HISTORY AND STORYTELLING IN A LIBIDINAL MODE:

The Space of the Hotel in Postmodern Fiction

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ABSTRACT

From Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* to Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote* and Franz Kafka's *The Castle*, the inn has served as an important setting in world literature. Following this literary lineage, this thesis attempts to locate the space of the hotel in postmodern literature. By exploring the short works of Julio Cortázar’s “La puerta condenada” and Jorge Luis Borges’ “Agosto 25, 1983” and the novels of Murakami Haruki’s *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* and D. M. Thomas’ *The White Hotel*, I pursue two main questions: first, following Foucault’s enigmatic observations on the relationship between time and space to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, I ask why in modernity generally and postmodernity more specifically are historical problems dealt with in spatial terms? Secondly, how do literary constructions of the hotel participate in this phenomenon, and above all, what does the space of the hotel foreclose?

I show how the hotels of postmodern fiction illustrate “history in a libidinal mode,” a concept I use to describe the imminently postmodern understanding of history that reflects radical twentieth-century developments in psychoanalysis and physics by privileging the comingling of energy and drives over linear chronology. In Freud's view of the unconscious mind, repressed elements are constantly reemerging. Similarly in Einstein’s principle of mass-energy equivalence, no object is ever lost or destroyed; it just changes form. Put together, these theorems destabilized the paradigm of chronological time. As such, history no longer unfolds along a line towards a trajectory; it is more like an enclosed system where energies are always recirculating and assuming new forms. The spaces of the hotel in postmodern fiction are literary constructions designed to accommodate this new “architecture” of both thought and being.

Using critic Tzvetan Todorov’s classification of literary genres, I deploy his descriptions of the “fantastic,” “marvelous,” and “uncanny” to describe the mechanics of space in each hotel. Put simply, all the hotels are peculiar—they are places where strange things happen, where time seems to follow different rules. The short stories of Cortázar and Borges present the hotel as a familiar place but through a series of strange events it becomes a fantastic space. The fantastic is never resolved, and so the hotel is laid out as a space where time seems to wander, but the mechanics of its movement remain undefined.

Both of the novels, however, are invested in producing spatial depictions of libidinal history that map out the relationship between the individual and the larger society he or she occupies by applying the basic structure and drives of the psychoanalytic mind to link the individual to his or her socio-historical context. Murakami’s *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* posits what the psychoanalytic structure of the mind looks like when applied to the real world and uses the hotel to represent a model for the collective unconscious. The protagonist of D. M. Thomas’ *The White Hotel* produces a poem set at a white hotel while undertaking analysis with a fictionalized Sigmund Freud. Her white hotel is a microcosm of interwar Europe and hysterically anticipates the Holocaust, which effectively renders an uncanny view of the future. The application and expansion of classical Freudian psychoanalytic theory to socio-historical concerns allows for a theorization of confronting and possibly even healing historical trauma (rooted in both cases in the Second World War). In each of these works, the authors experiment with the structure of the hotel to define the mechanics of what libidinal history, but perhaps more importantly, to provide a model for how we might learn to cope with living history in a libidinal mode.
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Carly Kaloustian received her Master of Arts in Comparative Literature from Cornell University in August 2012. While at Cornell, she taught a course on literary politics in the context of the Nobel Prize and World Literature and also worked at the Writing Walk-In Service, a tutoring center on campus. Before coming to Cornell, she studied English and Spanish literatures at the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor where she wrote an honor's thesis on *National Geographic* and U. S. colonialism and then completed a Fulbright/Austrian-American Educational Commission English Teaching Assistantship in Graz, Austria. A native of Metro-Detroit, Carly will be moving to Mainz, Germany, where she will teach English and begin studies in Psychology.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**Introduction:** Checking into the Hotel of Postmodern Fiction  
1 – 13

**Chapter 1**  The Unsettling Hotel: The Fantastic in Julio Cortázár’s “La puerta condenada”  
and Jorge Luis Borges’ “Agosto 25, 1983”  
14 – 42

**Chapter 2**  A Detective Story of the Japanese Mind: The Hotel as Collective Unconscious  
in Murakami Haruki’s *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*  
43 – 80

**Chapter 3**  Mapping the Social World onto Freudian Psychoanalysis:  
D. M. Thomas’ *The White Hotel*  
81 – 112

**Towards a Conclusion:** Checking out of the Hotel  
113 – 122

**Bibliography**  
123 – 131
Introduction

Checking into the Hotel of Postmodern Fiction

The great obsession of the nineteenth century was, as we know, history: with its themes of development and of suspension, of crisis and cycle, themes of the ever-accumulating past, with its great preponderance of dead men and the menacing glaciation of the world... The present epoch [twentieth century] will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity, we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed... Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” (22)

In Foucault’s observations in the introduction to “Of Other Spaces,” (1986) he posits a set of apparent oppositions between the ages: at the crux of the nineteenth century, “history” stood as the dominating question, but at the center of the twentieth, however, lies the issue of “space.” As it would appear, the former is a question of chronology, the latter of geography and spatiality. The “obsession” of “history” during the nineteenth century is understood by Foucault as history in a chronological dialectical mode. Within the chronological progression of the thesis of “development” and the antithesis of “suspension” comes the push of progression towards a resolution in synthesis. History, then, passes through a set of expected stages. In this mode, history is predictable because the model is repetitive: it cycles through periods of crisis and resolution. And since the “chronology” of history follows a foreseeable pattern, what begins is also something that can be concluded. There should be an end of the road, an end of a story.

As Foucault argues though, the paradigm of chronological “history” becomes less central in the transition from nineteenth- to twentieth-century thinking—the moment where we now focus our attention. Instead, the concerns of the twentieth-century “epoch of space” hinge upon issues
like “juxtaposition,” of placing things next to one another, of the “near” and the “far,” of distance and proximity. The so-called “spatial turn” in intellectual and philosophical circles, which gained traction in the 1970s\(^1\), is a consequence of a shift in the zeitgeist from the \textit{zeit} (time) towards the \textit{geist} (the spirit which gives shape and space to time). Why is it now, during the twentieth century of all times, all about space? What is it about the modern era that so specifically relies upon these spatial concepts?

Chronology, chronicle. The “chronicle of history” is to write the story, narrative, or the account of history, at the heart of which is the ancient Greek for time, \textit{kronos}. To write a history is to tell the story of time's progression, of the events which unfold, one after the next. To consider history is to necessarily think of this idea of chronology. We might also follow the suggestion of “histoire.” The French “histoire” (and Spanish \textit{historia}) carry a double valence of meaning that also exists deep within the etymology of its English equivalent, but has been lost in colloquial usage. “Histoire” implies both the traditional sense of the account of the past through chronological “history,” but also the idea of narrative, of story, and storytelling. In French as in Spanish, both meanings are expressed with the same signifier. If we then phrase Foucault’s observations in light of this occulted meaning, history, storytelling, and literature itself are all revealed as being inescapably inflected with this notion of chronological time.

If we look to literature with respect to these general observations on the state of each century, it comes as no surprise, then, that realism reigned as the formal paradigm of the nineteenth

\footnote{Jo Guldi summarizes the spatial turn in the humanities in a short article: “What is the Spatial Turn?” According to Guldi, from the 1840s, the issue of land reform gripped much of Europe and scholars in the mid to late nineteenth century searched for a conceptual vocabulary to depict “spatial experience and its artificial manipulation.” Early twentieth-century interest in ethnography and ethnology attempted to describe different worldviews and treatments of space. But it was not until the 1970s with the work of French theorists Foucault, LeFevre, de Certeau and others who “emphasized power relations implicit in landscape” that the so-called “spatial turn” took place and was able to provide the theoretical language for discussing the intersection of space, power, and history. From \textit{Spatial Humanities}, online, n.p. 12 July 2012 <http://spatial.scholarslab.org/spatial-turn/what-is-the-spatial-turn/>. As we will see, though, psychoanalysis, with its emphasis on spatiality, was in some ways ahead of its time.}
century. The great realist works of the nineteenth century do not call into question the progression of time, or its relation to space. Put simply, the realist mode attempts to represent “reality,” or the world outside of ourselves, in a mimetic way, which indicates the centrality of chronology in the intellectual and aesthetic thinking of this era. Realism was directly followed, however, by literary modernism, which signified a tremendous break with this traditional kind of storytelling in order, at least in part, to accommodate new advancements in psychoanalysis and physics—new “realisms”, in short. By destabilizing the linearity of time, together these new schools of thought radically unsettled the very mechanics of both the human mind and the material world.

According to the Freudian model of the mind and Einstein’s principle of mass-energy equivalence, memories like matter cannot be destroyed. They can only come to embody different forms—but will never be erased. Under Freud’s model, the past coexists side-by-side with the present as the adult neurotic is constantly subjected to the reemergence of repressed elements from his or her childhood. A nineteenth-century mentality would have attributed such repetition to dialectical cycles; Freud locates repetition in the unconscious mind, however, where elements within do not cycle, but exist simultaneously and are always channeling into new forms, namely, neurotic symptoms. For a twentieth-century observer, then, “simultaneity” can no longer be considered a simple temporal concept given Freud’s theories of repression and infantile sexuality and in light of Einstein’s formulation of the special theory of relativity. What’s more, Einstein famously posited that determining whether two events occur at the same “time” (chronology put to the test) is dependent not on a clock, but on the observer’s “frame” of reference, of where the observer asks this question of “time” in “space.”

Writing in 1967, Foucault is looking back on the broad transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth century in order to locate the genesis of the peculiar post-modern sensibility: “We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through
time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein” (22). In other words, history (and the way we experience it) seems to be happening more in a spatial than chronological mode. This realization presents a formal (which is to say, spatial) problem for literature. What new literary forms can be used to represent the ways in which we now engage with the world’s new mental and physical terrains? How are we to go about representing history when if it is no longer linear? What literary forms can be constructed to better accommodate a history that is always subject to temporal upwellings and other spatial dislocations?

Foucault does not provide a full answer to this question of form. He suggests the image of the “network” but does not specify the particular contours that this model might take. Interestingly, Sigmund Freud, writing a generation before Foucault, had also been looking for a way to represent history in a libidinal rather than chronological mode in order to account for the psycho-dynamics of the human mind. In Civilization and its Discontents (1930), Freud speculates which spatial models might give shape to the progression of history given his conception of mental life, where in the unconscious nothing is destroyed (16), only hidden, and if “regression goes back far enough, it can once again be brought to light” (17). This is to say, within the psychoanalytic model of the mind structured amongst the unconscious, preconscious, and conscious selves, achronological elements exist within the same space, and through libidinal forces like repression, psychosexuality, and dreaming, the past is always interrupting the present.

The language Freud uses in his quest for a spatial model is itself architectural, geological, spatial, endowed with a lexicon of layering and unearthing. He tests out the city of Rome and the human body as metaphors for the “psychical entity” (18) but ultimately rejects both because the urban space and the physical body grow and change on top of the pre-existing architecture, invariably altering the original structure to the point where it may no longer be intact or recoverable. In other words, the earlier phases of development are not preserved in their original states. This
leads Freud to declare that in order to represent “historical sequence in spatial terms we can only do it by juxtaposition in space: the same space cannot have two different contents” (19). And so he ends the chapter without an adequate working model for mental life that would render historical representation in spatial terms. Freud looked to the social world for a model, but did not something that fit.

We need a way of representing libidinal history, a mode of representation that would better reflect the century’s key developments in psychodynamics and physics by privileging the comingling of drives over linear chronology. This problem brings us to the literary form that appears to be working towards a representation searched for by both Foucault and Freud: the hotel of postmodern literature. The construction of the hotel in postmodern literature challenges Freud’s the conclusion that “the same space cannot have two different contents” by suspending the reign of chronological time. As such, the hotel of postmodern literature gives form to the idea of libidinal history. As opposed to linear, chronological progression, I define the concept of libidinal history is as a perspective on history in which like Freud’s theories of the libido and repression along with Einstein’s principle of energy-mass conversation, energy is always assuming new shape in different forms. “Energy” is simply all the ways in which we expend and experience it: psychic, physical, emotional, social, sexual, and intellectual. History in a libidinal mode, then, is a kind of (en)closed system (like the world, like any microcosm), what happens in one small corner may in fact determine the quality of the entire space. Moreover, what happened in the past is never over; it has just

2 Freud does not make frequent mention of hotels in his work. In The Uncanny (1919), he cites the number on the door of a hotel room as an example of a place where one might be confronted with seemingly random but uncanny repetitions (145). But this is really a suggestion, perhaps even a coincidence. In The Interpretation of Dreams (1899), he analyzes a few dreams of patients that take place in hotels, but does not focus his commentary on the setting itself (see 96-97; 185; 229-230; 260-261; 311-312). These are more incidental mentionings. Freud does appear to be searching, however, for a spatial model to best represent psychic life with regard to both individual and collective histories. The iceberg model depicts the relationship between the conscious and unconscious mind, and although Freud gestured towards this image in his theorization, he himself never explicitly uses this image; it was coined by psychologists in 1974 (Bayne et al. 136).
rearticulated itself in new forms. For the postmodern individual, this understanding of the world becomes a source of great anxiety. If these drives, which culminated in great violence and destruction during the Second World War, cannot really disappear, what new forms have they adopted? The space of the hotel in postmodern fiction offers a structure that begins to teach us how to live with the consequences of history in a libidinal mode.

In this thesis, I analyze the space of the hotel in the short stories “La puerta condenada” [The Condemned Door] by Julio Cortázar and “Agosto 25, 1983” by Jorge Luis Borges, as well as the novels The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle by Murakami Haruki and The White Hotel by D. M. Thomas. The space of hotel in this particular genre of literature provides an interesting way of entering into these questions of how to represent history in a libidinal mode because all of the hotels in these works (as opposed to other literary representations of the hotel) have one important thing in common. They are all places where chronological time is suspended, which effectively juxtaposes different temporal periods side-by-side—the past with the present, the present next to the future, and so on. But what does the suspension of chronological history make possible, or visible at the hotel? I show how the hotel of postmodern literature proves to be a threshold space where chronology becomes unsettled in order to remap the dynamics of the unconscious mind so as to confront and cope with historical trauma given this new zeitgeist.

We now turn our attention from the *zeit* to the *geist*, towards the ways in which representations of the unconscious mind and its relation to social history take spatial form in the hotel. Two main questions will help us locate the hotel of postmodern fiction: first, why is it that in the twentieth century, historical problems are to be apprehended in spatial rather than chronological terms? Secondly, how does the hotel specifically provide a way of mapping the relationship between the spatial and the historical, between the individual and the larger social or historical context in which he or she lives?
But first, to the inn.

From the Inn to the Hotel: A Short Literary History

Before there was the hotel, there was the inn. Some of Western literature’s most important and beloved works are set at inns. Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* is perhaps the earliest literary example. At the Tabard Inn of Southwark, Surrey, the narrator collects the stories of “wellyne and twenty in a campaignye, of sondry folk, by aventure yfalle in felaweshipe, and pilgrims were they alle that toward counterbury wolden ryde” (“Prologue”) who have taken shelter there for the night on their long journey towards the Canterbury cathedral. In a world where individuals from different social classes often remained isolated from one another, the Inn suspends these divisions through the shared company of storytelling, which puts characters in conversation with one another. Only at the Inn can the humble Miller tell his story to a Knight.

Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*, the first European Novel, also mainly takes place at inns. The rustic inns where Don Quixote finds lodging are also the kinds of spaces that allow storytelling to happen by putting unlikely guests in contact with one another. Horacio Chiong Rivero\(^3\) argues that the inns of *Don Quixote* provide a “narrative frame” to an otherwise “confusing labyrinth, a space that encapsulates the carnivalesque and the paradoxical folly of a veritable topsy-turvy world riddled with chaos, violence, enchantments, and chance encounters” (628). This exchange is enabled by “the serendipitous arrival of sundry characters” (628), who bring new energy (new stories) into the closed system, as it were. In a complex novel where different narrators, storylines, and stories-within-stories further complicate the already precarious division between reality and fantasy, the inns help to

anchor the narrative in a secure setting (631). It is this tension between reality and fantasy that also becomes important in determining the potential of space at the hotel of postmodern fiction, as well, and interestingly enough, we can trace its precedent to the Inn of Don Quixote.

From The Canterbury Tales to Don Quixote, we can start mapping out a pattern of inns and temporary residences among the prominent works of world literature. European aristocrats often found themselves living in hotels as a kind of semi-permanent home, as depicted in works from Daniel Defoe to Marcel Proust and Andre Gide. And it is not just limited to European literature, nor to this specific social class. The first section of Herman Melville's Moby Dick, for example, takes place in two different inns of New Bedford and Nantucket as Ishmael prepares for his departure, resulting in a kind of ritual separation from his earlier life to his next. Moving towards the end of the nineteenth and into the early twentieth century, the hotel came to replace the inn and literature began to reflect these changes. The fin-de-siècle was the era of the “grand hotel,” which was inaugurated with the opening of The Cecil in London, a luxurious hotel with 800 rooms. The country inn, with its modest amenities, quickly became eclipsed by the excitement and refinement of the grand hotel (Pready 10). In the modern era, it became possible to travel comfortably, and in style. Since then, the hotel has since become an important marker of social standing (Pready 24). As depicted in writers like Henry James and Edith Wharton, the hotel provided a space for escape from “the indignity of life in modern society” (Pready 23). In works by Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald, characters visiting hotels could safely pursue transgressive activities away from the prying eyes of their society, be it at home or abroad. And here within modernism, too, marks a kind of transition in our conception of the traveler and what it means to travel. “Travel” is derived from the Old French “travail,” which means “suffering or painful effort, trouble” (OED, “travail, n”). It is easy to forget that traveling was often quite demanding before the modern era. Inns accommodated weary travelers who came by foot or by horse and provided basic facilities, shelter from the
elements. Traveling was long, dangerous, physically exhausting, uncertain. This all changed with the rise of the grand hotel, which was then eventually supplanted by international hotel chains with brands catering to specific niche markets. By the rise of mass tourism in the mid-twentieth century, the toil and danger long associated with traveling was replaced by excitement, relaxation, and reprieve from the banalities of everyday life.

Now, hotels that dot our urban and suburban landscapes facilitate the awe-inspiring movements of people across places and time. Works set in hotels by contemporary travel writers like Paul Theroux and postcolonial authors like Salman Rushdie and Cristina García, among others, exemplify the oft-described conditions of living in postmodern world: globalization, homelessness, rootlessness, anonymity, exile. The hotel of postmodern fiction, however, is something distinct from all of these other incarnations of hotels. As opposed to these other literary hotels, the hotels of postmodern fiction embody history in a libidinal mode. To locate the postmodern hotel more precisely, however, first we must pay a visit the inn of Franz Kafka’s high modernist work, The Castle [The Castle] (1926).

It is the Inn of Kafka’s The Castle where one comes to the literary fork in the road. Marthe Robert’s The Old and the New draws parallels between Don Quixote and The Castle, showing how the formal construction and thematic concerns clearly resonate in each, but reflect different historical and social sensibilities. Each hero goes on “a quest of a precise nature, though apparently absurd, which must be carried through at any cost” (Robert 4). Both Don Quixote and K., the respective protagonists, are looking for something: Don Quixote is in search of adventures and love that will give his life meaning; K. is a land surveyor in search of a place to work and somewhere to call home. Here, however, a crucial distinction must be made. Don Quixote finds the things he is looking for at the inn, even though he may not realize it. K. does not. Let us now look more closely at The Castle, which Kafka began in 1922, coincidentally enough, in a kind of “inn,” during his stay at a mountain
ski resort Spindelmühle in present-day Czech Republic (Ormsby 133-134). For the long, ponderous, and often arduous meanderings of The Castle, its story can be summed up in just a few lines: K. is a land-surveyor from somewhere else, who has been summoned for employment in the service of the Castle. He arrives in the Village and takes lodging at the local inn. The Village is apparently located below the Castle but he cannot find a way up. K. spends the rest of the novel attempting to navigate the byzantine local customs and bureaucracy without ever succeeding in reaching the Castle, or making himself at home in the Village.

K. arrives one dark, cold, and foggy night at the Village. Because it is late, he stops at the local Inn to take a room for the night before proceeding onto the Castle in the morning. The innkeeper receives him suspiciously, and the other guests look on coldly, which suggests that K. has come to the wrong place, that he is not wanted there: “im Wirtshaus war man noch wach, der Wirt hatte zwar kein Zimmer zu vermieten, aber er wollte, von dem späten Gast äußerst überrascht und verwirrt, K. in der Wirtsstube auf einem Strohsack schlafen lassen, K. war damit einverstanden” (Kafka 9) [At the inn, everyone was still awake. The Innkeeper did not have a room to rent. Though he was surprised and confused by the arrival of the late guest, he wanted to let K. sleep on a straw mattress in the taproom. K. agreed to this., translation mine]. For a village so isolated in the middle of a deep winter, it seems unlikely that there would be no vacancy at the Inn. Regardless, K. is relegated to a storage area, not afforded even the dignity of a guest.

Despite the disconcerting lack of hospitality, K. is exhausted and soon falls asleep in his makeshift quarters, only to be abruptly awakened by an agent of the Castle. He regretfully informs K.: “Dieses Dorf ist Besitz des Schlosses, wer hier wohnt oder übernachtet, wohnt oder übernachtet gewissermassen im Schloss. Niemand darf das ohne gräfliche Erlaubnis. Sie aber haben eine solche Erlaubnis nicht oder haben sie wenigstens vorgezeigt” (Kafka 9) [This Village is the property of the Castle. He who resides here or sleeps here is effectively residing or sleeping at the Castle. No one...
may do so without permission. But you have no permission, or at least you haven’t shown it, translation mine]. Surely there is a mistake: K. informs him that he has been called to the Castle by the Count himself. But life in this Village, as K. will soon discover, will prove more often than not suspended in the dream-like state of liminality, of confusion—or it is nightmare?

*The Castle* is an allegory, but it is unclear whether K.’s experiences resonate most clearly as allegories of political, social, autobiographical, sexual, or religious significance (strong cases have been made in all of these examples\(^4\)). Remember, the (quest)ion drives us towards space, specifically, the space of the Inn and what it portends for K.’s life in this new world. It is not necessary to read too deeply into the text to feel K.’s alienation, to share of his frustration over the enigmatic workings of the bureaucracy, to spot the Castle only to watch it recede into the fog the closer he draws towards it. K.’s desire to reach the “Castle” is the spatialized expression of his need for inclusion into the community of the Village. The “Castle” does not exist as a real space; it is a symbol for attaining integration into the Village, where K. would perhaps be received not with the indignity of a loathed guest, but with the embrace of an insider—inhabiting not some unwanted corner of an Inn’s storage room, but perhaps included in the community with a room, better yet, a home of his own and a chance to ply his trade as the land surveyor that he is. Therefore, the Inn must be understood as a microcosm for the larger social forces that define life in this strange place that even K., the land-surveyor, will not be able to successfully navigate.

If the Inn of *Don Quixote* helped the hero along in his quest and put him in conversation with interesting and helpful people along the way, the Inn of Kafka’s *The Castle* does the exact opposite. K. will always be symbolically stuck in the storage room of the Inn, never able to attain his own place amongst the people of the Village. And so the novel literally breaks off mid-sentence.

\(^4\) Jonathan Ulyot in “Kafka’s Grail Castle” makes a strong case for the Castle as K.’s “Holy Grail,” inserting the novel in the tradition of knighthly romance and spiritual quest. In “Approaching K.’s Castle,” Mark Harman suggests that the sense of alienation in *The Castle* is a function of Kafka’s autobiography as a tenuously identified Jew in a society increasingly inhospitable towards Jews and frustration with periods of illness and madness.

Kaloustian 11
There is no resolution to be had. The story stops dead in its tracks. What has gone so terribly wrong in this place that even a cartographer cannot traverse the treacherous social terrain of this new world? The hotel of postmodern literature implicitly references the Inn of *The Castle* in order to position itself within the lineage of literary lodgings and to show how even for a protagonist with the best of cartographic tools, the minds of those around him and the social logic that drives their behavior are still the most impenetrable spaces of all.

**Checking into the Postmodern Hotel**

Despite its apparent ubiquity as a setting in literature, the space of the hotel has largely been neglected by scholars. Two recent studies show promise in addressing this conspicuous lack. Within the context of German literary studies, Bettina Matthias’ book *The Hotel as Setting in Early 20th Century German and Austrian Literature* (2006) focuses on the role of the hotel in social formation in pre-war literature. The hotel as a space of identity formation in nineteenth and twentieth century literature is the subject of Joanna Pready’s doctoral dissertation, *The Power of Place: Renegotiating Identity in Hotel Fiction* (2009). Both studies are adjacent to my topic, but find their focus in different thematic concerns. The relative lack of scholarship on the topic of hotels in literature poses a challenge, but also an opportunity to theorize an underexplored area of postmodern literature. In the following case studies, I show how the hotel seems to be a space that can, because of its architectural and thematic structures, accommodate “two different contents,” namely, a simultaneous juxtaposition of the present with either the past or the future. In all of these stories, the space of the hotel allows for a reconfiguration of history and the possibility of addressing historical trauma through a destabilization of chronicity. The hotel of Julio Cortázar’s “La puerta condenada,” for example, simultaneously hosts guests from the present and the past. In Borges’ “Agosto 23, 1985,” a younger
Borges encounters his dying self in on the third-floor of an Argentine hotel. The hotel of Haruki Murakami’s *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* is also a kind of space of historical catharsis, where the unlikely protagonist, through the space of his dreams, encounters an incarnation of evil in a Tokyo hotel, thereby confronting the legacy of historical guilt and trauma. In D. M. Thomas’ *The White Hotel*, the hotel is the psychoanalytic structure built by the patient, which anticipates the future crisis of Europe, and the young patient’s victimization in the events of the Second World War.

To locate these enigmatic hotels, I deploy Todorov’s classification of unsettling literary genres—the fantastic, the marvelous, and the uncanny—to describe the mechanics of space in each hotel. Significantly, the hotels are all initially presented as realist or real-enough spaces. Todorov’s categories help us describe the subtle shifts that expose this apparent “realism” for something else. As the stories progress, the spaces of the hotels prove to be undefined, ambiguous, frankly marvelous. This also differentiates the hotels of these works as places distinct from other kinds of literary lodgings. It must also be noted that the protagonists of all of these works are in different ways passively caught up in history, which causes them to suffer. They experience symptoms like fear, denial, feelings of loss and emptiness, and hysteria. How can these symptoms, which are rooted in historical trauma, be confronted, worked through, and perhaps even healed? By suspending the linearity of time, the hotel begins to imagine how history in a libidinal mode might work—and what possibilities such a history may foreclose.
Chapter 1

The Unsettling Hotel: The Fantastic in Julio Cortázar’s “La puerta condenada” and Jorge Luis Borges’ “Agosto 25, 1983”

Like airports and passenger trains, hotels are places that are perpetually occupied. Such places must always remain open due to the demands of their around-the-clock business; they never truly close. For anthropologist Marc Augé⁵, the postmodern world is full of these kinds of transient “non-places” where “thousands of individual itineraries converge for a moment, unaware of each other” (3). The architecture of “non-places” is designed to obscure the disorienting flurry of activity and information, to make the traveler feel “at home” in places that are most un-homely. On the other hand, common public places like government buildings, schools, markets, and even private homes have periods of emptiness—times when they are left alone, and returned to later. Government buildings close promptly after narrow weekday business hours; school doors are shut after the last bell rings and for long periods during semester breaks; markets are set up early in the morning and are disassembled hours later once the day’s wares have been sold. Private homes, the essential “lived-in” space are regularly left vacant by their occupants for periods ranging from moments for a quick errand, to the eight hour workday, to an extended holiday of weeks or months.

