

The Hotel Space Through the Senses in the Life and Works of Virginia Woolf

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Abstract

This thesis examines the function of the hotel space in modernist context through individual and collective sensory experiences in the novels and personal writings of Virginia Woolf. The modern conception of the hotel emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, operating as a new setting for modernist societal issues to be written in and of. The hotel is experienced by the individual first and foremost through its sensory offerings, and its unique position as a convergence point for larger, revolving groups of people allows novel sensory interactions as bodies share space and interconnect. My thesis establishes Woolf among her contemporaries as one of the most important modernist hotel authors; through my engagement with Woolf critics and sensory theorists, I analyse the wider implications of the auditory, tactile, and gustatory experiences found in Woolf's hotel writings on modernist social issues, including the public and private divide, women's liberation, class, and antisemitism.

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Introduction

My thesis aims not only to posit and cement Virginia Woolf's status as a hotel writer, but to analyse her exploration of broader modernist issues (including the public and private divide, women's liberation, and antisemitism) through embodied sensory experiences found in the hotel. The modernist hotel space was the nexus wherein many of the broad questions, themes, issues and sensory experiences of the era were explored; it acted as a new microcosm wherein several of these issues that defined the modernist period converge. In the introduction to the volume *Hotel Modernisms* (2023), editors Anna Despotopoulou, Vassiliki Kolocotroni and Efterpi Mitsi emphasise the heterogeneity of the space; it not only 'complicated issues of community, social and cultural mobility, gender, and sexuality', but 'accommodates and concretizes critical modes and concerns, ranging from politics and form, phenomenology and affect, gender and queer perspectives', allowing modernist artists to use the hotel to explore a wide variety of societal concerns.¹ Although her work is largely unexplored in the above volume, any of these issues were defining features of Virginia Woolf's hotel writings. In this introduction, I will highlight the main political and social issues embodied in the hotel space, trace the development of the hotel to its form in the modernist period, look at the defining features of the modernist hotel, and explain my use of the senses to explore this space.

Woolf frequently foregrounds women in the hotel space in both her private writings and her fiction, highlighting women's emergence into public spaces through their sensory experiences in the hotel. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the public and private sphere were separate, distinct spaces; women were confined to the private sphere, and the public sphere was dominated by men.² Anna Snaith highlights that as particularly middle-

¹ Anna Despotopoulou, Vassiliki Kolocotroni, and Efterpi Mitsi, "Introduction" in *Hotel Modernisms*, ed. by Anna Despotopoulou, Vassiliki Kolocotroni, and Efterpi Mitsi (Oxon: Routledge, 2023), p.1,2.

² See footnote 13, which reinforces this.

and upper-class women gained more autonomy and began to move more freely, they became ‘a significant presence in the public realm’.³ As their public presence increased, so did their presence in the hotel; while in the early nineteenth century (particularly middle-class) women ‘did not travel a great deal’ and so ‘inns and hotels catered almost exclusively for men’, hoteliers Henry Louis Florence, Auguste Escoffier and César Ritz took ‘female taste and preferences’ into great consideration, with lighting and architectural features in the Carlton Hotel (opened in 1899) designed with women’s desires in mind.⁴ Woolf’s interest in hotel sensory experiences is modulated by the class, gender, and race of the creator of these sensory inputs and outputs; women’s senses are often celebrated in Woolf’s fiction and nonfiction.

Woolf exposes her disdain for the upper- and middle-class character of the hotel and its guests through invasive sensory outputs, such as repetitive music and decadent flavours. Jewish bodies and their sensory exchanges in hotels are conflated with middle- and upper-class identities and behaviours, as Woolf represents them through antisemitic archetypes such as the cosmopolitan Jew and the gluttonous, bodily Jew. Bryan Cheyette argues that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries ‘the indeterminacy of the Semitic representations under consideration meant that ‘the Jew’ can be constructed to represent both sides of a political or social or ideological divide’ by writers.⁵ Woolf reproduces this indeterminacy in her presentation of Jewish sensory experiences; while Jewish touch is restrained, Jewish eating is voracious and excessive.

