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LIMINAL SUBJECT ON LIMINAL SPACE: THE REDEMPTIVE JOURNEY IN VALLÉE'S *WILD*

EŞİKSEL MEKANDA EŞİKSEL ÖZNE: VALLÉE'NİN *YABAN*'INDA KURTARICI YOLCULUK

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Abstract

Jean-Marc Vallée's film *Wild* (2014), adopted from Cheryl Strayed's memoir *From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail* (2012), portrays the real-life story of Cheryl Strayed's solo hike experience in the Pacific Crest Trail, abbreviated as PCT. The plot of *Wild* is adapted from a real-life story that takes place on a real long-distance hiking trail that reaches from the United States/ Mexico border to the United States/ Canada border. Reminiscent of the mythical wilderness journeys and road narratives in American culture and literature, *Wild* presents Strayed's journey blending the difficulties and gifts of the journey in nature. From the very beginning of the film, as it is presented mainly in the flashbacks or Strayed's memories that accompany her on her trail in the wild, before this journey, Strayed is a grieving and traumatized woman unable to overcome especially the death of her mother. Towards the end of the film, this journey in nature enables her to heal her wounds, resolve her traumas, find her true self, and be ready to become a part of the culture. From this perspective, the hiking experience of the main character resembles an initiation ritual maintaining change for the ritual subject. This article, using a significant sociological survey on the relation between ritual and liminality provided by Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner, examines the redemptive change of limen personae, Cheryl Strayed, journeying on a limen space, the wild.

Keywords : Jean-Marc Vallée, *Wild*, liminality, Arnold van Gennep, Victor Turner

Öz

Cheryl Strayed'in *From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail* (*Pasifik Zrivesi Yolu'nda Kaybolmuşluktan Bulunmuşluğa*) (2012) adlı biyografisinden uyarlanan, Jean-Marc Vallée'nin filmi *Yaban* (2014) PCT olarak kısaltılan Pasifik Zirvesi Yolu'nda geçen Cheryl Strayed'in yalnız yürüyüş deneyimini betimler. *Yaban*'ın olay örgüsü, Amerika Birleşik Devletleri/Meksika sınırından, Amerika Birleşik Devletleri/Kanada sınırına kadar uzanan gerçek bir uzun mesafe yürüyüş yolunda yaşanan gerçek bir hayat hikayesinden uyarlanmıştır. Amerikan kültür ve edebiyatındaki mitik yaban yolculukları ve yolculuk anlatılarını hatırlatan *Yaban* Strayed'in yolcuğunu doğada yolculuğun zorluklarını ve hediyelerini harmanlayarak sunar. Filmin en başından beri, Strayed'in yabandaki yolunda ona eşlik eden anılarında ya da flashbacklerde sunulduğu gibi, bu yolculuktan önce, Strayed özellikle annesinin ölümünün üstesinden gelemeyen yaslı ve travma geçirmiş bir kadındır. Filmin sonlarına

doğru doğadaki bu yolculuk onun yaralarını iyileştirmesini, travmalarını çözmesini, gerçek benliğini bulmasını ve kültürün bir parçası olmaya hazır olmasını sağlar. Bu açıdan bakıldığında, ana karakterin yürüyüş deneyimi, ritüel özne için değişimi sağlayan bir inisiasyon ritüeline benzer. Arnold van Gennep ve Victor Turner tarafından sağlanan ritüel ve eşiksellik kavramı üzerine önemli bir sosyolojik araştırmayı kullanan bu makale, eşik mekanda, yabanda yolculuk yapan eşik karakter Cheryl Strayed'in kurtarıcı değişimini inceler.

