"Always the same stairs, always the same room": The Uncanny Architecture of Jean Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight*

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Jean Rhys's Good Morning, Midnight *(1939) is a novel that returns obsessively to the uncanny architecture of the Parisian hotel, through providing insight into the deracinated experiences of protagonist Sasha Jansen, a woman existing at the peripheries of the interwar city. Strikingly, this uncanny architecture structures the narrative itself, in the form of frequent disruptions in temporality, stylistic negotiations of memory, and distinct fragmented typography. An architectural interpretation of Sigmund Freud's "The Uncanny" (1919) provides a useful interpretive lens for the novel, which helps to draw out how the uncanny functions — both thematically and formally — as a spatial and psychological symptom of the deracinated modern urban condition. Working in conjunction with Rhys's representation of memory, the uncanny architecture of* Good Morning, Midnight *challenges contemporary spatial theorists who posit the hotel as a key site for the liberating eradication of history, whilst also evidencing Rhys's literary innovations in the interwar period.*

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Jean Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939) is a novel that returns obsessively to the spatial and mental architecture of the Parisian hotel. Characterized by first-person narration, it provides intimate, although frequently unreliable, insight into the psychological experiences of Sasha Jansen, a deracinated woman

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existing at the peripheries of the interwar city. Such a marked preoccupation characterizes Rhys's interwar oeuvre as a whole, as *Quartet* (1929), *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* (1931), and *Voyage in the Dark* (1934) are all equally striking in their frank depiction of women traversing the marginal spaces of both London and Paris. Nearly all the spaces Rhys negotiates share similar characteristics, being spaces that are neither entirely private nor public, that confuse secure notions of interior/exterior and homely/unhomely space, and that are inhabited by individuals who have nowhere else to belong.

Intersecting with this landscape of European modernity is a crisis of national identity and colonial exile. None of Rhys's female protagonists seems to be European — a crucial factor that intensifies their vexed relationship with the city. As a child, Rhys herself was uprooted from her home in Dominica and transplanted onto English soil; she thus had first-hand experience of the strange and unfamiliar customs and spaces of an alien world. Growing up to become a chorus girl and then marrying three times, her life consisted of endless upheavals from a number of English and European towns and cities. Complicating this inability to settle was her problematic Creole identity; being white but speaking with a Caribbean accent, Rhys defied categorization, and hence her position within the imperial city was constantly unsettled.[1]

These dramatic upheavals deeply influenced Rhys's work, and writing became the outlet for her troubled experiences: "Oh the relief of words," she exclaims in her autobiography, "[a]lways a constant aching, no, an irritation, harsh, gritty, this feeling about England and the English" (*Smile* 164). Although it is not always obvious whether Rhys's protagonists share her Caribbean origins, it is clear that they are all culturally and geographically displaced from a colonial home.[2] They thus emerge as Homi Bhabha's "unhomely" subjects for whom "the borders between home and world become confused" (9). Such a liminal existence prevents these protagonists from ever being able to locate and inhabit a secure space of belonging within the imperial cities of both London and Paris.

For Rhys, exploring the uncanny nature of urban architecture becomes a key tool in articulating such deracination. The marginal spaces her characters inhabit are powerful catalysts for moments of estrangement and terror. Such moments can be read as manifestations of the uncanny as it is conceived in Sigmund Freud's famous 1919 essay on the topic: as that "realm of the frightening, of what evokes fear and dread" ("The Uncanny" 123). Although the uncanny is often associated with the ghost story or Gothic genre, it functions in Rhys's work as a feature of everyday life. During the uncanny moment, the stable boundary between private and public space is confused and problematized and secure notions of the self are threatened. Rather than being supernatural, the uncanny events in Rhys's novels can be understood as spatial and psychological symptoms of the deracinated modern urban condition, with which single, penniless women such as Sasha must contend.

Anthony Vidler's work on the uncanny aims to show how architectural space "reveals the deep structure of the uncanny in a more than analogical way" (ix). He

coins the "architectural uncanny" as a phrase that encapsulates the ways in which Freud's theory can be mapped onto the spaces of the modern city. As such, the architectural uncanny provides a strategy for "interpreting the relations between the psyche and the dwelling, the body and the house, the individual and the metropolis" (x). Interpreting the uncanniness of Rhys's architectural spaces in this way helps to fathom the intensely alienating nature of the city in her fiction, and also opens up important questions concerning home, belonging, and identity.

Focusing specifically on the hotel as it is represented in *Good Morning, Midnight*, this article sets out to explore the manifestation of the uncanny in the physical and psychological architecture of the building and in the architecture of the narrative itself. My approach builds on Andrew Thacker's development of a critical literary geography which seeks to "reverse the movement" of existing methods of reading space in literature "and understand how social spaces dialogically help fashion the literary *forms* of texts" (63). *Good Morning, Midnight* is shaped by frequent disruptions in temporal linearity, stylistic negotiations of memory, and distinct fragmented typography. Analyzing these striking formal properties in conjunction with the novel's thematic preoccupations helps to establish what Thacker terms the "textual space" of a literary work (63). As such, this paper aims to develop a more detailed and nuanced understanding of Rhys's literary innovations in the interwar period.