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Interestingly, the places that are not constantly occupied—the buildings that populate our towns and cities in which we conduct the affairs of our daily lives—are those places we consider settled. Settle, from the Old English setl, derived from the Old German sezzal, which has retained its image as a “seat” in the modern German Sessel (OED). To settle: to take a seat. A settled person: well-established, secure in his position. He knows where his seat is, so to speak. Being settled implies regularity, fixedness, reliability. To be settled down is to pick a place as your main “seat” and to enjoy the security that accompanies having a place to call home. The language of these definitions connotes the vocabulary of regularizing space through property, identity, and belonging. And so the politician takes his elected seat at the government office, the vendor installs himself at his market stall, the man comes home after a long day, takes his seat and is finally home. Each settled place belongs to specific persons who bring life into the space, but even the person who belongs there does not overstay his welcome, giving the place a needed respite from time to time. Just as people sleep, perhaps buildings also benefit from a kind of restorative solitude at the end of the day—once the inhabitants have left and locked the doors firmly behind them.

The same settled quality of these quotidian spaces cannot be observed in “non-places” like airports, trains, or hotels. Paradoxically, the places that are perpetually populated are in fact the unsettled places. The “inhabitants” are temporary visitors; no one really lives in these types of spaces. People passing through—of every imaginable background, profession, and persuasion—simply use the spaces for their intended purpose, and then move on. They are spaces of utility and transit: the commuter boards the train settles into an open seat, still warm from its last occupant. When the commuter gets off at his designated stop, another will shuffle in and take his place. The businessman checks into the hotel just for the night, and will be gone in the morning. Perhaps he will return for a

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6 In modern German, the word Hauptsitz, literally the “main seat,” headquarters or central location, retains this image of belonging more explicitly than in English.
second stay, but perhaps not. “Non-places,” which teem with an overwhelming volume of visitors always checking in and checking out, are actually the unsettled places. Here there is no permanent inhabitant, no one who would claim their “seat” for longer than a train ride or a short hotel stay.

These spaces belong to everyone and no one. There is something strange about a place that never sleeps. There is something strange about a place that cannot sleep, what with the constant flurry of around-the-clock, year-round activity. Something unsettling, in fact. The hotel is a space that never sleeps, but it must appear as though it does. This is what sets the hotel apart from other such “non-places.” It is a public space, but it must appear to be private.

What kind of space is the hotel? The hotel is an ersatz home, a substitute seat. A public space meant to function as a private place. A modern hotel is designed to be a home-away-from-home by approximating the same comforts and security its guests are used to in their own domiciles. Here, however, is a crucial distinction that must be made: the comfort enjoyed by the guest of a hotel is the product of a carefully constructed façade. As Bettina Matthias 7 notes, because hotels are “fully capitalized spaces” (3), the management is invested in making the guest forget that they are little more than a paying customer—an anonymous entity—in the hotel industry’s equation. The façade, constructed of carefully chosen decorations, then must mask the mark of the thousands who have resided in the hotel prior to the arrival of the current guest. Every trace of the long and surely colorful parade of visitors must be obscured so as to make the present guest feel comfortable—to feel at home. Some hotels have a vintage style, an antique charm. Hotels that are “lived in”, however, are shabby, derelict, run-down. This is not the same as “having character,” such as a historic hotel embodies. When checking in as a guest in a hotel, it is most disconcerting—unsettling—to be reminded of the myriad guests who have stayed before.

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7 Bettina Matthias, The Hotel as Setting in Early 20th-Century German and Austrian Literature: Checking in to Tell a Story (Rochester, NY, Camden House, 2006).
Each hotel room (the guest’s ersatz “seat”) must maintain the illusion of being made just for the guest because no one can feel quite at home in something that is not theirs. And so, the hotel staff undertakes strict housekeeping measures to disguise the wear of the unceasing human traffic that has passed through the halls and rooms of the hotel. The deliberately upturned and starched bedding, the mint placed squarely on the fluffed pillow, the fresh roll of toilet paper, the starkly bleached towels make it seem as if the guest is entering a private space made just for him. To find, perhaps, discarded papers in the trash, an indentation the shape of a head pressed into the down pillow, or the smudge of a stray fingerprint on the faucet from the previous guest would disrupt the façade that you are not the first guest, and surely will not be the last. The current guest, important only in the present moment, will soon become little more than an anonymous guest in an endless line of visitors. By keeping up appearances and anticipating the guest’s every need, the management of the hotel attempts to protect the guest from the reality that he is not the center of the hotel’s attention (there are many guests) by suppressing the histories of those who have already checked out. These histories somehow remain imprinted—whether visibly or not—on the hotel walls.

And so upon checking into a hotel, the guest enters into a local history—a kind of microcosm for the larger social history. During the course of his stay, the guest of literary fiction may make the acquaintance of some strange bedfellows—not just those who are currently checked into the hotel, but also those who have come before, and those who are yet to arrive. In the following case studies of this thesis, I argue that the hotel functions as a threshold space that destabilizes the chronicity of time by juxtaposing different time periods side-by-side, in the same space. What effect does this achieve? What kinds of things are possible in the hotels of postmodern fiction?

Some clues towards unraveling the question of why the hotel of postmodern fiction seems to be sorting out temporal problems in spatial terms can be gathered in Julio Cortázar’s “La puerta
condenada” and Jorge Luis Borges’ “Agosto 25, 1983.” These two short stories set in hotels help us enter into the space of the hotel in postmodern fiction. Two main questions guide this chapter. First, we know that the hotel is a kind of “non-place,” which has thus far helped us categorize the hotel as distinct from other types of spaces, but it does not fully explain how it works, or what kinds of things are possible there. If a “non-place” is defined by what it is not, we must look more closely at the particularities of “place” and “space.” Why is the hotel not a place? Put simply, what kind of space is the hotel? Secondly, how does the narrative formally “unsettle” the protagonist and the implied reader from the expected experience of the hotel? In other words, what kind of encounter becomes possible due to this “unsettling”?

Unsettling the Hotel Setting through the Fantastic Mood

Readers, like the characters in the stories themselves, rely on the setting of the narrative as a point of orientation. The setting locates a particular place in time, and prescribes the potential of the plot. “Setting” implies arrangement (place-ment), a deliberate effort to give structure to space. For geographer Yi-fu Tuan, this arrangement is to be understood as the fundamental difference between space and place. The particularities of setting turn a space into a place by imposing limits: “place is security; space is freedom” (3). Later Tuan adds, “from the security and stability of place, we are aware of the openness, freedom, and the threat of space” (6). Place is defined by structure, space by openness, lack of containment.

With regard to the hotel, though, the distinction between place and space is not as clear as would seem, as suggested by the ambiguity of Augé’s term “non-place.” While the term “non-place” helped us to differentiate the hotel from other kinds of places, the interplay between “place” and “space” will help us to locate just how this setting functions, how it works. For Tuan, “places are
centers of felt value where biological needs” are satisfied (4). The hotel is surely such a “place” because it offers protection to its visitors by providing lodging for the night—to eat, sleep, and so on. On the other hand, space is more “abstract” (6). Space represents infinite possibility and freedom, such as the randomness of encounter in the hotel, the possibilities of assuming a new identity as a guest, and the ability, perhaps, to pursue transgressive or extraordinary activities. The anonymous “space” of the hotel promises the seduction of living outside of oneself, even if just for the night.

Space cannot be contained in a setting—it pushes against the limits of place, reminding us of the constraints of the location being occupied. Space is further afield from our experience; place is closer to home. Space is out “there;” place is “here.” Though space and place are terms often used interchangeably, if we consider space and place as defined by distance and proximity, respectively, it becomes understandable why Tuan argues that space becomes place through the process of familiarization. As we come to better understand the space, we begin to define how to live in it, and thus: “what begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value” (4). In other words, place has a role assigned to it. Place serves someone’s purpose. We know what to do and how to behave in a given place; space remains unbounded, and thus, open to interpretation—this goes for both characters and readers alike.

Following Tuan’s logic, then, it would seem that the hotel is more of a “place”; it is a physical location where travelers check in as guests to rest on their journeys in the course of the narrative. In the short stories of Cortázar and Borges set in hotels, however, the hotels eventually prove to be more a “space” than a “place” following Tuan’s theoretical positioning of the topic (which also aligns with Augé’s assessment of the hotel as a “non-place”). The hotel of literary fiction, which starts off as a place—a recognizable structure with an anticipatable experience—becomes a more indefinite space in which the visitor is confronted with unexpected and inexplicable
events throughout the course of the narrative. In the book length study, Nataly Tcherepashenets\textsuperscript{8} discusses the distinct treatments of setting in the great Argentine writers. Although she is using slightly different terminology, she is also talking about the tension between space and place. In Cortázar's narrative world, Tcherepashenets argues that “place is a locality for dwelling and thinking, and displacement is an existential experience that carries ethical connotations” (xiv). In other words, the disillusionment of place results in a kind of space, which in Cortázar, as we will see, suggests an ethical dimension (what does it mean to be displaced, or to flee a place?). For Borges, on the other hand, “place...is an object of dream, thought, and interpretation rather than a material locality” (Tcherepashenets 130). In other words, place in Borges is a structure imposed on an abstraction, an architecture designed to house a (“spacy”) philosophical examination. As such, the setting in Borges comes to define the terms of the intellectual or artistic engagement. The hotel is a setting that allows the authors to play on both their characters’ and implied readers’ expectations of the “place” in order to subvert them for their own purposes. Tcherepashenets’ definitions of place and space rely on the relationship between the familiar and the unfamiliar, which is at the root of the unsettling that occurs in the hotels of the short stories “La Puerta Condenada” by Cortázar and “Agosto 25, 1983” by Borges. How does this transition from place to space “take place”?

In each of these short stories, the hotel setting is transformed from concrete place to ambiguous space by the deconstruction of the division between present and past, and present and future, respectively. This transformation of place to space is accomplished through the narrative mood of the fantastic. Todorov’s efforts to classify genres of fiction are central to my analysis of both how each hotel setting becomes “unsettled.” The “fantastic” as defined by Todorov is “the duration of uncertainty” (25) in the context of an ambiguous situation in which it is unclear whether the strange events can be explained through rational or irrational means. Once a decision is made, be

\textsuperscript{8} Nataly Tcherepashenets, \textit{Place and Displacement in the Narrative Worlds of Jorge Luis Borges and Julio Cortázar} (New York, Peter Lang, 2008).
it on the part of the protagonist or the implied reader, the fantastic becomes either “uncanny” or “marvelous.” At the root of the fantastic is the indecision as to whether the events are ordinary or extra-ordinary, respectively. In Todorov’s conception of the uncanny, “the laws of reality remain intact and permit an explanation of the phenomena described” (41). On the other hand, if a supernatural interpretation is decided upon, one in which the “laws of reality” must be altered or expanded to account for the strange events of the story, the text is “marvelous” (41). Accordingly, there is a temporal dimension to the fantastic state. It lasts only as long as the uncertainty lasts (41). Once a decision is reached, the fantastic is revolved. In other words, the fantastic does the “unsettling” and the decision “settles” the story.

Todorov goes to some trouble to delink his use of the “uncanny” from the version laid out by Freud in *The Uncanny* (1919), which for the Bulgarian literary critic posits “a hypothesis still to be verified” (47). Freud’s exploration takes Jentsch’s definition of the uncanny as that of “intellectual uncertainty” as a starting point. Therefore, Jentsch’s classification of the uncanny appears to align more closely with Todorov’s definition of the fantastic. After an revealing etymological examination of the German “unheimliche” and literary analysis of E.T.A Hoffman’s “The Sandman”, Freud decides that the uncanny is not defined by uncertainty, but rather by “something that was once familiar and [was] then repressed” (154). Freud’s definition is informed by his view of psychoanalytic processes like repression in order to accommodate his notions of infantile sexuality and the castration complex, forces he identifies at work in “The Sandman”. What is important to take away from Freud’s analysis is his final summation (which also appears to be influencing Todorov) that at the root of the uncanny is “something that should have remained hidden and has come into the open” (148). In other words, the unfamiliar intrudes upon the familiar, and it is this tension that generates the uncanny. This revelation of something that was supposed to have “remained hidden” is a kind of unsettling itself. Remaining hidden, of course, relies on spatial notions of familiarity and
unfamiliarity, between the known and the unknown, the public and the private. As was suggested earlier, one of the things the hotel in particular is interested in keeping “hidden” from guests is the mark of all those who have stayed (or will stay there) so as not to disturb the illusion of individuality and privacy in a mostly public place.

Underlying Todorov’s genre definitions of the fantastic, uncanny, and marvelous is the issue of familiarity, which is also central Tuan’s description of space and place, as well as to the Freudian conception of the “uncanny.” The “hesitation” of the fantastic is essentially the cognitive pause that occurs when the character (or the reader) tries to understand whether or not there is some rational, familiar explanation, or whether there are foreign, unfamiliar processes at work. In the next two sections, I show how the fantastic tone in Borges’ “Agosto 25, 1983” and Cortázar’s “La puerta condenada turns these hotels from familiar places to mysterious spaces. The narrative mood of the fantastic brings what was once “hidden” or “occulted” to the surface by defamiliarizing the place of the hotel and opening it as an unfamiliar threshold space that hints at but never confirms the dynamics of history in a libidinal mode. These stories both set up an exploration of what is possible in these hotels, but because the protagonists both flee in the end, the stories stop before the fantastic can be “settled.”

**Julio Cortázar: La Puerta Condenada**

Unlike Murakami’s *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* or Thomas’ *The White Hotel*, both of which deal with historical concerns rooted in the Second World War, the hotels of Cortázar and Borges are ahistorical in the sense that they are not interrogating a specific event. When placed together, the hotels in these two stories plot out a dynamics of history that works against the expectation of linearity and chronicity, very much in the vein of Foucault’s observations. It is important to note
that the historical context of both of these stories is contemporary, but not overwhelmingly so. Although the setting is given as Montevideo in Cortazar’s “La puerta condenada” and the Hotel “Las Delicias” in a suburb of Buenos Aires in Borges’ “Agosto 25, 1983,” both texts employ a rather anonymous atemporal tone, a move that alienates both the protagonist and the reader from tokens of familiarity. The time period, however, cannot be at any time other than the now. Small signifiers indicate the modern time setting: the ringing of the telephone in the reception, the hum of a passing car heard through an open window in the hotel. These are clues that locate the general time period, but do not insist on a precise historical moment. The lack of specific markers of time helps to construct a setting that moves towards “space” from the very beginning of the stories.

Julio Cortázar’s untranslated short story, “La Puerta Condenada,” from the 1953 collection Final del juego is about a guest, Petrone, who during the course of a four night stay at the Hotel Cervantes in Montevideo becomes increasingly unsettled by what sounds like the cry of a child in the room next door. According to Tcherepashenets, Cortázar actually stayed at a hotel in Montevideo like the Hotel Cervantes. Overwhelmed by fatigue and solitude, his experience there inspired “La Puerta Condenada” (114). The fact that the protagonist, Argentine businessman Petrone, checks into is the “Hotel Cervantes” is no coincidence; the name of the hotel evokes the hospitality and inclusiveness of the Inn of Spanish and World Literature’s most famous novel. By naming the hotel “Cervantes,” the setting of this short story is inserted into the line of literary lodgings and the associations that accompany them. It soon becomes clear, however, that this “Hotel Cervantes” is a departure from the historical lineage towards something new.

Although he is also a foreigner to these parts, Petrone is also a new kind of traveling protagonist. Unlike Cervantes’ Don Quixote or Kafka’s K., Petrone is not looking for a space of inclusion; instead, he simply seeks a place in which to rest, a place in which he can sleep and wake the next day ready to attend to his business meetings. From the first line, there is a clue that
something is unusual about this hotel, and perhaps also about Petrone: “A Petrone le gustó el hotel Cervantes por razones que hubieran desagradado a otros” (41). The opening paradox is that the protagonist likes the hotel for reasons that others would dislike it. That it is “un hotel sombrío, tranquilo, casi desierto” (41) suits his purposes perfectly. He just needs a quiet place to stay, not the excitement of a bustling hotel. Upon checking in, however, Petrone starts noticing some strange things about his room like “la falta del sol y aire,” (42) which contribute to a certain gloominess beyond mere quietness. For one, “el cuarto del baño tenía una ventana más grande, que se abría tristemente a un muro y a un lejano pedazo del cielo, casi inútil” (42). Sadly, the window opens (itself) onto a wall and a distant patch of sky. It is as if the surrounding edifices are squeezing out both light and air from this unfortunately situated hotel room, constructing a kind of claustrophobic space. These things do not trouble Petrone much at first, though. As the story unfolds, however, the quiet shadowiness alluded to in the first few lines of the story takes on new, unsettling dimensions as different layers of the hotel’s architecture uncomfortably juxtapose an occulted past with the present.

In Evelin Garfield’s reading of Cortázar’s “La Casa Tomada,” a short story (also from Final del Juego) about a brother and sister who become displaced from their family home in Buenos Aires by a mysterious force, she observes that Cortázar frequently describes the settings and daily routines in detail to emphasize the “normalcy of the atmosphere” before moving to “subvert the banal reality” (18) that seems to characterize the story. Tcherepashenets presents a reading on “La puerta condenada” that focuses on the door (rather than the hotel) as a symbol of the “divided self” (114-119) which relies on the claim that in Cortázar’s literary universe, physical displacement stands for psychological division (107). I would use her observations on the “dividedness” of the story, but instead focus on how the division between the expected and the unexpected, between the present and past become destabilized by means of the fantastic. In “La Puerta Condenada,” Cortázar
subverts the familiarity of the hotel through the uncertainty generated by the fantastic, which unsettles the expectation of the chronological mode of history.

After the first paragraphs hinting at the strangeness of the place, the plot proceeds normally, with everything going as expected for a hotel visitor in town on business. Consider how Petrone settles into his room after checking in: “Por la tarde Petrone se acomodó la ropa en el armario, ordenó sus papeles en la mesa, y después de bañarse salió a recorrer el centro mientras se hacía hora de ir al escritorio de los socios. El día se pasó en conversaciones, cortadas por un copetín en Pocitos y una cena en casa del socio principal” (42). From the way the narrative proceeds, it would seem as though the hotel just made a bad first impression. Petrone settles easily into his room at the Hotel Cervantes and makes himself at home. The routine—putting away his clothing, arranging his papers on the table, taking a bath, meeting his associates—is ordered in unassuming, logical prose. Without even a break in the sentence, Petrone installs himself in the room and effortlessly accomplishes his daily tasks. The hotel is fully conducive to his personal needs and business responsibilities.

Later, Petrone returns to the hotel after a long but successful day. In the second half of the paragraph, however, the tone switches subtly: “Cuando lo dejaron [Petrone’s business associates] en el hotel, era más de una. Cansado, se acostó y se durmió enseguida. Al despertarse eran casi las nueve, y en esos primeros minutos en que todavía quedan las sombras de la noche y del sueño, pensó que en algún momento lo había fastidiado el llanto de una criatura” (42). Everything has gone according to plan, with the exception of a slight disturbance. Petrone thinks he hears a baby’s cry. But this cry is all but forgotten by a swift return to narrative normalcy. Next, Petrone rises, leaves his room, and moves on: “antes de salir charló con el empleado que atendía la recepción y que hablaba con acento alemán” (42). The two foreigners chat and in their light discussion, Petrone fails to ask who—or what—it was that was crying earlier. The oddities he has noticed—the melancholic, claustrophobic feeling of his quarters, the soft cry coming from the adjacent room—remain his own
private observations. So far, nothing is strange enough to report to the staff in charge of the hotel. Maybe that cry was just the settling of the old building at night; maybe it was all just a dream.

As the conversation between Petrone and the receptionist wraps itself up, the ambience shifts yet again: “Cuando el empleado y Petrone se callaban, el silencio del hotel parecía coagularse, caer como ceniza sobre los muebles y las baldosas” (43). When the conversation stops, the silence of the hotel becomes overpowering, as if it were a physical entity coagulating, thickening like blood—almost human. The ominous association, where the energy of the hotel is described with physical characteristics, then disintegrates into ashes, as if it is impossible for the narrative to settle on a decision about how to describe of the strange feeling provoked by the hotel’s atmosphere. The uncertainty in the description itself embodies the Todorovan definition of the fantastic. Something is off in this hotel, but it is hard to define it—this is the fantastic hesitation. The profound silence uncomfortably amplifies the sounds of ordinary activities: “El ascensor resultaba casi estrepitoso, y lo mismo el ruido de las hojas de un diario o el raspar de un fósforo” (43). The rustling of the pages of the newspaper and the flick of a match resound through the empty space of the hotel, magnifying the emptiness of the space. The developing contrast between the defamiliarizing oddities of the hotel with the complete normalcy of Petrone’s activities and interactions with the manager at the reception creates a narrative tension that unsettles the protagonist’s default mode of experience, and readies him to perceive the unexpected.

When Petrone returns to the hotel on the second night, he notices again that “el silencio del hotel era casi excesivo” (43). This time it registers emotion in the unassuming protagonist; “sin inquietud pero con alguna impaciencia” (43) Petrone reacts to the hotel, rather than just passively observing and inhabiting it. This excessive silence is a disturbance that causes him to reevaluate the room; it opens him to something he had noticed before: “le sorprendió descubrir la puerta que se le había escapado en su primera inspección del cuarto” (43). The layers of history embedded in the
architecture of the room escaped his attention at first glance. Now he notices an old sealed up door, which signifies an alternative genealogy of the hotel’s history. Such is how the façade of the hotel works. Once the edge of the façade curls up, revealing a glimpse of something beneath, the front begins to crack and that which was once hidden emerges. And once Petrone notices this door, he fixates on it.

This leads to a turning point in the story:

Al principio había supuesto que el edificio estaba destinado a hotel, pero ahora se daba cuenta de que pasaba lo que en tantos hoteles modestos, instalados en antiguas casas de escritorios o de familia. Pensándolo bien, en casi todos los hoteles que había conocido en su vida—y eran muchos—las habitaciones tenían alguna puerta condenada, a veces a la vista pero casi siempre con un ropero, una mesa o un perchero delante, que como en este caso les daba una cierta ambigüedad, un avergonzado deseo de disimular su existencia como una mujer que cree taparse poniéndose las manos en el vientre o los senos. La puerta estaba ahí, de todos modos, sobresaliendo del nivel del armario. Alguna vez la gente había entrado y salido por ella, golpeándola, entornándola, dándole una vida que todavía estaba presente en su madera tan distinta de las paredes. (44)

This is the moment of realization for Petrone, which is set apart stylistically in its long, rambling and at times poetic tone from the short, declarative, unadorned prose style that has characterized the narrative to this point. While at first he took for granted that this hotel had just always been a hotel, now he notices that like many other “hoteles modestos,” it must have been converted from an office building or family home. In other words, this place has a history—a life before it was a hotel. The puerta condenada is a relic of the building’s former incarnation, a vestige of an outgrown phase. Petrone notices that these remainders are now concealed with other pieces of furniture. As suggested earlier, in the (re)modeling of the hotel, a successful interior design scheme obscures or otherwise covers over the history of the room, over the wear and tear caused by the unceasing traffic of the guests who have stayed before. But what is the nature of the history hiding below the current hotel design scheme? By likening the “puerta condenada” to a naked woman, who attempts to hide her exposed body with her hands, just like the carefully arranged furnishings cover over the door, a
certain personification results, giving the room a shape, and a stature of shame. This characterization, through the suggestion of sin, emphasizes that there is something that needs to be hidden from public view. It is as if the furnishings are arranged in front of vestigial structures like “la puerta condenada” to avoid exposing the guests of the hotel to something disgraceful, to some sin or shame from the past still embodied in the room—Petrone hears crying, not laughing or talking, after all. But what is so shameful about this past? What is there in this hotel that needs to be hidden?

The question of shame—of a dark past that needs to be covered up—is an interesting one, but it will not find resolution in this short story. It remains a suggestive allusion. These are important questions that will be addressed in The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle and The White Hotel, but here, this particular narrative seems to be working out the way in which history ever so subtly appears to imprint itself on certain kinds of (unsettled, unsettling) spaces like the hotel that we enter into at various times throughout our lives. Now Petrone senses the mark of all the people who must have passed through this door at one time; he understands that through their physical presence, they have imparted themselves on the space, “dándole una vida que todavía estabas presente” (44). The hotel is transforming from a place to a space with a life and a history of its own.

Garfield argues that “Cortázar defined the omnipresent element of fantasy in his short stories as the result of the desire to express [that] the illogical exceptions and not the rational rules that govern our lives” (Garfield 12). The “exceptional or fantastic in his short stories, therefore, coexists with our conventional world” (13). She explains further: the unexplainable “does not always ‘take over’ or usurp logical reality, instead it infiltrates and subverts it” (13). And so it follows then that shortly after Petrone’s realization, the narrative resumes its “normalcy.” Without further comment, Petrone falls asleep only to be interrupted again by an insistent sense that something is off: “le despertó una sensación de incomodidad, como si algo ya hubiera ocurrido, algo molesto e irritante” (44). The tone seems to be changing, but perhaps it is not the mood itself that is changing,
but Petrone’s ability to sense it. What the night before sounded like the faint cry of a “criatura” (42) is more clearly distinguished on the second night as the cry of a “niño” (44). He is becoming more certain about what he hears. Through the pitch of the baby’s cry, he can make out a gender. This time, he also hears the voice of a woman trying to soothe the child. The next morning, when he finally reports the nightly disturbances to the front desk, the manager tells him simply “un chico? Usted se habrá confundido”(46) and that next door lives only the old woman who cleans the hotel. The words of the manager come as a shock—an external affirmation that there is no child, and that there could not have been a cry. The reaction of the manager maintains the uncertainty of the event, which continues to power the fantastic tone.

The manager seeks to correct the problem by firing the woman from her job, and evicting her from her room. Now Petrone should be able to sleep undisturbed because the room next door is empty. On that fourth night, however, “volvió a sentirse mal, y el silencio de la habitación le pareció todavía más espeso” (50). The silent heaviness that pervades the room gives the space girth, an unmistakable substance that grows denser each night. When later in the night he finds it difficult to fall asleep in such overpowering silence, “ironicamente pensó que extrañaba el llanto del niño” (51).

The following long, drawn out final sentence stylistically parallels Petrone’s previous insight into “la puerta condenada.” It is constructed as a series of relative clauses built upon each other, each carefully qualifying the situation and leading to a final realization that his suspicions had been right all along:

Extrañaba el llanto del niño, y cuando mucho más tarde lo oyó, débil pero inconfundible a través de la puerta condenada, por encima del miedo, por encima de la fuga en plena noche supo que estaba bien y que la mujer no había mentido, no se había mentido al arrullar al niño, al querer que el niño se callara para que ellos pudieran dormirse. (50)

The winding final sentence, in such stark contrast to the sober, measured prose in the rest of the story, indicates that Petrone now knows that there is something behind that door, even though he
cannot explain it. As in the story, it takes him a long time to arrive at this understanding, but once he does, it is unmistakable. Coming through the door of the puerta condenada is the distinct cry of the child. At the end there is no resolution for Petrone, only a realization that despite his justifications, the child’s cry is not a figment of his or anyone else’s imaginations. Out of fear he feels the urge to escape from the hotel in the middle of the night because now there is certainly something to escape from. The cry is real. But it is inexplicable in conventional terms. It would appear that as the maid of the hotel, the dismissed woman had taken on the responsibility of caring for the hotel’s unwanted “child guest” so that the real hotel guests could sleep undisturbed. A kind of surrogate nurse, she attended not only to the physical upkeep and cleaning of the hotel, but participated in maintaining the normalizing façade by muffling the space’s history. She attempted to settle the child for his cry would surely unsettle the current guests. Without her, who will keep this eerie presence under control?