Anahtar Kelimeler : Jean-MarcVallée, *Yaban*, eşiksellik, Arnold van Gennep, Victor Turner

Introduction

Based on Cheryl Strayed's memoir *From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail* (2012), Jean-Marc Vallée's film *Wild* (2014) depicts Cheryl Strayed's 94-day-hike on the Pacific Crest Trail. Commonly abbreviated as PCT, Pacific Crest Trail is a real long-distance trail in the United States that stretches from the Mexico border to the Canada border. Cheryl Strayed's journey begins in Mojave, California, and ends at the Bridge of the Gods on the Oregon-Washington Border. In addition to presenting both the natural beauty and dangers of the trail, the film portrays how the road transforms Strayed and enables her to overcome her past traumas. The journey of the character in the wilderness has been one of the popular and mythical imagery of many American narratives that links with westward expansion, frontier spirit, and mobility. How the film reinterprets the elements of earlier popular American narratives has been analyzed from the perspective of gender—in its choice to focus on the experience of a female traveler as opposed to the mainstream American plots—(Catani, 2021; Papayanis, 2017) and as an example of the audiovisual travel diary genre (Argod, 2018). Also, a very short article titled "La Rituel Mythique de la Redemption" states that the film reexamines the American western genre depicting a mythic ritual that enables redemption (Castiel, 2015). Appreciating the presence of a female protagonist instead of the traditional white male travelers in the genre, this study is triggered by the question of what kind of dynamics the redemptive journey of this female character reveals. For this reason, instead of an analysis from the perspective of gender, this study is much more interested in the redemptive tone of the journey analyzing the motif of the journey depicted in the film in comparison to rituals that have been a topic of sociology of religion. Focusing on the similarity of Strayed's journey to an initiation ritual, this article uses a sociological lens mainly that of Arnold van Gennep's and Victor Turner's analysis of liminality to elucidate Strayed as a limen character journeying on a limen space. To this end, firstly the sociological analysis of rituals provided by Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner is described then Cheryl

Strayed's redemptive journey in *Wild* is analyzed as a ritual and as a symbolic process that includes symbols of ritual, crisis, and redemption.

1. Liminality, Liminal, and Liminoid

In order to understand the parallelism between Strayed's journey in *Wild* and the initiation rituals, the sociological analysis of rituals provides a necessary background. One of the significant contributions in sociology to ritual studies is maintained by Arnold van Gennep who in *The Rites of Passage* analyzes the "ceremonial patterns which accompany a passage from one situation to another or from one cosmic or social world to another" (Van Gennep 1960, 10). Stressing the significance of these transitions and analyzing *rites of passage* in a special category, he maintains a threefold analysis of rituals including phases of separation, transition, and incorporation (Van Gennep, 1960, 11). Van Gennep states that this threefold schema is "not developed to the same extent by all peoples or in every ceremonial pattern" (Van Gennep, 1960, 10). Liminality is such a dominant key concept in his analysis that van Gennep calls the rites of separation *preliminal rites*, the transition rites *liminal (or threshold) rites*, and the rites of incorporation *postliminal rites* (Van Gennep, 1960, 21).

Van Gennep's analysis of rituals with a focus on liminality inspires another renowned sociologist Victor Turner in profound ways. Turner not only re-discovers "the importance of liminality" but also tries to "'liberate' van Gennep's framework from both the functionalist and structuralist straight-jackets, inserting van Gennep's book on ritual passages where it truly belongs: in a processual approach" (Thomassen, 2009, 14). One of his earliest studies in which he elaborates on the concept of liminality, the communication of *sacra* in liminal matter, is "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites of Passage" published as a chapter in his book *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*. In *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure*, he further explains liminality: "Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. As such, their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural transitions" (Turner, 1977, 95). In this work, Turner highlights not only the processual nature of rituals but also the significance of ritual symbols in this process for "symbols are essentially involved in social processes" (Turner, 1977, 20). Turner examining the processual nature of ritual calls them social dramas that "are units of aharmonic or disharmonic process, arising in conflict situations" in *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Turner, 1974, 37). Reminiscent of Van Gennep's threefold schema, Turner advocates

that there are four phases in social dramas: breach, crisis, redressive action, and reintegration (Turner, 1974, 38-42).