THE ARCHITECTURAL UNCANNY

According to Freud, the haunted house is "perhaps the most potent" example of the uncanny, as it carries the symbolic associations so often connected with the concept, namely "death, dead bodies, revenants, spirits and ghosts" ("The Uncanny" 148). Vidler similarly argues that the uncanny represents a "quintessential bourgeois kind of fear," borne out of "the contrast between a secure and homely interior and the fearful invasion of an alien presence" (4). However, as Freud goes on to show, such a defining image has its shortfalls, for "here the uncanny is too much mixed up with the gruesome and partly overlaid by it" ("The Uncanny" 148). Indeed, the fear and horror associated with the haunted house should not be seen as synonymous with the uncanny. Such a view overshadows the important fact that within the uncanny moment the material and mental integrity of the house itself is threatened. It also fails to account for how the uncanny operates beyond the space of the domestic home—in the spaces of modernity, such as the hotel—as well as in narratives that never stray into the realms of the supernatural; Rhys's novel is a case in point. Rather than simply a product of the ghostly or the fearsome, the uncanny is in fact generated by the disruption of familiar spatial and psychological boundaries: it is "that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar" ("The Uncanny" 124). Freud's definition draws attention to the curious slippage so crucial to understanding the uncanny—its ability to be something at once fearsome *and* familiar.

Showing how the uncanny is defined by apparently contradictory terms, Freud traces the etymological roots of the word. First, he notes how *unheimlich*, the German word from which "uncanny" is derived, is "clearly the opposite of *Heimlich*," which can be defined as "belonging to the house, not strange, familiar, tame, dear and intimate, homely" ("The Uncanny" 124, 126). It follows, then, that *unheimlich* pertains to all that is strange, unfamiliar, and unhomely. However, Freud points out that *heimlich* can also be defined as that which is "concealed, kept hidden, so that others do not get to know of it or about it and it is hidden from them" ("The Uncanny" 129). This element of secrecy, far from being homely, means that *heimlich* "becomes increasingly ambivalent, until it finally merges with its antonym *unheimlich*" ("The Uncanny" 134). The uncanny, then, "is actually nothing new or strange, but something that was long familiar to the psyche and was estranged from it only through being repressed" and thus emerges as "something that should have remained hidden and has come into the open" ("The Uncanny" 148). Proffering this linguistic history, Freud reveals how the uncanny is far from being a supernatural phenomenon and is, in fact, entrenched in the destabilization of traditional notions of home and architectural space.

The uncanny is therefore a salient feature of everyday life and a concept premised on unsettling important spatial and psychological binaries conventionally associated with, but not limited to, the domestic home: familiar/unfamiliar, interior/exterior, private/public. Although not explicitly stated, Freud demonstrates how the uncanny can function as a framework for reading the architectural spaces of modernity. Read in architectural terms, then, Freud's essay extends understandings of the uncanny beyond the concept's Gothic origins so that it can grasp the complexities of urban life as it is presented in Rhys's interwar oeuvre. As Vidler suggests, it "allows for a rewriting of [. . .] categories such as imitation (the double), repetition, the symbolic, the sublime," so that "[q]uestions of gender and subject might be linked to the continuing discourse of estrangement and the Other, in the social and political context of racial, ethnic, and minority exclusion" (12). This is particularly apt given the discourse of female, colonial deracination that is so central to *Good Morning, Midnight*.

However, additional attention must be drawn to the structural properties of Freud's essay, for these help suggest how the concept also lends itself to interpretations of Rhys's formal innovations. As several commentators have observed, the form of Freud's essay itself reveals the strange structural properties that are intrinsically bound up with its associated themes (Bernstein; Cixous; Kofman; Royle; Weber). Although Freud aims to define the uncanny, his essay becomes a tentative exploration continually shadowed by doubt. Even when he supposedly arrives at a point of stability, declaring that the uncanny is "something familiar [. . .] that has been repressed and then reappears," he then admits that "[n]ot everything that reminds us of repressed desires [. . .] is for that reason uncanny" ("The Uncanny" 152). Freud's inability to put his finger on the essential quality of the uncanny is uncanny in itself, and thus the essay's very form communicates the uneasy slippage of the term and the crucial blurring of boundaries it encapsulates.

Hélène Cixous began this line of thinking when she suggested that "Freud's text may strike us to be less a discourse than a strange theoretical novel. [. . .] The text proceeds as its own metaphor" (525–6). Building on Cixous's argument, Samuel Weber reads this "metaphor" as doubt itself, arguing that Freud's essay proceeds as "a struggle against doubt" (1107). He thus suggests that the essay's form structurally recreates the doubt generated by the destabilization of space and self at the level of theme. Weber concludes that exploring the uncanny in a literary text involves scrutinizing not only "the mere contents represented 'in' or 'by' texts" but also the "'formal,' textual structure itself" (1115). In short, the uncanny narrative "demands *reading*" (Bernstein 1112).

Approaching the uncanny in this way is highly illuminating given the historical context of Rhys's work. As Raymond Williams has famously argued, there are important connections to be made between the social and cultural developments in the modern city and those of narrative form in the modernist period. Whereas some writers responded to the new urban milieu by representing it as a "liberating" source of "vitality" and "mobility" (43), many mourned the loss of "the ballast of familiar life" (40), and so the image of "an individual lonely and isolated within the crowd" (40) became increasingly dominant in their work. Nowhere was this latter image clearer, Williams argues, than in the work of immigrant writers who were faced with the added pressure of negotiating the strange cultural and linguistic landscape surrounding them. Indeed, Williams argues that many of the "major innovators" of the modernist period were immigrants and the intense uncanniness of their urban experience found even greater demands for new forms and modes of expression:

> At the level of theme, this underlies, in an obvious way, the elements of strangeness and distance, indeed of alienation, which so regularly form part of the repertory. But the decisive aesthetic effect is at a deeper level. Liberated or breaking from their national or provincial cultures, placed in quite new relations to those other native visual traditions, [. . .] the [. . .] writers [. . .] of this phase found the only community available to them: a community of the medium; of their own practices. (45)

For these writers, language became the tool for establishing themselves and gaining some sort of purchase in a new and turbulent world. Using it as "a medium that could be shaped and reshaped" (46), they were thus able to directly weave the uncanny fragmentation of urban life into the very texture of their work.

