Home About Issues Musings Reviews Submissions Contact

The Labyrinth of Memory: Iphigeneia, Simonides, and Classical Models of Architecture as Mind in Chris Nolan's Inception (2010)^[1]

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Abstract:

Chris Nolan's 2010 film Inception uses architecture as a language whereby to comment upon the relationship of the protagonist, Dom Cobb, with his deceased wife, Mal. This paper argues that three classical models - Homer's tomb of Myrhine described in the Iliad, Iphigeneia's dream of the collapse of the house of Agamemnon in Euripides's Iphigeneia Among the Taurians, and Simonides' Memory Palace mnemonic technique - manifest parallel uses of architecture as a metaphor for mind.

The film identifies each of its main characters - Dom, Mal, and Ariadne - with different architectures and with different modes of cognition. The Mal who haunts Dom's dreams is explicitly identified as a force in his subconscious, and Nolan associates her with amorphous architectures and spaces - foremost with the formless viscosity of water. Dom himself is her antithesis, identified with linear architectures like palaces and straight-line mazes. Ariadne is identified with circular mazes and proves capable of mediating between Dom

and his memories of his deceased wife in order to help him successfully to complete his greatest heist. This paper agues that Inception's implied tripartite division of the self - with Dom representing the analytical conscious mind, Ariadne the intuitive mind, and Mal the dangerous depths of the subconscious - draws upon pop-Jungian formulations of the relation between conscious and subconscious modes of cognition in order to critique a set of gender norms often associated with male protagonists in the genre of the hardboiled detective story. Inception is anticipated in subverting a dominant narrative of male heroes rescuing damaged female beloveds by the Classical models listed above; an examination of each of these passages helps to illuminate Nolan's own interrogation of the "damaged beloved" narrative in ways which can be fruitfully used by secondary and college-level teachers in class discussion and writing assignments to promote empathy and more healthy relationships among their students.

Introduction

Chris Nolan's 2010 film Inception addresses the psychology of love, loss, and grief in a cleverly-contrived science fiction tale which is likely to resonate sympathetically with audiences who have lost people whom they have loved, especially to psychological maladies such as substance abuse or mental illness. At the heart of the film lies a relationship between two souls deeply in love, and the question of what such a relationship means to the sole surviving partner (Dom Cobb, played by Leonardo DiCaprio) after his wife (Mal, played by Marion Cotillard) has committed suicide. This theme in Inception offers numerous possibilities for instructors at a secondary or university level to engage students in dialogue about issues relevant to many of their lives. At the same time, the film situates such personal issues within a framework of complex constructs relating to the Western tradition of the philosophy of mind, memory, and the subconscious.

In Inception, Nolan identifies the architectures of the rectilinear palace or labyrinth, the circular maze, and the amorphous mutability of water as metaphors, respectively, for the conscious, intuitive, and subconscious mind. Nolan's use of this metaphorical mental architecture is broadly Jungian, especially with respect to the two female leads of the film: Ariadne's ability to thread psychological labyrinths for Dom recalls the Jungian anima and Mai's function as part of Dom's subconscious, which undermines his conscious enterprises, resembles Jung's shadow and mother archetypes. This pop-Jungian architecture of the mind permits Nolan to critique, in the figure of Dom, the literary and cinematic icon of the hard-nosed, rational, practical male hero which pervades the literary tradition from Jane Eyre to The Big Easy. Through Dom's increasingly ineffectual and self-defeating attempts to negotiate dream architecture, Nolan reveals his hard-boiled hero's supposedly level-headed problem-solving abilities to be quixotic, ineffectual, and incomplete hermeneutics for the world. By underscoring Dom's need for other modes of interpreting the world, like Ariadne's, Inception highlights the inadequacies of a particular model of male detective-genre heroism and of the male-focalized, Romantic narrative plot pattern of the damaged female beloved, whose loss torments a guilt-ridden male husband or lover who tried but failed to save her.^[2]

Nolan's critique of the damaged-beloved narrative emerges organically from Ariadne's attempts to rescue Dom. As Ariadne grows into her anima-like mythological role as threader of labyrinths to rescue Dom's psyche from dissolution, an alternative narrative of Mai's self-destruction emerges - one which differs significantly from that related by Dom. In this narrative, it is not Mal's putative instability but Dom's invasions of his wife's internal architectures (embodied in her childhood home in the subconscious realm of Limbo) and his insistence on linear rationality, which have brought about both their ruin.^[3] Rather than a traditional one-sided narrative like Jane Eyre, in which the new love interest Jane becomes a surrogate ingénue to replace the lost spouse (in this case, Mal) and save her husband Mr. Rochester (in this case, Dom) from himself and from his guilt, Inception's shifting subjectivity and hermeneutic quagmire force viewers to question the heroism and epistemological certitude of the literary archetype of the Mr. Rochesters and Doms of the world.

Three Greco-Roman literary works employing the metaphor of mind-as-architecture attach gender to architectural spaces in a fashion similar to that found in Inception: the tomb of Myrhine in the Iliad, Iphigeneia's dream of the collapse of the house of Agamemnon in the Iphigeneia Among the Taurians, and Simonides' Memory Palace. The first two of these loci classici for architecture as mind in Euro-American iconography anticipate Inception's critique of a particular kind of myopic male discourse and contain a potentially-subversive woman's perspective. More broadly, these classical narratives of architecture of mind highlight alternatives to Dom's rectilinear rationality, which force their way to the forefront of Inception: Myrhine's tomb is an architecture which lacks but begs for a narrative, like Mal; the baptism of Orestes's linear pillar in water in Iphigeneia Among the Taurians, at first appears to portend death but in reality portends salvation; the Memory Palace mnemonic technique used by orators highlights the shortcomings of Dom's method of dream architecture, inasmuch as what Dom practices is not the design of dreams at all, but rather the rigid aggregation of memories.

