No Place Like Home: The Hotel in Modernist Women's Writing

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ABSTRACT

My PhD explores the theme of the hotel in the modernist fiction of Jean Rhys, Katherine Mansfield and Elizabeth Bowen, and considers it alongside theories of place and the body in order to interrogate the ways in which this space challenges conceptions of home and belonging. The project reads the hotel as a particular type of space, as that which exists in between the public and the private, and looks at the ways in which modernist women writers use the liminal, in-between space of the hotel to think through and challenge gendered distinctions of the public and the private. More specifically, the project examines how these writers question ideas of home, belonging and exile through the distinct unhomeliness and impermanence of the hotel. My project concentrates on the interwar writings of Rhys, Mansfield and Bowen, all of whom share a background of a colonial birthplace followed by a subsequent relocation to the imperial centre of London, and whose own sense of home is therefore unstable. Finally, the project demonstrates conclusively how their tendency to situate their narratives within hotels reveals the committed engagement of these three writers to the central themes and concerns of modernism and modernity. My first chapter considers glamour, romance and adultery in the hotel in the novels and short stories of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield, and engages with recent scholarship on interwar histories of women's sexuality to understand the recurrence of such themes. The chapter posits the hotel as a distinctly modern space, in which the female protagonists of these novels find the freedom to explore their sexuality and their desires away from both the moral constraints of the home and the judgemental gaze of the public sphere. However, the chapter also considers the way in which the sense of impermanence within the hotel constructs it as a place of transition and dramatic, potentially troubling change. The second chapter examines the ways in which the hotel is depicted in a more sinister light as a place of entrapment and confinement. It is in this chapter that the unstable distinction between public and private space within the hotel is explored fully, and I engage with Foucauldian theories of surveillance to consider issues of exclusion and segregation based on gender and class backgrounds. This chapter also explores the themes of loneliness and isolation that such a reading highlights, and links these to ideas of modernist anomie and alienation. The third chapter moves to a more hopeful reading of the hotel, looking at the ways in which it is often portrayed as a hiding place in the writings of these authors, in which characters seek refuge from the rapid change and chaos of modernity. This chapter also further explores the ways in which the hotel room functions for many of the female protagonists as 'a room of one's own,' a private space away from the demands of the domestic sphere. The chapter concludes with a reading of the hotel room as a retreat from the self, and engages with theories of trauma and loss to consider the spatial habits of these characters and the motivations behind them. This project provides a much needed reading of the unique and highly complex space of the hotel in modernist writing from the perspective of the female author and her characters, and asserts the importance of further critical work into the hotel as a key space of modernism and modernity.

FOR MY GRANDPARENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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This thesis makes extensive use of anonymous regular features in popular women's magazines, articles in newspapers and hotel advertisements. To efficiently reference such works, the referencing system used here therefore adapts the current MHRA referencing system, and references for these articles are given in full in footnotes, and not included in the Bibliography.

INTRODUCTION

I have often thought it would be interesting if the front of [...] an hotel [...] could be swung open on a hinge like the front of a doll's house. Imagine the hundreds of rooms with their walls lit up and the real-looking staircase and all the people surprised doing appropriate things in appropriate attitudes as though they had been put there to represent something and had never moved in their lives.

~ Elizabeth Bowen, *The Hotel* (1927)

Located somewhere in between the city and the home, the hotel has been largely overlooked in favour of these other, more dominant spaces of modernity. Not-quite-public and yet not-quite private, the hotel exists in a liminal sphere. In its transience, it is a not too distant relation of those other modern spaces such as the train station, airport and waiting room, and yet is decidedly more private than these 'doorsteps, docks and platforms' that exist in between one destination and another.[1] The hotel also shares many of the same interior liminal spaces as the home – it too has stairs, hallways, and corridors, those curious spaces in which 'one is somehow suspended' – but again, due to its impermanent nature, such spaces are markedly more public in the hotel than in the home, carrying with them the risk, or thrill, of encountering unknown persons round every turn.[2] Its complex liminality, and its resistance to being confined as either public or private, marks the hotel as a space that offers crucial insight into the shifting tensions and ideologies of modernity. The variety of different spaces within it – the lounge, the lobby, the corridors and the bedrooms – constructs it as the perfect literary setting, providing as it does a cross-section of society, all 'doing appropriate things in appropriate attitudes as though they had been put there to represent something'.[3] Most importantly, however, as a space that exists in between locations, the hotel is a space in which we can explore the histories of those marginalised

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[1] Elizabeth Bowen, *The House in Paris* (London: Vintage, 1998), p. 121. Further references to this edition are given in parentheses after quotations in the text, where the title is abbreviated to *HP*.

[2] Katherine Mansfield, *The Collected Letters of Katherine Mansfield*, ed. by Vincent O'Sullivan and Margaret Scott, 5 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984-2008), IV (1996), p. 256. Letter dated 29 July 1921.

[3] Elizabeth Bowen, *The Hotel* (London: Vintage, 2003), p. 79. Further references to this edition are given in parentheses after quotations in the text, where the title is abbreviated to *Hotel*.

subjects of modernity, those who do not belong or are excluded from the more dominant spaces of the public and private. In this thesis I explore the ways in which some modernist women writers use the hotel to think through the societal and cultural upheavals of the interwar period, and to challenge gendered distinctions of the public and private. I reveal how the hotel functions in these narratives as that which is decisively not home, thereby compelling us to reconsider our understandings of home, and of what it means to belong.

'A SENSE OF DISLOCATION AND ALIENNESS'[4]: BOWEN, MANSFIELD AND RHYS

This study focuses on the work of three authors in particular – Elizabeth Bowen, Katherine Mansfield, and Jean Rhys. I open by outlining the reasons behind the selection of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield as a focus for this thesis, and demonstrate why (and the ways in which) the use of the hotel in their work is of particular relevance and interest. I consider the connections between them, looking first and foremost at the striking similarities in their biographical details, the most prominent of which is their colonial heritage. The section also considers the formal, stylistic and, most importantly, thematic parallels across their work, and suggests that these might be traced, at least in part, to their shared experience of displacement resulting from their colonial status. Their status as women writers is also discussed, and the section highlights the ways in which their gender contributes both to their marginalisation as authors writing within the context of modernism, and as social and political subjects living through the interwar period. This section also acknowledges the shifting and often fluid class identities of each writer. The strands of the discussion are then drawn together to consider not only the extent to which the prominence of the hotel in the writing of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield is informed by these factors, but also, more crucially, what this prominence might reveal about marginal experience, home, and belonging in the interwar period and beyond.

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[4] Hermione Lee, *Elizabeth Bowen* (London: Vintage, 1999), p. 16.

Rhys, Bowen, and Mansfield may, at first glance, appear to be a rather disparate group of authors, seemingly connected only by virtue of their gender and the period in which their first major work was published. All three have been linked with modernism,[5] and yet the modernist credentials of all three have frequently been called into question.[6] The novels of Bowen, for example, have until recently been all but dismissed as 'middlebrow', a term which, as Nicola Humble observes, 'has always been a dirty word. Since its coinage in the late 1920s, it has been applied disparagingly to the sort of cultural products thought to be too easy, too insular, too smug'.[7] While it is the apparently domestic concerns of Bowen's writing that for so long prevented her inclusion in the modernist canon, Rhys's novels are often excluded because they do not comfortably adhere to popular definitions of modernist literature, definitions which will be explored in the following section of this Introduction. In her analysis of Rhys's interwar novels, Mary Lou Emery suggests that her narratives 'remain marginal to even alternate modernist canons of women's […] literature'.[8] More widely accepted as a key modernist writer as a result of her innovative and influential style, and her rejuvenation of the short story format, Mansfield was nevertheless never fully accepted amongst many of her modernist literary peers in the Bloomsbury group. According to Andrew Bennett, 'as a "colonial" from a family connected to commerce and as the mistress of the lower-middle-class Murry […], Mansfield was always to remain on the fringes of this august grouping'.[9] It is in Bennett's

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[5] Neil Corcoran describes Bowen as a 'second-generation cisatlantic modernist writer' (*Elizabeth Bowen: the Enforced Return* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004] p. 5), while Claire Tomalin writes of Mansfield that she was 'the true modernist who changed the rules for the English-language short story' (*Katherine Mansfield: A Secret Life* [London: Penguin, 1988], p. 5).

[6] Thomas Staley, for example, argues that Rhys's work 'was never very closely attuned to the technical innovations of modernism' ('The Emergence of a Form: Style and Consciousness in Jean Rhys's *Quartet*', in *Critical Perspectives of Jean Rhys*, ed. by Pierrette M. Frickey [Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1990], pp. 129-147 [p. 130]), while Nicola Humble suggests that '[c]onvenient literary fictions like "Modernism" […] leave little space for writers like […] Elizabeth Bowen' (*The Feminine Middlebrow Novel, 1920s to 1950s: Class, Domesticity, and Bohemianism* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001], p. 2).

[7] Humble, p. 1.

[8] Mary Lou Emery, *Jean Rhys at 'World's End': Novels of Colonial and Sexual Exile* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), p. xi.

[9] Andrew Bennett, *Katherine Mansfield* (Tavistock: Northcote House, 2004), p. 3.

reference to national and class identity that we can begin to appreciate more troubling reasons underlying the exclusion of these writers from the modernist canon.

In the context of this study's central concerns of home, belonging, and their effect on the subject, perhaps the most crucial of the multiple connections between these three writers is their shared history of a colonial birthplace, each of them having been born into families that formed part of the colonising tradition. Mansfield (née Beauchamp) was born in Wellington, New Zealand in 1888, the third daughter in a family that, according to her husband John Middleton Murry, 'had been in Australia and New Zealand for three generations'.[10] As a white, non-Maori child, Mansfield was aware from an early age of the differences between herself and the native New Zealanders, and was, biographer Claire Tomalin notes, 'fascinated by the exoticism of the Maoris and happy to pretend to Maori blood herself on occasion'.[11] Born in the West Indian colony of Dominica to a Welsh father and a white Creole mother of Scottish descent, Rhys was similarly conscious of the differences between herself and the other children of the island, and, if anything, felt them more intensely than Mansfield.[12] Recalling her childhood in Dominica in her autobiography, she writes: 'Side by side with my growing wariness of black people there was envy. I decided that they had a better time than we did.'[13] In her expression of envy, Rhys acknowledges the fact that she is not black, that she does not belong. The bi-national histories of Mansfield and Rhys are paralleled once again in the narrative of Bowen's life, who was born in Dublin to an Anglo-Irish family, and who moved to England at the age of seven. As Bowen herself reflects, '[a]t an early though conscious age, I was transplanted. I arrived, young, into a different mythology – in fact, into one totally alien to that of my forefathers'.[14] Hermione Lee foregrounds this notion of the alien in the very condition of

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[10] John Middleton Murry, 'Introduction', in *The Journal of Katherine Mansfield*, ed. by John Middleton Murry (London: Persephone, 2006), pp. vii-xvi (p. vii).

[11] Tomalin, p. 9.

[12] Elaine Savory, *Jean Rhys* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 4.

[13] Jean Rhys, *Smile Please: An Unfinished Autobiography* (London: Penguin, 1981), p. 50.

[14] Elizabeth Bowen, 'Pictures and Conversations', in *The Mulberry Tree: Writings of Elizabeth Bowen*, ed. by Hermione Lee (London: Virago, 1986), pp. 265-83 (p. 276).

the Anglo-Irish, observing that Bowen possessed 'a particularly acute form of the Anglo-Irish split between confidence and ambivalence, the sense of dislocation and alienness'.[15] It is this dislocation, this alienness that haunts each of these writers. Mansfield was, according to Bennett, defined by New Zealand 'above all, as displaced, placeless,'[16] and Savory maintains that Rhys, in the same way, 'was, in her culturally complex identity, unable to entirely belong anywhere'.[17] Linked by the undeniable fact of their colonial heritage, these three women never felt truly at home in the countries of their birth.

This feeling of dislocation intensified following the move, undertaken by all three authors early on in their lives, to England, and, more specifically, to the imperial centre of London. Mansfield's first experience of London – a city to which she returned periodically throughout her life – was in 1903 when she and her two sisters were sent by her parents to study at Queen's College, a girls' boarding school located in Harley Street. Despite its apparently progressive attitudes, Mansfield nevertheless experienced prejudice on account of her colonial background.[18] In a well-known passage from her journal, the author recalls the Principal of the school referring to her as '"a little savage from New Zealand".'[19] While there is little apparent resentment in her recollection of this particular incident, another passage from her notebooks details the judgement she feels emanating from the red geraniums in the garden of her London home:

[…] why should they make me feel a stranger? Why should they ask me every time I go near: 'And what are _you_ doing in a London garden?' […] I am the little colonial walking in the London garden patch – allowed to look, perhaps, but not to linger. If I lie on the grass they positively shout at me. Look at her lying on _our_ grass, pretending she lives here, pretending

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[15] Lee, p. 16.

[16] Bennett, p. 43.

[17] Savory, p. 3.

[18] Tomalin notes that the school 'had been founded in 1848 with the aim of cultivating individuality and free intellectual endeavour in its pupils rather than cramming them with facts or moulding them into pre-ordained shapes' (p. 20).

[19] Mansfield, _Journal_, p. 55.

this is her garden & that tall back of the house […] is her house. She is a stranger – an alien.[20]

Citing this passage, Bennett maintains that 'Mansfield's sense of being a "stranger", an "alien", is exacerbated by the unwritten rules that govern one's claim to a place, to a home.'[21] Feeling that she does not belong, Mansfield senses animosity from all possible places, even from flowers that are themselves not native to British soil.[22] A colonial outsider, she feels actively rejected by London, the heart of the imperial effort.

Like Mansfield, Rhys too felt a palpable sense of hostility on her move to the English capital, not only from the people of London, but also from the city itself. In her autobiography, she describes her first impressions of London as little more than one 'long, grey, straight street' after another.[23] This apparently endless pattern of identically drab streets conjures an atmosphere of confinement and claustrophobia, echoed in the following pages in her descriptions of the first landmarks and attractions she visits. Westminster Abbey, for example, is 'a muddle, a jumble of statues and memorial tablets,' in which there is 'hardly room to move'.[24] To the young Rhys, the animals in London Zoo appear imprisoned – the 'sad-eyed' lion paces constantly in its enclosure, while the Dominica parrot is 'hunched in on himself, the most surly, resentful parrot I had ever seen'.[25] Most disturbing to the author are the hummingbirds: 'The birds were flying around in a bewildered way. Trying desperately to get out, it seemed to me. Even their colours were dim. I got such an impression of hopeless misery that I couldn't bear to look.'[26] The bright colours of the birds are dimmed by the imprisonment of the zoo, just as Rhys felt

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[20] Katherine Mansfield, *The Katherine Mansfield Notebooks: Volume Two*, ed. by Margaret Scott (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p. 166. Emphasis in original.

[21] Bennett, p. 35.

[22] Bonnie Kime Scott has pointed out that the geranium in fact originated in South Africa (Keynote Address, 'Natural Connections: Woolf and Mansfield in an Eco/Feminist/Modernist Frame', *Shaping Modernism: Katherine Mansfield and her Contemporaries*, Cambridge University, 25-26 March 2011).

[23] Rhys, *Smile Please*, p. 98.

[24] Ibid., p. 100.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid.

her own vitality and enthusiasm had been dimmed by the city itself.[27] Fellow outsiders, the animals are, like Rhys, exiles from distant countries, trapped by the hostile environment of the imperial capital to be peered at curiously by its inhabitants. So distressed is she by what she sees that Rhys vows that 'nothing would ever persuade me to go into a zoo again,'[28] sentiments echoed in her account of her eventual departure, or indeed escape, from London: 'I vowed solemnly that I would never go back whatever happened, whatever happened whatsoever.'[29] Excluded from both her birthplace and the imperial centre, Rhys felt, as Savory notes, 'an intense ambivalence towards both the Caribbean and England and was, in her culturally complex identity […], unable to entirely belong anywhere'.[30] Like Mansfield, Rhys felt marginalised on account of her background, but unlike her, Rhys responded to the animosity she felt was directed at her with an equal level of cynicism and bitterness.

The same 'culturally complex identity' observed by Savory in Rhys is true not only of Mansfield, but Bowen also. Her attachments to both Ireland and England seem, throughout her essays and non-fiction, fluid and constantly changing. While for the most part, she distances herself emphatically from both nationalities, firmly defining herself as Anglo-Irish,[31] she occasionally slips into aligning herself directly with the Irish – for example, in her use of 'we' and 'our' in a description of Irish cooking: 'we are bad at pastry, poor at sauces; and our coffee-making notably is abominable'.[32] Many Irish critics, however, have been reluctant to include Bowen within the context of Irish literature largely, as Heather Laird observes, because of the 'confidential reports on political and civic life in Ireland that she compiled for the British Ministry of Information during the period of the Second World War,' a factor which, understandably, proves highly problematic for

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[27] Rhys details, for example, how her passion for literature was quelled after her arrival in the capital: 'my love and longing for books completely left me' (*Smile Please*, p. 111).

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid., p. 141.

[30] Savory, p. 3.

[31] Bowen, 'Pictures and Conversations', p. 274.

[32] Elizabeth Bowen, 'Ireland', in *People, Places, Things: Essays by Elizabeth Bowen*, ed. by Allan Hepburn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), pp. 164-169 (p. 168).

anyone attempting to place Bowen as Irish.[33] Yet any attempts to locate and define her as English prove equally impossible. She may have acknowledged the importance of her move to England, and the profound influence that this had on her creative career, but it was, as she makes clear, less the country itself and more the shock of dis-location that eventually inspired her writing:

> Possibly, it was England made me a novelist. At an early though conscious age, I was transplanted. I arrived, young, into a different mythology – in fact, into one totally alien to that of my forefathers, none of whom had resided anywhere but in Ireland for some centuries […]. From now on there was to be (as for any immigrant) a cleft between my heredity and environment […].[34]

For Bowen, this 'cleft between heredity and environment' is felt both in England and Ireland. Resolutely and inescapably Anglo-Irish – a heritage described by Vera Kreilkamp as 'a colonial class uneasily suspended, as if somewhere above the Irish channel, between a British and an Irish identity' – Bowen is split between the two countries, unable to comfortably belong to either one.[35] This idea of a split is developed by Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, who posit the Anglo-Irish as a nation in itself, but one that is 'at once within itself and beside itself, paranational. Both sides of the silent hyphen in "Anglo-Irish" are irremediably fissured, split within themselves'.[36] Existing somewhere in between the countries of their birth and England, the location of their colonial roots, Bowen, Mansfield and Rhys are unable to call either one home.

'STRIKING OUTWARD, INVADING THE UNKNOWN'[37]: WOMEN IN TRANSIT

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[33] Heather Laird, 'The "Placing" and Politics of Bowen in Contemporary Irish Literary and Cultural Criticism', in *Elizabeth Bowen: Visions and Revisions*, ed. by Eibhear Walshe (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2009), pp. 193-207 (p. 195).

[34] Bowen, 'Pictures and Conversations', p. 276.

[35] Vera Kreilkamp, 'Bowen: Ascendancy Modernist', in *Elizabeth Bowen: Visions and Revisions*, ed. by Eibhear Walshe (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2009), pp. 12-26 (p. 13).

[36] Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, *Elizabeth Bowen and the Dissolution of the Novel: Still Lives* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), p. 19.

[37] Bowen, 'Pictures and Conversations', p. 286.

The 'paranational' identities common to Mansfield, Rhys and Bowen prevent them from belonging either to the countries of their birth or to England, the origin of their colonial identity. Marked forever as outsiders, the authors swing, in their non-fictional writing, between embracing their uniqueness, and being exhausted and almost defeated by this same otherness. Never truly at home, the three writers consequently exist in a rootless, transient state, their lives marked by the constant movement between one place and the next. In her short life, Mansfield was perhaps the most travelled of the three – following her final departure from New Zealand in 1908, the author journeyed continually across Europe, moving on average at least once a year. While from 1918 onwards the majority of her travelling was undertaken on the advice of doctors to seek respite and a possible cure for the tuberculosis from which she suffered (and from which she eventually died in 1923), Mansfield did travel ceaselessly before her diagnosis: Bavaria, Paris, the South of France.[38] Rhys too, after leaving London in 1919 to marry Jean Lenglet in Holland, journeyed regularly across Europe – from Holland, to Paris, to Brussels, back to Paris, before finally returning to London in 1927.[39] In Bowen's case, it was her childhood that was filled with travel, or rather, as Maud Ellmann terms it, with 'successive dislocations'.[40] She moved to England with her mother Florence at the age of seven after her father was diagnosed with anaemia of the brain. She and her mother then moved around various locations up and down the Kent coast until her mother died of cancer in 1912, at which point Bowen was sent to a boarding school in Hertfordshire, returning to Bowen's Court, the family home in Ireland, to spend the holidays with her father. The continual travelling of these three women can be read as either positive or negative – they can be understood as either liberated, independent women, free to move about as they please, or instead as exiles, refugees, condemned to wander forever in search of home.

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[38] Bennett, pp. vii-viii.
[39] Savory, p. xxii.
[40] Maud Ellmann, *Elizabeth Bowen: The Shadow Across the Page* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), p. 27.

The same might well be said of their protagonists who move about constantly, and who exist almost entirely in the temporary, liminal spaces of hotel rooms and boarding-houses. The texts of Mansfield, Rhys and Bowen are dominated by these transitory spaces, and even the homes in their novels and short stories – traditionally spaces of permanence, stability and belonging – have an unmistakeable air of *im*permanence, either providing little comfort to their owners, seen, for example, in Anna and Thomas Quayne's dissatisfaction with their house in Bowen's *The Death of the Heart* (1938), or occupied at all times with the relentless coming and going of guests as in the Heidlers' Parisian apartment in Rhys's *Quartet* (1928). While the biographies of these authors should not be read as the primary influence on the shape of the narratives which Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield went on to write – as there are undoubtedly a number of other factors that contributed significantly to the structure and content of their texts, not least the context of the interwar period as a time of instability and change, modernist tropes of alienation and dislocation, and the marginality of women's experience – their experiences should certainly not be overlooked, forming as they do the consciousnesses and subjectivities of the authors in question.

As well as sharing the similar histories of colonial birthplaces and subsequent relocation to England, Mansfield, Rhys and Bowen all experienced in their early lives a sometimes devastating maternal absence. For Rhys and Mansfield, this absence took place largely in the form of an emotional distancing between mother and daughter. In her autobiography Rhys writes of her troubled relationship with her mother – Minna Lockhart, from who Rhys inherited her Creole blood – recalling how, as a young girl, she 'grew to dread her'.[41] She describes her numerous failed attempts to gain her mother's attention and affection, commenting that, 'she drifted away from me and when I tried to interest her she was indifferent.'[42] The two grew apart, seemingly due to her mother's apparent preference for Rhys's younger sister: 'Gradually I came to wonder about my mother less and less until

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[41] Rhys, *Smile Please*, p. 42.
[42] Ibid., p. 43.

at last she was almost a stranger and I stopped imagining what she felt or thought.'[43] According to the author's journals, Mansfield's mother was similarly emotionally detached from her children, particularly, according to friends of the family, her third daughter Katherine (née Kathleen).[44] This ostensible dislike of her daughter developed over the years, driven by what Mrs Beauchamp saw as Mansfield's reckless behaviour, and culminated in Mansfield being removed from her mother's will in 1909.[45] For Bowen, maternal absence was perhaps the most traumatic and life-altering, resulting as it did from the death of her mother when the author was thirteen years old. The grief felt by the adolescent Bowen was only intensified by the closeness and intimacy she had shared with her mother, particularly in the five years spent travelling around the Kentish coast together. In her unfinished autobiography, *Pictures and Conversations*, Bowen recalls the joyous thrill of sneaking into vacant villas without the permission of the estate agent, a 'game' in which both mother and daughter clearly revelled: 'I became as adept as a Fagin pupil at snaking in through some forgotten little back window, then finding a door to unbolt to admit her.'[46] Within these empty residences, Bowen and her mother dreamed of the possible happiness they might experience in each:

> With the first echo of our steps on the stripped floors, or of our voices excitedly hushed by these new acoustics, another dream-future sprang into being. We took over wherever we were, at the first glance. Yes, what a suppostitious existence ours came to be, in these one-after-another fantasy buildings, pavilions of love.[47]

The girlish glee with which they both explored these spaces conveys the depth of the bond between mother and daughter, and underlines the consequent level of grief and shock Bowen felt upon her mother's untimely death.

The mourning and grief felt by Bowen and, to a somewhat lesser extent, by Rhys and Mansfield for their absent mothers is paralleled by the atmosphere of mourning and

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[43] Ibid., p. 46.
[44] Tomalin, p. 13.
[45] Antony Alpers, *The Life of Katherine Mansfield* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982), p. 95.
[46] Bowen, 'Pictures and Conversations', p. 279.
[47] Bowen, 'Pictures and Conversations', pp. 279-80.

melancholia that runs throughout much of their work. Eluned Summers-Bremner examines the concept of mourning in Bowen's writing, and maintains that her 'fiction indicates a problematic condensation of absence and loss,'[48] while Bennett and Royle suggest that her novels are 'pervaded by the forces of dissolution and mourning'.[49] Both Jessica Gildersleeve and Kristin Czarnecki note the prevalence of mourning in Rhys's early novels – specifically *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939) – and maintain that the erratic moods and behaviours of Sasha Jansen can be read 'as symptoms of Kristevan depression,' a depression rooted in a 'thwarted mourning for the lost maternal'.[50] Particularly notable in Bowen's writings is the prevalence of motherless characters – many of her interwar novels feature protagonists whose mothers are dead or absent in some way. In the work of Mansfield and Rhys, the mourning for the absent mother can be traced through the complicated maternal relationships and anxieties concerning maternity that feature in many of their narratives. The tentative attempts at mothering displayed by protagonist Bertha in Mansfield's 'Bliss' (1920),[51] who is largely prevented from interacting with her own child by a judgemental and domineering nanny, reveals the confining and constricting nature of the social roles imposed upon women of all classes. In Rhys's writing, Julia Martin's troubled relationship with her dying mother in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* (1931), Anna Morgan's pregnancy and subsequent botched abortion in *Voyage in the Dark* (1934), and, most notably, Sasha's detached recollection of the death of her newborn son in *Good Morning, Midnight*, signal a deep-seated fear of the physical reality of motherhood. But the absent mother manifests not just in those narrative strands that explicitly link to the maternal, but

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[48] Eluned Summers-Bremner, 'Monumental City: Elizabeth Bowen and the Modern Unhomely', in *Modernism and Mourning*, ed. by Patricia Rae (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2007), pp. 260-70 (p. 263).

[49] Bennett and Royle, p. xviii.

[50] Jessica Gildersleeve, 'Muddy Death: Fate, Femininity and Mourning in Jean Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight*', in *Rites of Passage in Postcolonial Women's Writing*, ed. by Pauline Dodgson-Katiyo and Gina Wisker (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2010), pp. 227-244. Kristin Czarnecki, '"Yes, it Can be Sad, the Sun in the Afternoon": Kristevan Depression in Jean Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight*', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 32:3 (2009), 63-82 (pp. 63-4). See also Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, trans. by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).

[51] Katherine Mansfield, 'Bliss', in *The Collected Stories: Bliss* (London: Penguin, 2007), pp. 91-105.

also in the rootless characters who drift across the novels and short stories of these authors. Such a reading finds its foundation in Luce Irigaray's reworking of the Platonic concept of the *chora*, as she posits the mother as the original home for which all subjects feel 'an infinite nostalgia'.[52] These nomadic, homeless characters wander endlessly in search of home, only experiencing a sense of belonging in bodily closeness with others, a closeness that often replicates the intimacy of mother and daughter.

Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield are connected by more than the places of their birth – they are unavoidably linked by their status as women writers. All three were marginalised as both authors and subjects – marginalised in the modernist canon for their gender, nationality or subject matter – and marginalised in their lived experiences of everyday existence. Bonnie Kime Scott comments on the 'doubly marginal status' of these writers as women and 'as colonials,' and yet their colonial background was not the only thing that contributed to their perspective as outsiders – class was also an issue.[53] After moving to England from Dominica in 1907, Rhys struggled to make a living, touring the country as an underpaid chorus-girl from 1909-10. Aside from being financially unremunerative, this stint as a chorus-girl only served to further damage her reputation and lower her social standing. The daughter of a highly successful New Zealand banker, Mansfield was financially comfortable in her early life and adolescence. Not long after her return to London in 1908, however, Mansfield found that she could not live on her allowance from her father – and, more importantly, that she wanted to earn money for herself. While she kept her allowance for several years, her determination to write meant that this was spent largely on the printing costs for *Rhythm*, the literary magazine founded by Middleton Murry that she later co-edited, and the couple often struggled to make ends meet. While Bowen's Anglo-Irish heritage was decidedly upper class, she nevertheless struggled with the financial burden of Bowen's Court, which she inherited in 1930, and despite her efforts to maintain an illusion

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[52] Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. by Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 49.

[53] Bonnie Kime Scott, 'Introduction', in *The Gender of Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Bonnie Kime Scott (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 1-18 (p. 5).

of wealth in the comfort and hospitality she offered her guests at the house, several saw through the veneer. Virginia Woolf, who visited Bowen a number of times, commented in a letter written in 1934 to Vanessa Bell that the house was 'merely a great stone box […] full of decayed eighteenth-century furniture,' in which Bowen 'insisted on keeping up a ramshackle kind of state, dressing for dinner and so on'.[54] Woolf's cutting remarks are particularly revealing of the prejudices of the English upper classes, which operated to insidiously exclude those such as Bowen whose standards were thought to have slipped, and Rhys and Mansfield, whose financial constraints were far more apparent.

The colonial heritage of these authors, and their marginalised identities, undoubtedly impact upon their writings. Considered within this context, the prevalence of the hotel in the novels and short stories of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield seems wholly understandable. The hotel is both public and private, and at the same time is neither, existing instead as a curious, liminal space between the public world of the street and the private world of domestic life. Its liminality is further reinforced by its inherent impermanence – the constant coming and going of guests marks the hotel as a space that is, for all who inhabit or pass through it, undeniably temporary. It is also revealed as a key space for marginalised subjects, for those who exist outside societal norms and who are unable or unwilling to own or occupy a home of their own. The novels and short stories of these writers also demonstrate the ways in which the hotel became a crucial space for women in modernity, in which they were freed from the judgemental gaze of the street and the domestic responsibilities or expectations of the home. As such, the hotel as setting offers a unique opportunity for Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield to fully interrogate the subjectivities of their female protagonists, and to comment on the lives of women during the interwar period. As an in-between, no-place – neither here nor there – the hotel is also, for these authors, the ideal space in which to think through the complex ideas of home and belonging that are so integral to their writing.

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[54] Virginia Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Nigel Nicolson, 6 vols (London: Hogarth Press, 1979), V, pp. 299-300.

'A BEWILDERING PLURALITY'[55]: MODERNISM

Modernism has become an increasingly slippery term, one with multiple meanings and understandings. This section begins by considering the various definitions of modernism and modernist literature that have been put forward by critics, in an attempt to arrive at a working definition of what it is that makes a text, or a writer, modernist. The first of the definitions to be considered is that which characterises modernism as occurring within a particular bracket of time (one which alters quite drastically depending on critical approach). The section then moves on to definitions based on modernist tendencies – on the specific stylistic preoccupations of modernist texts, and the aims and ideologies behind their creation. Definitions that centre on the subject matter and thematic concerns of modernist writing are also considered, such as those which concentrate on the move from realism's tendency to detail the exterior world to modernism's focus on detailing the interior mind and the construction of subjectivity. Having laid out a framework for defining modernism within the context of this study, I tackle the issue of women in modernism, and acknowledge the vital critical work that has gone towards recovering many modernist women writers who had previously been either ignored or jettisoned into other subgenres, such as middlebrow/domestic fiction. The various reasons behind the exclusion of these writers are also explored, and the section suggests that, while Mansfield has long been widely accepted as a modernist writer (although is still not recognised as one of the central figures of modernism, in the way that James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and T. S. Eliot might be), the position of Bowen and Rhys within the modernist canon has either been contested or simply dismissed. Crucially, I outline the ways in which this study reveals how these authors can be understood as modernist.

What is it that makes a writer, or indeed a text, modernist? Is there one definable quality which can be pinpointed, recognised, and used as proof of an undeniable modernist

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[55] David Ayers, *Modernism: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), p. x.

status? A study such as this, which engages with the work of so-called 'modernist women writers', must be able to answer these questions, and yet attempts to define terms such as 'modernist' and 'modernism' often encounter problems owing to the frequency with which they reoccur in critical work, and the wide variety of texts and authors to which they have been applied. This is not necessarily a reason for concern – the multiplicitous nature of modernism is something that many critics argue is to be embraced and enjoyed. In his recent critical introduction to modernism, for example, Michael Whitworth suggests that '"modernism" is not so much a thing as a set of responses to problems posed by the conditions of modernity'.[56] The diversity of the definitions continually being developed for this 'set of responses' reflects and reinforces the diversity of modernism itself.

Typically, one of the most widely used definitions of modernism is that which situates it within a specific period. First published in 1976, Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane's *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature, 1890-1930*, places modernism, as the title suggests, within strict temporal boundaries. Their reasons for doing so are well explained, and are laid out via detailed accounts of the texts emerging internationally at a certain point, and the patterns that are traceable across them. Bradbury and McFarlane suggest that, 'like Romanticism,' modernism 'originated with historical neatness about the beginning of a century, in a period of deep intellectual reappraisal and social and intellectual change'.[57] Such a definition focuses on the historical context of modernism, aligning it with the social and cultural developments occurring at the same time, in, for example, urbanisation, industrialisation, printing presses, magazines, and political movements. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the parameters of this particular definition shift depending on the critical approach taken, and modernism begins and ends at different times according to the importance placed upon certain texts, events and developments by

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[56] Michael Whitworth, 'Introduction', in *Modernism*, ed. by Michael Whitworth (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), pp. 3-61 (p. 3).

[57] Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, 'The Name and Nature of Modernism', in *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature, 1890-1930*, ed. by Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (London: Penguin, 1976), pp. 19-55 (p. 28).

different critics. For example, Morag Shiach uses the same temporal boundaries as Bradbury and McFarlane for her study of modernism, labour and selfhood,[58] while for their collection on modernist literature and empire, Howard Booth and Nigel Rigby also locate the beginning of modernism as 1890, but choose to extend the closing parameters to 1940.[59] Gillian Hanscombe and Virginia L. Smyers, however, firmly situate their study of modernist women between the years of 1910 and 1940.[60] More recently, Jane Goldman and John Smart in separate works again pinpoint the beginning of modernism as 1910.[61] All three of these vary, however, in their views on the year of its conclusion. This tendency in criticism to regard 1910 as the metaphorical birth of modernism gives more than a slight nod to Virginia Woolf's own assertion that 'on or about December 1910 human character changed'.[62]

Yet while it is crucial to acknowledge the confluence of modernism and modernity, and the impact made by scientific, cultural, political and technological developments (among others) upon the art and literature that ran alongside them, it is nevertheless problematic to restrict modernism to one particular timeframe. By defining as modernist anything that falls within a specific period of time, the term itself is transformed, Douglas Mao and Rebecca Walkowitz maintain, 'from an evaluative and stylistic designation to a neutral and temporal one,' and thus risks becoming meaningless.[63] Further, in excluding any text that falls outside the boundaries of that period, such definitions run the more troubling risk of providing an understanding of modernism that is undeniably elitist. As Raymond

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[58] Morag Shiach, *Modernism, Labour and Selfhood in British Literature and Culture, 1890-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[59] Howard J. Booth and Nigel Rigby, eds, *Modernism and Empire: Writing and British Coloniality* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).

[60] Gillian Hanscombe and Virginia L. Smyers, *Writing for Their Lives: The Modernist Women, 1910-1940* (London: The Women's Press, 1987).

[61] Jane Goldman, *Modernism 1910-1945: Image to Apocalypse* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004). John Smart, *Modernism and After: English Literature 1910-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

[62] Virginia Woolf, 'Character in Fiction', in *Virginia Woolf: Selected Essays*, ed. by David Bradshaw (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 37-54 (p. 38).

[63] Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, 'Introduction: Modernisms Bad and New', in *Bad Modernisms*, ed. by Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2006), pp. 1-17 (pp. 1-2).

Williams suggests, in their attempts to pin modernism down to a strictly delineated period, critics ultimately confine it 'to this highly selective field,' thus denying it 'to everything else in an act of pure ideology, whose first, unconscious irony is that, absurdly, it stops history dead. Modernism being the terminus, everything afterwards is counted *out* of development. It is *after*, stuck in the post.'[64] In addition, a periodising definition of modernism is also reductive in its failure to take into account formal and stylistic tendencies present in its literature, as well as the central ideologies underpinning it.

In an attempt to avoid such pitfalls, others opt to define modernism not by the period in which it supposedly took place, but by the stylistic tendencies and formal attributes common across its literary works. Echoing Ezra's Pound's command to 'make it new,'[65] modernist literature, argues David Lodge, 'is generally regarded as […] being in reaction *against* traditional realism,'[66] and is consequently, according to Andreas Huyssen, 'experimental' in nature.[67] The reasons behind these shifts and innovations in style and form cannot be separated from the context of modernity, and Deborah Parsons highlights the importance of recognising that:

> For a generation born into the last decades of the Victorian era, yet whose maturity coincided with technological innovation, scientific revolution and the destructive rupture of world war, the sense of living in a new age was acute, and what had become the conventional forms of fiction seemed inappropriate, even hostile, to the depiction of their contemporary moment.[68]

The experimentalism hinted at by Huyssen is typically characterised by fragmentation and defamiliarisation within narratives, by innovative techniques such as stream of

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[64] Raymond Williams, 'When Was Modernism?', in Raymond Williams, *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists*, ed. by Tony Pinkney (London: Verso, 1996), pp. 31-35 (pp. 34-5). First emphasis mine; second emphasis in original.

[65] Ezra Pound, *Make it New: Essays* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1935).

[66] David Lodge, 'The Language of Modernist Fiction: Metaphor and Metonymy', in *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature, 1890-1930*, ed. by Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (London: Penguin, 1976), pp. 481-96 (p. 481).

[67] Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), p. 53.

[68] Deborah Parsons, *Theorists of the Modernist Novel: James Joyce, Dorothy Richardson, Virginia Woolf* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), p. 2.

consciousness and rhythmic prose patterning, by the use of 'mythic patterning as an "organising structure"'[69] and by the eschewal of 'the straight chronological ordering of its material, and the use of a reliable, omniscient and intrusive narrator'.[70] The narratives of modernist literature are disjointed, disrupted, and disruptive to the accepted order of things, typically beginning *in media res* and lacking any kind of closure or resolution. The 'modern novel,' suggests Lodge,

> has no real 'beginning', since it plunges us into a flowing stream of experience with which we gradually familiarize ourselves by a process of inference and association; its ending is usually 'open' or ambiguous, leaving the reader in doubt as to the characters' final destiny.[71]

Given these qualities, it is perhaps unsurprising that modernist literature is often regarded as being deliberately abstruse and 'difficult', removing as it does 'many of the devices that would have conventionally helped the reader make sense of the text,' and requiring, Whitworth maintains, 'the audience […] to collaborate actively in the production of meaning'.[72] While this definition escapes the problems of exclusion inherent in the periodising definition outlined above, it nevertheless encounters similar issues in its somewhat restrictive nature. It is perhaps problematic to insist that all modernist texts feature these stylistic traits, and yet it remains unclear how many of these stylistic attributes a text must feature in order to qualify as modernist – whether the mere inclusion of stream of consciousness, for example, would automatically confer modernist status upon a text. If a text does not feature any of these stylistic and formal qualities, and yet demonstrates in its subject matter the ideological preoccupations and concerns of modernist literature, to exclude it from the modernist canon is no less problematic than excluding it on the basis of the year in which it was written.

Traceable throughout the majority of modernist criticism is one final principal way in which literary works are defined as modernist, one that takes as its focus the subject

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[69] Whitworth, 'Introduction', p. 12.
[70] Lodge, p. 481.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Whitworth, 'Introduction', p. 12.

matter and the thematic and ideological concerns of modernist fiction. The aforementioned reaction against that which preceded it is demonstrated in part by a turn away from the intricate descriptions of the exterior world as witnessed in realism, to modernism's more pronounced focus on the interior consciousness of the subject. This is not to suggest that places or settings are not central to modernist writing – indeed, as shall be outlined later, modernism displays increasing concern with the urban, as well as with the liminal spaces of day to day existence. Rather, external settings in modernist literature become ever more closely linked to and inseparable from the subjectivities of characters inhabiting them. Modernism's narrative turn towards a more in-depth an exploration of subjectivity is noted by Bradbury and McFarlane, who remark that 'the movement towards sophistication and mannerism, towards introversion […], internal self-scepticism, has often been taken as a common base for a *definition* of Modernism'.[73] This turn inwards towards the self and subjectivity is, however, by no means the only principal theme apparent across modernist literature. As David Ayers observes,

> broad themes about the nature of selfhood and consciousness, the autonomy of language, the role of art and of the artist, the nature of the industrial world, and the alienation of gendered existence form a set of concerns which manifest themselves across a range of works and authors.[74]

Despite the variety of individual subjects and themes highlighted here by Ayers, there are nevertheless problems with this definition that arise due to its somewhat restrictive nature, implying as it does that a text must have certain key concepts or ideas at its core in order to be termed modernist. Of the three major strands in critical attempts to define modernism, however, this approach is undoubtedly the most flexible, and allows for the widest variety of texts to be classed as modernist.

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[73] Bradbury and McFarlane, 'The Name and Nature of Modernism', p. 26. Emphasis in original.
[74] Ayers, p. x.

While each of the three definitions outlined above are problematic in one way or another, they are arguably only so if taken individually. For example, Whitworth highlights the inadequacies of a purely chronological definition, maintaining that 'a theory of modernism that could not make reference to the formal features of the work would be an impoverished one. However,' he suggests, 'a theory which comprehends the relation between those formal features and the deeper cultural upheaval is richer than a theory which acknowledges both aspects without relating them.'[75] Definitions that focus solely upon the stylistic attributes or thematic concerns of modernist literature are similarly lacking. The stylistic tendencies and ideological concerns of modernist literature, such as fragmented and self-conscious narratives, defamiliarisation and lack of narrative resolution, accompanied by predominant themes of subjectivity, alienation and anomie, cannot be separated from the surrounding context of modernity. As Peter Brooker *et alia* argue, '[m]odernism is not determined by a modernity that precedes it but is imbricated in it, is inseparable from the self-reflexive nature of the modern life forms into which it is bound'.[76] Ideally, any definition of modernism should attempt to include elements of each of the strands outlined above. Yet it may not be possible to construct a definition that satisfies everyone, and the ideal definition of modernism may well not exist. As Brooker *et alia* suggest, 'no account of modernism can hope to be fully comprehensive, but […] any account must register its overdetermined, cross-disciplinary, international, and institutional affiliations'.[77] Acknowledging the many conflicting definitions of modernism constantly being revised and rethought in contemporary criticism does not mean that an understanding of modernism cannot or should not be attempted or thought through. In the context of a study such as this, which considers the hotel in modernist fiction by women, the understanding of modernism is inevitably and unavoidably affected by the central concerns of gender and space.

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[75] Whitworth, p. 6.

[76] Peter Brooker *et al*, 'Introduction', in *The Oxford Handbook of Modernisms*, ed. by Peter Brooker *et al* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 1-13 (p. 4).

[77] Ibid., p. 2.

Feminist critics have consistently pointed out the way in which modernism – or at least the understanding of modernism in criticism up until at least the 1980s – is often inherently gendered. In the introduction to her seminal critical anthology, *The Gender of Modernism* (1990) – the first of its kind in its focus primarily on previously neglected modernist female authors – Scott argues that '[m]odernism as we were taught it at midcentury was perhaps halfway to truth [….] [as it] was unconsciously gendered masculine'.[78] This 'unconscious' gendering, for Scott, took the form of the exclusion, or indeed erasure of women writers from the modernist canon. The overwhelming invisibility of modernist women writers was noted three years earlier by Hanscombe and Smyers, who point out that, were one to ask 'just about anyone interested in English literature, or women, or both, which women were writing in England just after the turn of the century,' one would be 'bound to hear "Virginia Woolf". You may sometimes hear added "Oh, and there was Katherine Mansfield".'[79] Such comments derive from a frustration with the invisibility of women authors in the modernist canon, their distinct absence from university syllabi and from wider cultural debates on modernism. This is in spite of the fact that a wealth of feminist criticism has worked, and continues to work, to unearth the neglected or forgotten women of modernism, such as H. D., Zora Neale Hurston, Djuna Barnes, and Olive Moore to name a few. As Maren Tova Linett suggests, there is, thanks to such studies, now 'much more to modernism than was apparent when analysis of "the men of 1914" with occasional mention of Virginia Woolf dominated courses and conferences about modernist literature'.[80] However, for the majority of those unfamiliar with the intricate and extensive networks of modernism, Woolf nevertheless remains the first and perhaps only modernist woman writer that readily springs to mind. Despite the progress that has been made, modernism still remains 'unconsciously gendered'.

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[78] Scott, 'Introduction', in *The Gender of Modernism*, p. 2.

[79] Hanscombe and Smyers, p. 1.

[80] Maren Tova Linett, 'Modernist Women's Literature: An Introduction', in *The Cambridge Companion to Modernist Women Writers*, ed. by Maren Tova Linnett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 1-16 (p. 10).

The exclusion of many of these women writers from the modernist canon is undoubtedly impossible to separate from the wider exclusion of women from literary canons in general. Alongside the many celebrated male writers regularly appearing on university syllabi, polls of greatest writers or novelists in newspapers and magazines, and general cultural commentary, there are usually little more than a handful of women writers. *The Observer's* '100 Greatest Novels of All Time', for example, featured a mere fourteen novels by women (and only one by a modernist woman writer – Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* appears at number 46 on the list), a percentage that, while perhaps an improvement on earlier lists, is still alarmingly low.[81] Jane Austen, Virginia Woolf, George Eliot, and perhaps a Brontë or two are all that are likely to make it onto most such lists, and the reasons behind such omissions can potentially be traced back to a lingering subconscious cultural suspicion that women's writing is in some way inferior merely by virtue of the fact that it is written by women.[82] In the majority of early modernist criticism certainly, Scott maintains,

> the inscriptions of mothers and women, and more broadly of sexuality and gender, were not circulated widely and were rarely collected for academic recirculation. Deliberate or not, this is an example of the politics of gender. Typically, both the authors of original manifestos and the literary historians of modernism took as their norm a small set of its male participants, who were quoted, anthologized, taught, and consecrated as geniuses. Much of what even these select men had to say about the crisis in gender identification that underlies much of modernist literature was left out or read from a limited perspective. Women writers were often deemed old-fashioned or of merely anecdotal interest.[83]

A clear example of this exclusion of women by their male counterparts can, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar maintain, be found in Ezra Pound's (he who exhorted his fellow artists to

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[81] Robert McCrum, 'The 100 Greatest Novels of All Time: The List', in *The Observer*, 12 October 2003 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2003/oct/12/features.fiction> [accessed 7 February 2011].

[82] For further discussion of the cultural response to women's writing, see Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, 2nd edn (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2002), and Lucy Gallagher, 'The Contemporary Middlebrow Novel: (Post)Feminism, Class, and Domesticity' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Newcastle University, 2011).

[83] Scott, *Gender of Modernism*, p. 2.

'make it new') 'strikingly sexualised […] definitions of what was new and who could make it'.[84] They note that 'Pound linked modernity with masculinity,' citing his claim that what belongs to man are '"the 'inventions,' the new gestures, the extravagance, the wild shots, the new bathing of cerebral tissues."'[85] For Pound, modernism as the art of modernity is the domain of men, while women are left with '"the accumulation of their hereditary aptitudes",' or rather, the traditions of their sex.[86]

It is as a result of this tendency to regard women writers as 'old fashioned', or concerned solely with such supposedly feminine issues as domesticity and childcare, that many feminist critics have challenged the very terminology of 'women's writing' and 'women writers'. Mary Jacobus argues that such terms suggest there exists an undeniable connection between women's lived experience and the literature they produce, that there is 'an unbroken continuity between "life" and "text" – a mimetic relation whereby women's writing, reading or culture, instead of being produced, reflects a knowable reality'.[87] Others have pointed out the discrimination implicit in these terms – that defining writing by women as 'women's writing' effectively separates and/or isolates women authors and designates them as other to the supposed norm of (white) male writers. As Peggy Kamuf observes,

> Western culture has […] traditionally reserved a separate category for the intellectual or cultural productions of women, intimating their special status as exceptions within those realms where to 'think male thoughts' is not to be distinguished from thinking in universals.[88]

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[84] Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century – Volume 2: Sexchanges* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press,1989), p. xi.

[85] Ibid. Pound's comments are cited in Remy de Gourmont, *Natural Philosophy of Love,* trans. with a postscript by Ezra Pound (New York: Privately printed for Rarity Press, 1931), p. 169.

[86] Ibid.

[87] Mary Jacobus, 'Reading Woman: Essays in Feminist Criticism', in *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader*, ed. by Mary Eagleton, 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), pp. 299-301 (pp. 299-300).

[88] Peggy Kamuf, '"Writing Like a Woman": Woman and Language in Literature and Society', in *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader*, ed. by Mary Eagleton, 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), pp. 298-9 (p. 299).

For such critics, to adhere or indeed succumb to this terminology is to suggest that writing by women is in some way radically different, and is thereby to risk not only subscribing to an essentialist understanding of literature, but also to risk further confining women into the genre of women's writing.