As a colonial woman writing directly from the imperial city, Rhys was part of the community Williams discusses. Experimenting with her artistic medium was thus crucial to her articulation of uncanny urban experience. Indeed, Rhys was deeply aware of the malleable potential of the prose form of the novel and it was something she actively desired. As Diana Athill, the editor of Rhys's autobiography, notes:

> All her writing [Rhys] used to say, started out from something that had happened, and her first concern was to get it down as accurately as possible. But "I like shape very much"—and again, "a novel has to have a shape [. . .]." (n. pag.)

The dynamic interrelation of form and content in Rhys's work—whereby she represents the uncanny as both a narrative structure and a dominating literary theme—is what makes Rhys's representation of the architectural spaces of modernity so striking. Through close readings of the hotel space in *Good Morning, Midnight*, I will consider this interwoven relationship in order to position Rhys as one of the "major innovators" Williams describes, as well as an important commentator on the female urban condition.

THE HOTEL

The hotel is a key space of modernity as it embodies the confusion of the private and public spheres that is so crucial to the development of the modern city. As Walter Benjamin puts it, at the turn of the century, "[t]he street becomes room and the room becomes street" (406). Not quite as intimate as the domestic home and never quite as exposed as the street, the hotel exists as an in-between space. However, as Emma Short notes in her recent thesis on modernist representations of the hotel, it remains a relatively unexplored space in popular accounts of urban modernity (64). The hotel lobby as a localized space has received a degree of critical attention and its liminal quality is usually noted. However, the relationship the lobby has with the spaces beyond it, or the liminal status of these alternative spaces themselves is generally not considered.

In his well-known essay, "The Hotel Lobby," Siegfried Kracauer describes the lobby as a space where people "become detached from everyday life" (176). If, as Short suggests, we take Kracauer's use of the "everyday" to mean "the quotidian existence of the public and private spheres" (65), then we could interpret this as a comment on the liminal quality of the lobby. However, "detached" suggests a removal from the everyday, and as Kracauer goes on to argue, "a sojourn in a hotel offers neither a perspective on nor an escape from the everyday" (177). As he understands it, the lobby is less an in-between space and more "a mere gap" (176). Kracauer mistakenly overlooks the crucial blurring of boundaries the hotel engenders, thus failing to see it as a potent site for exploring questions of home, belonging, and identity.

In contrast, Douglas Tallack's critical reflection on the lobby draws attention to the way in which the space parallels the street: "In the heterogeneous crowd of the lobby—as in that of the city—the familiar and unfamiliar, the homely and unhomely mixture which Freud calls the uncanny is just about discernible" (4–5). On the one hand, the lobby is a space in which numerous guests may encounter one another, thus confirming Richard Sennett's definition of the city as a place "in which strangers are likely to meet" (39). Yet on the other, it remains considerably smaller and less exposed than the city streets, leading Tallack to define it as

a space that is at once "semi-private and semi-public" (9). However, like Kracauer, Tallack is mistaken when he describes the relationship between the lobby and the spaces beyond it. The lobby, he argues, is "a semi-public gateway to *private places*": to the "*private realm* of 'upstairs'"; "bedrooms, the site of exaggeratedly *private* acts" (6; emphasis added). The hotel room certainly offers more privacy than the semi-public, semi-private lobby, but it is never entirely private, and is certainly not as personal or intimate as the bedroom of the domestic home.

Despite its liminality, then, the hotel does not transcend the everyday, but offers a new perspective on it. As Short explains, "[t]he hotel is uniquely positioned to provide insight into both spheres [the public and the private]" and thus opens up "discussions of marginality, alienation and liberation by providing a necessary alternative to these spaces, which are so often presented as an unshifting binary" (65). Indeed, Rhys's hotel rooms connect the personal history of her colonial protagonists to the wider political experience of life lived in the imperial city, and by negotiating the uncanniness of these spaces, I aim to amplify such connections.

From the very opening section of *Good Morning, Midnight*, the hotel room is presented as an uncanny space as Sasha enters one of the many hotel rooms that have come to define her marginal life. The scene before her is relayed with a sense of tawdry impersonality characteristic of Rhys's interwar oeuvre:

> "Quite like old times," the room says. "Yes? No?"
>
>   There are two beds, a big one for madame and a smaller one on the opposite side for monsieur. The wash-basin is shut off by a curtain. It is a large room, the smell of cheap hotels faint, almost imperceptible. The street outside is narrow, cobble-stoned, going sharply uphill and ending in a flight of steps. What they call an impasse.
>
>   I have been here five days. I have decided on a place to eat in at midday, a place to eat in at night, a place to have my drink in after dinner. I have arranged my little life. (*GMM* 9)

Sarah Kofman argues that "[i]n order to create an effect of uncanniness right from the beginning [of a narrative], this beginning must be striking, original and gripping" (137). This is indeed the case in Rhys's novel; the opening line is instantly arresting. Rhys's use of prosopopoeia confuses the boundary between the animate and inanimate—a device that, Freud points out, immediately invites the uncanny moment ("The Uncanny" 135). Initially, the reader is uncertain as to whether Rhys is attempting to suspend our disbelief by presenting us with a room that does really speak—after all, it is marked as direct speech—or if this is in fact some sort of psychological projection. Although deciding which is the case is never an easy task in Rhys's fiction, attempting to do so is nonetheless important, for it determines whether the event can be called uncanny or not.