Recent years have seen an increasing concern in popular media about unhealthy attachment styles, increasingly sociopathic behavior in relationships, and a general digital malaise and lack of civility resulting from excessive use of social media among high school and college aged students.^[4] The shifting focalization seen in *Inception* and in these classical exemplars can be fruitfully employed in the classroom to combat this moral deficit-to encourage students to imagine the narratives and ways of thinking which inform their peers' behavior, to question assumptions about reality and how others' minds work, and to practice empathy.

I. The Psychology of Architecture in Inception

The premise of the film is that the protagonist, Dom Cobb (Leonardo DiCaprio), and his wife, Mal (Marion Cotillard), are dream architects, capable of designing and manipulating architectural spaces in dreams within their own and others' minds. When Mal comes to prefer the world of dreams and the subconscious to that of reality, Dom embarks upon a plan of action, which ultimately results in her suicide. He tries to convince Mal that the city of dreams which they have created together is not real by setting spinning the top which Mal uses as a "totem"—a sort of diagnostic device which all dream architects carry to ensure that they can distinguish waking from dreams. Mal's top alerts her to whether or not she is awake by spinning without toppling in dreams but by following the normal rules of physics in the real world.^[2] When Dom sets her top spinning within the world of dreams, thereby suggesting that the dream world is not real, Mal becomes convinced not only that the dream city which she has constructed is unreal, but that the "real" world is also a dream. This delusion prompts her to kill herself in the hopes of awakening to a more real world. After her death, the memory of her, lodged Eurydice-like in the depths of Dom's subconscious, continues to roam unchecked through the corridors of his memory, with disastrous results for his subsequent attempts to use his skills to earn money by stealing information from unsuspecting marks' minds. [3]

A. Jungian Labyrinths in Inception: Labyrinths as Mental Illness and as Therapy

Inception is set largely within the labyrinths of characters' minds: linear labyrinths, like Dom's Japanese Palace, circular labyrinths, like the circular maze which Ariadne draws for Dom as a test of her abilities to stump him, and indeterminate spaces of dissolution, like the watery labyrinth of Limbo. Moreover, certain details of the film-Mal's mental illness and suicide, as well as Stephen Miles's (played by Michael Caine) status as an academic mentor to Dom and to Ariadne-implicitly associate these mental mazes with scientific, psychiatric modes of discourse. In particular, Nolan's choice to frame psychological issues in terms of the architectural metaphor of a labyrinth suggests Carl Jung as an important touchstone for this psychiatric discourse: in an oft-cited passage, Jung famously compares the treatment of a schizophrenic patient to threading a labyrinth, observing, "the symptoms of the case form the Ariadne thread to guide us through the labyrinth of symbolistic parallels."[4]

B. Dom as Patient: The Jungian Conscious Agent

As an analytically-minded architect, Dom himself corresponds broadly to Jung's formulation of the conscious mind: Dom's primary motive, like that of the patient in the above quotation by Jung, is to navigate the labyrinth of his own subconscious in order to be rid of his memory's ghost of Mal, who haunts him as relentlessly as the Furies haunted Orestes.^[5] Whenever Dom designs a tidy, rectilinear structure in a dream to use in perpetrating a heist, Mal appears and shatters his equanimity by literally pulling Dom's dream construction down around his ears.

C. Ariadne as Therapist: The Jungian Anima

If he is to escape his Orestes-like madness, Dom requires the aid of someone capable of negotiating the spaces of the mind in a fashion different from his. Just as in Jung's writings the mythological figure of Ariadne serves as a metaphor for the therapist, Dom's new assistant, significantly named Ariadne, will fulfill an analogously therapeutic function for him vis-à-vis the architecture of the mind, designing mental labyrinths specifically tailored to thwart unwelcome intrusions by Mal into Dom's dream palaces. Like Dom, Ariadne is adept at mazes, but, unlike the rectilinearly minded Dom^[6] Ariadne, when challenged to design a maze which can stump her new employer, succeeds only when she finally creates a circular, rather than a linear, maze. Likewise, as is the case for Jung's anima, the feminine gender of the Ariadne of Inception is crucial to her role: she is a foil and competitor to Mal in Dom's life, and her architectural designs are organic and nonlinear like the water with which the other major female character of the film is associated.

D. Mal as Junaian Mother and Shadow Archetunes

At least initially appearing to be the source of Dom's psychological imbalance, Mal resembles both the Jungian mother figure and the shadow. Jung defines the shadow in terms which closely resemble Mal's role in the film: "The shadow personifies everything that the subject refuses to acknowledge about himself yet is always thrusting itself upon him directly or indirectly."^[7] Compare Ariadne's statement, "You think you can just build a prison of memories to lock her in? You think that's going to contain her?" (Nolan 111).^[8] Mal's character, like the Jungian shadow, represents part of the patient's (i.e., Dom's) own psyche which has been unhealthily partitioned off within the subject's mental architecture.