Thus the terminology used habitually to describe writing by women is highly contested, and yet it is a terminology that must be fully thought through, particularly in a study such as this, which chooses to place its emphasis specifically on 'modernist women writers'. Given the arguments of Jacobus, Kamuf and others, it would perhaps be safer to avoid using the terms 'women writers' and 'women's writing' altogether. And yet there are, however, arguments to the contrary, which highlight the dangers inherent in a complete denial of one's sex as a writer. Toril Moi, for example, discusses the problem, and maintains that 'women are right to refuse attempt to make their subjectivity out to be coextensive with their femininity'. However, she suggests that

> [t]he problem arises when some women assume that the only way to escape imprisonment in one's sex is to deny that sex altogether, and so actually give in to temptation to say: 'I am a writer, not a woman writer.' In this way they only manage to foreground their claim to universality at the cost of sacrificing their femininity.[89]

While Moi's argument may not completely escape the problems outlined in the arguments above (in the sense that it arguably fails to counter the claims of essentialism raised by Kamuf and Jacobus), she nevertheless makes a strong case against women authors denying their sex altogether. As stated above, any discussion of women writers must engage with these issues, and must consider what, precisely, is being referred to when we speak of women's writing, and how such writing is defined. More specifically in terms of this study, we must consider what was so different about modernist writing by women that prevented it from being termed modernist by later critics, and by their male peers. The answer may lie in the subject matter – the novels of authors such as Dorothy Richardson, Rebecca West,

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[89] Toril Moi, '"I Am a Woman": The Personal and the Philosophical', in *What is a Woman? And Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 121-250 (p. 205).

and Rosamond Lehmann, for example, may seem, on the surface, to be preoccupied with domestic scenes, love affairs and parties – so-called 'women's themes', perhaps. And yet further consideration of such texts reveals them as works that not only tackle the key issues of modernity, but which also reshape modernist literature itself. As Scott points out,

> as critics and creative writers, modernist women actively transformed the novel to reflect their unique perceptions of everyday life. […] women were very much involved in the making of various modernist genres, including the novel, and they engaged in their own formal and thematic experimentation.[90]

Reconceiving modernist literature itself becomes, then, one of the primary ways in which feminist criticism locates women writers as key figures in the modernist landscape.

The recovery of modernist women writers in recent criticism tends to fall under one of two loose categories. In the first category, feminist critics work towards rescuing and/or rediscovering previously forgotten or neglected modernist women writers and affording them the critical attention that they have so far lacked. Hanscombe and Smyers' *Writing for Their Lives: The Modernist Women, 1910-1940* (1987), Linett's *The Cambridge Companion to Modernist Women Writers* (2010) and Scott's *The Gender of Modernism* and *Gender in Modernism* (2007) are key examples of this project, which is further bolstered by numerous biographies and single-author critical studies. In the second category, hinted at above, critics revisit the work of those writers who have perhaps not been forgotten, but who have been defined as existing outside of the boundaries of modernist literature. In these cases, the writing of these authors is reconsidered and retrieved from supposedly 'lesser' genres such as the middlebrow, and is repositioned within the modernist canon. Such a project not only involves re-reading the work of these writers and recognising previously overlooked or ignored aspects of their writing which conforms to accepted

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[90] Bonnie Kime Scott, 'Transforming the Novel', in *The Cambridge Companion to Modernist Women Writers*, ed. by Maren Tova Linnett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 17-32 (p. 17).

definitions of modernist literature, but often also entails a radical reconsideration of what constitutes modernist writing in the first place.

Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield are, in contemporary criticism at least, relatively well known. After a period of relative obscurity during her lifetime, Rhys's work was rediscovered following a BBC broadcast of an adaptation of *Good Morning, Midnight* in 1958, after which she wrote her most widely acclaimed novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966).[91] There has been a recent resurgence of work on Bowen, with a number of conferences, books and articles on the author emerging in the last decade.[92] Work on Mansfield is similarly flourishing, with a society set up in 2008 'to promote and encourage the worldwide study and enjoyment of Katherine Mansfield's writing'.[93] As a consequence, this study is more intrinsically connected with the latter category of recovery, revisiting the work of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield and reconsidering their work not only within the context of existing understandings of modernist literature, but also recognising and highlighting the ways in which these authors challenged and redefined the boundaries of modernist literature itself. As colonial authors, Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield are, as Linett observes, 'precariously positioned between categories of nation,' and an in-depth exploration of the work of these three writers reveals tropes of alienation, anomie, fragmentation, anxiety, exile, and an often overwhelming sense of homelessness, each of which can not only be attributed to their 'paranational' histories, but which also firmly place them within the traditionally accepted boundaries of modernist literature (each of these being tropes commonly

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[91] Elgin W. Mellown, 'Character and Themes in the Novels of Jean Rhys', in *Critical Perspectives on Jean Rhys*, ed. by Pierrette M. Frickey (Boulder: Lynne Reinner, 1990), pp. 103-17 (p. 103).

[92] See, for example, Maud Ellmann's *Elizabeth Bowen: The Shadow Across the Page* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), Neil Corcoran's *Elizabeth Bowen: The Enforced Return* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), Eibhear Walshe's collection *Elizabeth Bowen: Visions and Revisions* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2009), and Allan Hepburn's recent collections of Bowen's essays and radio transcripts: *People Places Things: Essays by Elizabeth Bowen* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008) and *Listening In: Broadcasts, Speeches and Interviews by Elizabeth Bowen* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010).

[93] 'About Us', *Katherine Mansfield Society* <http://www.katherinemansfieldsociety.org/join-about-us/> [accessed 8 February 2011].

accepted as modernist).[94] However, these authors can also be read as operating at the very limits of modernism, challenging, shifting and reshaping those boundaries as they rebel against them. Throughout this study, I demonstrate not only the ways in which these writers can and should be re-read within the context of modernism/modernist criticism, but also the active role each writer played in shaping and informing modernism itself.

A LITERATURE OF THE IN-BETWEEN: THE SPACES OF MODERNISM

The focus of this study upon the hotel situates it firmly within recent debates on the spaces and geography of modernism. Modernism has typically been understood as moving away from the domestic to the urban. While the urban undoubtedly figures centrally in much modernist writing, the approach to it within these narratives is not always positive. I suggest that the (apparent) aversion to the domestic, and the anxieties displayed towards the urban result in a prevalence of liminal spaces in modernist literature, which correspond with the stylistic traits of fragmentation, instability, alienation and the uncanny that are so prominent in modernism. Andrew Thacker argues that previous discussions of modernism have placed too much emphasis upon its temporality. While he accepts that 'the idea of "the modern" already implies a certain temporality that distinguishes it from the non-modern', he insists that, nevertheless, 'discussions of modernism must now consider also the very profound ways in which *space*, *place* and *geography* occupied the modernist imagination'.[95] Charles Burdett and Derek Duncan also note the impact of space on the form and content of modernist literature, and maintain that 'narrative was no longer guided by a solid plot and secure temporality, as space, both material and psychological, became the more dominant medium'.[96] I here reassert the importance of space and place in modernist literature by exploring and reconsidering its spatial tendencies. I challenge

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[94] Linett, p. 13.

[95] Andrew Thacker, *Moving Through Modernity: Space and Geography in Modernism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 3. Emphasis in original.

[96] Charles Burdett and Derek Duncan, 'Introduction', in *Cultural Encounters: European Travel Writing in the 1930s*, ed. by Charles Burdett and Derek Duncan (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2002), pp. 1-8 (p. 5).

previously accepted understandings of modernist space as exclusively urban, and suggest instead that a more fitting understanding of modernist spatiality might rather be found in the liminal spaces that exist in between the public and the private. I explore throughout the discernible effects of material space upon the form and style of modernist literature. Most importantly for this study, however, I highlight the impact of space upon the embodied subject, thus linking this spatial turn in modernist criticism to modernism's own move towards interiority and subjectivity.

Critical work on the spaces of modernism has tended to focus primarily on the city, and to define it largely, as Bradbury does, as an 'urban art'.[97] Bradbury suggests that this status of modernism as a metropolitan art form is due in part to the fact that 'the modern artist, like his fellow-men, has been caught up in the spirit of the modern city, which is itself the spirit of a modern technological society'.[98] The modernist preoccupation with the urban environment can indeed be linked to the rapid urbanisation that gathered pace towards the end of the nineteenth century. As Raymond Williams observes, 'there are decisive links between the practices and ideas of the avant-garde movements of the twentieth century and the specific conditions and relationships of the twentieth-century metropolis,' and the historical context of urban development is traceable in the literature and criticism of the time.[99] Baron Haussmann's radical redesign of Paris, for example, constructed the ideal environment for the *flâneur* as seen in the poetry of Charles Baudelaire, while simultaneously inspiring Walter Benjamin to seek out in the Parisian arcades the remnants of the city untouched by the same 'rectangular and perspectival

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[97] Malcolm Bradbury, 'The Cities of Modernism', in *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature, 1890-1930*, ed. by Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (London: Penguin, 1976), pp. 96-104 (p. 97).

[98] Ibid.

[99] Raymond Williams, 'Metropolitan Perceptions and the Emergence of Modernism', in Raymond Williams, *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists*, ed. by Tony Pinkney (London: Verso, 1996), pp. 37-48 (p. 37).

reorganization'.[100] London – home to an increasingly varied and skilled population, as well as the centre of empire and industry – provided the ideal focus for modernist works such as Eliot's *Waste Land* (1922) and Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), and for modernist critiques of the brutality of imperialism, such as Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902). Its ubiquity across such texts locates the modern metropolis as a key space in modernist literature.

Equally present alongside the dominant cityscape in modernist literature and art is a preoccupation with movement, transformation, and a fascination with speed which was perfectly met by the motorcar. As Thacker points out, 'motoring […] represented speed and power, qualities redolent of modernity and change itself,' and the pastime was well-represented in modernist texts such as E. M. Forster's *Howards End* (1910) and Evelyn Waugh's *Vile Bodies* (1930).[101] The motorcar plays a particularly significant role in many of Bowen's novels, including *The Hotel* (1927), *The Last September* (1929), *The House in Paris* (1935), *Friends and Relations* (1931), and, most notably, *To the North* (1932), in which protagonist Emmeline Summers's love of and fascination with speed results in a devastating and fatal car crash at the end of the novel. A fixation with movement is also evidenced by the increasing popularity of travel throughout the period, and by the consequent emergence of travel novels and narratives. The wider impact and relevance of this in modernist literature is noted by Alexandra Peat, who suggests that 'the proliferation of travel novels that emerged during the modernist period attests to modernism's obsession with narratives of both geographical and cultural movement'.[102] Burdett and Duncan also highlight the centrality of travel to modernist narratives, maintaining that modernism:

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[100] Beatrice Hanssen, 'Introduction: Physiognomy of a Flâneur: Walter Benjamin's Peregrinations through Paris in Search of a New Imaginary', in *Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*, ed. by Beatrice Hanssen (London: Continuum, 2006), pp. 1-11 (p. 4).

[101] Thacker, p. 63.

[102] Alexandra Peat, *Travel and Modernist Literature: Sacred and Ethical Journeys* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), p. 131.

can be seen as a metropolitan art of diaspora, the art produced in the wake of waves of migration and displacement that brought together millions of men and women of different nationalities, religions, and social classes in the great cities of Western Europe and the United States. The formal alterity of modernist art is therefore the consequence of travel and of the unpredictable fusions and fragmentations that occur when cultures are forced into unusual proximity.[103]

There is, in modernist literature, an overwhelming sense of fluidity across spaces, a proliferation of transitions across thresholds and boundaries which leads Thacker to remark that spaces in modernism 'cannot, it seems, be kept apart […]: rooms bleed into streets, anguished minds migrate to lands overseas'.[104] Modernism's preoccupation with movement constructs it, not as an 'urban art', but as one which is instead a literature of the shifting, liminal spaces of the in-between.

This emphasis on movement in modernist literature in turn produces protagonists who, constantly travelling in between places, are rarely, if ever, at home, and who inhabit instead unstable, transitory spaces, such as that of the hotel. The novels and short stories of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield are densely populated with such transient characters, many of whom – such as Bowen's Portia Quayne in *The Death of the Heart*, Rhys's Sasha in *Good Morning, Midnight*, and the eponymous protagonists of Mansfield's 'Father and the Girls' (1923)[105] – seem to exist solely in hotels. While the fiction of these three authors demonstrates a particular focus on or affinity for the hotel as a setting, hotels also feature heavily in many of the key, canonical texts of modernist fiction. The 'Sirens' episode of Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), for example, opens in the bar and restaurant of the Ormond Hotel. One of the principal settings of Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier* (1915) is the Hotel

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[103] Burdett and Duncan, p. 5.
[104] Thacker, p. 7.
[105] Katherine Mansfield, 'Father and the Girls', in *The Collected Stories: The Doves' Nest* (London: Penguin, 2007), pp. 466-72. Further references to this edition are given in parentheses after quotations in the text, where the title is abbreviated to 'FG'.

Excelsior in Nauheim.[106] Similarly, Woolf's *The Voyage Out* (1915) is set primarily in a hotel in the fictional South American resort of Santa Marina, and in Rosamond Lehmann's *The Weather in the Streets* (1936), the affair between Olivia and Rollo takes place almost entirely in hotels. Despite being such a prominent and popular setting, however, hotels are largely overlooked in critical work on modernist literature, which tends to focus largely, as noted above, on the notion of the modernist metropolis,[107] or else, more recently, explores the private domestic space in modernist literature.[108] Existing in between the public and private spheres, the hotel is the ultimate in-between space, perfectly representing the instability and transience that is so central to modernist literature.

'POPULAR MYTHS'[109]: THE INTERWAR PERIOD

In his 1977 analysis of interwar Britain, John Stevenson argues that the further we move from the period itself, the more difficult it becomes 'to recapture an accurate picture of social conditions between the wars, as we become more dependent upon casual impressions and popular myths'.[110] Today, that picture has become increasingly distorted, and the period is commonly regarded as a time of relief, celebration, and excitement. Summarised in popular culture by pithy epithets such as 'the Roaring Twenties' and 'the Flirty Thirties', the interwar years tend to be understood as a glamorous and carefree rebellion against the austerity of war, often seen through the privileged lens of the 'Bright Young Things' – 'London's smart set of Oxford bagged young men and flapper women'[111]

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[106] *The Good Soldier* is a fictionalised account of the adulterous affair between Ford and Rhys.

[107] As well as Bradbury and Williams's commentary on this, see also Deborah Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) and Elizabeth Wilson, *The Sphinx in the City: Urban Life, the Control of Disorder, and Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

[108] See Wendy Gan, *Women, Privacy and Modernity in Early Twentieth-Century British Writing* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) and Victoria Rosner, *Modernism and the Architecture of Private Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

[109] John Stevenson, *Social Conditions Between the Wars* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), p. 11.

[110] Ibid.

[111] Deirdre Beddoe, *Back to Home and Duty: Women Between the Wars 1918-1939* (London: Pandora, 1989), p. 23.

– who populated much of the literature of the time.[112] Such idealised conceptions of the period are crystallised in the recent resurgence in film and television productions set within its boundaries, which typically present a glamorised portrayal of the 1920s and 1930s.[113] Beginning in 2002 with Robert Altman's *Gosford Park*, this burgeoning trend for cinematic and televisual depictions of the interwar years in Britain has gradually built over the last ten years, reaching a climax in the latter half of the decade.[114] In such productions – which include adaptations of both interwar and contemporary literature set in the period, such as Stephan Elliott's adaptation of Noël Coward's 1926 play *Easy Virtue* (2008), and Channel Four's production of William Boyd's 2002 novel *Any Human Heart* (2010),[115] accounts of actual historical events, such as *The King's Speech* (2010), and straightforward dramatisations of life in the period, such as the BBC's recent instalment of *Upstairs Downstairs* (2010-present), and Stephen Poliakoff's *Glorious 39* (2009) – audiences are presented with a sleek, polished version of the interwar period in which the memories of the First World War, and the threat of the Second World War, are often overshadowed by cocktail parties, dinner dances, romance and lavish costumes.

Added to this sense of glamour that perpetuates contemporary retellings of the interwar period is the idea of speed and exhilaration brought about by the rise of new technologies in travel such as the motorcar and air travel and in the fascination with cruise ships.[116] Previously regarded as the sole eccentric preserve of members of the aristocracy and upper classes, developments in engineering during the First World War led to an

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[112] See, for example, Evelyn Waugh's *Vile Bodies* (1930), Nancy Mitford's *Highland Fling* (1931), and Anthony Powell's *Afternoon Men* (1931), among others.

[113] This resurgence follows an earlier spate of televisual representations of the interwar period, examples of which include the ITV serial *Upstairs, Downstairs* (1971-5), the serialised ITV adaptation of *Brideshead Revisited* (1981), and the serialised ITV adaptations of *Agatha Christie's Poirot* (1989-present).

[114] See: *Bright Young Things*, dir. by Stephen Fry (Warner, 2003), *Mrs Henderson Presents*, dir. by Stephen Frears (BBC, 2005) and *Atonement*, dir. by Joe Wright (Universal, 2007).

[115] See also *Brideshead Revisited*, dir. by Julian Jarrold (2 Entertain, 2008), *Miss Pettigrew Lives for a Day*, dir. by Bharat Nallumi (Focus Features, 2008) and *South Riding*, dir. by Diarmuid Lawrence (BBC TV series, 2011).

[116] This idea of speed so central to the period is foregrounded in the recent film adaptation of Coward's *Easy Virtue*, in which the glamorous Larita is reimagined as a racing driver, who enters the film as she means to go on, zooming down the driveway of the Whittakers' tranquil country house and screeching to a halt in what Colonel Whittaker dryly refers to as 'a blaze of gravel'.

increase in car production, and the subsequent fall in prices made the motorcar an increasingly affordable and attractive option for the general population in Britain. Between the wars, as Martin Pugh observes, 'the motorcar became an object of fascination for growing numbers of British people who saw it as another symbol of the "Roaring Twenties"'.[117] Those same technological developments that propelled the rise of the motorcar also increased the accessibility of travel by air and sea. Innovations in aircraft came at a rapid rate during the First World War, 'as private companies were encouraged to tender their designs to the Air Ministry'.[118] The expansion of the industry continued throughout the interwar years, and by the late 1920s commercial flights to Europe and destinations further afield were taking off on a regular basis. Holidaying on cruise-liners also became increasingly popular during this time, particularly so throughout the 1930s. Observing this trend, Juliet Gardiner comments that 'since the First World War the surplus of ships had supplied the means, and cruising around Europe and beyond had grown in popularity. In 1931, 70,000 passengers took a cruise and this number had risen to 550,000 by 1937.'[119] The glamour of the cruise arose not from its speed, as with the motorcar and the aeroplane, but from precisely the opposite – its luxury lay in the leisurely progression across the seas, during which passengers could slow down, relax, and, if they were so inclined, follow in the footsteps of Coco Chanel and cultivate an increasingly fashionable suntan.[120] Thanks to the new technologies in travel and tourism, the years between the wars have since been predominantly characterised as a carefree period of holidays and leisure for many.[121]

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[117] Martin Pugh, *We Danced All Night: A Social History of Britain Between the Wars* (London: Vintage, 2009), p. 251.

[118] Ibid., p. 305.

[119] Juliet Gardiner, *The Thirties: An Intimate History* (London: HarperPress, 2011), p. 615.

[120] Rebecca Tyrrel, 'White is the New Brown', *Telegraph*, 29 April 2001 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1317675/White-is-the-new-brown.html> [accessed 6 April 2011] (paragraph 6 of 18).

[121] For a more in-depth discussion of the rise in travel for leisure during the interwar period, see Charlotte Bates, 'Hotel Histories: Modern Tourists, Modern Nomads and the Culture of Hotel-Consciousness', *Literature & History*, 12:2 (2003), 62-75 (pp. 64-5).

Such nostalgia ignores the wider social problems and crises that prevailed throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Charles Loch Mowat admits that the years following the First World War were indeed 'enlivened by the "bright young things", whose gay parties and general lack of inhibitions created a legend of the "roaring twenties",' but, he asserts, that legend, 'for the overwhelming majority of the nation, had no foundation in fact'.[122] Instead, the relief that was felt immediately after the end of the war soon turned to grief at what had been lost, and beneath the surface of the celebrations lay a growing sense of anger and dissatisfaction, largely thanks to the mass unemployment that dogged the British population throughout the interwar period. The post-war boom that followed the First World War was relatively short-lived, based as it was 'on accumulated wartime savings and replacement demand,'[123] and, as Stevenson notes, from the point at which this began to falter in 1921, 'until the first months of 1940, Great Britain suffered mass unemployment on an unprecedented scale, with never less than a million people – a tenth of the insured population – out of work'.[124] Arising largely as a result of Britain's fragile economic position between the wars, the problem was due in part at least, Pugh argues, to the 'dramatic collapse of Britain's Victorian manufacturing economy after 1918'.[125] The progression of the economic slump throughout the interwar years is clearly delineated by Richard Overy, whose summary of 'the interwar business cycle' is suitably gloomy, dominated as it is by periods of recession, downturn and stagnation.[126] In 1929, the situation was considerably worsened by the Wall Street Crash, which triggered a period of severe depression in Britain referred to as the 'Great Slump'.[127]

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[122] Charles Loch Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars, 1918-1940* (London: Methuen, 1955), pp. 211-12.

[123] Sean Glynn and John Oxborrow, *Interwar Britain: A Social and Economic History* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1976), p. 143.

[124] John Stevenson, *British Society, 1914-45* (London: Penguin, 1984), p. 266.

[125] Pugh, p. 77.

[126] Richard Overy, *The Morbid Age: Britain and the Crisis of Civilization, 1919-1939* (London: Penguin, 2010), p. xxi.

[127] Ibid.

The discontent that pervaded interwar Britain as a result of these strained economic circumstances was accompanied by an underlying fear 'that civilisation was under threat,' a fear which, Overy argues, 'was a promiscuous and enduring hallmark of the two decades that separated the first great war from the second'.[128] For Overy, the manifestation of this anxiety was felt across a spectrum of social and cultural developments throughout the period. The rising popularity of psychoanalysis, for example, might well be seen as a response to this disquiet, as an attempt to quell the dread within the British population. The scars left by the First World War and the ever-increasing fear of another war resulted in a society that had never been more ready for or receptive to the practices of psychoanalysis – as Overy points out, 'psychoanalysis was precisely attuned to the age in which it emerged'.[129] And yet psychoanalysis can be understood as more than a mere response to a pre-existing fear – anxieties, neuroses, and disorders are the very stuff with which the practice is concerned, and it could well be argued that such conditions were produced and intensified by this. Simultaneously, the increasing popularity of psychoanalysis was itself a cause for anxiety for some, largely because of its insistent focus on repressed sexual desires. Overy suggests that 'the remorseless exploitation of sexuality by psychoanalysis was widely perceived to be socially dangerous rather than psychologically liberating'.[130] Nevertheless, the concern of psychoanalysis with the sexual behaviour of the interwar population in Britain corresponded with, and contributed to, the development of sexology, and helped bring about a discernible shift in society's willingness to discuss sexual issues openly and honestly.[131] This change paved the way for texts such as Marie Stopes's *Married Love*, published in 1918, which was revolutionary in its frank discussion of sex, and, more importantly, in its emphasis on the importance of finding pleasure in the sexual act. Stopes was also a pioneer of birth control, setting up 'the first clinic that was allowed to

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[128] Ibid., p. 14.
[129] Ibid., p. 137.
[130] Ibid., p. 149.
[131] See Chapter One for an in-depth discussion of the relationship between the two disciplines and their impact on interwar society.

dispense advice and contraceptive products without legal restriction' in London in 1921.[132]

Yet Stopes, and her campaigns for birth control, were closely linked to the growing interest in eugenics amongst British intellectual circles during the interwar period. Herself a prominent campaigner for the eugenics movement, Stopes believed throughout her career that 'only birth control could allow the ideal man and woman to develop and save the racial stock from decay,' and she left a large part of her fortune to the Eugenics Society upon her death in 1958.[133] 'The intellectual provenance of proto-fascist ideas in Britain' is, Dan Stone maintains, clearly detectable in these 'eugenics movements, movements that represented the "extremes of Englishness"' at the same time that they foreshadowed the threat of impending war.[134] Despite the liberation that the radical advances in birth control campaigns of Stopes offered women, they were simultaneously a symptom of and contributing factor to the anxieties that were so deeply rooted in interwar society.

A historiographical account of interwar Britain reveals discernible shifts in accounts of the period since the end of the Second World War. Many accounts, such as Mowat's 1955 publication, *Britain Between the Wars*, Stevenson's *British Society, 1914-45* (1984), and Overy's *The Morbid Age: Britain and the Crisis of Civilisation, 1919-1939* (2010), portray the years between the two world wars in a predominantly negative light. Mowat, for example, notes in the opening pages of his study that the end of the war in 1918 occasioned in many the hope 'that the losses and sufferings it had brought might be redeemed in a better world – a happier society at home, the nations of the earth living in peace and unity'. Instead, he argues, 'the history of the twenty years between the two world wars is the history of the disappointment of these hopes'.[135] More recently, Overy maintains that 'for the generation living after the end of the First World War the prospect of imminent crisis, a new Dark

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[132] Overy, p. 96.

[133] Ibid., p. 98.

[134] Dan Stone, *Breeding Superman: Nietzsche, Race and Eugenics in Edwardian and Interwar Britain* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002), p. 2

[135] Mowat, p. 1.

Age, became a habitual way of looking at the world'.[136] Such gloomy accounts as these are

contrasted with the many already-mentioned film and television depictions of the period,

which typically portray the interwar years in Britain in terms of their perceived glamour,

excitement and decadence. While neither of these perspectives is mistaken, equally neither

one tells the whole story. The interwar years cannot be neatly defined with a singular

narrative, and though its glamorous aspects should not be overlooked, neither should these

be allowed to overshadow the more serious social and economic concerns of the period,

and the anxieties that pervaded it. For a study such as this, which engages heavily with

issues of gendered and marginalised experience between the wars, to ignore this fact is to

deny the possibility of a fully informed reading of the period and its texts.

FROM WAR WORK TO HOUSEWORK: SHIFTING GENDER IDENTITIES

The changes in women's situation during the interwar period in Britain cannot be fully

understood unless placed in the wider context of the women's movement up until that

point, and in particular, of the suffragette movement. Officially beginning with the

formation of 'a society for the promotion of Women's Suffrage' in Manchester in 1865, the

campaign for British women's right to vote gained followers and gathered pace as the

nineteenth century drew to a close.[137] In 1903, the Women's Social and Political Union

(WSPU) was formed in London by Emmeline, Christabel, and Sylvia Pankhurst amongst

others, and in 1905, militant tactics on the part of the suffragettes began in earnest with the

arrest and imprisonment of Christabel Pankhurst and Annie Kenney on the charge of

spitting in the face of a police officer.[138] In the years that followed, suffragettes persisted in

their attempts to disrupt political and social events to the greatest extent possible,

frequently being imprisoned for their actions. Following the outbreak of war in 1914,

however, the suffragettes called a halt to their militant action, and Sylvia Pankhurst recalls

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[136] Overy, p. 3.
[137] Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Suffragette Movement* (London: Virago, 1977), p. 30.
[138] Ibid., pp. 191-2.

that '[w]e in the East End continued our work till the vote was won, but militancy was no more.'[139] While they continued to campaign for women's suffrage, the WSPU also devoted their efforts to ensuring fair working conditions and pay for the rapidly increasing female workforce. This rise in employment for women initially occurred within industries already traditionally designated female, which expanded to provide supplies for troops. As Gail Braybon observes, 'during the winter and spring of 1914-15 [...] the leather, hosiery, boot, kitbag, medical dressing and tailoring industries all took on more women, but such extra labour was for jobs which were usually regarded as women's in peacetime'.[140] By 1915, however, women had begun to replace men in industries with which they had previously been unfamiliar, and 'by 1916 there was actually a shortage of labour in the textile and clothing trades, as women moved into more lucrative munitions work'.[141] The combination of the respect and gratitude women gained for the vital role they played in the war effort and the ongoing campaigns of the suffragette movement enabled women to achieve partial suffrage in 1918, when Government finally granted votes to women over the age of thirty.

The financial independence and enfranchisement experienced by women during and immediately after the First World War inevitably had a profound effect on their attitudes towards their own position in society. Together with the atmosphere of celebration following the armistice, these crucial factors cultivated a new kind of femininity, which was crystallised in the figure of the flapper – the stylish, independent, and provocative woman who defied feminine conventions with her short sharp bob and androgynous clothing. Her fashion, argues Sheila Rowbotham, 'plucked specific male accoutrements out of context; appropriated and exaggerated, they were to be grafted on to a new culture of femininity'.[142] Martin Pumphrey also highlights the integral role fashion played in the identity of the flapper, maintaining that 'it is as a symbol of modern fashion

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[139] Ibid., p. 591.
[140] Gail Braybon, *Women Workers in the First World War: The British Experience* (London: Croom Helm, 1981), p. 45.
[141] Ibid., p. 46.
[142] Sheila Rowbotham, *A Century of Women: The History of Women in Britain and the United States* (London: Vintage, 1997), p. 120.

that the Flapper has meaning'. Of her revolutionary nature, he suggests that 'the Flapper, with her unencumbered simplified clothing, short hair and boyish figure, rebellious lifestyle and pursuit of pleasure, did genuinely challenge nineteenth-century constructions of femininity'.[143] Free to have fun, smoke, drink, and flit from one sexual partner to the next, the flapper was the very model of the emancipated woman, and was embodied in films such as *The Irresistible Flapper* (1919), *Goldfish* (1924), and *It* (1927) by a variety of actresses including Clara Bow, Louise Brooks and Colleen Moore. As a 'paradoxical combination of adolescent tomboyish androgyny and adult feminine sexuality,'[144] the flapper was a contradictory figure that represented simultaneously the joys and the anxieties conjured by the notion of women's emancipation. This polarity of opinion is summarised by Adrian Bingham, who notes that, 'to her supporters, the "flapper" personified the new opportunities in a world finally free of stifling "Victorian" conventions; to her enemies, she epitomised the erosion of manners and the slide into immorality and decency'.[145] Full of complexity, the flapper was the model of the truly modern young woman in interwar Britain.

Despite being a ubiquitous presence in the popular culture of the 1920s, however, the flapper was, in reality, largely a construct of that culture. Analysing the developing consumerism of the interwar period, Pumphrey suggests that advertisers quickly caught on to the selling power of the flapper, and points out that 'her hectic lifestyle and quest for individuality required clothes for innumerable social occasions: travelling, shopping, lunching, weddings, outdoor amusements, tea, dining, theatre, dancing'.[146] More pertinent to this study, however, are the arguments made by Billie Melman and Liz Conor highlighting the ways in which the figure of the flapper was cultivated by the media to

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[143] Martin Pumphrey, 'The Flapper, the Housewife and the Making of Modernity', *Cultural Studies*, 1:2 (1987), 179-194 (p. 186).

[144] Michelle Abate, *Tomboys: A Literary and Cultural History* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008), p. 121.

[145] Adrian Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 48.

[146] Pumphrey, p. 186.

rouse anxieties regarding the dangers of allowing young women the vote, and of the threats posed to society by women who refused to conform to norms of femininity.[147] While it should be recognised, as Bingham stresses, that the campaign against the flapper – or, more specifically, against 'the flapper vote' – really only took place in the political pages of the *Mail* and the *Mirror*, he himself acknowledges that 'editorials and feature articles […] did express suspicions about the independence and assertiveness of "modern women"'.[148] In their demonstration of the media's attempts to denigrate a generation of women through the figure of the flapper, such histories reveal that the interwar period was far from the period of liberation for women it is regularly assumed to be in more recent accounts and depictions. While some advances were made in the fight for gender equality (such as the 1923 Matrimonial Causes Act, which 'gave women equal grounds for divorce with men', and the granting of full suffrage to women in 1928), 'these were not,' Rowbotham maintains, 'the extensive reforms which many feminists and labour women had envisaged'.[149] Rather, the interwar period can be understood as one of shifting attitudes towards women, and anxieties regarding the figure of the flapper might instead be read as the first signs of a backlash against the supposedly emancipated woman.

This apparent backlash was triggered primarily by the mass levels of unemployment amongst returning troops in the years following the First World War, and was waged largely against the working woman. Susan Kingsley Kent maintains that, 'where once women had received accolades of the highest order for their service to the country during wartime, by 1918 they were being vilified and excoriated for their efforts'.[150] Public figures began to criticise women for what they regarded as the frivolous nature of their existence

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[147] See Billie Melman, *Women and the Popular Imagination in the Twenties: Flappers and Nymphs* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988) and Liz Conor, *The Spectacular Modern Woman: Feminine Visibility in the 1920s* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

[148] Bingham, p. 56.

[149] Rowbotham, p. 121.

[150] Susan Kingsley Kent, *Making Peace: The Reconstruction of Gender in Interwar Britain* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 100.

outside of work.[151] At the extreme, some blamed the unemployment crisis on 'the over-population of women', and called for the deportation of 'surplus' women in order to leave 'the sexes in the glorious "fifty-fifty" of a civilised population'.[152] As Bingham points out, however, the supposed backlash that took place across the newspapers of the interwar years 'has been considerably overstated. There *were* aggressive voices demanding the speedy removal of women workers,' but, he argues, 'in general […] the popular dailies were far more restrained than has been claimed.'[153] Yet the 'restraint' Bingham refers to here masked a far more insidious desire to drive women out of work and back into the home, a desire first expressed in the mid-1920s by concerned figures, such as Lady Frances Balfour, who, *The Times* reports, 'thought that the greatest danger that the present phase of emancipated women was encountering as they concentrated more on their own individuality was the loss of home and family life'.[154] This apparently benevolent and well-meaning concern was soon cultivated by the women's magazines that emerged during the interwar period in Britain.

As early as 1923, magazines such as *Home Life* raised the issue of 'Bachelor Women', who seemingly occasioned constant worry in the hearts of their mothers. In an attempt to reassure these supposedly overwrought mothers, *Home Life* confidently proclaims that most women, no matter how emancipated they may think themselves, 'still find their most satisfying mode of expression in refining and beautifying their homes. No amount of business success,' the writer insists, 'can conquer woman's instinct for home-making'.[155] According to such rhetoric, the home is the most natural environment for a woman, possessing an allure that she is incapable of resisting. Design and layout are,

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[151] See, for example, Lord Bathurst's comments on the fashion for spending 'every penny of wages in dress and silk stockings,' quoted in: 'Women Workers' New Outlook', *The Times*, 16 May 1923, p. 11 (paragraph 10 of 12).

[152] The argument of a Mr Gilbert Frankau, quoted in: 'The Position of Women – Hardwicke Society Debate', *The Times*, 12 April 1924, p. 10 (paragraph 4 of 5).

[153] Bingham, p. 60. Emphasis in original.

[154] 'The Position of Women – Hardwicke Society Debate', p. 10 (paragraph 5 of 5).

[155] 'Our Bachelor Daughters: Should Girls Wait on their Brothers?', *Home Life*, August 1923, Oxford, Bodleian Library, *John Johnson Collection of Printed Ephemera*, First Numbers: Women 1, p. 13.

according to these publications, just as important as maintaining the cleanliness of the domestic environment – 'this is,' after all, the *Woman's Journal* observes in 1929, 'an age of self-expression, and in what better way can a woman express her own individuality than in her own home?'[156] With the onset of the 1930s, these ideas became all the more pervasive as many more women's magazines emerged and insisted, more and more forcefully, that a woman's place was in the home – that women were not only responsible for, but defined by that home. Further, there is a decisive shift in intended readership, noted by Gardiner who argues that, while the magazines of the 1920s contained 'an abundance of advice for the so-called "bachelor girl",' those set up in the 1930s 'all concentrated on the concerns of married women'.[157] Magazines such as *Wife and Home*, the first issue of which was published in the final months of 1929, attest to the satisfaction to be gained from being the perfect housewife, declaring 'the career of the home-maker,' to be 'the finest in the world'.[158] This tendency to describe housewifery as 'a skilled profession'[159] became increasingly common throughout the women's magazines of the 1930s. *Modern Marriage*, for example, claims that 'there is no career more worth while than marriage,'[160] while *Woman's Own* 'realises that any girl worth her salt wants to be the best housewife ever – and then some'.[161] For the 1930s woman, personal and intellectual fulfilment was no longer to be found in the public world of work, but instead in the private sphere of the home.

The shifts in women's identities and position in society in the years following the First World War are, as has been demonstrated, undeniable. The campaigning of the suffragette movement, together with the vital work undertaken by women during the war,

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[156] Julia Cairns, 'Julia Cairns in Your Home', *Women's Journal*, November 1929, Oxford, Bodleian Library, *John Johnson Collection of Printed Ephemera*, First Numbers: Women 2, p. 72.

[157] Gardiner, p. 549.

[158] 'Keeping House for Him', *Wife and Home*, October 1929, Oxford, Bodleian Library, *John Johnson Collection of Printed Ephemera*, First Numbers: Women 2, p. 35.

[159] Bingham, p. 85.

[160] Frances Upton, 'Frank Talks on MARRIAGE – Now You Are Husband-High', *Modern Marriage*, April 1931, Oxford, Bodleian Library, *John Johnson Collection of Printed Ephemera*, First Numbers: Women 2, p. 33.

[161] 'How Do You Do?', *Woman's Own*, 15 October 1932, Oxford, Bodleian Library, *John Johnson Collection of Printed Ephemera*, First Numbers: Women 2, p. 5.

won the female population over the age of thirty the right to vote in 1918, with full suffrage being granted ten years later. Women's experience in professions previously unfamiliar to them furnished them with a greater level of independence, both financial and psychological. More confident, the young woman of the 1920s – or the 'bachelor girl' – took pride in her job and was eager to progress in the workplace. The figure of the flapper, while largely a construction of the media, nevertheless represented a generation of women who were beginning to break free of the gendered constraints of previous years. And yet, as discussed above, the shifts in gender identities witnessed throughout the interwar period were not always positive or progressive. The powerful discursive links made between women and home in the women's magazines of the 1930s reveal a society that was anxious to return to the values and stability of the past, and sought to reinstate the separate spheres ideology that pre-war feminism had fought so bitterly against.[162]

AT HOME AND ON THE ROAD: THE SPACES OF THE INTERWAR PERIOD

The immense upheaval of the First World War shook the belief in the supposed stability and security of the family home. Husbands, fathers and sons failed to return from the war, and many of those who did come back experienced an acute sense of alienation and displacement, an inability to readjust to everyday life. It is perhaps hardly surprising that the attempts of interwar society to come to terms with its loss centred largely on the space of the home. Such efforts involved an emphasis on the expression or distillation of the female self through homemaking, to the extent that, as one magazine suggests, filling one's own garden with flowers could become a patriotic expression of pride in one's country as this passage from *This England: A Magazine for Home and Holiday* indicates: 'My home is not new art, it is not old art. It is just English; just a part of the real English landscape around us.'[163] This fascination with and fixation upon the importance on the home intensified as the

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[162] Kent, pp. 5-6.

[163] 'Your Home', *This England: A Magazine for Home and Holiday*, April 1930, Oxford, Bodleian Library, *John Johnson Collection of Printed Ephemera*, Travel 1, p. 11.

period witnessed a marked surge in home-ownership. Thanks to the steady fall in house prices between the wars – due in part, Pugh observes, to the 'huge increases in supply of new homes'[164] – buying a house became an increasingly affordable option for many, and the rate of owner-occupation rose dramatically. This 'housing boom' not only enabled a significant percentage of the population to own their own home for the first time, but also significantly altered the landscape and geography of Britain, most notably in the escalation of suburban areas. Stevenson highlights this 'enormous suburban expansion of the interwar years,' an expansion which, he maintains, not only created 'semi-detached London,' but which also triggered 'a pattern of suburban growth and ribbon development which spread throughout the country'.[165] It is, however, crucial to recognise the role of class in home-ownership, and to acknowledge that, as Gardiner maintains, 'housing by the 1930s had become an increasingly salient indicator of the distinction between the working classes and the middle classes (particularly the lower middle class)'.[166] Owning a home remained an impossibility for many, and the insistent focus on the home's importance merely served to exclude and marginalise them further.

The rise of owner-occupation between the wars inevitably corresponded with the resurgence of the housewife as a universally recognisable figure in popular culture. The renewed emphasis on the importance of the home, and the construction of the housewife as a vital and fulfilling role for women in the women's magazines of the period, was not only aimed at restoring an assumed sense of social equilibrium, but also hugely benefitted the advertisers from whom these magazines gained essential revenue. With an increasing percentage of the population becoming home-owners, the opportunity emerged for a new wave of consumerism built around maintaining and enhancing the home, specifically targeting the housewife and her needs.[167] In cultivating the housewife, these magazines –

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[164] Pugh, p. 66.
[165] Stevenson, p. 129.
[166] Gardiner, p. 296.
[167] Advertisements for household products and appliances such as vacuum cleaners, washing machines, and electric cookers appeared in women's magazines alongside articles entitled

and crucially their advertisers – effectively constructed the model consumer, as the repetitive nature of housework ensured that cleaning products would always be required, and appliances were guaranteed to need to be replaced before long.[168] A direct result of this burgeoning consumer culture was the further development of retail and consumer spaces. Already a fixture of the British high street since the mid-nineteenth century, department stores grew in number and popularity throughout the period, despite 'the proliferation of chain stores' in the early 1920s (such as Woolworth's, Marks and Spencer's, British Home Stores, and WH Smith), which, Bill Lancaster argues, posed a 'major threat' to their existence.[169] Scholarship on the department store at the turn-of-the-century has tended to depict it as an emancipatory space for women, and has highlighted its unique role as an urban space outside of the home in which women were able to gather freely. Elizabeth Wilson, for example, observes the way in which 'department stores in their seduction of women created zones such as restaurants, rest rooms and even reading rooms where they could, towards the end of the century, go unchaperoned or certainly free of men's protection'.[170] With the societal and cultural drive to return to a separate spheres ideology, the retail space between the wars might similarly be understood as a positive, liberated space for women, in which they could escape the confines of the domestic. However, while such spaces may have afforded the *fin-de-siècle* woman an otherwise unavailable or previously unknown taste of freedom away from the home and the patriarchal system of chaperonage, for the women of the interwar period – existing in a society in which women had already successfully entered the male-dominated workplace, won the right to vote, and

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'Kitchen Work Without Fatigue', 'Take Care of Your Floors', and 'Special Housewifery Course: Taking Care of His Clothes and Yours' in magazines such as *The Ideal Home, Modern Home* and *Modern Marriage*.

[168] For a thorough discussion of this topic, see Judy Giles, 'Class, Gender and Domestic Consumption in Britain 1920-1950', in Emma Casey and Lydia Martens, eds, *Gender and Consumption: Domestic Cultures and the Commercialisation of Everyday Life* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 15-32.

[169] Bill Lancaster, *The Department Store: A Social History* (London: Leicester University Press, 1995), p. 85.

[170] Elizabeth Wilson, *The Sphinx in the City: Urban Life, the Control of Disorder, and Women* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), p. 60.

were free to walk the city streets unchaperoned – these spaces might perhaps not be best described as revolutionary. Further, the gendered shopping experience, and the spaces in which it occurs, loses its emancipatory potential when the products being purchased are household goods and appliances that further confine women to the role of the housewife.

The developing consumer culture in Britain during the interwar years was also evidenced, as noted above, in the steady rise in motorcar sales. As production increased and prices became more affordable, Sean O'Connell notes that the number of privately owned cars 'rose from just over 100,000 in 1918 to slightly over two million in 1939'.[171] With more and more people – couples, friends and families – having access to a car, motoring holidays, daytrips and weekends away became an increasingly realistic option for many. The surge in vehicle numbers inevitably had an impact on the roads and on the very geography of Britain, and Hugh Davies observes that 'it was clear even by the 1930s that traffic was growing so fast that the existing network, however well developed, would not be able to carry the traffic which seemed likely to want to use it'.[172] The rise of the motorcar also contributed greatly to the development of the hotel industry, as more roadside and rural hotels were established by those quick to spot a business opportunity in servicing the needs of both weary motorists and eager holidaymakers. In his 1937 study of hotels, F. J. Dawson notes the growth of the Trust House hotel chain catering specifically for the motorist, with a guaranteed affordability and standardised comfort. 'With such a wide network of houses,' he argues, 'the motorist who has to keep an eye on expenditure can tour with an easy mind, knowing exactly what his hotel bill will be.'[173] For those less concerned with costs and more concerned with escaping the pressures of the urban environment, Dawson highlights the

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[171] Sean O'Connell, *The Car and British Society: Class, Gender and Motoring, 1896-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), p. 19.

[172] Hugh Davies, *From Trackways to Motorways: 5000 Years of Highway History* (Stroud: Tempus, 2006), p. 69.

[173] F. J. Dawson, *The Nation's Hosts* (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1937), p. 55.

scores of old family mansions and castles, in our shires and Highlands, [that] have been converted into hotels since the War. They make excellent hotels, and astounding value is offered to those who like country life without any of its servant troubles or other domestic responsibilities.[174]

Like the retail spaces discussed above, the hotel can also be seen as a space of consumption, in which guests not only pay for a room, but also for the service of porters, maids, chefs and other staff who attend to their every need. They pay for the luxury of having things done for them, as Sasha in Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight* pays for the luxury of having 'the sheets changed every day and twice on Sundays'.[175] This idea of consumption extends further to the varied types of hotels available during the interwar period (and indeed today) – from grand or palace hotels, to mid-price establishments, to the more modest, budget hotels – each of which cater to a particular type or class of customer. Hotel guests consume the ideology of the hotels in which they stay just as they would any other product, implicitly aware that their class and social status is reflected in their choice of hotel.

This study posits the hotel as a crucial, often overlooked space of the interwar period, one which touches upon and is affected by all of the developments that have been discussed thus far. As noted above, the hotel can be read as a space of consumption in what was becoming an increasingly consumer-driven age. More crucially, it can be seen as a signifier of class status, in a period in which class boundaries shifted dramatically, and the middle class rose to prominence, with the formation of the Middle Class Union in 1919 and the blurring of class divisions due to rising incomes.[176] In essence, however, the hotel is also a place of rest and respite for its guests. These include the weary traveller, whose numbers, as already observed, increased significantly between the wars with the advances in all areas of transport, not least the motorcar. Increase in rail, air and sea travel also aided

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[174] Ibid., p. 19.

[175] Jean Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* (London: Penguin, 1969), p. 68. Further references to this edition are given in parentheses after quotations in the text, where the title is abbreviated to *GMM*. See Chapter Three for further discussion of this.

[176] See: Pugh, p. 87 & p. 94.

the growth of and investment in hotels located in major cities and ports. Yet the hotel during the interwar period played a more vital role, perhaps, as a refuge for those who were displaced or exiled (whether voluntarily or not), or for those who simply had no home to return to. The atmosphere of displacement and alienation so pervasive in the years following the First World War is exceptionally matched in the transience and impermanence of the hotel. The hotels of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield's writing are populated almost entirely by homeless, nomadic characters belonging nowhere but in its liminal and temporary spaces.

THE BODY, EMBODIMENT, AND SPACE

This study explores the mutually affective relationship between the body and space in the novels and short stories of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield, reflecting upon, among other things, the various ways in which a sense of belonging is constructed, or rather *de*constructed, through this relationship. The concept of corporeal subjectivity is therefore central to this study, which takes as its key focus the ways in which the corporeal, embodied subject is constructed by the transient, liminal spaces of the hotel, and the ways in which this construction differs from other, less marginal spaces such as the city and the home. This section highlights the shift in focus within this study from analyses of public and private spaces, more commonplace in spatial theory, to a more thorough consideration of liminality. Yet while the hotel does indeed exist, as has been noted, in between the more dominant spaces of the city and the home, it is nevertheless – being made up largely of interior spaces – slightly more private than public. As such, though the effects of the cityspace upon the corporeal subject are explored in depth throughout this thesis, I offer a more thorough and sustained consideration of the contrast between the hotel and the domestic sphere, and of the ways in which this contrast is demonstrated in the embodied behaviour and habits of the characters across these narratives.

Many spatial theorists suggest that the two terms of space and place have radically different meanings, recognition of which is essential to anyone engaging with issues of spatiality. In humanistic geography, for example, place is more associated with human emotion and attachment, while space is more empirical, Gillian Rose noting that 'place was the key humanistic geography concept; in contrast to spaces, which were represented through scientifically rational measurements of location, places were full of human interpretation and significance'.[177] More widely accepted, however, is de Certeau's definition in which he maintains that place indicates stability and fixedness, whereas space is that which is effectively produced by movement – for de Certeau, 'space is practiced place'.[178] His position is summarised by Thacker, who comments that '*space* indicates a sense of movement, of history, of becoming, while *place* is often thought to imply a static sense of location, of being, of dwelling'.[179] These two contrasting definitions of space and place can, however, be used to compliment each other in such a way that neither term risks becoming obscured by the other. As such, this study takes from human geography an understanding of place as the location of emotional attachment, and space as that which is brought into being by movement. In the context of this study an understanding of these terms is crucial, as the hotel can be understood both as place *and* space. The hotel – and the rooms within it – can be read as place, as a static dwelling to which characters often have a definite emotional attachment or response, despite their seemingly anonymous nature. As Chapter Three of this thesis demonstrates, hotel rooms can provide a sense of stability, a refuge from the rapid change of modernity. Equally, however, it is by its very nature full of the movement of bodies, the constant comings and goings of guests, and can thus also justifiably be defined as a space. Corresponding with Thacker's observation that modernism and modernist literature often 'complicate any sharp and easy division between

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[177] Gillian Rose, *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), p. 43.

[178] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. by Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 117.