During the early nineteenth century, dangers and difficulties (for example, safety, monetary, or social restrictions) began to subside with the emergence of safer, more

³ Anna Snaith, *Virginia Woolf: Public and Private Negotiations*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan Limited, 2003), p.16

⁴ Mary Cathcart Borer, *The British Hotel Through The Ages* (Great Britain: Ebenezer Baylis and Son Limited, 1972), p.164 and Elaine Denby, *Grand Hotels*, (London: Reaktion Books, 1998), p.150.

⁵ Bryan Cheyette, *Constructions of ‘the Jew’ in English Literature and Society Racial Representations, 1875–1945*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p.9.

accessible travel methods such as the mail coach and the railway, and women's liberation movements.⁶ These developments led to more people (especially women) travelling and staying in hotels than ever before; Mary Cathcart Borer highlights that both the increased population and economic boom in the late nineteenth century led to 'hundreds of thousands' of 'prosperous' people now 'able to enjoy the opportunities now offered them of comfortable travel and hotels'.⁷ As the century advanced and into the twentieth century, the hotel was often found at the forefront of many aspects of modernist life. Franziska Bollerey highlights some of the technological developments which Swedish *hôtellerie* quickly adopted early in Woolf's life (Woolf was born in 1881) in *Hotel Lobbies and Lounges: The Architecture of Professional Hospitality* (2013): in 1847, the 'Geneva Hotel des Bergues had the first flush lavatories', in 1866, the 'Samedan Hotel Bernina had bathrooms', in the 1860s, 'gas lighting was introduced', and in 1879 in 'the Hotel Engadiner Kulm, electric illumination was introduced'.⁸ The first lifts (which led to an increase in the number of high-rise, multi-story hotels built) were also invented in the latter half of the nineteenth century.⁹ At the time of its opening in 1889, the Savoy Hotel in London was the first to contain a 'theatre, chapel, print shop, laundry', and its six lifts were the 'largest and most efficient in Europe'.¹⁰ In 1899, the Carlton Hotel opened, the first hotel in London to have a bathroom for every room.¹¹ By Woolf's eighteenth birthday, the hotel was established as a comfortable, occasionally luxurious location for travellers abroad, and often one of the first buildings to adopt these advancements.¹² Infrastructurally and materially, the hotel provided the domestic assurances,

⁶ See Chapters 7 and 10 of *The British Hotel Through The Ages* for a more exhaustive narration of the development of these transportation methods.

⁷ Borer, p.177-8.

⁸ Franziska Bollerey, "Beyond the Lobby: Setting the Stage for Modernity-the Cosmos of the Hotel" in *Hotel Lobbies and Lounges: The Architecture of Professional Hospitality*, ed. by (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), pp.3-48 (p.11).

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Richard Penner and Walter Rutes, *Hotel Planning and Design* (London: The Architectural Press, 1985), p.35 and Bollerey, p.11.

¹¹ Borer, p.215.

¹² Not every multi-storey, large occupancy hotel can be considered a "luxury" experience. I will briefly discuss the different types of hotels featured in Modernist works in subsequent paragraphs. Furthermore, luxuries in the

‘security and repose of home’ amidst the ‘mobility’ of travel, while ‘stripped’ of the ‘routine obligations’ of everyday life.¹³

Why was the hotel one of the most important spaces for modernists wishing to escape the home and these obligations? Firstly, it is important to mention that for parts of the modernist period, life in a hotel was largely not possible, as World War I and II prevented most international, leisurely travel in Europe. However, hotels were still used for domestic travel in the United Kingdom, and particularly in World War I in mainland Europe (and England when casualties grew), they were repurposed into military hospitals and as administrative bases, which author May Sinclair documented firsthand in *A Journal of Impressions in Belgium* (1915).¹⁴ Sinclair wrote that her accommodation was simultaneously a ‘hotel and now it is a military hospital’, with its ‘great hall [...] stripped bare’ of ‘draperies and ornaments’, and the ‘army of waiters and valets and chambermaids’ replaced with ‘surgeons, ambulance men, hospital orderlies’ and ‘Belgian nurses’.¹⁵ In times of war, the hotel demonstrated the ability to shapeshift depending on the perception, needs, and desires of its occupants.