Jung's shadow shares with the mother archetype the trait of thwarting the designs of the conscious mind. According to the popular writings of Jungian acolyte Joseph L. Henderson, the mother archetype appears in the form of the Minotaur at the heart of the labyrinth in the Greek myth Theseus and Ariadne. The mother archetype is thus especially apposite to a tale like Inception's, in which a memory of a dead wife lurks at the heart of mental labyrinths, interfering with the hero's ability to find his way, until he receives help from a figure named Ariadne. Henderson also substantiates the equation of the anima figure with Cretan Ariadne, helping to account for Ellen Page's Ariadne and her function in Inception:

The Minotaur... perhaps symbolized unhealthy decadence of matriarchal Crete. (In all cultures, the labyrinth has the meaning of an entangling and confusing representation of the world of matriarchal consciousness; it can be traversed only by those who are ready for a special initiation into the mysterious world of the collective unconscious.) Having overcome this danger, Theseus rescued Ariadne, a maiden in distress. This rescue symbolizes the liberation of the anima figure from the devouring aspect of the mother image. Not until this is accomplished can a man achieve his first true capacity for relatedness to women.^[9]

In her anima-like role in Inception, the youthful Ariadne thus functions as an alter-ego and foil to the older shadow and mother figure of Marion Cotillard's Mal.^[10]

E. Limbo as Labyrinth: Water Eroding Architecture as Symbol of the Perils of the Subconscious Throughout Dom's and Ariadne's attempts to manipulate the mind of business mogul Fischer, Mal repeatedly appears and tries to lure the pair into Limbo, which, like Dante's zone of the underworld from which Nolan drew the name, is an architectural labyrinth of sorts-or, in Nolan's case, anti-architectural space. The point of contact between Limbo and the labyrinth is that both Dom and Mal at various points become lost or trapped in it.

Yet it is a strange sort of labyrinth. Arthur (Joseph Gordon-Levitt) explains that Limbo is characterized by the absence of deliberate human ordering: "Unconstructed dream space... Raw, infinite subconscious. Nothing there but what was left behind by anyone on the team who's been trapped there before. On this team... just Cobb" (Nolan 129).

Volume 1, Issue 1: **Classics and Contemporary Popular** Culture

Table of Contents Editorial

Q Search...

Moving Popular Culture Studies Scholarship into the Future Lynnea Chapman King and

Anna CohenMiller **Guest Editorial**

"καλὸν ἀνθρωπίνου βίου κάτοπτρον": Popular Culture as a Pedagogical Lens on Greco-Roman Antiquity

Kirsten Day and Benjamin Haller **Part I: Epic Reconsiderations** Wounds That Will Not Heal: Heroism and Innocence in Shane and the Iliad

Carl A. Rubino O Homer, Where Art Thou?: Teaching the

Iliad and the Odyssey through Popular Culture Mallory Young

The Odyssey and its Odyssey in Contemporary Texts: Re-visions in Star Trek, The Time Traveler's Wife, and The Penelopiad

Mary Economou Bailey Green Part II: Reception and Re-

narrations

Theseus Loses his Way: Viktor Pelevin's Helmet of Horror and the Old Labyrinth for the New World

300 and Fellini-Satyricon: Film Theory in the Tertiary Classroom

Leanne Glass **Part III: Gender in Cinematic**

Narratives The Labyrinth of Memory: Iphigeneia, Simonides, and Classical Models of Architecture as Mind in Chris Nolan's Inception (2010)

Benjamin Haller

Alison Traweek

Ovid and Mel Gibson: Power, Vulnerability, and What Women Want Geoff Bakewell

Experiments in Love: Longus' Daphnis and Chloe and Henry de Vere

Stacpoole's The Blue Lagoon Kirsten Day

Part IV: Reviews

Graphic Novel Review — The Adventures of Johnny Bunko: The Last Career Guide You'll Ever Need Robert G. Weiner

Video Game Review — Final Fantasy XIV: Level Up Forever Brian Cowlishaw

By design or by happy coincidence, Dom's name recalls the Greek root demo meaning "to build" from which the Greek and Roman word for house (domos) ultimately derives. Dom's activity in the film, too, is characterized by his construction and manipulation of built and structured architectural spaces. The eroding watery spaces of Limbo thus position water as Dom's nemesis. The Japanese mansion in which the film opens, for example, has been designed by Dom as a means to ensnare Saito (played by Ken Watanabe) into revealing information, and, as Dom's name would suggest, the space is ornate, finely crafted, organized, and linear. When the plot begins to unravel, water washes the entire palace away, acting out his failure in visual architectural terms. For an individual such as Dom, the unreconstructed nature of the subconscious Limbo is especially antithetical and threatening.

As a force of the subconscious which ruins Dom's plans, water is identified with the destructive power of his memory-ghost of Mal from the outset. In the opening scenes, set in the Japanese palace adverted to in the previous paragraph, the screen directions for Mal's introductory shot read, "Cobb and Arthur steady themselves against the wooden rail. Several TILES and pieces of MASONRY fall. Below them a BLACK SEA churns.... Seconds later, Arthur asks, "What's she doing here, Cobb?" and the camera pans to Mal (Nolan 28). When Mal intrudes, Minotaur-like, into the linear labyrinth of Dom's dream, only to unravel Dom's dream plot by shooting Arthur in the leg, water floods the entire palace (Nolan 28-44).

Yet, Mal is just one manifestation of the subconscious which threatens Dom, and for all characters in the film, water represents the subconscious with all its perilous and salvific potential. Just as the dream "ghost" of Mal trapped in Dom's subconscious repeatedly thwarts Dom's plans, so, too, water constantly undermines Dom's dream constructions. When Mal and Dom build their dream city in Limbo, the ocean laps constantly and corrosively at its edges (Nolan 192-93). Nevertheless, at the same time, water also appropriates from its rich tradition of Christian iconography a role as symbol of redemption. As the source of the final "kick," which awakens Ariadne and Dom (they believe) from the Fischer dream heist after Dom's rejection of Mal's imago (Nolan 214-15),^[11] and as the element from which Dom is "reborn" at the beginning of the film, water represents at least potentially a baptism for Dom from his obsession with his dead wife.