[179] Thacker, p. 13. Emphasis in original.

a conservative sense of place and a revolutionary sense of space,' it is this contradictory quality of the hotel – its refusal to be pinned down to one concrete spatial definition – that positions it as the ultimate modernist space.[180]

The concept of liminality is, as has already been made clear, central to this study of the hotel as a distinctly liminal space. Deriving from the Latin *limen*, meaning boundary or threshold, the word liminal denotes a spatial or temporal zone that exists, as Robert Preston-Whyte suggests, 'in a limbo-like space often beyond normal social and cultural constraints'.[181] The term was first used in a critical context by ethnographer Arnold van Gennep in 1909 'to describe the intermediate stage in the transition from adolescence to adulthood,' and has since come to be used by theorists to describe variously a space which lies in between two destinations, a space of movement or transition, or a boundary or threshold.[182] Citing Victor Turner, another key theorist of liminality, Annette Pritchard and Nigel Morgan observe that 'central to the notion of liminality is its transitory, betwixt nature, whether manifested in terms of social life, space or time, so that "in this gap between ordered worlds almost anything may happen"'.[183] Liminal spaces are often seen as spaces of resistance or challenge to the more dominant, normative spheres of the public and private. Homi K. Bhabha notes the radical potential of liminal spaces, and the way in which they are '*internally* marked by the discourses of minorities, the heterogeneous histories of contending peoples, antagonistic authorities and tense locations of cultural difference'.[184] Existing on the borders and margins of society, liminal spaces are therefore, according to Bhabha, spaces in which the marginalised can fight against the discursive norms that operate to oppress them. Equally, however, liminal spaces are uncanny,

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[180] Ibid., p. 13.

[181] Robert Preston-Whyte, 'The Beach as Liminal Space', in *A Companion to Tourism*, ed. by Alan A. Lew, Michael Hall, and Allan M. Williams (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 349-359 (p. 350).

[182] Ibid.

[183] Annette Pritchard and Nigel Morgan, 'Hotel Babylon? Exploring Hotels as Liminal Sites of Transition and Transgression', *Tourism Management*, 27 (2006), 762-772 (p. 764). See also Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), p. 13.

[184] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 148.

threatening and dangerous, promising nothing but the unknown. This complex and contradictory nature of the liminal space is encapsulated in the hotel, which, as I demonstrate throughout this thesis, functions – at times simultaneously – as a space of liberation, entrapment, refuge and incarceration for the characters in these narratives.

The transitory, unstable and impermanent nature of the hotel constructs it as an undeniably liminal space, existing in between the public and the private. More widely explored in spatial theory, the public and the private can be read as the dominant spaces of everyday existence, and yet they can also be understood as distinctly exclusionary in nature. Feminist approaches to spatiality commonly note the negative implications of the public sphere for women, arguing, as Linda McDowell does, that 'women have been, and continue to be, excluded from equal access to the public arena'.[185] The freedom to inhabit and explore the public is, as Rose notes, a type of 'spatial freedom which only white heterosexual men usually enjoy,' effectively marginalising all others.[186] In this thesis, I demonstrate the ways in which women are excluded and marginalised in the public spaces of the modern metropolis. The persistent associations of women with the domestic realm of the home, meanwhile, result in the insidious continuation of a separate spheres ideology in which woman is confined to the home, to the private realm of housework and motherhood. As Simone de Beauvoir so succinctly maintains, '[w]oman is destined to maintain the species and care for the home, which is to say, to immanence.'[187] Summarising years of debate on the domestic, Iris Marion Young comments that 'women serve, nurture, and maintain so that the bodies and souls of men and children gain confidence and expansive subjectivity to make their mark on the world'.[188] While women may be trapped

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[185] Linda McDowell, *Gender, Identity and Place: Understanding Feminist Geographies* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), p. 150.

[186] Gillian Rose, *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), p. 34.

[187] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier (London: Vintage, 2010), p. 455.

[188] Iris Marion Young, 'House and Home: Feminist Variations on a Theme', in *On Female Body Experience: 'Throwing Like a Girl' and Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 123-154 (p. 123).

within the home, others who fall outside of societal norms are denied entry. For those without money and/or a stable family background, the home is as exclusionary, if not more so, than the public space of the city, leading Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Biddy Martin to suggest that the very idea of the home is 'an illusion of coherence and safety based on the exclusion of specific histories of oppression and resistance, the repression of differences even within oneself'.[189] Both public and private spaces can thereby potentially exclude those who do not conform to the powerful societal norms concerning gender, race, class, and age which are sustained and enforced through discourse. In my reading of the liminal space of the hotel, I posit it as an alternative to such exclusionary spaces, and conceive it as a positive, emancipatory space for modernity's marginalised subjects.

The persistence with which Western philosophical thought has located the site of the authentic human self in the immaterial mind or consciousness – thus distinguishing it from the material body – can be traced back at least as far as the Cartesian *cogito*. Dualism between mind and body is crucial to Descartes' central argument in his *Meditations* – as Susan Bordo points out, 'the ontological distinctness of mind and body, and the exclusion of body from the human essence, are […] what makes the Cartesian reconstruction of knowledge possible'.[190] It is this same dualism, however, which Elizabeth Grosz maintains 'is responsible for the modern forms of elevation of consciousness (a specifically modern version of the notion of the soul, introduced by Descartes) above corporeality,' and which underpins many of the key arguments of Western philosophy.[191] Writing in the eighteenth century, Immanuel Kant, for example, incorporates such dualistic thinking into his theory of the human self – a self which, as Kim Atkins observes, Kant posits as 'part of the

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[189] Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Biddy Martin, 'What's Home Got To Do With It?' in Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practising Solidarity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), pp. 85-105 (p.90).

[190] Susan Bordo, 'The Pervasiveness of Cartesian Anxiety; or, Taking Cartesian Doubt Seriously', in Susan Bordo, *The Flight to Objectivity: Essays on Cartesianism and Culture* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1987), pp. 13-31 (p. 26).

[191] Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 7.

structure of consciousness'.[192] By the early-twentieth century, Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialism shows little sign of swaying from this view, focusing once more upon the importance of consciousness, and specifically on the transcendence of that consciousness over the immanence of the body. For these philosophers, the body exists as little more than a vehicle for the mind – an exterior, material shell housing an interior, immaterial consciousness or subjectivity. Inevitably, such ideas extend into popular societal and cultural understandings of the self, in which the physical body is often regarded as little more than packaging for the authentic, internal self, or in which, alternatively, it is positioned as the unruly site of uncontrollable emotional outbursts and irrationality, in stark contrast to the reason, restraint and rationality of the mind. It is this overt privileging of the mind over body which has led many feminist theorists to urgently reconsider the problems and dangers inherent in such a dualistic approach to the human subject.

The mind/body dualism so prevalent in Western thought and culture is of particular interest to feminist theorists, many of whom maintain that it reveals significant truths about, and even the reasons behind, the position of women in society. Many such writers have claimed that mind/body is just one in a long series of binaries – including male/female, active/passive, reason/emotion, rationality/irrationality – in which man is linked with the mind, rationality and reason, and woman with the body, irrationality and emotion.[193] This alliance of femininity with corporeality, and of masculinity with rationality, raises the issue of biological essentialism – the idea that, through upholding or embracing the reproductive specificity of their bodies, women risk becoming confined to the role of mother and nurturer. Many feminists have argued that it is the supposed link to embodiment and nature that has resulted in women being excluded from the public sphere of social and political freedoms, instead relegated to the domestic sphere of housework,

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[192] Kim Atkins, 'Commentary on Kant', in *Self and Subjectivity*, ed. by Kim Atkins (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 47-51 (p. 47).

[193] Discussions of these binary oppositions can be found in Moira Gatens, *Feminism and Philosophy: Perspectives on Difference and Equality* (Cambridge: Polity, 1991), Raia Prokhovnik, *Rational Woman: A Feminist Critique of Dichotomy*, 2nd Edition (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics*; and Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*.

child-rearing, and general day-to-day maintenance and support of the lives of their male counterparts.[194] It is here that we can thus begin to see the emergence of space and place, in terms of the domestic or private and the public as a key issue in theories of gendered embodiment. In an attempt to avoid falling into the trap of essentialism, many feminists have for years shied away from considering the body and its sexual specificity in any way. Recent feminist theory has, however, witnessed a surge of interest in the corporeal, led by Grosz, Moira Gatens and Young among others – thinkers who demand that we drastically rethink and revise our conceptions of the body and subjectivity.

For these theorists, the concept of corporeal subjectivity offers a solution to the persistent problem of mind/body dualism. Rejecting the dichotomy between mind and body, in which the self is seen as an immaterial mind trapped inside a material body, they propose that subjectivity is instead necessarily embodied, that the body, as Grosz argues, 'can now be understood as the very "stuff" of subjectivity'.[195] According to theories of the corporeal subject, the relation between mind and body (if, indeed, the two are not one and the same) is far more reciprocal, and is one in which consciousness and the body are mutually interdependent. As Raia Prokhovnik observes of Grosz's work, one of the principal aims 'is to demonstrate the necessary dependence of "psychical interiority" upon a "corporeal exteriority"'.[196] Grosz herself attempts to explain this relation by invoking the concept of the Möbius strip, an 'inverted three-dimensional figure eight,' maintaining that

> bodies and minds are not two distinct substances or two kinds of attributes of a single substance but somewhere in between these two alternatives. The Möbius strip has the advantage of showing the inflection of mind into body and body into mind, the ways in which, through a kind of twisting or inversion, one side becomes another.[197]

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[194] For further discussion of the impact of women's embodiment upon their situation and oppression, see Moira Gatens, *Imaginary Bodies: Ethics, Power, and Corporeality* (London: Routledge, 1996); Young, *On Female Body Experience*; and Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*.
[195] Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, p. ix.
[196] Prokhovnik, p. 157.
[197] Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, p. xii.

Through her use of this model in her consideration of the human subject, Grosz effectively destabilizes the dualism between mind and body, and instead re-visions subjectivity as a continuous 'inflection' of one into the other. Accordingly, we can therefore understand subjectivity as undeniably material, impossible to separate from the body itself.

The very term 'subjectivity' stands in opposition to ideas of an innate or originary self, denoting instead that which is constructed, and which develops and changes over a lifetime. In the case of the corporeal subject, precisely who or what is doing this constructing remains a contested area of debate. Judith Butler argues that not only is gender constructed by discourse, but that so too is the body and its physical sex, maintaining that 'the regulatory norms of "sex" work in a performative fashion to constitute the materiality of bodies and, more specifically, to materialize the body's sex, to materialize sexual difference in the service of the consolidation of the heterosexual imperative'.[198] While Butler's theory opens up possibilities for bodies to be reconceived, not just as male or female, but as potentially any number of gendered and sexed positions, her argument nevertheless fails not only to address the problem of where or with whom the constructing discourse originates, but also to explain precisely how the material body can be entirely discursively constructed. As Karen Barad suggests, Butler's theory falls short of providing 'an understanding of precisely how discursive practices produce material bodies,' of clarifying just how matter can arise out of non-matter.[199] Grosz's theories regarding the construction of the corporeal subject, however, afford a greater importance to the activity of matter in its own construction, and her invocation of the Möbius Strip demonstrates the way in which the surface of the body is firmly involved in this process of construction. Arguing that 'the skin and the various sensations which are located at the surface of the body are the most primitive, essential, and constitutive of all sources of sensory stimulation,' Grosz repositions the sense of touch as a key factor in the construction of the

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[198] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 61.

[199] Karen Barad, 'Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter', *Signs*, 28:3 (2003), 801-831 (p. 808).

corporeal subject, thereby strengthening the concept of subjectivity as necessarily embodied.[200] These arguments reveal the complex ways in which the corporeal subject is constructed both by discourse and by matter itself.

The emphasis on space and place throughout this study is largely drawn from this concept of the corporeal subject, a concept that demands an overt engagement with notions of spatiality. It is through the body that we, as subjects, locate ourselves in and interact with the space surrounding us. Indeed, the very materiality of the body dictates that we cannot avoid interacting, at least in some way, with our location. As Grosz points out, 'the body […] is the very condition of our access to and conception of space,'[201] and Sara Ahmed locates the body as '[t]he starting point for orientation […] the point from which the world unfolds'.[202] Edward Casey argues similarly that 'to be embodied is *ipso facto* to assume a particular perspective and position; it is to have not just a point of view but a *place* in which we are situated'.[203] The places we inhabit have, according to these theorists, a significant effect on the corporeal subject. As Ahmed suggests, 'bodies do not dwell in spaces that are exterior but rather are shaped by their dwellings and take shape by dwelling'.[204] Grosz's theory of corporeal inscription might enable a fuller understanding of the nature of these effects, and what lies behind them. Maintaining that the surface of the body is constantly inscribed and re-inscribed by, among other things clothes, diet, make-up and surroundings, Grosz suggests that it is 'through exercise and habitual patterns of movement, through negotiating its environment whether this be rural or urban […] [that] the body is more or less marked, constituted as appropriate, or, as the case may be, an inappropriate body for its cultural requirements'.[205] The corporeal subject is, in other words, constructed and re-constructed by his or her environment; the navigation of uneven

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[200] Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, p. 35.
[201] Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, p. 91.
[202] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 8.
[203] Edward S. Casey, *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study*, 2nd edn (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000), p. 182. Emphasis in original.
[204] Ahmed, p. 9.
[205] Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, p. 142.

rural terrain results, for example, in the strengthening of certain muscles, while the negotiation of flat, urban streets produces a markedly different body. Such effects are not just evident at a purely muscular level – in cities, the body engages with and is influenced by countless cultural elements in a wide range of media. As Grosz acknowledges, the city has become 'the place where the body is representationally reexplored, transformed, contested, reinscribed'.[206] Moving the discussion indoors to the domestic environment, Young observes that the interior of one's home, and the distribution of one's possessions throughout, inscribes the body in a similar way, suggesting that it is not merely the presence of personal belongings in the home, 'but their arrangement in space in a way that supports the body habits and routines of those who dwell there'.[207] For Young, subjectivity is constructed and sustained by the unique individual pathways created in the home. Through arguments such as these, the importance of space and place in the construction and constitution of the corporeal subject begins to become apparent.

It is, however, important to recognise here the mutually affective nature of the relationship between the body and space, and to thereby acknowledge the ways in which bodies themselves continually construct and reinscribe the environments they inhabit. Commenting on the capacity of the walker to challenge and physically alter the landscape of the city, de Certeau suggests that

> if it is true that a spatial order organizes an ensemble of possibilities (e.g., by a place in which one can move) and interdictions (e.g., by a wall that prevents one from going further), then the walker actualizes some of these possibilities. In that way, he makes them exist as well as emerge. But he also moves them about and he invents others, since the crossing, drifting away, or improvisation of walking privilege, transform or abandon spatial elements.[208]

In highlighting the radical potential inherent in the act of walking, de Certeau here rescues the corporeal subject from the role of passive entity or blank surface inscribed and

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[206] Elizabeth Grosz, 'Bodies–Cities', in *Space, Time, and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 103-110 (p. 108).
[207] Young, 'House and Home', p. 139.
[208] De Certeau, p. 98.

constructed by the space around it, instead affording it an active and vital role in the constant reimaginings of that space. Considering the continual expansion of cities, Grosz too notes the way in which 'the body […] transforms, reinscribes the urban landscape according to its changing (demographic) needs, extending the limits of the city ever towards the countryside that borders it'.[209] The space of the home undergoes a similar process of continual revisioning and reconstruction by the bodies that inhabit it, and, as Casey points out, often comes to 'resemble our own material bodies in certain quite basic respects'. Casey adds that this 'resemblance, moreover, is two-way. A dwelling where we reside comes to exist in our own image, but *we*, the residents, also take on certain of *its* properties. *How we are*, our bodily being, reflects how we reside in built places.'[210] These comments return the discussion once more to the reciprocal relationship between the body and space, the way in which both are continuously and unavoidably altered and transformed by each other. This mutually affective relationship between the body and space is best explored through phenomenology, a philosophy which, as Ahmed observes, 'reminds us that spaces are not exterior to bodies; instead, spaces are like a second skin that unfolds in the folds of the body.'[211] Throughout this study, I draw upon the work of phenomenological theorists such as Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, and Joyce Davidson, in order to explore this reciprocal relationship between the corporeal subjectivities of the characters of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield, and the spaces they inhabit.

THESIS STRUCTURE

This thesis contains three chapters, each of which explore a different aspect of the way in which the hotel functions throughout the modernist writings of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield. In the first chapter, I consider the ideological associations of the hotel with illicit sexual activity, and demonstrate the way in which such associations are foregrounded by

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[209] Grosz, 'Bodies–Cities', pp. 108-9.

[210] Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 120. Emphasis in original.

[211] Ahmed, p. 9.

these authors in their descriptions of the décor, furnishing and layout of the spaces within the hotels in their narratives. Through its glamorous surroundings, I posit the hotel as a distinctly modern space, in which the female protagonists of these novels find the freedom to explore their sexuality and their desires away from both the moral constraints of the home and the judgemental gaze of the public sphere. I also, however, consider the events which take place in the hotel as moments of transition, and think through the ways in which the hotel operates as a threshold, engendering dramatic, and occasionally fatal events. In the second chapter, I look at how the hotel is presented in the novels and short stories of these authors as a carceral space, in which their characters are trapped and confined. It is in this chapter that the unstable distinction between public and private space within the hotel is explored fully, and I engage with Foucauldian theories of surveillance to consider issues of exclusion and segregation based on gender and class backgrounds. This chapter also explores the themes of loneliness and isolation that such a reading highlights, and links these to ideas of modernist anomie and alienation. The third chapter turns to a more hopeful reading of the hotel as a space of refuge for the characters across these narratives, offering them an escape from the rapid change and chaos of modernity. I also explore the ways in which the hotel room functions for many of the female protagonists as 'a room of one's own,' a private space away from the demands of the domestic sphere. I conclude this chapter with a reading of the hotel room as a retreat from the self, and engage with theories of trauma and loss in order to fully consider the spatial habits of these characters and the motivations behind them. Throughout I provide a reading of the unique and highly complex space of the hotel in modernist writing from the perspective of the female author and her characters, and assert the importance of further critical work into the hotel as a key space of modernism and modernity.

CHAPTER ONE

'AN ATMOSPHERE OF DEPARTED AND EPHEMERAL LOVES': GLAMOUR, ROMANCE AND SEXUAL TRANSGRESSION IN THE HOTEL

In the contemporary Western cultural imagination, the hotel has come to be largely synonymous with sex and, more specifically, with sexual transgression. The ideological association of hotels with illicit sexual activity is certainly reinforced by popular culture[212] but these examples of illicit hotel sex are prefigured by some of the more overlooked texts of interwar literature. In Winifred Holtby's *South Riding* (1936), for example, the adulterous sexual desire between Sarah Burton and the gruff Robert Carne is finally acknowledged openly when they meet by chance in 'a second-rate hotel off [Manchester] Piccadilly'.[213] Sarah invites Robert up to her room after dinner and dancing, and the consummation of their attraction is only prevented when Robert suddenly falls ill with an acute attack of angina.[214] In Lehmann's *The Weather in the Streets*, Olivia Curtis and her married lover, Rollo Spencer, largely meet in the rooms of various hotels across Britain, such as the luxurious 'first-class modern hotel' on the Bournemouth seafront,[215] or the 'rambling, uneven' 'country-town' hotel in Salisbury.[216] In this chapter I consider the ways in which the hotel is used by modernist women writers as a narrative space in which to think through and challenge the sexual codes and practices of interwar Britain. An exploration of the prevalence of illicit sexual encounters taking place within the hotel throughout the texts explored here is framed by a discussion of shifting attitudes towards sexuality and sexual

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[212] For example, in *The Graduate* (1967), an adulterous affair is conducted in the fictional Taft Hotel, while in *Pretty Woman* (1990) a businessman keeps a prostitute conveniently on hand in his hotel room. In *Lost in Translation* (2003) a married actor wakes up next to the hotel's lounge singer on the penultimate morning of his stay.

[213] Winifred Holtby, *South Riding: An English Landscape* (London: Collins, 1936), p. 316.

[214] Ibid., pp. 326-31.

[215] Rosamond Lehmann, *The Weather in the Streets* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p. 157.

[216] Ibid., p. 160.

behaviour between the wars, revealing the hotel as a unique space in which sexual desire – and especially female sexual desire – might be realised.

The opening section of this chapter considers the hotel as a uniquely liminal space, which exists in between the public and the private, and explores the way in which the hotel is revealed to be the only space in which these characters are able to explore and act upon their desires. It posits the hotel as a space that exists in between – and therefore away from – the moral codes and restrictions of the public and the private, contrasting it with the open spaces of the city and the enclosed spaces of the home. I read the hotel narratives of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield within the context of public decency laws, debates on marriage and divorce, and the attitudes towards the sexual behaviour of single women during the interwar period, in order to elucidate the importance of the hotel for their female characters. To further explore the differences between the space of the hotel and that of the home, the hotel is compared with the boarding-house. Seemingly similar in its temporary, impermanent nature, a closer analysis of the boarding-house reveals it as a space which is more closely related to the domestic environment than the hotel, particularly in the strict moral codes concerning sexual behaviour, monitored and enforced by its landladies. This section demonstrates how, existing outside such codes, and offering a crucial level of anonymity unavailable anywhere else, the hotel allows the characters of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield to engage in sexual activity that would otherwise be prohibited.

The second section explores the various ways in which the hotel functions as a crucial space of transition in these narratives. It begins with a reading of the anonymity of the hotel environment, this time alongside the theories of phenomenologist D. J. van Lennep, who posits the anonymous surroundings of the hotel as transformative. The close analysis of the décor, furnishings and layout of the hotel involved in this consideration of the anonymous nature of the hotel then shifts to an examination of the more glamorous and upmarket hotels featured throughout these novels and short stories. The clear

contrasts drawn between these luxurious environments and the far more basic surroundings of the majority of hotels in these texts, reveals the former to be exclusionary, available only to certain classes of society. The section demonstrates the way in which this exclusionary quality, together with the undeniable transience of the hotel existence, reveals such spaces as illusory, in which reality is temporarily suspended. This impermanence marks the hotel as a distinctly liminal space, one which can be read as a boundary or threshold into what Bhabha terms as the 'unknowable, unrepresentable,' a space of transition in which life-altering events frequently occur.[217] The section concludes with a detailed discussion of the way in which the hotel – as a space of transition – functions throughout the novels and short stories of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield as a vital catalyst for change for their female characters.

The third and final section explores the way in which the ideological association of the hotel with sexual transgression is foregrounded by these authors through their descriptions of the environment of the hotel – in particular of its furniture and décor – and again draws on phenomenological theories of the relationship between the body and space in order to fully consider the effect that such spaces have upon those residing within them. Following Merleau-Ponty's observation that the body's experience of space is the very 'deployment of one's bodily being, the way in which the body comes into being as a body,' this section explores the way in which the corporeal subjectivities of Bowen, Rhys and Mansfield's female characters are constructed by the hotel, how they 'come into being' in its spaces.[218] Through a reading of the shifts in behaviour of characters in these spaces, the section suggests that their willingness to engage in sexual relations is potentially affected by their surroundings, and considers the extent to which they are effectively coerced into action by the implications of the hotel space.

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[217] Bhabha, p. 6.

[218] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Colin Smith (Abingdon: Routledge, 2002), p. 172.

'THIS IMPROBABLE PLACE'[219]: AWAY FROM THE PUBLIC AND THE PRIVATE

As a key space of modernity, the hotel has been largely neglected in favour of other spaces such as the city street or domestic sphere. In literary studies alone there have been numerous studies on the urban environment in modernity,[220] and an equally numerous amount that focus on the more private space of the home.[221] Even works on travel, which might reasonably be expected to reflect upon the space of the hotel in this context, regularly fail to engage with it on any meaningful level,[222] and to date there is only one book-length study of the hotel in literature of this period.[223] A few journal articles notwithstanding,[224] the body of work on this space is markedly insubstantial when compared to that on the city and the home in modernity.[225] The reasons behind this relative dearth of critical debate on the hotel are difficult to ascertain, particularly given the fact that it is arguably the most useful example of a liminal space in modernity. Existing in between the public space of the city street and the private space of the home, the hotel is thereby removed from both. In this sense the hotel exists in isolation – as Siegfried Kracauer suggests, 'if a sojourn in a hotel offers neither a perspective on nor an escape

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[219] Bowen, *The Hotel*, p. 168.

[220] See, for example, Malcolm Bradbury's 'The Cities of Modernism', in *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature, 1890-1930*, ed. by Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (London: Pelican, 1976), pp. 96-104; Deborah L. Parsons's *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); and Richard Dennis's *Cities in Modernity: Representations and Productions of Metropolitan Space, 1840-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

[221] Examples include Nicola Humble's *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel 1920s to 1950s: Class, Domesticity and Bohemianism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Victoria Rosner's *Modernism and the Architecture of Private Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); Morag Shiach's 'Modernism, the City and the "Domestic Interior"', *Home Cultures*, 2:3 (2005), 251-267; and Chiara Briganti and Kathy Mezei's *Domestic Modernism, the Interwar Novel, and E. H. Young* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).

[222] See, for example, Paul Fussell, *Abroad: British Literary Traveling Between the Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980); Burdett and Duncan's *Cultural Encounters*; and Alexandra Peat's *Travel and Modernist Literature: Sacred and Ethical Journeys* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011).

[223] Bettina Matthias, *The Hotel as Setting in Early Twentieth-Century German and Austrian Literature: Checking in to Tell a Story* (Rochester: Camden House, 2006).

[224] One example is Charlotte Bates's 'Hotel Histories: Modern Tourists, Modern Nomads and the Culture of Hotel-Consciousness', *Literature & History*, 12:2 (2003), 62-75.

[225] Such as Siegfried Kracauer's 'The Hotel Lobby', in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, ed. and trans. by Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 173-185; D. J. van Lennep's 'The Hotel Room', in *Phenomenological Psychology: The Dutch School*, ed. by Joseph J. Kockelmans (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987), pp. 209-215; and Douglas Tallack's '"Waiting, Waiting": The Hotel Lobby', *Irish Journal of American Studies*, 7 (1998), 1-20.

from the everyday, it does provide a groundless distance from it'.[226] The hotel does indeed offer a space away from the everyday, where the everyday is understood as the quotidian existence of the public and private spheres, but Kracauer is mistaken in his claim that the hotel 'offers neither a perspective on nor escape from' these dominant spaces. Rather, the hotel is uniquely positioned to provide insight into both spheres, as well as opening up discussions of marginality, alienation and liberation by providing a necessary alternative to these spaces, which are so often presented as an unshifting binary. This section explores the way in which the hotel, by virtue of this unique positioning, offers a space in which women are free to explore otherwise forbidden desires away from the moral dictates of the public and private spheres, and, as such, functions in the work of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield as a narrative space that allows them to think through and challenge widespread attitudes towards female sexuality during the interwar period.

The hotel exists in between the space of the city and that of the home, and those theorising the hotel space often highlight its inherent liminality. In his critical analysis of the hotel lobby, for example, Douglas Tallack posits the space as 'a semi-public gateway to private places'.[227] Yet while he is right in locating the lobby as a 'semi-public' space, Tallack's sweeping definition of the interior spaces of the hotel – including the lounge, dining room, and bedrooms – as 'private' fails to capture their true quality. These spaces are not private in the same sense – or, to put it more accurately, to the same extent – that a lounge, dining room or bedroom in a home is private. Nor is it the case, however, that all spaces within the hotel are semi-public in exactly the same way as the lobby. Rather, we might instead conceive of a spectrum of semi-public to semi-private space, along which each location within the hotel can be placed. Spaces such as the hotel dining room, for example, are slightly more public than that of the lounge – due to the increased presence of waiting-staff and higher likelihood that non-guests will also be dining there – but slightly less public than the space of the lobby. In Bowen's *The Death of the Heart*, for example,

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[226] Kracauer, p. 177.
[227] Tallack, p. 6.

Major Brutt's evident relief at finding the errant sixteen-year-old Portia Quayne alone in the empty lounge of the Karachi Hotel, in which 'the porter was off duty; nobody was arriving; they had not begun to come out from dinner yet,'[228] confirms it as a space somewhat more private than the dining room, in which he is conscious, as he leaves to meet Portia, 'of people pausing in what they were hardly saying, of diners' glum eyes following him' (*DH*, p. 286). More private than both these spaces are the corridors between rooms, hidden away on the upper floors, in which characters such as Bowen's Tessa Bellamy and Rhys's commis feel comfortable enough to walk down in states of undress (Tessa in the 'deshabille' of her kimono [*Hotel*, p. 30], and the commis in his white dressing-gown [*GMM*, p. 30]), but these are in turn less private than the rooms themselves. However, even the hotel rooms, which might be regarded (and indeed are by Tallack) as private nevertheless exist in the realm of the not-quite-private. As is demonstrated in greater detail in the following chapter, hotel rooms are never fully private. Instead, with the intrusions of chambermaids, porters, and other hotel staff, the impersonal and anonymous décor and furnishings, and the unavoidable (and occasionally intrusive) presence of other guests in adjoining rooms, the hotel room may be more private than other spaces within the hotel, but is nevertheless markedly less private than the domestic space of the home is generally assumed to be. The hotel, and all the different spaces within it, simultaneously occupies the positions of not-quite-public and not-quite-private.

Existing in between and therefore apart from the more dominant social spaces of the public and the private, the hotel thereby becomes a space in which otherwise impermissible activities and behaviours become possible. Offering more privacy than the public space of the street or park, the hotel – and, more specifically, the hotel room – provided a space in which couples might engage in sexual activity that was otherwise closely scrutinised in the more open, public spaces of interwar Britain. In the nation's

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[228] Elizabeth Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* (London: Vintage, 1998), p. 287. Further references to this edition are given in parentheses after quotations in the text, where the title is abbreviated to *DH*.

capital, for example, the London Public Morality Council monitored and reported on what Jeffrey Weeks summarises as 'the observed sexual activities of couples in various open spaces (such as Hampstead Heath, Clapham Common and Parliament Hill Fields)'.[229] The introduction of female police officers during the First World War led to an increased level of surveillance of female sexual behaviour in such spaces. Edith Smith was, Louise A. Jackson notes, 'the UK's first attested policewoman', who 'cautioned 50 "prostitutes" and secured the conviction of 10 others in 1917 by way of warning'.[230] More importantly in the context of this discussion, however, Smith also 'cautioned 100 "wayward girls" and referred 8 "fallen women" to rescue institutions for rehabilitation'.[231] Unfortunately absent from Jackson's account is any elaboration on the differences between these categories of 'prostitutes', 'fallen women', and, most interestingly, 'wayward girls', but the very fact that they are differentiated from prostitutes precludes them from being such – indeed, the distinction precludes them from being anything other than sexually curious young women. The increasing vigilance of the police force, and the harsher penalties involved (Weeks notes that by 1923 policewomen such as Smith 'had full powers of arrest') meant that acting upon these curiosities in public carried a far greater risk, an awareness of which is often demonstrated in the fictions of these authors.[232] In Mansfield's 'The Black Cap' (1924), for example, the unnamed female protagonist resists the attempts of her lover to take her in his arms once they are onboard a train together, exclaiming 'Don't! We're not even out of the station yet,' and then, in response to his second attempt, 'Please don't! I hate being kissed in trains.'[233] In Bowen's *The House in Paris*, Karen Michaelis is similarly wary of the illicit nature of her rendezvous with Max Ebhart being discovered, and wears 'a

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[229] Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality Since 1800*, 2nd edn (Harlow: Longman, 1989), p. 214.
[230] Louise A. Jackson, *Women Police: Gender, Welfare and Surveillance in the Twentieth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), p. 173.
[231] Ibid.
[232] Weeks, p. 215.
[233] Katherine Mansfield, 'The Black Cap', in *The Collected Stories: Something Childish* (London: Penguin, 2007), pp. 643-8 (p. 646). Further references to this edition are given in parentheses after quotations in the text, where the title is abbreviated to 'BC'.

bought wedding ring' to make their relationship appear legitimate to onlookers.[234] For these women, public spaces are imbued with the threat of exposure and retribution. The enclosed space of the hotel room, and its semi-privacy, offers a far more suitable location in which to explore their sexual drives and desires.[235]

Those same moral codes that triggered this increase in surveillance of sexual activity in public spaces also governed the more private space of the home during the interwar period. Though not necessarily enforced in precisely the same way as in the public sphere, the insidious surveillance of family, friends and neighbours played a significant role in encouraging people to adhere to the norm of the stable family home with a married couple at its heart, an ideology perpetuated during the interwar period by women's magazines and by marriage manuals such as those of Stopes. As noted in the Introduction to this thesis, the period between the wars witnessed a widespread attempt to recapture the stability and security of the home that had been so disrupted by the events of the First World War, a move which Chiara Briganti and Kathy Mezei characterise as 'the post-war reification of the home, domestic values and Englishness'.[236] The home was reconstructed in the cultural imagination of interwar Britain as a symbol of permanence, normality and

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[234] Elizabeth Bowen, *The House in Paris* (London: Vintage, 1998), p. 150. Further references to this edition are given in parentheses after quotations in the text, where the title is abbreviated to *HP*.

[235] Despite popularised accounts of the 1920s and 1930s in contemporary culture that perpetuate an idea of the period as encompassing the first sexual revolution, such depictions and perceptions of the interwar years bear little relation to the reality. 'Free love' and the supposed sexual emancipation of the 1920s rarely ever materialised outside the elite (and small) society of Bloomsbury and similar places. Neither was evidence of sexual liberation necessarily to be found within the texts and theories of sexology and psychoanalysis. While the increasing interest in and popularity of these disciplines in the interwar years may suggest a consequent loosening of debates surrounding sexuality and sexual behaviour, the extent and reach of these new debates was nevertheless limited. Even the discourse of sexology itself had its limits – the frank discussions found within its texts, and within the sex manuals of writers such as Stopes, were meant for a specific audience. The title of Stopes's most well-known publication, *Married Love*, clearly demonstrates this, as the book addresses itself directly and solely to married heterosexual couples. From this supposedly liberated discourse on sexuality, the entire single and non-heterosexual populations of interwar Britain were decidedly excluded, an exclusion which highlights the problematic discrepancies between the advice given to married couples and that which was offered to single men and women. The sexological discourse and marriage manuals of the interwar years failed to acknowledge or accommodate the sexual desires of single people, instead serving to reinforce heterosexual marriage as the norm from which all other lifestyles could only deviate.

[236] Briganti and Mezei, p. 2.

morality, encapsulating what Alison Light refers to as 'the social legitimacy of stable relationships, family and home'.[237] In the writing of these authors, the home is reinforced as the arena of family and fidelity, the exemplar of (heterosexual) normality. To commit adultery within this space would be to shatter this construction of fidelity and monogamy in the very place in which it is based, indeed, from which it is purported to originate. To engage in illicit sexual relations within the boundaries of the home would be to disregard powerful hegemonic discourses concerning the family and sexuality. Such an act would not only embody the betrayal of one's husband or wife, but would also subvert the apparently stable ideologies upon which the interwar notion of the home was constructed. As these authors demonstrate, so embedded are these ideologies in the subjectivities of these characters that they are unable to contravene them. In Bowen's *Friends and Relations*, for example, the homes of Janet Meggatt and her lover Edward Tilney are carefully indicated to be the site of the family, of happily married couples and of their children. During a tense conversation in the library of Janet's family home – made all the more impossible by the constant threat of interruption by family members – she and Edward circle and resist each other, suppressing their feelings for one another. These feelings are only momentarily revealed by Edward's declaration to Janet that 'I had to see you', but are otherwise steadfastly ignored, demonstrating their inability to even directly acknowledge their feelings within the boundaries of the home.[238] Their brief affair, which consists only of one charged embrace, occurs instead in the sitting-room of Janet's London hotel. This encounter – lasting all of a few moments thanks to a combination of their fear that they will be discovered, and their awareness of the futility of their actions – can only happen, is only allowed to happen, in this liminal space which exists outside of the moral codes of the private domestic sphere. As Janet tells Edward, 'There is nowhere for us to be' (*FR*, p.

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[237] Alison Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism Between the Wars* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 170.

[238] Elizabeth Bowen, *Friends and Relations* (London: Penguin, 1943), p. 95. Further references to this edition are given in parentheses after quotations in the text, where the title is abbreviated to *FR*.

133), acknowledging the impossibility of their affair outside of the hotel. The threat of the affair is too great to be contained within the home, the ideological site of the family, and the morality within which that concept is bound.

Discovery and/or acknowledgment of an adulterous relationship in the narratives of these authors also results, perhaps unsurprisingly, in the effective banishment of the affair to the liminal space of the hotel. In Bowen's *The Death of the Heart*, for example, housekeeper Matchett tells Portia – the child of an adulterous affair – of how her father was 'sent away' by his wife upon confession of his adultery, to live out the rest of his life with his mistress and their daughter in hotels, 'with no place in the world' (*DH*, p. 78). As a servant, and thus not a member of the family, Matchett provides the only dissenting voice in the novel regarding Mrs Quayne's actions, and tells an increasingly distressed Portia: 'He was sent away, as cook or I might have been – but oh no, we suited her too well. She stood by while Mr Thomas put him into the car and drove him off as if he had been a child' (*DH*, p. 78). Matchett's comments here reveal the extent to which the norm of the stable family home operates to exclude those who transgress the moral dictates upon which it is built. In Rhys's *Quartet* there is a similar move of an affair from the home to the hotel, and yet in this case the scenario is slightly different. The affair between protagonist Marya and Heidler begins when she is taken into the Parisian home of Heidler and his wife Lois. Fully aware – and at first accepting – of what is occurring between her husband and Marya, Lois dismisses Marya's wish to leave remarking that '"All this, of course, is because H. J.'s been making love to you, I know".'[239] In contrast to Mrs Quayne, Lois is initially reluctant to disturb the fragility of her marital home, and tells Marya that '"It's fatal making a fuss […]. The more fuss one makes … I don't believe in making scenes about things, forcing things. I believe in letting things alone. I hate scenes"' (*Quartet*, p. 64). Lois's willingness to overlook the affair between Heidler and Marya soon wears thin, however, and when the relationship between husband and wife begins to break down Marya is simply moved into a

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[239] Jean Rhys, *Quartet* (London: Penguin, 1973), p. 63. Further references to this edition are given in parentheses after quotations in the text, where the full title is given.

hotel so that the affair can continue outside of the home (*Quartet*, pp. 82-4). Here, unlike in Bowen's *The Death of the Heart*, it is only the mistress – and not the husband – who is excluded, as it is she who comes to signify the affair itself. With Marya no longer living there, Lois is able to reconstruct her home as what Mohanty and Martin refer to as an 'illusion of coherence,' and to deny the existence of the affair altogether.[240] The adulterous affair – or awareness of it – cannot, as these two examples demonstrate, be sustained within the strict moral codes of the interwar home.

Adultery was not the only form of sexual transgression for which there was no place within the interwar home. As the novels and short stories of these writers make clear, those engaging in premarital sex also transgressed strict moral codes surrounding the sexual behaviour of unmarried women. Such codes dictated that single women should retain their virginity and with it their respectability. The sex manuals of Stopes *et alia* made little or no provision for the single population, and engendered an atmosphere of suspicion and surveillance around the sexual behavior of those who were unmarried. Young unmarried girls such as Karen in Bowen's *The House in Paris* often lived with their parents in the family home. Engaged but not yet married, Karen's affair with Max – who is also engaged – falls just outside the legal boundaries of adultery, yet still clearly violates the moral boundaries of premarital sex in interwar Britain. Karen's transgressions are prompted, Neil Corcoran argues, 'at least in part, […] by her desire to break free from the constrictions of her apparently amiable, decent, moneyed, liberal, Regent's Park-metropolitan family'.[241] Yet the locatedness to which Corcoran refers – his firm placing of it as 'Regent's Park-metropolitan' – means that his description better suits her family *home*, rather than simply her family. The Michaelis' home at Chester Terrace is depicted in Bowen's novel as the archetypal upper-middle-class interwar home in its stability and normality. Beyond its walls, the city pulses with life – 'streets […] full of light and echoes of barrel-organs playing the

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[240] Mohanty and Martin, p. 90.

[241] Neil Corcoran, *Elizabeth Bowen: The Enforced Return* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 94.

new tunes' – while 'indoors at Chester Terrace, Michaelis family life continued as ever; intelligent, kind, calm,' the home standing in static opposition to the activity outside (*HP*, p. 123). The realisation of Karen's desire for Max is impossible within this space, not least because it affords her no privacy, no escape from the all-encompassing gaze of her parents – 'her family's powerful confidence was a searchlight that dipped into every valley, not letting you out of view' (*HP*, p. 133). In order to be with Max there is, for Karen, 'nowhere left to go' but the hotel (*HP*, p. 133). A similar situation is faced by Emmeline Summers in Bowen's *To the North*, despite the fact that the home she shares with her sister-in-law Cecilia is, at first glance, a strikingly modern domestic arrangement. Without the moral standards and constantly prying eyes of parents, Emmeline's anxiety to conceal her relationship with Markie Linkwater might initially seem curious, though could be explained by her characteristic 'reserve' and 'profound shyness'.[242] Yet her reluctance to bring the relationship into her home betrays the powerful morality with which the very concept of home is imbued, regardless of whether or not the actual space in question is a typical family home. When Cecilia remarks to Emmeline that '"You really are very young […]: I suppose I ought to take better care of you than I do. Do be sensible about Markie",' her apparent concern stems from popular interwar doctrine regarding the damaging effect of premarital sex upon a woman's reputation (*TN*, p. 98). It is a combination of an awareness of this concern for her, and of the truth underpinning it, that drives Emmeline away from the home to spend the night with Markie in the Hôtel du Padoue in Paris (*TN*, p. 142). For Karen and Emmeline, both single women, the hotel offers a more private, sheltered space in which their affairs can exist, hidden from the gaze of others. The hotel figures across these novels and short stories as a space that exists outside of normal, societal conventions and moral codes, in which characters are able to transgress the codes and ideologies by which they are confined in everyday life.

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[242] Elizabeth Bowen, *To the North* (London: Penguin, 1987), p. 50. Further references to this edition are given in parentheses after quotations in the text, where the title is abbreviated to *TN*.

In the context of this discussion of the home as a site of sexual morality in interwar Britain, a consideration of the boarding-house, and the unique differences between this space and that of the hotel, will be particularly fruitful. As another transient space in which guests stay for a limited period of time, the boarding-house shares many similarities with the hotel, and yet in the novels and short stories of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield it is also depicted as a space that is markedly more private than that of the hotel. Across these narratives, the décor of the boarding-house is repeatedly portrayed as homely and idiosyncratic. In Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark* (1934), for example, there are cutesy pictures on the wall of Anna Morgan's room in her boarding-house on Adelaide Road: '"Cherry ripe" over the washstand and facing it another picture of a little girl in a white dress with a blue sash fondling a woolly dog.'[243] The Victorian nature of the décor in the boarding-house is reinforced by these pictures, and in particular by 'Cherry Ripe', a hugely popular Victorian print, painted in 1879 by John Everett Millais, and reproduced in the 1880 Christmas edition of weekly newspaper *The Graphic*, an inclusion which boosted its sales considerably to 500, 000 copies.[244] Similarly, the rooms of Julia's Notting Hill residence in Rhys's *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* are 'dark, square,' and 'crammed with unwieldy furniture covered with chintz'.[245] This jumble of furniture resembles that highlighted by Briganti and Mezei in their reading of E. H. Young's 1927 novel, *William*, in which they maintain that Lydia's 'distaste for clutter […] is a foreshadowing of a […] radical dismissal of Victorian morality'.[246] The cramped and chaotic layout of the boarding-house in the narratives of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield not only marks it as a far more domestic environment than the hotel, but also denotes this same Victorian sensibility and morality. Surrounded by such belongings, characters in these establishments are unable to escape the fact that they are guests in

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[243] Jean Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark*, (London: Penguin, 1969), p. 39. Further references to this edition are given in parentheses after quotations in the text, where the title is abbreviated to *VD*.

[244] Laurel Bradley, 'From Eden to Empire: John Everett Millais's *Cherry Ripe*', *Victorian Studies*, 34:2 (1991), 179-203 (p. 179).

[245] Jean Rhys, *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* (London: Penguin, 1971), p. 109. Further references to this edition are given in parentheses after quotations in the text, where the title is abbreviated to *ALMM*.

[246] Briganti and Mezei, p. 98.

someone else's home, and must adhere to that person's moral expectations. In these descriptions, the boarding-house is revealed to be closer to the familial setting of the home, and is therefore implicitly governed by those same moral standards that safeguarded the concept of the family in interwar Britain.

Such descriptions of the idiosyncratic furniture and décor in the boarding-house, together with the presence of the landlady, clearly differentiate this space from the hotel in these narratives, revealing it to be someone's home, into which guests are welcomed for a fee. In their discussion of the boarding-house in interwar women's writing, Briganti and Mezei distance it from the space of the home and instead associate it with 'sexually risqué' behaviour, arguing that, 'as a transitory home where lodgers come and go and where space is communal and privacy scarce, the lodging-house, more than the family home, offers a dramatic site for intrigue and romance'.[247] While they are undeniably correct in highlighting the lack of privacy in the boarding-house, Briganti and Mezei nevertheless fail to recognise the way in which this same lack of privacy is exacerbated and intensified by the continual presence of the landlady, the very figure who confirms this space as a home. Throughout the novels and short stories explored here, it is the implicit (or indeed explicit) association of the *hotel*, and not the boarding-house, with illicit sex that is reinforced, as these authors construct the boarding-house as a space of morality, standing in direct opposition to the seedy nature of the hotel, by clearly aligning it with the private space of the home. This contrast between boarding-house and hotel is clearly demonstrated in Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark,* when Anna writes to Walter asking him to come and visit her in her boarding-house while she is ill, but instructs him to pretend to be related to her: 'My landlady won't want to let you up, but she'll have to if you tell her that you're a relation and please do come' (*VD*, p. 27). Similarly in Rhys's *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, the rigid morality of the boarding-house is again highlighted as Julia Martin worries about the consequences of her lover Mr Horsfield accompanying her back to her room: '"But if anybody sees you?" she asked. Her

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247 Briganti and Mezei, p. 120.

voice sounded as if she were shivering. He thought: "Well, you'll get turned out, my girl, that's a sure thing'" (*ALMM,* p. 109). As the couple creep quickly up the stairs of Julia's Notting Hill boarding-house, her anxieties reveal the extent to which their actions constitute a transgression, and indeed it is as a result of the landlady's discovery of them on the stairs the following evening that Julia is asked to leave the boarding-house altogether (*ALMM*, pp. 118-123). In its status as an impermanent residence for its guests, the boarding-house is, as Briganti and Mezei point out, a liminal, transitory space, but it is one that is, crucially, aligned far more with the private than the public across these narratives, and is as such a space in which sexually transgressive behaviour – of the kind found in the hotel – is decidedly impermissible.

The sense of the private and the domestic in the boarding-house is added to in the writings of these authors by the fact that most, if not all, of the owners of such establishments are women. Landladies were indeed more common than landlords in the boarding-houses of the interwar period,[248] and the landlady is an important figure

> in the study of lodgings, and domestic housing generally, because she was dominant in the family economy. She was also a contradiction in status: an active businesswoman and yet also a servant. She was a householder catering for the respectable itinerant, wielding economic autonomy and domestic power.[249]

Despite the landlady's prominence, however, the decision to clearly gender these owners is undoubtedly a conscious one on the part of these authors, and is one which foregrounds and reassesses the connection between femininity and domesticity which, as Young points out, has persisted in Western culture.[250] In these novels and short stories, the assumed link between women and the domestic is problematised and challenged by the dichotomous female characters who occupy the space of the boarding-house. The landlady is often

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[248] For more on this, see John K. Walton, *The Blackpool Landlady* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1978).

[249] Kate Macdonald, 'The Use of London Lodgings in Middlebrow Fiction, 1900-1930', *Literary London: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Representation of London*, 9:1 (2011) <http://www.literarylondon.org/london-journal/macdonald.html> [accessed 18 August 2011] (para. 14 of 34).

[250] Young, 'House and Home', p. 123.

presented mid-chore, as in Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark*: 'The landlady was washing the steps. She plunged her hands into a pail of filthy water, wrung out the cloth and started to rub again. There she was on her knees' (*VD*, p. 24). This figure is placed in direct contrast to the (often younger) female guests, such as Anna, who appear repulsed by the mundanity of the acts being carried out by their host. These narratives present two opposing visions of femininity, the domesticated versus the rootless, in which the domesticated lifestyle is presented as the more unpleasant and unappealing of the two. The lifestyle of these landladies, women who take an active – and lucrative – pride in decorating and maintaining their home, is regarded as outmoded and is actively rejected by the upcoming generation of younger women passing through their establishments, who are opting instead for a more transient lifestyle.

Also implicit in the association of femininity with domesticity encapsulated in the figure of the landlady is the concept of the maternal. The relationship between mother and home is reinforced in the figure of the housewife, for whom housework often also involves taking care of children – as Nancy Chodorow observes, 'women's activities in the home involve continuous connection to and concern about children'.[251] Feminist critics such as Chodorow have consistently pointed out the ways in which notions of femininity and domesticity are unavoidably bound to ideas of female reproduction and mothering, an argument crystallised by Beauvoir's claim that 'woman is destined to maintain the species and care for the home'.[252] Such connections between femininity, domesticity and motherhood inevitably result in a complex pattern of societal and cultural expectations being placed upon the female homemaker – or in this case landlady – in which the boundaries between homemaker and maternal figure become blurred. The fear of sexual immorality tainting the reputation of their establishments – a fear which is clearly apparent in Rhys's *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* and *Voyage in the Dark* – can be traced back to an

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[251] Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978), p. 179.
[252] Beauvoir, p. 455.

anxiety rooted in ingrained beliefs regarding what constitutes appropriate mothering. The moral climate of interwar Britain, with its continued emphasis on the sanctity of marriage and its hostility towards pre- or extramarital affairs, intensified such anxieties regarding the duties and obligations of the maternal figure. This was in addition to the close scrutiny and surveillance of mothers – and in particular working-class mothers – from the end of the nineteenth century onwards, and the efforts of a number of organisations and institutions to educate young women in the skills of motherhood and 'domestic science'.[253] As Jane Smith observes,

> The emphasis on maternal responsibility gained its legitimacy from an ideology of motherhood rooted in the nineteenth-century doctrine of spheres, which made women's place the home. Now that the welfare of the next generation was recognised to depend on the mother, the rhetoric of motherhood at once insisted on and elevated her maternal duties and status. The child was 'the epitome of the race', and child nurture within the family was all-important.[254]

This emphasis on the importance of good maternal practice inevitably meant that one's success as woman depended largely upon one's success as a mother and homemaker. Within these narratives, the unique nature of the boarding-house set up – a home run and maintained by an often older woman – and its consequent links between femininity, domesticity and mothering, hints at an underlying surrogate mother/daughter relationship, in which the sexual behaviour of the younger female guests is bound up with the powerful anxieties of maternal failure on the part of their landladies.