In "Liminal to Liminoid, In Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbology," Turner emphasizes that ritual symbols "appear not only in traditional 'tribal' cultures but also in the 'cultural refreshment' genres (poetry, drama, and painting) of post-industrial societies" (Turner, 1992, 22). In order to categorize different liminal experiences in traditional and modern societies, Turner offers two terms in relation to liminality, those of liminal and liminoid. In this work, Turner provides a detailed analysis of the differences between these two terms. Shortly, liminal refers to the ritual experience in tribal preindustrial societies whereas liminoid, as the suffix -oid meaning "like, resembling" indicates, "resembles without being identical with liminal" (Turner, 1992, 32) and is experienced in industrial and postindustrial societies. Turner advocates that "crucial differences separate the structure, function, style, scope, and symbology of the liminal in 'tribal and agrarian ritual and myth' from what we may perhaps call the 'liminoid,' or leisure genres, of symbolic forms and action in complex, industrial societies" (Turner, 1992, 41). In a way Turner suggests that "liminal experiences in modern consumerist societies to a large extent have been replaced by "liminoid" moments, where creativity and uncertainty unfold in art and leisure activities" (Thomassen, 2009, 15). Turner analyzes the similarities and differences between the liminal and liminoid processes and phenomena in detail (Turner, 1992, 52-55) but shortly liminal pheneomena of tribal preindustrial societies are mainly collective and functional; on the other hand, liminoid phenomena of industrial and postindustrial societies may be collective but "more characteristically individual products" and they are "often parts of social critiques" (Turner, 1992, 54). Turner further explains how liminal and liminoid may be seen at post/industrial societies outlining the differences:

> In complex, modern societies both types coexist in a sort of cultural pluralism. But the liminal—found in the activities of churches, sects, and movements, in the initiation rites of clubs, fraternities, masonic orders, and other secret societies, etc.—is no longer society-wide. Nor are the liminoid phenomena, which tend to be the leisure genres of art, sport, pastimes, games, etc., practiced by and for particular groups, categories, segments, and sectors of large-scale industrial societies of all types. But for most people the liminoid is still felt to be freer than the liminal, a matter of choice, not obligation. The *liminoid* is more like a commodity—indeed, often *is* a commodity, which one selects and pays for—than the *lirninal*, which elicits loyalty and is bound

> up with one's membership or desired membership in some highly corporate group. One *works at* the liminal, one *plays* with the liminoid. There may be much moral pressure to go to church or synagogue, whereas one queues up at the box office to see a play by Beckett, a performance by Mort Sahl, a Superbowl Game, a symphony concert, or an art exhibition. And if one plays golf, goes yachting, or climbs mountains, one often needs to buy expensive equipment or pay for club membership. Of course, there are also all kinds of "free" liminoid performances and entertainments—Mardi Gras, charivari, home entertainments of various kinds—but these already have something of the stamp of the liminal upon them, and quite often they are the cultural debris of some unforgotten liminal ritual. There are permanent 'liminoid' settings and spaces, too—bars, pubs, some cafes, social clubs, etc. But when clubs become exclusivist they tend to generate rites of passage, with the *liminal* a condition of entrance into the *liminoid* realm. (Turner, 1992, 55).

Even though Turner, in the above lines, indicates that both liminal and liminoid may be seen in complex modern societies and the cultural debris of an unforgotten liminal ritual may be found in liminoid performances, and although he is applauded for his contribution to ritual studies, he has also been criticized for his too sharp differentiation between these two terms. In contemporary recent studies, Turner's liminal and liminoid concepts have been used from various perspectives such as art projects (Laver et al, 2022), entrepreneurship education (Gaggiotti et al, 2020), sports (Rowe, 1998; Spiegel, 2011), tourism (Sharpley, 2022) some of which evaluate the relationship between these two concepts not as "distinction" but as a "continuum" (Deflem,1991; Gaggiotti et al, 2020; Rowe, 1998; Spiegel, 2011).