Until now I have hesitated to refer to the cry of the child as a “haunting” presence because the word carries with it the connotation of the supernatural. On a literal level, this story could be read as a ghost story of sorts. To call “La puerta condenada” a ghost story would be to decide on the marvelous explanation. But Cortázar does not give Petrone or the implied reader enough information to make that decision. Petrone is not the kind of man who is willing to open that door and confront whom or what is inside that room. What if we were to attribute the “ghostly” presence of the child’s cry not a supernatural or magical force, but to the occult in the original Latin sense of the word: relating to “something hidden from sight,” “concealed,” or “beyond ordinary understanding” (OED). This would push the fantastic more to the side of the uncanny, but ultimately, Petrone cannot decide on the explanation for the child’s cry; he simply affirms that it exists.

What if behind that door is not some spooky, supernatural phantasm, but something more banal: a moment out of step with chronological time? What if the explanation of the cry is as simple
as past coexisting—or from Petrone’s (and perhaps our) perspective, intruding—on the present? If we try to understand this story on these terms instead, I believe that we can begin to draw some preliminary lessons about the space of the hotel in literary fiction from Cortazar’s short story. First, the hotel is depicted as a dynamic space that appears to house different layers of history. The child’s continued presence in the hotel is not the result of supernatural forces, but has rather been occulted, kept from view. In this story, the baby ostensibly lived, and probably died, at an earlier point in the history of the building before it was converted into a hotel. If the child is suspended in the adjoining room, the “puerta condenada” can better be understood as a vestigial structure, is a kind of threshold that connects two asynchronic time periods and forecloses the possibility of communication between the past and the present. By way of this spatial juxtaposition, the notion of a linear chronology breaks down. Events that occurred in the past are not only imprinted into the actual physical setting, but are ongoing. The past is part of the present, as evidenced by the child’s persistent cry. And why a cry, instead of a cough, low murmuring, laughing or even shouting coming through the “puerta condenada?” The child’s cry is of course a personification of the hotel’s history, a clue pointing towards something traumatic, something unresolved.

Now, we have observed the hotel as place awakening and becoming a kind of space with a life, history, and will of its own. But what does this accomplish? Like a person, the space too contains a personal history made up of the stories of those who have lived in the space and have become a part of it. As such, the space has a kind of independent consciousness. But what takes center stage is a thing that cannot be seen, and can barely be heard. There’s something about the hotel as a space of expectation—where things are supposed to go as planned, without disturbances. Should there be a disturbance, the manager will correct it swiftly (as is also the case in this story). Despite having sent the woman away, however, the cry of the baby resumes again that night. The expectation of normalcy, the routine in the hotel, with its reassuring façade of order, become a kind
of stage where an ultimate ambiguity emerges from the unfurling corners of what appears to be—in
the heaviness of the air, the faint whisper from a previous time crescendoing into a cry.

Perhaps we can begin thinking of the hotel as a façade of familiarity—what we want to see—or what appears to be “reality.” In stories like this, this façade becomes an apparatus that draws attention to its own construct as a way of critiquing how reality is often perceived to be a monolithic structure when in fact it appears to hold a number of simultaneous, achronological possibilities. The hotel is a kind of narrative space that makes these possibilities visible.

Petrone, the Argentine businessman, is not the kind of character who is ready to confront what is behind “la puerta condenada,” but he is open enough to acknowledge the existence of some alternate force beyond his understanding. This occult presence frightens him because he has no way of interpreting it, and so it seems a dangerous thing, malevolent in its mystery. And so the story ends before he can either escape the hotel or confront the cry. The story does not conclude. It remains unsettled. Petrone has in some ways been “initiated” into this secret (occult) under-world of the hotel. It is as if he has been granted access to open the door, but refuses to turn the knob. He stands at the threshold but pulls back before crossing through. And so, the ambiguity persists. The hesitation which marks the fantastic is not acted upon. The question remains: what would it mean to confront—or even join—what lies behind the condemned door of that unsettling hotel room?

Jorge Luis Borges: Agosto 25, 1983

Unlike Petrone, the protagonist of Borges’ “Agosto 25, 1983” goes through that door and meets what is waiting for him inside. Borges is both the author and protagonist of “Agosto 25, 1983,” a short story from the 1983 collection La Memoria de Shakespeare. Borges checks into the quiet Hotel “Las Delicias” where he will meet his dying self in Room 19 on the third floor. The real
Borges died in 1986⁹, and this was one of his last publications. Significantly, hotels appear in two of the four stories of this collection. In the context of Borges’ biography, one wonders if the hotel is a kind of symbol for his impending death, a liminal space between the home and the unknown, a transit point between life and death. In any case, it is “Agosto 25, 1983” in which the hotel figures most prominently. From Borges’ biography, we know that hotels held a certain fascination for the writer. The hotel “Las Delicias,” a grand hotel in the small town of Adrogué to the south of Buenos Aires, is a real hotel that appears in a number of his stories. As a child Borges summered in Adrogué and stayed at this hotel with his family and as an adult he would often visit his sister Norah, who lived in the quiet suburb. In 1977, he titled a collection of poems written about the town Adrogué.¹⁰ Hotels in general and this hotel in particular are to be found throughout Borges’ corpus of work¹¹.

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⁹ Borges died on June 14, 1986 in Geneva, Switzerland from complications due to liver cancer. He was buried in Plainpalais, Geneva. (“Jorge Luis Borges,” Contemporary Authors Online, Literature Resource Center, Gale).


¹¹ The “hotel at Adrogué” first appears interpolated from Borges’ biography into fiction in the famous short story “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius” (1940) from The Garden of Forking Paths collection (1941). In this story, the narrator (presumably also Borges himself), hears of a country called “Uqbar” from a friend but can find no trace of it in any reference. The narrator is staying at the Hotel Adrogué, where he makes the acquaintance of one Herbert Asche. A friend of the narrator’s father, Asche dies suddenly, leaving behind a book at the hotel bar that had recently been mailed to him. When the narrator discovers its title, A First Encyclopedia of Tlön, an intellectual quest to uncover the genesis of this fictitious land ensues. For one, the hotel is limited to the background architecture of the narrative; it provides the scenery needed to energize the plot. Some of the themes we have been pursuing, however, are hinted at by this choice of setting. Here the hotel is the site of an enigma that can be brought to light. Because they lodge at the same hotel, these two characters form an unlikely acquaintance, and the narrator becomes the improbable inheritor of Asche’s urtext on Uqbar and the people of Tlön. The hotel facilitates the randomness of encounter and represents the endless possibilities such chance meetings may generate. And again, the space is a kind of historical repository for those who have stayed there: “some limited and waning memory of Herbert Asche…still lingers in the hotel at Adrogué, among the expansive honeysuckle vines and in the illusory depths of the mirrors” (Borges 70). The description of Asche’s lingering presence as somewhere between the living, breathing, tangible world and the confounding, empty reflections of mirrors speaks to a liminal condition somewhere between the present and the past that appears to exist in the hotel. We will also see this with the child’s cry in Cortázar’s “La puerta condenada.” A hotel room also plays an important role as the crime scene of a Kabbalistic murder in the detective story “Death and the Compass” (1942). Another mystery. In “Shakespeare’s Memory” (1983), a scholar accepts a transfer of the Bard’s memory from a military physician who had been in possession of Shakespeare’s full memory. This unlikely handover occurs in a hotel room after an academic conference. The inheritor eventually becomes overpowered by Shakespeare’s memory and has to pass it on, suggesting that identity, memory, history, and the division between self and other are far more fluid than may seem. In these stories, however, the hotel is the background to house the plot; it is not a setting from upon which all details of the story depend. These uses of the hotel in the plot are thematic clues towards Borges’ larger conception of the hotel and its place in his oeuvre, a space that seems to enable unlikely possibilities of storytelling by defying the limits of chronology.
In this story, a kind of coda to his oeuvre, a middle-aged Borges encounters the elderly Borges in a hotel room on his deathbed. The hotel functions as a threshold space where time is distorted, which enables the encounter between the protagonist and his dying self. Such a fantastic meeting defies chronology, both in the historical and narrative sense. As the setting, the hotel serves as a narrative frame depicted in the realist mode that encloses an extended dialogue between the Borgeses as they try to locate themselves in both time and space. The hotel, which was a familiar place for the protagonist, gradually becomes defamiliarized through the ambiguity of the fantastic. What are the conditions of them meeting in Room 19 of the Hotel “Las Delicias” on August 25, 1983? Where are they really? Is this even the real date of their meeting? This debate makes up the majority of the story’s content. Although they argue back and forth about how to explain what is happening, since neither Borges character nor the reader can determine whether the events have a rational (“uncanny”) or supernatural (“marvelous”) explanation, the premise remains utterly fantastic. When the hotel itself disappears in the end, it demonstrates that space, by providing a physical frame of reference, is what is ultimately needed to resolve the fantastic mode of the story. Time and meaning are indeterminable without it.

A man arrives at a train station at 11pm and walks to “el hotel” (413). The hour of day is significant: it is a threshold point in the dead of night, just before the turn of a new day. The traveler is headed not just towards any hotel, but a hotel that he knows well: “sentí, como otras veces, la resignación y el alivio que nos infundan los lugares muy conocidos” (413). It is a familiar and intimate place, one that offers refuge to the weary traveler. Part of the sense of relief derives from the fact that the traveler knows what to expect. Upon arriving at the front desk to check in, however, “curiosamente el dueño no me reconoció y me tendió el registro” (413). This unexpected (and un-homely) reception, where the front desk attendant does not recognize his supposedly familiar guest, figures an exploration of the anxiety of not being recognized by others, but perhaps
more importantly, not being able to recognize yourself. Is this even the hotel that the protagonist thinks it is? Has he arrived at the wrong place?

When the hotel owner hands him the registry, the man faces a disconcerting reality: “Mi nombre Jorge Luis Borges ya estaba escrito, y la tinta, todavía fresca” (413). The hotel owner, however, does not realize exactly what is going on. First he mistakes this Borges for the one who had already checked in. But “luego me miró y se corrigió:--Disculpe, señor. El otro se le parece tanto, pero, usted es más joven” (413). His language is polite and unperturbed. There is a simple explanation: the other guest looks much like him, except younger. For the owner this is an unremarkable coincidence, nothing more. Borges asks which room the “other” Borges chose. The owner reports that he asked for Room 19, which for Borges “era lo que había temido” (413). This terse sentence sits alone on its line, visually signifying the isolation and alienation that arise from this unsettling experience. The guest knows that something is off—something that the manager will be unable to “correct.” There is something about Room 19, or the fact that his double chose Room 19, that scares this Borges. He already seems to know what is waiting for him up there. Whatever is up there waiting for him, in any case, is something that Borges does not want to face, but knows he must.

As in Cortázar’s “La puerta condenada,” the tension between the formal realism of the hotel and the extraordinary encounter generates the fantastic feel. The realistic sensory and physical experience of the protagonist is emphasized in the opening paragraphs: “vi en el reloj,” and “fui caminando hasta el hotel.” Later, “subí corriendo las escaleras” to reach Room 19 on the second floor. Small decorative details of setting—the ink still wet from where the dying Borges had signed his name in the ledger, the “las plantas del salon,” and the “despiadada luz” in the room insist on a kind of realism that intensify the fantastic elements of plot that are unfolding across this ostensibly “real” stage.
When Borges opens the door and enters Room 19, he sees himself lying on the bed, “más viejo, enfaquecido y muy pálido” (413). The older Borges announces that “nada es raro en los sueños” and that this dream is his last: “es, estoy seguro, mi último sueño” (413). It would indeed appear that his double is the literal incarnation of future death, and the younger Borges has stumbled onto a scene he is not meant to live for many years to come.

As the Borgeses try to sort out where they are, each believes they are in a different physical place (and time) as dictated by their frame of reference. The younger Borges believes that he is in the present; the elder Borges holds that they are meeting in his present, which is twenty years ahead of the younger Borges, “in the future” of 1983. Consisting almost completely of back-and-forth dialogue, the conversation, which at times heightens to argument, is also the “hesitation” in the Todorovian sense. The ambiguity as to which side is “right” in their disagreement about who is dreaming who (and where) sustains the fantastic in an otherwise perfectly realist setting. A good deal of their conversation focuses on “settling” just where it is that this is taking place:

---Que fue de madre—repetí, sin querer entender—. Yo te sueño en la pieza 19, en el patio de arriba.
Quién sueña a quién? Yo sé que te sueño, pero no sé si estás soñándome. El hotel en Adrogué fue demolido hace ya tantos años, veinte, acaso treinta. Quién sabe. […]
Yo soy Borges, que vio tu nombre en el registro y subió.
Borges soy yo, que estoy muriéndome en la calle Maipú.
Hubo un silencio, el otro me dijo. (414)

The dying Borges is quite certain that he is dreaming about the younger Borges on his death bed in his (their?) childhood home on Maipú street. On the other hand, the younger Borges believes that he is dreaming of his dying self from Room 19 at the Hotel at Adrongoé. The older Borges argues that this cannot be true—who is dreaming who?—because the Hotel at Adrongoé was demolished.

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12 Freud argues in *The Uncanny* that the double figure is frequently deployed as “the uncanny harbinger of death” (142).
decades before. This assertion destabilizes the very structure that both the protagonist and the reader depend on for orientation in this fantastic world. Through short declarative phrases presented in chronological order, the younger Borges affirms his presence: that he saw the name in the ledger and went upstairs to the third floor where the dying Borges lay. He uses the present tense to insist on his presence, but the past tense to describe how he reached Room 19, which indicates his reliance on a traditionally chronological understanding of existence (and language). The dying Borges, on the other hand, responds by inverting the grammar of the declaration of existence (Yo soy Borges/Borges soy yo), and most importantly, uses the present progressive—“estoy muriéndome.” This debate of existence—of where and when they are coming to meet—is being waged with a rhetoric of temporal grammar. And the dying Borges seems to be winning, because from his vantage point, he knows not just what has happened in the past, but because of it, can tell the younger Borges what will happen to him (them) in the future. Through the language that the dying Borges uses, the future becomes more present than the present itself.

The narrative focuses on the younger Borges through the use of the first-person. This makes him the protagonist and grammatically figures an opposition between the self and its other within the double dynamic. Because the story is told through the first-person perspective of the younger Borges, the dying Borges is positioned as the “other,” the threatening one in the context of this challenge to identity, and also to time. This technique also focalizes on the present through the protagonist, where within the spatialized juxtaposition of distinctly temporal selves, the dying Borges is clearly the future self. In this sense, too, the future is “othered.” The double represents the fundamentally defamiliar aspect of the self within each of us (the geheim within the heim). The younger Borges begins to detest his double, “aborrezco tu cara, que es caricature, aborrezco tu voz, que es mi remedo, abborezco tu sintaxis patética, que es la mía” (416). This reaction speaks to the radical alterity and otherness of self. Where there is life and presence, there is also death and
absence, but that “other” is distant—off in the future. It is the simultaneous coexistence of the present and future selves that generates the threatening feeling because it is an apparent impossibility for which no explanation has yet been reached.

Although the hotel setting as frame has sustained a number of blows that begin to dismantle its structural coherence during the heated exchange between the Borgeses, the realist features hold up the normal, expectable façade. Until the final lines, that is, when things seem to take a turn with an even greater degree of fantasy. After the elder Borges takes his final breath, the younger Borges, who “en cierto modo…moría con él” (417), turns to flee this strange place: “Huí de la pieza. Afuera no estaba el patio, ni las escaleras de mármol, ni la gran casa silenciosa, ni los eucalyptus, ni las estatuas, ni la glorieta, ni las Fuentes, ni el portón de la verja de la quinta en el pueblo de Adrogué” (417). If we circle back to the beginning frame of the story, with its emphasis on the physicality of the hotel setting, this ending negates everything that was so carefully constructed. No longer is there that patio, the marble staircase, eucalyptus trees, statues, gazebo, garden, gate or fence surrounding the hotel. These familiar props have evaporated, leaving nothing behind. The ending completely dismantles the setting. Only an empty set remains. What kind of space has opened up?

With the final line of the story, “afuera me esperaban otros sueños” (417), it would seem that the fantastic hesitation is now decided upon: it was all just a dream. The hotel, then, was just a dream-space. The collapse of the realist mode, where the setting itself evaporates, however, indicates that we are still in the realm of the fantastic. At the end, with the disappearance of the hotel, the narrative frame only affirms the ultimate ambiguity that had been debated back and forth between the Borgeses during the majority of the story. Without the spatial frame of reference secured by the hotel, nothing can be decided. And so, the centrality of space is affirmed. Space is the determiner of history, in both temporal and narrative terms. When the hotel disappears, the story stops. It cannot go on. The protagonist has nowhere to go. Outside await only the amorphous shapes of other
dreams, a kind of nothingness symbolized by the blank space of the empty page. Without the hotel, it is unclear whose dream evaporated, where they were in the first place, and even whether the elder Borges really died, or if it was just a bad dream.

The hotel appears not to be a dream per se, but functions rather as a kind of setting that negotiates between different selves across different periods of time by suspending the reign of chronological history. The hotel allows for the development of a theory of the self, where using the more obvious example of the artist, who is the author of his own life, the hotel hosts a kind of meeting place between different temporal versions of the self. It is this portal that suspends time to allow for the impossible. Scaffolded onto the architecture of the hotel is the idea that knowledge, indeed all forms of experience, are somehow already there inside. It’s just about gaining access to where it is hidden, buried, or forgotten—in the Room 19s, behind the puerta condenadas—within which all is contained. The hotel spatializes a way of accessing the occulted, largely hidden (his)stories that lie inside of ourselves. The point is that even when we think we know ourselves, there are parts of us that are radically defamiliar, like a copy of a copy of a copy (this is why Borges’ voice is a disembodied version: “no era precisamente la mía; era la que suelo oír en mis grabaciones [413]). This story speaks to that unsettling suspicion that what seems most familiar—the places we frequent, our identities themselves—may be the most unfamiliar territories of all.

Alternatively, “afuera me esperaban otros sueños” could also be read as a defense mechanism—a kind of denial. The narrator has no choice but to conclude “it was all a dream” because the hotel evaporates into thin air, which is the stuff of dreams. Bound to rationalize an event that defies logic, the narrator resorts to a rationalization because he is emotionally implicated in the events which depict his impending death. This anxiety is related to time: in order to invalidate the unreality of time (and therefore, his encounter with his dying self), he rationalizes the
disappearance of space. In this way, he need not reconcile himself to certain death. As we will see in *The White Hotel*, to presage one’s own death is too terrible a thing to bear.

If we deploy a metacritical move might we be able to begin to resolve the fantastic. Right before the dying Borges takes his last breath, he tells his double, who insists that he will not forget this strange story when he wakes that yes, the story will remain with him, although it will be largely inaccessible, occulted from his waking consciousness: “Quedará en lo profundo de tu memoria, debajo de la marea de los sueños. Cuando lo escribas, crecerás urdir un cuento fantástico” (417). When the plot for this story is somehow dredged up from the depths of his memory (notice the geological language), the writer will think that he has created a fantastic story. Here “fantastic” is used in the sense of the marvelous. One possible reading is that the younger Borges, the protagonist, defies his dying self by writing the story. Even though the hotel collapses at the end of “Agosto 25, 1983”, the author reconstructs it through language, which is a kind of survival itself. Because Borges names himself as both the protagonist (and his kind of antagonist) in this story, the implied reader is tempted to read it in the context of his biography, as something that “happened” to him. The reader then hesitates between the impulse to read “Agosto 25, 1983” as non-fiction or fiction. Borges-the-author is aware of this confusion and manipulates it to put the characters and the implied readers “in their place,” so to speak. Whether inside or outside of the story, the power of the writer is to build a universe and raise questions, but then dismantle everything, leaving only suspicions and incomplete answers. The power to settle the fantastic lies with the writer himself.

Then again, given the date of the title, “Agosto 25, 1983,” maybe it’s all the reverse: perhaps the elder Borges is in the present moment, and the younger Borges is coming from the past. There is also the possibility that they really were in the dying Borges’ dream, and when he dies, he not only ceases to breathe, but stops dreaming too. The evaporation of the hotel could symbolize the literal death of Borges, and without him, the story cannot go on. Because the hotel disappears, we will
never know. Without a spatial frame of reference, nothing can be determined. The one thing we do know, however, is that when space collapses, so too does time. History, like storytelling, cannot maintain its shape without space.

Checking out of the Hotel: Towards Settling on a Conclusion

What do Petrone and Borges have in common? Both have the urge to flee their hotels in the end. Why? From what are they trying to escape?

The fantastic distorted space of the hotel produces anxiety in both Petrone and Borges. The things they experience bring about fear, rather than curiosity. These protagonists are not the kind of characters who want to confront what is deep inside the hotels. Although the encounter is set up, neither goes through with the full confrontation. Petrone is overwhelmed by the compulsion to run out of the hotel into the night after he realizes that the cry is real. Borges flees the hotel and once it disappears, he glosses over his unsettling experience with the rationalization that it was all just a dream. As such, both short stories make inroads into the space of the hotel, but stop short of the confrontation.

Petrone and Borges are not intrepid detectives or explorers; they are ordinary travelers who just want a quiet place to stay for the night. The reason that they both want to escape in the end is that to accept the encounters that they have had would be to completely undo everything in their lives. Petrone, an ordinary businessman, and Borges, at the height of his career, have nothing unsettling about their lives. They are not looking for anything personally and because of the ahistoricality of the stories, they are not implicated in a larger sociopolitical context that might present its own dilemmas or traumas. The conclusions to these stories, such as they are, suggest that they choose to forget or dismiss the extraordinary experiences in order to go back to living the way
they did before. There is also a subtle suggestion of the ethics underlying their escape: Petrone, for example, is disturbed by his experience, not by the fact that someone next door is crying, and likely suffering. He is not someone to become a hero who might help whomever (or whatever) it is that is suffering behind that door. The fact that Petrone and Borges flee, importantly, confirms that these protagonists are also not men willing to become the detective or explorer who might be able to figure out what is really going on in this space.

It is important to note that in our examples of these hotel settings, the uncanny is only alluded to, but not confirmed, in Cortázar, and the marvelous seems not to be the explanation in Borges. Because no explanation is reached, the stories both begin to suggest an alternate means of experiencing history that better reflects a new (post)modern understanding of reality in which time (and therefore storytelling as well) is defined by space. What contributes to this hesitation is the twentieth-century radical reimagining of historical relationships and the very structure of the self through psychoanalysis, where the libidinal, occult forces from the past (but perhaps also the future) find articulation in the present, defying a chronological conception of time and experience. Because these are short stories, they suggest a basic framework of how libidinal history works, but neither reveals the full mechanics of space. Since both protagonists flee in the end, the stories insinuate that neither is ready to deal with the repercussions of such a radical revision to the ways in which we live in the world.

In the following chapters, however, the protagonists of The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle and The White Hotel choose to fully engage with the strange hotels spaces that they enter into. What does it mean to confront, rather than just encounter, what it is that is waiting behind the puerta condenadas of these hotel rooms? What exactly is waiting for them there? These questions are left unanswered in the short stories of Cortázar and Borges. The fantastic, although it does not decide, still
accomplishes something important: it shakes things up. It opens a space of possibility, should the right kind of protagonist enter into it.

CHAPTER 2

A Detective Story of the Japanese Mind: The Hotel as Collective Unconscious in Murakami Haruki’s

*The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*

Freud once famously claimed that dreams are the royal road into the unconscious. This oft-cited saying is in fact misquoted. In a letter sent to German psychologist and colleague Wilhelm Fliess in 1900, Freud actually wrote: 'Die Traumdeutung aber ist die *via regia zur Kenntnis des Unbewußtens im Seelenleben*’ [The interpretation of dreams is the royal road to the understanding of the unconscious in psychic life, emphasis in original]. Dreams are dispatches from below, but it is the process of dream interpretation that forges a road into the unconscious. And so it is dream interpretation, not the dream itself, that allows the dreamer to travel into the occulted space of the human mind. The misquotation in the common usage is an interesting parapraxis (a revealing slip of the tongue) because it excludes the interpretive framework from the importance of the dream. Without the interpretative framework, which is to say, without the psychoanalytic model, the dream has nothing

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13 The “royal road” is the English translation of the German “via regia,” a common term used to describe an optimal solution or strategy for addressing a problem. Originally “via regia[s]” were roads used for trade and transportation under the protection of kings during the medieval era in Europe. One could travel these roads, but only under the conditions imposed by the Crown. Historically, “via regia[s]” also connected disparate and often diametrically opposed regions: Western and Eastern Europe, for example. The “via regia” was a privileged pathway for communication, trade, and cultural exchange. See [http://www.via-regia.org/eng/viaregiageschichte/definition.php](http://www.via-regia.org/eng/viaregiageschichte/definition.php)

to scaffold itself onto. The dream dissipates as quickly as it appeared—back into the deep reaches of the unconscious from where it came.

To follow the imagery of Freud’s observation, the unconscious mind is a space that can be traveled into, but like the world of Kafka’s *The Castle*, the road is uncertain, hard-to-find, sometimes obscured by the elements, confusingly circuitous. Some roads are fraught with peril, some promise an easy passage, and others lead to dead ends. While the dream may be the “royal road” into the unconscious, it is surely a difficult road along which to travel.

At the turn of the twentieth century, psychoanalysts were venturing into relatively uncharted territories. Early explorers of the mind stood at the unknown frontier of a new psychological landscape—working with a draft of a map that plotted the self as divided between the conscious and unconscious, between the known and the unknown territories—the *terra cognita* and *terra incognita*. Navigation was conducted with only the rudimentary tools of early psychoanalysis, and dream interpretation charted the course. When Sigmund Freud wrote to Fliess hypothesizing the interpretation of dreams as the prime method (the “via regia”) for exploring that vast interior world of the mind in 1900, however, much of the exterior physical world had already been mapped. Yes, there were still some areas that had not yet been penetrated by man—remote caves, mountaintops, and iceflows upon which no person had ever set foot. But under the pressure of colonization and war, these last pristine places on earth were being claimed for imperial and national projects. In the early part of the twentieth-centuries, Western European, American, Russian, and Japanese powers scrambled to bring the rest of the world under their dominion. By 1930, colonies and ex-colonies covered 84.6% of the world’s surface (Loomba xiii). To put it in geographer Yihan Tuan’s terms, as more of the earth’s surface came under human control, space became increasingly replaced with place. More and more of the earth became *terrae cognita*. Just as the psychological frontier was opening up, the geographical one was vanishing.
What landscapes had not been dominated by colonial exploration of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were penetrated by the World Wars, bringing man and his conflict with other man to those few remaining wild regions of the globe. The Second World War in particular breached the last untouched spaces: armies stalked across the desert of North Africa (where tracks left by General Rommel’s tanks are still today imprinted in the Saharan dunes), to the shallow atolls of the Pacific (still humming with radiation and undetonated mines), to the bitter frozen tundras of the Russian steppe (haunted by the vast network of Soviet gulags), to the bottom of the worlds’ oceans (still littered with sunken Uboots). By the end of the Second World War, most of the world had not just been explored, but brought under control (and settled). Perhaps the only real places left to be discovered on the terrestrial plane are the basaltic trenches of the worlds’ oceans, a few patches of receding ice in the Poles.

In the process of gathering geographic knowledge—through colonization, exploration, and finally, war—things happened that “should never have happened” (Hannah Arendt quoted in Agamben 71). Things happened that cannot take back, that we cannot forget. A paradox emerges: our understanding of the physical world came at the cost of understanding, in a fundamental way, the minds of man who participated in the massacres justified under the banner of science, nation, progress. Despite over half a century of philosophical and literary pondering in the aftermath of the Second World War, the behavior of those who committed atrocities as well as those who stood passively aside, as observed by Giorgio Agamben “still seem[8] profoundly enigmatic” (Agamben 11). In his examination of the concentration camps of Europe, he calls the witness who survived “the cartographer of this new terra ethica” (69), who in writing (re)-maps the human mind to begin to account for what he has experienced. It would seem that only at the expense of understanding the human mind did the physical world become terra cognita. And so in an almost fully explored world, the last great frontier is psychological. As geographer John K. Wright famously declared in 1947
“the most fascinating terrae incognitae of all are those that lie within the minds and hearts of men” (Wright 15). By the end of the twentieth century, it would seem that we knew more about the geography of the earth than the interior landscape of the traveler himself.