Weber stresses the importance of "the role of the narrator" in uncanny fiction; although it is "totally neglected by Freud," it "must be interrogated, since this provides the context for that movement of repetition and splitting which is constitutive for the uncanny" (1123). Reaching the third paragraph of the opening section of *Good Morning, Midnight*, it becomes clear that the novel attests

to a form of psychological realism. The first person voice belongs to Sasha, who inhabits a naturalistic, albeit highly interiorized, world. In retrospect then, the prosopopeia in the opening line becomes an uncanny moment of paranoid fantasy and psychological projection. Sasha is acutely aware of her deracinated condition and on entering a space that she knows has come to define her life, she projects her personal insecurities onto the room itself so that it uncannily vocalizes her own thoughts.

Sasha's lack of reaction to this strange event is characteristic of the façade of sanity and detached indifference she at times manages to uphold. She later admits that she has been "[s]aved, rescued, fished-up, half-drowned, out of the deep, dark river, dry clothes, hair shampooed and set" (*GMM* 10) and that she is "a bit of an automaton, but sane, surely—dry, cold and sane" (*GMM* 10). Such protestation clearly shows that Sasha refuses to admit how close she remains to the brink of insanity, yet she does recognize that her breakdown has left her a hollow shell of her former self. Her identity is here reduced to a number of discrete, dehumanized images that are presented stylistically as a rigid, structured list. Freud argues that "manifestations of insanity" can become uncanny as they "arouse in the onlooker vague notions of automatic—mechanical—processes that may lie hidden behind the familiar images of a living person" ("The Uncanny" 135). Whereas Sasha wants to believe that her automaton tendencies are evidence of sane control, they in fact expose the damage done: although she is susceptible to moments of shock and fear, more often than not she is simply numbed to her surrounding environment and situations. Sasha thus embodies the uncanniness of the automaton, something mirrored in the controlled and economized sentences that orient the room in the opening passage. The description is strangely detached and almost objective—it is Sasha's voice but is strongly, and unsettlingly, indifferent.

In a rare essay dedicated to the hotel room, van Lennep discusses the common reaction toward its being a space both reminiscent of, and different from, the domestic bedroom: "My hotel room is my room; for I shall pay for it, perhaps I have even reserved it in advance, but at the same time how little is this room *my* room" (212). He argues that the particularities of the hotel experience—the bell boy, the luggage delivery, the homogenous furniture—are always reminders that "only a few hours before my room was someone else's room" (212). The hotel room unsettles the occupant by confusing secure notions of personalization, possession, and intimacy and calling into question any claims for authentic ownership. It is simply a space "*for anybody* who can pay for a night's rest, and thus it is for no one" (212). Although the process of "inhabiting" the room does eventually take place, the initial entry into the space is always characterized by an uncanny dilemma of not belonging (212). In light of this normative reaction, Sasha's initial response to the stark impersonality of the room is unusual. Although she is acutely aware of the standardized materiality of her room, it is not a source of anxiety. In fact, in appropriating the generalizing French nouns "madame" and "monsieur" (*GMM* 9), she provides a blasé, and seemingly resigned, view of what is in fact a starkly

gendered space: madame's bed is bigger than monsieur's, to ensure that he may "visit" her whenever he pleases.

Rhys's attention to smell is also of importance as it demonstrates the profound sensory uncanniness of the space.[3] A room's smell, van Lennep argues, has a transformative power, as it "can give us the feeling of familiarity or of alienation" (210). In terms of the hotel, van Lennep suggests that smell is uncanny in its very absence — there is "no smell" as "[t]he room has been made up, the traces carefully removed, the room is fresh" (212). Although pleasant, this absence is unsettling, as it functions as an immediate reminder of the impersonal transience of the space. Yet for the cheap and seedy rooms inhabited by Sasha, the opposite is true: the musty smell of impersonal neglect becomes indicative of her deracinated condition. For Sasha, who is already indifferent and resigned to her surroundings — or at least pretends to be so — the room's stale smell reveals the paradoxical condition of her existence. Despite being "faint, almost imperceptible" (*GMM* 9), it is easily detectable and recognizable because these "cheap hotels" (*GMM* 9) are her regular haunt. Although unhomely, the smell is, for her, familiar and normalizing.

THE IMPASSE

Importantly, Sasha's perceptions of the hotel interior are always linked to the street outside. Her overview of the hotel room soon considers the architectural figuration of the "impasse" (*GMM* 9) outside her window.[4] Intruding upon her consciousness in this way, this feature of Parisian street architecture reveals not only the claustrophobia of the room, but of Sasha's life itself. Marginalized by her female identity, lack of economic independence, failed sexual relations, and severed connection from her ambiguous cultural origins, Sasha is denied the comfort and security of a domestic home. She is instead forced to inhabit this small, mean room that is in stifling proximity to the street outside. Her life is thus rendered through a continual state of negation; as she puts it, "I have no pride — no pride, no name, no face, no country. I don't belong anywhere. Too sad, too sad" (*GMM* 38). The architectural structure of the impasse figuratively embodies Sasha's social and economic position within society. The street leads to an enclosed and restricted space that is neither fully interior nor exterior; it either forces a dead-end retreat or else an uphill struggle by foot.