2. Liminality and The Symbols of Change in the Redemptive Journey in *Wild*

A brief survey of the concept of liminality, especially the ways van Gennep and Turner ponder on it, provides a lens to think about the change in the film *Wild*. The film presents a liminal personae hiking—an activity that can be considered as both a liminoid leisure activity of contemporary societies and a liminal experience reminiscent of the tribal initiation ceremonies according to Turner's analysis. Clearly, Strayed sets on this journey because she is unable to overcome her past traumas, and hiking in the wilderness offers her healing. In addition to this overall hiking experience, there are two other repetitive actions that can be identified as a part of the ritual process and leisure. One of them is reading: throughout her journey, she reads and leaves messages on the trail registers on certain parts of

the trail. At the end of the message, she always puts her name along with the name of the author she is quoting indicating how she shares and internalizes the writer's ideas or emotions. Also, she keeps a diary through which not only she revisits her memories which will later help her to make sense of them but also the audience gets information about her traumas in preliminal phase. Without an effort to categorize Strayed's hiking experience and other ritualistic-like actions according to liminal/liminoid distinction or continuum, this study evaluates the liminal experience of the major character and how this experience resembles a ritual in a symbolic processual analysis. This further necessitates an analysis of symbols of ritual along with symbols of hardship, trauma, and pain on the one hand and symbols of healing, sacred, and redemption on the other hand.

Wild concentrates on the liminal journey of the major character on the Pacific Crest Trail. The events are presented in a nonlinear style in which the events of the preliminal phase are juxtaposed to those of liminal phase. The use of crosscuts to flashbacks is a repeated form throughout the movie through which the audience learns what happens at the preliminal phase before even she is separated from the culture and begins her solitary hike in nature. At the beginning of the movie, Cheryl is already on the journey but the events in the past are crosscut to the liminal experiences in the form of flashbacks. The opening sequence of the film is a good example of this technique. The film begins with a straight-on point-of-view shot in which the audience sees what the character sees: a magnificent view of mountain tops and sky. The heavy breathing sound that accompanies the view indicates that the subject is in physical pain. Then Strayed is seen on top of the mountain with one of her shoes off and when she takes off her sock, the camera zooms into her toe in blood. Uttering the line "I'd rather be a hammer than a nail," from the song "El Condor Pasa," she pulls her already ruptured toenail, and while she is suffering in great physical pain accidentally one of her boots falls down the cliff. In a burst of anger, she tosses the other boot. As she screams in pain and anger, the scene is crosscut to a series of flashbacks that include scenes of sex, a dictionary page, abuse, a horse, a fox, a dead-like woman with eyes closed, and a burning map. Then the series of flashbacks each of which lasts about a second cut to a black screen in which the name of the film in yellow flickers like a fire that is crosscut to a map burning in a campfire. Then begins the moment Strayed takes off a truck and checks in a motel right before she begins her journey.

This beginning not only exemplifies the dominant style in which different moments of hiking, the liminal phase, is crosscut to scenes of the past but also clarifies that the

journey/hiking experience runs parallel to a life crisis ritual since it is an outcome of the overweight of the crises in her life all of which are depicted in this series of flashbacks. At the very beginning, these flashbacks and what they refer to are not clear to the audience but as the film goes on, the connections are maintained. The flashback scene of the woman with closed eyes depicts Strayed's dead mother, Bobbi. This event is the major crisis that traumatizes Strayed. The horse in the flashback is her mother's horse and later in another flashback, she remembers how she and her brother have to shoot the horse to end its pain. The fox in the flashback, seen a couple of times later, appears to be the spirit of the mother that somehow guides Strayed in her journey in mother nature. The scenes of abuse will relate to the abusive father figure that the family escapes from in Strayed's childhood. The scenes of sex, as revealed later in the movie, are moments that depict her inability to deal with the traumas that lead her to an addiction to heroin and sex. Papayanis calls attention to the parallelism between the heavy breathing right before the flashback sequence to the heavy breathing during sex in the flashback sequence: "Since Strayed, we later learn, has become compulsively promiscuous in response to her mother's death, it is fitting that the film begins with the sexualized sound of heavy breathing, only instead of sex, it is the hard breathing of physical exertion, the exertion of trekking the PCT" (Papayanis, 2017). In one of these sex scenes in the opening flashback sequence, she wears a ring that shows she is not only promiscuous but also a cheater. As the film goes on, it becomes clear that she loves her husband and he loves her but she is so traumatized that she cannot endure maintaining meaningful relationships. The scene of the dictionary page showing the meanings of the word *strayed* refers to the moment she chooses a new surname after she is divorced. All these flashbacks explicate her traumas before her preliminal phase even before she decides to separate from society. The scene of the burning map is the map of the Pacific Crest Trail which is indicative of the regenerative power of the liminal experience in wild.

