broader question of how we do ground any social practice, but the paper focuses on the theme of personal loss.

In connection to physically expressed recognition, consider how Mason renders the fight between Gilgamesh and Enkidu. First we can see a hint of recognition from the people that Enkidu is 'stealing' from Gilgamesh: 'Where the bride was to be chosen, Enkidu stood/Blocking his way. Gilgamesh looked at the stranger/ And listened to his people's shouts of praise/For someone other than himself' (Mason, 23). In the description of their battle we see animalistic imagery that is reflective of Enkidu's nature:

> They fell like wolves
> At each other's throats,
> Like bulls bellowing,
> And horses gasping for breath
> That have run all day
> Desperate for rest and water…

[7]Reflect on Gilgamesh's mental tiredness at the beginning of the epic, his petty jealousy, his inability to lift the meteor of Anu, and so on. Strength would be a show of success in these areas—a sign not only of his advancing to be a proper ruler but also a 'proper' human being according to the prevailing social norms.

[8]This occurs elsewhere in epic literature as well, e.g. in the wrestling contests in the Norse epic, *Grettir the Strong*.

> A child screamed at their feet
> That danced the dance of life
> which hovers close to death. (Mason 24)

But as was foretold by the meteor that Gilgamesh would be unable to budge, neither Gilgamesh nor Enkidu emerges as victor: 'And a quiet suddenly fell on them/When Gilgamesh stood still Exhausted' (Mason 24). Mason renders this shared moment of recognition rather explicitly:

> …He turned to Enkidu who leaned
> Against his shoulder and looked into his eyes
> And saw himself in the other, just as Enkidu saw
> Himself in Gilgamesh (Mason 24).

Taken literally, one can imagine a stare-down in which each is poised to make another attempt at a 'take-down' and each sees a tiny image of the other—but this masculine sizing up is not what's at stake. Identity in the form of the other is at stake:

> In the silence of the people they began to laugh
> And clutched each other in their breathless exaltation (Mason 24).

If Hegelian recognition between two individuals is a step on the way to attaining a state of total integrity in which one sees oneself fully expressed in the universe, we can see this moment in which Enkidu and Gilgamesh experience a height of mutual recognition as a momentary glimpse into a state of total integrity. At the level of the image, considered in itself, the moment of total integrity is their shared, joyous laughter as they embrace in 'breathless exaltation.'[9]

So far we've seen how the early parts of Mason's *Gilgamesh* respond to the concept of Hegelian recognition. The rationale for bringing in this ''concept is the existential basis for their friendship; loss of his only friend will mean the loss of a critical source of recognition; and if recognition informs personal identity, it entails a (partial) loss of Gilgamesh himself. Thus, the intensity of Gilgamesh's personal

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[9]Readers of Milton will notice a parallel here to Eve's moment of self-recognition in the mythical stream. Readers of poetry will want to note closely how much control over one's own reflected image is warranted, on pain of defeating the necessary autonomy of the 'other' that is critical to maintaining the dialectic. In my own opinion, Milton overworks the image and it is his authorial designs over a pristine Eve that are 'vain,' not Eve's own apperceptions of herself.

loss, even to the point where in his journey—he is utterly disconsolate at first and attempts to seek immortality in order to bring Enkidu back—his face becomes the face of 'loss itself' (Mason 72). Gilgamesh becomes what Victor Turner, following Arnold Van Gennep's anthropological work, describes as a 'liminal persona.'[10] One could consider a figure to be a 'liminal persona' who proceeds through a liminal state,[11] where understanding of liminal state is included within Turner's line of thought:

> 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…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 (Turner 46).

Following Van Gennep, Turner takes up the notion of a state to define 'rite of passage':

> …all rites of separation are marked by three phases: separation, margin (or limen), and aggregation. The first phase of separation comprises symbolic behaviour signifying the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure or a set of cultural conditions (a 'state'), during the intervening liminal period, the state of the ritual subject (the "passenger") is ambiguous; he passes through a realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state; in the third phase….the ritual subject…is in a stable state once more and, by virtue of this, has rights and obligations of a clearly defined and "structural" type, and is expected to behave in accordance with certain customary norms and ethical standards (Turner 47).