The unrelenting presence of the landlady, combined with the aforementioned idiosyncratic décor, constructs the boarding-house in these narratives not only as a space that shares more in common with the private, domestic sphere, but also as one which lacks the vital element of anonymity offered by the hotel. In the boarding-house, as noted above,

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[253] These include the General Medical Council, the Women's Labour League, the National Association for the Prevention of Infant Mortality, and the National League for Health and Maternal Welfare.

[254] Jane Smith, *The Politics of Motherhood: Child and Maternal Welfare in England, 1900-1939* (London: Croom Helm, 1980), p. 68.

guests exist in amongst the furniture and belongings of someone else, within rooms decorated according to particular tastes that are not their own. The space belongs unavoidably to another – to the landlady – and entering it involves, as van Lennep observes, entering the 'intimacy' of the other. Guests in these establishments are consequently unable to transgress the moral boundaries of that other.[255] Where the boarding-house is personal, the hotel room is 'impersonal' – it is, as van Lennep suggests, '*for anybody* who can pay for a night's rest, and thus it is for no one'.[256] For him, the anonymity of the hotel is transformative, enabling its guests to break free from the 'obligations and traditions' of everyday existence.[257] In these novels and short stories, it is this anonymity which enables characters finally to escape the restrictions imposed on them by the morality of the private and public spheres, and to explore their sexualities.

Providing greater privacy and safety than the public street or park, and lacking the strict moral codes of the private domestic setting, the hotel instead exists in between the two spheres, offering a temporary no-man's-land, a seemingly lawless realm in which female characters are aware of the possibility that they might transgress the strict moral boundaries of British interwar society. Through their use of the unique space of the hotel as a principal setting for romance and sexual transgression, Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield foreground the impossibility of such behaviour outside the boundaries of the hotel as the prohibitive nature of both public and private spaces is explicitly demonstrated. The palpable fear of discovery displayed by characters such as Karen in Bowen's *The House in Paris* and Mansfield's protagonist in 'The Black Cap' confirms the threat of retribution present in the public spaces of interwar Britain for sexual misdeeds. These authors explore the subtle differences between domestic spaces and the hotel, and consider the consequences of these differences upon the freedoms of their characters, primarily through the boarding-house, which, at first glance seemingly similar in its transitory nature, is set up

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[255] Van Lennep, p. 211.
[256] Van Lennep, p. 212. Emphasis in original.
[257] Ibid., p. 213.

in opposition to the hotel. Throughout these novels and short stories, the hotel functions as a crucial narrative space to think through and challenge the restrictions placed upon female sexuality during the interwar period.

A THRESHOLD INTO THE UNKNOWABLE[258]: THE HOTEL AS A SPACE OF TRANSITION

Having demonstrated the ways in which the hotel is removed from the moral codes and restrictions of the more dominant spaces of interwar society, this section presents a more detailed analysis of the hotel itself, and how this space functions in Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield as one of transition. Beginning with the notion of anonymity raised towards the end of the previous section, this section looks closely at the ways in which the hotel and its rooms are constructed in these novels and short stories as anonymous spaces, catering for anyone and no one in particular, and provides a reading of van Lennep's conception of this anonymity as transformative. This analysis of the anonymous nature of the décor, furnishings and layout of the hotel then shifts towards an exploration of a specific type of hotel to look at the often glamorous environments of several of the hotels depicted throughout these narratives. This element of glamour is, however, acknowledged to be exclusionary, as it is present only in certain types of hotels, which only certain sections of society can afford. The section highlights the way in which the hotel is, through this opulence, constructed as an illusory space, a suspension from reality which cannot be sustained, and links this to the necessarily impermanent nature of the hotel to explore the consequent effects of this impermanence upon the corporeal subjectivities of those residing within. From this reading of the transient nature of hotel existence the section moves to an in-depth analysis of the liminality of the hotel, and the way in which, through this liminality, it operates as a space of transition in writings of these authors. Reading the life-altering – and often life-shattering events – that take place within the hotel across these narratives alongside Bhabha's understanding of liminal space as a 'threshold' into the

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[258] Bhabha, p. 6.

'unknowable, unrepresentable,' this section concludes with a discussion of the way in which the hotel functions in these texts as a vital catalyst for change.[259]

The notion of anonymity – briefly touched upon towards the end of the previous section – is central to any discussion of the hotel. In their choice of décor, furnishings and layout, hotel owners attempt to cater for anyone and no one in particular, and to meet the basic needs of the countless and varied guests passing through their establishments. As van Lennep notes, the bed in a hotel room 'is one of tens or hundreds which have been purchased simultaneously; and the same can be said of almost everything else in the hotel room. Even the pictures on the wall were bought wholesale.'[260] Throughout the novels and short stories of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield, this sense of anonymity is often conveyed through the peculiar feelings of déjà vu experienced by characters upon entering yet another identical hotel room. In Rhys's *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, for example, Julia's arrival in her hotel room triggers powerful memories of another room she once occupied:

> At once all feeling of strangeness left her. She felt that her life had moved in a circle. Predestined, she had returned to her starting point in this little Bloomsbury bedroom that was so exactly like the little Bloomsbury bedroom she had left nearly ten years before (*ALMM*, p. 48).

Similarly in *Good Morning, Midnight*, Sasha reflects on the way in which hotels and hotel rooms are indistinguishable from one another: 'Walking back in the night. Back to the hotel. Always the same hotel. […] You go up the stairs. Always the same stairs, always the same room….' (*GMM*, p. 28). For these characters, the anonymous nature of the rooms they pass through results in a series of hotel experiences that are indistinguishable from one another.

While these experiences may be unvarying and occasionally monotonous in their similarity, the anonymous surroundings of the hotel engender the potential for shifting, fluid identities. The repetitive nature of the hotel experience is captured again in a

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[259]Bhabha, p. 6.
[260] Van Lennep, p. 212.

comment by a female travelling librarian – quoted in 1928 by Norman S. Hayner – who warns that the prospective hotel guest has 'very little chance to show any originality in selecting your surroundings. One hotel bedroom is very like another.'[261] This remark may seem to cast rather a negative light on the hotel lifestyle, but Hayner's accompanying footnote to this quotation reveals a more positive attitude, noting that the librarian 'also exclaims, "I do not know of any place in the world where one feels more independent"'.[262] Her feelings of independence in the hotel, together with Hayner's own observation that the 'anonymity and impersonality' of the hotel make it 'free', speak to the arguments of van Lennep, who suggests that it is precisely these qualities that construct the hotel as a liberatory space.[263] Surrounded by nondescript items of furniture that are not one's own, van Lennep maintains that one experiences a rare freedom:

> In this room for which I do not bear any responsibility, in that it does not indicate my past or my future, in that I merely appear in it as a number in an arbitrary series, I suddenly become freed of my obligations and traditions. I find myself transformed through the anonymity of the hotel room.[264]

The anonymity of the hotel room is in part attributable to the lack of one's own belongings, of objects imbued with one's own personal memories, and with which one has a relationship, built up over time. In the home, belongings, Young maintains, 'support and display *who I am*.'[265] In the hotel, however, the absence of these belongings removes the support for one's identity, opening up possibilities of multiple, exchangeable identities. As Marc Katz suggests, the hotel is 'a site of exchange of all sorts – information, money, services, goods. And among these,' Katz argues, 'we might include identity as well, since as sites of displacement, hotels tend to magnify that sense of the performative that is

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[261] 'The Unpublished Manuscript of a Traveling Librarian', cited in Norman S. Hayner, 'Hotel Life and Personality', *The American Journal of Sociology*, 33:5 (1928), 784-795 (p. 790).

[262] Ibid.

[263] Ibid.

[264] Van Lennep, p. 213.

[265] Iris Marion Young, 'A Room of One's Own: Old Age, Extended Care, and Privacy', in *On Female Body Experience: 'Throwing Like a Girl' and Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 155-70 (p. 157). Emphasis in original.

concomitant with urban anonymity.'[266] In this sense, we might read the behaviour of Bowen's Emmeline and Karen within the hotel – both of whom conform in their everyday lives to interwar expectations of feminine respectability – as a performance of a more liberated, sexually adventurous identity enabled by the anonymity surrounding them. The anonymous nature of the hotel space offers its inhabitants the opportunity to temporarily relinquish their everyday identities, and the societal restrictions placed upon them.

This notion of the hotel as a space removed from everyday existence, in which habitual identities can be exchanged for alternative, more exciting ways of being, is further reinforced by the glamorous surroundings of several of the hotels depicted across these narratives. The eponymous Hotel of Bowen's first novel, for example, possesses all the gleam and glitz of a Palace Hotel, from the rather lavish drawing room and its furniture, with 'the light brocades of the upholstery,' and 'satiny wallpaper and […] lace blinds over the door' (*Hotel*, p. 108), to the 'vivid glitter,' 'glazed stuffs,' and 'noisy colours' of the hotel lounge (*Hotel*, p. 154). This same sense of glamour and opulence is conveyed by the 'gold wicker settee' and 'shimmering' vestibule tiles of the Hôtel du Padoue in Bowen's *To the North* (*TN*, p. 142), and by the intricate wood-patterned ceiling and floor, and 'the doors that had lozenges and squares of green picked out in gold' in Mansfield's 'Father and the Girls' ('FG', p. 470). The lavish décor and furnishings in each of these examples conjures a dreamlike atmosphere that once again recalls the grandeur of the Palace Hotel. As Jean D'Ormesson suggests, 'something more is needed in order for an hotel to become truly grand, something other than just another comfortable place to stay, with well-appointed bathrooms and impersonal bedrooms. And that something is fantasy.'[267] The glamorous surroundings of many of the hotels featured in these novels and short stories further

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[266] Marc Katz, 'The Hotel Kracauer', *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 11:2 (1999), 134-152 (pp. 138-9).

[267] Jean D'Ormesson, 'Introduction', in David Watkin, Hugh Montgomery-Massingberd, Pierre-Jean Rémy and Frédéric Grendel, *Grand Hotel: The Golden Age of Palace Hotels, an Architectural and Social History*, trans. by Daniel K. Wheeler, Martine Meade and Murray Wyllie (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1984), pp. 7-11 (p. 8).

distance these spaces from the everyday, constructing a fantasy, an alternative reality that affects the subjectivities, and conduct, of the guests within.

This distance between the opulent spaces of several of the hotels throughout these texts and the more mundane, ordinary spaces of day-to-day life is reinforced by the clear contrasts drawn between these and the cheaper hotels featured in the writings of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield. By situating their narratives across a variety of different types of hotel, these authors are able to reflect upon the illusory and exclusionary nature of the expensive, luxurious establishments, which are affordable only to a certain section of society. Located on the Italian Riviera, Bowen's eponymous Hotel is such an establishment, and is a place in which affluent British guests spend their winters. As such, it is clearly marked as a space of leisure and indulgence, and is distinctly opposed to the more utilitarian spaces of many of the other hotels in these novels and short stories, such as the dingy Karachi Hotel in Bowen's *The Death of the Heart*, the overwhelmingly gloomy hotel in which Sasha stays in Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight*, and the cramped, angled attic rooms of the Parisian hotel in Mansfield's 'Je ne Parle pas Français' (1920).[268] Contrasted with these more modest, practical spaces, the glitzy and lavish hotels of these narratives are constructed as spaces in which reality – that is, the reality of everyday existence – is suspended. This suspension of reality is exemplified by Sydney and Milton in Bowen's *The Hotel*, the unlikely couple who become engaged during their stay in the hotel, and who write letters about their sudden and unexpected engagement home to their friends and family in order to make it seem more real, in order to feel as if they have 'some sort of attachment outside this improbable place' (*Hotel*, p. 168). Their awareness of the unreality of the hotel is reinforced by Sydney's eventual realisation of the impossibility of their marriage. She explains to Milton: 'I think we have been asleep here; you know in a dream how quickly and lightly shapes move, they have no weight, nothing offers them any

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[268] Katherine Mansfield, 'Je ne Parle pas Français', in *The Collected Stories: Bliss* (London: Penguin, 2007), pp. 60-91. Further references to this edition are given in parentheses after quotations in the text, where the title is abbreviated to 'JNPF'.

resistance' (*Hotel*, p. 182). The hotel in its unreality offers the 'dream' of their relationship no resistance, but the dream ends with Sydney's recognition that they cannot exist together outside of the hotel, that there is no place for them in the reality of everyday life. In this sense, the hotel becomes an illusory space, in which fantasy and the impossibility of the affair can briefly be realised while reality is suspended.

Yet a suspension of reality, rather than its discontinuation, implies that this is a temporary state, and that reality must resume at some point. The impermanence of the hotel denies any sense of stability or rootedness, offering only a temporary resting-place for its guests. For many of these characters, their time spent within the hotel, and within their affairs, is brief and unavoidably finite, and a return to everyday existence seems inevitable. Emmeline and Markie's stay at the Hôtel du Padoue lasts one weekend (*TN*, p. 117), while Karen and Max (*HP*, pp. 148-166) and Anna and Walter (*VD*, pp. 65-71) stay for only one night – even more brief are the mere minutes spent by Janet and Edward in Janet's London hotel (*FR*, pp. 131-4). As Pritchard and Morgan suggest, hotels 'are places 'out-of-time' and 'out-of-place', and the impermanence of the hotel as a setting corresponds with, and indeed emphasises, the impermanence of the encounters that take place within, further highlighting the illusory nature of this space.[269] For several of these characters, for example Emmeline in Bowen's *To the North* and Anna in Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark*, there seems to be a desire to overcome this transience, a yearning for permanence. Emmeline's distress at the fleeting nature of her encounter with Markie is distinctly apparent as she explains to him, "'I just hate moving'" (*TN*, p. 145), and again in the suggestion that 'she longed suddenly to be fixed, to enjoy an apparent stillness' (*TN*, p. 144). Similarly, Anna's joy at being able to spend an entire night with Walter (rather than having to leave before morning as she does at his home) betrays an underlying wish for stability:

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[269] Pritchard and Morgan, p. 764.

> I remembered that I hadn't got to get up and go away and that the next night I'd be there still and he'd be there. I was very happy, happier than I had ever been in my life. I was so happy that I cried, like a fool. (*VD*, p. 66)

Anna's relief at not having to move, and in particular her happiness that Walter will be there the next morning, suggests that this desire for permanence is intertwined with a desire for an everyday reality in which their romantic attachments are permitted. Anna, together with many of the other characters in these narratives, longs for a stability denied by the society in which she lives. Instead, such characters are compelled to move constantly from hotel to hotel – where the reality of the external world is suspended – if their affairs are to stand any chance of survival.

The temporary, fleeting quality, so often ascribed to the hotel in the writings of these authors, marks it primarily as a space of constant movement, and further confirms its status as a liminal space, one which allows and indeed engenders what Bhabha refers to as the 'temporal movement and passage' necessarily involved in liminality.[270] Reading these narratives alongside theories of liminality – in particular those highlighting the 'movement and passage' so central to such spaces – uncovers the time spent in the hotel by many of these characters to be a process of transition. In the opening chapters of Bowen's *The Hotel*, for example, Sydney is unwaveringly attached to the somewhat indifferent Mrs Kerr. Yet as the novel progresses, and her stay in the hotel lengthens, her attachment to Mrs Kerr weakens. She becomes more assured in her own needs, desires and worth, an assurance that is exemplified in her refusal to marry Milton, and this clear transformation is largely due to the unique experience of hotel-life, to the space of the hotel itself. Indeed, the illicit affairs that take place within the hotel throughout these novels and short stories can themselves be read as moments of transition, in which characters undergo a significant and considerable change. The ephemeral, transient space of the hotel is one that clearly engenders these moments of change and development.

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[270] Bhabha, p. 5.

The notion of transition in the hotel is further developed by Pritchard and Morgan's observation that the experience of the liminal space, while often simply regarded as an experience of the 'in-between', can equally be seen as 'the metaphorical *crossing* of some imagined spatial or temporal threshold'.[271] Their argument derives from an acknowledgement of the etymological roots of liminality (meaning threshold or boundary), which reveals the hotel to be a borderland between worlds, a space which is both marginal and which is crossed or traversed by those who enter it. This idea of a threshold recalls Bhabha's reading of the liminal space as an 'intersitial passage between fixed identifications,' a space which is traversed, bridged, or passed through. In the work of these authors, the hotel functions as just such a threshold, a boundary crossed, perhaps unwittingly, by their characters into what Bhabha describes as the 'unknowable, unrepresentable,' into that which does not permit 'a return to the "present"'.[272] In the context of these novels and short stories, the 'unknowable' and 'unrepresentable' takes the form of the life changing and often devastating nature of the events that take place within them. For many of these characters, the repercussions of their sexual encounters in the hotel dramatically alter the course of their lives, and occasionally prove to be the cause of fatal consequences for those involved. In Rhys's *Quartet*, for example, Marya is quickly and brutally killed by her husband Stephan after she reveals to him the details of her affair with Heidler (*Quartet*, p. 143). In Bowen's *The House in Paris*, Karen and Max's night in the Ram's Head Hotel catapults Max into a tormented mental decline, resulting in his eventual suicide (*HP*, p. 183), leaving Karen alone and pregnant with their child. The dramatic final scenes of Bowen's *To the North* – in which Emmeline, in a state of heightened emotion, crashes the car carrying herself and Markie, immediately killing them both (*TN*, p. 245) – can be traced back to their sexual encounter during their weekend at the Hôtel du Padoue. The link between sex and death played out in each of these narratives can be traced throughout Western philosophical and psychoanalytic thought, not least in Sigmund Freud's work on

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[271] Pritchard and Morgan, p. 764. Emphasis mine.
[272] Bhabha, p. 6.

the struggle between *eros*, the sex instinct, and *thanatos*, the death instinct, which, he maintains, underpins all human existence.[273] As Beverley Clack notes, there is, in Western culture, 'an explicit connection […] between human sexuality and the inevitability of death,'[274] and this connection is foregrounded in the climactic events of several of these novels and short stories. In those cases in which the outcome is slightly less devastating, the after-effects of these illicit nights spent in hotels are still considerable. In Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark*, for example, the tempestuous events that take place during Anna and Walter's stay at the country hotel (*VD*, pp. 72-5) prove to be the catalyst for his abandonment of her, and the scene of their final meeting, and his final, absolute refusal to take her back, takes place in yet another hotel (*VD*, pp. 82-5). The shock of Walter's departure sets Anna on a course of unfulfilling and seemingly meaningless affairs, which eventually results in her pregnancy and subsequent life-threatening abortion (*VD*, pp. 155-9). The impermanent and temporary nature of the hotel constructs it as a space of transition, in which characters, willingly or unwillingly, cross the threshold into the unknowable, and find themselves unable to return.

From a feminist perspective, the often catastrophic outcomes of these hotel liaisons seem somewhat problematic. Faced with death, unwanted pregnancies or deep depression, it would be easy to read the fates of many of these female characters as punishment for daring to transgress the boundaries of the hotel, and the moral codes of the interwar period. The only characters who escape such fates are Livvy Thompson in Bowen's *The Last September* and Sydney Warren in *The Hotel*, and it is worth noting that both of these characters become engaged to be married whilst in the hotel, without engaging in illicit sexual relations. In addition, Sydney's stay at the eponymous Hotel is in the company of, or rather, under the protection of, her older cousin Tessa, and it is perhaps for this reason also that she escapes the terrible consequences that face many of the other

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[273] See Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle and Other Writings*, trans. by John Reddick (London: Penguin, 2003).

[274] Beverley Clack, *Sex and Death: A Reappraisal of Human Mortality* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), p. 3.

characters in these narratives. Those women who enter the liminal space of the hotel unchaperoned, or worse, with men to whom they are not tied by marriage, must, it appears, endure the apparently unavoidable repercussions of their actions. For many, these repercussions involve an enforced return to the home, and a denial of any further opportunities for privacy. In Bowen's *The House in Paris*, for example, Karen returns to Chester Terrace after her affair with Max, where the house 'compels' her with 'its fixed eye' (*HP*, p. 173). Following Max's death and the news of her illegitimate pregnancy, she is subtly but firmly coerced into marrying her fiancé Ray Forrestier, for whom she had previously lost all affection, and is thereby confined to the role of wife. Similarly, in Bowen's *Friends and Relations*, Janet, driven by guilt, travels back through the night to Batts, and once home is allowed no peace or privacy from her daughter Hermione, who plays noisily outside her window, and her husband Rodney, who insists on sitting with her in her bedroom (*FR*, pp. 135-8). Wendy Gan posits this kind of removal of privacy as a punishment that is in many ways just as devastating as the fatal consequences experienced by the other characters in these narratives, and maintains that it reflects the moral concerns of the period:

> A woman's access to privacy and consequently to alternative fluid identities was […] a crucial part of the experience of modernity. Yet, this aspect of modernity, when misappropriated for sexual behaviour, was also a reason for alarm. Privacy as a means of opening up other worlds to women apart from the fixity of their identities as married and domesticated housewives offered too much of an escape from patriarchy, too much of a tantalizing vision of another self, another way of being and doing things. For the woman who took too much advantage of the modern opportunities of privacy, including an indulgence of its alternatives, the punishment was a loss of that window into that other world – the withdrawal of the privileges of privacy.[275]

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[275] Wendy Gan, *Women, Privacy and Modernity in Early Twentieth-Century British Writing* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 157.

In the case of characters such as Karen and Janet, the withdrawal of the privileges of privacy is clear, and effectively prevents them from straying beyond the limits of acceptable female behaviour. Gan's argument not only highlights the centrality of the issue of privacy to discussions of women's experience of modernity, but also hints at the importance of the hotel – specifically the hotel room – in providing that privacy. The hotel room does operate as a place away from the gaze of the public sphere, and away from the demands and moral codes of the domestic, in which these female characters find their own space, and its importance becomes even more pronounced when such privacy is denied them. However, what Gan's argument demonstrates is that the fleeting nature of the affairs within these novels should not simply be attributed to the temporary, transient nature of the hotel. Rather, the impermanence of this particular space acts more as a signifier of the impossibility of women's sexual freedom in interwar Britain.

Yet to dismiss these narratives as merely exemplifying the consequences of defying the rigid rules of feminine conduct in interwar Britain would be to fail to recognise their inherent complexities. There has been a noticeable tendency in recent criticism towards a rather one-dimensional reading of many of their female protagonists, specifically those in Rhys's writings, in which the sexual behaviour and lifestyle of these characters is assumed to be not just morally lacking, but ultimately passive. For example, Sue Thomas devotes an entire chapter to the figure of the 'amateur prostitute' in Rhys's early novels, pointing out that, 'in early twentieth-century Britain, Rhys's protagonists would have been classified as "amateur" prostitutes (called "straight girls" by prostitutes) or "sexual free-lance" women'.[276] While Thomas provides a detailed and insightful reading of the ways in which 'Rhys engages with, and often provides supplementary, at times transculturating, framings of the public discourses that circulated around the amateur,' her willingness to return to, and effectively reinforce, such negative definitions is problematic.[277] Similarly, Urmila

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[276] Sue Thomas, *The Worlding of Jean Rhys* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999), p. 67.
[277] Ibid., p. 68.

Seshagiri aligns *Voyage in the Dark*'s Anna with Emile Zola's 'doomed prostitute' *Nana*,[278] and Cynthia Port suggests that each of Rhys's first four novels 'centres on a woman who – alienated from her family, without a husband and financially desperate – must maintain her beauty in order to remain in sexual circulation and sustain herself financially'.[279] Port's argument successfully demonstrates the ways in which Rhys's novels reveal the troubling reality of femininity and ageing, but her wholly negative reading of the characters' predicaments and lifestyles raises the same problems. By defining and re-defining Rhys's protagonists as amateur prostitutes, these critics reinforce the negative associations made by interwar society that discouraged women from engaging in sexual activity outside of marriage. Not only this, but by employing such terminology these writers also effectively mark these characters out as little more than passive victims – women who are incapable of participating in a sexual relationship to satisfy their own desires. Such a reading is not only one-sided, but is also damaging, and refuses to acknowledge these characters as active sexual agents, who, as in the case of Marya and her initial desire for Heidler, and Anna and her evident passion for her lover Walter, clearly pursue their respective affairs in order to fulfil their own sexual needs. It is by reading the characters in these novels and short stories as active agents, as opposed to passive victims, that we might instead understand their time spent in hotels not as triggering a chain of negative and often tragic events, but rather as a vital and positive catalyst for change. In Bowen's *The Hotel*, for example, Sydney's hotel experience opens up new avenues of possibility for her, freeing her from her dependence on Mrs Kerr, and endowing her with a newfound sense of independence. This same feeling of independence is gained by Emmeline in Bowen's *To the North* following her sexual awakening in the Hôtel du Padoue, which liberates her from the position of meek and submissive sister-in-law, finally placing her on an equal footing with the more worldly and dominant Cecilia. In Mansfield's 'The Black Cap', the aborted romantic encounter in a

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[278] Urmila Seshagiri, 'Modernist Ashes, Postcolonial Phoenix: Jean Rhys and the Evolution of the English Novel in the Twentieth Century', *Modernism/Modernity*, 13:3 (2006), 487-505 (p. 497).

[279] Cynthia Port, '"Money for the Night is Coming": Jean Rhys and Gendered Economies of Ageing', *Women: A Cultural Review*, 12:2 (2001), 204-217 (p. 206).

hotel confers on the protagonists a renewed passion for her husband, and a determination to make her marriage work. For these characters, the hotel is indeed a space of transition, one that engenders dramatic, often crucial change.

Throughout these narratives, the hotel provides far more than a simple place to stay for the characters within it. Rather, it operates as a space of transition and transformation, opening up new and endless possibilities, and engendering the exchange of shifting, fluid identities. The décor, layout and furnishings play a large role in constructing the hotel as such a space. In many cases, it is the anonymity of the hotel environment, and the uniformity of its rooms, which enables characters to shake off their everyday identities and reach beyond into unknown patterns of behaviour. In other instances, it is the luxury and opulence of the hotel surroundings that effectively distances characters from their habitual realities, and which encourages them to engage in relationships and activities that would elsewhere be unthinkable. Yet as this section demonstrates, crossing this border into what Bhabha terms 'the unknowable' is not without risk. The fates of several characters in these novels and short stories demonstrate the potential dangers for those women who enter the hotel. However, the often tragic outcomes of these characters ought not to be read as cautionary tales for women readers, but rather as reflecting the complexities inherent in the hotel space itself. While its distance from the public and private spheres offers freedom to its guests, those same social and moral codes that control and restrict behaviour within these spaces also operate to protect those within them. As a liminal space, the hotel exists outside of this security. Yet despite the unknowable and unpredictable nature of the hotel, its importance as a catalyst for change in these texts, and specifically in the lives of their female characters, should not be underestimated. For these authors, the hotel functions as a vital narrative space, one that engenders crucial moments of transition.

'SEX, ROMANCE AND ADVENTURE'[280]: THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE HOTEL

As highlighted in the introduction to this chapter, there exists in contemporary culture a powerful association between hotels and illicit sexual activity, an association that was also present in the literature of the interwar period. In the novels and short stories of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield, the sexual connotations of the hotel are made strikingly apparent. This section demonstrates the ways in which this ideological association is reinforced in the narratives of these authors through descriptions of glamorous, luxurious, and occasionally overtly erotic décor and furniture. It interrogates the extent to which characters within these novels are affected and influenced by culturally constructed ideas of the hotel as a highly sexualised space exempt from the moral codes of society, and considers whether or not such ideas lead these characters to regard the affairs that take place within the hotel with a certain level of inevitability. More importantly, however, this section reads the hotel in these texts through a framework of phenomenological theory to think through the effect of this space upon those characters residing within it. Phenomenology is perhaps best summarised as the philosophy of lived experience, and key theorists in the field Merleau-Ponty and Sartre were primarily concerned, Dermot Moran notes, with 'going beyond narrow empiricist, psychological assumptions about human existence, broadening the scope of philosophy to be about everything, *to capture life as it is lived*'.[281] While the phenomenological philosophy of Sartre will be referred to in more detail in the following chapter's discussion of the distinction between self and other, this section is primarily concerned with the theories put forward by Merleau-Ponty (and the developments of these made by others), and in particular those in his *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) concerning the body and space. A pioneering voice in the study of corporeal subjectivity, the body plays a crucial role in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. For him, as David Morris points out, 'there is no ontological distinction between the experiencing "I" and the body as one lives

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[280] Pritchard and Morgan, p. 765.

[281] Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 5. Emphasis mine.

it. Indeed, the lived body is one's intentional opening to the world, through which alone one experiences meaningful things in the first place.'[282] Human subjectivity, according to Merleau-Ponty, is necessarily embodied, and it is only through the body that one is able to experience one's surroundings. This clear emphasis on the relationship between body and space makes the phenomenological approach posited by Merleau-Ponty an ideal framework through which to read the complex interactions at work between the space of the hotel, its association with illicit sexual activity, and the behaviour of characters within that space.

Hotels feature heavily throughout the writings of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield, providing a principal setting for significant events in the lives of their characters, and the differing descriptions of their interiors play a significant role in forming the initial impressions of the hotels themselves. Passages describing furniture, wallpaper, and lighting amongst other items of décor, create a sense of the atmosphere, the luxury (or indeed the absence thereof), and the inherent potential in the hotel to affect and influence those who stay there. As noted in the previous section, several of the hotels across these narratives are perceived as glamorous by characters, and are depicted as such. In Bowen's *The Death of the Heart*, Portia recalls looking in through the window at the luxury of a Palace Hotel (*DH*, p. 44), while in *The Last September*, Lois Farquar reflects dreamily that 'she would like to stay in a hotel by herself,' suggesting an idealistic association of hotels with sophisticated lifestyles.[283] The description of the décor in several of these hotels also conveys a sense of luxury. The 'dark, thickly carpeted' corridors of Bowen's *The Hotel* (*Hotel*, p.26), the 'gold wicker settee' and 'shimmering' vestibule tiles of the Hôtel du Padoue in Bowen's *To the North* (*TN*, p. 142), and the luxuriously upholstered private dining room of the Hoffner hotel in Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark* (*VD*, p. 18), all construct these hotels as places of opulence and splendor. The link between this glamour and the sexual encounters that

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[282] David Morris, 'Body', in *Merleau-Ponty: Key Concepts*, ed. by Rosalyn Diprose and Jack Reynolds (Stocksfield: Acumen, 2008), pp. 111-20 (p. 111).

[283] Elizabeth Bowen, *The Last September* (London: Vintage, 1998), p. 99. Further references to this edition are given in parentheses after quotations in the text, where the title is abbreviated to *LS*.

occur within these hotels becomes evident as the concepts of luxury and the erotic begin to overlap. This is perhaps best demonstrated in *Voyage in the Dark*, in the description of the private dining room referred to above, which provides the setting for Anna's first romantic encounter with Walter Jeffries. Upon entering the room, Anna observes that 'there was a red-shaded lamp on the table, and heavy pink silk curtains over the windows. There was a hard, straight-backed sofa, and two chairs with curved legs against the wall – all upholstered in red' (*VD*, p. 18). This heavily sexualised description, with its emphasis on the red upholstery, the pink silk, and the curves of the chair legs, clearly signals Walter's intentions, and it comes as little surprise to Anna or the reader when she discovers the half-hidden door to an adjoining bedroom (*VD*, p. 20). His choice of hotel and selection of rooms plainly demonstrates to Anna what Walter expects of her – '*You can now and you can see what it's like, and why not?*' (*VD*, p. 20. Emphasis in original). Similarly in *Quartet*, Marya is placed in a room in the Hôtel du Bosphore by her lover Heidler. 'An atmosphere of departed and ephemeral loves' lingers within the room, and the wallpaper, with its large mauve flowers, is described as 'vaguely erotic', attributes which are particularly appropriate for a room in which Marya is to be kept as a mistress (*Quartet*, p. 87). In these examples, the wallpaper and furniture – and, more specifically, the choice of colour, texture, and overall design – sends a clear message to those who find themselves within these spaces.

Such sexually suggestive décor, along with the luxury and overall decadence of these hotel interiors, serves to emphasise an implicit ideological link between hotels and sexual encounters. In their consideration of the hotel as a site of transgression, Pritchard and Morgan observe that, in Western culture, hotels 'are synonymous with sex, romance and adventure'.[284] While their research is more specifically focused upon the hotel of the present day, it nevertheless speaks more widely to the implications of the hotel historically, and their suggestion is reinforced throughout many of these texts by the way in which hotels figure as sites of romance and excitement for the characters. The opening pages of

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[284] Pritchard and Morgan, p. 765.

Bowen's *The Hotel*, for example, show Miss Pym scanning the letter-racks for clues regarding forthcoming arrivals: 'These long forecast shadows for ever darkening the threshold of the Hotel excited Miss Pym; for some new arrival that never arrived she was storing up tenderness' (*Hotel*, p. 8). For her, the Hotel itself seems to embody the potential for romance and passion, even if that potential is never realised. Passages such as this, which depict characters' preoccupation with the possibility of impending flirtations, pre-empt Tallack's arguments regarding the hotel lobby as a space of anticipation, and his acknowledgement of the 'peculiar limbo quality' it possesses. He posits the lobby as

> a place which some people do not pass through immediately, or at all. Instead it becomes a
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> place of waiting, even for those in a hurry. The lobby […] is very much a space filled with
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> events, though sometimes the anticipated events do not happen.[285]

As suggested earlier, Tallack's arguments can be extended beyond the lobby to the other, equally liminal spaces of the hotel, and so too can this sense of anticipation that he locates specifically in the lobby. It is present, for example, in the aforementioned private dining room of the Hoffner hotel in Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark*, and Marya's eroticised hotel room in *Quartet*. The connection between liminality and expectation drawn by Tallack is invaluable to a reading of the hotel in these narratives, as it hints at the way in which certain types of spaces affect the behaviour of those within them, and helps to further explain the link between hotels and the potential for illicit, and exciting, sexual activity.

For other characters, however, the association of the hotel with sexual adventure is less welcome, and can at times lead to unshakeable feelings of discomfort and unease. In Rhys's *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, for example, Mr Horsfield observes with contempt a young couple engaged in a passionate embrace in a hotel room opposite his own, concluding that 'you couldn't get away from that sort of thing for a moment in this place' (*ALMM*, p. 36). In Bowen's *The Last September*, Lois's impressionable friend Livvy Thompson confides to her that her father "'didn't like me to go there alone because of the

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[285] Tallack, pp. 9-10.

officers",' (*LS*, p. 109), thus acknowledging her father's desire to prevent her from engaging in the seemingly inevitable sexual encounters that threaten within the hotel, and hinting at his fear of the masculinity he imagines is inherent within this 'public' space. The reactions of these characters could simply represent the more morally conservative attitudes present in interwar society regarding extramarital sex. Yet it is worth noting that those characters who object to the prevalence of, or potential for sexual activity within the hotel are primarily men, and that this wariness – such as that of Livvy's father – therefore suggests an underlying patriarchal anxiety concerning this as a space in which women might freely explore their desires, and signals a deeper fear of an uncontrollable, dangerous female sexuality. This fear, argues Clack, can be traced back throughout the history of Western philosophical thought in the continued association of woman with Eve: 'Her fundamental concern is with procreation, and thus she is defined in terms of her sexuality. As a sexual being she, like Eve, is at the mercy of […] Satan.' Clack argues further that, while later philosophers may have departed from the strict confines of Christian theology, 'this notion of the insatiable sensuality of woman is maintained'.[286] Other critics have located this fear of woman's 'insatiable sensuality' across a wider cultural spectrum of literary and filmic horror stories that represent what Barbara Creed refers to as 'the monstrous-feminine,'[287] one of the most notable examples of which being Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), a novel which, Judith Roth maintains, is built upon an undeniable 'hostility toward female sexuality'.[288] This hostility towards female sexuality underpins the distaste of Mr Horsfield, and the vigilance of Livvy's father, both of whom recognise the sexual implications of the hotel, and the possibilities it offers to women.

We might question, however, how much the behaviour of female characters within hotels throughout these novels is affected by these implications, by this implicit link

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[286] Beverley Clack, 'Introduction: A Fling with the Philosophers', in *Misogyny in the Western Philosophical Tradition: A Reader*, ed. by Beverley Clack (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), pp. 1-9 (p. 3).

[287] Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 1

[288] Judith Roth, 'Suddenly Sexual Women in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*', *Literature and Psychology*, 27 (1977), 113-21 (p. 113).

between hotels and sexual encounters. How much, for example, does Marya's recognition of the 'atmosphere of departed and ephemeral loves' (*Quartet*, p. 87) in her hotel room influence her subsequent actions within that room? It might well be argued that this recognition leads her to regard the continuation of her affair with Heidler within this room – an affair in which she herself seems largely to have lost interest – with a sense of inevitability. This same sense of inevitability is strongly conveyed in Bowen's *The House in Paris*, as Karen makes the journey to the Ram's Head Hotel, where she consummates her illicit affair with Max, the fiancé of her close friend Naomi. Karen approaches the meeting with an indifference that at times verges on dread, and which is reified in the surrounding scenery – an overwhelming sense of greyness, 'ruin' and isolation pervades, and the town is described as 'like nowhere, near nowhere, cut off from everywhere else' (*HP*, p. 148). The out-of-season rain conveys a sense of foreboding, with the suggestion that 'rain in summer seems a kind of disaster,' and it is noted that this idea 'had hung over Max and Karen' (*HP*, p. 149) at their initial meeting. The hotel, once they arrive, is itself 'dull' and 'dark,' and the 'real ram's head' (*HP*, p. 150) which glares at them from the wall of the hallway is distinctly unwelcoming. Despite these omens, and despite Max's warning to Karen that she should be sure she knows what she is doing, as '"it will be too late when you ask yourself: What have I done?"' (*HP*, p. 151), the couple proceed to consummate their affair. There seems to be an unspoken acceptance, particularly on the part of Karen, of what must take place once they arrive at the hotel – they are seemingly compelled to fulfil the expectations of the hotel room itself. A feeling of confinement is palpable in this scene – they appear to be trapped, not just in, but *by* the room, as Karen observes the 'inescapable barred square' (*HP*, p. 151), cast on the ceiling by the street lamp and branches outside. This sense of being trapped into their actions by the hotel room, of acting without choice or free-will, is reiterated by Karen's reflection on the inevitability of this room, or one like it, and their encounter within it: 'all that time we were travelling to only this: a barred light on a ceiling, a lamp, a tree outside' (*HP*, p. 153). Here, the hotel has none of the glamour, romance or

excitement seen in many of the other novels, but instead takes on a far more sinister function, entrapping and compelling characters into action, apparently weakening their resolve, thereby problematising not only the space of the hotel, but also the concept of sexual liberation itself, removing the vital element of choice in these encounters. In their attempt to escape the moral codes and conventions of society by engaging in an extramarital affair, Karen and Max find that they are no more free, no more emancipated than they were in their respective engagements, and the hotel room functions as a signifier of the distinct lack of options available to them.

This theme of entrapment persists across several of these narratives, most notably in Rhys's *Quartet*, in which, as noted already, Marya's married lover Heidler books a hotel room to keep her nearby in order that they might continue their affair. The room, with its explicitly sexual overtones, quickly loses any appeal it might have had, taking on instead a somewhat horrifying and threatening aspect. The large flowers on the wallpaper, once 'vaguely erotic,' (*Quartet*, p. 87) now 'crawled like spiders over the black walls of her bedroom' (*Quartet*, p. 91). The more Marya realises that Heidler is 'forcing her to be nothing but the little woman who lived in the Hôtel du Bosphore for the express purpose of being made love to,' (*Quartet*, p. 92) the more unpleasant her room becomes, leading her to conclude that 'a bedroom in hell might look rather like this one. Yellow-green and dullish mauve flowers crawling over black walls' (*Quartet*, p. 93). Her feelings of claustrophobia are emphasised and exacerbated by the 'stale scent' and 'dimness,' (*Quartet*, p. 92) of the room, and she quickly becomes unwell, unable to leave her bed for days on end. Her illness and despair can be partly attributed to her treatment at the hands of Heidler, but the room itself contributes significantly to her physical and mental state, prefiguring Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological theories concerning the impact of space upon the embodied subject, and his argument that 'I am not in space and time, nor do I conceive of space and time; I belong to them, *my body combines with them and includes them.*'[289]

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[289] Merleau-Ponty, p. 162. Emphasis mine.

For Merleau-Ponty, our bodies are undeniably affected by the space we inhabit, to the extent that body and space merge together, revisioning and reconstructing our corporeal subjectivities. As her affair progresses, Marya's subjectivity is very definitely reconstructed by the room she inhabits through the convergence of body and space. Yet while it is undoubtedly the case that the particular material characteristics of the room – such as the size, shape, lightness, and objects contained within it – affect her in a very specific way, the room's hold over Marya is also a result of what Davidson refers to as 'the perspectives, power and (often behind the scenes) performances of others,' which, she argues, 'can combine with subjective sensitivities to make space anxious and aversive, domestic, dull and drab, or oppressive and exclusive'.[290] Inherent within this space is Heidler's agenda to keep Marya (or, more specifically, her sexuality) constantly available to him for his own pleasure. The very recognition of the décor as 'vaguely erotic' seems to trigger her subsequent awareness that she is being kept in this room for a specific purpose, and the room appears to embody the experiences of 'all the women who had lain where she was lying. Laughing. Or crying if they were drunk enough' (*Quartet*, p. 93). Trapped in this room by Heidler, Marya's behaviour can perhaps be seen as a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy, her awareness of the particular nature of the room contributing to her willingness to give in to his demands, to her inability to put up a fight.

Marya's apparent resignation to the circumstances in which she finds herself, and her increasing submission to Heidler's desire, reveals the hotel room in a different, more sinister aspect. Rather than a liberatory space for her to explore, and enjoy exploring, her own desire, this particular room becomes a device through which Heidler is able to exert and maintain power over her. The dissolution of her strength is demonstrated by the fact that she hates the room and yet feels unable to escape, and by the way in which she lies 'quivering and abject' in Heidler's arms, 'like some unfortunate dog abashing itself before its master' (*Quartet*, p. 102). Marya seems weakened, both physically and emotionally,

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[290] Joyce Davidson, *Phobic Geographies: The Phenomenology and Spatiality of Identity* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), p. 21.

through exposure to the room itself, and we can potentially read Heidler's choice of this room as a conscious act of manipulation and control. In a move which anticipates Luce Irigaray's arguments concerning the expectations upon woman to function as place for both foetus and man, but crucially not for herself, Heidler places Marya in the hotel room order to be able to use her as place, as home, thus rendering her homeless. As such, Marya and hotel room, both places occupied by others, become intrinsically connected, the boundaries between them blurred, though in a very different manner to that envisaged by Merleau-Ponty. Rather than a dynamic, positive relationship between body and space, Marya instead experiences what Irigaray refers to as 'a female *placelessness*. She is assigned to be place without occupying place.'[291] In her summary of Irigaray's position, Young links it more concretely to an implicit nostalgia for the maternal, noting that 'man puts woman in her place so that he can return to the original maternal home'.[292] In his use of Marya as place, Heidler seeks to recapture the safety and security of the womb, and, crucially, in doing so effaces Marya's own subjectivity – as Young maintains, 'in women men look nostalgically to return to their own lost home; thus they fail to face women as subjects with their own identities'.[293] So Heidler objectifies Marya, viewing her as little more than a place within which he himself can dwell, within which his own subjectivity can be supported and nurtured. Marya's growing hatred of the room in the Hôtel du Bosphore, and its gradual transformation from a sanctuary to a prison, signifies this ultimate objectification, and her undeniable placelessness as a result of Heidler's treatment of her.

That such themes recur repeatedly throughout these narratives not only reinforces the association of the hotel with extramarital affairs and transgressions, but also hints at a lack of choice available to many women in such situations. In Bowen's *To the North*, for example, Markie decides that he will accompany Emmeline on a business trip to Paris: 'So Markie said that they would fly to Paris together: that should be very nice. Emmeline had

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[291] Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. by Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 52. Emphasis in original.
[292] Young, 'House and Home', p. 129.
[293] Ibid.

not thought of the enterprise in quite that way. […] she could, anyhow, do nothing if he elected to book by the same plane' (*TN*, p. 118). As such, Markie arguably forces the inevitability of their intimacy at the hotel once they arrive, placing Emmeline in a bind from which she feels unable to extricate herself. Similarly in *The House in Paris*, it is Max, not Karen, who suggests that they spend the night together (*HP*, p. 147). The use of hotel rooms to suggest and coerce is perhaps best demonstrated in Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark*. In Mansfield's 'The Black Cap', however, the protagonist runs away with her lover, but is horrified on arrival to find there is only one bed, and, despite this overt suggestion of sex, exercises her right to choose and leaves. Yet this example of an active resistance to the sexual suggestions of male lovers is rare amongst these narratives. As noted earlier, the plush red upholstery of the first hotel room Anna is taken to by Walter is highly sexually suggestive, and the hidden bedroom adjoining their private dining-room even more so. Their next visit to a hotel is for a rare weekend away from London in the country, by which point Anna has learned to read the code of the hotel and knows what is expected of her, so much so that she herself suggests, during a walk in the forest, that they '"go back to the hotel"' (*VD*, p. 68). Any impression that this is an active choice made on her own behalf, and for her own pleasure, is quickly dispelled by the aside which follows: '(You shut the door and you pull the curtains over the windows and then it's as long as a thousand years and yet so soon ended. Laurie saying, "Some women don't start liking it till they are getting old")' (*VD*, p. 68). Through her submissive behaviour, it becomes clear that Walter, like so many of the other male characters throughout these narratives, has successfully appropriated the concept of the hotel room as a tool used to control and coerce his lover, to ensure that she always knows what is expected of her. The persistence with which female characters are coerced into sex by their lovers throughout these narratives serves to reinforce the lack of choice available to them in such situations.

Through the detailed descriptions of luxurious and overly erotic décor and furnishings, these authors successfully foreground the ideological association between the

hotel and illicit sexual activity, and build upon the atmosphere of anticipation and excitement that constantly haunts this space. Yet what this section has focused primarily upon is the effect of such surroundings upon the corporeal subjectivities and behaviours of those characters residing within the hotel. A reading of these narratives alongside phenomenological theories of the body and space reveals the ways in which the bodily habits and inclinations of these characters are clearly affected by the hotel environment. Such a reading not only demonstrates the undeniable relationship between space and the embodied subject, but also raises serious questions concerning the level of inevitability that is therefore attributable to the sexual encounters that take place within the hotel throughout these novels and short stories. This notion of inevitability has further implications, which are far more problematic, regarding the way in which the hotel space is used by the male lovers of these female characters to coerce and control the behaviour of their partners. On this understanding, the hotel comes to resemble a space of incarceration, in which women are trapped and compelled into action, occasionally against their own will.

CONCLUSION

Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield present the hotel as a highly complex space, and the varied and multiplicitous experiences of the characters who reside within it resist neat categorisation. Throughout their novels and short stories, and in particular in the tragic fates of many of the female characters who engage in illicit sexual activity within the hotel, these authors clearly demonstrate what Bettina Matthias refers to as 'the problematic nature of the hotel for women'.[294] However, what their narratives demonstrate most forcefully is that the hotel is a space that offers these characters a level of freedom unavailable anywhere else in interwar Britain. Throughout these texts, the hotel functions as a space in which women are allowed the opportunity to explore their sexuality, an opportunity denied them in the reality of the everyday. In this sense, the hotel can be regarded as a distinctly

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[294] Matthias, *The Hotel as Setting*, p. 67.

modern and emancipatory space, one which has been widely neglected in critical work on modernism and modernity. Feminist critics have highlighted the problems inherent within traditional readings of and approaches to modernity, suggesting that they tend to disregard the more positive aspects of women's experience within this timeframe. Rita Felski, for example, cites Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's argument that:

> […] frequent descriptions of the modern period of deepening despair, paralysis and anxiety fail to address the visions of many female modernists, for whom the idea of the modern was to embody exhilarating possibilities and the potential of new and previously unimaginable sexual and political freedoms.[295]

In the novels and short stories of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield, the hotel becomes a space in which the contradictions and struggles surrounding women's sexual and political freedoms in the interwar period are contested and thought through. For their female protagonists, hotels represent an alternative, indeed an antidote, to the mundane domesticity of their everyday lives, an escape from the gendered space of the home. Yet while it is essential to recognise the ways in which both Rhys and Bowen posit the hotel in a favourable light as a modern space for women, it is also vital that we not overlook the ways in which both the positive and the negative aspects of the sexual encounter within the hotel are addressed in each of these novels, thus defying any attempt at a straightforward reading. As Pritchard and Morgan suggest,

> we need to appreciate that the concept of liminality should be problematised […] to acknowledge that no territory or place can offer equal freedom from restraint to all nor can it be uniformly experienced since spaces are hybrid, mutable and protean.[296]

Through narratives which depict the sexual experimentation and pleasure experienced by their female protagonists alongside the concomitant tragedies that often seem to arise as a direct result of this illicit sexual activity, Rhys, Bowen, and Mansfield successfully

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[295] Rita Felski, 'Modernism and Modernity: Engendering Literary History (extract)', in *Modernism*, ed. by Michael Whitworth (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), pp. 228-243 (p. 230).

[296] Pritchard and Morgan, p. 765.

problematise the liminal space of the hotel, and recognise the multifarious complexities

inherent within it.