Likewise, Sasha has nowhere to belong and nowhere to go; she simply wanders in a perpetual loop from hotel room to street and street to hotel room. Contemplating this continual repetition and unavoidable return, she is acutely aware of the downtrodden nature of her daily routine:

> Eat. Drink. Walk. March. Back to the hotel. To the Hotel of Arrival, the Hotel of Departure, the Hotel of the Future, the Hotel of Martinique and the Universe. . . . Back to the hotel without a name in the street without a name. You press the button and the door opens. This is the Hotel Without-a-Name in the Street Without-a-Name, and the clients have no names, no faces. You go up the stairs. Always the same stairs, always the same room. (*GMM* 120)

Yet crucially, Sasha strongly desires and actively seeks the anonymity the hotel offers. Following her failed marriage and the death of her child, she is desperate to suppress the painful memories of her past. Recalling her lodgings back in London, Sasha appears to embrace the death-like imagery of the room: "Two-pound-ten every Tuesday and a room off the Gray's Inn Road. Saved, rescued and with my place to hide in—what more did I want? I crept in and hid. The lid of the coffin shut down with a bang" (*GMM* 37). As is so characteristic of Sasha, she here conflates contradictory metaphors of rescue and retreat with death and entombment. Although she desires the safety and enclosure of the private room, it is nevertheless figured as a dangerously annihilating space. Having now returned to Paris to seek respite from these competing tensions, Sasha stakes the hotel as a space in which to forget, thus becoming complicit in the urban system that both defines and restricts her to the marginal spaces of the city.

The sharp staccato verbs that open the passage above mimic the rigid structure of Sasha's life. Although she is a rootless wanderer, her path through the city is sharply defined by her attempt to forget; to "have a programme, not to leave anything to chance—no gaps. No trailing around aimlessly with cheap gramophone records starting in your head, no 'Here this happened, here that happened'" (*GMM* 14). The short, decisive sentences that describe Sasha's deliberate movements from street to room contrast with the longer, less structured sentences that communicate the blurred anonymity of the hotel itself. The hotels all lack personal or specific names and thus become indistinct and interchangeable. As the noun phrases spiral into repeated negation, the hotel becomes characterized only by its impersonal and repetitive uniformity, where people simply take on nameless, faceless identities.

According to Kracauer, the hotel lobby is "a negative church" where "people appear [. . .] as *guests*" (175). Instead of creating a community, it simply "accommodates all who go there to meet no one" and in doing so, "has no function other than to encompass them" (175–6). Kracauer's argument is certainly convincing in its alignment with Sasha's description of entering the hotel. Just as she observes that "the clients have no names, no faces" (*GMM* 120), he argues that the inhabitants of the lobby "disappear behind the peripheral equality of social masks," thus morphing into "ungraspable flat ghosts" (Kracauer 181, 183). This allusion to the ghostly figure recalls Sasha's description of the "commis voyageur" (*GMM* 28) who occupies the room next to hers; "thin as a skeleton" and "always wearing a dressing-gown," he is continually "[h]anging around [. . .] like the ghost of the landing" (*GMM* 13). At this point, however, applying Kracauer's theory to Rhys's fiction becomes increasingly problematic, for her representation of the space complicates and challenges his otherwise persuasive account.

Kracauer argues that in the lobby, people simply "drip down into the vacuum" and so all social relations are dissolved into "a mere gap" (176). Yet despite resembling one of Kracauer's ghosts, the commis is forever intruding upon Sasha's privacy and is far from a democratic equal. At one point in the novel, when Sasha walks past the commis, he tries to block her way. Although she continues past him

defiantly and "slam[s] the door of [her] room" (*GMM* 30), she remains vulnerable
to his influence. As Short points out, "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" always pose a threat to the inhabitant (66). Indeed, no sooner has Sasha
entered the supposed retreat of her room than "there is a knock on the door. It's
the commis [. . .]. I put my hand on his chest, push him backwards and bang
the door. It's quite easy. It's like pushing a paper man, a ghost, something that
doesn't exist" (*GMM* 30–1). Although on a physical level, Sasha is apparently the
dominant force, psychologically, the commis instills fear and repulsion in her,
becoming the symbol of patriarchal power:

> there I am in this dim room with the bed for monsieur and the narrow street outside
> (what they call an impasse), thinking of that white dressing-gown, like a priest's
> robes. Frightened as hell. A nightmare feeling. . . . (*GMM* 31)

Sasha may well be shielded physically from the commis's wandering gaze, yet
the thin walls are no match for his forceful presence. Kracauer's emphasis on the
democratizing power of the hotel is therefore undercut in Rhys's novel, for the
commis impinges on Sasha's consciousness, constantly revealing her subordinated
position as a single woman, vulnerable to the opposite sex. Consequently, the
hotel room fails to be a safe, enclosed space for Sasha and instead emerges as an
uncanny space of fragility and fear.

THE NON-PLACE

In his discussion of the hotel lobby as a voided space, Kracauer's essay strikingly
anticipates anthropologist Marc Augé's more recent theory of "non-place." Non-
places, according to Augé, are defined as the "transit points" and "temporary
abodes" in the modern city that "are there to be passed through" (78). Thus,
the "air, rail and motorway routes [. . .], the airports and railway stations, *hotel
chains*, leisure parks, large retail outlets" are all examples of this non-place as they
are united in their transience and vapidity (emphasis added). Although Augé
is responding to a contemporary moment far later than Rhys's interwar soci-
ety—that of late capitalism and what he terms "supermodernity"—his theory is
nevertheless highly applicable, and indeed useful, for thinking about the ways in
which the hotel is navigated (30).