How does one begin going about entering into the unconscious mind? Geography overlaps in significant ways with psychoanalysis, for the latter “is, after all, a spatial discipline” (Pile 77), as Steve Pile reminds us. Both disciplines rely on a conceptual lexicon of exploration, geological uncovering, and the seduction of excitement and danger promised by travel into the great unknown. The hotel specifically is a space in which all of this converges: the iterant postmodern age, the psychoanalytic sensibility, and the urge to penetrate uncharted territories. As a recurring literary setting, the hotel helps map the relationship between psychoanalysis, geography, and the postmodern by plotting the correspondences between the physical and psychological world. The hotel appears to house collective drives by modeling the way history in a libidinal mode is experienced on both an individual and national level. Hotels appear across postmodern Japanese author Murakami Haruki’s wide corpus, but the hotel figures most centrally in The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle (1995; 1997), the novel that is also considered his most important work. In this epic

15 Also quoted in Pile 10, who discusses Wright’s article.


17 The Dolphin Hotel is an important setting in Murakami’s works, especially in the so-called “Trilogy of the Rat,” including his first work, Hear the Wind Sing (1979; 1987), Pinball 1973 (1980; 1985), and A Wild Sheep Chase (1982; 1989). The unofficial continuation of this trilogy, Dance Dance Dance (1988; 1994) also has a number of hotels, including a revisiting of the renovated Dolphin Hotel. Tokyo “love hotels” are central to the recent novel, After Dark (2004; 2009), a book about sexuality, transgression, and repression. Hotels also appear in some of the short stories in his collections The Elephant Vanishes (1983), after the quake (2000; 2002) and Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman (2006). Hotels are a recurring literary fascination for Murakami, to say the least, but it seems that the hotel in The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle is the most experimental and theoretical hotel-space in his work.

18 All publication dates refer to the original date of publication in Japan and the publication of the English translation, respectively. It is also important to note that The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle was originally published serially in Japan in three parts. The publication history is reflected in the novel’s structure, which is also divided into three parts.

19 While Murakami Haruki is an important and widely-read author whose name often comes up in speculations on who will be the next winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature (a Christian Science Monitor article placed his odds in 2011 at 8:1), his critical reception in Japan is decidedly cooler (Wood 50). Although he is Japan’s best-selling novelist, some Japanese

Kaloustian 46
novel, the hotel is a kind of unconscious psychic repository for Japanese society accessed by
dreaming and meditation. This expansive novel is composed of a “Joycean range” of narrative forms
including “flashbacks, dreams, letters, newspaper stories, and transcripts of Internet chats” (James
4). The dizzying array of stories, characters, and narrative forms culminate in a violent conflict that
takes place in Room 208 of a mysterious, dream-like hotel that the protagonist has been checking
into and out of throughout the novel. The hotel is the space of resolution—but what needs to be
solved in the first place?

A Detective Story of the Japanese Mind

*The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* is a detective story of the Japanese mind. Toru Okada is its
narrator, protagonist, and as we will see, its interpreter of dreams. Like the hotels of “La puerta
condenada” and “Agosto 25, 1983,” the hotel of *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* becomes a mysterious
and ambiguous space where its visitors are confronted with unexpected, unsettling realizations—and
challenges. Unlike Petrone and Borges, who flee their hotels, however, Toru confronts what is
behind the door. Toru is “a supernormal guy” who does “such unnormal things” (324, emphasis in
original). Why is Toru being led into the hotel? Who or what is guiding him there? What will Toru
find once he checks in? The hero of this postmodern epic (Strecher 355) does dream analysis, not
just for himself, but for his entire society, and is willing to follow the “royal road” that his adventure

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... critics have considered him “a lightweight, a wiseguy who never took anything seriously” (James 1). Strecher clarifies that
hesitant critics are more concerned with his deviant tone than the content of the stories: “Murakami’s works give one
the impression of a serious artist who expresses himself in a distinctly un-serious manner” (355). Part of this “un-
serious” impression derives from Murakami’s unique use of colloquial language, a move that goes against the entrenched
formal language of the Japanese literary establishment (Yeung 3). Murakami created this “new Japanese language” by
writing in his (at the time limited) English and then translating it into Japanese, resulting in a distinctive style of short
sentences, simple vocabulary, and popular cultural references (Fisher 155, 158). While some of his works had already
been translated into English, *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* is the one that made him well-known in the West, and so his
popularity here is relatively recent. For these reasons, there is a paucity of scholarship in either Japanese on English on
*The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* (see also Wood 373). That said, *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, for both its feat of storytelling and
serious thematic concerns, helped to establish Murakami as a major contender in not only Japanese but world literature.
paves into the collective unconscious of all of Japan. At the end of this road is Room 208 of the hotel.

We first meet Toru in the kitchen of his suburban Tokyo home while he is cooking spaghetti. From this insistently quotidian opening, it is hard to imagine the strange places his life—and the stories others tell him—will take him. He moves through haunted houses of his neighborhood, to the no-man’s land of Outer Mongolia and then across to the Russian front during the Second World War, to Tokyo bars, restaurants, and office buildings, to the bottom of a well, and finally, to a kind of parallel hotel world where in Room 208, he confronts pure evil. On search to recover what he has lost, he meets psychic prostitutes, Creta and Malta Kano, a morbid teenager named May Kashara, a veteran of the Russian campaign during the war, Lieutenant Mamiya, and a mother-son team by the names of Nutmeg and Cinnamon and who perform psychic healings for wealthy clients. His path also keeps crossing with Noboru Wataya, a slick technocrat with immense popularity in the media and a rising career in Japanese politics. Noboru Wataya is the brother of Toru’s wife Kumiko, and is poised to take a seat in the Diet. In the background to impressive narrative orchestration is the song of the wind-up bird, whose cry has been heard across the generations and continues to portend doom: “every time the wind-up bird came into my yard to wind its spring, the world descended more deeply into chaos” (Murakami 125).

As in any good detective story, something has been lost, and needs to be found. First Toru’s cat runs away, and then his wife Kumiko leaves him. These are the inciting problems. The rest of the novel is spent trying to get them back. As a detective, Toru is constantly in conversation with strangers, each of whom give him clues that bring him closer to uncovering why his cat and wife have gone missing. Yet Toru is not the only character who is suffering from the disappearance of something important. Everyone in the novel seems to have lost something, and all are looking for a way to fill that lack. A feeling of emptiness defines each of the characters and unites them across all
their particularities of social class, gender, age, and occupation. In almost all of the cases, as Toru will learn, this emptiness can be traced back to the trauma of the Second World War.

This novel is the first of Murakami’s to deal explicitly with the historical specters haunting postmodern Japan: the brutality of the Japanese campaign in China and Russia during the Second World War and perhaps as its result, the “corruption of the modern state” (Fisher 155). With the call of the wind-up bird in the air, a deep sense of hollowness and alienation pervades the social world of *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, which is clearly indebted to Kafka\(^{20}\). It must be mentioned, though, that although Murakami is a Japanese author, that does not exclude him from the lineage we have been developing from Cervantes to Kafka, to Freud and onto the postmodern authors of world literature in the second half of the twentieth century. As Fisher argues, for writers of Murakami’s generation, “modernity is no longer the exclusive property of the West” (156) and for these postmodern writers, “the ‘West’ and ‘Japan’ are problematic entities…objects and cultural practices that once defined the West can also be found in Japan” (Fisher 156). The book is decidedly about Japan, but deals with a world of symbols, expressions, and spaces (like the hotel) that are immediately legible to a global audience. As Japanese writer Kenzaburo e has asserted in conversation with British author (of Japanese descent) Kazuo Ishiguro: “Murakami writes in Japanese, but his writing is not really Japanese. If you translate it into American English, it can be read very naturally in New York” (e and Ishiguro in Strecher 356). For an author who grew up reading the European classics and American popular literature (Fisher 157), and who has lived for years outside of Japan, it is not

\(^{20}\) The Kafkaesque in Murakami is further confirmed by the title of the novel released after *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle: Kafka on the Shore* (2002). According to James, “the novel’s biggest debt is to Kafka, whose influence may have filtered down to Murakami by way of Kobo Abe…The pervasive atmosphere of alienation in Murakami’s work bears a [close] affinity to the waking dreams of the German Jew in Prague” (3). Indeed, Toru and K. are both unassuming outsiders who attempt to navigate the strange social worlds they inhabit, which in many ways resists their presence in uncovering the driving mechanisms through which these worlds function. The similarity in tone employed by Murakami and Kafka is also raised by Wood: “the defining feature of this world, which gives it an odd, much-filtered resemblance to the world of Kafka, is that metaphors cannot be relied on to stay only metaphorical” (50). As the re-interpreter of the historic Inn for the new conditions of modernity in *The Castle*, Kafka appears to be followed by Murakami, who takes up the hotel as a kind of postmodern Inn in *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*. As we will see, against the backdrop of sheer normalcy, marvelous events unfold: metaphors are not just metaphors, and language is not just figurative: the royal road of interpretation actually takes Toru to the hotel, the Castle K. could never reach.
surprising that he developed both a literary style that is in many ways rooted in Western literature and philosophy. More importantly, however, is that even though Japan is part of the “East,” that binary begins to break down in the context of Japan’s early twentieth-century colonial projects and its position in the Second World War. Japan was a strong military power, a key player in both world and hemispheric politics, the first victim of the nuclear age, and finally, an enthusiastic example of the late capitalistic model. The historical legacies and traumas it now harbors bear greater resemblance to the “West” than may be commonly acknowledged. In fact, the traumatic legacy of these geographical and military exploits may be the common ground of a literary postmodernity that links together these disparate regions and cultures through a mutual ambience and psychological state of loss and emptiness.

In the postmodern Japanese novel, significantly, Murakami goes to the battlegrounds of the Japanese front in Outer Mongolia in order to write about the state of contemporary Japan. The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle is set during 1984-85 but a large portion of the novel is a “Boccaccian” (James 2) story-within-a-story told to Toru by Lieutenant Mamiya, a veteran who served as a geographer tasked with mapping the no-man’s land of Outer Mongolia, which for the Japanese military erupted into a disastrous engagement with the Russians known as the Battle of Nomonhan in 1939. His position as a cartographer resonates with K., the land-surveyor of The Castle. When his battalion was captured, he witnessed truly horrific events. Although he survived and eventually returned to Japan, completely traumatized, he is haunted by a hollowness that seems to define not only his own life, but collective life as well. Something important was lost during this war—something that the cartographer has been unable to locate.

21 Kakoi has raised an interesting point that is adjacent to my own argument about how Japan fits into this postmodern literary lineage. Within the West-East binary, the “East” was further fragmented with Japan occupying its dominant role. As the most significant imperial power in the East, Japan employed a kind of “orientalism” that “created an identity for Japan to secure a position as a modern state in response to the Western Orientalism in which she was perpetually denigrated” (26). Kakoi discusses the different rhetorical “othering” of Chinese and Russian characters encountered in the war stories in The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle as revealing the Japanese attitudes during this period which made possible the imperial agenda and “wartime atrocities” (25).
That sense of emptiness is to be solved through the detective story of *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, which recalls the structure of the Freudian case study that works towards uncovering the root of a mystery. In fact, the detective novel as a genre really came into its own during the 1920s and 1930s, the so-called “Golden Age” of European and American detective fiction. Contemporaneous to this literary development of course, are the careers of both Kafka and Freud, and the rise of psychoanalysis itself. Freud was a professed fan of detective fiction (Yang 597) and modeled his case studies on the way in which Sherlock Holmes related his investigations to Watson (Yang 598-99). As Yang argues, psychoanalysis, with its concentration on root causes, intention, drives, helped to make detective fiction what it is today—not merely a story of the event, but an insight in its driving forces and the psychology behind criminality (597). Murakami developed his signature spare prose in no small part by imitating the “hard-boiled” style American detective fiction writer Dashiell Hammett, who modeled himself on Hemingway (Fisher 159). But there is more to Murakami than just an awareness, appreciation, or appropriation of Western literary conventions and thought. On the contrary, he fits into this line of European and European-centric authors because he is Japanese. As a detective story of the Japanese mind, Murakami appropriates the Freudian architecture of the psychic self in order to construct a literary universe in which what was lost during that Second World War may be found again.

Lieutenant Mamiya, the cartographer-soldier, is not able to retrace his steps to regain that ephemeral thing that was lost in endless expanse of Outer Mongolia. The one who will come forth to find what was lost is Toru, an ordinary man of the next generation, a new kind of geographer of the “hearts and minds” of Japanese society. Toru is visited by the psychically wounded members of Japanese society—the sensitive inheritors of profound alienation, the veterans, the children of war...

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22 In another Murakami novel, *A Wild Sheep Chase*, what Fisher calls a “mock-detective story,” the unnamed protagonist reads *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (Fisher 158). Incidentally, the main setting of this novel is the mysterious Dolphin Hotel. The detective story, hotel fascination, and Freudian sensibility permeate Murakami’s œuvre.
criminals, and the innocent bystanders—all of whom are implicated in the historical trauma. They tell him their stories, and Toru listens. The formal structure of the novel is constructed by these stories-within-the story, which defines Toru’s role as both detective and therapist. On this new frontier of the “mind”, Toru will act as the interpreter of dreams in order to access the seat of unconscious drives and historical trauma: the hotel. In a kind of psychic battle, Toru will have to defeat the inner demons of Japan’s past, of which he is also an inheritor. I argue that in The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle, the hotel houses the unconscious of Japanese society, modeling a kind of collective unconscious of history in a libidinal mode. Toru becomes the hero of the novel because he is able to construct the “royal road” into this unconscious space, and what is more, he travels into that uncharted territory to battle the evil lurking deep inside Room 208, which is insidiously poisoning conscious life outside of the hotel.

From Home to Empty House (towards the Hotel)

The inciting plot conflict of The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle is that Toru and his wife Kumiko’s cat has suddenly run away. They search for their cat all over their neighborhood, to no avail. The cat is nicknamed “Noboru Wataya,” after Kumiko’s strange brother. Both share a characteristically empty expression, they have “this blank stare” (15). Toru has recently become unemployed, and senses that his wife Kumiko is growing increasingly distant. Although they have made a home together, Toru begins to suspect that there are parts of Kumiko that she is not allowing him to access. As they lay in bed together one night with Kumiko sound asleep, Toru worries: “inside lay a world that belonged to Kumiko alone, a vast world that I had never known. I saw it as a big, dark room. I was standing there holding a cigarette lighter, its tiny flame showing me only the smallest part of the room” (Murakami 30). The way in which Toru imagines his wife is architectural and
indebted to the psychoanalytic structure of the mind. The idea of really knowing someone, or even oneself, is illusory because deep inside are inaccessible, closed-off, unconscious spaces. It is as if Toru stands bewildered at the threshold of a “big, dark room” that is his wife’s inner life. With limited powers, he can only illuminate a small corner of that room and does not yet have the ability to see everything that lies inside. Perhaps he never will find the light switch, and this is a source of great anxiety: “would I ever see the rest? Or would I grow old and die without ever really knowing her?” (31).

With the run-away cat and Kumiko’s retreat deeper inside of herself, Toru’s home is becoming less of a home and more of an empty house. From the beginning of the novel, empty spaces embody both physical and psychological landscapes which represent problematic social and historical relationships. This discourse of architectural emptiness also permeates the very ways in which individuals conceive of themselves—significantly, as empty houses and vacant containers. The novel develops a trajectory in which the empty architectural spaces that represent both the physical and psychological planes of existence will be resolved at the hotel. In other words, Toru is left with an empty house, and the key to returning home is at the mysterious dream-like hotel. How to get there, though, is a mystery—the task of Toru-as-detective.

From the very beginning of the novel, Toru is searching for “Noboru Wataya.” The cat, whose real name is Mackerel, becomes a kind of red herring for the real issue, which is Noboru Wataya, the man who is Kumiko’s brother. In the signature misleading style of detective fiction, Toru is already onto him, but he doesn’t know it yet. The disappearances and emptiness seem to point to Noboru Wataya, but why? Soon after the cat runs away, Toru takes a meeting in the lounge.

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23 In Japanese, “container” or “vessel” is 容器 or yōki. “Iremono” (入れ物) can mean container, case or receptacle, which interestingly enough, can also be translated as “casket” depending on the context. This is a relevant etymological link, because the symptom of feeling like an empty container, then, is tantamount to a kind of inner death. “Hotel” is written ホテル in katakana, the script reserved exclusively for foreign loan words, demonstrating that the hotel is indeed an imported concept (Brandon Lewis Williams, Japanese speaker, 6/20/2012).
of the Shinagawa Pacific Hotel with Malta Kano, a psychic who phones him in the opening scene of the book. The Shinagawa Pacific Hotel is a real space (not the hotel), a nexus of travelers and strangers in the busy Tokyo cityscape. It brings unlikely acquaintances together, and makes apparent connections that have otherwise been invisible. Malta contacts Toru for two reasons: first, she claims that she can help him get his cat “Noboru Wataya” back, and secondly, her sister, Creta Kano, was “violently raped” (41) by the man Noboru Wataya. Malta and Creta Kano help Toru along during his quest, for they are also searching for something—namely, an understanding of what led Noboru Wataya to “defile” Creta. Although it is not yet clear how—and why—their paths overlap, Toru does not resist the strange direction his life is beginning to take and goes to the hotel. Toru’s willingness to travel to strange, unexpected places will help him along on his quest to find the things that have gone missing from his house.

Their encounter resolves little other than reaching an agreement that they will help each other find what they are looking for. Before their meeting ends, Malta touches Toru’s hand: “[her touch] turned me into a vacant house. I felt empty: no furniture, no curtains, no rugs. Just an empty container” (44). Malta Kano is a force for good in his life; it is not that her touch empties him in a malevolent way. Instead, her touch teaches him empathy. He himself is not hollow inside, but he can now understand those who are and feels the perilousness nature of this emptiness—crucial elements in starting him off on his journey. A parallelism develops between the exteriority of the physical world and the interiority of the psychological self, and the body is what seems to unify these two empty entities. To become the hero of the novel, Toru has to be made to feel this emptiness, and its threat, in order to begin the quest that will restore wholeness to those suffering from symptoms of hollowness. After Toru experiences himself as an empty house, the psychic Malta tells him knowingly: “you are entering a phase of your life in which many different things will occur. The disappearance of your cat is only the beginning” (44).
Toru’s home really becomes an empty house when at the end of Part I, Kumiko disappears, and we learn that in the opening chapter of Part II that she has not returned home—and is not coming back. In the meanwhile, though, the emptiness of the character’s internal landscapes reinforces the ambiance of alienation in the external world. Numerous characters also describe themselves as vacant containers, empty homes. In a book that is largely comprised of characters telling their life stories to Toru, he is a good detective (or psychoanalyst) because he remembers the minutiae of not just what was expressed in a conversation, but how it was expressed. In recalling a discussion with Kumiko some years ago, Toru picks up an important clue that she had revealed: “I [Kumiko] get this feeling like some kind of little something-or-other is there, somewhere inside me…[sic] like a burglar is in the house, hiding in the closet…[sic] and it comes out every once in a while and messes up whatever order or logic I’ve established for myself” (236). There is some yet-unnamed force at work in Kumiko personified as a dangerous intruder, which she describes as emptying her of all her contents. The pauses in her description (the ellipses) indicate her struggle to find the right words to describe this force. To follow the logic of the imagery, her house used to be a home. But the burglar is emptying it of the vital objects that make it a home—the things that made Kumiko whole. Her inner turmoil has parallel repercussions in the external world as little by little, she herself becomes a hollow shell and their home becomes an emptied house.

Who is the burglar in her house, lying in wait? To find out the cause of Kumiko’s unexplained disappearance, Toru takes another meeting arranged by Malta Kano with Noboru Wataya, again at the Shinagawa Pacific Hotel (Noboru had previously consulted the Kano sisters for their services—psychic and sexual). Toru does not immediately connect Kumiko’s emotional distance throughout their marriage or her disappearance with her brother, but he does know that he was a troubling character in her life: “whenever the topic of Noboru Wataya came up, she would get a strange look on her face…but exactly what that look meant I had no way of knowing” (68,
emphasis in original). By the end of the novel it will become clear that Noboru Wataya is responsible for “emptying” out Kumiko as well—for defiling her as he has Creta Kano. Toru does not know that yet, but he is onto him.

Toru hates Noboru. There is something deeply suspicious and unsettling about his brother-in-law, an academic who writes of esoteric concepts but has made a successful cross-over into the media. At their first meeting many years ago, Toru remembered thinking “who was this man?...Where was the real Noboru Wataya?” (75). Toru detests Noboru for his lack of intellectual consistency, and for the way he is loved by the masses because of it: “Noboru Wataya was an intellectual chameleon…he knew how to use the kind of logic that moved the great majority” (76). He is pure art: a façade, a mask. As the logical result of a sound-bite culture, he knows how to gain the allegiance of the public with style rather than substance. In a world obsessed with appearances and superficiality, he becomes a natural TV personality: “In the medium of television, Noboru Wataya had found the place where he belonged” (75). In television, he thrives (literally) in a hollow box. When speaking to him, Toru senses that “it was not his real face” (77), a threatening feeling that makes Toru want to escape. An “egoist with nothing inside him,” Toru does not trust Noboru for a minute, and suspects that there is something deeply wrong with him, a man with “strangely expressionless” (198) eyes “like a bottomless swamp” (79). Noboru Wataya is himself an empty container, cleverly covered over with a photogenic disguise, “something slick and artificial” (197), a “sophisticated mask” that, as much as Toru hates to admit it, has “a certain kind of attractive power” (197). His immense popularity, and Toru’s suspicion of it, suggests that his hollowness might just represent everything that is wrong with Japanese society. With his prolific media presence, “I felt as if Noboru Wataya were lying in wait for me just around every corner in the known world” (80, emphasis added), like that burglar hiding in the recesses of Kumiko’s inner “house.” Noboru
Wataya is a dangerous man and a threat to the society he has charmed, but no one sees him for who he really is. Except Toru.

At the second meeting in the Pacific Hotel, Noboru announces that Kumiko has left Toru for another man. Toru doesn’t believe him because Kumiko also hates her brother and he doesn’t believe that she would confide in him. Noboru derides Toru for being a loser: “all you’ve accomplished in six long years is to quit your job and ruin Kumiko’s life” (199) and the usually mild-mannered Toru replies with a kind of challenge that sets him up as Noboru’s adversary in an undeclared war: “But I’m not as stupid as you think I am. I know exactly what you’ve got under that smooth, made-for-TV mask of yours. I know your secret. Kumiko knows I know: we both know what’s under there. If I wanted to, I could tell it to the world. I could bring it out into the light. It might take time, but I could do it.” (203). The secret, of course, is that Noboru Wataya, the darling of all media, is the hollow man, a dangerous force leading Japanese society towards destruction. When threatened with that feeling of profound emptiness—be it inside and out—even-keeled Toru rises to action, even though it seems out of character. Toru explains: “Every time I talk to that guy, I get this incredibly empty feeling inside. Every single object in the room begins to look as if it has no substance to it. Everything appears hollow…because of this feeling, I end up saying and doing things that are simply not me” (204). In other words, Toru recognizes this threat of being turned into an empty container, or being forced to occupy one, even if only for the duration of their meeting. Everything Noboru Wataya contacts gets turned inside-out and emptied. Skinned alive, as it were.

With Kumiko’s disappearance still a mystery, Creta Kano eventually confides in Toru. Another piece of the puzzle falls into place through a long conversation with the patient detective. Like Kumiko, Creta too suffers from a certain emptiness that seems to originate with Noboru Wataya. As she reveals to Toru, she has had a difficult life: earlier she suffered from inexplicable
physical pain, which led her to attempt suicide. Her suicide attempt failed but left her completely numb, pain-free for the first time in her life. She began working as a prostitute to pay the bills. Noboru Wataya, whom she met at a downtown hotel six years ago, was her last customer. Because she had only lived in total pain or total numbness, she had never experienced sexual pleasure. Noboru, however, drives her into a sexual frenzy with the concentrated touch of his hands (he was otherwise impotent [300]) using some sort of supernatural sorcery to command Creta’s sexual arousal, which grants him access to the inside of her body. He then proceeds split apart her body, out of which “came crawling a thing that I had never seen or touched before…It had always been inside of me, and yet it was something of which I had no knowledge. This man had drawn it out of me” (301). Creta describes this strange process of nearly dying as an architectural break-down, a container being disassembled: “every screw in my body had not only come loose but had fallen out” (300). After this thing was removed from deep inside, “everything came gushing out of me…it seemed as if all my memories, all my consciousness, had just slipped away. Everything that had been inside me was outside now” (302). For a woman who had lived life in two modes—overwhelming pain and unceasing numbness—emptiness is a completely new sensation. “And when I regained consciousness, I was a different person” (302).

Numbness is not the same as emptiness. After her encounter in that Tokyo hotel room with Noboru Wataya, Creta confessed, “virtually everything inside of me had spilled out and been lost” (305)—she was now empty. And so began the long process of rebuilding herself, making her house again a home: “I am quite literally empty. I am just getting started, putting some contents into this empty container little by little” (311). Malta warns her sister, though, that Noboru almost killed her: “you could have been lost forever; you might have had to wander forever through genuine nothingness” (307). Although Noboru almost completely emptied Creta of everything she was, “the defilement…remains inside” and Malta warns her, “at some point you will have to rid yourself of it”
Like that burglar in Kumiko’s inner world, the mark of the defilement is hidden somewhere deep within, as if located in a closed-over room. As in any architectural space, all rooms are connected to each other. The defilement is not isolated, and will one day spread out to infect the rest of the self.

Ridding herself of that “defilement” is not just Creta Kano’s task because she is not the only one who is suffering from the terrible emptiness. Toru suspects that Kumiko too, is afflicted with the same defilement Creta harbors. Indeed, in the penultimate chapter, Kumiko confirms that Noboru “defiled” her as well (602). Kumiko’s absence—both physical and psychological—has turned Toru’s home into an empty house, a vacant container. This dynamic also serves as a national allegory. Japan is a country afflicted by an insidious emptiness deep inside of which lies a defilement, from which Noboru Wataya, a man without substance, derives his power. Where did this force come from? And how can Japan once again be made whole? The answer to these question lies in the hotel, but first, another mystery must be brought to light, which leads Toru back to the Second World War.

An Inheritance of Emptiness

Toru’s house is not the only empty space in the external world. Unemployed, he spends his days poking around the neighborhood looking for the cat. There he stumbles upon a vacant house which has long stood unoccupied. Instead of finding “Noburu Wataya”, though, he uncovers a dried-up old well, which “had been made in another age” (66). Reminded of a divination once told to him by a psychic war veteran, Mr. Honda, “When you’re supposed to go up, find the highest tower and climb to the top. When you’re supposed to go down, find the deepest well and go down to the bottom” (51), Toru kept the old man’s riddle in the back of his mind—another clue. He
develops a fascination with this old well and seeks to learn the mystery of the property. As Toru pieces together the story of the abandoned house, he discovers that the house has been cursed since its first owner, a decorated Japanese colonel of the campaign in Northern China, committed suicide there rather than stand trial for war crimes in the post-war period (117). Since then, the house has been haunted by something malevolent: “bad things happen to anybody who lives there. It’s just one of those pieces of land” (118). And so, the space has remained unoccupied as a kind of cursed relic from the war. Significantly, Toru has lived in this neighborhood for many years without noticing either the house or the well. As a kind of symbol for the post-war generation, he lived his life carrying the burden of the sins of the previous generation, without feeling their weight.