The scope of this paper precludes focusing on every aspect of Gilgamesh in terms of his passage from separation phase to aggregation

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[10]Perhaps it could be argued that on account of his hybrid nature, Gilgamesh is a liminal persona from the beginning. However, it is an idea such that if it were to find true resolution anywhere, it would only be at the level of cosmological-symbolic description.

[11]Here it is reasonable to wonder which is the explanatorily primitive notion: 'state' or 'persona'?

through liminal state,[12] and what these states might mean for him. Rather it will scrutinize Gilgamesh as a liminal figure, one who is caught up in the liminal passage and is in a certain sense invisible:

> The subject of passage ritual is, in the liminal period, structurally, if not physically, "invisible." As members of society, most of us see only what we expect to see, and what we expect to see is what we are conditioned to see when we have learned the definitions and classifications of our culture….A set of essentially religious definitions coexist with these [cultural definitions] which so set out to define the structurally indefinable "transitional-being"…a name and a set of symbols (Turner 47).

Turner proceeds with a discussion of some of the symbols of decay and gestation (broadly, sorts of change) associated with initiation rites. It would take a much more comprehensive study of Sumerian texts to arrive at a conception of what these symbols might be for initiation rites in the historical Gilgamesh's world, but if we pry apart such symbolism from its religious trappings, and in the spirit of Bachelard, root figural liminality in terms of *poetic* 'name and symbols,' we can develop a sense of how the lyric poem grapples with loss.

In *The Poetics of Space* ''Bachelard's phenomenological investigation of the poetic image—which he argues is explanatorily fundamental relative to psychological and psychoanalytic theory—concerns how poetic images culled from various works of poetry can articulate our relation to 'kinds of space'—internal/psychological space and external/physical space. Drawing on Rilke's letters, Bachelard elaborates his idea of space:

> The two kinds of space, intimate space and exterior space, keep encouraging each other, as it were, in their growth. To designate space that has been experienced as affective space, which psychologists do very rightly, does not, however, go to the root of space dreams. The poet goes deeper when he uncovers a poetic space that does not enclose us in affectivity. Indeed, whatever the affectivity that colors a given space, *whether sad or ponderous, once it is poetically expressed, the sadness is diminished, the ponderousness lightened. Poetic space, because it is expressed, assumes values of expansion*….In this activity of poetic spatiality that goes from deep intimacy to infinite ex-

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[12]One might in fact argue that Gilgamesh and Enkidu, in their quest to conquer Humbaba, are ur-instances of neophytes of a Babylonian maturity ritual.

tent, united inidentical expansion, one feels grandeur welling up….And wherever space is a value—there is no greater value than intimacy—it has magnifying properties. Valorized space is a verb, and never, either inside or outside us, is grandeur an "object"…To give an object poetic space is to give it more space than objectivity; or, better still, it is following the expansion of its intimate space' (Bachelard 202, emphasis added).

When Bachelard is 'applied to study Gilgamesh and Enkidu as figures navigating liminal space, it can be seen that the way Mason represents this space steers through these two risks, or misconceptions, about poetic space in general; a) that poetic space 'encloses' the reader in the affective, and b) the space emerges as *yet another object* of consciousness, thereby losing its grandeur and foreclosing upon its oneiric value.

After receiving the blessings of the council of Elders and Ninsun, Gilgamesh and Enkidu depart for the Cedar forest to slay Humbaba. Arguably the two are already in a liminal place, having left the familiar walls of the city as well as their familiar social roles. But it is Gilgamesh's interior voice that reveals the expressive depth of the sacred albeit external space he is entering:

> Her [Ninsun's] words still filled his mind
> As they started in their journey,
> Just as a mother's voice is heard
> Sometimes in a man's mind
> Long past childhood
> Calling his name, calling him from sleep
> Or from some pleasureful moment
> On a foreign street
> When every trace of origin seems left
> And one has almost passed into a land
> That promises a vision or secret
> Of one's life, when one feels almost god enough
> To be free of voices, her voice
> Calls out like a voice from childhood,
> Reminding him he once tossed in dreams. (Mason 32)