According to Augé, the non-place "deals only with individuals (customers,
passengers, users, listeners)" who are "identified (name, occupation, place of birth,
address) only on entering or leaving" (111). For this reason, "the user of the non-
place is in contractual relations with it (or with the powers that govern it)" and
this is an important relationship if the anonymity of the non-place is to be realized
(101). As Augé explains, "the passenger accedes to his anonymity only when he
has given proof of his identity; when he has countersigned [. . .] the contract" (102).
In terms of the hotel, this "contract" comes in the form of the check-in desk and

its associated formalities—a structural element of the lobby that was developed in the early decades of the twentieth century.

In his critical response to Kracauer's theory of the lobby, Marc Katz discusses these developments in the hotel check-in system:

> But of course buildings never entirely predetermine the scenarios they house. As de Certeau reminds us in his essay on the flaneur [. . .], even walking is itself a process of spatial appropriation, or "displacement." Merely crossing the threshold of the hotel carries with it, intentionally or not, ways of resisting the hotel's manufactured sense regime. (140)

Having realized the inevitable dangers of un-policed space, the authorities put in place a system that saw the twentieth-century hotel "transformed into a huge, private information-gathering apparatus" (Katz 140). The check-in desk appeared as "a quasi city gate" that "managed interior pedestrian traffic and served as a kind of policing unit under legal obligation to check for unregistered aliens" (Katz 140). This structural redesign of the hotel lobby thus increased the space's uncanny potential.

This is precisely the function of the hotel patron's "bureau" (*GMM* 31) in *Good Morning, Midnight*, for Sasha is repeatedly asked to confirm her identity by completing the check-in form:

> When I get downstairs the patron tells me that he wants to see my passport. I haven't put the number of the passport on the fiche, he says. [. . .] What's wrong with the fiche? I've filled it up all right, haven't I? Name So-and-so, nationality So-and-so. . . . Nationality—that's what has puzzled him. I ought to have put nationality by marriage. (*GMM* 13)

However, Sasha's ambiguous nationality is further complicated by her marriage to and separation from her Dutch husband, Enno. Floating in a state of cultural and national liminality, Sasha is unable to confirm her identity. She avoids signing the "fiche" by trying to ignore the patron's continued attempts to pin her down: "'Attends, attends, ma fille. Tu vas voir si je n'ose pas.' [. . .] His voice pursues me out into the street. 'Attends, ma fille, attends. . . .'" (*GMM* 31). Flouting the contractual relations of the non-place and ignoring the patron offers Sasha a brief moment of resistance, but this is undercut by the ensuing reminder of her ambiguous cultural status. Consequently, she is unable to achieve a state of recognized and legitimate citizenship and therefore cannot relinquish a proven identity and accede to a state of anonymity. The temporary hotel identity that Sasha needs and desperately wants in order to suppress both the awareness of her present deracinated condition, and the painful memories of her past, is utterly denied.

In terms of Augé's theory, the hotel becomes a space free from social pressures, for the non-place "creates neither singular identity nor relations; only solitude, and similitude" (103). In stressing this element of social equality, Augé's theory of non-place possesses an affinity with Kracauer's conception of the hotel lobby. However, Augé takes his argument one step further by making the forceful

claim that in the non-place "[t]here is no room [. . .] for history" (103). Providing an escape from the weight of the past, the hotel-as-non-place thus becomes an emancipatory space; as Augé explains, "the relative anonymity that goes with this temporary [non-place] identity can even be felt as liberation" (101). Such a quality is also noted by van Lennep, whose essay becomes closely aligned with Augé's theory when it asserts that the hotel room is "free from all historic meaning":

> 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. (213)

Theorized in these terms, the hotel room becomes a key site for forgetting, because its non-place status renders the guest an anonymous, arbitrary figure who is free from social inequality and any responsibility for the past.

However, in its representation of memory, Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight* problematizes Augé's theory of non-place by showing that the hotel room is anything but a safe retreat from history. In a series of narrative flashbacks, the reader finds out that before her breakdown, Sasha spent her married—supposedly domestic—life journeying through a series of hotel rooms in London, Amsterdam, Brussels, and Paris (*GMM* 95–121). For a character who has thus spent her entire adult life moving in and out of hotel rooms, forgetting becomes an impossible task.

THE PALIMPSEST

As *Good Morning, Midnight* progresses, Sasha's memory increasingly becomes the driving force of the narrative, as traumatic events from her past punctuate the surface of the narrative. Whereas Sasha consciously recalls some of these memories, others irrupt unconsciously, manifesting themselves structurally as instances of narrative flashback. It is useful to think of these two forms of remembering as examples of voluntary and involuntary memory—two concepts powerfully evoked by Marcel Proust in his momentous *Remembrance of Things Past* (1913–27). Proust equates voluntary memory with conscious recollection—it consists of "facts" that are recalled by the "the memory of the intellect" (1: 47). As a result, these sorts of memories "preserve nothing of the past itself" (1: 47). In strong contrast, involuntary memory is triggered by simple moments of everyday life—a smell, a sound, a sight, or space—and is experienced as a direct and deeply vivid reliving of a past event. As such, involuntary memories allow the mind to "immobilise" in "a moment brief as a flash of lightning", "a fragment of time in the pure state" (3: 905). These two forms of remembering are evident throughout *Good Morning, Midnight*, whenever Sasha either recalls or directly relives events from her past.