II. Classical Architectural Metaphors of Mind

The discussion above hints that the architecture of Nolan's dream world participates in a long tradition of gendering architecture: "feminine" architecture is identified with suppressed, subconscious, or forgotten discourses, and "masculine" architecture with a dominant voice of strident rationality and rhetorical deliberation whose inability to access these suppressed discourses proves its fatal weakness.

Homer's tomb of Myrhine, Euripides' tragedy Iphigeneia Among the Taurians (ca. 414-411 BCE), and the rhetorical mnemonic device of Simonides' Memory Palace each provide a Classical antecedent for this gendering of space. These classical antecedents establish the architectural syntax deployed and subverted by Nolan in the film, and help to provide insight into the shortcomings of Dom's epistemological and psychological underpinnings. A. Homer: Funerary Architectural, the Architecture of Memory, and Male Subjectivity

Homer's description of the tomb of Myrhine in the *Iliad* is an instance of gendered architecture which identifies the subconscious and forgetfulness with the feminine, and memory and prospective deliberation with the masculine The special relevance of this passage to Inception lies in the manner in which it illustrates how architecture, embedded within a predominantly androcentric discourse, can offer a potentially-subversive female counternarrative by calling attention to what the male-oriented narrative has omitted.

For the male heroes in the Iliad, funerary architecture is an anchor to which individuals' identities can be tied as a bulwark against the oblivion and the dissolution of self which death in battle threatens. Thus, male graves often serve as foci for kleos (Grethlein 30-31): the tomb which Hector envisions the Achaeans building for Alexandros in Iliad 2 will serve as a definitive encapsulation not only of the decedent's fame but of Hector's (Iliad 7.84-91), and Agamemnon and Achilles envision a similar function for tombs of warriors slain at Troy at Odyssey 24.32-84 (Grethlein 29-32).

Male heroes thus imagine architecture anchoring their own memory within the world of the living. For women, however, the situation is very different. Perhaps because they are denied access to the martial kleos (fame) that motivates male warriors, and because their public character is in some ways inversely proportional to the loudness of their repute, [12] it is the ephemerality of memory which is especially apparent in their funerary architecture. A case in point is the hermeneutic indeterminacy, which attaches to the grave of the woman, Myrhine, in Iliad 2: no longer herself able to recount her deeds and lacking an inscription, the long-dead Myrhine is as ghostly, numinous, and obliquely-perceived a figure as Mal in Inception. As is the case for Mal, too, all impressions of Myrhine are mediated through the inadequate lens of male subjects.

While Dom is able to see and interact with Mal within the palaces he and Ariadne build in dreams, his Aristotelian moment of recognition occurs when he must acknowledge that the phantom of Mal that haunts his dreams is nothing other than his own subconscious representation of his wife, and is not in any real sense her: "I wish you were [real]. But I couldn't make you real. I'm not capable of imagining you in all your complexity and... perfection. As you really were. You're the best I can do. And you're not real" (Nolan 204). Dom is Dom's true problem, and the dead Mal is now voiceless and unknowable. Similarly, Myrhine is a male construct, whose true story and inner workings are opaque. Indeed, just as Mal survives only as a shadowy reflection in the sub-basements of Dom's memory, so too the tomb of Myrhine, in Iliad 2, is in fact remembered to be Myrhine's only by the gods (mortals now call it a "place of brambles"). [13] Myrhine herself has become a blank canvas upon which others may project their fantasies, memories, and desires.[14]

The grave of Myrhine, with its associations with forgetfulness, thus offers an instructive parallel to Mal's situation "buried" at the bottom of the elevator shaft of Dom's subconscious.^[15] Other ancient models suggest how this submerged and repressed discourse of the feminine can play an Ariadne-like role in saving a linear-minded male protagonist resembling Dom. The house of Agamemnon in Iphigeneia's dream in Euripides' Iphigeneia Among the Taurians offers rectilinear architecture explicitly identified with the mad and soon-to-be-sacrificed male protagonist Orestes. In this respect, Orestes recalls Dom in Inception. Iphigeneia's stratagem to rescue herself and Orestes from sacrifice, on the other hand, echoes the curved, watery, and labyrinthine spaces associated with Mal and Ariadne in Inception.

B. Iphigeneia Among the Taurians, Domestic Architecture, and Feminine Subjectivity

The grave of Myrhine, with its associations with forgetfulness, thus offers an instructive parallel to Mal's situation "buried" at the bottom of the elevator shaft of Dom's subconscious.^[15] Other ancient models suggest how this submerged and repressed discourse of the feminine can play an Ariadne-like role in saving a linear-minded male protagonist resembling Dom. The house of Agamemnon in Iphigeneia's dream in Euripides' Iphigeneia Among the Taurians offers rectilinear architecture explicitly identified with the mad and soon-to-be-sacrificed protagonist Orestes, curved and watery spaces identified with the once-sacrificed, now miraculously not-dead Iphigeneia, and intuitive, sinuous forms of cognition, on the part of the latter coming to the rescue, to save them both from certain death through immersion in water.

Iphigeneia is the daughter of Agamemnon, the leader of the Greeks at Troy. In this tragedy, rather than being sacrificed to Artemis, as in the canonical version of her myth, Iphigeneia has been secreted away to the shores of the Black Sea by Artemis. Here, she must sacrifice all Greeks to a barbarian version of the very goddess who has rescued her. At the start of the tragedy, her brother Orestes and his side-kick Pylades have arrived, seeking her at the behest of the oracle of Delphi, hoping to cure Orestes of the madness brought on by the Furies after his divinely-sanctioned murder of the mother who killed his father. After nearly sacrificing her brother without recognizing him, Iphigeneia escapes captivity by telling her captors that both the impure Orestes and the statue of Artemis, which he has touched, must be baptized in the sea. Through this symbolic death by water, Orestes escapes with his sister and returns to Greece.