The flashbacks in the opening sequence then wrap up the whole dominant idea that she takes this liminal journey because she is facing a life crisis. She is screaming on the top of the cliff not only because she is in great physical pain and loses one of her boots but also because she is in great psychological pain unable to overcome memories of the dead mother, the abusive father, and the divorced husband. Out of all these traumas, the major one is clearly the death of the mother which can be classified as anomie. In *The Sacred Canopy*, Peter L. Berger explains that "the success of socialization depends upon the establishments of symmetry between the objective world of society and the subjective world of the individual"

(Berger, 1967, 15). This symmetry is enabled by an individual's conversation with meaningful others and "if this conversation is disrupted, . . . the world begins to totter" (Berger, 1967, 17). Berger calls the meaningful order "nomos" and the disruption of this order "anomy" that could in extreme cases leads an individual to become wordless: "Just as an individual's nomos is constructed and sustained in conversation with significant others, so is the individual plunged toward anomy when such conversation is radically interrupted" (Berger, 1967, 21). Bobbi's death is the anomic force traumatizing Strayed that further disables her to maintain new meaningful conversations indicated in her divorce with the man she actually loves. From this perspective, her hiking adventure may be seen as a nomizing effort of a world-less individual trying to cope with an anomic abandonment and to heal the objective/subjective symmetry. Turner also evaluates anomie in relation to his analysis of liminality:

> Liminality may be the scene of disease, despair, death, suicide, the breakdown without compensatory replacement of normative, well-defined social ties and bonds. It may be ***anomie,*** alienation, ***angst,*** the three fatal *alpha* sisters of many modern myths. In tribal, etc., society it may be the interstitial domain of domestic witchcraft, the hostile dead, and the vengeful spirits of strangers; in the leisure genres of complex societies, it may be represented by the 'extreme situations' beloved of existentialist writers: torture, murder, war, the verge of suicide, hospital tragedies, the point of execution, etc. (Turner, 1992, 46-47)

In his analysis of ritual, liminality, and anomie, Turner categorizes the anomie in tribal and contemporary, post/industrial complex societies. What matters is the inherent relation between anomy and liminality in a general sense, rather than the categorization of different forms of anomie in different societies. Strayed goes through a liminal journey as a result of this anomic abandonment. She is disoriented because, as Strayed expresses, her mother is not only "the love of [her] life" but also "the center of everything [she] is" (Vallée) and upon losing her, she is center-less, world-less.

How she decides to set on this journey reveals it as well. In a flashback that depicts Strayed in conversation with her friend Aimee, Strayed, upon learning that she is pregnant (whose father is not her husband), questions how she "becomes a shit" (Vallée) and decides to buy the book *Pacific Crest Trail* saying "I gotta go back to that store. I'm gonna walk myself back to the woman my mother thought I was" (Vallée). Even though her mother's tombstone that she remembers reads "I am always with you," Strayed is unable to find a way to cope

with the presence of the memories of her deceased mother. Later, she mentions how after the funeral, she carries the ashes of her mother, saying "I spread most of them around her grave. But some of the larger chunks I put in my mouth and swallowed whole" (Vallée). Swallowing chunks of her mother's ashes, a Eucharist-like ritualistic moment, does not provide her with healing; this ritualistic hiking experience gradually will do that. The death of the mother is an anomy that she cannot overcome. The scream at the hospital when Strayed finds out that her mother is dead is crosscut to the scream in the opening sequence on the top of the cliff. This crosscut further delineates that she is there in the wild because she is grieving.