Although the expanding variety of travel methods opened the possibility of travel to more of society than ever before, the majority of modernist hotel guests were middle- or upper-class; Bettina Matthias highlights that the hotel was a ‘[witness]’ to the ‘shift from an aristocratic to a bourgeois leisure class’, and ‘from a sedentary to a traveling society’.¹⁶ Tourists (who were likely all from the same country) could gather abroad in hotel common

late eighteenth and early nineteenth century do not align with what contemporary audiences may consider luxuries now; although flushing toilets, electric lighting, and lifts would be considered a basic necessity in a twenty-first century hotel, it was expensive, upper-class hotels, such as the Ritz and the Savoy, who were able to implement these technologies soon after their invention and at mass scales.

¹³ Shawna Ross, ‘Landslide at the Pension Bertolini: Anti-tourism versus Groundless Transculturalism in E. M. Forster’s *A Room with a View*’, in *Hotel Modernisms*, ed. by Anna Despotopoulou, Vassiliki Kolocotroni, and Efterpi Mitsi (Oxon: Routledge, 2023), pp.95-109 (p.95).

¹⁴ Kevin J. James and Andrew P. Northey, ‘The British State as Hotel Occupier on the Home Front, 1914–1922: A Model for Comparing Experiences in the Wartime Hospitality Sector’, *Mondes du Tourisme*, 22 (2022), p.1.

¹⁵ May Sinclair, *A Journal of Impressions in Belgium*, (London: Global Grey, 1915), p.12.

¹⁶ Bettina Mathias, *The Hotel As Setting in Early Twentieth-Century German and Austrian Literature: Checking in to Tell a Story*, (United Kingdom: Camden House, 2006), p.3.

spaces and share travel experiences, often replaying the cultural and social roles they would play back home in the westernised microcosm they created in the hotel. Matthias invokes Thorstein Veblen's 1899 concept of conspicuous leisure and the 'superficiality, consumption, and theatricality' enacted by the 'privileged class', demonstrating that these performances often took place in the predominantly bourgeois hotel.¹⁷ In order to secure and display their societal position to their equals, the upper-classes must 'devote their time to activities that do not contribute to the sustenance of life', engaging in 'non-productive pursuits' either in front of one another or through later narration; Matthias cites examples such as shopping and buying expensive clothing and artworks, language learning (in particular classical languages, or learning for the sole purpose of communicating while travelling), and recreational sports (especially those centred around expensive equipment or with expected dress codes).¹⁸ As travel became a key identifying symbol of the leisure class, they enacted their displays of wealth in the new, ideal setting of the hotel, surrounded by fellow guests wealthy enough to travel abroad and local, lower-class servants. As Matthias explains, guests could spend their days in pastimes such as shopping, sports, sightseeing and personal education, and come to the 'perfect stages' of hotel common spaces including 'lobbies', 'bars', restaurants, and drawing-rooms and show their 'mastery' of both their 'social skills', including 'manners, conversation, the latest dances, music' and 'games', and the fruits of their leisure.¹⁹ This bourgeois social play is often found in Woolf's private writings, and is a recurring feature of modernist hotel fiction, including Woolf's *The Voyage Out* (1915) and in many of her close friend E. M. Forster's hotel works, most notably *A Room with a View* (1908).