Architecture is a prominent image in the dream of the collapse of the palace of Agamemnon with which Euripides begins the tragedy. Trieschnigg has pointed out the many difficulties involved in determining the precise signification of Iphigeneia's dream, but, if one sets aside the question of how accurately the dream foretells the actual development of the action of the tragedy, its overall import is clear. At the start of the tragedy, Iphigeneia describes a dream which she believes relates the death of her brother Orestes, but which in fact presages his imminent arrival as a Greek potential sacrifice on her shore.

In this dream, an earthquake has destroyed her Greek home in Argos and only a pillar with blond hair-her longlost Orestes-survives:

I thought that, in sleep, I left this land and dwelt in Argos, and slept in the midst of the young women; and that the back of the earth was shaken with a jolt, and that I fled and stood outside looking up at the frieze of the palace falling, and the whole house in ruins was leveled to the floor from the heights of the palace.... And that only one pillar was left standing, or so it seemed to me, from my ancestral home. From its capital there hung blond locks, and it took on the voice of a man, and I employing this stranger-slaughtering art I here ply honored and anointed it with water as if destined for death, lamenting. But the dream signifies as follows, as I divine: Orestes is dead, and I consecrated him for sacrifice: for the pillars of the home are the male children, and they die, whomsoever my lustral water smites. (Iphigeneia Among the Taurians, 44-58)^[16]

From the outset, the dream attaches gender to architectural spaces: the house is divided, as customary, into male and female spaces, and Iphigeneia sleeps in the midst of the other maidens of the palace of Agamemnon (παρθένοισι δ' ἐν μέσαις, i.e., in the *gynaikonitis*, or women's quarters).^[17] The pillars themselves, on the other hand, are masculine: "the pillars of the home are masculine offspring" (στῦλοι γὰρ οἴκων παῖδές εἰσιν ἄρσενες). In keeping with Greek gender expectations, the male pillar has a voice ($\phi \theta \epsilon \gamma \mu \alpha \delta' \dot{\alpha} v \theta \rho \dot{\omega} \pi o u \lambda \alpha \beta \epsilon \bar{v} v$), whereas Iphigeneia herself is relegated to the conventionally passive and fundamentally reactive female role of lamentation (κλαίουσα).^[18]

This disposition of architecture is similar to that of Inception. Orestes's status as a pillar in the house of Agamemnon recalls Dom's propensity for constructing rectilinear architecture, like the medieval Japanese palace, which he designed in order to plumb the depths of Saito's subconscious. Orestes's and Pylades's entrance onto the stage, too, closely mirrors Dom's first entrance in the film: both emerge from waters associated with a past of madness onto a shore where they hope to find deliverance.

Pylades's and Orestes's entrance scene contrasts their desire to find a straight, short path to accomplishing their aims with the many twisting obstacles that stand in their way. When the pair arrives, Orestes describes his own fate after the murder of Clytemnestra in labyrinthine locutions (77-84): he has "fulfilled many twisting races" (δρόμους τε πολλοὺς ἐξέπλησα καμπίμους) until he asked Apollo "how I might come to the end of my wheeldriven madness and of my labors" (έλθὼν δέ σ' ἡρώτησα πῶς τροχηλάτου / μανίας ἂν ἕλθοιμ' ἐς τέλος πόνων τ' έμῶν).^[19] The land of the Taurians presents the appearance of a perilous labyrinth, which must be negotiated if they are to achieve their objective of discovering the statue of Artemis. There are circular walls, stairwells of difficult access, and the possibility that they may be sacrificed in a barbaric ritual of human sacrifice not dissimilar to the anthropophagy of the Minotaur if they succeed in penetrating the temple:

Pylades (for you are my partner in this undertaking). What should we do? For your see the lofty obstacles presented by the encircling walls. Should we make our approaches on the stairs? Then how should we escape notice? Or should we undo the bronze-wrought bars with pry-bars, of which we have no knowledge? And if we succeed in opening the doors and are caught contriving our intrusion, we will die... but before we die, let us flee upon our ship, on which we sailed here. (Iphigeneia Among the Taurians, 95-103)

Orestes's and Pylades's reactions to this topography mirror the gender distinctions of the architecture of Iphigeneia's dream: Iphigeneia uses the word "twisting" ($\sigma \tau \rho \epsilon \phi \epsilon i$) to describe the flow of waters in the Euripus, near which she was sacrificed, but Orestes and Pylades rather twist-the same word, στρέφω-their eyes analytically to identify seminal landscape features. The features noted by Orestes are rectilinear, man-made, architectural features—first the palace in line 69 (μελάθρα, properly "roof pole", echoing Iphigeneia's pillar), then the altar in 72, then the stones below the temple frieze ($\theta \rho \eta \kappa \delta \varsigma$) adorned with spoils, 73-4.^[20]

When we first meet Dom in the film, he, like Orestes and Pylades, is emerging from the sea on hostile shores, which threaten to annihilate his identity. Like Orestes, he swiftly emerges from the flux of the sea and makes his way to a temple-like architectural construct: in this case, the Japanese mansion. Like Orestes in Iphigeneia Among the Taurians, Dom in this opening sequence is lost in a land that portends his dissolution and destruction: the subconscious realm of Limbo.