The death of the mother results in an identity crisis. Bobbie is a woman of grace who wants to help her daughter's identity formation. Strayed remembers the moments in which Bobbi says "if there's one thing I can teach you it is to try to find your best self" and at another moment Strayed says "Mom said there's a sunrise and sunset every day and you can choose to be there for it. You can put yourself in a way of beauty" (Vallée). This sunrise and sunset cycle that refers to the transitional nature of cosmology symbolically highlights the liminal transition in the ritualistic process in the wild in which she is transformed from a "shit" to a self "in a way of beauty". This identity crisis is initially indicated in one of the flashbacks in the opening sequence that shows the dictionary page explaining the meanings of the word *Strayed* as "to wander from the proper path, to be lost, to be without a mother and father, to become wild" (Vallée). No longer carrying her husband's surname (and her father's surname), she desires to form a new identity, an identity she chooses as strayed, who will find her way back after losing herself in the liminal wild space. Victor Turner comments that "in many societies the liminal initiands are often considered to be dark, invisible, like the sun or moon in eclipse or the moon between phases, at the 'dark of the moon'; they are stripped of names and clothing, smeared with the common earth, rendered indistinguishable from animals" (Turner, 1992, 26). In the movie, she decides to change her name before she decides to set on a liminal journey but it still reminds the identity crisis that the liminal initiand goes to. Strayed is not stripped of clothing or not totally smeared with the common earth like animals but her worn-out clothes, her inability to maintain hygiene in the wild, the way she learns to be an element of nature, the parallelism in the way she moves to especially the flights of the birds are indicative of her new self as a liminal initiand.

The difficulties she faces in the wild in the liminal phase run parallel to the anomic crises that lead her to this experience. One of the most obvious symbols is clearly her overweight backpack. Right before her journey in the motel room she even fails to stand up

with the backpack on her shoulders. In her journey, she gradually learns to keep the backpack lighter but from the beginning till the end, she carries this backpack which symbolizes the psychological weight she is carrying. The small boots that she loses in the opening sequence and the physical pain in her feet also stand for her inner pain. Throughout her liminal phase, especially in the beginning, she thinks about quitting; for instance, she comes to crossroads as the audience hears the song "should I stay or should I go". This crossroads and the giant rock that blocks her way that she manages to climb over represent her willingness not to quit the ritualistic liminal activity. In addition to these symbols, experiencing the wild is not easy as Strayed's problems as a result of severe weather conditions (both the heat and the snow), wild animals, dehydration, the possible threats posed by strangers, etc. display.

In addition to the symbols of pain and anomie, there are also symbols of change and healing. At Kentucky Meadows, while she is chatting with another hiker named Greg that informs her about several posts on the trail, Strayed says that she likes the sound of the Bridge of the Gods. After Greg advises her not to beat herself up, she has a sudden flashback of a scene in her mother's doctor's office, the scanned image of her mother's tumor is reflected onto the framed image on the wall depicting a scene of wilderness. This reflection or the juxtaposition of tumor and wilderness indicates how Strayed finds solace in nature for her grief due to the death of her mother caused by a tumor. The framed scene of the wild at the doctor's office stands for the healing of not Bobbi but Strayed. Also, this liminary experience teaches her to get over the crisis related to the divorce. Strayed mentions how she used to write her husband's name Paul on the sand on every beach ever since she met him and she is not going to do it again because she is ready to move on. Furthermore, at one point on her journey, she calls her brother, leaves a message, and advises him to "walk a little" (Vallée). Towards the end of her journey, she finds a llama and returns this pet to the boy who is hiking with his grandmother. They chat about problems in life and after stating that she has problems with her dad and her mother is dead, she consoles the child saying "Problems don't stay problems. They turn into something else" (Vallée). All those moments in her journey indicate that she has changed and she is able to share the wisdom that comes with that change with others.