The hotel stages not only the upper-class social interplay neverendingly on display in the hotel, but also reveals a tension between the guests and workers. Bollerey pinpoints the hotel as 'the one place that concentrates the urban macrocosm of social segregation into the

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p.31.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p.31-33.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p.33.

narrowest space', arguing that 'nowhere else are poverty and wealth so near to each other'.²⁰ While they may observe the leisure class' social performances and cross paths in the 'corridors' and 'dining room', hotel staff are expected to operate silently 'behind the scenes' wherever possible, ensuring the 'frictionless operation' of the enterprise.²¹ Servants were expected to meet each need and desire of the guests while remaining invisible; Polly Hember reveals the 'unseen and unmentioned systems of labour' hidden behind H.D.'s recounting of her dream-like morning routine in her personal hotel writings.²² Contrastingly, in both Woolf's letters and diaries and her fiction, hotel guests are acutely aware of the presence of staff, with Woolf frequently relaying their sensory invasions in the bedroom and common rooms. Moreover, in her fiction, Woolf exposes gendered labour in the hotel; male guests are intimidated by the freedom of movement of female housemaids, as they remind them of their singledom and the impermanence of their stay and mark upon their room.²³ While conspicuous leisure often took centre stage in public spaces and modernist works (including in *The Voyage Out*), the lower classes still occupied hotels and hotel fiction as both guests and employees (for example, Sasha Jansen in Jean Rhys' *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939)).

Just as it situates the lower, middle- and upper-classes in constant tension with one another, the boundary between public and private space is broken in the hotel. Matthias notes that the hotel bedroom is 'private but ultimately impersonal', as it acts as a refuge from their fellow guests in common spaces, but lacks the decorative touches or unseen personal memories of the home.²⁴ Moreover, housekeeping staff enter the room unseen by guests, moving amongst and touching their sparse belongings, working to erase any trace of the room's occupant even whilst the guest is still renting the room. Particularly in larger, grand

²⁰ Bollerey, p.19-20.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Polly Hember, 'H.D.'s Hotel Visions', in *Hotel Modernisms*, ed. by Anna Despotopoulou, Vassiliki Kolocotroni, and Efterpi Mitsi (Oxon: Routledge, 2023), pp.110-123 (p.112).

²³ Emma Short also explores hotel barmaids' positions of power in "'The hotel story he made up": Hotel Life, Death, and Work in *Ulysses*', in *Hotel Modernisms*, ed. by Anna Despotopoulou, Vassiliki Kolocotroni, and Efterpi Mitsi (Oxon: Routledge, 2023), pp.155-167 (p.158-9).

²⁴ Matthias, p.7.

hotels, the bedroom is one of dozens, if not hundreds, of identical rooms, its illusion of privacy unmasked the moment the room is left and fellow guests and staff are encountered in the hallways. However, this illusion is often dispelled before one has even entered. Matthias narrates the experience of walking down the corridor to your assigned bedroom: ‘you hear sounds coming out of the rooms, clicking noises like those of a typewriter, music, the sound of a running shower [...] you detect a human voice, and you start wondering whether there are real people living here with you’.²⁵ Despite the physical boundaries, sounds from other guests and staff permeate the room, reminding them of their position in the larger, temporary conglomerate of occupants of the hotel space. Therefore, private space is never wholly private, and hotel common spaces remained inaccessible to the lower classes, operating instead as the stage for the social plays of the middle- and upper-class guests who could afford extended stays.

Moreover, these class and public/private boundaries are further blurred when considering the length of time often spent travelling and in a hotel. Hotel living grew vastly in popularity during the 1920s, as ‘affluent groups, celebrities, artists’ and others moved in, and these numbers continued to rise throughout the 1930s.²⁶ Notable contemporary hotel residents include Henry James, Katherine Mansfield, Ernest Hemingway, and Marie Woolf, Virginia Woolf’s mother-in-law. Many other modernist authors stayed in hotels for extended periods. As the leisure class repurposed the hotel into a makeshift domestic space where relationships between guests could develop, the public and private divide further complicated. For an ‘existential[ly homeless]’, travelling population, the hotel was arguably the most important building in modernist culture.²⁷

The place of the hotel in modernism has been noted and explored in depth by many other critics. Essential works include the previously mentioned Bettina Matthias’s *The Hotel*

²⁵ *Ibid*, p.60.