Where one might expect Gilgamesh's departure here to be a frightening or even traumatic experience, these aspects of the affective space are lightened by the intimacy of Gilgamesh's mother's voice, which reminds him of his home when 'every trace of origin seems

left.' The carefully tempered emphasis on abstract nouns[13] ensures that the reader does not conjure up a picture that would have the effect of objectifying liminal space, lending to Mason's verse narrative in this section what Bachelard in characterizing ancestral forests has called 'the immediate immensity of depth' (Bachelard 186). Speaking of the infelicity of 'psychological transcendents' as a description of how ancestral forest spaces open up: 'It would be difficult to express better that here the functions of description—psychological as well as objective—are ineffective. One feels that there is *something else* to be expressed besides what is offered for objective expression. What should be expressed is hidden grandeur, depth' (Bachelard 186).

Relating Bachelard's concept of the ancestral forest back to Turner's conceptualization of the liminal, the voice through the Cedar forest is a way to emphasize the physical invisibility of the liminal figure. The king isolated in his hut as he undergoes an initiation rite is made 'invisible' to his subjects, stripped of his brightly colored status. In Gilgamesh it is the depth of memory, carried through a mother's voice, that assumes the expansion of poetic space—those deepest origins of ourselves which, like the sharp word of a god rebuking us in a dream, humble us, disclosing to ourselves our vulnerabilities, as opposed to enclosing us affectively around them. The part-God tyrant Gilgamesh was once only a child in Ninsun's arms. His mother's voice, internalized and yet promising to disrupt his pretense in order to express his immortality and disturb the sacred order (Humbaba had been appointed by the gods as protectorate of the Cedar Forest), is no mere sacrum—such as a mask or monstrous costume whose exaggerated features, according to Turner's view, serve the liminal figure as a form of 'primitive abstraction' that enforce some particular social norms (Turner 52). Rather, it is part of Gilgamesh's identity as a liminal figure, much as the notes of a melody constitute the melody even if the human tendency is inevitably to lose the thread, or the origin of one's narrative consciousness, especially during those glimpses, as Bachelard describes it, 'When the dialectic of the I and the non-I grow more flexible, I feel that fields and meadows are with me, in the with-me, with-us' (Bachelard 188).[14]

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[13]That is, I would emphasize the lack of proper nouns (which fix a concrete time and place) as opposed to the idea that many of the nouns used are archetypal.
[14]One might explore the analogy between immense and yet intimate spaces and the melody further. Musicians often speak of melodic line as the horizontal dimension of music while harmony is the vertical dimension. Without the former music is soulless, without the latter it is formless, calling out for a renewed complexity that feels as if it desires externality. Bachelard writes in prayer-mode: 'May all matter be given its individual place, all sub-stances their ex-stance. And may all matter achieve con-

The depth of Gilgamesh's own intimate immensity as a liminal figure is not only depicted by means of the mother-voice. When Gilgamesh and Enkidu reach the sacred cedars of the forest we see some of the ways that the liminal logic of 'neither this nor that' (or perhaps, 'both this and that') is revealed:[15] 'They stood in awe at the foot/Of the green mountain. Pleasure/Seemed to grow from fear for Gilgamesh/…Some called the forest, "Hell," and others "Paradise"…But night was falling quickly/And they had no time to call it names,/Except perhaps "The Dark"...' (Mason 35). One can reject any form of essentialism about names here and still appreciate the point that the two friends and neophytes find themselves overlooking that indefinable state where 'normal' valuations cease to apply. Just as in their fight in the marketplace they briefly broke through that continuum of value from life to death—dancing in the face of it—here, in a state of exalted fear, the two hybrids momentarily step outside the spectrum between 'Hell' and 'Paradise'—whatever these two convenient designations might mean. Lost are the valuations that conveniently apply to space when sacred space is meant; likewise, the binary logic that appears to be seen in space (present as an object before consciousness) fades into a landscape consumed by dusk.