Both works also include a female lead who has experienced violation at the hands of a male loved one. As observed above, water is an important leitmotif in Nolan's characterization of Mal as a potent aspect of Dom's subconscious mind. It also plays an important role in defining their relationship with one another. Mal's childhood house in the dream world of Limbo is surrounded by a moat of water:



The image is poignant: though Mal, like Dom, conceals secrets within safes bundled inside architectural spaces (her totem, in the doll house, in her childhood home), these architectures essential to Mai's interior life are encircled by a veritable moat. While this water could perhaps represent the ever-present threat of dissolution into the subconscious (cf. the water which erodes the edges of Mal's and Dom's dream city), the strategic positioning of a material represented as uniquely antithetical to Dom throughout the film also hints that Mal is protecting herself from Dom. In the scene in which Dom violates Mal's childhood home to implant the idea of the illusory

interior space of her consciousness, so intimate as to warrant comparison to rape or emotional abuse. Iphigeneia has herself been the victim of egregious abuse at the hands of the father who sacrificed her. Her dream at the start of the tragedy similarly asserts the house of her father as an interior, specifically feminine space violated by Agamemnon's feigned wedding and sacrifice, and the Black Sea of water separating her from Greece, protects her, too, from a household which quite literally eats its own.[22]

character of their city in Limbo as well, Dom's penetration of Mal's interior world is represented as a violation of an

The solution to ending the cycle of violence and abuse is also similar in both works, involving a ritual reenactment of the Original Sin which began the violence. The woes of the House of Agamemnon began with Iphigeneia being sacrificed, so she must now pretend to sacrifice her brother in order to liberate him; Dom's troubles began with Mal threatening to drown both of their minds in the subconscious, and, to free her, Dom must convince Mal to commit suicide. Finally, to end his Orestes-like madness, which results from this act of near-murder, Dom must himself die a death by water, strikingly similar to Orestes's, when Ariadne has their van crash off a bridge into a river.

C. Simonides' Memory Palace and Rectilinear Architecture as a Metaphor for Conscious Rationality

A third architectural metaphor helps to shed light on Chris Nolan's use of the house as a metaphor for the analytical, conscious mind in Inception. The association of the kind of problem-solving typical of male heroes of heist dramas like Inception-linear, practical, analytical-with rectilinear architecture finds practical application in the rhetorical method of loci or the Memory Palace.

As Cicero relates the anecdote in De Oratore, Euripides' older contemporary Simonides of Ceos invented the method with a little help from the gods, when he left a feast being thrown by Skopas of Thessaly, and, in his absence, the palace collapsed. The realization that he was able to identify the badly disfigured corpses of the feasters by remembering where they were sitting gave rise to the technique of using physical settings like architecture to order and preserve facts in one's memory.^[23]

The memory palace technique of which Simonides was regarded as the protos heuretes is represented by oratorical handbooks as a consummately deliberate and analytical technique. Quintilian, in Institutio Oratoria, describes in detail how the student orator constructs a mental image of a palace and associates parts of his speech or other memoranda with architectural features of the palace. Then, by mentally retracing his steps through the palace while delivering his speech, the orator can recall each fact to be remembered from the feature where it was deposited:

For when we return after a time to certain places, we not only recognize the places themselves, but we even recall those things which we did in these, and persons come to mind and sometimes also unspoken thoughts are recalled. And so a technical science has arisen from experiment: they choose places as expansive as possible, and decorated with great variety, perchance a great house, and one divided into many recessed chambers. Whatever is noteworthy in it, they carefully fix their mind on this, so that without delay or pause their conscious mind is able to run through all its parts. And their first task is not to get stuck in coming upon [these parts]. For that memory [of the architecture of the house] must be more firmly-ingrained, seeing as how it will help another memory. Then those things which they have written or embraced in their mind, they demarcate with some sign, whereby they may be reminded... Then, they assign the first impression to some recess, as it were, the second, e.g., to the atrium, then they go around the impluvium, and entrust them in order not only to bedrooms and parlors, but also to statues and the like. By virtue of this, when the memory must be retrieved, they begin to revisit these places from the beginning and demand back what they entrusted to each object, in order that they may be reminded by their image. (Institutio Oratoria 11.2.11-21) [24]

Quintilian's description of the loci method parallels the activities undertaken by Dom and Mal in constructing their dream city in Inception. Their dream city contains not fantastical utopian buildings of the kind with which Italo Calvino populates his Invisible Cities, but replicas of houses, which they have actually inhabited in the course of their real lives. Even the modifications which they make to buildings are relatively nugatory: "we both wanted a house, but we loved skyscrapers. In the real world we had to choose. Not here," Dom informs Ariadne in describing their residence in Limbo (Nolan 194).

Beyond such minimal adjustments, almost realizable even in the real world, the city of Cobb's and Mal's Limbo is constructed almost completely of memories: it is, in essence, Simonides' memory palace. This is a violation of the rules that Nolan imposes on dream worlds in Inception, as Dom advises Ariadne early in the film: "Never recreate places from your memory. Always imagine new places" (Nolan 71). Ariadne repeatedly brings this to Dom's attention: "But these aren't just dreams, are they? They're memories. You said never to use memories" (Nolan 107), she observes in shock as they descend on their katabasis to Limbo to meet Mal in the (again, very real) hotel room where she committed suicide. Recall, too, Ariadne's recrimination to Dom after she meets the frenzied Mal in this room: "You think you can just build a prison of memories to lock her in? You think that's going to contain her?" (Nolan 111).