CHAPTER TWO

'A NOT UNCOMFORTABLE CELL': ENTRAPMENT AND CONFINEMENT IN THE HOTEL

The stereotypical image of the prison as a gloomy building in which inmates are confined within row upon row of identical cramped cells, however familiar it may seem, is nevertheless one which is relatively new to Western culture. In their introduction to a collection of essays on the history of the Western prison, Norval Morris and David J. Rothman observe that 'before the eighteenth century the prison was only one part, and by no means the most essential part, of the system of punishment'.[297] Up until this point, prisons were primarily used either as a holding place for those awaiting trial or execution, or as a space in which to contain and control political prisoners or spies. The practice of cellular confinement, with which the prison system is now more commonly associated, was derived largely from the Catholic monastic tradition, in which monks would be kept within their individual cells to reflect upon and repent for their sins. The influence of this tradition, argues Edward M. Peters, is crucial to the history of the prison, offering as it does 'the first instances of confinement for specific periods and occasionally for life for the purpose of moral correction'.[298] Tracing the adoption of this method of cellular confinement in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England, Michel Foucault notes the firm belief of prison reformers such as Jonas Hanway (as expressed in his 1776 publication *Solitude in Imprisonment*) in the redemptive powers of such a prison environment. For such reformers, Foucault notes, 'between the crime and the return to right and virtue, the prison would constitute the "space between two worlds" the place for the individual

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[297] Norval Morris and David J. Rothman, 'Introduction', in *The Oxford History of the Prison: The Practice of Punishment in Western Society*, ed. by Norval Morris and David J. Rothman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. vii-xiv (p. vii).

[298] Edward M. Peters, 'Prison before the Prison: The Ancient and Medieval Worlds', in *The Oxford History of the Prison: The Practice of Punishment in Western Society*, ed. by Norval Morris and David J. Rothman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 3-43 (p. 27).

transformation that would restore to the state the subject it had lost'.[299] It is in this understanding of the prison as a 'space between two worlds' that we might begin to trace parallels between the prison and the hotel, a similarly in-between space. Picking up on ideas already touched upon in the first chapter's discussion of glamour, romance and adultery, this chapter considers the ways in which the hotel figures as a place of entrapment and confinement in the writings of Bowen, Mansfield and Rhys. While the previous chapter concluded with suggestions for a somewhat more positive reading of the hotel, revealing it as a space in which women might feel free to explore their sexuality away from the various constraints of the private and public spheres, it also hinted at the more sinister elements at work concerning the implicit control exerted over some of these women by their sexual partners. Consequently, this second chapter considers the varying ways in which the hotel is often figured throughout the interwar novels and short stories of these authors as a space of imprisonment.

The sections of this chapter are structured according to the three principal themes of incarceration identifiable throughout the work of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield. The first of these is the persistence with which the authors depict the hotel room in their writings as a cell-like, carceral space. This opening section uses historical and contextual material on prisons from the mid-nineteenth to early-twentieth century to explore the various parallels between these and the fictional hotel rooms of these authors. These are the kinds of prisons that would have been familiar to anyone living in the U.K. during this period from a general awareness, fed by discussions and debates in the press.[300] Rather than reflecting directly the state of prisons in interwar Britain, their hotel narratives embody cultural assumptions regarding prison life, constructed over time from representations found in literature and the popular press. The work of Charles Dickens, for example, which Bowen

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[299] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin, 1977), p. 123.

[300] In particular, see: 'Prisons', *The Manchester Guardian*, 23 November 1927, p. 8; 'Mr Clynes on Prison Conditions: Abolition of Solitary Confinement', *The Times*, 19 May 1931, p. 13; and 'Aims of Prison System: Conflicting Critics, Commissioner's Reply', *The Manchester Guardian*, 28 June 1932, p. 11.

freely admits to having 'read […] exhaustively as a child,' frequently portrays, often in vivid detail, life inside Victorian prisons.[301] In particular, his novels *Oliver Twist* (1838), *Little Dorrit* (1857), and *Great Expectations* (1861) each feature descriptions of prison interiors, such as that of Mr Dorrit's cell in the Marshalsea, the walls and ceiling of which are 'blackened with flies,'[302] or the cold 'stone bench […], which served for seat and bedstead' in Fagin's condemned cell.[303] Similarly, Oscar Wilde – who had, according to Sydney Janet Kaplan, a 'far-reaching and profound' effect on Mansfield and her writing[304] – provides a first-hand account of his experiences inside Pentonville, Wandsworth and Reading Prisons in 'De Profundis', published posthumously in 1905, in which he refers to 'the plank bed, the loathsome food,' and 'the silence, the solitude, the shame' of cellular confinement.[305] As the campaign for women's suffrage undertook increasingly militant action in the early-twentieth century, and as public concern was captured by numerous horrific stories of the force-feeding of imprisoned suffragettes, interest was raised in the more general conditions of prison life. The popular press became a forum for first-hand accounts of prison life from prominent members, such as that of Mrs Pankhurst in *The Daily Telegraph* in 1908,[306] and for detailed descriptions from correspondents on the circumstances faced by suffragettes in prison.[307] Such accounts, together with the personal writings of Wilde and the popular fiction of Dickens, constructed the prison in the collective imagination of interwar Britain as a very particular type of space, traces of which are clearly detectable in the hotel environments depicted by Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield.

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[301] Elizabeth Bowen, 'Out of a Book', in *The Mulberry Tree: Writings of Elizabeth Bowen*, ed. by Hermione Lee (London: Virago, 1986), pp. 48-53 (p. 50).

[302] Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit* (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 58.

[303] Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist* (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 295.

[304] Sydney Janet Kaplan, *Katherine Mansfield and the Origins of Modernist Fiction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 10.

[305] Oscar Wilde, 'De Profundis [Epistola: In Carcere et Vinculis]', in *De Profundis and Other Writings* (London: Penguin, 1973), pp. 89-212 (p. 148).

[306] Mrs Pankhurst, 'Suffragists in Prison', *The Daily Telegraph*, 18 February 1908. For more on this, see June Purvis, 'The Prison Experiences of the Suffragettes in Edwardian Britain', *Women's History Review*, 4:1 (1995), 103-133.

[307] See, for example, the article in a series by an unnamed correspondent 'Prison Life and Administration – VI. The Women', *The Times*, 10 June 1910, p. 4.

The second section of this chapter details the distinct lack of privacy inherent in the hotel environments of these novels and short stories, and considers the effect that this has on the bodily behaviour of characters who find themselves exposed to the unrelenting gaze of both hotel staff and other guests. Foucauldian theories of surveillance, most notably those raised by the theorist in his celebrated analysis of Jeremy Bentham's *Panopticon*, provide an ideal framework through which to read the impact of this constant scrutiny upon the corporeal subjectivities of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield's hotel-dwelling characters. First proposed by Bentham in a series of letters in 1787,[308] the Panopticon is a prison design engineered to encourage self-regulating behaviour in its inmates, 'to induce […] a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power.'[309] Here, Foucault summarises the basic architecture of the Panopticon:

> […] at the periphery, an annular building; at the centre, a tower; this tower is pierced with wide windows that open onto the inner side of the ring; the peripheric building is divided into cells, each of which extends the whole width of the building; they have two windows, one on the inside, corresponding to the windows of the tower; the other, on the outside, allows the light to cross the cell from one end to the other. All that is needed, then, is to place a supervisor in a central tower and to shut up in each cell a madman, a patient, a condemned man, a worker or a schoolboy. By the effect of backlighting, one can observe from the tower, standing out precisely against the light, the small captive shadows in the cells of the periphery.[310]

While Foucault's discussion of the Panopticon is central to an understanding of the way in which surveillance operates to manipulate and control the occupants of the hotel in the novels and short stories explored here, this is not to suggest that the architectural structure of the hotel directly corresponds with the model outlined above. There is not some equivalent of a central control tower (say, for example, the front desk) from which the

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[308] Jeremy Bentham, *Works*, ed. by John Bowring, 11 vols (New York: Russell & Russell, 1962) IV.

[309] Foucault, p. 201.

[310] Ibid., p. 200.

hotel manager is able to observe all activity within the hotel (although this may well be the case in some of these narratives, such as the front desk of the Hôtel de l'Univers manned by the forbidding Madame Hautchamp in Rhys's *Quartet*); rather, it is the specific way in which this manner of surveillance functions, and, crucially, the effect that this has on those being observed, which is of most importance here. As Tony Fabijancic, writing on the carceral space of the shopping arcade, reflects, it is not that the layout is identical to that of the prison, but rather that there exists 'a similar reification of power, a similar physical expression of the relationship between figures in authority and those outside, a similar use of space and vision for purposes of control'.[311] The inmate in the Panopticon is never certain that he or she is being watched from the control tower, but it is this uncertainty, the impossibility of knowing either way, which compels the individual to behave at all times as though he or she were in fact being observed. In the same way, hotel guests in the writings of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield can never be certain whether they are being observed or monitored at any one time by the hotel management, staff, or even other guests, all of whom become an insidious and persistent presence surrounding these characters. Reading the hotel through Foucault's theory of Panopticism, in which inmates are eventually and inevitably 'caught up in a power situation of which they themselves are the bearers,' allows for an in-depth consideration of the power relations at work in the hotel, and the extent to which such power is inscribed on or implicated in the corporeal subjectivities of those residing within.[312]

The third and final section of the chapter reflects upon the way in which many of these characters seem trapped, either in a certain kind of hotel, or in particular spaces within the hotel, apparently unable to escape despite their best efforts. Engaging with theories of marginality to think through the potential reasons behind this inability to break free of these spaces, the section considers the variety of social prejudices at work within the

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[311] Tony Fabijancic, 'The Prison in the Arcade: A Carceral Diagram of Consumer Space', *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*, 34:3 (2001), 141-158 (p. 143).
[312] Foucault, p. 201.

context of interwar Britain in order to discern precisely what about these characters keeps them confined to certain types of spaces. More specifically, this section embarks upon a sustained discussion of the types of spaces from which these characters are being excluded. These include the more luxurious spaces within a particular hotel (such as the larger, lighter rooms at the front of Bowen's eponymous hotel, as opposed to the smaller, darker rooms at the back), as well as the more expensive or highly sought after hotels (such as the hotel in which Sasha unsuccessfully tries to acquire a room in Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight*, or the 'fashionable […] big jazzy hotels' that Mansfield's Mr and Mrs Williams are unable to afford).[313] More crucially, however, the section examines how their inability to escape the hotel environment demonstrates the decisive exclusion of these characters from the private, domestic sphere of the home. Building upon Rosemary Marangoly George's assertion that 'the basic organizing principle around which the notion of "home" is built is upon a pattern of select inclusions and exclusions,' this final section suggests that the novels and short stories of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield might be read as offering an implicit critique of the exclusion and marginalisation of certain subjects in interwar society.[314]

'WHAT AN UGLY, COLD ROOM'[315]: THE HOTEL ROOM AS CARCERAL SPACE

As noted toward the end of Chapter One, the hotel often functions throughout the work of these writers as a space of confinement, in which characters are effectively trapped by their lovers, or by their own desires. In several of these novels and short stories, however, this idea of sexual entrapment extends into a wider, more complex, and more troubling use of the hotel as a place of incarceration, with cell-like rooms in which characters frequently

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[313] Katherine Mansfield, 'Mr. and Mrs. Williams', in *The Collected Stories: The Doves' Nest* (London: Penguin, 2007), pp. 497-501 (p. 500).

[314] Rosemary Marangoly George, *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 2.

[315] Katherine Mansfield, 'The Little Governess', in *The Collected Stories: Bliss* (London: Penguin, 2007), pp. 174-189 (p. 185). Further references to this edition are given in parentheses after quotations in the text, where the title is abbreviated to 'LG'.

find themselves detained. In Bowen's *The House in Paris,* for example, Karen spends the night staring at the 'inescapable barred square' (p. 151) reflected on the ceiling of her hotel room. At times, the prison metaphor is directly and explicitly evoked, as when, in Rhys's *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, Julia learns of the cessation of funds from her ex-lover, and feels 'as a prisoner might feel who has resigned herself to solitary confinement for an indefinite period in a not uncomfortable cell and who is told one morning, "Now, then, you're going to be let off today"' (p. 14). Drawing on phenomenological theories of embodiment and space, the section discusses the effects of incarceration (and the accompanying attributes of the carceral space) upon the subjectivity of characters in these texts. The section discusses the bodily traces left by the long periods of isolation faced by many of these characters, but follows this with an acknowledgement of the inescapable presence of other guests. The section closes with a detailed consideration of the threat that this constant, unrelenting presence poses to the characters' sense of self.

There are numerous ways in which the hotel is figured throughout the writings of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield as a carceral space, one of the most immediately striking of which is the varying descriptions of the type or nature of furniture within the rooms, which often explicitly mark the space as cell-like. The 'iron bedstead' and 'tin slop-pail' of Julia's Bloomsbury hotel room in Rhys's *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* (p. 47) provide clear examples of such institutional items, instantly evoking images of the most minimalistic, standard issue prison furniture of the type described by Bill Forsythe in his exploration of cellular confinement in English prisons from the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries:

Each cell was much the same in size and furnishings to all the others. In the early twentieth century, in each, cell furnishings included a mattress (if earned by good behaviour), bed board, pillow, mug, stool, plate, slop bucket, towel, two blankets, soap, hair brush and comb,

spoon, salt cellar, tooth brush and paste, bible, prayer book and hymn book and dish cloth.[316]

Edward Marston's description of the 'strictly functional' furniture found in the cells of Pentonville prison, which opened in 1842, conjures an even sparser image. According to Marston, the furnishings of Pentonville cells when it opened were comprised solely of 'a table, a three-legged stool, an open corner cupboard on which the prisoner's hammock was stored during the day and a shaded gas-burner'.[317] These depictions of cells containing nothing but the most essential furniture bear a marked resemblance to many of the sparsely furnished hotel rooms in the novels and short stories of these authors.

It is not only the amount of furniture in the room that affects the characters – its proportions and overall shape can also have a powerful effect upon them. Large items of furniture often seem to inspire feelings of horror in the room's inhabitants. Mansfield's little governess, for example, recoils at the first sight of her room in daylight: 'Ugh! What an ugly, cold room—what enormous furniture! Fancy spending the day in here!' ('LG', p. 185). Her evident shock and distaste at the sheer size of the furniture emphasizes not only her discomfort, but also her unfamiliarity with it and with the room itself. This furniture is not what she is used to – it is not fitted to, nor does it complement, her bodily size and shape. It does not correspond to what Young refers to as her 'bodily habits and routines,' which materially construct the embodied subject over time.[318] For Young, a relationship gradually builds between oneself and the furniture in one's home, which one has chosen and is familiar with, and which comes to fit the contours of one's body. This relationship, she maintains, helps to support and maintain one's subjectivity. Distinctly *un*familiar, the furniture in the little governess's hotel room is instead, like the iron bedstead and tin slop-pail of Julia's accommodation, standard issue, chosen to cater for all eventualities, shapes

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[316] Bill Forsythe, 'Loneliness and Cellular Confinement in English Prisons 1878-1921', *British Journal of Criminology*, 44:5 (2004), 759-770 (p. 761). Forsythe references E.W. Mason, *Made Free in Prison* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1918), p. 159.

[317] Edward Marston, *Prison: Five Hundred Years of Life Behind Bars* (Richmond: The National Archives, 2009), p. 109.

[318] Young, 'House and Home', p. 139.

and sizes, rather than to suit individual needs. As noted in the previous chapter, phenomenologist van Lennep highlights the way in which the hotel room is made all the more impersonal by the homogeneity of the items within it: 'The bed […] is one of tens or hundreds which have been purchased simultaneously; and the same can be said of almost everything else found in the hotel room.'[319] Such uniformity not only marks these hotel rooms out as neutral, blank spaces designed to cater for anyone and no one in particular, but, more importantly, it creates a distinct feeling of unease in the characters who occupy these rooms, a quite literal sense of the Freudian *unheimlich* arising from the alien nature of the everyday objects surrounding them. The mounting anxiety felt by these characters, and the encroaching, sinister suggestion of the uncanny, is powerfully conveyed by the increasingly threatening nature of the furniture, culminating in scenes such as the climax of Mansfield's 'The Stranger' (1922). In this story, Mr Hammond, after learning of his wife's brief but intense friendship with another man at the time of that man's death, sinks into 'the deep, ugly chair'[320] in the hotel room he shares with her, and seems to quickly become trapped within it: 'He couldn't move… He felt all his strength flowing—flowing into the big dark chair, and the big dark chair held him fast, gripped him, forced him to bear it' ('Stranger', p. 362). While his inability to move can partly be attributed to the shock of his wife's revelation and its implication that she may not, as he had previously assumed, belong solely to him, it is significant that Mr Hammond feels that it is the chair that is draining his energy. That he is affected in such an intensely physical way by this piece of furniture further emphasises the potential impact furniture can have on the embodied subject.

Such an exploration of the importance of furniture, of objects, in creating the atmosphere of and/or resemblance to a prison cell must also inevitably turn to a consideration of personal possessions, or rather, their absence. In describing the hotel rooms of their characters, these writers often linger on the scarcity of belongings around

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[319] Van Lennep, p. 212.

[320] Katherine Mansfield, 'The Stranger', in *The Collected Stories: The Garden Party* (London: Penguin, 2007), pp. 350-364 (p. 360). Further references are given in parentheses after quotations in the text, where the title is abbreviated to 'Stranger'.

the scene. Sasha's room in Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight*, for example, bears little or no physical imprint of her habitation – 'the bottle of Evian on the bedtable, the tube of luminal, the two books' are all she seems to need, or at least, are all the possessions, other than clothes, that are worthy of mention (p. 11). The absence of personal effects yet again recalls the prison environment, in which inmates are stripped of their belongings, and indeed in style it reads rather like Forsythe's list of cell contents referred to above. The scarcity of personal possessions often found in the hotel rooms of these characters also provides a clear contrast between the space of the hotel and that of the home, a contrast which becomes particularly apparent in light of Young's suggestion that one of the defining characteristics of a home is the display of objects which 'reflect in matter the events and values' of the occupier's life.[321] The permanence of a home allows for the accumulation of one's possessions, the arrangement in space of things which, more often than not, hold some meaning, and which in a sense operate as a facet of one's subjectivity – as Young maintains, such belongings 'carry sedimented personal meaning as retainers of personal narrative'.[322] The transient hotel lifestyle forbids the accumulation of too many belongings, and the need to travel light prevails over any kind of sentimentality, thereby denying the sedimentation of 'personal meaning' that Young argues is so central to the support of subjectivity. With nowhere permanent in which to settle, these characters must be able to pack all their possessions into a suitcase or two, ready for the next destination. The homelessness of many of the characters found in the writings of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield therefore both necessitates, and is emphasised by, the dearth of personal effects they carry with them, an absence which disrupts and potentially effaces their own 'personal narratives'.

The size of the hotel rooms throughout these novels and short stories is also important when considering their similarities to spaces of incarceration. Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield often emphasise the cramped nature of their characters' accommodation to

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[321] Young, 'House and Home', p. 139.
[322] Ibid.

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further accentuate the feeling of confinement. The Karachi Hotel, in which Major Brutt resides in Bowen's *The Death of the Heart*, has, for example, a distinct lack of space due to the fact that 'all upstairs rooms […] have been partitioned off to make two or three more,' in a clear money-spinning venture by the hotel owners. The attic room which he occupies, however, is 'too small,' even, 'to be divided up,' and therefore offers him the 'most privacy, though least air' (*DH*, p. 285). Crushed into this tiny room, Major Brutt's circumstances are little more than confined and claustrophobic, and when Portia comes to visit him there is barely enough room to accommodate them both: 'His chair back grated against the chest of drawers: on the mat there was just room for his feet' (*DH*, p. 291). Similarly in Bowen's *The Hotel*, James Milton arrives to find himself in one of the smaller back rooms of the hotel, and recognises immediately that it 'offered *no space* for his baggage, and was so furnished as to confuse thought, distract contemplation and impede the movements of the body' (p. 27. Emphasis mine). The account of this particular hotel room is particularly revealing in the context of a theory of space and its impact upon the corporeal subject, highlighting as it does the way in which a confined space, which 'impedes the movements of the body,' will have immediate consequences on the subject's consciousness, 'confusing thought,' and 'distracting contemplation'. These descriptions parallel those of cells in prisons such as Pentonville, which, as Marston notes, each measured a mere 'thirteen feet by seven feet,' with a ceiling height of nine feet.[323] In these two scenarios furniture is again foregrounded, this time to increase the sense of claustrophobia through the overcrowding of already restricted spaces, and to further highlight the differences between the environment of the hotel and that of the home. In the home, Young argues, 'the arrangement of furniture in space provides pathways for habits – the reading lamp placed just here, the television just here, the particular spices on the rack placed just so in relation to this person's taste and cooking habits'.[324] If, as suggested here, furniture can be arranged in a space to support and maintain the bodily routines of its inhabitants, it therefore

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[323] Marston, p. 109.
[324] Young, 'House and Home', p. 139.

follows that it can also be arranged in such a way as to confuse and restrict these habits. In these tiny, cramped hotel rooms, the furniture operates to upset and disorient the occupants, disrupting and destabilising their subjectivities through denying them the opportunity to develop bodily habits, to fully *in*habit the space surrounding them.

The enclosed nature of many of these rooms is often further exacerbated by the décor (or lack of it). The overall state of the décor has often fallen into disrepair – Sasha mistakes the bugs on her wall for 'splashes of dirt', and yet seems unperturbed either way, her lack of concern suggesting that she has perhaps become accustomed to such standards of living (*GMM*, p. 12). The plain, old and worn décor that is so prevalent across these texts again seems to emphasise the similarities between these rooms and is reminiscent of the bleak and bare walls of a cell. In contrast to this, oppressive wallpapers seem to draw the walls in on the characters, to the point at which Mrs Travers, in Mansfield's unfinished short story 'Such a Sweet Old Lady', awakens each morning to find herself 'shut in by the same wallpaper'.[325] As noted in the previous chapter, in Rhys's *Quartet* the wallpaper in Marya's room in the Hôtel du Bosphore, which she at first finds rather quirky, soon becomes sinister and threatening, leading her to think that "'A bedroom in hell might look rather like this one. Yellow-green and dullish mauve flowers crawling over black walls'" (p. 93). Marya's feelings of antipathy towards the décor in her hotel room here clearly recall those of the protagonist in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892) towards the wallpaper surrounding her day and night, the pattern of which is 'a florid arabesque, reminding one of a fungus. If you can imagine a toadstool in joints, an interminable string of toadstools, budding and sprouting in endless convolutions – why, that is something like it.'[326] Gilman's heroine is – like Marya herself – effectively imprisoned by her partner in her attic bedroom, which, with its 'heavy bedstead,' 'barred windows,' and 'gate at the head of

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[325] Katherine Mansfield, 'Such a Sweet Old Lady', in *The Collected Stories: The Doves' Nest* (London: Penguin, 2007), pp. 484-6 (p. 485).

[326] Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper* (London: Virago, 1981), p. 25.

the stairs,' also closely resembles a prison cell.[327] The implications of this intertextual reference are clear – confined to her hotel room, Marya, along with many of the other female characters encountered in these novels and short stories, risks the same devastating fate of mental breakdown as Gilman's unnamed protagonist, signalling the wider implications of the effects of incarceration upon subjectivity.

Light, or rather the notable absence of light is also used by these authors to great effect in creating an atmosphere of enclosure and confinement. In several of these texts the semi-permanent darkness of the hotel rooms seems to play a crucial role in the construction of the characters' subjectivities. Deprived of natural light, characters like Marya seem to become physically weakened: 'She felt giddy and curiously light, as if she were floating about bodiless in the scented dimness' (*Quartet*, p. 93). The occasional attempts of these characters to resist and escape the unrelenting 'dimness' are rarely successful, and they instead remain trapped, almost suffocated by the darkness. Sasha, for example, at one point embarks on a search for a new hotel room, 'a light room,' to contrast the gloom of her current hotel (*GMM*, p. 32). The idea of light is referred to repeatedly, signalling its importance to her, and her increasingly frantic pleas mark her desperation to break free of her current room, in which the light 'is so bad that you can't be sure' what kind of day it is outside (*GMM*, p. 13). The lack of natural light is a common theme throughout Rhys's early novels – as noted, the room in which Heidler places Marya is described as 'dim' (*Quartet*, p. 93), and Julia's first hotel room has 'a sombre and one-eyed aspect because the solitary window was very much to one side,' creating a definite 'gloom' within the room (*ALMM*, p. 7). Bowen also makes use of darkness to accentuate the confined nature of her hotel rooms – Major Brutt's attic room has a tiny 'doll's house window dark from a parapet' (*DH*, p. 291), and, in *The Hotel*, Bowen highlights the difference between the front rooms of the Hotel, 'on the sunny side,' and the back rooms, which were 'smaller, never so bright,' and from which 'no sky was visible' (p. 26). The

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[327] Gilman, p. 14.

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prevalence of dark rooms intensifies the feeling of claustrophobia and of the characters being somehow further shut in by the gloom. Recalling the intentionally meagre cell windows of Victorian prisons such as Pentonville, which 'were situated high up in the wall, to prevent prisoners looking outside,'[328] or Holloway, in which, as suffragette Alice Toyne remarked in *The Times*, there was a distinct 'want of light in most of the cells,'[329] the small or solitary windows of these hotel rooms prove inadequate to let in enough natural light, meaning that, as noted by Sasha, characters are no longer able to tell what kind of day, let alone what time of day, it is. This lack of light directly impacts upon their physicality – Marya's skin takes on a 'greyish' hue after having lain in bed in the Hôtel du Bosphore for days on end (*Quartet*, p. 97), and the 'horribl[e] fatigue' experienced by Julia can be attributed to the pervading gloom of her hotel room (*ALMM*, p. 9). In the extreme, being deprived of light proves fatal for Portia's father, Mr Quayne who, unable to escape the 'back rooms in hotels, or dark flats in villas with no view,' soon dies of a chill which he 'never got used to' (*DH*, p.21). Denied light and open air, these characters become inmates trapped in their shadowy cells.

Rhys's Sasha, Julia and Marya, along with Bowen's Major Brutt, all resemble prisoners in their absolute isolation – the extended periods they spend alone in their darkened, shabby rooms serve to further intensify the sense of confinement. Major Brutt's longing for the company and community of a family home, for an escape from the 'almost unremitting solitude in his hotel,' suggests also that this isolation is not always the result of a personal choice (*DH*, p. 86). These lengths of time spent unaccompanied have a noticeable effect on the behaviour of these characters, and ultimately impact upon their subjectivity. They become awkward, unused to making conversation or interacting socially, and this awkwardness often develops into intense paranoia. In Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight*, for example, Sasha dines in a familiar, seemingly friendly restaurant, but quickly

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[328] Allan Brodie, Jane Croom and James O. Davies, *English Prisons: An Architectural History* (Swindon: English Heritage, 2002), p. 95.

[329] Alice Toyne, 'Letters to the Editor: Common Sense and Prison Reform', *The Times*, 13 April 1907, p. 14 (paragraph 1 of 6).

becomes convinced that two young girls (and the rest of the clientele) are mocking her (pp. 42-5). It is difficult to discern whether or not this is actually the case, but her fragile mental state – which can be largely attributed to the long periods of time she has spent alone in her hotel room – suggests that these slights are largely imagined. Major Brutt's intense awkwardness is displayed when he makes an unannounced visit to the Quaynes' home on Windsor Terrace (*DH*, pp. 88-97), during which he misreads Thomas's bodily signs and signals, and becomes increasingly uncomfortable: 'Major Brutt had these apprehensions that will make an animal suddenly leave, or refuse to enter, a room' (*DH*, p. 92). His loneliness is so extreme that he seeks company wherever he can, only to become convinced that his company was not, perhaps, desired. For Sasha and Major Brutt, the seclusion they experience within their hotel rooms leaves a clear and undeniable impression on their mental state.

The length of their stay often further intensifies the isolation experienced by such characters in hotels. These are not people who are merely passing through, or enjoying a leisurely holiday. Rather, the rooms they inhabit become semi-permanent lodgings, providing a temporary resting place for those who have nowhere else to go. These characters often stay for months, rather than days or weeks at a time, and consequently spend extended periods of time alone in their rooms with little or no human contact. Moving from place to place prevents them from building up a community of friends, and as Bowen's Portia remarks to Major Brutt, any extended stay in a hotel merely serves to reinforce the temporary nature of the space:

> if you always live in hotels […] you get used to people always coming and going. They look
> as though they'd always be there, and the next moment you've no idea where they've gone,
> and they're gone forever. It's funny all the same. (*DH*, p. 48)

With its stream of arrivals and departures, the hotel again here parallels the space of the prison, in which inmates serve sentences of dramatically varying lengths. In this sense, the indeterminate nature of Major Brutt's residence in the Hotel Karachi might well be read as

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a lengthy sentence, one that denies him the companionship he so dearly longs for. This denial is painfully expressed in a letter to Portia, in which he writes:

> Some good friends of mine in this hotel, whose acquaintance I made here, have just moved on, and I find they leave quite a gap. One is often lucky in striking congenial people in these hotels. But of course, people rather come and go. (*DH*, p. 286)

The impermanence that is so inherent to the hotel environment renders such characters unable to sustain – or occasionally to even initiate – meaningful relationships with others within the hotel, thereby intensifying their sense of isolation and alienation within this space.

Inevitably, this acute isolation experienced by many of these characters impacts powerfully upon their corporeal subjectivity, and their solitary lifestyle has clear implications when read alongside concepts of carceral space. Rhys's Marya stays in bed in the Hôtel du Bosphore for days on end, only getting up to gaze horrified at her reflection, despairing at her 'swollen and flaccid' eyelids and 'greyish' skin, before returning to bed where she lies 'huddled with her arm over her eyes' (*Quartet*, p. 97). Marya has been placed in this hotel by her married lover, Heidler, and as his mistress, she has effectively been forced into isolation by him, kept away from the more social space of his home, and from the comfortable domestic life he shares with his wife. The analogy of the prison, which the theme of isolation so readily recalls, is particularly interesting here. In a prison, solitary or cellular confinement is used as a punitive measure, and was a practice particularly popular in prison regimes 'between 1878 and 1921,' which were, according to Forsythe, 'deliberately designed to restrict rigidly communication between prisoners'.[330] Samuel Hoare, chairman of the Society for the Improvement of Prison Discipline, advocated solitary confinement in 1835, arguing that it 'inspires Dread beyond that of any Description of Imprisonment, and […] forms the most powerful Agent in deterring from Crime, and

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[330] Forsythe, p. 759.

producing the Reformation of the Offender'.[331] Forsythe notes further that, 'in penal servitude, the first nine months of sentence for recidivists, with lesser terms for non-recidivists, were served in cellular isolation from other prisoners before transfer to associated labour,' thus highlighting the fact that such punishments were usually reserved for persistent criminals, or those who had committed particularly serious or dangerous crimes.[332] The clear connections drawn by these authors between hotel rooms and cells, which are dramatically foregrounded by the long periods of isolation endured by their occupants, implies that characters such as Marya are being punished in some way by their lovers, and by society in general. The fact that many of these characters are often kept away from the space of the home by their lovers suggests that their alleged crime may be the threat these single women pose to the family home, and the potential damage their sexuality might wreak upon it. As noted in the Introduction, the emphasis placed on the importance of marriage and family effectively ostracised the single population of interwar Britain, creating a society in which, as Katherine Holden maintains, 'intimate (sexual) relationships outside marriage were condemned,' and in which 'marriage was regarded as the most important happening in a woman's life'.[333] Read in this way, and considered alongside sexual histories of the interwar period, these texts can be seen to offer an implicit critique of the revered status of, and the determination to cling onto, the idea of the family home in interwar society, and of the extent to which discourses surrounding the sanctity of this concept operated to marginalise and exclude those who might potentially disrupt or destroy it. Through situating these characters in hotel rooms that come to resemble carceral spaces, these authors demonstrate the effective marginalisation of the single woman in interwar society.

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[331] Taken from *Reports from the Select Committee of the House of Lords Appointed to Inquire into the Present State of the Several Gaols and Houses of Correction in England and Wales* (1835), 4 & 5, appendix 1, 395. Cited in Brodie, Croom and Davies, p. 88.

[332] Forsythe, p. 761.

[333] Katherine Holden, *The Shadow of Marriage: Singleness in England, 1914-60* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), p. 81.

Exclusion from society, however, is only one outcome of enforced isolation. Foucault outlines those principles which underpinned the use of isolation as punishment upon its introduction in eighteenth-century England, and notes that not only does isolation prevent prisoners from conspiring with one another, but that it also 'provides a "terrible shock" which, while protecting the prisoner from bad influences, enables him to go into himself and rediscover in the depths of his conscience the voice of good'.[334] Isolation was introduced as a means of encouraging the prisoner to contemplate his/her crimes, to 'rearrange […] the imperatives of the moral subject'.[335] Those same principles underpinning the practice of solitary confinement regarding the potential for prisoner reformation through isolation from others formed the foundation of the Separate System that was widely adopted in English prisons from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, which consisted of keeping prisoners entirely separate from each other at all times. Belief in the effectiveness of this method still prevailed in the years preceding the interwar period – Forsythe cites the argument of Evelyn Ruggles-Brise (Chairman of the Prison Commission in Britain from 1895) that isolation 'provided an opportunity for reflection for those who had been living a criminal lifestyle'.[336] The idea of reflection is central here, as it hints at the underlying design to engender an automatic practice of self-monitoring and self-discipline within the prisoners through enforced isolation. As Foucault observes, the development of the prison institution was concerned with punishment 'as a technique for the coercion of individuals; it operated methods of training the body […] by the traces it leaves, in the form of habits, in behaviour'.[337] The bodily traces left by cellular isolation manifest themselves in the (often dramatic) alterations in behaviour that are so clearly demonstrated by many of the characters in these novels. By trapping their mistresses in hotel rooms, characters such as Heidler attempt to subdue and suppress their lovers, transforming them into Foucauldian 'obedient subject[s], the individual subjected to habits, rules, orders,' and

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[334] Foucault, p. 122.
[335] Ibid., pp. 122-3.
[336] Forsythe, pp. 760-1.
[337] Foucault, p. 131.

'an authority that is exercised continually around […] and upon [them]'.[338] Through limiting all other human contact, Heidler positions himself as the authority to which Marya must submit – in the words of Foucault, it is her isolation which 'guarantees that it is possible to exercise over [her], with maximum intensity, a power that will not be overthrown by any other influence; solitude is the primary condition of total submission'.[339] The power Heidler exerts over Marya, which 'crushed her' and 'bore her down' (*Quartet*, p. 93), is thus further enabled and augmented by the seclusion imposed upon her. For Marya, and for several of the other characters across these narratives, the time spent alone in the hotel can be read as a form of punishment for refusing to adhere to the moral codes of interwar society.

This notion of punishment through enforced isolation might at first seem to be challenged or contradicted by the unavoidable presence of other guests in these hotels, and the nearness of these characters to those guests, and yet the reverse is often the case. Instead of fostering within them an idea of community and companionship, the characters' constant awareness of the proximity of others merely serves to intensify their feelings of loneliness and detachment. This apprehension of their fellow guests is triggered in these characters through a variety of different sources. Scattered possessions and personal objects, for example, make clear the presence of others – the landing of Sasha's hotel is cluttered with detritus from other rooms, 'the wreckage of the spectacular floors below,' (*GMM*, p. 13) as well as with the shoes of her fellow guests (*GMM*, p. 28), reminding her of their existence. Similarly in Mansfield's 'Je Ne Parle Pas Français', Raoul Duquette and his friends pass a pair of boots on the landing of their hotel, leading Raoul to muse in an aside, '(why is it that one never sees an attractive pair of boots outside a door?)' ('JNPF', p. 81). The characters also become (sometimes painfully) aware of the lives of other guests through brief glimpses and overheard snippets, or, in the case of Julia, through the strains of music leaking from the room of the young man next door who sits with his girlfriend, playing 'the same record over and over again' on his gramophone (*ALMM*, p. 13). These

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[338] Ibid., pp. 128-9.
[339] Ibid., p. 237.

continual reminders of the presence of others, coupled with the acute inability (or indeed refusal) of many of these characters to interact with those others, exemplifies the alienation and anomie that is so central to modernist texts, firmly positioning the hotel narratives of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield alongside more canonical modernist works like Eliot's 'The Waste Land', and Joyce's *Ulysses*. Much to her irritation, Sasha also occasionally encounters on the landing the man in the room next door to hers: 'The man who has the room next to mine is parading about as usual in his white dressing-gown. Hanging around. He is the ghost of the landing. I am always running away from him' (*GMM*, p. 13). Her reference to this man as a ghost recalls Rhys's earlier character Julia in her description of the woman on the floor above as 'a shadow' (*ALMM*, p. 11). The other guests in these hotels constantly haunt the hotel corridors, and more importantly the consciousnesses of the characters, as shadows and ghosts, who never solidify into anything resembling real human contact. Instead, this awareness of other guests, so inherent in the hotel existence, seems to become implicit in the construction of subjectivity, in the defining of oneself against these others.

Julia carefully and painstakingly applies her makeup each morning, as to not do so 'would have been the first step on the road that ended in looking like that woman on the floor above' (*ALMM*, p. 11). Julia constructs herself against this Other, so as to avoid fading into a 'shadow'. Sasha is terrified of her neighbour, and desperately tries to avoid any interaction with him, perhaps in the hope that resisting such a relationship will prevent her from turning into 'a ghost, something that doesn't exist' (*GMM*, p. 31). Here, the dichotomy between Self and Other posited by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, and in particular the developments of it made by Sartre, is complicated by the fraught relationships of these characters with their fellow guests.[340] For Hegel, self-consciousness is reached through the Other's recognition of oneself, an affirmative process through which the self is confirmed and the Other negated. As Stephen Houlgate reflects,

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[340] G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. by A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

I find my identity *recognized* by something other than and independent of me. This moment of recognition is built into the act of independent self-negation performed by the other self-consciousness: for by negating itself the other declares itself to be nothing in and for itself – it "posits its otherness … as a nothingness" – and so *makes way for me*. The other thus allows me to relate wholly to *myself* in relating to another, because all I see in the other is his or her recognition of my identity.[341]

According to Hegel, the look of the Other is positive and necessary to the solidification of one's own subjectivity. In *Being and Nothingness* (1943), however, Sartre questions the validity of Hegel's argument, suggesting instead that he is 'guilty of an epistemological optimism.'[342] For Sartre, the look of the Other is inherently hostile, not least because one's existence might come to depend entirely on that look: '*my* being as the condition of my selfness confronting the Other and of the Other's selfness confronting me'.[343] Rather than functioning as the object that confirms my subjectivity, it is through the look that the Other can instead objectify me. In an attempt to escape this seeming inevitability, these characters refuse and avoid the look of the Other so as to retain/maintain their own existence or sense of self. Davidson summarises the contradictions inherent in the look of the Other, observing that:

Without the look I am nothing, or at least not properly human, but with the look I become aware of the tenuous grounds of my own existence. The same look that solidifies and objectifies me also alienates, disturbs and threatens to *discompose* me.[344]

For characters like Julia and Sasha, the constant presence of other guests in the hotel threatens to disturb and discompose them, to deconstruct their already fragile and fragmented modernist subjectivities to the point of complete disintegration.

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[341] Stephen Houlgate, 'G. W. F. Hegel: The Phenomenology of Spirit', in *The Blackwell Guide to Continental Philosophy*, ed. by Robert C. Solomon and David Sherman (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), pp. 8-29 (p. 15). Emphasis in original. See: Hegel, p. 110.

[342] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. by Hazel E. Barnes (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 264.

[343] Ibid., p. 309.

[344] Davidson, p. 76. Emphasis in original.

The extreme physical closeness of the hotel guests throughout these novels also creates an overall impression of them as being packed in, tightly squeezed into every available space. Their experiences in the hotel, and their sharp awareness of the presence of others, might usefully be compared to Marya's impressions of her husband Stephan's time in prison in Rhys's *Quartet*. Their conversations during visiting hours are almost drowned out by the persistent voices of the other inmates, 'like the buzzing of giant insects. Inexorable, bewildering noise' (*Quartet*, p. 36). This noise does not signify community – rather, like the clutter on the landing and the fleeting shadows of the other guests in a hotel, it marks the struggle of the individual to maintain its subjectivity and sense of self amidst the clamour of others. Indeed, on leaving the prison after one of her visits to Stephan, Marya is reassured and comforted by the sight of a merry-go-round, the mundanity of which 'made her feel more normal, less like a grey ghost walking in a vague, shadowy world' (*Quartet*, p. 46). Rhys's choice of phrase here, in particular the use of the word 'ghost', draws attention to the similarities between Stephan's prison experience and that of many of those characters who reside in the hotel. The 'vague, shadowy world' of the prison, with its crowds of leering Others, threatens to dismantle and deconstruct Marya's subjectivity in much the same way that the presence of fellow hotel guests threatens to dissolve the subjectivities of the characters in these novels and short stories. Further, the physical manifestation of this potential deconstruction is realised in a description of Stephan's appearance after having been imprisoned for six months: 'it seemed to her that Stephan was a stranger: dark-bearded, shaven-headed, very thin, very bright-eyed […] he gripped the bars and leaned forward, talking slowly in his rusty voice' (*Quartet*, p. 85). Incarceration has left visible traces on Stephan's body, in the same way that it leaves clear traces on the bodies of those characters who are trapped within the hotel, thus demonstrating not only the similarities between the prison and the hotel – and the carceral nature of each – but also revealing the undeniable relationship between the body

and space, and the ways in which that relationship can be, and is, manipulated to exert power over the embodied subject.

Through its exploration of the types of hotel rooms that regularly appear throughout the modernist writings of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield, this section has shown the ways in which such spaces might be read, not as spaces of leisure or relaxation, but rather as ones of incarceration and imprisonment. The dimensions, décor and furnishings of these rooms combine to mark them out as cellular spaces, which clearly inscribe and affect the bodies of those inhabiting them. The extended periods of intense isolation experienced by characters in the hotel room further imply an element of punishment, a system of correction for those subjects who refuse to conform to the normative values of British interwar society. Marginalised on account of their gender, nationality, age or class, these characters are trapped in the liminal, unhomely space of the hotel room, unable – as Thacker suggests – 'to convert these spaces into places of belonging'.[345] The unrelenting presence of other guests and staff in the hotel further adds to the overwhelming atmosphere of confinement, and the characters' attempts to maintain a stable and coherent sense of self against these Others demonstrates a distinctly modernist concern with the fragility of subjectivity, and the ease with which it is fragmented by the chaos of modernity, the crowds of the urban environment, and the destabilising look of the Other.

'A CURIOUS FEELING OF EXPOSURE'[346]: SURVEILLANCE IN THE HOTEL

Expanding outwards from the hotel room to the wider, more communal areas of the hotel, this second section explores the theme of surveillance that runs throughout many of the novels and short stories of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield. Referring once again to the work of Foucault, the section uses his discussion of Bentham's *Panopticon* as a theoretical framework to think through the coercive effects of the hotel space on the corporeal

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[345] Thacker, p. 194.

[346] Katherine Mansfield, 'The Doves' Nest', in *The Collected Stories: The Doves Nest* (London: Penguin, 2007), pp. 437-454 (p. 451). Further references to this edition are given in parentheses after quotations in the text, where the title is abbreviated to 'DN'.

subjectivity of their characters. Opening with a detailed consideration of the lack of privacy afforded to guests in the hotel room, the section proceeds to look at the ways in which characters continue to be monitored, often unknowingly, in the communal areas of the hotel by both staff and their fellow guests, and suggests that the seemingly innocuous presence of these Others can in fact be read as the 'visible and unverifiable' power articulated by Foucault.[347] Through an examination of the ways in which the sexual behaviour of these characters is inhibited in the hotel as a result of their awareness that they are being watched, the section considers the extent to which they are therefore 'caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers.'[348] The section concludes with a discussion of the way in which such arguments further complicate the space of the hotel, but ends with a suggestion for a more positive reading, which posits those characters who refuse to be coerced by this Panoptic surveillance as challenging and resisting the manipulative effects of the hotel space upon their embodied subjectivities.

As noted towards the end of the previous section, a common characteristic of hotels in the interwar writings of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield is their intensely crowded nature. Paralleling the modern metropolis that often lies just beyond its threshold, the hotel is an environment in which characters are thrown together, surrounded on all sides by the unknown potential of their fellow guests. Sasha, Major Brutt and Raoul are constantly aware of the presence of others in their immediate vicinity, an awareness which derives, as noted above, from the various belongings scattered about the hotels, the noises which float into their rooms through adjoining walls, and the occasional (unwelcome) encounters in corridors. The man in the neighbouring room to Sasha, for example, screams abuse at her as she approaches her room, and continues to shout at her through the walls, causing her to feel uncomfortable and frightened:

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[347] Foucault, p. 201.
[348] Ibid.

As I get up to the fourth floor landing the commis opens his door and puts his head out. 'Vache! Sale vache,' he says when he sees me. His head disappears and the door is closed, but he goes on talking in a high, thin voice.

I take off my coat and hat […]. All the time I am listening, straining my ears to hear what he is saying.

The voice stops. (*GMM*, p. 125)

The voice of the commis (commercial traveller) dominates not only the landing, but his yelled insults of 'sale vache' – colloquially translated as 'nasty/dirty cow' or 'slut' – pursue Sasha into her own room, breaching the thresholds of her space. These constant reminders of other inhabitants invade the supposedly private space of the hotel room, thereby alerting characters to the fact that any of their own movements can be heard, or indeed seen, by neighbouring guests. The relentless proximity of other hotel guests inevitably results in a lack of any kind of privacy, and their overwhelming consciousness of the closeness of others is manifested in the tendency of several of them to alter and/or restrict their (bodily) behaviour to avoid being overheard or detected. In Bowen's *The Death of the Heart*, for example, Portia's conduct when she arrives in the home of her brother and sister-in-law is itself a hangover from a life lived in hotels. That she 'instinctively spoke low after dark: she was accustomed to thin walls' (*DH*, p. 73), suggests that her bodily habits have been noticeably and permanently altered by the temporary and exposed places she has been used to, thus demonstrating the way in which the corporeal subject is constructed according to the specific types of spaces in which it dwells.

The 'thin walls' to which Portia has become so accustomed hint at the poor construction and shoddy design found in many of the hotels during a period in which, as Rex Pope observes, 'informed opinion, from both within and outside the industry, was critical of its standards,' and in which 'the Report of the Royal Commission on Licensing

(1931) spoke of "a generally recognised need to improve".[349] Such structural shortfalls add to the sense of exposure that is so essential to note in these novels and short stories, and illustrates all the more sharply the distinction between the private sphere of the home, and the not-quite-private space of the hotel. The hotel rooms inhabited by many of these characters provide no privacy – their daily routines and behaviours are betrayed by the thinness of bedroom walls, the nearness of other guests, and even by the proximity of people in adjacent buildings. As a result of the specific locations of their hotels within intensely built-up areas, both Julia (*ALMM*, pp. 129-30) and Sasha (*GMM*, p. 30) find themselves staring directly into the bedrooms of women living across the street from them. The buildings are so close together that Sasha can see the contents of the other woman's room in minute detail, and this, combined with the intimate nature of those contents, highlights the extent to which this enclosed network of rooms operates to deny the occupants any kind of privacy: 'The street is so narrow that we are face to face, so to speak. I can see socks, stockings and underclothes drying on a line in her room' (*GMM*, p. 30). The realisation that by watching the woman across the street put on her makeup she may well lead that woman to 'retaliate by staring at me when I do the same thing,' prompts Sasha to move away from her window in order to escape the 'harden[ed]' gaze of her not-too-distant neighbour (*GMM*, p. 30). Her behaviour here recalls the desire to avoid the look of the Other – her fear of the woman staring back at her is so powerful that it drives her to retreat into the depths of her room.

The powerful feeling of exposure experienced by characters dwelling within these hotel rooms not only compels them to withdraw into remote corners and to keep their voices below a whisper, but the lack of complete privacy also inhibits their sexual activity. The guests of the Hotel Karachi in Bowen's *The Death of the Heart*, for example, suffer from the fact that 'the thinness of these bedroom partitions make love or talk indiscreet' (p. 285),

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[349] Rex Pope, 'A Consumer Service in Interwar Britain: The Hotel Trade, 1924-1938', *The Business History Review*, 74:4 (2000), 657-682 (p. 663). See also the Royal Commission on Licensing (England and Wales), *Report*, cmd. 3988 (1931), p. 58.

and often feel too uncomfortable to be able to enjoy sexual relations with another person. This discomfort is further exemplified by an episode in Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight*, in which Sasha refuses to let René ('the gigolo') come up to her room after a night out. Fearing the judgemental comments of the patronne and other guests – '(The patronne saying: "L'Anglaise has picked up someone. Have you seen?")' (*GMM*, p. 67) – she begs him to get a room of his own in a hotel some distance away. The scene is repeated after another evening out towards the end of the novel, in which Sasha again asks René not to come back to her hotel, but this time, despite her pleas, he follows her up to her room. Once inside, she hesitates as they kiss, panicking that their movements have been detected: 'already something has gone wrong. I am uneasy, half of myself somewhere else. Did anybody hear me, was anybody listening just now?' (*GMM*, p. 148). Despite the fact that she is not at all certain that they have been overheard, Sasha's alarm that they may have been dramatically and abruptly undermines her willingness to engage sexually with René, positioning her as the ultimate self-regulating subject.