So far we've seen how Mason has used sonic memory and liminal logic to depict the sort of inner poetic space which Bachelard in his chapter on 'intimate immensities' describes in a phenomenological vein. As mentioned before, we can think of this in terms of a transformation between two kinds of space—internal and external—

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quest of its space, its power of *expansion over and beyond the surfaces by which a geometrician would like to define it*' (Bachelard, 202–203, my italics). Conceptualizing briefly harmony's vertical dimension as a force external to melodic line, and yet dependent on melodic line, analogous to those social-structural characteristic that from an anthropological point of view help to constitute the liminal figure's 'success' conditions for aggregation even while depending on him to complete the passage, one can see that Bachelard's point against the reductive geometric conception of space—which overlooks just how it can be driven inward—generalizes as a point against any given theory's claim to explanatory priority in construing liminal spaces; including Bachelard's own approach which views logos as a structural-organizing principle that has a right to explanatory priority (at least, as a source of value) over psychological theories.

[15]See Turner, p.49 for further discussion of the liminal logic of processes of death and growth. There is also a general point to be made that the language Mason uses in the Cedar forest episode ceases to adhere to classical logic partly to call our attention to the fact that the descriptive function of language breaks down in application to a liminal space or transcendent object; the koans familiar to Zen Buddhism gear the neophyte to experiencing a moment of realization that offers insight into a non-dual world, while here the aim of contradictory language seems more to highlight the destabilization of the neophyte's consciousness during his passage to aggregation.

which can occur given the right sort of poetic catalyst. The scenes we focused on from *Gilgamesh*, roughly speaking, show the magnification between the Cedar forest and the mother-voice of childhood, and the deep-relation between them.

In conclusion, the paper focusses on some passages that relate specifically to Mason's treatment of Gilgamesh's liminality as a grief-torn figure who has lost his friend—his only source of recognition. The presence of Ninsun's voice, as the two embark on their journey to the Cedar forest, foregrounds Gilgamesh's continuous repetitions of the name 'Enkidu' after Enkidu has succumbed to mortal wounds, which, in turn, serves to propel Gilgamesh forward through his states of grief, displaying Bachelard's sense of intimate immensity.

Another explication of Bachelard presents another way of conceiving of space, where the emphasis is on how expressive space allows one to escape the affective. Focusing on an example of the expansion of the intimate space of a tree, Bachelard considers the remarks of Joë Bousquet:

> Space is nowhere. Space is inside it like honey in a hive. In the realm of images, honey in a hive does not conform to the elementary dialectics of contained and container. Metaphorical honey will not be shut up, and here, in the intimate space of a tree, honey is anything but a form of marrow. It is the "honey of the tree" that will give perfume to the flower. It is also the inner sun of the tree. And the dreamer who dreams of honey knows that it is a force that concentrates and radiates, but turns. If the interior space of a tree is a form of honey, it gives the tree "expansion of infinite things" (Bachelard 202).

When Bachelard is discussing the 'dialectics of contained and container' the point here is not merely that the honey threatens to spill out, that the space cannot be contained, it's that the honey/space is at the nexus of innumerably many other relations between the trees, the flowers, the sun, our perceptions of each of these, and so on. In the end, there is no delimiting by means of some further set or relations that we for whatever provisional reasons are apt to describe as 'basic.' Anyone who has experienced personal loss understands the sense in which the loved one, though no longer living, continues to stand in that nexus of memory, personal relations, affective and volitional dispositions, and so constitute a 'private' space of grief. You watch a sunrise and remember a remark from the loved one; you walk into the woods

and see part of the trail bending into the undergrowth that would have presented itself as a perceptual affordance, or perhaps an object of curiosity, if the loved one 'were there.' There is, of course, a very real sense in which that person's past 'person-stage' continues to exist at that time.