The homology between Simonides' memory palace and the method of Dom's dream constructs calls attention to his tragic flaw. Despite his vocation as dream architect, Dom does not really know what dreams are. Mal taunts him with this failing when he meets her for the last time in Limbo: "What are the distinguishing characteristics of a dream?" Mal scoffs. "Mutable laws of physics? Tell that to the quantum physicists" (Nolan 196). Mal's words suggest that Dom may believe that the difference between dreams and memories is that the latter must adhere to the rules of reality, whereas the former do not have to. The important difference, however, and the one which Dom fails to grasp, may in fact be that dreams can be genuinely creative and allow the adept dreamer not just to cobble together bits of reality but to imagine things never seen before. Nolan adumbrates Dom's ingrained skepticism about creativity and new ideas in Dom's opening conversation with Saito: "What's the most resilient parasite? ... A bacteria? A virus... An intestinal worm? ... An idea. ... Resilient, highly contagious. Once an idea's taken hold of the brain, it's impossible to eradicate." This decidedly negative disposition toward ideas is a virtual leitmotif for Dom's character. He lacks the creative capacity to envision a completely new reality and seems instinctively to fear changes to the architecture of his mind: "it's beautiful, but if you keep on changing things...." Dom advises Ariadne, just before his subconscious, irritated by Ariadne's manipulations, attacks her in the form of Mal during one of Ariadne's initial training sessions (Nolan 70).

While Dom's quotation in the previous paragraph refers in part to Nolan's rule that the subconscious has a quasiimmune system which resists and attacks invasions (Nolan 70), it also betrays his fundamental failing throughout the film: even while Mal was alive, and certainly after she has perished, Dom has been unable to "change things" within his subconscious, and the Limbo in which he traps these memories serves much the function for Dom that Dante's served for his virtuous pagans—a space of eternal stagnation for those who lack the faith to reconfigure their own internal architecture. The rectilinear, historical structures upon which Dom insists, his reliance on safes and predictable storage places for information, and, in Quintilian's metaphor of the memory palace, the rhetorician's insistence that memories be positioned linearly and sequentially on a re-creatable tour of a palaceall betray a rigidity lacking to the watery spaces of the subconscious.

As Bryson has remarked, "architecture not only stands for the control of the self; it is the actual material means by which the self exercises control over its words and its world" (Bryson 278). Dom's memories, however, have taken control of him, becoming a veritable labyrinth, with all that this connoted for the Greeks. For Plato, the expression to "fall into a labyrinth" was a metaphor for reaching a point of aporia in dialectical inquiry (Euthydemus 291b, λαβύρινθον ἐμπεσόντες). Similarly, in his description of the labyrinth in Egypt, Herodotus references a second dimension of labyrinths in the Greek imagination: they contain hidden subterranean secrets. ^[25] This labyrinth is a space in which the rationalizing conscious mind cannot accomplish its goal through analytical thinking, but only through the assistance of the subconscious, Dionysian female forces of an Ariadne or an Iphigeneia capable of offering the hero a death and rebirth by water.^[26]

More than merely underscoring Dom's need for Ariadne, however, his failure to dream creatively may also cast light on the reason for the failure of his dream utopia with Mal: the ability to dream, to imagine, to truly vicariously feel sensations which extrapolate from but ultimately transcend the boundaries of one's own past experiences, is key to empathy. The notion that the male conscious mind is forlorn unless it comes to terms with its intuitive, empathetic anima is not only eminently Jungian, but it is fundamental to being a fully-realized human being capable of loving and living happily. The dreamless, empathyless Dom, perhaps through his anagnorisis of the unreality of the phantom Mal who haunts his memories, must learn to do this: otherwise, he will end up, as Saito and Dom both intone twice at key points in the action, "an old man, ...filled with regret, ...waiting to die alone" (Nolan 216).

Conclusion

Chris Nolan's 2010 film Inception and the Greco-Roman literary and rhetorical tradition use architecture as a metaphor for human consciousness in a manner evocative of Carl Jung's anima, shadow, and Minotaur-mother archetypes. Since Jung drew extensively on Greek and Roman mythology in framing his psychological theories, the homologies between Jung, Homer, Iphigeneia Among the Taurians, and Simonides' memory palace demand little explanation.

What is worthy of comment is the manner in which Nolan's film exploits these architectural metaphors of the mind to give depth and pathos to his own unique twist on the essentially Romantic and post-Romantic plot of the damaged and irrevocably lost beloved. While Nolan indeed begins his film by painting his "problematic" female lead Mal in predictable hues of a sexist stereotype of irrational women older even than Greco-Roman discourses on hysteria, by the end, he inverts this stereotype, calling into question the healthiness of Dom's pragmaticallydelivered, clinical diagnoses of Mal's putative instability, and even the very reality of Dom's world. If Dom's original sin was to implant in Mal's mind the idea that "your world is not real," his karmic comeuppance is the realization that his world is every bit as flimsy: the last framing shot of the film in which Mal's totem wobbles uncertainly, never decisively toppling to specify whether Dom is awake or asleep, demonstrates that Dom himself no longer knows or cares whether his world is real.

The film thus offers a number of important pedagogical opportunities. In an era which has seen routine school shootings, rampant relationship abuse, and the normalization of narcissistic, sociopathic, or borderlinepersonality behaviors in relationships, it is important for students to be exposed to relationships that challenge black-white thinking and demand that viewers explore the viability of each partner's position. Inception, like Homer's Myrhine and Euripides' Iphigeneia Among the Taurians, asserts the importance of complementing the rational Apollonian side of the personality with the more intuitive, empathetic, Dionysiac brand of creative imagination. While the identification of femininity with empathy or intuitive thought is dubious at best, sexist at worst, I hope to have demonstrated that each literary and cinematic locus examined above undercuts such trivial generalizations about gender even as it, to a certain extent, enacts them on the page, stage, or screen. Rather than reinforcing negative gender stereotypes, the labyrinthine complications and multifarious points of view dramatized in the interpersonal relationships in all these works can serve as the basis of writing assignments and class discussions which encourage students to form healthier relationships and to appreciate the value of the Humanities for living their lives kindly and well.