For Proust, involuntary memory is always a pleasurable experience—he describes it as consisting of "marvellous," "diverse happy impressions" that are the source of "immediate enjoyment" and "happiness" (3: 904–5). In sharp

contrast, the process of involuntary memory is deeply painful for Sasha as it is always inextricably linked to the traumatic events of her past, such as her husband's desertion and her baby son's death. Even when she relives a comparatively stable period in her life, when she is working as a receptionist in a Parisian clothes shop, allocating customers a "vendeuse" (*GMM* 16) on the shop-floor, Sasha's involuntary memory ends with her losing her job and being turned back out onto the street (*GMM* 26).

According to Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), returning to past trauma is a predisposition in all human beings. If, he argues, we consider "the life-histories of men and women, we shall find courage to assume that there really does exist in the mind a compulsion to repeat" (25). The problem associated with this repetition compulsion is not the repetition in itself, but rather the method by which the repetition occurs—in effect, as voluntary or involuntary memory. Referring to psychoanalytic practice, Freud explains that trauma patients tend to "repeat the repressed material as a contemporary experience instead of, as the physician would prefer to see, remembering it as something belonging to the past" (*Beyond* 18–9). This form of traumatic remembering can be understood as the working of involuntary memory—albeit deeply negative as opposed to pleasurable.

One example of this is the neurotic dream which has "the characteristic of repeatedly bringing the patient back into the situation of his accident" (*Beyond* 10). Although the same experience is equally possible in a conscious state, this is a useful example for it provides a nice link to Freud's discussion of repetition in "The Uncanny". He argues that "constant recurrence" ("The Uncanny" 142) is a potent example of something that invokes the uncanny feeling through recalling "the helplessness we experience in certain dream-states" ("The Uncanny" 143–4). The repetition involved in the simple recollection of past events is not uncanny, but the process of repetition compulsion—via involuntary memory—is. The inevitable and inescapable rupture of past trauma robs patients of control and forces them to helplessly and directly relive the past.

This formulation proves to be crucial, for it helps us to distinguish between Rhys's depiction of Sasha's voluntary acts of recollection and the more uncanny experience of involuntary memory and narrative flashback. Despite Sasha's insistent attempts to forget, she can never entirely resist recalling events and details from her past. Indeed, much of the time spent in her hotel room is filled with this type of conscious recollection and these voluntary memories are always narrated in the past tense, as is clear in the example below:

> I can't sleep. Rolling from side to side. . . .
>
> Was it in 1923 or 1924 that we lived round the corner, in the Rue Victor-Cousin, and Enno bought me that Cossack cap and the imitation astrakhan coat? [. . .]
>
> Was it in 1926 or 1927?
>
> I put the light on. The bottle of Evian on the bedtable, the tube of luminal, the two books, the clock ticking on the ledge, the red curtains. (*GMM* 11)

Drugged by luminal and alcohol, Sasha here struggles for clarity of thought. The question-form her thoughts take and the incongruity of the dates expose her uncertainty and her inability to remember facts about this period of her life. However, she is successful in maintaining a degree of distance from this uncertain past, narrating her incoherent memories in the past tense. This "aloofness" is what Freud argues enables the trauma sufferer to "recognize that what appears to be reality is in fact only a reflection of a forgotten past" (*Beyond* 19). Although lying in the darkness of the hotel room prompts Sasha's memory, her past remains sharply defined from the reality of her present. This is evident in the contrast between the tentative questioning that follows the ellipses and her precise documentation of the material objects that she perceives once she stops remembering and switches the light on. The tangibility of the objects in the room anchors her to a physical present which ultimately—in a Proustian sense—"preserves nothing of the past" (1: 47).

However, as these memories accumulate, the narrative becomes less inclined to remain in Sasha's present. She is plunged directly back into the past through a series of disorientating flashbacks—or involuntary memories—in which she is forced to witness events again in painful detail. During these moments of narrative analepsis, Rhys narrates the past in the present tense, displacing both the reader and Sasha to a point in time and space prior to that of the primary diegesis of the novel. This process can be understood as the uneasy slippage from voluntary to involuntary memory, as Sasha repeatedly fails to maintain the state of "aloofness" needed to distance herself from the past and resist reliving its traumas.

In one such instance, Sasha returns to her hotel room where she begins to indulge in a voluntary memory:

> I get up into the room. I bolt the door. I lie down on the bed with my face in the pillow. Now I can rest before I go out again. What do I care about anything when I can lie back on the bed and pull the past over me like a blanket? Back, back, back. . . .
>
> . . . I had just come up the stairs and I had to go down them again.
>
> "No, no, your room's not ready. You must come back, come back. Come back between five and six." "What time is it now?" "It's half-past ten."
>
> [. . .] I stop a taxi. The man looks at me and hesitates. Perhaps he is afraid I may have my baby in his nice new taxi. What a thing to happen! (*GMM* 49)

The use of ellipses and the line break here are typical of Rhys's fragmented typography that works to create, at a formal level, a sense of spatio-temporal disjunction and disorientation. For a moment, the reader is left suspended in a liminal space, unsure of the coordinates of the present moment. The opening sentence of the following section is narrated in the past perfect tense, indicating that Sasha is still voluntarily recalling this event—a misleading stylistic feature, given that the preceding line break suggests the beginning of a flashback. The actual beginning of the flashback, however, appears in the next sentence, when the direct speech and the subsequent switch to a present-tense narrative voice signals a spatio-temporal jump. As the memory continues, it becomes clear that Sasha is

reliving the traumatic events of childbirth—we later find out that she loses the baby. At the level of character, then, Sasha's memory becomes uncanny as it occurs through the process of repetition compulsion and her repressed past comes back to haunt her directly in an involuntary memory. At the level of narrative form, Rhys stylistically represents this rupture of memory through disorientating tense switches that are never quite aligned with the fragmented typography, thereby creating an uncanny slippage into narrative flashback.