As the book progresses, though, Toru comes to discover the profound ways in which the historical trauma of the Second World War is imprinted not only on the physical landscape (even in Toru’s completely average suburban neighborhood), but also on the psychological one. When Mr. Honda dies, his friend and war compatriot, Lieutenant Mamiya, comes to deliver something the old psychic had left in his will to Toru. But first, he asks Toru’s permission to tell him his story from the war: “I’ve never told it to anyone” (133). Always the good listener, Toru agrees, and Lieutenant Mamiya launches into his long and captivating tale. The basic story is simple enough: Lieutenant Mamiya was a “professional mapmaker” (169) assigned to a small and secretive military operation in enemy territory directly preceding the disastrous Battle of Nomonhan. Later in the war, he lost his left hand\(^{24}\) and was interned in a Soviet gulag until 1949. Despite all the dangers, he survived, which was predicted by Mr. Honda, who told him that he would not die in the war, but in Japan after a living a long life (149). When Mamiya finally returned home to Hiroshima after twelve long years

\(^{24}\) Cervantes, too, lost his left hand as a soldier, in his case fighting against the Ottomans in North Africa; He was also a prisoner of war, in Algiers. The one-handed Lieutenant Mamiya appears to be a direct reference to Cervantes, for he too lost his hand in a battle of dueling empires, in this case, the Japanese and the Russian. The reference to Cervantes also finds justification in the formal constructions of extended stories-within-a-story, which characterize the narratives of both *Don Quixote* and *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle.*

Kaloustian 60
abroad, he found that his family had been killed in by the atomic bomb (170). Mamiya may have survived the war, but he never really escaped it: “After returning to Japan, I lived like an empty shell. Living like an empty shell is not really living, no matter how many years it may go on” (171). In telling Toru his untold war story, the Lieutenant passes on the inheritance of emptiness to the next generation.

Where does this emptiness come from, exactly? Lieutenant Mamiya first experiences the dangers of emptiness in the immense landscape of the Mongolian steppe, which he was tasked to map for the Japanese army: “the surrounding space is so vast that it becomes increasingly difficult to keep a balanced grip on one’s own being…the mind swells out to fill the entire landscape, becoming so diffuse in the process one loses the ability to keep it fastened to the physical self” (139). This is the threat of the vast unknown. The sheer nothingness engulfs the individual trying to hold onto the separation between himself and the endless horizon. In “such an utterly desolate landscape, an overwhelming hallucination can make one feel that oneself, as an individual being, is slowly coming unraveled” (139). As Mamiya describes, the mapping effort is rather futile: “national borders don’t mean very much in such a vast wilderness” (137), but even this land too must be plotted onto the map of the world because “you simply can’t fight a modern war without such maps” (138). An army’s success will be in part determined by its geographical grasp of the globe. On the abandoned steppe, the Lieutenant finds himself asking: “why did we have to risk our lives to fight for this barren piece of earth…this vast land where nothing lived?” (146). The empty landscape Mamiya has been tasked to tame poses not just a military threat, but also, perhaps, an existential one as well. Maybe this is a place that shouldn’t be mapped.

The emptiness may also derive from the experience of violence itself. Assigned to a sensitive mission, Lieutenant Mamiya, Mr. Honda, and the officer, Yamamoto, steal across enemy lines over the infamous Khalkha River, to retrieve a top-secret document, the contents of which only
Yamamoto knows. Camped out on the embankment of the river, the unit is caught one night but Mr. Honda is nowhere to be found (his psychic powers allowed him to slip away). The Russian officer, attempting to extract information about the letter, sets loose a Mongolian tribesman on Yamamoto, who skins him alive. Lieutenant Mamiya is forced to watch and recalls the scene in excruciatingly vivid detail: “to this day, I remember…I see it in my dreams. I have never been able to forget it” (159). For sociologist Klaus Theweleit, who has written extensively on the production of fascist discourse, the eruption of violence forces the psychological and physical boundaries of the body to “dissolve.” According to Pile, “Theweleit argues that war brings these men [soldiers] closer to the earth and to their own bodies…As the grenade explodes, ego boundaries and bodily boundaries dissolve, the explosion destroys the relationship between the internal and external” (Pile 204). As such, the moment of violence destroys the integrity of the division between the psychological and physical state. This theoretical reading finds perfect incarnation in the skinning alive of Officer Yamamoto, for whom the internal literally becomes the external. Because the moment of violence deconstructs the boundaries between the inside and the outside by forcing them onto the same plane of existence, as it were, the result is nothing short of a terrifying nothingness when the contents of the self become dislodged and dissipate into the atmosphere. The destruction of these conceptual categories is the hallucinatory disorientation of violence. Following Theweleit’s observations, the moment of violence induces a kind of psychosis (commonly defined as the inability to distinguish between the internal and the external), where nothing seems quite real.

After the Mongolian has disassembled the body—turning the insides onto the outside—the Russian officer gives Mamiya “a chance to survive” (161) by throwing him down into an empty well. He survives the fall and realizes he is as good as dead: “I had been abandoned at the bottom of a well in the middle of the desert” (163). For fifteen seconds a day, a blinding light from the sun shines into the deepest darkness of the well. This light “burned up the very core of my life, until
there was nothing left” (170). After this intense existential experience, he is rescued by Mr. Honda, who had seen this all coming and had buried the damned letter somewhere in the endless plain. They decided never to tell anyone about the letter or the events that transpired because they “arrived at the conclusion that such a thing [the letter] should never have existed in the first place” (168). It brought out pure evil and turned the lives of all involved inside-out.

Survival for Mamiya was irrelevant, for he had suffered a kind of death in the well and was left hollow: “even in the face of those monstrous Soviet tank units, even when I lost his left hand of mine, even in the hellish Soviet internment camps” (170) the maddening emptiness was all he could feel. When he returned home to Japan, “There was nothing left for me. I felt truly empty, and I knew that I should not have come back there” (170). The mysterious light during his time in the well burnt up his being, and all that was left was his body as an empty container: “I was not, in the true sense of the word, alive. I simply performed the mundane tasks that were handed to me” (171). Because of the trauma he experienced, it was impossible for him to live a normal life, to have real human connections. When he would try to connect to someone, to forge a bond beyond the superficial motions of day-to-day life, “I would close my eyes and see Yamamoto being skinned alive” (171).

Before Lieutenant Mamiya delivers Toru the “keepsake” (172) bequeathed by Mr. Honda, he says: “The heart and flesh of an empty shell give birth to nothing more than the life of an empty shell. This is what I hope to have made clear to you, Mr. Okada” (171). Nothingness begets more nothingness. A man emptied of his spirit is like a society emptied of his humanity, and neither can have meaningful or significant lives. In an empty man, or for that matter a hollow society, the mark

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25 Lieutenant Mamiya’s recurring experience of the trauma and its accompanying feelings of emptiness are a classic fictional presentation of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Kumiko and Creta Kano also seem to be suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, which is characterized by three main criteria: (1) recurring flashbacks to the traumatic event, (2) feeling emotionally numb or depressed; and (3) experiencing hyperarousal symptoms like insomnia, feeling tense, or lacking control over one’s emotions. From the National Institute of Mental Health, “Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder” 7 July 2012, <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd/what-are-the-symptoms-of-ptsd.shtml>
of defilement that emptied these entities of their substance that is lurking within is just waiting to come out, and take over.

The letter was not destroyed. It is still there in Outer Mongolia, deep inside the earth somewhere. Lieutenant Mamiya became an empty container who is cursed to carry the spirit of its malicious contents with him. And he brought it back to Japan after the war.

This is the legacy of historical trauma: a people drained of its substance by unspeakable violence, alienated by the depths of human depravity, unable to fully live in the present because of the pull of the past. The generation that fought that war has little to bequeath to the next generation. Toru opens the “keepsake” from Mr. Honda: “I worked up a sweat removing layer after layer of carefully sealed wrapping paper, until a sturdy cardboard box emerged” (172). The layers of wrapping paper symbolize the carefully disguised and repressed quality to this inheritance. It is nicely packaged, but once the exterior is removed, the contents are deeply unsettling: “It was a fancy Cutty Sark gift box, but it was too light to contain a bottle of whisky. I opened it, to find nothing inside. It was absolutely empty. All that Mr. Honda had left me was an empty box” (172).

Burdened with an empty inheritance, Toru becomes a synecdoche for modern Japan. Toru, with his empty house, Kumiko, a vacant container with a burglar lurking inside, and Creta Kano, as an empty container with the traces of defilement, are suffering from the historical legacy of trauma of the Second World War that has turned the world inside-out, and in the process, emptied its people and its collective life of that which gave it meaning. Toru, though, as the detective (and psychoanalyst) of the Japanese mind, with his skill in unearthing clues (“removing layer after layer”—the very language is couched in the geological, geographical, the psychoanalytic) and piecing together mysteries (making whole what has been fragmented), might just be the one to make that empty container full again.

For that, he will have to travel to Room 208 of the dream-hotel.
Entering the Hotel

In the context of this examination, just as in the plot of the book, it has taken us some time to arrive at the point where we can begin talking about the hotel, although we have already discussed the importance of hotels to the plot of the story itself: the Shingawa Pacific Hotel hosts the meetings that have helped drive Toru further along on his journey to uncovering the mystery of his wife’s disappearance, and Creta Kano met Noboru Wataya at an unnamed downtown Tokyo hotel six years prior, which is where her defilement occurred. As such, hotels are both the sites of potential resolution, of uncovering the mystery—and the scene of the crime.

Towards the beginning of the story, before Lieutenant Mamiya tells Toru his story and passes on the inheritance, Toru dreams of Creta Kano, or as he will soon discover, Creta Kano visits him in his dreams. This is the first of many unsettling dreams that lead him to the hotel, a kind of other-worldly, dream-like hotel. Scrambled through the symbolic logic of the unconscious, this space contains signifiers, from all of the stories that have yet to be told—clues that will help him to unlock the mystery of Kumiko’s disappearance and the hotel itself. What makes this hotel different than the other hotels of the book? Is it even a “real” space? What is “staying” at the hotel?

The dream goes like this: Toru sits down in a hotel bar and orders a drink. A faceless man who knows Toru’s name approaches him and leads him upstairs, deeper into the hotel. Toru follows him “unresisting” (102). The faceless man leads him down the corridor for some time, stopping at the door of Room 208. Unlocked, Toru opens the door and enters into a large darkened room. He orients himself in the room by looking around, and although most of the corners are obscured by the darkness, he inspects an oil painting hanging on the wall. Realizing he is thirsty, he goes to the liquor cabinet but cannot open the door. Creta Kano, who had been in the room, makes herself visible and seduces Toru. They begin to have sex, despite his protestations. When he climaxes in the
dream, he wakes up on his couch in his apartment and realizes that he has climaxed there as well. He rises, cleans himself up, and resumes his day.

*The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* is driven by the tension between the totally ordinary and the extra-ordinary, which are paralleled by the division between the two main settings: the “real-world” of Tokyo and the “dream-world” of the hotel. But to impose the categories “real” and “dream” is to settle for an answer to the mystery of the detective story without taking the journey. Instead, I will refer to the “real world” as the “primary world” and the “dream-hotel” as the “hotel world.” As we will see, it is not clear that the hotel is exactly a dream-world, but what is certain is that dreaming and mediation take Toru there. The ordinary seems to coexist, or exist adjacently, to the marvelous, supernatural events that take place at the enigmatic hotel. That the extraordinary seems to infringe upon, or at least drive events in the primary world, does not seem to bother Toru in the least, unlike Petrone or Borges, or example. As such, Toru wakes up from his unsettling dream, cleans himself up, and heads off to the kitchen to eat something.

In this other-worldly hotel, characters and objects from the primary world—both the past and the present—exist in coded, disguised ways. This first “dream”, though, contains all the clues. Now Toru just needs to uncover the stories in the primary world that will decode the symbolic objects found in the room. This makes him not just a detective, but a kind of psychoanalyst, an interpreter of dreams.

The interpretation of Toru’s dream goes like this: In this “dream,” he has an inexplicable thirst for whisky, specifically, Cutty Sark whisky. He has no way to explain this urge; it is just a strange drive: “the bartender asked me what kind of scotch I’d like, and I answered Cutty Sark. I really didn’t care which brand of scotch he served me, but Cutty Sark was the first thing that came to my mind” (101-102). His thirst for the Cutty Sark whisky clearly represents a desire to solve the mystery, to find the complement to the empty box bequeathed to him by Mr. Honda. Cutty Sark
whisky is one of those international brands, an image of a hyper-capitalized, postindustrial world. The empty Cutty Sark gift box as-inheritance also suggests the hollowness of the late-capitalistic world in which all aspects of life are commodified—a world that was built by the survivors of the Second World War. Furthermore, the whiskey was named after one of the last great clipper ships used by the English empire to transport tea back home from the Colonies. As such, the Cutty Sark connected the West with the East (two disparate regions) in the era directly preceding the rise of steam transportation—in short, the modern age. Cutty Sark was a vessel of communication and in the context of the hotel, the Cutty Sark box and bottle connect the primary world with the hotel world.

Before Toru can be served at the bar, he is led deeper into the hotel by a faceless man. Where his face should have been “was wrapped in a dark shadow, and I couldn’t see what lay beyond it” (102). Toru has also thought of Noboru Wataya as a kind of faceless man, but this guide does not come across as nefarious. Instead, the faceless man is in urgent need of Toru’s help (“Please, come with me. We have so little time. Hurry” [102]). The faceless man leads him to the site of the crime, and as such, is probably more likely the embodiment of Officer Yamamoto, a man who became faceless when he was skinned alive in Outer Mongolia. It also follows that the victim would lead Toru to the space where he will be able to eventually confront the thing responsible for the crime.

When they reach the room, the faceless man tells him: “It isn’t locked. You should be the one to open it” (102). Toru is somehow destined for this, and trusts the faceless man enough to follow his suggestion. He stands at the threshold to Room 208: “Beyond it lies a large room. It seems to be part of a suite of rooms in an old-fashioned hotel. The ceiling was high, and from it hung an old-fashioned chandelier. The chandelier was not lit. A small wall lamp gave off a gloomy light, the only source of illumination in the room. The curtains were closed tight” (102). Toru
identifies his surroundings in short, declarative observations, as if he is mapping the lay of the room in his memory. Beyond the visible aspects, though, the room has unknown depths, adjacent rooms, and darkened corners, suggesting the anxiety of the expansive unknown. The room is also constrained and clearly cut off from the outside world with its tightly drawn curtains. The incompatibility of the acrophobic with the claustrophobic makes it an unsettling space. The description also recalls the way in which Toru imagined the inaccessibility of Kumiko’s interiority, with Toru standing in a large room holding a cigarette lighter, with only enough light to illuminate the immediate area around him, leaving large parts of the room quite literally in the dark. The “gloomy light” (102) lends itself to the mood of alienation and emptiness that defines the lives of the main characters in this book. That the room appears to be part of a suite, and not just an isolated room, suggests that there are doors that connect the rooms to each other, which aligns with the way in which Creta Kano later describes her dissociative powers—as the ability to enter into unconscious spaces by slipping quietly from one room to another (306).

In the hotel room, Toru finds himself ill at ease and tries to “calm [himself] down” (102) by looking at the large oil painting hanging on the wall, in which a river is depicted. This is clearly the river in Outer Mongolia where Lieutenant Mamiya’s unit was captured and Yamamoto was flayed alive. After looking at the painting, Toru finds himself with a “strong craving for whiskey,” but cannot pour himself a drink because the liquor cabinet is sealed. He craves the thing that his generation does not have: they have access only the empty box, not the contents. Having lived most of his life unaware of the ways in which the events of the Second World War are rearticulated in modern life, Toru develops a need to seek out answers from the past—thus his thirst. This desire is phrased as a physical need in the hotel world because this is a libidinal space where abstractions are rooted in drives that manifest on the body. Toru strains to open the doors of the cabinet, which are
really just “imitations” of door. He cannot open that door, not yet, as Creta Kano warns. This is course symbolizes the mystery and the detective work laid out for Toru.

Creta Kano comes out from the shadows and seduces Toru. They begin to have sex. Toru loves his wife Kumiko and wants her, not Creta. But this transgression is not meant to be a betrayal of his relationship with Kumiko. Instead, in his wife’s absence, Creta Kano becomes a vessel whose body draws out the libidinal urges defining life in this space. Significantly, Toru’s sexual drives reveal other anxieties. As he becomes more and more aroused, he tells Creta out of nowhere to stop for fear that they will be interrupted by Noboru Wataya: “Stop it…Noboru Wataya will be here any minute. I don’t want to see him here” (103). Toru’s anxiety about Noboru’s intrusion links up neatly with other plot elements that unfold in the novel, namely, the ways in which his presence has ruined the lives of Kumiko and Creta, which is what in turn infringes upon Toru’s life, turning his home into an empty house. Through an expression of his sexual urges, Toru is able to tap into the insidious libidinal drives threatening to enter into this room, as embodied in Noboru Wataya. The detective has identified the perpetrator, albeit in an obscured, unconscious way.

Through the “dream”—his first visit to Room 208 of this hotel—Toru is confronted with the very architecture and objects that hold the clues to the mystery he must solve as a detective of the Japanese mind. As in the psychoanalytic process of dream interpretation, the dream offers up the answers, albeit in the coded lexicon of the unconscious. But these objects will only gain meaning through his adventures in the primary world; first, he must receive the stories of strangers before he can plot the symbolic resonances between the two worlds. In order to decipher this symbolic language, other stories must first be unearthed. That is the adventure and mystery of interpretation. And it takes the detective/interpreter to unexpected places on that “royal road” deeper within.
The Hotel as Collective Unconscious

In *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, the hotel is a repository for things that have happened in the past. By adhering to the basic Freudian structure of the individual mind and expanding it to a larger societal consciousness, the hotel poses a kind of experiment as to what form a collective unconscious might take. The relationship between the primary world and the hotel world functions like the relationship between the Freudian conscious and unconscious, respectively, in which repressed and traumatic events in the unconscious manifest as physical symptoms on the body of the neurotic.

The structure of the hotel reflects the model of communication among the Freudian conscious, preconscious, and unconscious structures. Numerous entry points from the unconscious open up to the conscious—doors, windows, rooftops, and so on. The Freudian preconscious is often thought of as the readily-accessed parts of conscious memory, whereas the unconscious is differentiated as repressed content, which is therefore not easily accessed (Lear 108, 111). The lobby of the hotel aligns with the preconscious state. As the faceless man, who is tasked with managing the lobby describes: “I don’t know everything that happens here. This is a big place, and my area of responsibility centers on the lobby. There is a lot that I don’t know anything about” (572). Like the manager, the faceless man confirms that there are areas of the hotel that are beyond his grasp—unconscious elements represented by sealed off rooms, mysterious floors, stairways that lead to nowhere, false doors, etcetera. It also follows that the faceless man would occupy the “preconscious” area because by sharing this story with Toru, Lieutenant Mamiya dislodged the memory of Officer Yamamoto from repression. In the act of sharing the story becomes part of the collective consciousness.
When Toru travels into the hotel, he enters into the lobby and relies on the faceless man to guide him to the deeper reaches of the hotel. Toru, however, is not a welcome guest. Before entering into the room itself, the faceless man warns him: “Whatever business you have, get it over with quickly and go back where you came from. This place is dangerous. You are an intruder here” (573). Why is he considered an intruder—a threat to the hotel? Toru is a conscious entity traveling through an unconscious space. He threatens to dislodge the elements that seek to stay buried under repression. Neurosis is stubborn and difficult to undo because the unconscious, by definition, resists treatment, which is what Toru is preparing to do.

At the hotel, the strange and disorienting ambience of the marvelous tone lends itself particularly well to representing the unconscious. As Freud famously described, “The unconscious, at all events, knows no time limit” ([1914] 331). Because the unconscious houses achronological events in the same space, the unconscious is necessarily timeless. So too is the hotel: “There is no way to tell the time. It could be morning or evening or the middle of the night. Or perhaps this place simply has no time” (393). In a place where people communicate “in words like secret codes” (576), the physical layout of the hotel is just as disorienting as are the social interactions. As he follows the faceless man deeper into the hotel, Toru loses his bearings: “It was such a long stairway that, midway through the process, I lost track of whether we were climbing or descending. I wasn’t even sure it was a stairway” (571). The very floor he treads upon is unstable. Without the faceless man as his guide, who himself confessed to the profound unknowability of this place, Toru would be truly lost as they journey “rushing around another corner, down a short staircase, through a small secret door, through a low-ceilinged hidden passageway, into yet another corridor” (572). Perhaps the most convincing evidence, though, that the hotel represents the unconscious is for the very reason that it is such a difficult—and dangerous—place to explore. Like the unconscious, it resists penetration. Only the most intrepid of explorers like Toru will make any progress here, and only after numerous
expeditions will he finally reach his destination: Room 208, the core of the unconscious, the seat of the defilement.

Moving In and Out of the Marvelous Hotel

The first time Toru visits the hotel he does not know how to explain the space, nor does he try to. Early on in his detective search, the hotel is a fantastic space. By definition, the tone of a detective story is necessarily fantastic (ambiguous) until the mystery is solved. According to Ronald Knox, who codified the rules of writing detective fiction, a marvelous explanation (or ending) is unacceptable. The second “commandment” to his Ten Rules of Golden Age Detective Fiction states quite clearly that in the search for the answer to the mystery: “All supernatural or preternatural agencies are ruled out as a matter of course”. Likewise for Todorov, the detective, in his attempt to resolve the fantastic ambiguity of the mystery, eventually arrives at an uncanny as opposed to marvelous rationale: “the detective story, once it is over, leaves no doubt as to the absence of supernatural events” (Todorov 50). This clearly does not hold true in The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle because even during the first visit to the hotel, there is already preliminary evidence that it is a marvelous as opposed to uncanny space. What is the effect of invoking the detective story genre if only to provide a marvelous, supernatural explanation? If the hotel is “not just a dream,” then what exactly is it?

Toru does not seem very invested in answering this question: as one critic remarked, “neither Toru nor the novelist seems to know or care whether Toru's adventures are real or illusory” (James 4). The more important issue is uncovering what is possible in this space. Toru does not resist going to the hotel, nor does he try to find a rational explanation to describe the events. He may be
able to describe the laws governing the space of the hotel, but he will never be able to answer why the hotel functions as it does, or what ultimate power is in control, etcetera. Unperturbed by the limited range of his explanatory powers, Toru resumes his normal routine upon awakening from what seemed like a strange dream: “then I went to the kitchen and peeled an apple” (103).

The marvelous exists outside of, or perhaps adjacent to, the realm of the quotidian world. For this reason, the hotel world is juxtaposed so unremarkably with Toru’s everyday environment. According to Todorov, if “new laws of nature must be entertained to account for the phenomena, we enter the genre of the marvelous” (41). Since the hotel space seems to obey laws that are simply not of the primary world, the hotel is extra-ordinary, marvelous. Toru’s experience in Room 208 of the hotel could easily be written off as “just a dream” if not for two reasons: (1) the hotel seems to be a shared space, not a private dream; and (2) what happens at the hotel has (physical) consequences in the primary world.

First, the hotel is a shared space, not just Toru’s own private dream. It is not just that Toru dreams of Creta; she was actually there. Creta Kano confirms this during a conversation with him in the primary world that she was in fact in his “dream.” She gives him details about their meeting at the hotel that she could have only known from being there herself (211-212). This is obviously outside of the laws of nature, super-natural, because this is not how dreams work. Only a marvelous explanation can account for this occurrence. It appears that individuals who are located at different places in the primary world can occupy the same space at the hotel, which leads us to believe that the hotel must be some kind of alternate world that exists adjacently to the primary world.

Secondly, and most importantly, what happens in the hotel appears to have physical consequences in the primary world. When Toru climaxes in the hotel dream, he also climaxes in the primary world. This could just be a coincidence, but it’s the first clue that things that happen at the hotel have real repercussions in the waking world as well. Still, there are other rational explanations

Kaloustian  73
available: at first Toru writes it off as nothing more than a nocturnal emission and heads off to the bathroom to clean himself up. But as he continues to “dream” of the hotel during other nights, it keeps happening. He begins to believe that it might be more than an involuntary bodily function: “Yes, it was possible for us to couple in our minds and for me to come in reality. In truly deep darkness, all kinds of strange things were possible” (231). Toru’s makes a decision to accept what happens there for what it is: something beyond his immediate powers of explanation. Because the hotel marks itself on the physical bodies of those who travel there, the body becomes a bridge linking the primary world with the hotel world, confirming that the hotel is not a dream space, but rather, a site of the marvelous.

Further physical evidence settles any remaining suspicion that this was just a dream. One morning when Toru is shaving, he discovers a blue-black mark on his cheek. He inspects the mark and thinks back upon the “dream” from which he had just awoken. In the hotel world, the faceless man had warned Toru in the hotel lobby not to go up to the room (“this is the wrong time” [286]), but Toru pushed on, inexplicably driven to enter that room. Once there, “[Creta Kano] had pulled me through the wall so that we could escape from the dangerous someone who had opened the door and was coming into the room. The moment I passed through the wall, I had had the clear sensation of heat on my cheek—in the exact spot where I now had this mark” (287). Creta Kano was waiting there to save him. As a psychic, she intervened because not all the clues have come together and he is not yet prepared to meet who is coming through that door. Still, though, she was not quite quick enough, and the malevolent essence of that someone has imprinted itself on Toru’s face.

Toru begins to piece together the mechanics of the hotel by the physical evidence it leaves on the body. He starts to believe, again, that it was much more than just a dream: “Perhaps the mark was a brand that had been impressed on me by that strange dream or illusion or whatever it was. _That was no dream_, they were telling me through the mark: _It really happened. And every time you look in the_
mirror now, you will be forced to remember it’ (287, emphasis in original). He decides to accept the marvelous explanation. The meaning of the mark, however, remains a mystery.

The Battle of Room 208

One of the last sets of stories Toru as the detective-analyst gathers is told to him by Nutmeg, a psychic healer who grew up in Manchuria during the Japanese occupation. With her tale of familial and historical trauma, the information helps to locate the origin of the mark in the Second World War. By way of “marvelous” coincidence, Toru bears the same mark as her father, a veterinarian stationed in Manchuria who had “a blue-black mark on his right cheek” (400). Nutmeg’s father participated in atrocities during the war, including the malicious execution of a Chinese prisoner with a baseball bat. He later died in a Soviet gulag. With Nutmeg’s story, the mark links Toru with Nutmeg’s nameless father in an undeniable way along a historical continuum. The physical manifestation of the mark on the following generation is another kind of inheritance—an insidious one that is slowly spreading across Toru’s face. The mark’s historical origin explained, the physical body also reveals something important about the content of Room 208 and what kinds of things reside in the hotel. The hotel is a repository for historical events, objects, and drives, which manifest on the bodies of its visitors. Toru literally carries the mark of history on his face. Because Toru now understands the basic properties of the hotel, he knows what is possible there, and more importantly, just what is at stake in confronting that someone who is coming to meet him in Room 208.

To bring this detective story to a close, Toru needs to solve two problems: first, he has to find Kumiko and bring her back home; and secondly, he has to defeat Noboru Wataya, his nemesis, the one responsible for Kumiko’s disappearance and Creta Kano’s hollowness. As he visits the hotel
more and more frequently, he tells himself that he must “be more careful” because there is “something that could have fatal consequences” (565) in that room. Leading up to the final confrontation, Toru has learned to travel to the hotel not just by dreaming, but also by way of dissociative meditation. He practices this meditation at the bottom of the dried-up well in his neighborhood, armed with a baseball bat in preparation for “confront[ing] whatever it is that must be there” (395). His choice of the baseball bat seems a random impulse until Nutmeg shares the story of her father, who oversaw the senseless execution of the Chinese prisoner with the same weapon. The baseball bat is another object from the hotel world that has been decoded through the sharing of (traumatic) stories in the primary world. Thinking back to my observations on histoire, story and the history are both rooted in the same place: the hotel. As a repository for historical drives and objects, the hotel shows Toru how all these personal stories intersect with the larger historical trends, and more importantly, how the lives of individuals get caught up and destroyed in these movements.