It is not only the other guests in the hotel whom characters such as Sasha fear will overhear, and ultimately judge, their behaviour. Within the supposed privacy of their rooms, guests continue to be watched by maids and porters. The maid who shows Karen and Max to their room in the Ram's Head Inn in Bowen's *The House in Paris*, for example, at first refuses to leave: 'the maid who would not go refolded a towel over a jug; Number Nine shuffled with servants staring into your back' (p. 150). In *To the North*, the chambermaid of Emmeline and Markie's Parisian hotel attempts to engage Emmeline in conversation in her room, seemingly wishing to find out if they are married by enquiring if she and her 'husband' are enjoying their stay (p. 147). There are a number of similar instances in which characters in boarding-houses are similarly intruded upon in their rooms by their landladies. In Mansfield's 'Pictures' (1920), Ada Moss is burst in upon in her

bedroom: 'Suddenly, in bounced the landlady.'[350] In Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark*, Anna is conscious of the inevitable intrusions of her landlady each morning: 'When I got home I lay down without undressing. Then it got light and I thought that when Mrs Dawes came in with my breakfast she would think I had gone mad. So I got up and undressed' (p. 77) However, while there are obvious correlations between the activity of staff in both hotels and boarding-houses, there are also significant differences which reveal the potential motives underlying the movements of hotel staff in the writings of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield. The most notable, and vital, of these differences concerns the visibility or presence of staff in each establishment. The landladies of boarding-houses in these writings tend to be ever-present and constantly in attendance, making no secret of the fact that they want to know their guests' business. This is evidenced by Ada's landlady in Mansfield's 'Pictures', who insists that Ada opens a letter in front of her, and snatches it away again when she suspects that Ada is not telling the truth about its contents: 'the landlady was too quick for her. She pounced, secured the letter' (p. 121). As discussed in the opening chapter, there seems, in these novels and short stories, to be a clear link made between the boarding-house landlady and the boarding-house itself, to the extent that the boarding-house – as a more recognisably domestic space – comes to represent its female/matriarchal owner. The desire of these landladies to know the intricate details of their guests' lives consequently stems from a concern over their establishments' – and therefore their own – reputations. In the boarding-houses featured throughout these writings, landladies make their presence known to protect and maintain the 'good name' of their businesses. The owners of the hotels in these novels and short stories, however, are rarely in view, and their appearances in the rooms of the hotel guests are very infrequent. Rather, it is the seemingly innocuous maids and porters – whose jobs necessitate them entering hotel rooms – who seem to unnerve and unsettle the characters in these texts.

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[350] Katherine Mansfield, 'Pictures', in *The Collected Stories (Bliss)* (London: Penguin, 2007), pp. 119-128 (p. 119). Further references are given in parentheses after quotations in the text.

The hotel maids and porters who lurk in the rooms of guests, and the boarding-house landladies who constantly threaten to burst in upon these characters, are closely linked by their class identities. In the case of the hotel chambermaids and porters, these identities are firmly working-class, sharing a similar background to the domestic servants whose own voices, Light argues, 'are rarely heard' in historical accounts of the period.[351] Instead, servants are frequently portrayed in nineteenth-century literature, as Brian McCuskey observes, as 'snoops, voyeurs, and blackmailers'.[352] Somewhat less sinister, but no less interfering, the boarding-house landlady was, John K. Walton notes, regularly depicted in popular culture during the interwar period as a far more comedic figure, and Briganti and Mezei highlight the role of these women as familiar 'stock, textualised figures in English literature, variously farcical, nosy, rigidly authoritarian, kindly and inept'.[353] In the novels and short stories of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield, these comical stereotypes are knowingly acknowledged and played with. Walton suggests that the source of such humour was the unease that the figure of the landlady inspired, an unease that 'reflected and responded to the anomalies of class as well as gender: landladies were from the working class but not of it, and they combined the roles of servant and independent businesswoman, to the confusion of superior observers'.[354] In this context, the feelings of paranoia that the presence of hotel staff and boarding-house landladies inspire in the characters of these authors might well be attributed to a middle-class anxiety over being observed and, consequently, controlled by members of a lower class. However, while this suggestion may hold true for many of Bowen's characters – such as those in *The Hotel*, Karen in *The House in Paris*, and Emmeline in *To the North* – who are more obviously middle-class, the same might not be said for most of the characters found in the narratives

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[351] Alison Light, *Mrs Woolf and the Servants: An Intimate History of Domestic Life in Bloomsbury* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2008), p. 1.

[352] Brian W. McCuskey, 'The Kitchen Police: Servant Surveillance and Middle-Class Transgression', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 28:2 (2000), 359-375 (p. 360).

[353] Briganti and Mezei, p. 111.

[354] John K. Walton, 'The Blackpool Landlady Revisited', *Manchester Region History Review*, 8 (1994), 23-31 (p. 24).

of Mansfield and Rhys, who are, like the landladies identified by Walton, from the working-class but no longer of it. For these characters, the anxiety that they feel is due simply to the fear of being observed, and ultimately judged, by the hotel staff who exist in an uncomfortable proximity to their own social class.

The scenes outlined above, in which members of hotel staff linger and hover in the rooms of these characters, suggest that they may have a hidden purpose, and imply that behind their service and smiles is a more sinister capacity to record, and judge the morality of, the behaviour of guests. In this sense, the hotel staff can be understood as the 'visible and unverifiable' power referred to by Foucault in his discussion of the Panopticon, with its suggestion or implication of surveillance.[355] The maids and porters are 'visible', due to their omnipresence throughout all areas of the hotel (specifically in the supposedly private rooms), and are 'unverifiable' on account of the fact that it is rarely clear to the characters in these texts whether or not they are being observed, thereby enforcing the principle that 'the inmate must never know whether he is being looked at at any one moment; but he must be sure that he *may* always be so'.[356] There is a further distinction to be made here between maids and porters – the maids, in their specific tasks of stripping bed sheets and cleaning rooms, scrutinise the bodily functions of the hotel guests in a way that the porters – who merely transport luggage to the rooms – do not. Issues of class here link with notions of gender and surveillance, where the maid, who literally cleans up the dirt of these characters, knows in detail the personal behaviours and secrets of the guests who dismiss her. The writings of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield demonstrate the differences between the use of surveillance within the hotel to subtly but categorically coerce and control, and the constant and obvious monitoring of guests found in the boarding-house, a difference which lies in the type of power being exerted in each space. As the boarding-house landlady is almost always visible, and therefore almost always verifiable, her establishment cannot strictly be understood as a panoptic space. In being constantly present, the

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[355] Foucault, p. 201.
[356] Ibid. Emphasis mine.

landlady's aim is to ensure that she knows what is occurring in her establishment, that she sees first-hand what is happening in her own house. The hotel staff, while occasionally visible, are nevertheless markedly less verifiable, and, unlike the boarding-house landlady, they, like the domestic servants discussed by McCuskey, 'are not agents of discipline,' but act instead 'as surrogates of discipline, standing in for the forms of power and authority that circulate invisibly within Victorian society'.[357] Rather than explicitly preventing the guests from engaging in sexual activity by legislating against it and by physically preventing men from entering the bedrooms of female guests, characters in these hotel rooms are instead placed under a subtle yet distinct level of surveillance, in which they can never be certain if they are being watched, and if so, by whom. As in the Panopticon, the feeling of being exposed (and perhaps judged) effectively engenders self-regulating behaviour in the characters themselves, by inducing within them 'a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power'.[358] The knowledge that they can at all times be seen and heard by a visible, or worse invisible, presence often discourages these characters from engaging in any potentially transgressive activity.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the surveillance of guests by staff extends in these novels and short stories into the communal areas of the hotel. The inescapable gaze of the hotel staff is demonstrated in Rhys's *Quartet*, when Marya is informed of her husband's arrest by the 'formidable' *patronne* of the Hôtel de l'Univers, Madame Hautchamp (p. 31), who sees all from her 'small sitting-room behind the hotel bureau', and thus knows intimately the affairs of her guests (p. 21). The suggestion that she constantly observes all who pass through the hotel is reinforced a few pages on when she is described as 'the watching Madame Hautchamp,' (*Quartet*, p. 27), confirming her status as a perpetual witness to, and judge of, the events in her hotel. Guests such as Marya are silently but decidedly controlled and condemned by the gaze of the *patronne*, under whose gaze 'one could only bow the head and submit' (*Quartet*, p. 31). The extent to which hotel guests are (often unknowingly)

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[357] McCuskey, p. 363.
[358] Foucault, p. 201.

watched is again illustrated perfectly by the scene in Bowen's *Friends and Relations* in which Lewis, a close friend of the recently disappeared Edward, is able to glean information of the previous night's events from the hotel porter (p. 144). These events – which consist of a climax of the hitherto unspoken desire between Edward and his sister-in-law Janet – are recalled in scrupulous detail by the porter (details which include Janet's specific dress and appearance: 'She wore day clothes, a dark wrap coat, looked and spoke as usual' [*FR*, p. 144]), thereby hinting at an increased level of surveillance where sexual activity is concerned. The insidious and unremitting gaze of hotel staff is clearly demonstrated in both these examples, revealing the extent to which characters must carefully adapt their behaviour throughout all areas of the hotel.

The sense of vulnerability, of being laid bare to the watchful eyes of others in the communal spaces of the hotel, is also reflected on in Mansfield's unfinished story, 'The Doves' Nest' (1923), in which the dining-room of a rented holiday villa is likened to that of a hotel due to the way in which it causes its tenants to feel 'exposed':

> It was not a favourite room of theirs as a rule—it was overpowering. They bobbed uncertainly at the pale table with a curious feeling of exposure. They were like those meek guests who arrive unexpectedly at the fashionable hotel and are served with whatever may be ready, while the real luncheon, the real guests, lurk important and contemptuous in the background. ('DN', p. 451)

Here the hotel is designated as a space which has the capacity to be cruel and unwelcoming, and in which characters can feel intensely vulnerable to the judgemental gazes of others. The mother and daughter of the story are uncomfortable in this room, and the lack of ownership they feel over the space is foregrounded by its comparison to a 'fashionable hotel' in which they are distinctly out of place. Notably here, however, it is the other guests – as opposed to the staff – in the (metaphorical) hotel whose 'contemptuous' looks 'overpower' the characters. While they hold no real authority over them, many of the characters in these novels and short stories nevertheless fear the pointed gaze of the other

guests, and the moral censure it potentially conveys. The feeling of exposure hinted at in Mansfield's short story is cemented in Bowen's *The House in Paris* in a scene in which Karen and Max, having spent the night in a hotel together, are seen to resemble a young couple at home as she watches him write a letter in the hotel lounge. However, as he writes, the lounge begins to fill with other guests, with 'people, crowding through the swing doors, [who] sat down in the ring of chairs between her and him,' and the gaze of these others makes Karen feel instantly uncomfortable: 'Their looking at Karen made her at once pick up an old copy of *The Sketch*' (*HP*, p. 158). The domestic tableau, seemingly so idyllic at first, is made strange by the presence of others, by a lack of privacy that quickly and brutally marks the setting as not home. The fear that these other guests may somehow be aware of their sexual transgression, of the fact that this happily married couple are merely performing a role (having bought a fake wedding ring to keep up the pretence [*HP*, p. 150]), drives Karen to hide behind an old magazine, and to shield herself from the penetrating looks of these others.

The unhomely setting of the hotel, and the unsettling feeling of exposure which it engenders, is one which makes certain conversations impossible, such as that between Portia and Major Brutt in the lounge of his hotel, during which he is constantly alert to the ubiquity of other guests. Owing to the disparity in their ages – to the fact that Portia, being a young girl of sixteen, insists on engaging in what could appear, to onlookers, to be an intimate conversation with a middle-aged man – Major Brutt becomes so uncomfortable that he moves the conversation up to his own attic room, and only continues it once he has made sure that the entire floor is empty. And he is perhaps right to be concerned – the hotel setting of Bowen's first novel, *The Hotel*, with its preponderance of communal areas, constructs a scenario in which it is impossible to keep a secret for any length of time, and in which interpersonal relationships between guests are scrutinised by their fellow residents. The drawing-room of the eponymous hotel, for example, provides (as was highlighted in the first chapter) a space for many of the female guests to gather and talk,

primarily about those who are elsewhere or absent. In one particular scene, they warn Tessa Bellamy (Sydney's cousin, and chaperone on this holiday) of the dangers of her young cousin's friendship with Mrs Kerr:

> 'She is very much…absorbed, isn't she, by Mrs Kerr?'
>
> 'I have known *other* cases,' said somebody else, looking about vaguely for her scissors, 'of these very violent friendships. One didn't feel *those others* were quite healthy.'
>
> 'I should discourage any daughter of mine from a friendship with an older woman. It is never the best women who have these strong influences. I would far rather she lost her head about a man.' (*Hotel*, p. 60. Emphasis in original)

The overall lack of privacy in the hotel is exemplified in this instance through the gossipy nature of the women's conversation, which is apparently engendered and/or encouraged by the communal space of the hotel drawing-room. On this particular rainy day, the chairs in the room have been arranged in a semi-circle around 'the one open fireplace in the Hotel,' (*Hotel*, pp. 52-3) and are occupied entirely by the older female guests, who, in their attempt to shut out and ignore the gloomy weather, also exclude the other guests in the hotel, and definitively mark their ownership of this private-public space. 'Their backs,' which are 'turned in a kind of contempt on three tall windows through which cold light from the sky and the sea poured in on them gravely,' (*Hotel*, p. 58) are consequently turned on the rest of the hotel, constructing a physical barrier which other guests find difficult, and are therefore reluctant, to breach. Colonel Duperrier, for example, pauses before entering the drawing-room to fetch a pen for the young Joan Lawrence, seemingly halted by a wave of anxiety: 'He stood a moment longer, tugging his short moustache, then braced himself, magnificently squaring his shoulders […]. He hesitated in front of the lace-hung doors, whose appearance seemed to appall him' (*Hotel*, p. 54). The 'lace-hung doors', absence of men, and stereotypically ladylike pursuits of the women within it (the majority of the 'ladies present' are occupied with 'embroidering something unpractical and therefore permissible' [*Hotel*, p. 59]), mark this drawing-room as a decidedly feminine space.

While such a space can undoubtedly be seen as positive, providing a sanctuary for women who find themselves excluded from traditionally masculine, public spaces, it is nevertheless a space from which all others – including other women – are firmly excluded. The nervous and socially awkward Miss Fitzgerald, for example, longs to join the exclusive circle of women, but is unable to enter the room: 'Miss Fitzgerald, standing on tiptoe, peeped over the lace blind through the glass of the drawing-room doors, sighed and shook her head. The room presented a too unbroken front of matronhood' (*Hotel*, p. 53). Her exclusion from this space, and from this community, can be read in terms of the 'pattern of select inclusions and exclusions' that, George maintains, the concept of home is built around.[359] As an unmarried woman, with no family of her own to take care of, Miss Fitzgerald's domestic situation is likely to be markedly different to the married women of the drawing-room, and as a consequence of this difference she is denied entrance to this circle of matronly domesticity. The young Joan Lawrence, while bolder and more carefree than Miss Fitzgerald, displays a similar reluctance to approach the threshold, being 'a little daunted by the habitués of the drawing-room, who played bridge crushingly well, were impeccably manicured and had a hardish eye that negative one's importance' (*Hotel*, p. 54). The inability of both women to infiltrate the drawing-room reveals it as an exclusionary space of privilege as opposed to one of sisterly inclusion, and thus problematises idealised notions of female community which otherwise might be implied by the drawing-room circle. Only a certain type of woman is, it seems, welcome within this particular space, a type revealed by those who are absent from it. Miss Fitzgerald's sudden awareness of the impossibility of her broaching the 'unbroken front of matronhood' can be attributed to her position as an older, unmarried woman, out of place among the assorted wives of the drawing-room, while for Joan, on the other hand, this same knowledge comes not only as a result of her single status, but also – and perhaps more importantly – because of her age and assumed inexperience. Both women, however, are excluded on account of their

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[359] George, p. 2.

domestic situations, neither of which conform to the norm of feminine domesticity exemplified by the women of the hotel drawing-room.

The ladies of the drawing-room (for they are referred to as 'ladies', rather than 'women' or 'girls') are primarily the older, married female guests of the hotel, who congregate to discuss those others who are not present – the younger and/or unmarried women in the hotel whose absence is occasioned by their firm exclusion from the group. In this light, the matter being discussed in the passage outlined above, that of the 'suitability' of a young female guest's relationship with an older woman at the hotel, reveals the extent to which this assembly of ladies observe and pass judgement on a particular type of female guest. The level of interest and, more importantly, the depth of knowledge of the other women in the hotel on the subject of this friendship hint at the surveillance undertaken by each individual member of this group of the other guests in the hotel. For while it is never explicitly acknowledged, it is the sexuality and potential sexual behaviour of Sydney and her older companion Mrs Kerr which is under scrutiny in this conversation. As Petra Rau observes, Sydney's sexual identity, and the nature of her relationship with Mrs Kerr, is 'unrepresentable within the realist trajectory' of a novel which seeks to create an authentic representation of interwar values and ideals.[360] While Rau here makes a valuable comment regarding the attitudes towards same-sex relationships during this period, she nevertheless overlooks the implicit critique of such attitudes offered by Bowen's narrative. Scenes such as those which take place in the drawing-room of Bowen's fictional hotel enable an appreciation of what Jeffreys refers to as 'the effect which the sexological injunctions were having on women's relationships with each other' during the interwar period.[361] That the relationship is described as 'unhealthy', 'eccentric', and even 'violent' (*Hotel*, p. 60), and that it is scrupulously monitored by the matriarchs of the drawing-room, highlights the way in which interwar discourses on sexuality permeated

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[360] Petra Rau, 'Telling it Straight: The Rhetorics of Conversion in Elizabeth Bowen's *The Hotel* and Freud's *Psychogenesis*', in *Sapphic Modernities: Sexuality, Women and National Culture*, ed. by Laura Doan and Jane Garrity (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 217-231 (p. 226).
[361] Jeffreys, p. 126.

everyday conversation and opinion. More importantly, these scenes provide further evidence of the way in which the sexual activity of characters in these novels and short stories is constantly and scrupulously observed in the hotel. Sydney's subsequent reluctant acceptance of an offer of marriage from the hapless James Milton, carries with it the implication that the culture of surveillance within the hotel does have the power to alter or significantly affect the behaviour of those within it, to coerce and control those who are subjected to the gaze through a process of self-regulation, pre-empting Foucault's argument that:

> He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection.[362]

By accepting Milton's proposal (after having rejected him once before), Sydney succumbs to the effect of the constant surveillance meted out upon her by the other female guests of the hotel, thus becoming 'the principle of [her] own subjection'.

These arguments further complicate the more positive reading of the hotel posited by the first chapter as a space in which single female characters (and thus single women in the interwar period) were free to engage in sexual activity, and in which they could explore their sexual desires away from the private space of the home, with all its accompanying ideologies of the family and marriage, and the censorious gaze of the public sphere. The hotel inevitably incorporates key attributes of both the public and the private, functioning simultaneously as an emancipatory space in which women might engage in forbidden sexual relations, and as a space in which they are coerced and controlled by the surveillance operating within. The hotel provides a certain level of privacy (although just how much privacy is negotiable), but that privacy is contaminated by the public element of scrutiny under which characters are placed throughout these novels. Yet while these ideas may

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[362] Foucault, pp. 202-3.

obscure the earlier, more optimistic reading of the hotel, they fail to negate or contradict it altogether. Despite the censorious gaze of the drawing-room ladies, Sydney's apparent conversion to heterosexuality is short-lived, as she informs her fiancé that their marriage is 'quite impossible' (*Hotel*, p. 181). Instead, she returns at the end of the novel to her studies, refusing, as Rau argues, 'to be defined by terms that deny her identity and reality'.[363] The conclusion to Bowen's narrative offers a more promising outlook for characters within the hotel, as Sydney, through rejecting a lifestyle constructed around heteonormative values of marriage and homemaking, successfully resists the powerful and manipulative effects of surveillance. In the same way, it is by continuing to pursue their sexual relationships within the hotel regardless of the awareness that they are under constant observation that characters such as Sasha, Emmeline and Karen reveal the possibility of shoring the boundaries of one's subjectivity against such attempts to infiltrate and control. In the writings of these authors, female characters are still able to engage in sexual activity within the hotel, but when they do, they do so with the knowledge or suspicion that they are being watched. And while surveillance can, and indeed does, operate to compel self-regulatory behaviour in those towards whom it is directed, what is demonstrated by a number of these characters is that the attempts of a Panoptic system to construct docile and passive subjects can be challenged and resisted.

'ALWAYS THE SAME STAIRS, ALWAYS THE SAME ROOM'[364]: AN INESCAPABLE LIFESTYLE

One of the most intriguing similarities between the space of the hotel and that of the prison arises with the persistent implication that the hotel is a place from which there can be no escape. This third and final section examines the ways in which the hotel figures as an impasse in several of these narratives, and explores the potential reasons behind this. Following a discussion of the ways in which the idea of an impasse is suggested by specific

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[363] Rau, p. 228.
[364] Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight*, p. 28.

descriptions of hotels in these novels and short stories, the section then considers the ways in which characters seem to be allocated either to particular types of hotel, or to specific sites within the hotel, on account of their class or socio-economic background. The development of this argument is then accompanied by an exploration of how female characters are further marginalised on account of their gender, and maintains that those who refuse to conform to normalised feminine gender identities of the interwar period are consigned to the liminal space of the hotel as a result. The section then proceeds to further interrogate the ways in which specific bodies – female, foreign, Other – are restricted to the transitory, in-between space of the hotel by the disciplinary structures of British interwar society. As such, this section reveals the ways in which Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield use the space of the hotel to expose the highly prejudiced and exclusionary nature of interwar society towards those who will not – or cannot – adhere to its norms.

As has been consistently noted throughout this chapter, a palpable feeling of confinement runs throughout many of the texts considered here. The novels and short stories of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield are populated with small, darkened rooms, which are often crowded with furniture, and in which characters frequently feel physically trapped, as Anna does in Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark*: 'I kept the curtains drawn all the time. The window like a trap. If you wanted to open or shut it you had to call in somebody to help you' (p. 90). The broken window of Anna's boarding-house bedroom furthers the perception that she has somehow been ensnared within it, and cannot escape of her own accord, and this sense of entrapment becomes even more pronounced in the depictions of hotels throughout these texts. The idea of the hotel or hotel room as an impasse from which it impossible to break free is clearly evident in these texts, and is referred to explicitly in *Good Morning, Midnight*: 'The street outside is narrow, cobble-stoned, going sharply uphill and ending in a flight of steps. What they call an impasse' (p. 9). This idea quickly becomes a clear metaphor for Sasha's situation, as she finds herself unable to escape her hotel room (and the lifestyle that accompanies it), and is noted by Chris GoGwilt, who observes that

'this feature of Parisian street architecture also figuratively evokes the "impasse" of Sasha Jansen, trapped in her social position by cultural alienation, relative poverty, and sexual dependence'.[365] While his reading of Sasha as 'sexually dependent' is problematic (as is his tendency to join other critics in referring to Rhys's protagonists as 'prostitutes'[366]), as it relegates Sasha to the position of passive, helpless female, his argument is nevertheless important as it draws attention to the importance of the impasse in *Good Morning, Midnight*, and the way in which this concept can be seen to extend to the rest of Rhys's literature.[367] He maintains that

> the word 'impasse' figuratively encapsulates the predicament of almost all of Rhys's female protagonists. Connecting room and street in a word that undoes the separation of interior private and exterior public space, the 'impasse' delineates the experience Rhys's protagonists are bound to repeat in finding themselves trapped in the double-bind of private and public metropolitan space.[368]

GoGwilt's foregrounding of the idea of a 'double-bind of private and public metropolitan space' is particularly pertinent to a discussion of the hotel, a space which exists quite literally in between the private space of the home and the public space of the city, suggesting that this liminal quality is implicitly linked to the notion of the impasse.

This notion of the centrality of the impasse to the narrative of *Good Morning, Midnight* can be used to further consider the predicaments of many of the other characters across these novels and short stories, many of whom, such as Bowen's Major Brutt and Rhys's Marya and Julia, seem trapped in a hotel lifestyle from which they cannot escape. Major Brutt seems to have become a permanent resident of the Hotel Karachi in *The Death of the Heart*, the dilapidated nature of which is hinted at in descriptions of the shoddy way in which it has been converted from two adjoining houses, and in depictions of rooms in

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[365] Chris GoGwilt, 'The Interior: Benjaminian Arcades, Conradian Passages, and the "Impasse" of Jean Rhys', in *Geographies of Modernism: Literatures, Cultures, Spaces*, ed. by Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), pp. 65-75 (p. 67).

[366] See, for example, Thomas, pp. 67-93, Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis*, p. 145 and Savory, pp. 71-3.

[367] GoGwilt, p. 68.

[368] Ibid., p. 67.

which 'the floors creak, the beds creak; drawers only pull out of chests with violent convulsions; mirrors swing round and hit you one in the eye' (*DH*, p. 285). Similarly, Rhys's Marya moves from a shabby hotel room on one side of Paris ('A bedroom, balcony and *cabinet de toilette* in a cheap Montmartre hotel' [*Quartet*, p. 10]) to another similarly run-down room on the other (the Hôtel du Bosphore in Montparnasse): despite the distance between them there is little to distinguish one room from the other. As such, this inability to escape is conveyed most strongly by the prevalence and persistence in these narratives of certain types of hotel, and characters often observe the similarities between their current room and those that they have previously stayed in. For example, Julia, as observed in the previous chapter, suddenly recognises that, 'predestined, she had returned to her starting-point in this little Bloomsbury bedroom that was so exactly like the little Bloomsbury bedroom she had left nearly ten years before' (*ALMM*, p. 48). The startling similarity between the two rooms, in layout and décor, triggers within her the uncanny sensation that 'her life had moved in a circle,' (*ALMM*, p. 48) and that she has failed to move forwards. In *Good Morning, Midnight*, Sasha also reflects on the pattern that has become her life: 'Walking in the night. Back to the hotel. Always the same hotel. You press the button. The door opens. You go up the stairs. Always the same stairs, always the same room…' (p. 28). Sasha is unable to escape a certain type of hotel – dingy, dark and cramped – and the hotels and hotel rooms in which she stays have become indistinguishable from one another. Anna Snaith notes a similar tendency in Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark*, in which Anna 'loses the ability to chart her surroundings as they become invisible to her by being indistinguishable'.[369] Passages such as these suggest that, even if these characters are able to escape one particular hotel, the next will be exactly the same, and they will never be able to break free of the monotonous cycle in which they are trapped. The fact that the majority of the

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[369] Anna Snaith, 'A Savage from the Cannibal Islands: Jean Rhys and London', in *Geographies of Modernism: Literatures, Cultures, Spaces*, ed. by Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), pp. 76-85 (p. 80).

characters facing such a predicament are women only serves to further emphasise the gendered nature of their marginalisation.

What becomes evident in these novels and short stories is a marked variation between the hotel experiences of middle to upper-class characters and those of middle to working-class characters, suggesting that the inability of many of the characters found within the writings of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield to escape a certain type of hotel might well be attributed to their socio-economic background. Of all the texts considered here, the novel in which a class divide within the hotel itself is most readily apparent is Bowen's *The Hotel*, despite the fact that its eponymous hotel is a prime holiday spot for the 'leisured classes'. Located on the Italian Riviera, the hotel is considered by its (predominantly British) guests as 'an ideal place to pass the winter' (*Hotel*, p. 11) – their intention to spend an entire season there thus highlighting their affluence. In their history of travel writing in the 1930s, Burdett and Duncan note the importance of class and wealth to the very ability to travel during this period, stressing the necessity of 'wealth and access to travel networks'.[370] While none of the guests in Bowen's hotel can legitimately be labeled working class, there is nevertheless a definite distinction between the lower and upper-middle classes, which is clearly marked by the types of room allocated to each character. Early on in the novel, it becomes apparent that the first floor of the hotel is the most prestigious floor thanks to an oblique reference to the second floor, 'where people could not afford to have baths so often' (*Hotel*, p. 26).[371] The exclusive nature of the front-facing rooms of the hotel is also indicated by the fact that they are highly sought after by guests, being filled with light and looking out 'over the town into dazzling spaciousness, sky and sea' (*Hotel*, p. 26). The back rooms, on the other hand, are 'smaller, never so bright, and looked out over

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[370] Burdett and Duncan, 'Introduction', p. 6.

[371] This reference to guests not being able to afford baths seems to suggest that this was a convenience that had to be paid for in the hotel. While there is little historical evidence to support this suggestion, in a study of Grand Hotels it is noted that in 1896, 'the new Palace Hotel at St Moritz […] was only providing one bathroom per floor on the grounds that visitors would not wish to pay the necessary price'. Elaine Denby, *Grand Hotels: Reality and Illusion* (London: Reaktion Books, 1998), p. 122.

the road,' (*Hotel*, p. 26) straight into the windows of the adjacent villas, thus recalling the windows in the hotel rooms of Rhys's Sasha and Julia, which share a similar line of view straight into the bedrooms of those in the neighbouring buildings (*GMM*, p. 30; *ALMM*, p. 129). James Milton arrives to find himself in a tiny back facing room, which offered 'no space for his baggage' (*Hotel*, p. 27). Sydney, the young protagonist of the novel, occupies a back room in the hotel, and while she seems perfectly content here, the room is judged to somehow suit her by some of the other guests, such as the rather materialistic Veronica Lawrence, who 'thought that it was just like Sydney to be at the back of the first floor instead of the front of the fourth, with a balcony and sunshine' (*Hotel*, p. 111). Despite the implicit irony here which derives from the fact that Sydney's first-floor back room is almost certainly more exclusive than Veronica's front room on the fourth floor, there is nevertheless a clear association made here between Sydney and a particular type of room, an association which suggests that people are linked, or indeed tied to places by virtue of the type of person they are or are perceived to be. Throughout this novel, and across the other narratives explored here, the class backgrounds of characters play a significant role in determining the type of space they are allocated within the hotel.

Many of the inclusions and exclusions operating across the various spaces of the hotel can indeed be attributed to class. For example, elsewhere in Bowen's hotel, Mrs and Miss Pinkerton, two wealthy sisters-in-law, occupy two of the front rooms on the first floor, an invitation into which fills Tessa and Sydney with a sense of awe – 'They must have been the first in the Hotel to cross that threshold' (*Hotel*, p. 30). Their delight at being permitted to enter this room prompts a consideration of the types of places from which characters such as these – who, while not poor, are certainly not of the same social standing as Mrs and Miss Pinkerton – are excluded. Yet there are a number of other factors at work in dictating the types of spaces that characters are granted or denied access to. In Rhys's *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, Julia finds herself barred from the homely atmosphere of her wealthy uncle's boarding-house: 'Two middle-aged women were sitting by the fire

talking. They looked comfortable and somnolent. But Julia sat outside the sacred circle of warmth' (p. 57). Here, it is not only her lower social standing that prevents Julia from being admitted to this 'sacred circle of warmth,' but it is also the brevity of her time spent within this space. The two women by the fire are, in their 'somnolence', depicted as long-staying guests, whose repeated use of the space by the fire has bestowed upon them a sense of ownership of this space, an ownership which effectively excludes outsiders such as Julia, who are just passing through. In Mansfield's short story, 'A Truthful Adventure' (1924), the unnamed protagonist at first finds herself similarly and very decidedly excluded from a hotel in Bruges: 'Madame came in and told me that there was no room at all for me in the hotel—not a bed, not a corner.'[372] The reasons behind her initial exclusion soon become clear when Madame explains: "'You see, it is the season in Bruges, and people do not care to let their rooms for a very short time"' ('TA', p. 530). The owner of the hotel does not even 'glance at my little suit-case lying between us,' the meagre size of which, the protagonist is 'gloomily' aware, is the reason behind her refusal, implying as it does a very short stay. The grounds for her previous exclusion are confirmed once the protagonist informs the owner that she will be staying in Bruges for "'at least a fortnight—perhaps a month"',' at which point Madame immediately informs her that she 'might have a room at her private house' instead ('TA', p. 531). While the hotel owner's decisions here are clearly governed by a financial incentive – a longer stay will bring in more money to her hotel – they are also, at least in part, dictated by an unspoken prejudice against transient, nomadic characters. The exclusion of these characters from not only specific areas within these establishments, but also from the establishments themselves, reveals that permission to enter such spaces is based not on what one has, but on what one does not have, and perhaps more importantly, on what one is not. As such, these spaces are revealed to be distinctly discriminatory.

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[372] Katherine Mansfield, 'A Truthful Adventure', in *The Collected Stories: Something Childish* (London: Penguin, 2007), pp. 529-536 (p. 530). Further references are given in parentheses after quotations in the text, where the title is abbreviated to 'TA'.

What emerges throughout Bowen's *The Hotel*, and what is reinforced by many of the other novels and short stories considered here, is a sort of code, based upon the varying types of room, through which is signified the particular class, social standing and financial position of each character. This code is put into practice by other characters, as when Anna Quayne observes, in Bowen's *The Death of the Heart*, that Portia and her parents 'always had the back rooms in hotels, or dark flats in villas with no view' (p. 21). Exiled by Mr Quayne's adultery and struggling financially, the family lived a marginalised existence, and were thus confined to a certain type of room, a factor which Anna uses to denote their socio-economic position to her friend St Quentin. Anna makes a similar, seemingly offhand remark about Major Brutt's hotel, referring to it as 'that sort of hotel that he stays at' (*DH*, p. 303), from which it is clear that she views the Karachi Hotel as a particular type of hotel that caters for a particular type of person. While Anna's comment is perhaps more revealing about her personal opinion of Major Brutt, whom she regards as 'quite pathetic' (*DH*, p. 288), it also adheres to the aforementioned code, in which he, as an out-of-work exile, 'the man from back somewhere, out of touch with London,' (*DH*, p. 45) is relegated to a certain standard of room – a dark, cramped attic room with no view – in a certain type of hotel. A reading of this alongside Foucault's argument that 'discipline is an art of rank,' reveals that different classes of people are allotted to different rooms or residences, and enables a further appreciation of the way in which overarching disciplinary structures and discourses operate to organise and manage individuals.[373] Those characters who already experience social prejudice as a result of their class, gender, or national identity are often further marginalised, their hotel existence restricted to a specific type of room. This is yet another way in which the hotel might be understood as a disciplinary space, one which is 'at once architectural, functional and hierarchical,' and which, according to Foucault, 'guarantee[s] the obedience of individuals, but also a better economy of time and gesture'.[374] The characters within these fictional hotels are arranged and organised according to the

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[373] Foucault, p. 146.
[374] Ibid., p. 148.

specific code outlined above, in order to better monitor, access and control them, positioning them according to their class and confining them forever to a particular species of space from which it is impossible to escape.

In accordance with this code, the dark, back-facing rooms on the top floors of hotels inhabited by Bowen's marginalised characters are also the types of rooms occupied by protagonists in the writings of Rhys and Mansfield, most notably Rhys's Julia and Sasha, and Mansfield's Ada. As already noted, however, throughout *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, *Good Morning, Midnight*, and Mansfield's 'Pictures', it becomes apparent that these characters' socio-economic position is not the only determining factor towards the spaces in which they find themselves. What is instead suggested by these texts is that the marginalisation of these women may have as much to do with gender as it does with class, and further, that they are excluded from certain types of places and included in others according to how well they 'fit' the normalised gender identities of interwar society. Julia, for example, is judged by her landlady to be little more than an alcoholic spinster, and is thus given a dark room on the second floor. Then, on arrival in the Bloomsbury hotel, she is assigned room number nine, which 'was small and very cold' (*ALMM*, p. 47). Finally, on her return to Paris she finds herself in a room 'which depressed her because it was so narrow, and because it was so horrible not to be able to open the windows without having several pairs of eyes glued upon you' (*ALMM*, p. 130). The remarkable similarities between these three rooms, their dingy and depressing natures, reinforce the idea that she cannot escape from this particular type of space. More importantly, however, the persistence of this type of room in Julia's narrative, along with the condescending opinions of the hotel staff, suggests that she, as a slightly older, unmarried woman who also belongs to a lower social class than certain other older, unmarried women in these narratives, such as Bowen's Miss Pinkerton in *The Hotel*, is not worthy of anything else, that in a society in which youth and marriage are prized as the ultimate feminine attributes, she will inevitably be relegated

to the shabby 'backrooms of hotels'.[375] The portrait of the ageing single woman in interwar society is perhaps epitomised by Mansfield's Ada. Ignored by society, and overlooked, despite her classical training, as a singer by various companies in favour of younger, more attractive girls – 'I had a call for twenty-eight ladies today, but they had to be young and able to hop it a bit—see?' ('Pictures', p. 125) – she is consigned to 'a Bloomsbury top-floor back,' which 'smelled of soot and face powder and the paper of fried potatoes she brought in for supper the night before' ('Pictures', p. 119). Sasha, meanwhile, remains in the same hotel room throughout *Good Morning, Midnight*, despite her particularly telling attempt to escape her current situation. In desperation, she takes a taxi to a 'respectable' (*GMM*, p. 31) hotel, and asks for 'a light room' (*GMM*, p. 32). She is initially offered room 219, but it quickly transpires that the room is occupied, at which point Sasha becomes frantic and anxious: 'Suddenly I feel that I must have number 219. Just try me, just give me a chance' (*GMM*, p. 32). Her failure to secure room 219, the fact that she is not given a chance, leaves her both exhausted and accepting of her fate, seemingly aware that any room she is given will be the same as the one before, and that any idea of escape is a fantasy: 'All rooms are the same. All rooms have four walls, a door, a window or two, a bed, a chair and perhaps a bidet…Why should I worry about changing my room?' (*GMM*, p. 33) On returning to her old room, Sasha appears completely resigned to her place in society – 'Here I belong and here I'll stay' (*GMM*, p. 34) – a place which has been designated for her by a society which marginalises single women over a certain age, and which deems them unworthy of a better quality of life.

The hotel itself can be understood more generally in these narratives as a space to which marginalised subjects are consigned by society. In Bowen's *The Death of the Heart*, for example, the ageing and penniless bachelor Major Brutt is doomed to eke out the remainder of his existence in shabby hotels such as the Karachi, despite his longing for a stable, family home like that of the Quaynes. His 'almost unremitting solitude in his hotel'

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[375] For more on this see Holden, *The Shadow of Marriage*, and Sheila Jeffreys, *The Spinster and her Enemies: Feminism and Sexuality, 1880-1930*, 2nd edn (Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 1997).

constructs the Quayne residence as 'the clearing-house for his dreams,' a 'visionary place, round which all the rest of London was a desert' (*DH*, p. 86). Yet both he and Portia – for whom Windsor Terrace is the first real home she has ever known – are decidedly excluded from the Quayne home on account of their class backgrounds and questionable, inconvenient histories.[376] In the case of Portia, however, the ambiguity of her origins contributes further to a life of permanent displacement – having been brought up in hotels, boarding-houses and pensions across Europe, she does not really belong anywhere, and is, as a result, effectively exiled from the 'normal, cheerful family life' (*DH*, p. 15) of the Quaynes' London home. The end of the novel sees Portia finally displaced to Major Brutt's cramped hotel room in which 'she looked at once harsh and beaten, a refugee' (*DH*, p. 293). Rhys's *Quartet* and *Voyage in the Dark* are similarly revealing about the reasons behind the confinement of certain characters to the hotel, and their exclusion from the homes of others, as the protagonists of both novels share a complex background of uncertain origins. Marya, while purporting to be English, inspires confusion in those who meet her as to her background, and Heidler's question upon meeting her, '"But you are English – or aren't you?"' (*Quartet*, p. 12), implies that there is something in her appearance or manner that marks her as Other. Anna's heritage is even less clear to her fellow characters. A Creole woman from the West Indies, she is taunted by her fellow chorus girls who call her 'the Hottentot' (*VD*, p. 12) on account of her birthplace, but is gently mocked by her lover Walter when she repeatedly protests her ancestry: '"I'm the fifth generation born out there, on my mother's side." "Are you really?" he said, still a bit as if he were laughing at me' (*VD*, p. 45). These characters thus find themselves forced into the temporary, shabby spaces of dilapidated hotels and boarding-houses on account of their indiscernible origins. Shut out of more affluent establishments, and, perhaps more importantly, from the homes of other characters, and illustrating George's suggestion that 'the basic organising principle

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[376] As already noted, Portia is the product of Thomas Quayne's father's extramarital affair, and Major Brutt is an old acquaintance of Anna and her ex-lover, Pidgeon. As such, their inconvenience stems from the embarrassment they cause the Quaynes as unwelcome reminders of a past they would rather forget.

around which the notion of "home" is built is a pattern of select inclusions and exclusions,'[377] characters such as Portia, Anna and Marya are ostracised from mainstream interwar society as a result of their Otherness, and, as marginalised bodies, are placed in the distinctly marginal spaces of the run-down hotel.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has considered the various ways in which the hotel is depicted in the interwar novels and short stories of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield as a carceral space, in which characters are confined and monitored, and from which they are unable to escape. Through a detailed reading of the precise nature of these spaces, their size, layout, furniture and décor, it has explored the numerous effects of this incarceration on the embodied subjectivities of these characters, and has appealed to the discourses on sexuality and gender in interwar Britain to think through the potential reasons why these characters find themselves trapped in these spaces. What has become most apparent in this chapter is the way in which those characters who do not adhere to the norms of interwar society – those characters who are marked as Other through their bodies (female, ageing, or of indeterminate origin) – are marginalised and relegated to the temporary, in-between space of the hotel, and how they are kept there by disciplinary structures which operate to coerce, manipulate, and suppress them, and which 'render [them] docile […] by means of precise work upon their bodies'.[378] This chapter has also, however, put forward a more positive reading of these texts by suggesting that certain characters – those who engage in sexual activity despite the surveillance which they are so evidently under within the hotel – challenge and resist the efforts of such disciplinary structures by refusing to be suppressed by them. The following chapter builds on these positive aspects, and suggests that the space of the hotel, rather than being seen merely as a carceral space in which characters are

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[377] George, p. 2.
[378] Foucault, p. 231.

confined against their will, might also be understood as a refuge, as a space to which many

of them actively choose to escape.

CHAPTER THREE

'A GOOD SORT OF PLACE TO HIDE IN':
THE HOTEL AS REFUGE

In its offer of a room and a bed, the hotel is, at its most fundamental level, a space for sleep and respite. During the interwar period, as today, ideas of relaxation and tranquillity were often central to the way in which a hotel was marketed – for example, a leaflet from 1933 advertising the Grand Pump Hotel in Bath highlights the 'studied care' given to 'visitors requiring rest and absolute peace'.[379] A similar advertisement from the 1920s for Tibbald's Park Hotel in Hertfordshire, which comments that 'at Tibbald's there is nothing whatever to worry about,' marks the hotel not just as a space of rest, but also as one of carefree enjoyment, thus signalling an interwar preoccupation with holidays and leisure.[380] Developments in the travel industries during the period enabled an increasing percentage of the British population to holiday abroad. At home, the rise of the motoring industry, detailed in the Introduction, resulted in a marked increase in the numbers of people escaping to the countryside at the weekend, a shift which impacted significantly on the hotel industry. As Mary Cathcart Borer notes, by 1923, the 'motor car age had arrived and exploring the countryside was probably the most popular weekend pastime'.[381] In the years between the two World Wars, many hotel owners enjoyed an unprecedented rise in profits, thanks largely, Charlotte Bates suggests, to the 'increase in tourist traffic,' which, she argues, 'entailed a concomitant growth in tourism as an industry in a mutually dependent relationship between economics and leisure'.[382] The hotel was firmly situated at the epicentre of this new age of travel, where the emphasis was on leisure and pleasure,

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[379] *Bath and the Grand Pump Hotel*, Advertisement, 1933, Oxford, Bodleian Library, *John Johnson Collection of Printed Ephemera*, Hotels 2.

[380] *Tibbald's Park Hotel*, Advertisement, circa 1920s (date unavailable), Oxford, *John Johnson Collection of Printed Ephemera*, Hotels 2.

[381] Mary Cathcart Borer, *The British Hotel Through the Ages* (Guildford and London: Lutterworth Press, 1972), p. 241.

[382] Bates, p. 64.

offering, for its interwar guests, a welcome escape and retreat from the grind of day-to-day existence. It is upon this idea of escape that this final chapter focuses. Moving away from the ideas of entrapment explored in the previous chapter, this chapter offers a more positive, and more hopeful reading of the hotel as refuge in the modernist fiction of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield.

The chapter is structured across three sections, each of which explores from what, or from whom, the characters in these narratives seek refuge. The first section begins with an initial examination of the specific characteristics that mark the hotel as a space of refuge across the writings of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield. The section identifies the need of these characters for occasional respite from the disorientating effects of the fast-paced urban environment, thereby aligning these narratives with the central modernist concerns of alienation and anomie. The section asserts, however, that this need for moments of respite from the modern metropolis is, for many of these characters, only momentary, and argues that the majority of the female protagonists in these texts are more than capable of traversing and mapping the city, and of engaging in *flânerie*. This section maintains that for these characters, the urgent need to seek refuge derives from another, more threatening aspect of the public sphere. Building on the arguments raised in the previous two chapters concerning the potentially debilitating and deconstructive effects of the look of the Other upon the subject, the section suggests that hotels and hotel rooms function in these narratives as a refuge from the judgemental gaze of others encountered in the city streets. This section illustrates the impact of this look on the corporeal subjectivity of those towards whom it is directed, and reads this alongside theories of the 'boundary crisis' usually associated with spatial phobias such as agoraphobia, in order to think through the necessarily embodied aspect of these retreats from the public space of the city.

The second section continues this consideration of refuge, and suggests that, while the hotel may well provide a retreat from the public sphere, the writings of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield also clearly demonstrate its function as a much needed escape from the

private space of the home. The section maintains that the hotel can in this way be read as a space of empowerment, which restores a sense of agency to its female guests through enabling them to perform an active resistance to domestic routine and drudgery. Situating the discussion historically within the interwar years by referring to women's magazines of the period, the section reads these narratives alongside feminist theoretical texts on the problematic nature of domesticity in order to interrogate the possibility of the hotel as a restorative space for women during the interwar period. The section also demonstrates the way in which housework and homemaking effectively left women during the interwar period with no space to call their own, and suggests that the hotel, for them, provided a level of privacy unavailable elsewhere. The section concludes with a further discussion of the liberatory potential of the hotel, and posits it as a space which, in its offer of an escape from the static identity of housewife, engenders the possibility for shifting, fluid identities.

The third and final section of this chapter moves from an exploration of the types of spaces from which these characters seek refuge to think through the ways in which the hotel is used by them as a refuge from the self. Beginning with a brief discussion as to how we might define the self in this context, the section suggests that, rather than comprising a single, unitary self, each character in these narratives is instead made up of a collection of selves, thus corresponding with a key modernist trope of fragmentation. The modernist emphasis on interiority also proves useful in differentiating between self and subjectivity, and the section acknowledges that where the subject is that which is constructed by external factors or influences, the self or selves might rather be understood as internal and reflective, consisting primarily of personal memories built up over time. The section considers this idea alongside Young's theory of the home as a space in which belongings and possessions are carefully arranged in space, items which carry 'sedimented personal meaning as retainers of personal narrative'.[383] In this sense, the home can itself be read as a retainer – or rather container – of personal narrative, a physical manifestation of the

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[383] Young, 'House and Home', p. 139.

memories that make up the self. As such, the section considers the hotel in these narratives as a space which affords characters a refuge from the often painful memories that the home comes to signify for many of these characters. Framing the discussion with theories of trauma and loss and their impact on the embodied subject, this section explores the extent to which these characters seek refuge from their memories, and often, from their guilt.

'SHUT THE DAMNED WORLD OUT'[384]: A RETREAT FROM THE PUBLIC

The depictions of hotels and hotel rooms in the novels and short stories of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield clearly mark them as spaces of refuge for the characters who inhabit them, and as spaces which become increasingly important to these characters as their narratives progress. What remains to be understood, however, are the specific reasons behind the apparently urgent desire to seek refuge that is demonstrated by so many of the characters in these texts. There is often a distinct sense of desperation in their search for a room, evidenced, for example, by Julia's frantic need to find 'a cheap hotel in Bloomsbury' as quickly as possible on her arrival in London, as 'the thought of driving from hotel to hotel alarmed her' (*ALMM*, p. 46). The palpable feelings of dread in this instance betray her terror of failing to find a place in which to hide, thereby foregrounding the question of exactly from whom or from what she feels she must seek refuge. The answer to the question may lie in this prospect of 'driving from hotel to hotel' through London, and her anxiety regarding this movement across London suggests that it is the urban environment itself that inspires Julia's fear. Accordingly, this section explores the various ways in which the public, urban spaces of these novels and short stories inspire within these characters an often overwhelming desire to retreat back to the safety and refuge of the hotel.

The previous chapter's discussion of the ways in which hotel rooms function as places of confinement in the early work of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield dealt briefly with

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[384] Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight*, p. 68.

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the idea of enclosure, and noted particularly how the absence of light is used to create such an impression. While this sense of enclosure can indeed be viewed, as previously suggested, as threatening and sinister, it is also – sometimes simultaneously – represented as comforting in several of these narratives. This ambiguity is typical of the shifting and often contradictory nature of the hotel. In what seems to be a far more positive manner than that which was explored in the previous chapter, hotel rooms often function in the writings of these authors as safe spaces in which characters feel embraced and protected by the darkness that surrounds them. Several of these characters find an element of reassurance in the gloom, signalling that that which confines them is also that which distances them from the perceived threats of the external world. Julia's first hotel room in the opening pages of Rhys's *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* provides a good example of a room that seems to figure simultaneously as a place of confinement and as a place of comforting enclosure. The darkness in the room, its 'sombre and one-eyed aspect' due to the off-centre positioning of the 'solitary window' makes it seem almost cave-like, cut off from the rest of humanity (*ALMM*, p. 7). An active desire for darkness on the part of characters is evidenced in Mansfield's 'The Stranger', in which John Hammond wishes he had turned the light off in the hotel room he shares with his wife in order to achieve a true physical closeness with her: 'He wanted to blot out everybody, everything. He wished now he'd turned off the light. That might have brought her nearer' (p. 361). In this example, the darkness constructs a more private and personal space that encourages physical intimacy and contact. In both instances, the shadowy nature of the hotel room obscures and excludes the harsh and potentially hostile realities of what lies beyond it.