In Mason's verse narrative, we can see how Enkidu's memory continually spills out of Gilgamesh's psyche in the form of the name 'Enkidu' which for Gilgamesh is personified by his friend's native attributes:

> Gilgamesh wept bitterly for his friend.
> He felt himself now singled out for loss
> Apart from everyone else. The word *Enkidu*
> Roamed through every thought
> Like a hungry animal through empty lairs
> In search of food. The only nourishment
> He knew was grief, endless in its source
> Yet never ending hunger. (Mason 53)

In this episode of grief, the scene immediately following Enkidu's death, we see Gilgamesh's state of loss as a name whose immensity is such as for us to be invited to 'roam' within it. The idea of grief as a self-perpetuating state is also conveyed by its description as a 'hungry animal' that can only ever feed on itself. Of course, one envisions the presence of Enkidu himself, but as no more than a phantom, occasioned by each token of the word 'Enkidu,' with the irony that this Enkidu is more assertive and domineering over Gilgamesh' thoughts than the Enkidu that quickly lost to Gilgamesh the argument to go into the Cedar forest (Mason 27).

Haunted by the name, Gilgamesh is disconsolate and goes to seek out immortality, not for his own sake, but for the possibility of bringing back Enkidu. As he proceeds on his journey on the Road of the Sun, it is Enkidu's name embedded in Gilgamesh's consciousness that helps to propel him forward, serving as a companion in his loneliness: 'Without a light to guide him,/Ascending or descending,/He could not be sure,/Going on with only/The companionship of grief/In which he felt Enkidu at his side./He said his name: Enkidu, Enkidu,/To quiet his fear/Through the darkness....He spoke Enkidu's name aloud/As if explaining to the valley/Why he was there, wishing his friend/Could see the same horizon...' (Mason 59-60). The contrast between the depth of sonic grief experienced in the first person and its third-person observation is reflected in Mason's description of Gil-

gamesh's echolalia as '…private mumbling [that] made both time and distance/pass...' and Siduri's conflation of Gilgamesh's grief as self-love and rage in his desire to find the boatman Urshanabi, as if Gilgamesh were seeking after his own immortality (Mason 62-66).

We often take for granted language that enables us to communicate ideas and objects distant in time and space; names call up the designated objects, renewing their presence in consciousness. Each person leaves traces of their existence on others, and Enkidu's existence for Gilgamesh is ever-renewed by the incessant incantations and his loss more keenly felt when 'Enkidu' is an empty sound for others. Much as we saw Gilgamesh become 'invisible' in the sense described by Turner's 'liminal persona,' the name 'Enkidu' is presented as if inaudible, stripped of its meaning for others. When Gilgamesh has returned to Uruk there is a scene exemplifying this idea:

> He entered the city and asked a blind man
> If he had ever heard the name Enkidu,
> And the old man shrugged and shook his head,
> Then turned away,
> As if to say it is impossible
> To keep the names of friends we have lost.
>
> Gilgamesh said nothing more
> To force his sorrow on another. (Mason 91-92)

Dwelling on Gilgamesh' (failed) quest for immortality would be besides the point here. Perhaps instead we can close with an analogy that underscores Bachelard's ideas about intimate immensity. The individual Enkidu falls under many different descriptions, many of which, on account of their generality (friend, co-slayer of Humbaba, native of the Steppe, etc.) fail to carry the resonance of the name which encompasses all of these descriptions and is yet endowed with a singularity as expressed in lamentation. As Lyn Hejinian puts it in her summary rejection of closure: '...we can only know things and indeed only perceive them as things, distinct from one another, by virtue of their differences, and hence on the basis of their details' (Hejinian, 'Continuing Against Closure'). Hejinian suggests that true subjectivity offers consciousness a kind of polis, or site in which the self can see itself as one object among many. Recalling how Bachelard's related concern is to preserve space as something that is not experienced as an object, the sonic space afforded by the repetitious poetic employment of the name Gilgamesh prevents a private space of grief from becom-

ing a public container in which a friend's loss is robbed of its particularity and incommensurable value. Yet, paradoxically, the name is also the basis of detail in terms of which we can come to have a sense of Gilgamesh's grief, perhaps alleviating our own grief by making it communal. Loss, which makes one in a certain sense invisible, implies all the more a need to be heard; and it is the lyric poem that can satisfy this need through the expansion of Bachelardian space. Generally, the mapping of formal poetic spaces of loss, and arguably the formal poetic spaces of love, as evinced by the use of names—the beginnings of depth—in these spaces, may testify to the complexity of the corresponding emotional states and help us to better recognize Bachelard's insistence that we ought not reductively psychologize that which makes us human.

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