The final confrontation goes like this: urgently led by the faceless man for the last time to Room 208, Toru arrives and speaks to the woman hiding in its shadows. This time there is an unopened bottle of Cutty Sark on the table. Toru tells the woman that he thinks she is Kumiko. He also identifies Noboru Wataya as the criminal at the center of it all. Toru tells the woman he believes to be his wife that he will finally take her home. He draws closer to the door, and readies himself for who he believes to be Noboru Wataya: “I had to defeat this thing. This was the war that I would have to fight” (582). The man comes through the door and they fight to the death. Toru wins. When Toru comes to again, he is in the well, but the well has mysteriously filled with water, and he is drowning. He is rescued by Nutmeg’s son Cinnamon, who dresses the wounds he sustained during the battle.
The interpretation of the confrontation goes like this: Toru has traveled to the hotel enough times by now to have prepared himself for battle. Although his knowledge of the lay of the land is imperfect, he trusts his guide, the faceless man, to take him there. In Room 208, at the core of it all, he can finally link the clues he has gathered in the primary world to the coded symbols of the hotel. It is as if he has finally reached the end of the “royal road”—his surveying work is complete, and now, he can plot the correspondences. It is clear that enough progress has been made in his search for answers because now the Cutty Sark bottle is out on the table. In this way, we see how progress made in the primary world also influences the hotel world. Things have shifted around and opened up: the bottle is no longer locked behind a cabinet. He and the woman can now share a drink, suggesting that the things he has been looking for can and will be found here.

The woman insists that they speak in the dark. It is in the darkness of the hotel room where Toru brings the mysteries to light, where he “risk[s] putting into words the thoughts that has been slowly forming” (578) in this mind. In the darkness, Toru finds clarity and finally names the thing that makes Noboru Wataya so dangerous: “Now he is trying to bring out something that the great mass of people keep hidden in the darkness of their unconscious. He wants to use it for his own political advantage. It’s a tremendously dangerous thing...smeared with violence and blood, and it’s directly connected to the darkest depths of history, because its final effect is to destroy and obliterate people on a massive scale” (579). As Toru had intuited all along, Noboru Wataya possesses a kind of preternatural power that allows him to manipulate people. His power is the mysterious hold of megalomaniacal political leaders, whose devious ways endear them to the masses and terrify those who can see past the façade. The way in which Toru describes it evokes the fascist fanaticism of the era in which all of the stories he has gathered originate. His realization forecloses an anxiety that the same force will resurface again in the present generation. This sentiment, of course, is a very postmodern one. “Never again,” which nations vowed to themselves and each other in the postwar
period, has proven to be an “empty” promise. Articulating Noboru’s powers raises the stakes of the confrontation. This battle is really about stopping the malignant spread of the evil in this generation, which reemerged from the “darkest depths of history” that last took hold of the primary world during the Second World War. It also suggests that this evil is not unique or exceptional and that under the right circumstances, under the control of the right charismatic leaders, it can and will return. Any society must always remain vigilant against its resurgence.

It would appear that an ambience of emptiness and sense of alienation is a prerequisite for this malevolent force to take hold. For this reason, Kumiko’s return home and defeating Noboru Wataya are inextricably linked. Restoring their home and restoring Japan means filling up what has been emptied, and staving off the sinister force. After Toru tells the woman, “I’m going to take you home” (581, emphasis in original), she gives him a “present” (581): the baseball bat. Using the baseball bat against Noboru Wataya is a kind of corrective to the historical trauma which Toru has inherited. Unlike the veterinarian, he uses the baseball bat to defeat evil rather than further it. Of course, this is also the symbolic break with the generation of his forefather, the requisite Oedipal gesture. When they finally engage in combat, Noboru is armed with a knife, linking him to the Mongolian tribesman who skinned Yamamato (the faceless man). As they fight, there is no mistaking that this is a real battle: “The knife really cut me. It cut me as a real knife” (589). Toru wins by beating the man’s head to a pulp, which not only connects him to the Chinese prisoner in this circle of historical re-enactment, but also suggests that the figure-head in which the evil force has manifested has been destroyed...at least for now.
Surviving the Hotel

Toru carries with him into the primary world wounds from the battle in the psychic one. The physical body again confirms that what happens at the hotel holds real consequences: “The man had cut my right cheek. Exactly where the mark had been. The cut was certainly there, but the mark was gone” (600). The knife pierced his face in the hotel, which seems to have drained the embodied evil out of the mark. A marvelous occurrence, the disappearance is physical evidence that proves the battle in the hotel world has helped to solve the historical conflict haunting the primary world. As a detective story that wants us to explore the Japanese mind as if it were a physical space, the marvelous tone is what makes this possible. The marvelous enables the protagonist, otherwise bound by ordinary human capabilities and the laws of the waking world, to travel into a space that doesn’t exist in the world as we know it. In other words, the marvelous tone is what allows Toru to become the detective and psychoanalyst of the Japanese mind.

Accordingly, when Toru wakes, the well is filled with water, suggesting that the defeat of Noboru in the battle has reopened some cosmic flow, bringing wholeness to that which was previously dried-up and empty in the primary world. It is the beginning of a resolution. And the end of this confrontation completes the historical circle into which Toru was drawn. Like Lieutenant Mamiya, he too is rescued from a well and nursed back to health. But because Toru helps to invert the historical lineage in which Lieutenant Mamiya was involved, he will have the chance to live a full life—to make his house again a home.

In the primary world, Noboru Wataya collapsed with a stroke and is now on life support. He is weakened, but not completely dead. Things cannot be destroyed in the unconscious itself, but once they are brought to the surface, to the primary world, they can be addressed—and done away with. The disappearance of the blue-black mark on Toru’s face is a good example. This is the goal of
psychoanalytic therapy: to dislodge repressed elements, bring them to the surface, and once the patient is aware of the problem, it can finally be brought to resolution.

But The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle ends just before the “therapy” is completed. Kumiko writes to Toru to tell him that she will finally kill Noboru by unplugging him from the life support machine. This move would bring the therapy to its conclusion by destroying the root of the neurosis. But the book ends before the outcome of this final battle is revealed. In the last chapter, we learn that Kumiko is indeed in jail and is awaiting trial, suggesting that she was successful in her endeavor. But there is a more subtle issue: we do not know if she actually killed Noboru Wataya. She may well not have been able to kill him, as suggested by her upcoming trial, which Toru speculates will be over quickly, and that she be sentenced to a short stay in prison, if not an outright dismissal. Perhaps she is awaiting trial for attempted murder, not first-degree. Ultimately, the book remains agnostic on the question of whether Noboru Wataya is really dead.

This is the resolution of The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle, such that it is. Nothing is destroyed, it only changes form. Toru brings this force out of the unconscious into the light of day. Kumiko seeks to banish it from the primary world, a gesture towards victory—at least for now. But the relationship between the hotel world and the primary world suggests that this resolution may only be temporary. As Kumiko fears, “He’s not going to die…he may not regain consciousness, though. He may just continue to wander through darkness” (582). Noboru Wataya may be weakened in the primary world, but he could just have easily retreated to a deeper corner of the hotel world. If the hotel represents the collective unconscious space of a nation, there are so many untended nooks and crannies where, no matter how diligently the hotel staff look after the space or how well the guests treat their home-away-from-home, there will always be a forgotten room or corridor where that burglar, the force they quelled—for now—will be lying in wait for the right social conditions when it can again emerge from the darkness.
CHAPTER 3

Mapping the Social World onto Freudian Psychoanalysis in D. M. Thomas’ *The White Hotel*

The life of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) spanned an era of profound dissonance: historical progress spurred barbarism, technological innovations facilitated human and ecological destruction. Intellectual and artistic movements were threatened by fascist backslides. Freud’s biography overlaps in revealing ways with the triumphs and failures of European civilization. Fin-de-siècle Vienna—where Freud resided just a few streets *outside* of the potent imperial Innere Stadt—was home to astonishing advancements in the arts, sciences, and philosophy, but was also a place of deep anti-Semitism and political struggle.27 Contemporaneous to his work on the case studies with Josef Breuer (including the case study of Anna O., which later became *Studien über Hysterie*), a crisis of anti-Semitism gripped France in 1894, known as the Dreyfus Affair. The death of Freud’s father was followed by the election of an anti-Semitic mayor of Vienna, Karl Lueger, in 1897: the symbolic despot replaced with a real one. In 1905, Einstein propagated his “Theory of Relativity,” which was around the same time that Freud befriended Jung. Revolutions springing up in physics, psychoanalysis, and art were accompanied by increasing military tensions, which exploded in the outbreak of the First World War. Just a year after publishing *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* in 1921, Mussolini rose to power. After a decade of increasingly strained economic and political life in Europe, Freud and Einstein began a correspondence on the topic of war (“Why War?”) in 1932. A year later, (Austrian) Hitler rose to power and Freud’s books would be burned in Germany as

“degenerate works” (entartete Kunst). He escaped to England in 1938 and died just weeks after the Nazis invaded Poland in September 1939. Four of his sisters were murdered in the concentration camps of Europe.\(^\text{28}\)

When transposed against the peaks and valleys of the historical landscape through which Freud’s life traversed, one begins to suspect that *zeitgeist* profoundly shaped the trajectory of both the events in his personal life as well as and his intellectual and professional development. One of the most persistent criticisms of Freud’s work, however, is that psychoanalysis does not satisfactorily account for the social influences that contribute to an individual’s history (Horrocks 139). With a preference for locating root causes in infantile sexuality and the traumas of childhood, traditional Freudian psychoanalysis is surprisingly laconic on the intersection of the patient’s social context with psychic life and neurosis.\(^\text{29} \quad 30\). How do the social and cultural influences of history link up with psychoanalysis? In other words, how might psychoanalysis account for the complex combination of personal history and social context that together are the sum of a life?

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\(^{28}\) Biographical and social anecdotes taken from the “Timeline” of Freud’s life from the Freud Museum-London. 4 July 2012 <http://www.freud.org.uk/education/timeline/>

\(^{29}\) This is not to say that Freud was not an avid observer of the social environment. Freud made important critiques of religion, society, and morality (*Civilization and its Discontents*, *Totem and Taboo*, *The Future of an Illusion*, etcetera). He also ventured into social psychology—the study of how individual behavior is influenced by the presence of others—with *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, among other works. The point is that while Freud may have been interested in social psychology, it does not comprise the core of psychoanalytic theory.

\(^{30}\) Horrocks, citing Greenberg and Mitchell’s important *Object Relations in Psychoanalytic Theory*, describes that philosophical treatments of man have generally fallen into two camps—man-as-an individual (which is indebted to Enlightenment ideals) and man-as-intrinsically-social. In contrast to more popular view of object relations in contemporary psychology which sees the human as a “social unit,” Freud’s lies on the other side of the spectrum because psychoanalysis is fundamentally a more “individualist” psychology (Horrocks 97). Horrocks also explains that because of this focus on the individual, traditional Freudian psychoanalysis has been criticized for its apoliticality, which subsequent theoretical work in other fields, particularly feminism, has helped to ameliorate (139). By combining feminist theory (among other philosophical approaches) with psychoanalysis, it becomes possible to rethink the unconscious in ways that develop a kind of politics. In the case of *The Wind Up Bird Chronicle* and *The White Hotel*, socio-political elements become repressed in the unconscious, just like libidinal or transgressive drives of the individual psyche. This is the literary challenge to traditional psychoanalysis—finding a way to accommodate the complex way in which the social world imprints itself on the life of an individual. Roger Horrocks, *Freud Revisited* (New York, Palgrave, 2001).
D. M. Thomas’ *White Hotel* (1981) begins to imagine an answer to this problem. The novel, unusually constructed as it is, begins with a biographical sketch from Freud’s life, as described in a fictionalized letter (depicting real events, however) sent from the United States back to the European continent by Sándor Ferenczi, the Hungarian psychoanalyst who accompanied Freud and Jung on their infamous trip to America. The opening motif of discovery and voyage into the unknown links up thematically with Cortázar, Borges, and Murakami, and confirms that we are on the right course. Postmarked from the Standish Hotel in Worcester, Massachusetts—the New World—on September 8, 1909, Thomas’ Ferenczi writes of the strange, “rather extraordinary occurrence” during “a luncheon in a very luxurious hotel” (Thomas 4) hosted by Freud on the eve of their embarkation to the United States. And so Thomas’ Ferenczi tells the story: at this Bremen hotel, the conversation among colleagues turned to the “peat-bog corpses” which had recently been discovered in northern Germany. Freud became distraught over the topic of conversation and admonished Jung, who was fascinated with the story, “Why are you so concerned with these corpses?” (5). Jung, however, continued to be “carried away” by his fascination with the archaeological oddities, and “Freud slipped off his chair in a faint” (5). Upon awaking, Freud accused Jung “of wanting him out of the way” (5). As Ferenczi reports, “Jung, of course, denied this in the strongest terms” (5). In fainting, something has come to light. Freud is onto something, but what? What in his unconscious could have caused the father of psychoanalysis to lose consciousness?

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31 The letter from Ferenczi to his mistress back in Hungary is fiction, but the fainting episode depicted in the letter, of course, is based on real events that have been described by Jung in letters. Karin Sanders, *Bodies in the Bog and the Archaeological Imagination* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009) 51.
The Hysterical Freud

Throughout most of history, but particularly in the Victorian era, fainting was associated with hysteria, or disturbances in the womb. One of Freud’s early contributions to psychoanalytic theory was the 1895 *Studien über Hysterie* in which he identified hysterical symptoms with repressed memories, thereby delinking the ailment from the organic disease process. At the root of hysteria is the psychological, not the pathological. As such, the disorder requires a psychoanalytic treatment to deracinate trauma elements from the patient’s past that have been repressed in the unconscious mind. Like dreams, the language used by the patient reveals clues about what is really going on in the unconscious. Thomas’ Freud chooses words that depict anxiety in spatial terms: Freud believes Jung wants him “out of the way,” perhaps dead, indicating a deep fear that there is “no room” anymore for the father of psychoanalysis. But perhaps this is not just an Oedipal struggle. What if an additional symbolic logic is at work? There is also an undercurrent to this conversation that suggests their conflict might also represent the “racial” and ethnic tensions of the times, with Freud as the Jew and Jung as the archetypal Gentile. The language with which Thomas’ Ferenczi describes Jung—Freud’s Swiss (and Aryan) protégé—as being “carried away” evokes the phrasing often used to describe Europeans caught up in the maelstrom of fascism. In 1909, though, this storm was but gathering on the horizon.

The plot of *The White Hotel* develops the therapeutic relationship between Sigmund Freud and his patient, a Jewish musician of Ukrainian extraction named Elizabeth (“Lisa”) Erdman. Their therapy commences just after the end of the First World War, but the book spans the interwar years, leading finally to the Holocaust. Lisa (a fictional character) seeks the analyst’s help in coping with her hysterical symptoms, which manifest as a peculiar and unrelenting pain in her left breast and ovary. During a retreat to an Alpine health spa, she produces a remarkable poem about a “white hotel”
which is rife with scenes of sexuality and disaster. She presents this poem to her analyst as part of their therapy and the book is organized around various formal interpretive efforts designed to uncover the meaning of Lisa’s white hotel. The epistolary exchange of the “Prologue” is comprised of Ferenzci’s opening letter and various letters sent from Freud to his colleagues introducing his patient’s poem of the white hotel. The verses Lisa has written about the white hotel transposed into a musical score make up the first chapter, “Don Giovanni.” Thomas’ Freud encourages her to analyze the poem, the results of which constitute the second chapter, “The Gastein Journal,” a self-reflective and extended prose version of the poem. Freud’s analysis of his patient becomes the topic of a case study (masterfully ventriloquized by Thomas) in chapter three, published under the pseudonym he assigns to Lisa, “Frau Anna G.”32 After this section as Barnsley has observed, what started as a “novel of ideas” becomes “more a novel of events (452) by transitioning to a more traditional plot-based story line. An omniscient third-person voice replaces the first-person voice(s) of the first three chapters and narrates Lisa’s life after analysis: her career as an opera singer, her marriage and move to the Ukraine, and her murder in the pits of Babi Yar.

In a novel that moves forward from the opening frame of Freud’s fainting spell in 1909, to Lisa’s analysis just after the First World War, and onwards to the Second World War and the Holocaust, it keeps returning to the white hotel, which stands at the center of this novel33. With its constantly shifting formal structures and narrative modes, the hotel is both the enigma and the anchor, the conflicting site of anxiety and comfort. Why the hotel? Hotels are spaces of anonymity,

32 “Frau Anna G.” echoes “Anna O.” the pseudonym for the feminist Jewish woman Bertha Pappenheim, one of Freud’s most famous case studies in Studien über Hysterie.

33 Thomas has published on how he conceived of The White Hotel both stylistically and thematically. While the constructedness of the novel may appear to be a feat of narrative planning and deliberation, Thomas emphasizes the role of coincidence and serendipity in his creative process, which also “play[ed] an important part in the book.” (1960). Interestingly, Thomas has much more to say about the process of writing the novel than of the figure standing at the center of the novel, the “white hotel.” For more on Thomas’ creative process, see “Freud and The ‘White Hotel.” British Medical Journal (Clinical Research Edition) 287, 6409 (December 24-31, 1983): 1957-1960.
transit, and modernity: indeed, the Bremen hotel for Freud is the point of embarkation from the Old World into the New, a kind of transitional passage from the known into the great unknown. Lisa’s white hotel poem is an artistic depiction of her unconscious drives and motivations—the fruits of what has come to the surface during her analysis with Freud. What is it about the space of the hotel, specifically, that inspired such libidinal energy in both for the father of psychoanalysis and his patient?

The anxiety that appears to precipitate Freud’s fainting episode has to do with the fear of domination, obscurity, and most importantly, death—both in a professional and existential sense. As Sanders confirms, letters from Jung describing Freud’s fainting incident in Bremen indicate that Freud was convinced Jung’s “inordinate” interest in the peat-bog corpses symbolized his death-wish against his symbolic father (50). Not surprisingly, Freud resorted to the Oedipdal dynamic as his first means of interpretation. The explanation, rooted in infantile sexuality, is in keeping with classical Freudian psychoanalytic theory. But what was it about the corpses, specifically, that so upset Freud? Sanders argues that because peat-bog corpses are so perfectly preserved, they embody “the idea of being buried alive,” which is the “most uncanny thing of all” (50). The corpses are “locked in the space between the familiar and the unfamiliar” (50), between life and death. Their uncanny life-like preservation is a kind of intrusion of the past on the present. It would seem that the peat-bog corpses would be “poster children” for Freud’s theory” (50) as the very embodiment of the uncanny mechanism—the way the unconscious mind interacts with the conscious self.

Accordingly, Freud should have liked the corpses for their symbolic value because they illustrate his theory so well. But instead he sensed something deeply unsettling about them. If the

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34 It is worth mentioning that “Erde” is the German for “earth” which also echoes the anxiety about being buried alive as fated in the name of Thomas’ hysterical patient of Freud. Her name also resonates with Freud’s hysteria about the peat-bog corpses.

35 Thomas himself comments in his discussions on the creative genesis of The White Hotel: “[Jung’s discussion of the peat-bog corpses] was really itself an extraordinary coincidence when one thought of the other kind of peat bog corpses.
aperture of explanatory causes is enlarged to include not just infantile sexuality, but also, perhaps, the social context, the peat-bog corpses could represent not just the age-old Oedipal conflict, but could also portend something terrible that is to come. What if the mummified corpses (found in Germany, no less) foreshadow the mass graves of the Second World War? What if the future, not just the past, is subject to the forces of repression in the unconscious mind? Was the real Freud, by his own terms, a hysteric?

As part of the “Prologue,” the letter about Freud’s hysteria is the point of departure into the novel, but it is dated ten years prior to the epistolary exchange that unfolds amongst Freud and his colleagues discussing his patient’s fascinating case and intriguing poem in 1920. Why is Ferenczi’s letter part of the Prologue? Although it seems “out of place,” the letter serves as the narrative frame that readies us to enter into the “the white hotel.” Moreover, the depiction of the fainting event from Freud’s life serves a thematic bridge between analyst and patient, between the biographical and metaphorical significance of the hotel within the realm of psychoanalysis. Although Freud did not write extensively on the figure of the hotel, it is clear from his biography that hotels held symbolic importance, as it was in hotels that Freud experienced recurrent (“hysterical”) fainting symptoms related to his fear of death and external aggression, as represented in this case by the young Swiss gentile, Jung. Initially, Freud placed great faith in Jung as the figure who could help legitimate

which later in the century the Germans were desperately trying to dig up and cover their traces of Babi Yar” (1960). But is it really a “coincidence,” (which connotes randomness, chance, the marvelous) or was there something more rational about what Freud sensed? The novel suggests the latter.

36 Nicholas Royle has also observed that there seems to be an uncommented link between the hotel and psychoanalysis, for “the hotel is where Freud repeated loses his head” (3) in the course of several fainting fits. He notes that in The Interpretation of Dreams, Freud had called the dream as a “sort of holiday” (quoted on 4). This leads him to argue that “perhaps in some sense…every dream is a ‘hotel dream’, a not-at-home place that is nevertheless not the same as homelessness” (4). What is interesting here is that Royle is pointing to the uncanny-like quality of the hotel, which helps solidify our suspicions that the hotel is a kind of unconscious space.

37 On November 24, 1912, three years after his fainting spell at the Bremen hotel over the peat-bog corpses, Freud hosted a luncheon for a number of his psychoanalytic colleagues at the Park Hotel in Munich. Among the discussants was Swiss physician Carl Jung and Ernest Jones, the English psychoanalyst who later helped to arrange Freud’s escape from Nazi-occupied Austria. The guests were to discuss plans for the new monthly journal they had founded, the

Kaloustian 87
psychoanalysis as an international movement by deracinating it from its “Viennese Jewish origins” (Kramer 112). As such, Freud saw Jung as symbolic son, the inheritor of a movement, whose ethnic background would lend “credibility” to a science whose founding practitioners were Jewish in a world increasingly hostile towards their ethno-religious background. In other words, Freud was highly aware of the social context in which they were operating. Freud’s friendship with Jung, then, was also strategic—a way of hedging his bets and ensuring the survival of his life’s work in the threatening world of anti-Semitism. Theirs was an Oedipal conflict informed by the social and racial struggle of the times.

Accordingly, by the end of The White Hotel, it becomes clear that Freud’s anxiety over the mummified peat-bog corpses parallels Babi Yar, where his patient Lisa Erdman meets her violent end. By opening The White Hotel with a depiction of Freud’s fainting spell in that hotel in Bremen, Lisa’s “hysterical” symptoms of the “white hotel,” which both represent repressed elements of her past and anticipate events which will befall her in the future, are aligned with the real Freud’s own experience. The real Freud intuited, however unconsciously, that the repressive mechanism might work both ways. This juxtaposition forges a correspondence between analyst and patient that prescribes a way of approaching the mysterious white hotel. The biographical sketch, then, not only contextualizes Thomas’ critique of Freudian theory: it legitimates it. The hotel connects fact and fiction. By “making room” for symbolic elements from both the patient’s personal history and social

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38 In fainting, Freud himself became a hysterics, which effectively dispels the gender prejudice from the ailment. For Robertson, by depicting Freud as a hysterics, the novel also renders a feminist critique of psychoanalysis: “she progresses from a pitiable ‘hysterics’ to a competent, brave, and independent woman, and there is at least the possibility that she does it in spite of Freud rather than because of him” (456-457).
context, which derive from both the past and the future, the hotel comes to represent an expanded view of the unconscious mind—and a challenge to classical Freudian psychoanalysis.

**Delinking the Future from the Marvelous: Towards an Uncanny Future**

During the course of their therapy, Thomas’ Freud commits to a certain reading of Lisa’s white hotel, which locates the meaning of the enigmatic structure in traumatic events of the patient’s past. This reading of the events, as demonstrated in the doctor’s case study of Lisa, “Frau Anna G.,” in Chapter 3, is in keeping with classical Freudian psychoanalytic theory: hysterical and neurotic symptoms are attributed to the reemergence of a patient’s repressed and unresolved past. Stories she revealed in analysis about conflicts with her parents from childhood, the death of her mother in a fire at a hotel when she was just a young girl, and a degrading sexual encounter with sailors as a teenager decode the mystery of the white hotel for Freud. Significantly, Lisa does not fully agree with Freud’s “reading” of the white hotel and insinuates that there may be more to the “white hotel” by accounting for her clairvoyance—an ability that she had kept from Freud until much later, when she reviewed the case study he was readying for publication.

The differences between Freud’s and Lisa’s positions—whether the events of the hotel backshadow or portend—are ultimately resolved by increasingly objective modes of narrative storytelling. As the book progresses from Lisa’s poem, to Lisa’s discussion of her poem, to Freud’s case study on Frau Anna G., to the omniscient narration of Lisa’s life post-therapy, and to the historical documentary mode that relates her gruesome end in Babi Yar, the shift in narrative mood can best be described as moving from the aesthetic and subjective towards the verifiable and the objective. History itself becomes the determiner. In the context of the narrative, it settles the question of meaning by fulfilling Lisa’s “premonition.”
Still, how are we to account for the accuracy of Lisa’s premonition? As we have discussed, the interpretation of dreams, the “via regia” into the unconscious, is the method towards disrobing what the unconscious has placed under disguise or distortion. Premonition is not part of this model. Instead, it belongs to the realm of the supernatural, the mystical. Classical psychoanalytic efforts, which are colored by these ideological (and temporal) preferences, then, reveal only part of the story—one façade of the hotel, as it were. Todorov’s distinction between the uncanny and the marvelous will be helpful in defining what is at stake in this debate of meaning. Whether the symbolic objects of the “white hotel” can be located in the past or the future can be considered in Todorovian terms a question as to whether the story is uncanny or marvelous: “the marvelous corresponds to an unknown phenomenon, never seen as yet, still to come—hence to a future; in the uncanny, on the other hand, we refer the inexplicable to known facts, to a previous experience, and thereby to the past” (42). Because it is located in the past, the uncanny belongs to the realm of the “real,” to events that have already occurred; the marvelous, however, is outside of normal experience, and because of its strangeness and novelty, it cannot be explained in conventional terms. This relegates marvelous, (seemingly) unexplainable abilities like clairvoyance to the fringe—to the supernatural, to the “occult.”

Since the story unfolds chronologically (from 1909 to 1941 by the end of the book), among the three “characters” engaged in the interpretive effort—Freud, Lisa, and the implied reader—Freud is the only figure who does not have access to the “future.” Both Lisa and the implied reader do. Written in 1981, Thomas’ perspective on the interwar years leading up to the Holocaust benefits from the certainty gleaned from hindsight. Because Lisa and the reader know things about the future

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39 The Freudian uncanny is also invested in this temporal distinction between the past and the present in order to describe the dynamic of repression, the upwelling of past events long held in place by repressive mechanisms, and the effect of these memories on the conscious mind. For Freud, however, uncanniness is a feeling that derives from the reemergence of something that was once familiar but has been defamiliarized by repression. While Todorov and Freud both developed their theories of the uncanny from literary analysis, their goals are quite different. Freud finds textual evidence for this theory of psychological repression; Todorov is searching for a classification schema for different kinds of narrative tones.
that Freud does not know, an interesting question arises: if we consider Freud as a metonym for all of European society, could he have known what was coming? Lisa grants him access to her white hotel, so why doesn’t he see what she sees? Why didn’t they all see the gathering storm?