As observed in Chapter One, this idea of being somehow removed from reality is often reinforced by the décor of the hotels throughout these narratives. In Julia's room, for example, the 'fantasy' is

> accentuated by the pattern of the wallpaper. A large bird, sitting on the branch of a tree,
> faced, with open beak, a strange, wingless creature, half-bird, half-lizard, which also had its

beak open and its neck stretched out in a belligerent attitude. The branch on which they

were perched sprouted fungus and queerly shaped leaves and fruit. (*ALMM*, pp. 7-8)

The door to Julia's hotel room can thus be seen as a threshold which tempts and transports her into an exotic hideaway. The enticing effect of hotel rooms, as noted in the opening chapter, can also be seen in Mansfield's unfinished story, 'Father and the Girls', in which an elderly man and his two daughters make a brief stop-off at a hotel in an unnamed European country. Standing at the doorway, his daughter Edith finds herself 'bewitched' by 'the lovely room' ('FG', p. 469), entranced by the understated beauty of the décor, 'the pale, green-panelled walls […] the doors that had lozenges and squares of green picked out in gold' ('FG', p. 470). The elements of the room combine to give it an almost enchanted, magical atmosphere, to the extent that 'the bed looked as if it were breathing, softly, gently breathing,' ('FG', p. 470) and the room itself seems to whisper to them, '"Rest! Stay!"' ('FG', p. 471), offering them respite from their 'on the wing' ('FG', p. 470) lifestyle, and, perhaps more importantly, allowing them a temporary escape from reality. In many of the novels and short stories of these authors, these ideas of fantasy and escape are central to their depictions of the hotel, enabling them to present it in stark contrast to the often unforgiving reality of interwar existence.

In these two examples, the hotel room becomes a welcoming and comforting space that provides an escape from the outside world, or a break from the hectic lifestyle of modernity. The technique of personifying these rooms is used in these and other instances to further emphasise such ideas. In Bowen's *The Hotel*, for example, Sydney's room seems to talk to her after a visit from Veronica Lawrence: '"She has so absolutely given you the go-by," the room repeated, catching her unawares. The shapes of the furniture, everything that she looked at, said it again' (p. 118). This communication of the room with its occupant arguably highlights the relationship between the two, a relationship which is, crucially, most often depicted as mutually supportive. This sympathetic relationship is perhaps most evident in Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight*, in which Sasha's room speaks to her

as if she were an old friend. Their bond is foregrounded by the opening lines of the novel being given over to the room – "'Quite like old times," the room says. "Yes? No?'" (*GMM*, p. 9) – thus indicating the importance and prominence of the history between Sasha and the hotel room in general. As the narrative progresses, the room itself develops as a character, one who 'welcomes her back' after her failure to secure another room in the manner of a spurned but forgiving lover: "'There you are," it says. "You didn't go off then?'" (*GMM*, p, 34). Each of these examples signals an undeniable closeness between Sasha and her hotel room, and a wider connection between these characters and the rooms they inhabit which binds them together in such a way that the characters feel safe inside them. The relationship provides a welcome contrast to the supposed impersonality and harshness explored in the previous chapter's discussion of hotel rooms as spaces of incarceration.

The qualities discussed thus far mark these rooms out as spaces of refuge in which characters can feel safe and protected. This particular way of thinking about the hotel room seems a great deal more positive than seeing them as spaces in which characters are trapped, as it affords them a more active role in choosing their residences. Exactly how positive or realistic this is, however, will be discussed in more detail as this chapter progresses. The hotel rooms featured in this discussion are explicitly referred to as refuges or hiding places on several occasions. For example, the bedroom shared by Rhys's Marya and her husband Stephan is a place in which she is 'very near to being happy,' (*Quartet*, p. 14) and which is defined in the narrative as a kind of sanctuary: 'Marya went back to her bedroom from the misty streets and shut the door with a feeling of relief as if she had shut out a malignant world. Her bedroom was a refuge' (*Quartet*, p. 28). Similarly, Julia regards her exotically wallpapered hotel room as 'a good sort of place to hide in' (*ALMM*, p. 9). The feeling of security she experiences within it is further emphasised by the observation that 'locked in her room – especially when she was locked in her room – she felt safe,' again hinting at the aforementioned comfort and reassurance that these characters derive

from confined spaces (*ALMM*, p. 9). As a result of the first person narrative, Rhys's Sasha seems the most vehement in her demarcation of her hotel room as a hideaway, stating defiantly that 'a room is a place where you hide from the wolves outside' (*GMM*, p. 33). Sasha later reveals her deep-seated desire for such a place in her admission towards the end of the novel 'as soon as I had the slightest chance of a place to hide in, I crept in and hid' (*GMM*, p. 120). For these characters, the hotel room becomes a much sought after, and potentially much needed, space of safety in which to conceal themselves from the city outside.

The cities of London and Paris have come to be regarded as landmarks in the geographical mapping of modernism[385] – as Bradbury points out, '[w]hen we think of Modernism, we cannot avoid thinking of these urban climates and the ideas and campaigns, the new philosophies and politics, that ran through them'.[386] The industrial developments and technological advances of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries elevated the urban experience, thereby feeding the 'metropolitan art' of modernism.[387] Much of modernist literature is inextricably linked to the space of the city – as Thacker maintains, 'we can note the streets and buildings of the metropolis as the setting for many key modernist texts, such as the perambulations of Leopold Bloom in Dublin, or of Clarissa Dalloway in London'.[388] In this sense, it is by locating the majority of their novels and short stories in London and Paris that Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield firmly align themselves once more with the wider concerns of modernism. However, more relevant to a discussion of the hotel as refuge in these texts is the impact that these urban spaces have upon the subjectivity of their inhabitants. The quickening pace of modernity was perhaps most in evidence in its larger cities, and Whitworth suggests that the modern self living in

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[385] Critical studies focusing solely on the relationship between the city and modernism/modernity include Parsons's *Streetwalking the Metropolis*, Wilson's *The Sphinx in the City*; Dennis's *Cities in Modernity*, and Desmond Harding's *Writing the City: Urban Visions and Literary Modernism* (London: Routledge, 2003).

[386] Bradbury, 'The Cities of Modernism', p. 96.

[387] Ibid., p. 101.

[388] Thacker, p. 6.

those cities was therefore 'overwhelmed with sensations: the city is full of signs drawn from various codes, and full of fast and unpredictable movement'.[389] The acceleration of modern life was at its peak in the urban centres of industry and technology, whose inhabitants faced a relentless and dizzying sensory overload. The overwhelming character of the modern metropolis, and its disruptive potential, is noted further by Gan, who maintains that 'spatially, the city becomes the site' for all the changes of modernity,

> for the renouncing of the old and the embracing of the new. But while the city represents the cutting edge of capitalism, technology and ideas, it is also a place of anomie and alienation. The rush of the new brings with it a break with old certainties and familiar modes of being with resultant anxieties.[390]

These anxieties, while present throughout modernity, are particularly true of the interwar period, at the beginning of which any 'old certainties' had been shattered by the First World War, and towards the end of which the growing political unrest, in combination with the technological developments in warfare, brought with it new fears. The anomie of the modern metropolis is therefore encapsulated in and reinforced by the specific anxieties and concerns of interwar society. The debate on the disorienting effects of the modern city upon the subjectivities of its inhabitants may be well rehearsed, but such observations are worth repeating if we are to fully consider the individual narratives of the female characters in the interwar writing of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield, and the reasons why they so often choose to retreat to the enclosed spaces of the hotel.[391]

The urban experience, according to Gan, presents a threat to the stability of the modern subject and to that of the modern female subject in particular. Consequently, she suggests that the need for a space of one's own in which one could escape the chaos of the modern city was therefore all the more important. This metropolitan chaos is more than

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[389] Whitworth, 'Introduction', p. 7.
[390] Gan, p. 11.
[391] For recent discussion on the disorienting effects of the modern urban experience, see: Thacker, p. 28, Harding, pp. 4-5 & p. 11, and Scott McCracken, 'Imagining the Modernist City', in *The Oxford Handbook of Modernisms*, ed. by Peter Brooker et al (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 637-54 (p. 644).

evident in the novels and short stories explored here – it is apparent in the startlingly bright lights of Paris which 'wheeled in the artificial dusk' in Bowen's *The House in Paris* (p. 232), in the taxi drivers who scream abuse at Ada in Mansfield's 'Pictures' (p. 123), and in the disorienting urban sprawl depicted in Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight*: 'North, south, east, west – they have no meaning for me…' (p. 26). For Gan, it is from this bewildering tumult that the modern female subject must – if only occasionally – retreat, and she highlights the importance of privacy to the modern woman, positing it as a means for her 'to process the upheavals of modernity'.[392] These moments of privacy are particularly important for the female subject, whose gender often acts against her as a marginalising factor in the modern metropolis. In light of this, this section reassesses the arguments made in the previous chapter regarding the absence of privacy in the hotel, and suggests that, while this space can, by its very nature, never be private in the same sense as the home or domestic sphere, it nevertheless provides 'a crucial respite to momentarily protect [themselves] from the impact of change, to pause and reconsider [their] place in modernity,' and offers these characters a level of privacy unavailable elsewhere.[393]

The suggestion that these characters are hiding from the rapid change of modernity neatly cements the connections between the writing of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield and some of the central concerns of modernism. However, such an argument also raises problems for a feminist reading of these texts due to its implicit assertion that the female characters in these novels and short stories are in some way incapable of withstanding the incessant onslaught of the modern city when, more often than not, the women in these narratives prove themselves more than capable of handling the rapid pace of modern life. Bowen's Emmeline, for example, co-runs a small but successful travel agency, and seems to relish finding ways in which to manipulate the technological and industrial advances of modernity to her advantage. Her confidence and familiarity with the geography of London are clearly demonstrated as she takes a leisurely drive through the city to her suburban

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[392] Gan, p. 3.
[393] Ibid.

home: 'Leaving the hoarse dingy clamour, the cinema-posters of giant love, she turned into Regent's Park, swept round under lines of imposing houses and, out of the park again, steadily mounted to St John's Wood' (*TN*, p. 94). The 'imposing houses' of Regent's Park fail to intimidate Emmeline who 'sweeps' past them with an assuredness, deftly negotiating the urban landscape and 'steadily' making her way to her destination, and the passage thus successfully reveals not only her accomplished control of new technologies such as the motorcar, but also her ease and assurance in finding her way around the city.

Similarly adept at traversing the streets of the metropolis are the female protagonists of Rhys's early novels. In *Quartet*, for example, the sound of a poorly played concertina reminds Marya of wandering round the familiar side-streets of Paris, filling her with 'the same feeling of melancholy pleasure as she had when walking along the shadowed side of one of those narrow streets full of shabby *parfumeries*, second-hand book-stalls, cheap hat-shops,' and 'bars frequented by gaily-painted ladies and loud-voiced men' (p. 9). The diverse and unexpected sights of the metropolis also intrigue Sasha who, in the opening pages of *Good Morning, Midnight,* recounts the things she saw on a brief 'health-stroll round Mecklenburgh Square and along the Gray's Inn Road. I had looked at this, I had looked at that, I had looked at the people passing in the street and at a shop-window full of artificial limbs' (p. 11). The apparently casual wanderings depicted in these passages recall the *flâneur*, the archetypal urban figure who is defined by Rachel Bowlby as a 'man about town with ample leisure and money to roam the city and look about him'.[394] As a concept, the figure first emerged in nineteenth-century Paris, brought about, maintains Elizabeth Wilson, by the changing landscape of the city:

> The proliferation of public places of leisure and interest created a new kind of public person with the leisure to wander, watch and browse: the *flâneur*, a key figure in the critical literature of modernity and urbanization. In literature, the *flâneur* was represented as an archetypal

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[394] Rachel Bowlby, *Still Crazy After All These Years: Women, Writing and Psychoanalysis* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 4.

occupant and observer of the public sphere in the rapidly changing and growing great cities of nineteenth-century Europe.[395]

The element of observation pinpointed here by Wilson is particularly important to an understanding of the *flâneur* and the practice of *flânerie*. Kakie Urch notes that *flânerie* necessitates 'the ability to gaze, to observe, to in some way be part of the crowded spectacle without being the object of desire'.[396] In this sense, the emphasis placed on observation in the above extracts (in particular Sasha's 'I had looked at this, I had looked at that') seems to further align Marya and Sasha with the *flâneur* – the archetypal spectator of life in the metropolis – enabling us to regard them as representative of the *flâneur*'s female counterpart, the elusive *flâneuse*.

A controversial figure, the very existence of the *flâneuse* has been contested, with some citing the supposedly scopophilic element of *flânerie* highlighted by Parkhurst Ferguson as that which precludes female involvement. Agreeing with Janet Wolff's argument that the role of the *flâneuse* was simply 'non-existent,'[397] Griselda Pollock maintains that women could not engage in the activity of *flânerie* in the same way as men, as '[w]omen did not enjoy the freedom of incognito in the crowd. They were never positioned as the normal occupants of the public realm,' and therefore 'did not have the right to look, to stare, scrutinize or watch.' Instead, she argues, women 'are positioned as the *object* of the *flâneur*'s gaze'.[398] Women, as Bowlby summarises, were therefore excluded from *flânerie* 'a priori. For *flânerie* involved a certain conception of the woman as being herself part of the spectacle, one of the curiosities in which the *flâneur* will want to take interest in the course

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[395] Elizabeth Wilson, 'The Invisible *Flâneur*', *New Left Review*, 1:91 (1992), 90-110 (p. 93).

[396] Kakie Urch, 'The [Em] Space of Modernism and the Possibility of *Flâneuserie*: The Case of Viña Delmar and her "Bad Girls"', in Lisa Rado, ed., *Modernism, Gender, and Culture: A Cultural Studies Approach* (New York and London: Garland, 1997), pp. 17-46 (p. 24). For further discussion on this, see Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, 'The *Flâneur* On and Off the Streets of Paris', in Keith Tester, ed., *The Flâneur* (London: Routledge, 1994), 22-42.

[397] Janet Wolff, 'The Invisible *Flâneuse*: Women and the Literature of Modernity', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 2:3 (1985), 37-46 (p. 41).

[398] Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and Histories of Art* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 100.

of his walking.'[399] Yet while many feminist critics argue against the feasibility of the *flâneuse*, others have suggested that to deny her existence in this way is to subscribe to the very same patriarchal ideologies which such critics purport to object to in their analyses. Wilson, for example, maintains that to place so much emphasis on the scopophilic aspect of *flânerie* effectively traps women 'forever in the straitjacket of otherness, struck down and turned to stone by the Male Gaze'.[400] To suggest that the female characters of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield are subjected to this voyeuristic stare thereby implies that they are in some way controlled or dominated, thus relegating them to a position of passive victimhood at odds with the confident, independent women who actually appear in these novels and short stories. Nor do they fit Pollock's description of women who 'were never positioned as […] normal occupants of the public realm'[401] – rather, the ease with which many of these characters traverse the streets of the modern metropolis suggests that these writers are consciously figuring their fictional women as precisely that, as the 'normal occupants' of the urban environment.

Such a positive re-evaluation of these characters which holds them up as potential examples of the *flâneuse* nevertheless fails to address their tendency or desire to seek refuge within the (semi-)enclosed spaces of the hotel. While not wishing to relegate them to the same submissive positions which many of those arguments countering the *flâneuse* inevitably veer towards, there still seems to exist some level of resistance to the presence of these women in the public spaces of the city, a resistance which is seemingly felt by them, and which compels them to retreat to the 'safe' space of the hotel. This resistance derives, in part at least, from the landscape and architecture of the modern city, which, as Davidson points out, was designed and built by men and for men, an assertion which leads her to conclude that the effects of the metropolis on its female subjects 'were noisome and

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[399] Bowlby, p. 6.
[400] Wilson, 'The Invisible *Flâneur*', p. 102.
[401] Pollock, p. 100.

unnerving'[402] to say the least. This 'unnerving' aspect of the architecture of the city is powerfully conveyed in Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight*, in which Sasha hurries back to her hotel past the overtly hostile facades of the 'dark houses,' which she feels loom over her 'like monsters': '[…] they step forward, the waiting houses, to frown and crush. […] Tall cubes of darkness, with two lighted eyes at the top to sneer' (p. 28). The urban spaces of modernity – the construction and layout of its cities – were themselves gendered, effectively presenting an almost insurmountable front, the efforts to scale which often left women such as Rhys's Sasha and Mansfield's Ada exhausted and ready to seek shelter.

Yet another type of resistance can be found in public attitudes towards women – specifically single women – who wandered the city alone in the interwar period. While many of the arguments concerning the impossibility of the *flâneuse* are highly problematic in their tendency to refer to women in the public urban spaces of modernity as either 'streetwalkers' or 'prostitutes', it may be worth reflecting momentarily on their use of such terms when thinking about public opinion of the single woman on the streets. The argument that 'unaccompanied women in public spaces were taken to be prostitutes' may well be rather reductive, but it does hint at the dismissive and prejudiced attitudes towards women in turn-of-the-century cities, attitudes which returned once more following the resolution of the First World War.[403] By taking up the jobs left vacant by men in the First World War, and through their committed involvement in the war effort, women gained what Parsons refers to as an 'increased independence and public visibility'.[404] However, the end of the war was accompanied by a sustained media campaign to drive women back into the home to free up jobs for returning soldiers, and to restore traditional gender roles.[405] Pugh notes the tendency of interwar women's magazines to make 'determined efforts to encourage [women] to take pride in being good "home-makers". It was the special mission

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[402] Davidson, p. 23.
[403] Thacker, p. 83.
[404] Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis*, p. 125.
[405] For further discussion of women's involvement in the war effort, and the ensuing backlash, see Beddoe, *Back to Home and Duty*; Braybon, *Women Workers in the First World War*; and Kent, *Making Peace*.

of *Good Housekeeping*, for example, to try to elevate housekeeping to the status of a profession.'[406] Unsurprisingly, perhaps, this movement to return women to the domestic sphere 'brought with it a backlash against female emancipation'.[407] Single or unaccompanied women in the interwar urban environment were therefore once again, according to Parsons, 'associated with the fallen woman'.[408]

The hostility from passersby felt by several of the characters in the writings of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield provides a clear demonstration of the shifting attitudes towards women in the streets of the modern metropolis. The single woman seems to be targeted with a particularly harsh brand of animosity in these texts, with characters such as Rhys's Sasha and Bowen's Karen, as I discussed earlier, feeling decidedly apprehensive about being seen in public with men to whom they are not married. The interwar period, argues Holden, saw 'increasingly vicious attacks upon spinsters'[409] due to popular belief that they undermined the institution of marriage. She also highlights the role of literature in reinforcing such views, noting that, '[d]uring the 1930s, [a] sense of it never being too late is suggested in sympathetic fictional portraits of older single women which indicate their marriage potential, alongside others which show spinsters as failures or as threatening to marriage'.[410] Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield may well portray the older, single woman in their work, but each one writes against the tradition of belittling or demonising those who chose not to marry. By situating this supposedly tragic spinster figure at the centre of their narratives, and by writing from her perspective, these authors actively subvert and challenge contemporary beliefs regarding gender roles and the sanctity of marriage. Yet while they are not averse to representing the older single woman in their fiction, neither do these writers shy away from representing the harsh realities faced by these figures on a daily basis in the urban environment. It is perhaps in this regard, therefore, that Parsons's

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[406] Pugh, *We Danced All Night*, p. 177.
[407] Parsons, p. 125.
[408] Ibid.
[409] Holden, p. 12
[410] Ibid., p. 11.

discussion of the differences between the urban experiences of the female characters of authors such as Woolf and Richardson – both writing slightly earlier than (at least) Rhys and Bowen – and characters in the later, interwar writings of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield becomes particularly pertinent.[411] She suggests that, '[w]hereas Richardson and Woolf's characters used the urban street and room to manifest independence and assert a place on the urban map,' these later protagonists 'choose to inhabit streets and rooms that allow them hiding-places; that conceal them from the urban map. The purpose of their walks is largely retreat, anonymity from others and themselves.'[412] In the writings of Rhys, Bowen, and Mansfield, many of the characters search only for a refuge from the overt hostility they face in the city streets.

What many of these characters seek to escape from within their hotel rooms is the judgement of others. As noted, many of the characters in the novels and short stories considered here face such judgements on a regular basis as they venture out into the streets of the metropolis. The eponymous and unassuming protagonist of Mansfield's story 'Miss Brill' (1922), for example, quietly suffers the comments of a young couple on an adjacent bench: "'that stupid old thing at the end there […]. Why does she come here at all—who wants her? Why doesn't she keep her silly old mug at home?"'[413] The emphasis placed on Miss Brill's age in these remarks once again highlights the fact that gender and marital status are not the only attributes on which these characters are judged. Age is also an issue for Rhys's Sasha who, in a Javanese restaurant in Paris, finds herself being scrutinized by another member of the clientele: 'One of the men stares at me. He says to the girl: "Tu la connais, la vielle?" Now, who is he talking about? Me? Impossible. Me – la vielle? […] This is as I thought and worse than I thought.…A mad old Englishwoman, wandering around

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[411] Both Woolf and Richardson's first novels (*The Voyage Out* and *Pointed Roofs*, respectively) were published in 1915, some twelve years before the publication of Bowen's first novel, *The Hotel* in 1927, and fourteen years before Rhys's *Quartet* in 1929.

[412] Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis*, p. 125.

[413] Katherine Mansfield, 'Miss Brill' in *The Collected Stories (The Garden Party)* (London: Penguin, 2007), pp. 330-336 (p. 335). Further references are given in parentheses after quotations in the text, where the title is abbreviated to 'MB'.

Montparnasse' (*GMM*, pp. 35-6). In the case of Miss Brill, other remarks of the girl in the young couple reveal that class may also be a factor here, as she ridicules Miss Brill's fur: "'It's her fu-fur which is so funny," giggled the girl. "It's exactly like a piece of fried whiting'" ('MB', p. 335). The girl's derisory comments on the poor quality and condition of the garment are made all the more cutting by the scenes a few pages earlier, in which Miss Brill is depicted taking the fur out of its box with a discernible mixture of pleasure and pride: 'Dear little thing! It was nice to feel it again. She had taken it out of its box that afternoon, shaken out the moth-powder, given it a good brush, and rubbed the life back into the dim little eyes' ('MB', p. 331). The observation that the item looks like 'a piece of fried whiting' may well be a reference to the fish and chips which were so popular with the working-class population in Britain at the time, and is thus a potentially snide remark on Miss Brill's socio-economic position.[414] The lack of any obvious origins of several of these characters also inspires in others the palpable hostility from which they seek refuge in the hotel. Rhys's Julia, for example, has had a 'career of ups and downs [which] had rubbed most of the hall-marks off her, so that it was not easy to guess at her age, her nationality, or the social background to which she properly belonged' (*ALMM*, p. 11). Marya puzzles those around her, as discussed, while Sasha resigns herself to the fact that she has 'no pride, no name, no face, no country. I don't belong anywhere' (*GMM*, p. 38). Judged on the basis of gender, age, class, marital status and (lack of) nationality, for many of the characters in these novels and short stories the hotel provides an escape.

The refuge sought by many of these characters is from the scrutiny contained in the city, from the piercing looks and stares of passersby. Ada, for example, detects the 'gleam of spite' in the eyes of a younger chorus girl ('Pictures', p. 125), while Julia's fear of the disapproval of others engenders a habitual facial expression of suspicion and timidity (*ALMM*, p. 101). Once again, this emphasis on observation recalls the figure of the *flâneur*, who takes pleasure in consuming the sights of the city. The key difference between this line

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[414] See John K. Walton's *Fish and Chips and the British Working Class, 1870-1940* (London: Leicester University Press, 1992) for an in-depth discussion on this topic.

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of argument and this chapter's earlier discussion, however, is that here the space of the *flâneur* is occupied by the judgemental passerby, not the female protagonists. In one sense, this returns us to the claims of feminist critics that this visual aspect of *flânerie* is necessarily scopophilic, and who posit it as the male gaze which controls, suppresses and dominates the women towards whom it is directed. However, in her critique of these arguments Wilson maintains that subscribing to the idea of the male gaze effectively reinforces its 'mythic power', thereby resulting in a situation in which 'women are stuck forever in the straitjacket of otherness, struck down and turned to stone by the Male Gaze'.[415] Not only this, but she suggests the gaze of the *flâneur* might instead be understood as anxious, rather than scopophilic, 'a shifting projection of angst' in reaction to the modern metropolis, 'rather than a solid embodiment of male bourgeois power'.[416] Indeed, in these novels and short stories the gaze projected at or onto the female protagonists is perhaps not strictly scopophilic in nature – for one thing, this gaze often emanates from other women as well as from men, and is clearly judgemental, rather than desiring. Throughout the narratives explored here, these characters are rarely seen as objects of desire – rather, as in the case of Sasha, Ada and Miss Brill, they are regarded as objects of ridicule by those around them. As noted above, the stares they receive and the implicit judgements these stares carry arise on account of the marginalising factors of age, background, class and marital status. Yet while this might seem to avoid the problems inherent in a reading of this undeniable gaze as scopophilic, it nevertheless fails to explain why the looks of others have such a marked effect on these characters, and why they are still compelled by them to 'shut the damned world out,' and to seek refuge within the space of the hotel.

Such arguments only reduce the problematic nature of the gaze of others if one is approaching it from a background of what Thacker refers to as 'psychoanalytic models of the "male gaze", where women are fixed in ocular images as part of a masculine definition

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[415] Wilson, 'The Invisible *Flâneur*', p. 102.
[416] Ibid., p. 109.

against castration anxiety'.[417] However, an alternative approach from the perspective of existentialist theories on the look of the Other (as broached in the previous chapter's discussion on privacy) highlights the potentially destabilising effect of any such look upon the subject. The look of the Other is what solidifies one's existence in the world – to be looked at and recognised confirms one's status as (at the very least) an object for the Other. However, the existence which the look confirms is not necessarily an existence with which one is familiar or comfortable, and the lack of control possessed by the subject over how s/he is perceived by the Other within that look is potentially disturbing. The look threatens to destabilise and disrupt the subject at the same time as it confirms his or her existence – according to Sartre, 'I grasp the Other's look at the very center of my *act* as the solidification and alienation of my own possibilities.'[418] These simultaneous and seemingly contradictory capacities of the look are summarised by Davidson:

> Although the look brings us an awareness of our separate existence, it also threatens to erode the very space within which we create ourselves. Without the look I am nothing, or at least not properly human, but with the look I become aware of the tenuous grounds of my own existence. The same look that solidifies and objectifies me also alienates, disturbs and threatens to *discompose* me.[419]

The power of the look is such that it can disrupt, and potentially 'discompose' or completely destroy the subjectivity of its object. The look of the Other can construct the subject as something other than that which s/he comprehends her or himself to be – as Sartre notes, '[t]o be looked at is to apprehend oneself as the unknown object of unknowable appraisals—in particular, of value judgements.'[420] It is this understanding of the look (as opposed to a scopophilic reading) which corresponds more fittingly to the experiences of many of the characters considered here, who frequently become the unwitting objects of the value judgements of others in the public sphere. Women such as

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[417] Thacker, p. 83.
[418] Sartre, p. 286. Emphasis in original.
[419] Davidson, p. 76. Emphasis in original.
[420] Sartre, p. 291.

Rhys's Sasha and Mansfield's Miss Brill are actively constructed by the judgemental gazes of others in the public sphere as marginalised beings who do not, or cannot, exist within society. In a particularly astute passage, Sasha reflects upon the unrelenting gaze to which she is regularly subjected in the streets of the city:

> That's the way they look when they are saying: 'Why didn't you drown yourself in the Seine?' That's the way they look then they are saying: 'Qu'est-ce qu'elle fout ici, la vieille?' That's the way they look when they are saying: 'What's this story?' Peering at you. Who are you, anyway? Who's your father and have you got any money, and if not, why not? Are you one of us? Will you think what you're told to think and say what you ought to say? Are you red, white or blue – jelly, suet pudding, or ersatz caviare? (*GMM*, pp. 76-7)

This extract, with its emphasis on the insistent, questioning gaze of, the 'looking' and 'peering', captures the essence of these existentialist theories on the look of the Other, and the potentially destabilising effect it can have on the subject.

When situated in public places, many of the characters of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield repeatedly find themselves threatened, alienated and discomposed by the look of the Other. Consequently, these characters regularly feel the need to remove themselves physically from such confrontations, or to avoid any possibility of them altogether. When out walking, for example, Rhys's Julia 'always kept to the back streets as much as possible' (*ALMM*, p. 13). Similarly, Sasha's existence 'is really a complicated affair of cafés where they like me and cafés where they don't, streets that are friendly, streets that aren't' (*GMM*, p. 40). Any deviation from these 'friendly' city spaces often results in an emotional or physical breakdown, as it does when Sasha finds herself in floods of tears in a Parisian café: 'He stood me another brandy-and-soda and while I was drinking it I started to cry' (*GMM*, p. 9). This determination to stick to a strict, carefully thought-out routine and map betrays in these characters a deep-seated sense of uneasiness, or perhaps a palpable feeling of anxiety, an anxiety which, as Davidson notes, is posited in existentialism as 'that indefinite *edginess*, that vertigo inducing fear of the void that might at any time open beneath our

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feet'.[421] In Sasha's case, this void is the looming possibility that she might lose control and somehow expose herself in front of others, a fear that is so powerful that her grasp on reality slips, making her paranoid and insecure. According to Davidson, this is the full effect of anxiety – with its onset 'the familiar world recedes, its reality and concreteness are challenged and the subject is left feeling profoundly, inexplicably alone'.[422] For the female protagonists of Rhys's novels, most notably for Sasha and Julia, this anxiety is a constant presence, dominating their day-to-day existence and impacting on their decisions – 'I make no mistake this time. We go to the neutral café.' (*GMM*, p. 56) – and is further exacerbated by the look of the Other.

Davidson maintains that not only does the look have the potential to alienate the subject, but that, more importantly, it has the power to disrupt his or her sense of embodiment. She writes: 'The other's look can seem to rob the individual of *vital* aspects of their identity, reducing their sense of embodied selfhood to that of an object over which they have only limited control.'[423] To be seen and judged by another, and to be aware that what is seen by that other is a perspective of one's body that is both unfamiliar and unexpected, is an experience that inevitably shocks and disturbs. In *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, Rhys's Julia is physically unsettled by the evident disgust her appearance occasions in a man who has been following her:

> He was young – a boy – wearing a cap, very pale and with very small, dark eyes, set deeply in his head. He gave her a rapid glance.
>
> '*Oh, la la,*' he said. '*Ah, non, alors.*'
>
> He turned about and walked away.
>
> 'Well,' said Julia aloud, 'that's funny. The joke's on me this time.'
>
> She began to laugh, and on the surface of her consciousness she was really amused. But as she walked on her knees felt suddenly weak, as if she had been struck a blow over the heart. The weakness crept upwards.

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[421] Davidson, p. 73. Emphasis in original.
[422] Ibid.
[423] Ibid., p. 79. Emphasis in original.

As she walked she saw nothing but the young man's little eyes, which had looked at her with such deadly and impartial criticism. (*ALMM*, p. 135)

The judgemental glance of this young man has an almost overwhelming effect on Julia, and her knees are weakened not by an idealistic romantic encounter, but by the 'deadly and impartial criticism' she sees in the man's eyes, and the unfamiliar version of herself that has inspired it. The shock of this recognition triggers a disharmony in her sense of embodiment – while she thinks she is amused, and that the remark has not affected her, her weakening knees, and the apparent lack of control Julia has over them, reveal the true extent to which the incident has shaken her, leaving her keen to seek refuge once more.

Such physical reactions to the judgements of others in the public sphere might benefit from being read in parallel with theories of agoraphobia. A necessarily embodied condition, agoraphobia can be understood, according to Davidson, as a 'boundary crisis', in which the boundaries of the agoraphobic body feel, or indeed are, threatened by the presence of other people. Highlighting Anthony Vidler's arguments regarding the diminishing distance between subjects that accompanied the development of urban space,[424] Davidson suggests that, 'when robbed of this "distance", the invasive proximity of others is perceived by sensitive individuals to weaken their boundaries'.[425] Sasha's dread that she might burst into tears in front of others, and her determination to avoid this at all costs, clearly demonstrates this boundary crisis: 'Above all, no crying in public, no crying at all if you can help it' (*GMM*, p. 14). As a bodily fluid, tears fall under the Kristevan understanding of the abject – that which has been expelled from the body and which can inspire fear and horror.[426] Tears and other excretions pose a threat to our sense of embodiment and to our bodily boundaries, 'attest[ing],' Grosz argues, 'to the permeability of the body, its necessary dependence on an outside, its liability to collapse into this outside

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[424] Anthony Vidler, 'The Explosion of Space: Architecture and the Filmic Imaginary', *Assemblage*, 21 (1993), p. 44-59 (pp. 46-7).

[425] Davidson, p. 23.

[426] For further discussion of the abject, see Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

(this is what death implies), to the perilous divisions between the body's inside and its outside'.[427] The act of crying, of shedding tears, decisively breaks these 'perilous divisions between the body's inside and its outside', and can thus be viewed as an example of the agoraphobic boundary crisis referred to by Davidson. The fear of the collapse of these bodily boundaries is, as Grosz observes, intrinsically linked to a fear of death and dissolution, a link which is clearly demonstrated by the contemplation of suicide that Sasha's fear of crying in public inspires within her: 'My throat shuts up, my eyes sting. This is awful. Now I am going to cry. This is the worst.…If I do that I shall really have to walk under a bus' (*GMM*, p. 44). Such a reaction is too strong and too powerful to be ascribed to mere embarrassment or humiliation. Her alarm is such that it is as if the dissolution of these bodily boundaries in public might undermine the integrity, the wholeness of her corporeality – 'I must be solid as an oak. Except when I cry' (*GMM*, p. 37) – leaving her body vulnerable to invasion from anything and anyone in the public sphere.

The severity of reactions such as Sasha's in the above instance might well be described as panic attacks. Sasha, in the moments immediately after she feels her eyes filling up, frantically plans her next appointment at the hairdressers in a desperate attempt to distract herself:

> I try to decide what colour I shall have my hair dyed, and hang on to that thought as you hang on to something when you are drowning. Shall I have it red? Shall I have it black? Now, black, that would be startling. Shall I have it blond cendré? But blonde cendré, madame, is the most difficult of colours. It is very, very rarely, madame, that hair can be successfully dyed blond cendré. (*GMM*, p. 44)

The jerky nature of the prose, with its rapid questions and short, sharp sentence structure flitting from one thought to the next gives the impression of someone who is indeed drowning, flailing and grasping wildly at anything to keep herself from going under, from being submerged in her panic. More extreme than anxiety and more devastating than fear,

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[427] Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, pp. 193-4.

panic, according to Davidson, is 'experienced as an unbearable attack on one's sense of self in space, constituting an unmitigated existential threat. […] it destroys one's sense of relatedness to other people, and locatedness in place, alienating the subject from the practices of everyday life.'[428] This same sense of dislocation is present in Anna's sensation of becoming ghostly – 'I didn't want to talk to anybody. I felt too much like a ghost' (*VD*, p. 98) – an ephemeral feeling in which she feels she might fade away completely. For her and many of the other characters who populate these novels and short stories, it is the debilitating panic caused by the presence of others in the public spaces of the city which triggers their retreat into the (semi-)private spaces of the hotel. It is precisely this urge to seek refuge in the enclosed space of the hotel room which thus aligns characters such as Sasha and Julia with the figure of the agoraphobic, as they effectively assume the 'protective boundaries' of the hotel room 'as reinforcement and extension of the psychocorporeal boundaries of the self'.[429] In so doing, Davidson argues, 'the agoraphobic thus *incorporates* her "own four walls" as an essential element of her "ontological security"'.[430] In this sense, the hotel becomes for these characters a vital support to their corporeal subjectivity, providing a safe, secure space away from the potential threats of the public sphere.

Drawing on histories of modernity and modernism, feminist theories of *flânerie*, and phenomenological approaches to spatial phobias, this section has charted not only the various different ways in which the hotel functions, for the characters of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield, as a hiding place from the public spaces of the city, but also the possible reasons behind these characters' apparent desire to seek refuge. However, while it has tried to maintain an understanding and appreciation of these fictional women as strong and independent, there are nevertheless moments – such as the above consideration of agoraphobia – where the discussion comes dangerously close to depicting these characters

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[428] Davidson, p. 3. Emphasis in original.
[429] Ibid., p. 24.
[430] Ibid.

as passive victims who have no other option but to hide, and who cannot cope within the modern metropolis. It is perhaps inevitable that a discussion which considers in depth the physical dread and panic felt by women in the public sphere might run the risk of constructing them as helpless. Yet an engagement with theories such as Davidson's is crucial in order to think through the urban experiences of women in the interwar period, and the often devastating effects of those experiences upon their subjectivities. The following section explores the ways in which women in the narratives of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield seek refuge within the hotel from the private sphere, and considers whether or not this retreat can be read as a rejection of domestic drudgery.

'TO MAKE A HOME […] NEARLY KILLS ONE'[431]: A RETREAT FROM THE PRIVATE

Thus far, the chapter has reflected upon the various ways in which the characters in these texts use the hotel or hotel room as a refuge from the public sphere. Yet those arguments which posit the hotel as a place in which female characters withdraw from the public spaces of the city run the risk of relegating these women to a position of victimhood, rendering them unable to adjust or adapt to the fast-paced modern metropolis. Through a consideration of the private sphere of the home – a very different type of space, on first glance at least – this next section restores a vital agency to the female characters of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield. By reading the novels and short stories of these modernist authors alongside feminist histories of women and the domestic, this section addresses the problems raised in the previous section by proposing that the hotel existences of these women are not so much a retreat from the domestic sphere, but might rather be appreciated as an active resistance to it. The section also considers the hotel as a space which affords a level of privacy to these characters which is unavailable elsewhere, and which thus locates it as a unique and crucial space in women's experience of modernity. The section draws to a close with a discussion of the potential inherent within this unique

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[431] Bowen, *The Hotel*, p. 62.

space of the hotel for an engendering of fluid identities, and for a freedom from the traditional and unitary domestic identity of the housewife. Importantly, however, the section concludes with an interrogation of the validity of these arguments, and questions the authenticity of this freedom by examining the alternative accommodation options available to these characters.

As was made clear by the discussions of the previous section, the public space of the city is one which, historically, has proved resistant to women, and which has been more readily associated with men and masculinity. This association of men with the public sphere exists in a dualistic relationship with the alliance of women with the private, domestic sphere: 'For millennia, the image of Penelope sitting by the hearth and weaving, sowing and preserving the home while her man roams the earth in daring adventures, has defined one of Western culture's basic ideas of womanhood.'[432] This image, and the dualism within which it is enshrined, has proved remarkably resilient to attempts to dismantle it, and the figure of the housewife continues to haunt the efforts of contemporary feminism as a problematic, and at times seemingly inescapable, spectre. As observed in the opening chapter, much feminist scholarship has traced the confinement of women to the home back to the perceived link between woman and the body that has arisen due to her reproductive cycles and childbearing capacities. Woman, as Beauvoir maintains, is 'shut up in her flesh, her home,' bound to the domestic space by a patriarchal society which assumes the inevitability of her embodiment.[433]

The intensity of the attempts of societal and cultural discourse to relegate women to the private sphere of the home has of course fluctuated throughout history, but some of the most significant of these changes took place in the first half of the twentieth century. As already noted, the onset of the First World War saw many women in Britain take up those jobs left behind by men, particularly in the years following the introduction of

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[432] Young, 'House and Home', p. 123.
[433] Beauvoir, p. 609.

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conscription in January 1916.[434] Noting the popularity of lucrative munitions work among women during wartime, Braybon highlights the additional fact that 'women also increasingly replaced men in private, non-munitions industries, like grain milling, sugar refining, brewing, building, surface mining and shipyards'.[435] The end of the war and the ensuing interwar period, however, witnessed a burgeoning wave of cultural antipathy towards the working woman, carried largely, as observed in the Introduction, by the new women's magazines which constructed as the ideal a version of domesticated femininity. As Cynthia L. White points out, 'throughout the fiction, the chat, and the answers to correspondents in […] magazines, there was a substantial effort to curb restlessness on the part of wives, and to popularise the career of housewife and mother'.[436] A considerable number of new magazines aimed at women were set up during the 1920s and 1930s, the majority of which took as their focus the home and domestic activities. Titles such as *Home Life*, *The Ideal Home*, *Modern Home*, *Wife and Home*, and *Woman's Own* were among the magazines to emerge in the interwar years in Britain, and each placed an emphasis on the importance of homemaking and housewifery, thereby revealing a determined effort post-war to re-domesticate women, and to restore traditional gender roles to the home.

The first issue of *Woman's Own*, published in 1932, opens with an introduction to the publication from the editors, proclaiming it as 'our new weekly for the modern young wife who loves her home'.[437] Their message continues:

WOMAN'S OWN will be a paper with a purpose – a paper thoroughly alive to the altered conditions of the present day. The home paper that realises that any girl worth her salt wants to be the best housewife ever – and then some.[438]

From the pervasiveness of this kind of rhetoric in most of these magazines, the 'altered conditions of the present day' referred to here would appear to be a return to the home *en*

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[434] Braybon, p. 46.

[435] Ibid.

[436] Cynthia L. White, *Women's Magazines, 1693-1968* (London: Michael Joseph, 1970), p. 101.

[437] 'How Do You Do?', *Woman's Own*, 15 October 1932, Oxford, Bodleian Library, *John Johnson Collection of Printed Ephemera*, First Numbers: Women 2, p. 5.

[438] Ibid.

masse by British women. Women were overtly encouraged by such publications to reject a career outside of the home in favour of 'the career of the home-maker', which the first issue of *Wife and Home* describes as 'the finest in the world'.[439] As White observes, 'By the early 'twenties, household management had come to be regarded as a demanding and responsible profession, requiring systematic instruction if competence were to be achieved in all its many branches.'[440] This construction of home-making as a career more worthwhile and fulfilling than any paid job lays bare the socio-cultural desire to entice women away from the public world of work, and to confine them once more to the private sphere.[441]

In order to encourage women to replace paid employment with domestic work, many women's magazines during the interwar period often attempted to gloss over the more unpleasant side of housework, instead appealing to the sense of wifely duty which they assumed in their readers. The first issue of *Modern Marriage*, for example, introduced a regular 'Special Housewifery Course' column which directly addressed young wives, imploring them to take pity on their poor husbands: 'Men like to be looked after and cared for, and it is so worth while doing a little extra work, isn't it, in order that your husband may be absolutely happy and contented?'[442] In reality, this 'little extra work' inevitably combined with the other multitudinous 'little' tasks of the housewife to create an endless (and thankless) stream of chores and drudgery. *The Family Pictorial* recognised this, and suggested timetabling housework, arguing that 'eight hours ought to be time enough for any woman to get in a satisfactory day's housework. After that, no matter what she *might* be

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[439] 'Keeping House for Him', *Wife and Home*, October 1929, Oxford, Bodleian Library, *John Johnson Collection of Printed Ephemera*, First Numbers: Women 2, p. 35.

[440] White, p. 102.

[441] For a discussion on the professionalisation of housewifery in women's magazines of the interwar period, see Martin Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain 1914-59* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), pp. 209-18; Jill Greenfield and Chris Reid, 'Women's Magazines and the Commercial Orchestration of Femininity in the 1930s: Evidence from *Woman's Own*', *Media History*, 4:2 (1998), 161-74; and Adrian Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[442] Judith Ann Silburn, 'Special Housewifery Course – Taking Care of His Clothes and Yours', *Modern Marriage*, April 1931, Oxford, Bodleian Library, *John Johnson Collection of Printed Ephemera*, First Numbers: Women 2, p. 47.

doing, she should leave it.'[443] Despite the potential problems and stress inherent in struggling to fit all the necessary chores into a limited timeframe, by proposing an 'eight-hour day for housewives' the article at least acknowledges that a day of domestic labour is not much different from any other kind of labour.[444] Indeed, as Beauvoir observes, domestic work differs from other, paid professions only in the fact that it is never complete:

> Few tasks are more like the torture of Sisyphus than housework, with its endless repetition: the clean becomes soiled, the soiled is made clean, over and over, day after day. […] Eating, sleeping, cleaning – the years no longer rise up towards heaven, they lie spread out ahead, grey and identical. The battle against dust and dirt is never won.[445]

It is this cyclical and never-ending quality outlined by Beauvoir which represents the reality of housework – a reality of which many of the characters in these novels and short stories seem all too aware, and are eager to avoid.

That very few of the female protagonists (or indeed, other female characters) who populate the interwar writing of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield conform to the role of housewife is undeniably significant. Those that are in possession of a home and a marriage – such as Anna Quayne in Bowen's *The Death of the Heart*, Lois Heidler in Rhys's *Quartet*, and Linda Burnell in Mansfield's 'Prelude' – are invariably surrounded by housekeepers (such as the formidable Matchett in *The Death of the Heart*), maids, and other forms of household help who carry out the chores of housework for them. However, as has been revealed throughout the previous chapters, many of the women in the novels and short stories of these authors reside instead in the temporary spaces of hotels, in which the task of maintaining the rooms is automatically undertaken by the chambermaids and other

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[443] 'An Eight-Hour Day for Housewives', *The Family Pictorial*, 20 September 1919, Oxford, Bodleian Library*, John Johnson Collection of Printed Ephemera*, First Numbers: Women 3, p. 4. Emphasis in original.

[444] The year of publication of *The Family Pictorial* must be noted, as there is a continual and perceptible shift in attitudes towards housework and homemaking following the First World War. The longer the period between the end of the war and the time of publication, the more insistently the magazines treated housework as a wifely duty.

[445] Beauvoir, p. 470.

members of staff. Having the chores of housework and tidying done for them permits an escape from the drudgery of everyday existence for these women, and allows them to experience a feeling of decadence and leisure. Sasha, for example, relishes the extravagance of having her bedding changed by someone else, as I discussed earlier: 'That's my idea of luxury – to have the sheets changed every day and twice on Sundays. That's my idea of the power of money' (*GMM*, p. 68). The feeling of freedom from the responsibility of housework extends beyond the confines of the hotel room and into the hotel itself when Sasha observes the clutter on the hotel landing, the 'brooms, pails, piles of dirty sheets and so forth,' (*GMM*, p. 13) but then appears to forget them in an instant, as it is not she that will have the job of cleaning it up. This absence of responsibility is perhaps at the root of Sasha's lack of concern towards the 'black specks' on the wall of her room (*GMM*, p. 12), and the cockroaches in the communal bathroom which she calmly watches 'crawling from underneath the carpet and crawling back again' (*GMM*, p. 29). While these two examples might, as suggested in the previous chapter's discussion of entrapment, demonstrate Sasha's resignation to, and acceptance of, her lowly place in life, her relaxed attitude could equally, and more positively, signal her acknowledgement that these things are not her responsibility. The combination of the presence of hotel staff whose job it is to clean the rooms with the lack of ownership inherent in this hotel lifestyle, means that the hotel becomes the ideal place in which to hide from the responsibilities of the home.

However, Sasha's allusion to 'the power of money' in the above quotation is a reminder of the shadowy presence of the staff who are paid to carry out this work. Much as the housewife is rarely seen carrying out her daily chores by her husband and family, the figure of the chambermaid, although clearly present in these texts, is rarely seen carrying out her tasks around the hotel, and, much like those of the housewife, her chores are arduous and cyclical. In her account of life of hotel staff of the period, former hotel receptionist Dorothy Gray outlines the typical working day of the chambermaid in this period:

A list of arrivals and departures will have been given out from the office, and they go to the linen-room for their clean sheets and pillow-cases, having first collected the soiled ones. Then they make the beds and tidy up the washstands (if any) in each room before beginning again on a second round, this time to sweep, dust, and fill up water jugs and bottles.[446]

Recalling the day of the housewife in its repetitive nature, the job of the chambermaid, and her presence in these texts, raises unavoidable problems when considered from a feminist perspective, as the burden of work is merely transferred onto other women, and onto those who are most likely from a less privileged background. Thus, in escaping the drudgery of the domestic realm, those women who inhabit hotels effectively trap other women in the same 'battle against dust and dirt'.[447] It could be argued that the occupation of the chambermaid is somewhat more positive than that of the housewife due to the simple fact that the chambermaid is *paid* to maintain hotel rooms, meaning that cleaning and 'housework' are thus officially recognised as work and remunerated as such. Nevertheless, the marked gender distinction between staff roles in the hotels featured in these texts cannot be explained away so easily. There are no examples of a male equivalent to the chambermaid in any of the novels and short stories explored here. Instead, the exclusively male porters and bellboys operate as a distant counterpart performing a very different kind of role carrying the luggage for the guests, as in Mansfield's 'The Stranger', where the porter 'ma[kes] two journeys' of carrying the luggage for Mr and Mrs Hammond (p. 359). Only entering the rooms briefly when the guests themselves are present, their job within the hotel takes place largely in the semi-public areas of the lobbies and corridors, effectively allowing them – as noted in the previous chapter's discussion of surveillance – to police these areas. The tasks of the chambermaids, however, take place within the more private space of the hotel room when the guests are not there, thus reinforcing the dualisms of

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[446] Dorothy Gray, *Hotel Receptionist: A Balanced but Entertaining Account of Hotel Life as Seen by the Staff* (London: George Allen Unwin, 1945), p. 164.
[447] Beauvoir, p. 470.

public/private, male/female on a smaller scale within the hotel. In this sense, the nature of the relationship between female guest and female hotel staff remains problematic.