As both Sasha's memory and the narrative continue to unravel in this way, each become increasingly disorientating and confusing. For Proust, involuntary memories should only ever be fleeting, for the "present scene" is always more dominant. He explains that if this wasn't the case, then the individual may lose consciousness, for "so complete are these resurrections of the past during the second that they last" that they make us see, breathe and feel like we are directly in that moment; thus "our whole self" is forced "to believe that it is surrounded by these places or at least waver doubtfully between them and the places where we now are" (3: 908). In terms of Sasha's experience of involuntary memory, however, Rhys depicts this threat as all too real. Due to her mental fragility and ambivalent vacillation between remembering and forgetting, she possesses a looser grip on the reality of the "present scene." She is thus highly susceptible to surrendering to the weight of the past and allowing her involuntary memories to overcome her. Furthermore, this continual toggling makes it hard for the reader to orientate the spatio-temporal coordinates of the narrative voice, thus losing touch—in a similar way to Sasha—with the primary diegesis of the novel. Structurally, then, this recurring narrative analepsis creates an uncanny reading experience that recreates for the reader the intense feelings of disorientation and loss of volition Sasha herself experiences.

Rhys's representation of the relationship between the hotel room and memory thus functions as a direct challenge to the celebratory accounts of this kind of social space in the work of Kracauer, Augé, and van Lennep. The hotel room may well be a temporary space to be journeyed through, but for Sasha it is also a space of continued return. For this reason, it can never be called "a space which cannot be defined as relational, historical, or concerned with identity" (Augé 77–8). Sasha's socio-economic position, her fragile identity, and her entire history is thoroughly conditioned by and relative to the hotel room and the uncanniness it manifests. In a particularly revealing moment in the novel, this becomes explicit as the room morphs into a palimpsest containing her entire life:

> This damned room—it's saturated with the past. . . . It's all the rooms I've ever slept in, all the streets I've ever walked in. Now the whole thing moves in an ordered, undulating procession past my eyes. Rooms, streets, streets, rooms. (*GMM* 91)

Andreas Huyssen defines the palimpsest as "an urban imaginary" that "in its temporal reach may well put different things in one place: memories of what was there before, imagined alternatives to what there is" (7). The formation of the palimpsest is both a physical and mental process in which "[t]he strong marks of

present space merge in the imaginary with traces of the past" (Huyssen 7). Not only can this process be triggered by the "visible markers of built space"—in Sasha's case the impersonal furniture of the hotel room and the impasse outside—it can also be formed by the "images and memories repressed and ruptured by traumatic events"—as is clear in Sasha's compulsive remembering (Huyssen 52). For Sasha, then, it is both the physical and psychological uncanniness of the hotel room that transforms it into an urban imaginary pregnant with her spatial and psychological past.

CONCLUSION

In his discussion of memory, history, and forgetting, Paul Ricoeur claims that the city streets offer a far richer "text" to be read than the isolated room or building (151). Although he is right to stress this imbalance, the complex and profoundly symbolic nature of hotel room in *Good Morning, Midnight* reveals how modern interior spaces, such as the hotel, nevertheless give rise to a significant amount of "sedimented history" and "complex passions" (Ricoeur 151). At the level of discourse, the hotel space in the novel ultimately reveals the misleading hyperbole of spatial theorists such as Kracauer and Augé. Although their persuasive accounts have much to be praised, attending to the ways in which they overlook the architectural uncanniness of the hotel helps to reassert the specific qualities that make it such a crucial space of modernity.

By foregrounding the hotel room as an uncanny space that is always connected to the outside world and is constantly shifting between the real and imaginary spaces of the present and the past, and through her control of narrative shifts of interior time in her protagonist, Rhys shows that the hotel room can never assume the role of a static, anonymous container where social and historical responsibility is transcended. The hotel thus becomes a socio-spatial site that opens up important questions about the modern urban condition that women like Sasha were forced to contend with in the interwar period. By cleverly manipulating the form of her writing to communicate something of the physical and mental experiences of the hotel space, Rhys creates a narrative architecture that constructs a reading experience just as uncanny as the spaces being read—material evidence of her innovations as a twentieth-century urban writer.

Notes

Previous versions of various sections of this paper were presented at the "Architecture & Literature: Forms of Memory" symposium at the University of Nottingham (16 October 2013).

1.   See Angier for a comprehensive biographical account of Rhys's life. See also Rhys's unfinished autobiography for first-hand accounts of some of these biographical events (*Smile*).

2.   See Johnson for an overview of the subtle moments in *Good Morning, Midnight* that point to Sasha's Caribbean past.

3. Interestingly, in one of Freud's anecdotes explaining the uncanny feeling, he recounts a story of a married couple who move into a furnished flat. Every evening, when it gets dark, they experience strange ghostly occurrences that are accompanied by "an unbearable and highly characteristic smell" ("The Uncanny" 151).

4. For an enlightening discussion of the impasse in Rhys's work, see Bowlby (34–58) and GoGwilt ("The Interior"; *Passage* 97–126).

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