The issue that arises in understanding Lisa’s white hotel is about how—and whether—social influences manifest in unconscious life. Susan Vice has described Thomas’ technique as a “narrative satire on backshadowing,” (38) a term used by Michael André Bernstein in his discussions of representation in Holocaust fiction. Bernstein describes:

Backshadowing endows the past with the coherence of an inevitable and linear unfolding; it works by a kind of retroactive foreshadowing in which the shared knowledge of the outcome of a series of events by narrator and listener is used to judge the participants in those events as though they too should have known what was to come. (626, emphasis in original)

For Bernstein, backshadowing allows both the narrator and the reader to “judge” characters for their perceptiveness, for what they “should have known.” For those looking back on the past (like Thomas, writing from the future), the past, especially during this interwar era, seems to have a kind of inevitability to it: how could they have not known? Thomas makes an interesting move by giving the internal narrator Lisa foresight, which places her both inside and outside of the dynamic among narrator (Thomas and Lisa), reader, and participant (Lisa, Freud, all of Europe) described by Bernstein. A key difference to keep in mind is that Lisa’s foresight derives from the unconscious; Thomas’ from his position in the 1970s looking back on history. From where Thomas stands, history indeed seems “inevitable and linear,” but for Lisa, who must unpack content mixed from the past and future and distorted by the forces of repression, it is not easy to make out cause-and-effect in a timeless space like the unconscious. History does not seem so inevitable from where she stands. And so in the context of this book, we do not judge Lisa in the same way as we would judge Freud, who serves as a kind of metonym for European society. Thus the contemporary reader recognizes Freud’s “blindness” and satirically shares in Lisa’s “clairvoyance.” The effect is conspiratorial:

Kaloustian 91
everyone knows a secret that Freud does not. But even if Freud were let in on the secret, would he accept it?

Because the novel opens with Freud’s hysteria about those peat-bog corpses, we begin to suspect that Freud’s own theory is blocking him from fully comprehending the true origin of Lisa’s hysterical symptoms, or even his own. His theory is also preventing him from arriving at the correct diagnosis. And so, Thomas’ Freud becomes the object of irony. His blindness renders him unable to anticipate the future—which seems to be boldly confronting him and all of Europe—because he is so wedded to his theory of the mind where repression of the past is the only temporal psycho-dynamic. Psychoanalytic theory, encompassing as it is, does not accommodate the possibility of premonition, which in Todorovean terms belongs to the future and therefore to the supernatural and the marvelous. Thus, Freud is shown to be repressed by the very theory he created.

*The White Hotel* experiments with a space that would lift some of the ideological preferences “repressing” Freud from fully understanding his patient. The hotel is the ideal structure for representing this revised view of the unconscious mind because the hotel itself is a hybrid space located on the interstices between private and public, individual and collective, the personal and the social. As an expanded conception of the unconscious mind, the hotel becomes more than just a repository of things repressed from the past. It also includes social influences, which necessarily shape a kind of future. Because *The White Hotel* effectively divorces premonition from the supernatural, it suggests that through the model of the white hotel, a timeless space of the unconscious, psychoanalysis may begin to be able to account not just for a repressed past, but also may help to uncover a future that is yet to come. An uncanny view of the future may yet be possible.

40 Cross makes a similar argument in service of addressing the novel’s critique of reason: “at the center of *The White Hotel* is a dialectic in which Freud…represents the hostility of the Enlightenment to all that it deems superstition” (24). It is indisputable that the novel engages in a critique of “rational” versus “irrational” thought (we can see the linkages here to the uncanny and the marvelous, respectively) because this binary is constantly challenged at the formal level by the variety of discourses, not to mention the implicit debate that unfolds between Lisa and Freud in assigning meaning to the “hotel.” Certainly Freud’s theory of the mind is informed by this dialectic, and lacks any critical apparatus for beginning to comprehend what lies outside of his theoretical structure—namely, Lisa’s psychic gift.
From Don Giovanni to The Gastein Journal

Taken in isolation, the hotel of “Don Giovanni” is ambiguous—the fantastic mode in the Todorovian sense. There are not enough indicators to plot correspondences to either Lisa’s past or future; indeed, it may well be just fiction, or a dream. As her audience listening in, Freud and the reader do not have access to enough of Lisa’s “backstory” story to construct an informed interpretation. To sync up her personal history to the hotel, we will have to learn more of her story, which is what following section “The Gastein Journal” provides in part. The reader, however, enters into the white hotel not just from the privileged position of hindsight, but also with an important clue: Freud’s fainting spell. Keeping in mind the frame of The White Hotel, the reader seeks out correspondences not only between the hotel and Lisa’s life, but also between the nature of Freud’s hysteria and that of his patient.

And so, as the novel progresses to “The Gastein Journal,” it becomes increasingly clear (to the implied reader, but not to Freud, the object of backshadowing’s ironic twist) that the events related at the white hotel also portend the Holocaust. There is both a personal reading and a social reading, and it is nearly impossible to separate the two. This surety is all the more emphasized by the narrative construction of the novel. Freud’s case study, which sets forth the good doctor’s informed medical opinion immediately follows “The Gastein Journal,” furthering Thomas’ ironic treatment of Freud due to backshadowing. While these events are familiar to us as the implied reader (reading “from the future”), the happenings and characters taking lodging at the white hotel have been defamiliarized by this space. The literary construction of the white hotel, like the unconscious mind, communicates by way of metaphor and symbol, a figurative process that necessarily distorts, disguises, and defamiliarizes its subject—a subject that would otherwise be familiar, easily identifiable for what it is. A kind of uncanny tone results not just from the thematic content, but
also from the novel’s formal construction through backshadowing as we (but not Freud) recognize these defamiliarized events and characters for what they really represent.

The Don Giovanni Poem: In Bed with Violence

Up in the high alpine reaches sits a white hotel overlooking a crystal clear lake, where picturesque mountains jut up to the sky, providing a dramatic backdrop to an idyllic scene. This white hotel, however, is a most unusual mountain retreat. Standing at the center of the landscape, it is a haven from the profane and the urban, but keeps receding from view: “The white hotel merged into the trees. The trees / merged into the horizon of the green sea” (19). Is the hotel a mirage caused by the bending of light at disorienting altitudes or is it a fluid space made of the stuff of dreams? Who comes to the white hotel, and why? Is the white hotel a refuge, a shelter, or a transit point? Is it even a real place? The whiteness of the hotel is a kind of blankness—holding the mystery of the place into which the narrator enters. The young female guest arrives here as if in a dream, guided by a young man she meets on a train with whom she begins an intensely erotic sexual relationship. They are housed by the white hotel, enveloped in its protection away from judgment, but not from danger, as a series of disasters take the lives of many of those staying there. The destruction outside does not touch the lovers, however, who unabashedly and wildly couple.

“Don Giovanni” is not art for art’s sake. Lisa composes the poem of the white hotel with a specific awareness of her therapist. Astutely aware of her audience, she writes with a provocative admission: “I started to have an affair / with your son” (15). The possessive “your” addresses Freud, which confirms that from the opening lines, the poem is performing for its intended audience. By appropriating Freud’s “son” as her lover, she also pulls Freud into this space, resulting in a kind of
triangular desire in which the expression of her sexuality is mediated by psychoanalysis, as represented by Freud’s presence. The “love triangle” also implies a kind of underlying sociality to the patient’s white hotel—this is not just a private love story. Through the conflation of sexuality (which is normally associated with the personal and private) with the disasters that occur during the course of her stay at the white hotel (the “social world,” as it were), the expression of Lisa’s sexual desire comes to reveal a deep anxiety about violence and death generally, and as we will come to learn, her own murder more specifically. These anxieties about death, then, are linked to the relationships, and by extension, the society of which she is part.

Freud’s “son”, the fictional lover whom she meets on a train, first takes Lisa to the white hotel: “[He] took me to a white lakeside hotel / somewhere high up, the lake was emerald / I could not stop myself I was in flames / from the first spreading of my thighs, no shame / could make me push my dress down, thrust his hand / away, the two, then three, fingers he jammed into me” (15).

The purity of the hotel, with its clean white walls and its pristine surroundings, stands in stark opposition to the intensely erotic imagery of the poem that does not shy away from the

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41 Rene Girard writes of “triangular desire” in his 1966 text, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*. The theory of triangular desire claims that desire is always inflected by a mediating force between the subject and the object, poses a kind of symbolic geometry of what drives human relationships. An invisible force is always standing between and directing the subject and the object of the subject’s desire. This model reminds us of the structuralist theorization of meaning itself, in which the signifier is the “mediating” force between the referent (the real object) and the signified (the idea of the object). That said, Girard insists that the mediating force is “intersubjective” and that it “cannot be localized anywhere” (Girard 2). As an addendum, I would suggest that in the case of *The White Hotel*, the hotel itself becomes a structure that houses this slippery network of relations and exposes the real source of sexual desire in this world as derived from Lisa’s anxiety about external violence (the brutal bayonet rape she will experience in the pits of Babi Yar, specifically).

42 As Cowart has observed, *The White Hotel* abounds with love triangles. The letter from Ferenzci, even, is addressed to his lover Gisela, not his wife (Cross 222). For Cowart, the abundance of love triangles symbolizes the “difficulty of sorting out erotic realities from their manifold deceptive appearances” (223)—pointing to the immense interpretive challenges posed by this book. I might add another triangle: the relationship of “knowing” among Freud, Lisa, and the implied reader, where Freud is the one “left out” of the backshadowing sentience, as it were.

43 *The White Hotel* has been highly acclaimed and is the subject of numerous studies, but it is not without its controversy. Part of the controversy surrounding this novel derives from the long-standing debate about the radical unrepresentability of the Holocaust and ethics of its appropriation, especially with regard to fiction. The comingling of sexuality and violence in particular have led some critics like Kappeler to claim that it is a “pornographic and nonsensical novel” (quoted in Vice 54), while others like Roberston and Wirth-Nesher have refuted this charge on the grounds that “Lisa Erdman is depicted overall with dignity and subjective empathy rather than reduced to an object from start to finish” (quoted in Vice 39). Despite this “polarized” critical reception, the novel was well-received in both England and the United States (Vice 38-39).
grotesqueness of the body or the sexual act. Significantly, it is Freud's son who leads the way, and Lisa finds herself out of control. She depicts her passion in terms of fire, an allusion that will come to carry more potent meaning as disasters unfold at the white hotel. While some critics have interpreted the unabashed eroticism and overt sexuality of Lisa’s poem as evidence of her sexual liberation and feminist orientation\footnote{See Robertson, who writes that “she had always been a more sexually healthy ‘liberated woman’” (468) and “when we look back at the early part of the novel we see what a healthy gesture it was for a woman of her time to write frankly and spontaneously about sexual desire in a way that linked it to her nurturing capacities” (469). While this may be going on, I believe that the viciousness of the encounters dominates whatever “healthy gesture” Lisa may be making in the poem and instead reveals that for her, sexuality is associated with violent, penetrative, phallocentric sex.}, the very language with which she depicts her sexual experiences seems to work against this reading. True, the sexual encounter is phrased in language that, for an upper class woman of the early twentieth century, is uncommonly forward (Robertson 469). Throughout the poem, though, harsh verbs like “rammed” (17, 21), “burst” (18), “jammed” (16, 17, 19, et al.), “driving like a piston,” (19) and “impaled” (19) are used to describe their sexual encounters. This mechanized and brutal lexicon indicates how Lisa really feels about the sexual activity. Although she does not shy away from the sexual encounters or fight off her lover, the language creates an uneasiness about their intercourse by connoting violence. The conflation of sexuality with violence, disaster, and destruction becomes a mainstay of Lisa’s experience at the white hotel.

Indeed, by the end of this first stanza, it is clear that the aggressiveness of the sexual encounter is not exactly pleasurable for Lisa. In fact, by her own admission, it is unequivocally painful: “I was split open / by your son, Professor, and now come back, a broken / woman, perhaps more broken” (16). Again, Lisa inserts Freud into the sexual encounter, (“by your son, Professor”), turning him into a spectator in their ménage\footnote{Ménage a trois, of French provenance, is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as “A relationship or domestic arrangement in which three people (usually a husband and wife and the lover of one of these) live together or are romantically or sexually involved.” These rhetorical moves bring Freud into the “domestic arrangement” at the hotel—a home away from home.}. Formally, this implication incorporates Freud into the
very structure of the white hotel and implicates him in the events that are occurring there. She grants him entry, so to speak, and makes room for him there. By sharing this poem, Lisa is looking to assuage the trauma she has experienced, symbolically embodied in the split verse “a broken / woman,” showing these two divisive aspects of self. Her plea “can / you do anything for me can you understand” is run on. In the absence of orthographic marks, it is questioning without being interrogative. It is almost as if while she knows she needs his help, she can’t quite ask him for it. And so, the success of their therapy will depend on whether Freud (and the implied reader) “can understand” the highly figurative world she has constructed in the poem—whether they can enter into the world of the white hotel. Her interpolation of Freud into the poem, who brings with him his interpretive tools, creates both an imperative and identifies a method (psychoanalysis) that might be able to untangle this complicated narrative in which she has woven her sexuality at the white hotel with unspeakable violence and destruction all around. Why do sex and violence, life and death, share such close quarters?

There are three main settings at the hotel: Lisa’s private room, the public areas of the hotel (dining room, hallways, basement, roof, etc), and the surroundings—the crystal mountain lake and the alpine mountainsides. Although Lisa and her lover are staying at the hotel, they are relatively isolated from the realities surrounding them because they spend most of their time in their room: “we stayed there, I don’t know, a week at least / and never left the bed” (16). At the white hotel, Lisa loses track of the passage of time, which further adds to the destabilization of what is going on around her. Disoriented and intoxicated by their frenetic sexual energy, the lovers mostly block out what happens at the hotel. Sometimes, though, they overhear unsettling things: “I think it was the second night, the wind / came rushing through the larches, hard as flint, / … and some people drowned, / we heard some waiters running and some guests / but your son kept his hand upon my
breast” (16). When some guests of the hotel drown during a violent wind storm, the lovers do not even leave their quarters to aide in the rescue efforts. They hear the shouts and the heavy footsteps of the hotel staff running to assist those who had been struck down by tragedy, but not do appear upset by the disturbances. Although “there were shouts and there were crashes in the hotel” (16), these sounds are distant, impersonal, disembodied, as if the noise were a product of the hotel itself and not the people in it.

Disaster does not touch the lovers either physically or emotionally. Their personal connection to others staying at the hotel is minimal and their sense of responsibility towards other guests is non-existent. They concern themselves only with their fulfilling their desire. Eventually, the disturbances from outside will begin to encroach upon this “private” space and Lisa will begin to realize that she was never really safe, and that in fact, she has been in bed with the violence for the entire duration of her stay.

Even though the hotel and its grounds are subject to extreme forces from extreme weather conditions, it is always another part of the hotel that is destroyed. It is always someone else who suffers the tragedy. Lisa’s room sustains only superficial damage after the storm: “some windowpanes were broken” (17)—an easy repair. And so they continue their epic lovemaking, “he kept sucking sucking me” (16). Freud’s son returns to her breast, fixated on his pleasure. They fall asleep peacefully, all the while hearing “the doors banging” (17) as the hotel staff bringing the corpses of the drowned into the hotel. A minor disturbance, but locked in their room, they are safe from all that. And so they sleep.

More disasters follow the drownings of the second night: a fire in one wing of the hotel, an avalanche that buries people alive, and an accident on the ski lift. On another day (remember, the passage of time is disorienting here), Lisa and her lover join some other guests on a boat on the lake. Under a “murderous sun,” a hostile force in the seemingly placid alpine setting, Lisa and her lover
engage in feverish sex while the other guests look passively on. Their gaze is averted when a fire breaks out in the hotel. Again, Lisa is isolated from the disaster by her lover’s insistent ministrations:

One wing was burning, and the people rushed / to the ship’s prow to stare at it in horror. So, pulling me upon him without warning, / your son impaled me, it was so sweet I screamed / but no one heard me for the other screams / as body after body fell or leapt / from the upper stories of the white hotel. / I jerked and jerked until his prick released / its cool soft flow. Charred bodies hung from trees, / he grew erect again. (20)

Again, the experience of tragedy is voyeuristic and non-threatening. It is somewhere “over there” at the hotel, but the guests are safe on the boat. While the other guests look on in horror at the burning wing of the hotel from afar, Freud’s son forces himself upon Lisa, and she shouts out too, but her voice is muffled by the screams of those dying in the flames. During this gruesome scene, in an act of supreme decadence Freud’s son reaches his climax. The disaster does not quell his sexual attraction; instead, it seems to heighten it as he again grows aroused despite (or perhaps because of) the “charred bodies” now hanging in the trees. Significantly, it appears that Freud’s son is the one aroused by this violence, not Lisa. She claims to have screamed out in passion, but later that night admits “I was so sore / I think something inside of me had been torn” (20). While she is surrounded by other guests and her lover at all times, she also subtly reveals that she feels alone and physically broken.

Although it seems like her private room affords her security, things are safe neither outside nor inside of the white hotel. While Lisa and her lover spend all day and night in the bed of their private quarters, losing track of the time and day, the hotel staff are busy at work rebuilding the burned out wing of the hotel to make room for the unceasing stream of guests “begging for a bed” (27), some of whom “had to be turned away” (27) from this mountain refuge. With their private room, the lovers have their own space but also hear the commotion outside, not just of the disasters and reconstruction efforts, but also of the “telephones” and “reception bells” constantly ringing with requests. They hear a couple “weeping / at being turned away” (27) and another woman

Kaloustian 99
“screaming” (27) who goes into labor. The surviving occupants of the white hotel come to appear less like guests and more like refugees.

In “Don Giovanni,” the relationship between the public and the private as represented by the hotel and its separate rooms becomes a metonym for the ways in which the individual experiences her own life in connection to the larger forces of her society. The individual is to her room as the guests are to the hotel. Given the historical and biographical context set forth in the Prologue, I would argue that Lisa’s white hotel mirrors the zeitgeist of the European interwar years by illustrating tension between the simultaneous insulation and implication of the individual in the larger events unfolding in the social world. The hotel is an especially apt structure for representing interwar European society not only because it negotiates between the private and the public, but also because as a hotel, it “sells” the illusion of privacy when in fact the lives and fates of those lodging at the white hotel are all inextricably linked. At the end, though, Lisa’s sense of privacy disappears altogether: “we heard a scraping, at the window was / the jolly chef…he gave the wood a fresh white coat, and winked” (27). Short-staffed as they are at the white hotel, the chef is commissioned to repaint the charred building, and applies another layer of white paint to cover up the burnt façade. Peering into their room, he shatters their illusion of privacy and winks at them, as if to tell them that he knows what is really going on. No room is really isolated at the white hotel, and no one is safe from the violence occurring all around them. And in fact, the violence that always seemed to be outside of the room is in fact inside as well. It is not just that disasters unfold all around her; Lisa is literally in bed with the violence, but is not quite able to recognize it for what it really is.

46 Not all critics of The White Hotel would agree with this reading. For example, Cross argues that the reader, like Freud does in the case study of chapter three, “will naturally assume” (25) that the content of her poem represents events from her past. I would argue, however, that this reading misses a crucial piece of evidence—Freud as hysteric—that Thomas uses to frame the novel. Because this frame is in place, we read Lisa’s texts differently, with an awareness of what those peat bog corpses and the hotel may symbolize—both in a figurative and historical sense.
For Thomas’ Freud, who does not enjoy the vantage afforded by backshadowing, the images and metaphors of the white hotel in “Don Giovanni” are hysterical, its symbols largely inaccessible, its architecture overwrought with the personal rooted in the patient’s past. As Freud explains in his case study: “finding the flood of irrational images too much to deal with, I [Freud] invited her to…write down her own analysis of what she had produced” (114). Instead of composing a strict analysis of the poem, however, Lisa “had chosen to expand her original phantasy, embroidering every other word” (114), which resulted in “The Gastein Journal,” a kind of prose translation of the verse. Although this is not a traditional expository analysis, it fills in some of the gaps and demystifies the enigmatic symbolism of “Don Giovanni” by providing specific information that makes clearer links to biographical, societal, and historical references found in the white hotel. In other words, “The Gastein Journal” provides the kind of material Freud (and the reader) need to perform more pointed analysis. Significantly, the reader, who is operating from the position of hindsight, recognizes some “uncanny” resemblances to the events of World War II. Together they are all headed towards disaster beyond anyone’s wildest imagination—beyond the imaginations of everyone but Lisa and the reader, that is.

In the context of the novel, the progression from “Don Giovanni” to “The Gastein Journal” is marked by a shift from the first-person to the third-person. While Lisa is the author of both sections, the shift in narrative mode creates a sense of distance between the author and her work. The first-person presence generates the subjective ambiguity of the poem, and the distance of the third-person narration imparts a greater degree of objectivity to the prose analysis. The author writes herself into the poem, and she must find a way to write herself out of it in order to understand the space she has constructed. As such, the world of the white hotel opens up
significantly to include a colorful cast of characters beyond Lisa, her lover, and other incidental actors who appear in the poem.

With its greater emphasis on sociality, the white hotel of “The Gastein Journal” is in conversation with the other kind of hotel-health retreats of late nineteenth and twentieth century literature, the most famous being Thomas Mann’s *The Magic Mountain*. In Mann’s 1924 novel, the inhabitants of the sanatorium make up a microcosm of Europe. The same is also true of the white hotel, where Lisa makes the acquaintance of guests from diverse national, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. From “Don Giovanni,” we know that the hotel serves as a symbol of partitioned and fragmented community, a decadent society in which responsibility towards others sharing the same space is a distanced proposition. By making the better acquaintance of the other guests staying at the white hotel, it becomes clear that not only are the guests of the white hotel metonymic of European society, but they also display the racially and religiously motivated hostilities that will culminate in the Second World War and the Holocaust. In fact, the longer we stay at the white hotel, the more it begins to suggest not a resort, but a concentration camp.

And so “The Gastein Journal” begins with a nightmare, but the reader does not know that Lisa is “only dreaming.” While this scene was omitted or undetectable in the poem, it offers some revealing clue. Before arriving the white hotel, Lisa is running through a forest from soldiers from whom “there was no escape” (31). Soon she “collapsed into the bitter earth” (32). As she hears the soldiers coming closer and closer to her, “she crawled she felt bullets pumping into her shoulder.” Suddenly she awakes from the “dream” and is on the train heading to the white hotel: “the ticket collector was shaking her” (32). In other words, she awakens from the nightmare of her (future) reality where she will be pursued by Nazis into the dream of the white hotel, a kind of illusory shelter from the brutality that awaits her later in life. Her life (and the lives of all of Europe’s Jews) is heading towards the pits of Babi Yar and the death camps of the East, but she does not quite know
that this is her/their final destination; her hysterical symptoms, however, anticipate the bayonet rape she will suffer by a soldier in 1941. And so when Lisa meets her lover, Freud’s son, a (Jewish) soldier returning home, she sees him “lying frozen in his coffin,” (35) an uncanny omen of things to come. The parataxis is revealing: she moves from the soldiers hunting her down in her “dream” to awaken in the train car to meet the aggressive sexual advances of Freud’s son. The figure of the soldier unites her anxiety of violence and death with her sexuality. Although the scene remains mysterious to Freud, it teaches us how to read this section. As a frame to “The Gastein Journal,” this scene colors all of Lisa’s encounters at the white hotel with an unmistakable anxiety that appears to be rooted not in trauma of the past, but in real anticipation of the future.

This time at the hotel we get to know who is staying there. A German lawyer named Vogel, an English major called Lionheart, and a Russian named Bolotnikov-Leskov take an especially prominent role. Their names represent their countries of origin as the European allied and axis powers. As such, these individuals come to stand for the conflicts among the powerful nations of Europe. Vogel, the German, expresses blatantly anti-Semitic comments when referring to the disaster on the slopes by minimizing the loss of human life: “it might have been worse—there were a large number of Yids among the victims” (84). His drunkenness only partially excuses his behavior. His Russian friend leads him away and returns to apologize to the group whom Vogel had made that distasteful remark (among whom Jews are present). While he apologizes for Vogel’s insult by saying “It was inexcusable,” he also asks for their understanding because “Vogel had suffered more than most from the disasters of the white hotel” (84), an excuse that recalls an oft-cited justification for anger defeated Germany, who “unfairly” endured political humiliation and economic poverty at the hands of the victors after the First World War. As in interwar Europe, like at the white hotel, this resentment was often inflected with shades of anti-Semitism.
An uneasy ambience pervades the space, but no one can quite put their finger on the problem. A newcomer to the hotel, a Belgian doctor, asks whether the disaster on the ski lift might have been an act of “political terrorism” (84). This question unsettles the guests, who “were beginning to get uneasy with this talk of violence and terrorism” (84-85). These larger concerns are ignored in favor of lighter topics: “the conversation on the terrace turned gradually to more pleasant themes, such as the likelihood tomorrow of firm snow and calm water” (85). The guests ignore the tragedies—the literal disasters at the white hotel, the anti-Semitism—to pursue their leisure in the beautiful surroundings. Just as with Lisa and her lover, who alone in their room making love are “disturbed by nothing more ominous than the faint but frequent ringing of telephone in the depths of the hotel” (85), the guests ultimately do not want to be bothered by what is going on around them. They would literally rather talk about the weather.

Because time is dis-placed at the white hotel, the space is not limited to mere allegory of interwar European society. After arriving at the white hotel, some more clues appear that unmistakably link the particularities of the hotel with the events of the Holocaust. First, she arrives on a train. She realizes that “she has no luggage whatsoever” and all that she had brought with her had either been “stolen” or “vanished” (44). Of course, collecting the piles of stolen suitcases and looting them of their valuables was the first step in the process of disembarkation at the concentration camps. Later at dinner, guests are seen dancing to music, not from an orchestra, but from “a gypsy band” (45), another ethnic group that was persecuted by the Nazis. As “whole new crowd[s] of tourists move in” (82) and try to find a place to eat in the dining room, they are entertained by the band, just as the Jews arriving from the trains to Auschwitz were greeted with music upon their arrival. The “new arrivals wore looks of horror and pity” and the “gypsy band and the waiting staff tried to keep up an air of jollity, for the sake of the newcomers; though they themselves had suffered losses” (82).
All of those who arrive at the white hotel and are granted entrance into the “dining room” left behind their lives to take this “holiday.” A brief section composed of short postcards to friends and family back home from guests introduces the cast of characters staying at the hotel as (mostly nameless) individuals from all ages and all walks of life: a nurse, a priest, a Japanese maid, and army major, a banker’s wife, a watchmaker, a boy, a salesman, a lawyer, a prostitute, and so on (47-51). The generic titles rather than names lend a metonymic quality to these characters. The fact that they do not have names speaks to their anonymity, but also rhetorically enables them to stand for groups from all walks of life. This brings us to another important point: the white hotel is a hotel without social class. Normally, only a certain class of people can or will take lodging at a hotel, depending on its quality. Everyone stays at the white hotel, though, from a prostitute to the rich banker’s wife.

The postcards “sent home” are short and display the full spectrum of awareness—from complete ignorance to full knowledge—of what is going on at the hotel47. For some, it is an idyllic space: “we are sitting on a boat in the lake, gnawing chicken bones and drinking wine. Hotel is marvelous” (47) writes the secretary. Some write of the conditions at the hotel, which appear less luxurious and far more trying than the secretary described. “We’re jammed against one another…Bodies! Everywhere!” (48) complains an army major, while because of the fire, the watchmaker remarks: “well, there go all our possessions except the clothes we stand up in” (48). Taken together, the postcards present a conflicting report of what things are really like at the white hotel. After all, Jews facing deportation were often told that they were going on vacation or being relocated somewhere safer in the East to begin a new life. Others did not believe the euphemisms and knew what the rumors resettlement really meant. As the postcards go on, though, optimistic

47 Jewish deportees were sometimes allowed to write a final letter or postcard to their families. The letters were generally limited to 20-30 words in length and naturally anything that would have been incriminating for the Nazis was censored. While imprisoned, occasionally inmates were instructed to write letters home to their families detailing how “well” they were treated, how much food they were receiving, and how much they were enjoying their new lives. Part of the permanent exhibition at the Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas in Berlin displays examples of these postcards. 4 July 2012 <http://www.stiftung-denkmal.de/>.
messages from the prostitute, like “the weather is good and the food first class” and the retired couple, “It’s still been worth coming, the holiday of a lifetime” (50) begin to sound hollow and unconvincing.