Endnotes

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[2] The top itself as an emblem of madness has a classical parallel as well, though it does not relate to architecture: one of the most famous similes of Vergil's Aeneid is his comparison of the Allecto-maddened Amata to a top at 7.378-84 ("or like a top which flies beneath the braided lash....").

[3] As a number of online commentators on the film point out, Nolan leaves open the possibility that Mal may in fact be right in her suicide scene (Nolan 140-42; cf. Robert Dougherty's article at http://voices.yahoo.com/inception-explained-impossible-without-mal-6495804.html): in the first scene of the movie Dom is trapped in the Limbo of the subconscious. It is possible to read the film as the real-world Mal's katabasis (or, alternately, as a katabasis by the Mal projection in Dom's subconscious) to awaken Dom from the state of Limbo: in effect, the exact opposite of what Dom believes to be transpiring across the course of the film.

[4] Jung, Symbols of Transformation xxv.

[5] Dom does not match Jung's descriptions of the archetype of the male equivalent of the anima, the animus, but rather functions as the conscious mind throughout the film, attempting to reconcile the various subconscious portions of the personality. See Jung, Archetypes 284.

[6] Witness the elegant straight lines of the medieval Japanese palace which Dom has designed for Saito in the framing opening sequence, and the decidedly non-linear and amorphous water which destroys the palace. [7] Jung, Archetypes 284-85.

[8] Jung, Archetypes 284-85. In the film Mal's desire to thwart Dom seems to arise from a mix of anger over Dom having "infected" her with the idea that her world was not real and jealousy of Ariadne.

[9] Henderson 117. For Jung's concept of the anima, see Jung Archetypes, 25-30: "she is a mischievous being who crosses our path in numerous transformations and disguises, playing all kinds of tricks on us, causing happy and unhappy delusions, depressions and ecstasies..."; "the anima is not the soul.... But a natural archetype that satisfactorily sums of all the statements of the unconscious, of the primitive mind, of the history of language and religion.... It is always the a priori element in his moods, reactions, impulses, and whatever else is spontaneous in psychic life." See also Hillman.

[10] Jung, Symbols of Transformation 324: "[The mother] was our first experience of an outside and at the same time of an inside: from the interior world there emerged an image, apparently a reflection of the external motherimage, yet older, more original and more imperishable than this-a mother who changed back into a Kore, into an eternally youthful figure."

[11] Dreaming characters, it is explained in the film, are awakened from dreams by a jolt or "kick," such as being pushed into a bathtub. Water is involved in most instances of the "kick" in the film.

[12] See e.g., the well-known, if significantly later, descriptions of traditional roles for women in public discourse at Thucydides 2.45.2.

[13] Βατίειαν, Iliad 2.813. Cf. Grethlein 2008, 30.

[14] Similarly, too, the turning post which Achilles uses in the funeral games of Patroclus in Iliad 23 was apparently once a tomb-as Aristarchos favored, and as Edwin Floyd recently pointed out in a not yet published article, a skiros—clippings of stone or metal, possibly constituting a herm, and potentially etymologically related to the Sanskrit coskuyate, "to protect," and thus related to the commemorative capacity of memory--its potential to preserve and protect the immortality of mortals.

[15] Both Evans' original publications on the "Tree and Pillar Cult" of Minoan Crete and Marija Gimbutas' many publications on pre-Indo-European religion posit a more female-centered religion before the arrival of the Greeks. There have been numerous critiques and qualifications of this thesis from both archaeological and ideological perspectives, such, e.g., Burkert, Homo Necans 80 and Eller, Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory.

[16] All translations from Greek and Latin are my own.

[17] See Morgan 1982 for a classic discussion of the division of space in the Greek house into ἀνδρωνῖτις and γυνκαικωνῖτις.

[18] The literature on female speech in Greek public discourse is vast, but see Thuc. 2.45.2 for the locus classicus on the desirability of the removal of women from the public discourse. [19] The initial references to dromoi and "wheel-driven madness" are also a reference to the chariot race of Pelops.

[20] As Wiles (201-203) observes, the statue of Artemis was possessed by Sparta (so Pausanias); the Persians had stolen the previous Athenian contender from Halai; there was also a wooden statue at Brauron.

[21] Inception. Director Chris Nolan. Warner Bros Pictures (2010).

[22] I.e., in the myth Agamemnon's father Atreus, who cooked and served the sons of his brother Thyestes for dinner.

[23] Cf. Cicero, De Oratore II.352-53.

[24] This method is described in a number of loci classici, including Ad Herennium 3.28-40. See Slater, Yates, Carruthers, Holcomb, Jarratt, Bryson, Post, Marchiesi, and Farrell.

[25] See Herodotus 2.148.

[26] Dionysian because she marries Dionysus after her abandonment by Theseus (as a demoted Minoan vegetation goddess, Ariadne's cult and Dionysus' were similar and perhaps in competition: see Nilsson 523-28). Eisner 176 offers that Dionysus was originally the consort of Ariadne in Cretan vegetation cult: Ariadne left Dionysus for Theseus and was slain at his bidding (Od. 11.321-25), then resurrected.

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