Strayed's conversation with this child not only shows how she begins to offer words of healing but also leads her to face her pain. Learning about the death of Strayed's mother, the child, probably in an attempt to soothe her back, begins to sing a song that his mother used to sing to him. The lyrics of the song *Red River Valley* are way too meaningful:

From this valley, they say you are leaving.
We will miss your bright eyes and sweet smile,
For they say you are taking the sunshine
That has brightened our pathway a while.

So come sit by my side if you love me.
Do not hasten to bid me adieu.
Just remember the Red River Valley.
And the cowboy that loved you so true.

The connections to Strayed's life in this cowboy song are clear; the death of the mother or her departure from this valley, leaves Strayed's pathway dark and now she has to learn to bid adieu. At the beginning of the song, Cheryl looks at the kid, at a later moment, as Feinstein calls attention, the director Jean-Marc Vallée and the cinematographer Yves Bélanger "treat us to a visual feast, a montage of magnificent surrounding vistas, sanctified by the boy's unspoiled, uninflected melody" (Feinstein, 2014). This moment is just one of the many crosscuts the director is using to take us into the major character's memories in her mind. The cowboy song is crosscut to the scenes of her tent in the vast wilderness, and landscape with foliage, distant mountains, sky, and rivers, and in each flashback scene, there is a sun which symbolizes the transition from one day to another and from crisis to renewal. In these flashbacks, the audience either sees Strayed watching the wilderness with the sun or is given a point of view subjective shot through which Strayed's vision is shared. Even though, after Strayed says goodbye to the child and grandmother, she falls on her knees and cries uttering "I miss you" (Vallée), this cathartic moment, along with all those symbols of transition in sacred nature, indicates that she is getting ready to bid adieu.

In addition to this use of crosscuts to flashbacks, another technique that Vallée uses is voiceover narration which maintains Vallée to remain loyal to the memoir form of narrative. Throughout her liminal journey, while she is hiking, writing her diary, or doing any other activity, the audience hears the voiceovers. Other than a couple of other hikers that she encounters on her journey or her breaks at PCT stations, she is a solitary hiker; from this perspective, the use of voiceover narration in the rarity of dialogues may not be surprising. However, the voiceover narration is also a means through which the director welcomes us inside her mind and maintains a parallelism to the way a writer records a memoir. Therefore,

in addition to the use of crosscuts to flashbacks, the voiceover narration enables the audience how Strayed as a liminal personae is experiencing a transition from crisis to renewal.

Towards the end of her journey and the film, as she is moving in the wilderness, she also learns to accept her mistakes, saying in a voiceover "What if I forgive myself? What if I was sorry? But if I could go back in time I wouldn't do a single thing differently. What if I wanted to sleep with every single one of these men? What if heroin taught me something? What if all those things I did were the things that got me here? What if I was never redeemed? What if I already was?" (Vallée). During this voiceover, the camera depicts Strayed as a harmonious part of nature as she is following where the PCT signs take her. She wakes up with the frogs on her sleeping-bag, and she feeds herself the fruits in the bushes. Now that she is ready to forgive herself and accept herself as she is, the liminal journey is about to end. She says, "It took me years to be the woman my mother raised. It took me four years, seven months, and three days to do it without her. After I lost myself in the wilderness of my grief, I found my own way out of the woods" (Vallée). As the audience hears Strayed uttering those lines in a voiceover, the camera depicts a point-of-view shot moving through a sign that shows her the way. This Pacific Cross Trail Sign on a cross further stresses how this experience offers her redemption or salvation and how this journey is symbolically a sacred journey. This threshold experience in the wild offers her symbolically to find her path in life.

After traveling on different crossroads, rivers, and paths of the trail, all of which signal the transition of the liminal character moving on physical boundaries and psychological phases, in the ending sequence, Strayed manages to arrive at the Bridge of the Gods, the final destination. As she is walking towards and on the bridge, looking at the bridge, her boots, the landscape, and the birds flying, she feels thankful for this experience: "Thank you, I thought over and over again, for everything the trail had taught me, and everything I couldn't yet know. How in four years I'd cross this very bridge and marry a man in a spot almost visible from where I'm standing. How in nine years that man and I would have a son named Carver, and a year later have a daughter named after my mother, Bobbi." (Vallée). While the camera depicts Strayed watching the river, the sky, and the wild on top of the bridge from different angles, the audience hears Strayed in voiceover saying "I only know I didn't need to reach with my bare hands anymore. To know that seeing the fish beneath the surface of the water was enough. That it was everything." (Vallée). At this moment she turns her head and notices a fox on the other side of the bridge the fox stares back at her and then leaves. The way that she encounters a fox earlier in which she questions what the fox wants conflicts with the calm