Nevertheless, the temporary nature of the hotel further contributes to the absence of responsibility felt by those characters residing in hotels in the writings of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield. The ownership involved in a booked hotel room is ephemeral at best, lacking the stability and security that accompanies home-ownership. By that same token, however, the temporary inhabitation of a hotel room also requires none of the responsibility involved in home-ownership. Not only do characters such as Julia and Karen enjoy the luxury of not having to clean them, but their lack of connection to and investment in these spaces means that they feel no desire to clean or maintain them. The lack of belongings necessitated by the hotel lifestyle further contributes to this, as the characters have relatively few items with which to decorate the room. The possessions they do have often tend to be functional rather than frivolous, for example that 'bottle of Evian' and 'the two books' belonging to Sasha (*GMM*, p. 11), and the characters are therefore relieved of the responsibility or inclination to clean, dust and arrange such objects. Yet this discussion of ownership, and in particular that of possessions, requires a clarification of what is meant by the terms 'housework' and 'homemaking'. As Young asserts, 'not all homemaking is housework'.[448] Rather, she defines homemaking as that which 'consists in the activities of endowing things with living meaning, arranging them in space in order to facilitate the life activities of those to whom they belong, and preserving them, along with their meaning'.[449] Homemaking, then, has more to do with the act of creation – of interior decoration and design, and of the careful arrangement of belongings – than with cleaning, maintenance and upkeep. Young's carefully worded definition of homemaking is also distinctly gendered – her emphasis on the importance of 'endowing […] with living meaning' and 'preserving' belongings in the home parallels the experiences of birth and childcare. This distinction between housework and homemaking forms part of Young's

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[448] Young, 'House and Home', p. 138.
[449] Ibid., pp. 140-1.

attempt to demonstrate the creative and fulfilling potential of the domestic space, and to rescue it from the damaging critiques of second wave feminism. Yet read in the context of these narratives, this invocation of the maternal and its concomitant duties and obligations merely serves to further explain the desire of many of these characters to seek refuge from the heavy responsibilities of the domestic in the relative freedom of the hotel.

Also particularly pertinent, however, is Young's allusion to the 'meaning' of the personal possessions to be arranged in the domestic space, as this hints at a more deep-rooted understanding of the home as a reflection of one's identity and personality. This notion was particularly popular in the domestic ideologies of women's interwar magazines, in which women were encouraged to create a home which reflected their unique tastes and personality – which conveyed, in effect, the essence of their character. As the editor of the first edition of the *Woman's Journal* writes in 1929, '[t]his is an age of self-expression, and in what better way can a woman express her own individuality than in her own home?'[450] The ideal home was a crystallisation of its creator's personality, and that creator, according to the popular women's press of the 1920s and 1930s, was inevitably female. Efforts to encourage women to commit to the process of homemaking focused on the fun that could be had in selecting wallpapers and furnishings, and on the satisfaction of finally possessing a home that truly represented one's 'authentic' identity. However, much like housework, the activity of homemaking is never completed – it is the accumulation of possessions and objects over an entire lifetime, each of which must fit within an already established style. More importantly, this conflation of home and identity continually reiterated by the interwar popular press reveals that this endless task of homemaking is in fact the endless task of creating and sustaining one's identity. Home, according to the magazines, was a reflection of one's personality, a reflection projected for others to see. Constructed for the benefit of family, visitors, and society more generally, the identity expressed through the interwar home is therefore performative. Just as Butler argues in her discussions of the

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[450] 'Julia Cairnes in Your Home', *Woman's Journal*, November 1929, Oxford, Bodleian Library, *John Johnson Collection of Printed Ephemera*, First Numbers: Women 2, p. 72.

performativity of gender that 'there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results,' so we can understand the identity expressed through the home, in its adherence to a set of norms and styles already decided upon by the editors of the magazines, and by the manufacturers of wallpaper, furniture, and other household items, as being 'performatively constituted by the very expressions that are said to be its results'.[451] This performative identity expressed through the processes of homemaking is one which must be continually sustained and maintained, a tiring and draining task for those women who undertake it. In Mansfield's 'Prelude' (1920), Linda Burnett's fatigue is palpable on her first morning in her family's new house:

> Linda turned over and raised herself on one elbow to see the room by daylight. All the furniture had found a place—all the old paraphernalia, as she expressed it. Even the photographs were on the mantelpiece and the medicine bottles on the shelf above the washstand. Her clothes lay across the chair—her outdoor things, a purple cape and a round hat with a plume in it. Looking at them she wished that she was going away from this house, too. And she saw herself driving away from them all in a little buggy, driving away from everybody and not even waving.[452]

The mere sight of her possessions, of 'all the old paraphernalia', insistently reminds her of the prospect of homemaking. The effort of making a home all over again, and of reconstructing an identity all over again, is a prospect daunting enough to trigger within her powerful thoughts of escape. Her feelings, and the feelings of many of the other female characters in these novels and short stories, are neatly summarised by one of the drawing-room ladies in Bowen's *The Hotel*, who admits that to 'make a home […] nearly kills one' (p. 62). For these characters, the hotel offers a refuge from the exhaustion of homemaking, and its inherent demands of a continual performance of a pre-determined identity.

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[451] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 33.

[452] Katherine Mansfield, 'Prelude' in *The Collected Stories: Bliss* (London: Penguin, 2007), pp. 11-60 (p. 25). Further references are given in parentheses after quotations in the text.

It is not simply the exhaustion in which homemaking so often results that inspires many of these characters to seek respite in the hotel. The endless nature of both homemaking and housework results in a scenario in which women – particularly those living through the interwar period in Britain – become trapped in the home, and in which they find themselves cut off from social contact with anyone other than their spouse and family. The isolating effects of domesticity have been the subject of significant feminist debate, most notably in Betty Friedan's seminal text *The Feminine Mystique*, which brought the dissatisfaction and despondency of the American housewife in the 1960s to the forefront of social and cultural consciousness, labelling it as 'the problem that has no name'.[453] More recently, Stacy Gillis and Joanne Hollows have picked up on the concerns of Friedan and other second wave feminists, noting that 'the confinement of women to the home rendered them isolated, powerless and, crucially, lacking a sense of identity derived from their own labour'.[454] While it is important to note the historical and national discrepancies between these arguments – developed from a perspective of 1960s America – and the British interwar narratives considered here, this same sense of isolation and alienation is nevertheless powerfully conveyed through the conversation of the aforementioned drawing-room ladies in Bowen's *The Hotel*, and through the remarks of one in particular:

> As winter comes on with these long evenings one begins to feel hardly human, sitting evening after evening in an empty room […] it feels so unnatural shutting oneself in with nobody […] I really begin to feel […] as if I didn't exist. (*Hotel*, p. 61)

The loneliness of the homemaker is depicted here as both devastating and inevitable, and 'shutting oneself in with nobody' seems a foregone conclusion. Indeed, her comment suggests that the detachment felt by a woman within the home is so intense, so severe that it corrodes any sense of identity, to the extent that it seems to threaten one's very existence.

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[453] Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), p. 17.

[454] Stacy Gillis and Joanne Hollows, 'Introduction', in *Feminism, Domesticity and Popular Culture*, ed. by Stacy Gillis and Joanne Hollows (New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 1-14 (p. 6).

Here again we might return to the Hegelian reading of the power and importance of the look of the Other to confirm and support one's existence.[455] Alone in a house, the homemaker finds her existence threatened, as there is no one else in whose look they might see themselves reflected to find confirmation of their being. Yet any possibility that the presence of a man might counteract or prevent this isolation is sharply dismissed by the acknowledgement of one of the ladies that 'if one does make a home for anybody one is still very much alone. The best type of man is no companion' (*Hotel*, p. 62). Here, the look of the man proves inadequate. He is 'no companion,' as in his look woman is reflected as a wife and mother, as an object to his subject. Instead, these particular women seek refuge from the loneliness of the home in the community of women they find in the hotel, a community of equals in whose looks their subjectivity is sustained, supported and, crucially, recognised.

The hotel can provide a refuge from the home, and a space in which women can come together in a supportive network. However, it can also, in apparent contrast to this, offer these characters a crucial level of privacy unavailable within the domestic sphere. The dichotomy of public and private space was typically available only to men, who worked and socialised in the public sphere before coming home to rest and recuperate in the privacy of the home, a pattern which provided them with what Gan refers to as 'a perfect dynamic of self and community'.[456] This dynamic was, however, unattainable to women, and in particular to those women who found themselves enacting the interwar ideals of housewifery and homemaking. For them, the domestic 'profession', taking place within the private space of the home, lacked a corresponding space in which to recover from the chores undertaken during the day, leading Gan to question the whereabouts of 'the private sphere's equivalent to the public sphere's private sphere'.[457] For Gan, this equivalent is only found outside of the home, in the temporary habitations of modernist women's writing,

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[455] Hegel, p. 110.

[456] Gan, p. 4.

[457] Ibid., p. 4.

such as Miriam Henderson's garret room in Richardson's *Pilgrimage*.[458] In this sense, the hotel room offers an essential privacy to women in the interwar narratives of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield, and signifies 'a distinctly modern achievement' for the characters who inhabit them.[459] Not only do such spaces offer privacy and respite from the demands of husband and family but they become, more importantly, a 'room of one's own' in the Woolfian sense, allowing women to break free, if only momentarily, from the fixed identities of wife and homemaker. The anonymous nature of the hotel room, and the lack of possessions noted above, further enables this release, permitting an escape from the memories of a life together imbued within those belongings. As Young observes, 'when dwelling space is shared,' by husband, wife and family, it becomes 'the space in which we dwell among the things that are *ours*'.[460] Possessions, as 'the material markers of events and relationships that make the narrative of a person or group,' act as a constant reminder of one's role in the family, of a life together, and of a sense of duty.[461] Their notable absence within the hotel rooms of many of these characters might thus be a conscious omission, as opposed to a mere requirement of the transient hotel existence.

In this sense, the hotel can be understood as a space which, in providing a rare level of privacy to women away from the trappings of the home, consequently permits an escape from a culturally prescribed identity. As Gan suggests, privacy provided the modern woman 'with the space to affirm an alternative identity apart from a traditional domestic role or even the seemingly more progressive role of a wage slave'.[462] The combined factors of privacy, anonymity, transience and liminality construct the hotel room as a unique space in which characters can explore and construct a range of identities, free from the constraints of the home. As suggested in Chapter One, and reiterated in the opening paragraphs of this chapter, the glamour and grandeur of a number of the hotels featured in

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[458] Ibid., p. 1.
[459] Ibid.
[460] Young, 'A Room of One's Own', p. 157. Emphasis in original.
[461] Young, 'House and Home', p. 140.
[462] Ibid., p. 3.

the texts explored here – such as the 'vivid glitter' of Bowen's eponymous Hotel on the Italian Riviera (*Hotel*, p. 154), the intricate green and gold décor in Mansfield's 'Father and the Girls' (p. 470), and the opulent hidden bedroom in Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark* (pp. 20-1) – construct a fantasy environment in which guests are encouraged to abandon the monotony of an everyday, domestic existence, and in which they are free to indulge in alternative identities. This sense of freedom from the drudgery of the home is echoed in Julia's thoughts on those still trapped within the domestic sphere. In a dramatic switch of emphasis in Rhys's *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, the prison cell, compared at the beginning of the novel to Julia's hotel room (*ALMM*, p. 14), becomes in the final pages of the text the bedrooms of women in their homes: 'The houses opposite had long windows, and it seemed to Julia that at each window a woman sat staring mournfully, like a prisoner, straight into her bedroom' (*ALMM*, p. 129). We can read this passage as a final recognition of the freedom inherent in a hotel existence, further supporting this more positive reading of the hotel as a space that makes possible a level of independence, which was otherwise unattainable to the modern woman.

Further consideration of the arguments put forward throughout this chapter, however, reveals a number of problems, the first, and perhaps most serious or damaging, of which regards the authenticity of this freedom. The reading proposed above portrays the behaviour of these female characters, their life in hotels rather than homes, as an active resistance to the very concept of home and the domestic. But is this really the case? Hotels are constantly referred to throughout these novels and short stories as 'hiding places', but the very use of the term 'hiding' implies avoiding, raising the inevitable question of the extent to which these characters are merely avoiding, or indeed retreating, from both public and private worlds, and highlighting the potential legitimacy behind suggestions that they are therefore adopting a passive role, essentially giving up. Sasha's overwhelming sense of despair throughout Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight*, reified in statements such as 'I want one thing and one thing only – to be left alone,' (p. 37) would certainly seem to suggest so. In

addition, the very notion of an active resistance to the domestic would seem to imply that these characters have the option to live in a home, that they have made some kind of choice. Many of these characters – in particular those populating the novels of Rhys – do not have such a luxury, but have rather been forced into the liminal space of the hotel as a result of their gender, age, marital status, financial position, nationality, behaviour, or indeed, all of the above. Their lack of any kind of steady income prevents them from ever buying a house, and their status as single women removes even the occupation of housewifery from their reach. Marginalised by circumstance and by society, these characters are often not free but trapped, confined to the space of the hotel.

However, despite the apparent lack of choice available to these characters, they nevertheless seem resistant to the very idea of the home environment, as evidenced in their unmistakeable aversion to the homes of others. Julia's visits to the home of her sister and dying mother, for example, seem to inspire within her feelings of disgust and unease – her mother's bedroom 'smelt of disinfectants and eau-de-Cologne and rottenness' (*ALMM*, p. 70). Similarly, Marya's experience of the Heidler home engenders a claustrophobic panic, the 'fright of a child shut up in a dark room. Fright of an animal caught in a trap,' (*Quartet*, p. 71) and she yearns to escape into a space of her own, into the hotel existence in which she is, 'for the first time in her life […] very near to being happy' (*Quartet*, p. 14). In *Voyage in the Dark*, Anna senses a resentment emanating towards her from the home of her lover Walter, recounting how his house was 'dark and quiet and not friendly to me. Sneering faintly, sneering discreetly, as a servant would. Who's this? Where on earth did he pick her up?' (p. 43). Anna is acutely aware that she does not belong in this house, but crucially her obvious distaste for it – demonstrated in her description of a room on the ground floor of the house as being 'stiffly furnished – I didn't like it much' (*VD*, p. 75) – implies that she does not want to belong there. Those characters who do have the option of a domesticated existence – such as the drawing-room ladies of Bowen's *The Hotel* – seem equally eager to

escape the home, and the drudgery and exhaustion that so inevitably accompanies a woman's existence within it.

Following the arguments of the previous section, which posited the hotel as a space in which the female characters of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield retreat from the perceived threats of the public sphere, this section has restored a vital agency to these same characters by outlining the ways in which they occupy the hotel in an active resistance to the demands of domesticity. The section's discussion of the efforts of the emerging interwar women's press to drive women back into the home following the First World War, and to construct the role of housewife and homemaker as a fulfilling and worthwhile career, reinforces the strength and determination of these characters in their refusal to adhere to the powerful gender norms of interwar society. Crucially, through a reading of these narratives through the lens of feminist theories of domesticity, this section has revealed the destructive potential of the home for the subjectivities of those women confined within it. As such, it has located the hotel as a critical space in women's experience of modernity, one which provides an essential alternative to the restrictions of the home. Having discussed the public and private spaces of modernity, the final section of the chapter moves inward to discuss the ways in which characters in these novels and short stories embrace the transitory hotel existence as a refuge from the past and from the self.

'ALL MYSELF [...] FLOATING AWAY FROM ME LIKE SMOKE'[463]: A RETREAT FROM THE SELF

Here I explore how many of these characters, rather than retreating from other people or spaces, are in fact retreating from themselves. Beginning with an interrogation of the very concept of the self, the section considers the various aspects of identity from which characters in the interwar novels and short stories of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield seek refuge within the hotel. It considers in further detail the way in which these characters are

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[463] Rhys, *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, p. 41.

marginalised on account of their socio-economic and marital status, and re-evaluates the hotel as a space in which to hide from this awareness of the self, in which characters are able to construct an alternative version of their reality. I also revisit the potential for fluid identities inherent within the hotel raised in the preceding section, and reconsider this in the context of these characters' attempts to escape from the self. Developing ideas of what is meant by the self, the section also highlights the awareness of many of these characters of an emptiness and loneliness, and demonstrates how the constant movement necessitated by a hotel lifestyle can be read as an avoidance of this. Moving on from notions of transience, I build upon ideas which were touched upon in the previous section concerning the way in which the home is regarded in the interwar period as an expression of identity, and in this light reconsider the retreat from the home as yet another way of retreating from the self. This discussion of the home and the self focuses once more on the personal possessions, objects and furniture which fill the home, and on the way in which these artefacts become 'layered with meaning' and memories over time. An examination of the lack of personal possessions in the hotel, and the anonymity of the space in more general terms, redirects the discussion once more towards memory, and the impact of place and space upon memory and recollection, thereby positing the hotel as a space in which memories can be avoided. Importantly, I focus on the memories of devastating events held by many of these characters – such as the deaths of children and the sudden departures of lovers – and reveals the extent to which their awareness of their responsibility for or culpability in these events drives them to seek refuge in the hotel. The discussion is framed by theories of trauma and loss in order to fully consider the spatial habits of these characters and the motivations behind them.

In order to fully explore the ways in which the hotel functions within these novels and short stories as a space in which characters seek refuge from the self, it is first necessary to clarify precisely what is meant by the term 'self'. Thus far the discussion has referred in the main to the subjectivity of the characters, with the understanding that

subjectivity is that which is constructed, for the most part, by external factors and influences such as language, space, and ideology. However, there is perhaps a distinction to be made here between the subject and the self. If the subject is, as Nick Mansfield suggests, 'always linked to something outside of it,' then we might be able to understand the self as that which is not constructed by extraneous factors – as that which is more internal than external.[464] Such an understanding of the self as a facet of an interior consciousness foregrounds the connection between the apparent retreat from the self in the writings of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield and what Charles Taylor highlights as 'the modernist turn to interiority,' as the determination of their characters to hide from aspects of the self inevitably results in a sustained narrative exploration of that self.[465] Yet to accept a definition of the self as that which is unconstructed by external influences is thereby to accept the self as that which is original and *a priori*, an understanding which directly contradicts, and is incompatible with, the concept of corporeal subjectivity underlying this project. This idea of an essential and innate self is contested throughout the work of Freud, Jacques Lacan and Foucault, whose constructivist theories have been built upon more recently by theorists of corporeal subjectivity such as Butler and Grosz.[466] For these thinkers, there is nothing within the subject that is not already affected by external influences, a position which renders impossible the idea of an *a priori* interior self outlined above.

There may, however, be alternative ways of defining the self and the subject that avoid the obstacles outlined above. In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), John Locke sketches out a theory of the self which highlights the centrality of past experience

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[464] Nick Mansfield, *Subjectivity: Theories of the Self from Freud to Haraway* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), p. 3.

[465] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 459.

[466] Butler uses Freud's model of the Oedipus complex, which asserts that subjectivity is constructed by the gender relations and sexual desires operating in a child's formative environment, and Foucault's theory of the discursive construction of sexuality, in her development of a theory of the way in which the body comes to bear the marks of gender and sex.

and memory in its constitution,[467] a theory summarised by Susan J. Brison as identifying 'the self with a set of continuous memories, a kind of ongoing narrative of one's past that is extended with each new experience'.[468] Rather than existing *a priori*, the self is instead a *tabula rasa*, or blank slate, added to over time by personal memories. In this sense, the self can be understood as being indirectly constructed by external factors through a process of internal reflection. This concept of the self is central to a discussion of these narratives, all of which foreground the importance of memory in the construction of their characters – in many of these novels and short stories, it is from their memories that characters seek refuge within the hotel. This concept of the self can also be incorporated into our understanding of the subject, which we might further conceive of as not just that which is constructed by external factors, but also as a collection of multiple selves. In this sense, characters such as Rhys's Sasha, Mansfield's aging family in 'Father and the Girls' and Bowen's Karen are hiding, not from a single, unified self, but from several different selves which combine to constitute their subjectivities.

This conception of subjectivity as a collection of multiple selves corresponds with modernist tropes of fragmentation, as these multiplicitous selves can be seen as fragments of a larger whole. The 'modernist turn to interiority' cited by Taylor need not, as he maintains, necessitate a unitary selfhood. Rather, he suggests that

> a turn inward […] didn't mean a turn to a *self* to be articulated, where this is understood as an alignment of nature and reason, or instinct and creative power. On the contrary, the turn inward may take us beyond the self as usually understood, to a fragmentation of experience which calls our ordinary notion of identity into question.[469]

This concept of multiple, fragmentary selves reoccurs throughout the narratives of these authors – the subjectivities of their characters are made up of numerous different selves,

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[467] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. by Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 328-48.

[468] Susan J. Brison, 'Outliving Oneself: Trauma, Memory, and Personal Identity', in *Gender Struggles: Practical Approaches to Contemporary Feminism*, ed. by Constance L. Mui and Julien S. Murphy (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), pp. 137-165 (p. 146).

[469] Ibid., p. 462. Emphasis in original.

each of which often correspond to a different period in their lives, and, crucially, to a different space in which they fleetingly dwelled. Sasha, for example, sees her past self 'coming out of the Métro station at the Rond-Point every morning at half-past eight, walking along the Avenue Marigny, turning to the left and then to the right' (*GMM*, pp. 15-6), and on Tottenham Court Road, Julia experiences 'the ghost of herself coming out of the fog to meet her' (*ALMM*, p. 49). The unstable, fragmented subjectivities of these characters can be understood as a direct consequence of the impermanence of the hotels they inhabit, the brevity of their time spent within which results in the development of a different self. Yet the liminal nature of the hotel space also, as the discussions of the previous section demonstrate, engenders and encourages in its inhabitants a fluid movement between these fragmentary selves – as in Sasha's immersive and powerful wandering between her various selves (each of which is signified by a different hotel) in Part Three of Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight* (pp. 95-121) – which further reveals the complex yet undeniable relationship between subjectivity and space. As such, not only does the space of the hotel enable these authors to demonstrate the effects of such transitory spaces upon the subjectivities of their characters, but it also enables them to reveal far more about the interior consciousnesses of their characters in line with other modernist writers.

A constructivist approach to the characters found in these novels and short stories, such as that outlined above, will consider the external factors which combine to effect and establish their subjectivities, and the societal and cultural status of these women is one of the most obvious of these. As has already been acknowledged, the socio-economic position of several characters throughout these texts is considerably less privileged than that of the upper-middle class characters populating a large proportion of British modernist fiction. Indeed, such characters can be found in several of Bowen's novels – the wealth of the majority of the guests residing at the hotel on the Italian Riviera in *The Hotel* is evidenced by the luxury of 'wintering' away from home. For more marginal figures such as Rhys's

Julia, the hotel can offer a space in which to temporarily escape the reality of their financial circumstances, in which she is transported into the 'exotic hideaway' highlighted in the opening paragraphs of this chapter. As noted in the first chapter, the glamour and opulence often found in the hotel can create, for several of these characters, an illusion of wealth, or at least a brief respite from the harsh facts of their day to day lives. Yet the option of such luxurious environments is, as noted in Chapter One, unavailable to many of the characters in these narratives. For example, Sasha's desperation to move to another, more 'respectable' hotel (*GMM*, p. 31) denotes her desire to evade the socio-economic position into which she has been thrust. However, even the less inviting hotels in these novels and short stories – such as the hotel to which Sasha inevitably returns, and in which she lies in the bath and watches 'the cockroaches crawling from underneath the carpet and back again' (*GMM*, p. 29) – offer, as noted above, small luxuries, such as that of having the sheets changed on a regular basis (*GMM*, p. 68), and are thereby capable of momentarily shielding inhabitants from the truth of their socio-economic identities.

As noted in the opening chapter's discussion of adultery, the hotel can also provide an escape from stifling or unfulfilling relationships. The small London hotel visited by Bowen's Janet in *Friends and Relations*, for example, acts as a hiding place from the constrictive identity of wife and mother, while the Ram's Head in Bowen's *The House in Paris* offers Karen not only a safe space in which to consummate her affair with Max, but also a momentary reprieve from her engagement to Ray which fills her with unease and uncertainty: 'She was not married yet: at the same time she had no right to still be looking about; she had to stop herself asking: "What next? What next?"' (p. 69). In much the same way, however, the hotel can also become a space in which to hide from the label of 'single woman'. While the hotel visits of characters such as Bowen's Emmeline (*TN*, pp. 140-151), Rhys's Anna (VD, pp. 65-74), and Mansfield's Mouse ('JNPF', pp. 81-90) may permit them to engage in sexual relations with their lovers away from prying eyes, they may also allow them to escape briefly the constant reminders of, and judgements upon, their marital

status. Such attempts to hide from the way in which society perceives and judges them demonstrate one way in which these characters seek refuge within the hotel from the self. However, this socially constructed element of subjectivity is perhaps less complex and more tangible than that which a number of other characters seek to evade. While for many, a fast-paced and transitory lifestyle is a mere by-product of a hotel existence, this relentless movement is actively sought by others as a way of avoiding a sense of emptiness that otherwise threatens to overwhelm them. The elderly father in Mansfield's 'Father and the Girls' drives his two grown daughters onwards on a perpetual holiday, desperately maintaining their 'on the wing' lifestyle in order to ward off any thoughts of home, 'the only word that daunted' him (p. 470). The reasons behind his desire to avoid a sedentary, domestic existence are not made immediately apparent, but are nevertheless hinted at in this brief meditation on the subject:

> Home! To sit around, doing nothing, listening to the clock, counting up the years, thinking back… thinking! To stay fixed in one place as if waiting for something or somebody. No! no! Better far to be blown over the earth like the husk, like the withered pod that the wind carries and drops and bears aloft again. ('FG', p. 470)

It is clear that remembrance and reflection are the occupations from which the family (or rather, the father) wish to distract themselves, and the insistent protestation of 'No! no!' is particularly revealing, coming as it does after the suggestion of 'waiting for something or *somebody*'. This telling slip hints at the possibility of a loss – perhaps that of a mother and wife – which runs deep and which the family, and in particular the father, refuses to mourn, and fears to face, preferring instead the diversion of a frenetic, nomadic way of life.

Similarly, the enigmatic Mrs Kerr in Bowen's *The Hotel* – seemingly quite content with a life spent in hotels and away from the home – tells her (estranged) son Ronald of her loneliness in a rare moment of transparency:

> 'You see,' she said, 'I, who am what is called "an attractive person", am going to be lonelier than most people, the beautiful or the devoted. I shan't be able to crowd myself round for

consolation and company with hundreds of little photographs of loving or having been

loved.' (p. 189)

The transient nature of the hotel existence enables Mrs Kerr to avoid the reality of the lack of meaningful personal relationships in her life. Her determination not to dwell on this absence is evident through the marked brevity of this reflective mood, and in the speed with which she changes the subject (and tone) of the conversation to yet another trip: 'Then she smiled. "At any rate," she went on, having extracted an envelope that had already been opened, "I don't begin to be lonely just yet – here's such a charming letter, an invitation, from those Emmerys in Paris"' (*Hotel*, p. 189). For Mrs Kerr, as for the small, aging family in 'Father and the Girls', hotels – and the lifestyles they engender and support – are spaces in which to evade and outrun the loneliness which might otherwise encroach. The unavoidable brevity of relationships with both people and places afforded by the hotel effectively shields them from the reality of their solitary existence, allowing them to maintain the illusion of choice, rather than face the absence of stable relationships in their lives.

The aversion to stability and to the home depicted in the above extracts – and in particular in the desire of Mansfield's elderly father figure to avoid the stillness of domesticity at all costs – returns the discussion once more to the relationship between home and self explored in the previous section, and recalls the interwar understanding of the home as an expression of personal identity. As has already been observed, the practice of homemaking involves interior decoration, and the arrangement of furniture and personal possessions in such a way that embody the personality of the homemaker. Such possessions, as Young points out, 'become layered with meaning and personal value as the material markers of events and relationships that make the narrative of a person'.[470] Yet it is not the effort and exhaustion of homemaking that the father in Mansfield's short story wishes to avoid, but rather the identity of the homemaker reflected in the home – the way

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[470] Young, 'House and Home', p. 140.

in which the personal effects and their arrangement in space act as a constant reminder of an absent wife and mother, of one who is lost and of their life together. This distinction, however, is clearly gendered – the contrast between Mansfield's elderly father and those female characters discussed in the previous section implies that, while women seek to escape the activity of homemaking, men merely seek to avoid reminders of the absence of a homemaker. The possibility that women might similarly seek to avoid reminders of a relationship, or of a lost or absent loved one, is thus obscured. Mrs Kerr's fixed resolve to keep to temporary, impermanent spaces such as the hotel demonstrates, perhaps, less a desire to avoid the toil of homemaking, and more a desire to avoid the emptiness of a home. Indeed, for Mrs Kerr it is precisely the lack of mementos with which a home ought to be filled – the lack of those 'hundreds of little photographs of loving or having been loved' (*Hotel*, p. 189) – that troubles her. In this sense, it is the necessary dearth of personal effects and the consequent anonymity of the hotel room – that same anonymity which was posited as a negative attribute in the previous chapter's discussion of the hotel room as a carceral space – which certain characters actively seek out and embrace, and which constructs the hotel as a refuge from the loneliness and emptiness of the home.

From this discussion of characters' attempts to avoid and escape the meaning with which personal possessions and the space of the home are layered, the connections between the self and memory, outlined in the introductory paragraphs to this section, begin to emerge. Remembrance of things past haunts the characters of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield, often driving them – as demonstrated above – to seek refuge in the anonymous spaces of hotel rooms, and to hide from their personal memories, that 'ongoing narrative of [the] past' that forms the basis of the self.[471] In Bowen's *House in Paris*, for example, Karen withdraws to her hotel room on account of her 'dread of the past' (p. 207). Refusing to leave to meet her estranged son Leopold, she instead lies shuddering 'on the Versailles bed, with the gloves she had put on to go to Paris, then pulled off, dropped on the floor,

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[471] Brison, p. 146.

and the violets she had pinned on for Leopold pressed dead between her breast and the bed' (*HP*, p. 215). However, her attempts to escape her memories differ somewhat from that of Mansfield's incomplete family, or that of the lonely Mrs Kerr. In Karen's case, it is not only the loss of a child which torments her, but a powerful sense of her own accountability for that loss, and her insurmountable guilt is due to what Helene Moglen (in a reading of maternal grief in Daniel Defoe's *Roxana: The Fortunate Mistress* [1724]) terms the 'abdicat[ion] of her maternal responsibilities'.[472] The result of Karen's affair with Max, Leopold was adopted shortly after he was born, and Karen pretends to herself and others that her efforts to block out all recollection of the child are for the sake of her husband Ray, who married her in spite of her infidelity during their engagement. As the formidable Mme Fisher tells Leopold,

> Dread of the past and nervous weakness of body must have made her, later, grasp at what appeared to be peace. Dread must have made her shrink, on her own account or her husband's – whom she dared not wrong further – from knowing you. […] That she must not love you was written on her heart. (*HP*, p. 207)

In actual fact, however, Karen's desire to forget Leopold arguably derives from the guilt and regret she feels due to her complicit involvement with his adoption, and her culpability in the circumstances of his birth. In the 'unspoken dialogue' between them, Karen begs Ray to 'stop remembering,' only to be told by Ray, 'It is you who remember' (*HP*, p. 216). Indeed, rather than refuse to acknowledge his existence, it is Ray who tries to coax Karen into accepting her past and finding Leopold (and who ends up collecting Leopold himself in an act of defiance), astutely recognising that any attempts to hide from these memories in the transitory spaces of the hotel are doomed to failure.

In the anonymity of the hotel room, and the transience of the hotel lifestyle, Karen seeks distraction and relief from the maternal responsibility she finds so hard to bear, but

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[472] Helene Moglen, *The Trauma of Gender: A Feminist Theory of the English Novel* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), p. 47.

despite her best efforts, the figure of Leopold continually haunts her as the absent third in their young family:

> When, travelling, they might have been most together objects would clash meaningly upon those open senses one has abroad. That third chair left pushed in at a table set for a couple. After-dark fountains playing in coloured light, for no grown-up eye. [...] The third bed in their room at the simple inn. (*HP*, pp. 219-20)

The grief for a child who has been – willingly or unwillingly – given up is pervasive and all-consuming, and the liminal space of the hotel can offer Karen only the most fleeting of distractions before the memories of what she has lost come crowding in. Yet while the hotel may not hold the capacity to completely efface such painful memories, it nevertheless provides characters such as Karen and Rhys's Julia with a much needed – if only momentary – relief from traumatic past experiences. It may be unclear, at first, whether Karen's experiences can truly be regarded as 'traumatic', as the element of choice in giving Leopold up for adoption arguably disqualifies her experiences from being defined as such. However, the circumstances surrounding that choice – the sudden and unexpected suicide of Max, her lover and the child's father (*HP*, pp. 182-3) – and those which followed shortly after – the stillbirth of her first and only child with Ray (*HP*, p. 205) – are perhaps severe enough to be understood as traumatic, and are in keeping with Ian Hacking's definition of trauma as 'cruel and painful experiences that corrupt or destroy one's sense of oneself'.[473] In this light, Karen's refusal to leave the hotel room in Versailles, and her severe reaction of 'shudder[ing]' face-down on the bed, might instead be seen as bodily manifestations of that trauma, where the hotel room becomes a safe space in which to hide from the memories of those events, but also in which to experience the after-effects without fear of judgment or scrutiny.

Julia in Rhys's *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* has experienced a similarly devastating loss of a child, this time shortly after birth, about which she tells her lover Mr Horsfield in

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[473] Ian Hacking, 'Memory Sciences, Memory Politics', in *Tense Past: Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory*, ed. by Paul Antze and Michael Lambek (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 67-88 (p. 75).

passing, referring simply to 'the papers about my baby who died and was buried in Hamburg' (p. 41). Julia only refers to the baby indirectly, 'the papers' being the subject of her remark, and it is worth noting that the incident is referred to only twice in the entire narrative – briefly here, and then in slightly more detail when she visits the father of the child: 'When you've just had a baby, and it dies for the simple reason that you haven't enough money to keep it alive, it leaves you with a sort of hunger' (*ALMM*, p. 80). The minimal references to the death of her child – and the fact that this second instance is thought rather than spoken aloud – cement Julia's experiences as traumatic, as they correspond with theories regarding the impossibility of narrating or representing trauma. As Primo Levi suggests, 'our language lacks words to express […] the demolition of the self' that constitutes the traumatic event.[474] The hotel room is a place in which Julia finds refuge from her unutterable experiences: 'Locked in her room – especially when she was locked in her room – she felt safe' (*ALMM*, p. 9). For both her and Karen, the hotel room offers momentary reprieve from the trauma of their pasts.

In keeping with the complex and shifting nature of the hotel, however, it can function – sometimes simultaneously – throughout these narratives as both a space in which to hide from memories, and a space that has the capacity to trigger them. As already observed, the hotel room that Julia finds herself in on her arrival in London, for example, instantly transports her back an earlier period in her life:

> Predestined, she had returned to her starting-point in this little Bloomsbury bedroom that was so exactly like the little Bloomsbury bedroom she had left nearly ten years before. [...] Perhaps the last ten years had been a dream; perhaps life, moving on for the rest of the world, had miraculously stood still for her. (*ALMM*, p. 48)

The similarity between the two spaces is – as noted in the previous chapters – so strong that Julia is not simply reminded of the earlier bedroom, but feels as if she has been physically transported back in time. Similarly, the hotel room of Rhys's Sasha is 'saturated

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[474] Primo Levi, *If Not Now, When* (New York: Penguin, 1985), p. 9.

with the past … It's all the rooms I've ever slept in' (*GMM*, p. 91). Forming the entirety of the third part of the novel, the memories prompted by this one room document a specific and formative period of her life, from meeting and marrying her husband, through their poverty, her pregnancy, the death of her child, and, finally, the departure of her husband (*GMM*, pp. 95-121). In this sequence, the infant's death is – as in *After Leaving Mr Makenzie* – referred to only fleetingly, Sasha's reference to the event complete in a mere two sentences: 'He has a ticket tied round his wrist because he died. Lying so cold and still with a ticket round his wrist because he died' (*GMM*, p. 116). While the baby, is in this case, referred to directly (unlike Julia's), the focus is of the description is placed more upon the 'ticket round his wrist', demonstrating once more the unrepresentability of traumatic events.

Despite the abundance of memories triggered by Sasha's hotel room (and the length of the section in which they appear), her allusion to it as 'this damned room' (*GMM*, p. 91) suggests that these memories are not altogether welcome, in this sense recalling the Proustian concept of 'involuntary memory'. While widely famous for the exquisite rush of memories evoked by the taste of a madeleine dipped in lime-flower tea,[475] Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* (1913-27) presents a detailed theory of those memories which are triggered unexpectedly by external factors or influences, and which often, as Richard Terdiman observes, deal with 'pain, suffering or anguish'.[476] Anne Whitehead comments further upon this idea, maintaining that, in Proust's novel, 'the memories recovered are often of unhappiness and irreversible loss, so that they resuscitate or reactivate a former grief or sorrow. In this sense,' she argues, 'involuntary memory bears a much closer resemblance to Freudian trauma than might be apparent from Proust's consistently celebratory account.'[477] This particular interpretation of involuntary memory aligns Rhys's

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[475] Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time, Volume One: Swann's Way*, trans. by C. K. Scott Moncrieff (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 2001), pp. 37-40.
[476] Richard Terdiman, *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 217.
[477] Anne Whitehead, *Memory* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), p. 111.

narrative with that of Proust, as Sasha's joyful memories of the early years of her marriage – 'My beautiful life in front of me, opening out like a fan in my hand' (*GMM*, p. 99) – are interspersed with the more unwelcome memories of sorrow and heartbreak: 'Everything all spoiled' (*GMM*, p. 116). The hotel room inhabited by Sasha thus becomes the counterpart to Proust's madeleine, and a space in which the repressed trauma of her past resurfaces without warning.

Yet there is another, apparently contradictory way in which this same hotel room functions in Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight*. Where Sasha's narrative differs from that of Julia – and indeed from many (if not all) of the other characters in the novels and short stories considered here – is in the detail with which she recalls the birth and death of her child earlier on in the novel. This lengthy passage begins with her arrival at a Parisian maternity home – 'a funny house' in which 'there are people having babies all over the place' (*GMM*, p. 49) – and ends with her looking down at the dead body of her five-week-old child. Sasha's recollection of being wrapped in bandages by the midwife to remove all traces of the pregnancy invokes the notion of bodily memory:

> When I complain about the bandages she says: 'I promise you that when you take them off you'll be just as you were before.' And it's true. When she takes them off there is not one line, not one wrinkle, not one crease. (*GMM*, p. 52)

In this example, the natural marks of pregnancy, which would act as a bodily memory of the experience, and which would add to what Grosz terms as the 'biography [and] history of the body,' are erased.[478] By eradicating the marks of her pregnancy, the midwife effectively eradicates Sasha's corporeal memory, the evidence written on the body, of her dead child. Sasha's repetition of the phrase 'not one line, not one wrinkle, not one crease' thereby comes to signify her grief at the absence of a bodily reminder, and her guilt at being left physically untouched:

> And five weeks afterwards there I am, with not one line, not one wrinkle, not one crease.

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[478] Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, p. 142.

And there he is, lying with a ticket tied round his wrist because he died in a hospital. And there I am looking down at him, without one line, without one wrinkle, without one crease. (*GMM*, p. 52)

It is because of her guilt, coupled with her grief, that Sasha, in this instance, retreats to her hotel room specifically to submerge herself in memories: 'What do I care about anything when I can lie on the bed and pull the past over me like a blanket?' (*GMM*, p. 49). Here, rather than figuring as a space in which to hide from trauma, the hotel becomes a space in which she can block out any and all other distractions of everyday life in order to immerse herself in memory, to actively engage with the events and experiences that make up her various selves, and which constitute her subjectivity. In the hotel room, characters such as Sasha are able to process and come to terms with the traumas of their past selves, a vital space in which they might work through and accept their grief and loss away from the demands of the public and private spheres.

This section has demonstrated the ways in which the hotel – as well as offering the characters of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield a refuge from the potential threats of the city, and from the domestic responsibilities of the home – operates across these narratives as a space in which characters might find refuge from the self. It has maintained that, for many of these characters, the hotel offers an escape from socially-defined identities, allowing them the opportunity to forget, if only momentarily, the reality of their day-to-day existence. I have also explored the ways in which the necessary transience and impermanence of the hotel lifestyle enables characters to avoid painful reminders of the absence of loved ones or meaningful relationships. Crucially, however, I have revealed the hotel in these narratives to be a space in which characters are able to seek refuge from the traumatic experiences of their pasts, and in which they are able to find a momentary reprieve from their pain. This pain, I have argued, is made particularly apparent throughout the novels and short stories of these authors through recurring instances of maternal grief and guilt over the loss or death of a child. In these instances, the hotel in its complexity

becomes, as this section has demonstrated, both a place in which characters are able to seek refuge from their pain, but also, simultaneously, a safe and vital space in which they are gradually able to work through, and potentially come to terms with, the traumas they have experienced away from the demands and distractions of modernity.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have provided a detailed exploration not only of precisely from what or whom these characters seek refuge within the hotel, but also a consideration of what unique qualities and aspects of this space make the hotel particularly suited to providing such a refuge. As a space that is situated in between the public and the private, the hotel allows a sanctuary away from the harsh realities of the modern metropolis, and from the disorienting and debilitating effects of the look of the Other. It also offers an escape from the drudgeries of the domestic sphere, back into which the cultural discourse of interwar Britain was attempting to drive women. As such, the hotel functions throughout these narratives as a vital space of privacy for the female characters of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield. In addition, the complexities of its anonymous and transitory nature constructs it as a space in which its inhabitants can find relief from painful or traumatic memories, and its transience distracts them from the loneliness that haunts them. Crucially, however, the hotel operates throughout these novels and short stories as a space in which characters can also – often simultaneously – engage with and come to terms with the trauma of their pasts, away from the distractions and demands of everyday life. As such, these authors clearly position the hotel as an essential space for women in modernity.

CONCLUSION

Eat. Drink. Walk. March. Back to the Hotel.
~ Jean Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939)

I opened this thesis by locating the hotel as a distinctly liminal space, as that which exists in between the public and private spheres that have so far dominated critical debates on modernity. As demonstrated throughout the novels and short stories of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield, the hotel is, as a result of this liminality, an ideal narrative space – it is, at its most fundamental level, a space in which *things happen.* Returning to Bhabha's understanding of the liminal space as a 'barrier or boundary,' a threshold which, once crossed, leads to the 'unknowable,' the hotel is a space of transition, in which the crisis points of these novels and short stories are bound, from the start, to occur.[479] Such crisis points, as I have shown throughout these chapters, can take a number of forms. They can often be something as seemingly brief and insignificant as a conversation between friends – such as that between Portia and Major Brutt towards the end of Bowen's *The Death of the Heart*, in which Portia reveals to him the extent to which he is ridiculed by those he holds most dear – and yet the reverberations from these moments of truth resound through the texts, undermining the beliefs of those involved, and shattering their understanding of their place in the world. The instantaneous nature of such revelations is countered by the steady, drawn-out changes that also occur in the liminal space of the hotel, such as Sydney's growing sense of independence and assuredness in Bowen's *The Hotel* as she gradually frees herself from an unrewarding attachment to the domineering Mrs Kerr. In several of these narratives, the consequences of such transitional moments within the hotel are not immediately apparent. As I discuss in Chapter One, this is most often true of the sexual encounters that occur within the hotel, to which many of the tragic and devastating outcomes in these texts – such as Emmeline and Markie's fatal car accident in Bowen's *To*

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[479] Bhabha, p. 6.

the North, Max's suicide in *The House in Paris*, and Marya's murder at the hands of her estranged husband in Rhys's *Quartet* – can clearly be traced back. In its liminality, the hotel engenders such dramatic moments of change in the narratives of these authors, catapulting their characters into the 'unknowable' and 'unrepresentable' beyond.

Positioned in between and therefore away from the city and the domestic environment, the hotel is also used by these three authors to reflect upon and lay bare the gendered distinctions between the public and private that resurfaced during the interwar period. Throughout this thesis, I have shown the ways in which Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield, by repeatedly situating their female protagonists within the liminal space of the hotel, reveal the shifting expectations of femininity between the wars, and the consequent restrictions faced by women. The close monitoring of female sexual behavior is, as I argue in Chapter One, indicated by the contrasts drawn in these narratives between the more open and public spaces of modernity in which expressions of illicit sexual desire are prohibited – such as the train carriage in which Mansfield's unnamed protagonist anxiously resists the advances of her lover ('BC', p. 646) – and the semi-private space of the hotel room, in which characters are finally able to explore such desires. I have also, however, demonstrated the ways in which the hotel is set up in a similar opposition to the private space of the home in these texts through the marked awareness of these characters of the impossibility of any sexual transgressions within the domestic sphere. This reveals the home as a space strictly governed by the heteronormative values of marriage and family. The persistence with which these authors situate the illicit sexual encounter within the hotel highlights the impossibility of such activity outside of this space, and thus provides an incisive comment on the shifting attitudes to sexual morality in interwar Britain. As such, these authors write against popular myths perpetuated both during and after the interwar years, and embodied in the figure of the flapper, which portrayed it as a time of sexual emancipation. Through the space of the hotel, they reveal the realities of the restrictions placed upon women's sexuality throughout the period. By situating the hotel as a space in

which female characters such as Marya, Karen and Emmeline are able to explore their sexual desires that were elsewhere forbidden, Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield position it as a liberatory space for women during the interwar years. Its liberatory potential is further revealed through the marked distance in these narratives between the hotel and the domestic drudgery of the home. As I discuss in Chapter Three, the relief felt by characters such as Sasha at being able to have 'the sheets changed everyday and twice on Sundays,' coupled with their perception of other women in their homes as prisoners trapped in an endless cycle of housework noted in the same chapter, demonstrates their resistance to the interwar backlash against the working woman, and the drive to confine her once more to the domestic sphere (*GMM*, p. 68). Through the hotel, these authors not only offer a critical assessment of the oppressive ideologies of interwar Britain concerning woman's role in the home, but they also establish the hotel as an alternative space for women.

Yet as the broad and apparently contradictory themes of my chapters show, the hotel in these narratives defies any attempts at straightforward categorization. It is a space of sexual freedom for women that also functions, often simultaneously, as a space in which women are entrapped and coerced by their male lovers. Similarly, it is a space in which they are both incarcerated and in which they seek refuge – a space in which they are freed from the responsibilities of the domestic role, but also a space to which those who are *excluded* from the home are consigned. This notion of exclusion is, as I have demonstrated throughout this thesis, central to a reading of the hotel in the novels and short stories of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield. These authors are themselves marginal figures, both amongst their literary peers and in society more generally, whose own biographical narratives echo the transient and nomadic nature of the hotel existence. Carol Dell' Amico's description of Rhys as 'a displaced colonial and outsider for whom everything on her arrival to the foreign shore of the home country became strange,' is also equally true of Mansfield and Bowen.[480] Displaced and estranged from the culture and society of their imperial home, the writings

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[480] Carol Dell' Amico, *Colonialism and the Modernist Moment in the Early Novels of Jean Rhys* (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 1.

of these authors share a clear concern with narratives of marginalisation and dislocation, narratives for which the transient space hotel provides the ideal setting. A sense of marginalisation is perhaps most apparent in their depictions of the hotel as a carceral space, in which, as I have shown in Chapter Two, those characters who fall outside the discursive norms of interwar society are confined. The tropes of surveillance and enforced isolation that I have identified in many of the hotel narratives of these authors convey the extent to which marginalised subjects are monitored, policed and punished outside of the typical regulatory and disciplinary structures of the legal system and the prison. Most importantly, however, I have demonstrated the ways in which the hotel is revealed in the writings of these three authors as a space in which all those who have been excluded from society – and crucially from the space of the home – find refuge.

In Chapter Two, I demonstrated how, in the altered behaviour and appearances of many of these marginalised characters – such as Marya's 'swollen' eyelids and 'greyish' skin (*Quartet*, p. 97), and Portia's 'hotel habit' of 'instinctively [speaking] low after dark' (*DH*, p. 55 & p. 73) – the marks of the hotel as disciplinary structure are made apparent. Yet such changes also reveal the ways on which space impacts upon the subject, and denote a central concern in the writings of these authors with the mutually affective relationship between the body and space. Through this relationship – which is, as I have shown throughout this thesis, foregrounded in the work of all three writers – Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield sketch a theory of subjectivity as that which is necessarily embodied, and reveal the ways in which this subjectivity is variously constructed by the spaces we inhabit. This speaks directly to the project of modernism – and in terms of the various definitions of modernism put forward in the Introduction, the narratives of these authors can be seen to fulfill numerous different aspects of each. Stylistically, these texts adhere to many of the accepted characteristics of modernism – most, if not all of them open *in media res* and lack closure, and none of them provide any concrete answers or explanations concerning the events that take place within the hotel, and, crucially, nor do they offer any kind of stable definition of

the hotel itself. Thematically, the key modernist concerns of alienation, anomie, fragmentation and exile are, as I have demonstrated throughout these chapters, central to Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield's consideration of the hotel in their novels and short stories. Through their complex and challenging female characters, and their experiences within the hotel, all three authors tackle tensions surrounding the 'alienation of gendered existence' identified by Ayers as a central theme in modernist literature.[481] The undeniable emphasis placed by these authors upon the construction of their characters' corporeal subjectivities by the transitory space of the hotel reflects the modernist turn to interiority and narratives of selfhood, and is thereby another way in which we might locate these narratives within the wider spectrum of modernist literature. In my reading of the hotel in the work of Rhys, Bowen and Mansfield, I establish a firm connection between the recent move towards considerations of spatiality in modernist criticism and modernist literature's own focus on interiority and the construction of the subject. Following Thacker's emphasis on the 'movement *between* [...] spaces' in modernism,[482] and Burdett and Duncan's definition of modernism as 'a metropolitan art of diaspora [...] produced in the wake of waves of migration and displacement,' I have located the hotel as central to a new understanding of modernism, one which undermines the dominance of the metropolis and the home, and which redefines it as an art of liminality.[483]

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[481] Ayers, p. x.
[482] Thacker, p. 7.
[483] Burdett and Duncan, p. 7.

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