Despite the conflicting reports, one thing is certain: families have been torn apart at the white hotel. The baker’s wife grieves over the loss of her elderly mother: “our hearts are breaking. Dear mother has died in a terrible fire at the hotel…we are trying to keep cheerful for the children’s sake” (49-50). A seamstress writes “my little girl is dead” (51). The elderly and the young are among the first to be lost from the crowd of guests. For some reason, these demographics are hit hardest by the “disasters.” Lisa wonders why a woman heavy with child would have come to white hotel: “it was foolish [for her] to have come, without being sure of a room, so far on in her pregnancy” (85). Luckily a room was found for her, but not everyone is so lucky. Just where the guests who had to be turned away go is never clarified. No one seems to ask.

Up in the mountain beyond the hotel, passengers travel between peaks on a ski lift. When the cable snaps scores of passengers are dropped to their deaths. Lisa and her lover observe this from afar. The soldier takes out his telescope and trains it on the distant mountain. Trying to bring it into focus, “he caught reflected sunlight and had to pull his eyes away” (79). This time he looks “more cautiously” (80) and sees people falling, but “with the naked eye nothing could be seen but a cable car crawling minutely along between two mountains” (80). Everyone is falling to their deaths, “the men and boys struck the ground or the lake first” and “the women and young girls fell next” (80-81). Divided by gender, fathers with their sons, mothers with their daughters, the guests disappear into the abyss below. This disaster, related but spatially distanced from the white hotel itself, recalls the mass executions of the Holocaust that were carried out in rural areas, especially in Eastern Europe. Hidden from view, no one really sees what is happening. Only a few look closely
enough to see. Later back at the hotel, of course, the Belgian doctor would ask if this event was an act of “political terrorism,” but no one wanted to talk about this unpleasant possibility.

By the end of “The Gastein Journal,” many of these guests have checked out and “a whole new crowd of tourists had moved in” (82). Only a few from the original crowd remain, and although they have survived the numerous disasters, they have not all fared so well here. Now “Vogel, the older members of the Dutch family…Bolotnikov-Leskov, and the pale, sad, pathetically thin young woman with her elderly nurse” (82) are all who remain. As more and more guests filter into the hotel, overcrowding conditions set in. Under such dire circumstances, the deaths of some guests in the numerous disasters becomes a kind of “godsend; but even this unusually rapid turnover could not keep pace with the demand, and many had to be turned away” (85). As more and more “hopeful visitors turned up at the white hotel” (59), there is a never ending stream of newcomers, but no one ever checks out to go back where they came from. There is no leaving the white hotel. And so the departure of a guest at the hotel means only one thing: the individual has died in a recent disaster. In an attempt to maintain an air of conviviality, however, the deaths are spoken of only in euphemisms. Lisa and her lover get a “better, bigger table” in the dining room, for example, because “several guests had moved out” (64). It seems as though Lisa and the other guests have taken lodging not in a hotel, but in something like a concentration camp.

This brings us to a problem: how can the white hotel hold symbols indicating interwar Europe and the Holocaust? If “Don Giovanni” seems to be representative of the prevailing attitudes of the interwar years, then how can “The Gastein Journal” depict both the time leading up to the war, and the Holocaust itself? It is not a contradiction for the space to hold these two temporally distinct allegories because as a kind of unconscious space, the white hotel is not bound to the rules of chronological time. Such is the representative power of depicting spatially history in a libidinal mode. In the spatial plane, cause-and-effect cannot be discerned. Under these conditions of representation,
juxtaposition dictates the nature of the relationship. But what becomes visible or possible by placing these two “contents” side-by-side? The white hotel seems to hold both her individual history as well as collective European history. Lisa was actually not delivered to the concentration camps of Europe on the train, but this is in the space of her “unconscious.” Her fate in Babi Yar, the end of her own personal history, aligns more clearly with the individuals who fell from the cable car to her death in the mass grave in the valley below, but she only observes this from afar at the white hotel. While others die at the white hotel, she survives, even though she will be murdered relatively early in the Holocaust, in 1941. It is not necessary for the events of her own life to perfectly match up with what is happening at the white hotel. The difficulty we experience as readers in discerning Lisa’s true fate from the fates of others, in fact, is a rhetorical move that reinforces the essential role of sociality in the make-up of an individual’s psychic life—and the impossibility of separating her personal history from the social history in which she lives and ultimately dies.

The Uncanny Future

At the end of Freud’s case study, he diagnoses Lisa’s hysterical symptoms in the expected way: “The symptoms were, as always with the unconscious, appropriate: the pains in breast and ovary because of her unconscious hatred of her distorted femininity; anorexia nervosa: total self-hatred, a wish to vanish from earth. Also, the breathless, choking condition…as a consequence of having glimpsed the true circumstances of her mother’s death” (140). The pains refer from symbolic feminine locations; her feeling of choking derives from the Elektra complex—the mythic psychosexual struggle of the girl against her mother. Freud reads the white hotel as the “haven of security” and believes that “the original white hotel—we have all stayed there—[is] the mother’s womb” (143). Her journal indicates an “acceptance of the unalterable past” and serves as “an
interesting example of the unconscious preparing the psyche for the eventual release of repressed ideas into the consciousness” (141). Under the influence of backshadowing, this reading is incomplete and unsatisfying for both Lisa and the implied reader. As Robertson confirms, “Freud comes out of this looking considerably less authoritative than when the book started” (455).

The white hotel is all of these things, but it is also so much more. In a letter sent long after her analysis was completed, Lisa writes Freud: “your analysis, (the mother’s womb, and so on) strikes me as profoundly true” (184). But as Lisa will also reveal to Freud, the hotel is not just a womb: it is also a grave. Functioning as a kind of unconscious space where time is suspended, the white hotel simultaneously contains a repository of the past, a critique of the present, and an omen of the future. It holds all things. This much Thomas’ Freud intuited: “by the time I had put down the notebook I was convinced that it might teach us everything, if we were only in a position to make everything out” (115). The phrasing, again, identifies a spatial problem, a problem of perspective. From Freud’s vantage, he is not in a “position” to see all that we can see.

In one of their last exchanges, Freud affirms Lisa’s additional insights in light of her clairvoyance but “prefer[s] to go ahead with the case study as it stands, despite all the imperfections” (195) because he has no way of integrating her premonitions into the scientific theory of psychoanalysis. Although he does not know how to comprehend her clairvoyance, like the good scientist he is, he does not dismiss her: “my experience of psychoanalysis has convinced me that telepathy exists. If I had my life to do over again, I should devote it to the study of this factor” (196). Thomas’ Freud recognizes the limitations of both his theory and of the case study itself by

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48 Barnsley confirms that the transition from “Don Giovanni” to “The Gastein Journal” and finally to Freud’s case study, “Frau Anna G.,” exhibits an “over-all ‘movement’ of the book…from introspection to extrospection, from psychic realities to social ones, from, indeed, the province of depth psychology to that of social science…[this movement] suggests that ethnic factors, and not, as with Freud, purely sexual ones, enter into the etiology of her illness” (Barnsley 454).

49 Readers might wonder whether the real Freud would have ever made a statement like this. Berman argues that yes, the imminently rational and analytical thinker was “fascinated by occult phenomena” (288). Although Freud did not believe...
identifying an area in need of further research. He ends the letter to Frau Erdman with a kind of apology: “I call to mind a saying of Heraclitus: ‘The soul of a man is a far country, which cannot be approached or explored.’” He goes on to say: “It is not altogether true, I think, but success must depend on a fair harbor opening in the cliffs” (196). Freud explored one coast, as it were, of the unconscious mind. But there are many other shores to be scaled and harbors to be sounded. He was only one of the first explorers, after all.

Despite the shortcomings of their analysis and the limitations of psychoanalytic theory, Thomas’ Freud is able to help Lisa. She gets better. Freud concludes his case study with an update on her condition: “Frau Anna said she had continued to suffer some mild recurrences of her symptoms from time to time, but not to a degree that would interfere with [her life]…I am happy to say that I have continued to hear of her over the years, as a talented musical performer, pursuing a successful career in Vienna” (144). Her therapy, of which her literary efforts of the white hotel are an important component, allows for her to live her life she was meant to: she falls in love with a Jewish singer named Victor and becomes a stepmother to his son, having the child she never thought she could have. They spend many years together in the Ukraine. This makes her happy. In the end, though, the insights gleaned from her therapy do not allow her (or anyone else) to avoid their terrible fate. By giving Lisa the gift (or curse) of foresight,\textsuperscript{50} Thomas effectively delinks the future from the realm of the marvelous by making room for this ability in psychic life. Lisa becomes a kind of “Cassandra in the prophecy of her body’s symptoms” but “she had no way to speak of them or act with historical effectiveness” (Robertson 465). In Robertson’s view, their therapy does

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in “less respectable” things like levitation or palmistry, he did observe a number of superstitions in his own life. As Berman also argues, when the issue of telepathy or prophecy emerged in his works, especially in regard to dreams, Freud does not wholeheartedly reject the possibility (289).

\textsuperscript{50} For Robertson’s feminist critique, this is a problem. Thomas “finds no way to portray woman’s knowledge in other than stereotypically mythic terms” (465). While this argument may be true, I believe that it discounts the ultimate power afforded by Thomas to his female protagonist, a woman who outdoes Freud. It also ignores the reverse: Thomas turns Freud himself into a hysteric, effectively displacing the expected gender roles of psychoanalysis.
not ultimately empower Lisa because she cannot change her fate. So what is the point of an uncanny future if the forward trajectory of an individual or collective life can be neither avoided nor changed?

The answer to this question, I believe, is two-fold. First, just because she is not able to escape her fate does not mean that her therapy was entirely unsuccessful. To the contrary: the white hotel defamiliarizes her future enough so that she can live with the foreknowledge that she possesses. It would be torture for her to actually know the precise details of the fate awaiting her and her people. Such knowledge would make it impossible for her to live any kind of life. Symbolic knowledge is not equivalent to real knowledge—thankfully. Working through the symbolic knowledge of the future, however, gives her relief enough to live in the present. Such is the realistic goal of any therapy, what Thomas’ Freud describes as turning “hysterical misery into common unhappiness” (127). A modest but achievable goal, Lisa is even able to surpass “common unhappiness” by having love in her life, if only for a time, and even though her association with her husband and step-child will result in her murder. At the root of psychoanalysis is the belief that by accessing and working through repressed emotions from the past, the patient will be better able to cope with the present. Under this revised model, perhaps the patient will be better able to deal with whatever comes in the future as well, even if she can’t escape what is coming.

If Robertson and others are dissatisfied with Lisa’s therapy due to her inability to extricate herself from her fate in the “nightmares of history” (468), perhaps they are looking to the wrong person. Perhaps the responsibility, indeed, even the possibility, of changing the political or historical trajectory lies not with Lisa, the patient, or even Freud, the theoretician, but with the implied reader. Because The White Hotel plots the relationship between psychoanalysis and the social world, the hotel teaches us of the dangers of viewing ourselves in isolation from one another. All are implicated in

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51 As a side note, Lisa had lived most of her life hiding her Jewish roots. By marrying Victor and adopting her stepchild, she lived in the open as a Jewish woman for the first time in her life. This also suggests that her therapy helped her to stop repressing this part of her identity—and that this was beneficial—even if it marked her for persecution.
the larger structures in which we inhabit. Any illusion otherwise is just that—an illusion. By expanding the view of the unconscious mind to include (the possibility) of influences from the social world, readers visiting the white hotel can one day check out and take those lessons with them back to the places from where they came.

At the turn of the twentieth-century, Freud was occupied with mapping the human mind. There was so much to explore that he was not able to adequately address the ways in which the social world maps itself onto the psyche of the individual—and vice versa. Robertson also identifies an important parallel between the apoliticality of Freudian psychoanalysis and the high modernist artists, who despite “acute sensitivity to the society around them…tended to give us survival by aesthetic escape” (452). One thing that the uncanny view of the future suggests is that the future is doomed to repeat itself. Phrases like “Never again,” the lesson we were supposed to have learned from the Holocaust, have become uncanny repetitions—with Cambodia, Rwanda, Darfur. How can these uncanny repetitions be broken? Moving into the twenty-first century, perhaps this is now the task of postmodern writers like D. M. Thomas and others—to scout new “harbors,” as it were. Like Lisa’s “Don Giovanni,” artistic creation may just be the first step, a therapy of sorts, that teaches us how to learn to live with ourselves. I see literature as my only chance for learning how to cope with my fate, our fate, of living in a world of unbearable contradictions, knowing full well that there are people who can build something like the white hotel, and others who would burn it to the ground.
Towards a Conclusion

Checking out of the Hotel

What do the hotels of this thesis, and the characters who stay at them, share in common? First, these are characters, who for whatever reason, are in some way homeless. Petrone is only temporarily homeless, as he takes lodging for the night in an unfamiliar city during a business trip to a foreign country. Borges too seeks the comfort of the “Hotel Delicias” in his favorite town of Adrongué just for the night but receives an unhomely reception. These characters are staying in the hotels for only a short while, but it is unclear when they flee the hotels at the end of the stories whether they will really be able to return home, or whether their experiences have in some way fundamentally unsettled them. Toru is someone who has actually lost his home and must live with the empty house until he can find what has gone missing. He is surrounded by the psychically wounded who conceive of themselves as empty containers, vacant houses. Hopefully his homelessness will be brief, should he find what he is looking for—the people that he needs to make his home and his life once more complete. Frau Elizabeth Erdmann, Lisa, is an exile who must make do with the makeshift homes she constructs as she moves from place to place. In the countries she travels between, be it for work as an iterant opera singer or fleeing anti-Semitism, her living spaces are never truly homes; they are just provisional lodgings. The fact that she chooses the image of the white hotel to embody her psychic life mirrors her living situation. She exists in a state of perpetual transit that bears closer resemblance to a hotel than a home. All of these characters are
transient, international figures subjected to the forces of postmodernity—conditions of anonymity, rootlessness, exile, displacement, and alienation.

Secondly, as travelers they all go on odysseys into unknown spaces. Some of these travelers, like Toru, work more like detectives; others like Lisa are more like explorers. They traverse unfamiliar urban territories, discover forgotten corners of places once familiar, uncover untold stories, and penetrate mysterious psychic landscapes. And finally, none of the hotels that they enter into are “real” in the conventional sense. The power of applying Todorov’s classification of genres helps us to describe what kinds of things are possible in each hotel. While all hotels suspend chronological time, some hotels host the past, while others seem to accommodate the future, and Lisa’s white hotel, for example, seems to house all modes of time. Because none of the hotels quite obeys the commonly accepted “laws of nature,” a new world of possibilities opens up based on the dynamics of the space—be it fantastic, marvelous, or uncanny. In attempting to depict the way the unconscious mind might work, the marvelous and the uncanny are especially useful representational strategies because they allow us to explore mental terrain as if it were a real physical landscape. Strange things happen in the mind (as a matter of fact) that when applied to a realist setting look as if they are going against the rules of reality. The mind is a concept; it has no physical coordinates. But the fantastic, marvelous, and uncanny tones make it possible for a protagonist, otherwise bound by ordinary human capabilities, to travel into a space that doesn’t exist in the world as we know it. In other words, these narrative strategies allow the protagonist to become a geographer of the mind who can now plot the correspondences between the primary world and the hotel, the individual and national histories.

To the third point: all of the characters checked out of their hotels, so to speak. Petrone and Borges flee; Toru passes through the wall of the hotel back into the well, bearing the wounds of battle, and Lisa’s hysterical symptoms subside enough for her to get on with her life. And finally,
one thing I have also tried to prove is that our authors repeatedly show how following one’s intuitions opens up unexpected doors. Petrone and Borges both sense something, but they dismiss their feelings. They react to the unknown with fear, which leads them to make rationalizations and in the end, their departures do not settle anything. What sets characters like Toru and Lisa apart is that they trust their intuition, which allows them to confront rather than just encounter. These were all points I have made before, but putting them together will lead us to a different set of questions that might direct us towards a kind of conclusion: What kind of home is waiting for these characters when they check out of the hotels they have been occupying? When—if—these characters are able to return “home,” what will they take from the hotel with them? My intuition is that the hotel is a kind of Ur-symbol for the postmodern condition, which maps out the relationship of the individual to the larger social, political, and historical context in which he lives. So let us now follow this hunch.

Had this Master’s thesis developed into a doctoral dissertation, I would have pursued the question of the hotel alongside the question of the home. I believe that by theorizing these two spaces next to each other, I would be able to best locate the unique space occupied by the hotel in the context of literary and cultural studies. And so because I was not able to fully engage with ideas of the home in this examination, I must speak here in broad strokes, which I do so only to suggest the other directions or trajectories my research might uncover, or open up. Other rooms we might gain access to, so to speak. Just as a hypothesis, what if the hotel of postmodern fiction offers the possibility of returning home? What if it is more than just a stop along the way, but rather the very place that holds the key to the return?

At the beginning, I introduced the hotel of postmodern fiction as part of a lineage of texts that originates with the inns of Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* and Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*, but more
specifically references the disorientating village Inn of Kafka’s *The Castle*. Perhaps to fully understand the hotel, though, we have to go back further, to Homer’s *The Odyssey*.

At the root of all Western Literature is the motif of the return home, stemming from Odysseus’ long journey back to Ithaca. Odysseus’ return home after the Trojan War is unlikely for many reasons. He faces numerous geographical and psychological barriers on the way. The chances of making it back to Ithaca alive (wars, storms, enemy attacks) are bad enough. But there is also the possibility that his home is gone—that everyone has moved on. Even if he managed to make it back, is he still capable of being the king? He is, after all, no longer the same man who set out all those years before. Although his battle against the suitors restores him to the throne, the violence he resorted to intimates that he returned to Ithaca an empty man and that part of him is still (and will forever be) on the battlefields of Troy. Athena has to intervene to stop Odysseus and his incessant bloodshed. As such, there is a link between war, which displaced him geographically, and trauma, which disturbed him psychologically. Both are impeding or delaying a complete homecoming. Even though he has returned to Ithaca, has he really arrived home?

Through the example of Odysseus, we begin to suspect that this condition of homelessness is not just specific to the twentieth-century, the century of space; perhaps it is also a kind of eternal recurring archetype. *Trauma comes from the Greek ὢ*, which means wound. Although the German *Der Traum* and its English equivalent *Dream* do not derive from the same etymology\(^{52}\), one cannot help but hear the echo of trauma in dream. While they may not share an etymological link, a practical correspondence has been forged between the two since Freud’s work. My sense is that after the Second World War, we keep obsessively returning to this war, be it in philosophy, literature, or casual conversations. It is now the eternal war within our minds. It is the war that we

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52 According to the Oxford English Dictionary, “dream” comes from the West Germanic “draum,” and it has been suggested that this is “a derivative of the verbal series *druun, druug, drug*, to deceive, delude, German *trügen*” (OED, *dream*, n.7).
keep revisiting in our nightmares, or rather, it is the trauma that keeps readdressing us through our dreams. It seems like it is the thing that stands in the way of us being at home with ourselves.

While the “home” is still an important issue relating to identity, belonging, and nation in contemporary fields like deconstruction (Derrida’s work on hospitality in particular comes to mind) and postcolonial studies (where is the home for the exile or immigrant, in a globalized world?, as investigated by Edward Said, among many others), my intuition is that by the advent of modernism, writers and philosophers began reimagining the traditional house, as it were, for a variety of reasons. Coming out of the Romantic period of the nineteenth century, issues like individuality and the family unit were quite neatly attached to the notion of a home. The end of the nineteenth century saw a fundamental reimagining of the individual to his (and her) family in Freudian psychoanalysis. With its attention to the structure of the individual mind and the allegorical network of relations from childhood that holds sway over the adult (who never really leaves the mythic childhood house), it would seem that the cluster of individual-family-house was pretty well-mapped.

In literary modernism, however, we see issues of homelessness emerging, with Kafka’s *The Castle*, to cite just one example. Writers like Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One’s Own* and James Joyce in *Ulysses* reimagined the space of the home to better suit changing beliefs, behaviors, social conditions of the times. Literary modernism coincided with the social and political upheaval that made exiles out of millions, while economic arrangements conspired to shift populations from rural homelands to urban centers. But it was still all about the home. How are we to account for what lies outside of the “home”? How do we represent the relationship between the individual and the society in which he inhabits? What is the impact of the historical context on the life of the individual, and vice versa? These are some of the issues taken up in literary postmodernism, and the space of the hotel is a recurrent symbol that helps us form answers to these questions.
In the arrogance of the modern world, though, we thought that “progress” had given us answers to these questions. After the war, social organizations like the nation-state and explanatory apparatuses like psychoanalysis came apart. And so these questions become more urgent. Empires that had colonized most of the earth’s surface broke apart into independent republics. Many of the new nations on the map continued to fail their people. Despite proclamations of equality and “never again” (from philosophers and politicians alike), genocide did not end with Auschwitz. Life in the postmodern world is marked by the suspicion that the “home” is either lost or empty or inaccessible due to the consuming pull of the historical trauma that continues to haunt us. With its model of locating trauma in infantile sexuality, traditional psychoanalysis does not have much to offer the one who returned, be it the executioner or the victim, who now must relearn how to live with himself, in this world. This feeling of unhomeliness and loss was phrased in a number of different ways in the texts of this examination. Petrone and Borges were “unsettled,” the psychically wounded of Japan were like “empty houses,” Lisa was hysterical. Homelessness becomes a kind of spatialized depiction of these psychological states, all of which are rooted in the trauma of war.

I also sense that Heidegger figures into the changing awareness of what the home means, and what the possibility of homecoming may be in the postmodern age. In the short essay “Building, Dwelling, Thinking” [Bauen, Wohnen, Denken] he draws a distinction between places like “railway stations” and “market halls” with “homes” (143): all, yes, are buildings that house man” but the human, although he “inhabits [the former], does not dwell in them” (144). For Heidegger, dwelling (being there—a form of dasein) is a kind of affirmation of ontological presence. But the home does not guarantee that dwelling can or will occur. We can now identify a revealing paradox: while “dwelling is never thought of as the basic character of man’s being” (146), as I have argued, Western literature continually (re)orients its characters and readers towards the home. Although he frames his exploration of what it means “to be” by the post-war housing crisis in Germany, he argues that the
fundamental issue of homelessness goes deeper: “the real plight of dwelling is indeed older than the world wars with their destruction, older also than the increase in the earth’s population and the condition of the industrial workers. The real dwelling plight lies in this, that mortals ever search anew for the nature of dwelling, that they must ever learn to dwell” (159). To use Heidegger’s vocabulary, the wars brought to an unconcealedness the fundamental problem of being, that is, dwelling [wohnen], which again defines the individual in spatial terms as belonging to the house, but unable to really live inside of it. That the wars of the twentieth century brought this issue (again) to light makes the challenge of dwelling a kind of uncanny repetition—one that is repeated through the ages. Then the problem of dwelling, as I understand it, must then be reimagined in each generation. The problem is always the same; the shape of the solution is the variable and depends on the particularities of the historical context. I believe that the hotel is part of a long line of literary and philosophical efforts in learning how to dwell, which is to say, learning how to live as ourselves, with ourselves.

Adorno’s famous statement from Minima Moralia (published in 1951, the same year as Heidegger’s “Dwelling, Building, Thinking”) now makes sense: “In his text, the writer sets up house…For a man who no longer has a homeland, writing becomes a place to live” (Adorno 87). Although this observation was born out of the historical conflict survived by the German-Jewish exile, when placed alongside Heidegger’s ideas on dwelling (this is the power of juxtaposition at its finest: a German Nazi sympathizer followed by the imagined enemy), something more fundamental emerges. In such a “precarious age” (Heidegger 157), the text itself becomes a kind of shelter that attains to dwelling. Now we can ask the question: in the context of postmodern literature, what role does the hotel play in teaching us to dwell, which is to say, to both live and be? Is the hotel itself a new kind of home?
Let us return for a moment to *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, the epic of the Japanese mind. Toru puzzled over the complex web of relations he finds himself implicated in: “linked as in a circle, at the center of which stood prewar Manchuria, continental East Asia, and the short war of 1939 in Nomonhan. But why Kumiko and I should have been drawn into this historical chain of cause and effect I could not comprehend. All of these events had occurred long before Kumiko and I were born” (498). The post-war generation grapples with the same conflict of responsibility experienced by Oedipus. Hegel explains: “Oedipus has…been involved in these most evil crimes without either knowing or willing them” (quoted in Agamben 96). Free of malicious intent, Oedipus’ crimes are unlikely to be recognized as such “since he had neither intended nor known these crimes himself, they were not to be regarded as his own deeds” (Hegel quoted in Agamben 96). The paradox of Oedipus is that he unknowingly participated in these crimes. I think that a similar paradox faces the postwar generation, too. Somehow we too find ourselves in this “circle” and like Toru, we stand bewildered. What is interesting is that Freudian psychoanalysis, inspired by the archetype of Oedipus, gestures to this enigma but does not name it. Within traditional psychoanalysis, then, is the possibility of locating the individual within his social or historical context and describing his implication in events beyond his control.

What has “drawn” people like Toru, an ordinary guy, “into this historical chain of cause and effect? How can people like Petrone, Toru, Lisa, me, be responsible for what happened “long before” we were born? As Odysseus and K. have shown us, we are all always already within this “historical chain.” While we may not have had a hand in these crimes of our forefathers, nor may we have made the same choices had we been there, we still have to live (dwell) with the consequences. After inheriting a legacy of homelessness, we search for a way to live with ourselves knowing what has been done. Despite his heroic efforts in confronting the lingering evil of historical trauma,
Toru’s home is not fully restored at the end of *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*. He doesn’t really return home. He is able, though, for the first time in a long while, to finally fall asleep (Murakami 607).

The suspension of time at the postmodern hotel accomplished through the narrative modes of the fantastic, marvelous, and uncanny shows us that we are always already implicated in the events taking place there, even if they happened long before we were born, even if they haven’t happened yet. As a kind of microcosm, the hotel begins to provide a space of resolution for working out the problems afflicting the world “outside its walls”. As a public space with private elements, the hotel makes connections between people who seem totally unconnected. If we think back to our leading question of why historical problems are dealt with spatially in twentieth-century literature, the issue is really about representation. To return home requires a different route, and the hotel models the relationship of the individual to the society he or she occupies. As such, the hotel destabilizes the home as the privileged space. In order to deal with the legacy of historical trauma—the empty Cutty Sark box—we have to see ourselves as connected, not as autonomous units. The hotel joins the individual rooms of the hotel through a shared architecture and shows how a malicious element on one floor can come to threaten an entire building. The people who would exploit the terrible things hiding in our collective unconscious—the base drives, the historical traumas long repressed, our tendencies towards excess—are the ones who pose the greatest danger to our world.

If the twentieth-century was all about space, I believe that the twenty-first century may just be about learning how to live in these spaces, once and for all. The hotel models the dynamics of history in a libidinal mode and therefore, the absolute imperative of collective responsibility. I would rather see myself, indeed, I can’t help but see myself, as fundamentally implicated and defined by the larger social and historical structures in which I inhabit. I suspect that we still do not know how to recognize our inherent collectivity. Still informed by nineteenth-century romantic sensibilities, we

Kaloustian 121
tend to see ourselves as individuals, free-standing “houses” isolated from one another, as it were. And therein lies the improbability of solving or even addressing the most pressing problems facing the world (which portend, of course, the ultimate destruction of earth, permanent homelessness): nuclear war and climate catastrophe. Maybe the point is not about returning home. Maybe the reason that none of these characters ever returns home at the end is because to do so would be dangerous or impossible. Maybe there is not a home to return to; maybe there never was. Perhaps the lesson, after all, is that we must finally recognize how we all dwell the same structure; we are but private rooms connected to each other through public spaces (halls, air, sea, stairways) in one great hotel. We live, we dream, and we die side-by-side.
Primary Materials


**Secondary Materials**


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