way she is looking at her at the end of the journey. Even though this fox is not identical to the other foxes she sees earlier, clearly it is the spirit of the mother and at this time, she is ready to leave her on the other side, to bid adieu. The last lines in the voiceover are "It was my life– like all lives, mysterious and irrevocable and sacred. So very close, so very present, so very belonging to me. How wild it was, to let it be" (Vallée). Then, at the end of her journey, she realizes that all lives are sacred. This moment, like the other moments in the film, is a mix of long shots of the landscape she is viewing on the bridge and close-ups of her face. She watches the middle realm—the river and the forest and then the above realm—the sky and then closes her eyes.

The film ends with the song "El Condor Pasa," identical to the way it begins. As mentioned earlier, one of her first utters in the opening sequence is "I'd rather be a hammer than a nail" right before she rips off her toenail. At a later moment in the film, Cheryl humming the melody of the song is crosscut to a flashback depicting Bobbi humming the song. As Zuckerman states, the director explains that the track "was perfect to accompany Bobbi almost in the magical way, [to] accompany Cheryl on the trail as if Bobbi's soul is there walking with her daughter," (Zuckerman, 2014). Giving significant information about the use of music in the film, Zuckerman explains how" music often functions as memory—meshing into the movie's flashbacks, sometimes even seeming to emerge out of Cheryl's own mind as she sings to herself on the trail" (Zuckerman, 2014). Also, this article calls attention to how music is used in flashback scenes and how music is intentionally not used in the scenes of the wild:

> Then, of course, there are moments where no music plays at all. Vallée was eager to explore the solitude and environmental sounds of the trail. "I want to have a contrast between the flashbacks, where there's civilization and music and culture, and then back on the trail, where there's almost nothing," Vallée says. "See where she's thinking in the first act about her mother, and then we cut to the place where she's studying with her mom. There's the Leonard Cohen track playing, 'Suzanne.' And then we're back on the trail and there's no more music. (Zuckerman 2014).

From this perspective, the music, especially "El Condor Pasa," both indicate the presence of Bobbi in her mind and clash with the wilderness sounds in the journey. The repetition of "I'd rather be" phases in the lines "I'd rather be a sparrow than a snail," "I'd rather be a hammer than a nail," "I'd rather sail away," "I'd rather be a forest than a street," and "I'd rather feel

the earth beneath my feet" are indicative of the choices that the subject is making: even though the journey is hard and challenging, she chooses to move in nature.

Conclusion

Wild with Vallée's use of voiceover narration, flashbacks, music, blend of long-shot and close-ups, presents how nature provides a threshold experience for a solitary hiker/ritual subject to heal past traumas. This experience of liminality, the rite of passage, is the way Strayed chooses to be initiated. The symbols of change such as sunrise and sunset, crossroads, rivers, and bridges all resemble the processual nature of rituals. Similar to the experience of ritual subjects or initiands who "acquire a special kind of freedom, a 'sacred' power' of the meek, weak and humble" (Turner, 1992, 26), Strayed's separation from culture and her solitary hike in nature give her a chance to explore a sacred power. As the final voiceover informs, after she comes back from her threshold experience, she is able to have meaningful relations to have a family, incorporated (in Van Gennep's terminology) or reaggregated (in Turner's terminology) into the community. Accepting the death of her mother in this nomizing ritualistic redemptive experience, to use Berger's terminology, she maintains conversations with new significant others and objective/subjective symmetry, healing anomie. Presenting the wild as a limen space, the film indicates the nurturing and redemptive power of the sacred nature for lost identities.

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