²⁶ Penner and Rutes, p.98.

²⁷ Matthias, p.1.

as *Setting in Early Twentieth-Century German and Austrian Literature: Checking in to Tell a Story* (2006) and *Hotel Modernisms* (edited by Despotopoulou, Kolocotroni, Mitsi), Emma Short's *Mobility and the Hotel in Modern Literature: Passing Through* (2019), and Robbie Moore's *Hotel Modernity: Corporate Space in Literature and Film* (2021). Modernist authors whose works are frequently discussed in these books (and whom I have classed as 'hotel writers') include Arnold Bennett, Elizabeth Bowen, Henry James, James Joyce and Jean Rhys. Despite the hotel in *The Voyage Out*, the numerous hotels in *Jacob's Room* (1922), and the hundreds of hotels extensively documented in her personal writings, Virginia Woolf is largely absent from discussions of the modernist hotel space, other than a brief mention in the introduction to *Hotel Modernisms* and two short journal articles by Ayako Muneuchi ('Hotel Narrative and the Birth of Virginia Woolf's Modernism', 2006) and Randi Saloman ("Directly a box was unpacked the rooms became very different": Hotel Life and *The Voyage Out*', 2009). While Woolf rarely ventures into the 'restless nights in one-night cheap hotels' occupied by the lower classes throughout the fiction of James Joyce (the Ormond Hotel in *Ulysses* (1922), 'The Dead' in *Dubliners* (1914)) and Jean Rhys (the hotel on Gray's Inn Road in *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939)), she depicts the grand hotel and the social performances and bonds formed by the leisure class found in Elizabeth Bowen's *The Hotel* (1927), and in many of Bennett and Forster's works.²⁸ My thesis will reveal the hotel's importance in Woolf's life, placing it alongside the numerous critical works dedicated to the hotel in the works of her contemporaries.

I explore the hotel through the lens of the senses not only due to Woolf's foregrounding of sensory experiences in her hotel writing, but also because the senses were how those who inhabited the hotel space experienced their presence. Phenomenological philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty discussed this in his book *Phenomenology of Perception*

²⁸ T. S. Eliot, *Selected Poems*, (England: Faber and Faber, 2009), p.3.

(1945): ‘sense experience [...] invests the quality with vital value, grasping it first in its meaning for us [...] [it] is that vital communication with the world which makes it present as a familiar setting of our life’.²⁹ Furthermore, sensory perception is the key way in which the other social and political frameworks I explore are experienced.³⁰ I have divided my thesis into three chapters: the first focuses on sound, the second discusses touch, and the third chapter focuses on (the absence of) taste. Although there is no chapter dedicated to vision, sight operates as a supporting sense in my explorations of sound, touch, and taste; in her essay ‘The Cinema’ (1926), Woolf argues that the ‘English unaesthetic eye’ is a ‘simple mechanism’ operating as a ‘competent nursemaid until the brain comes to the conclusion that it is time to wake up’.³¹ Woolf reiterates the simplicity of the organ in her essay ‘Street Haunting: A London Adventure’ (1927): ‘the eye is not a miner, not a diver, not a seeker after buried treasure’.³² There is ‘something abstract’ behind the simple image captured by a camera and observed by the eye, ‘moving’ and ‘calling’ for ‘help’ from aids such as ‘words’ and ‘music’ to fully actualise its potential symbolism.³³ As sight alone held little value for Woolf, I have interwoven vision throughout the thesis, instead allowing it to enrich my analyses of the other senses in the hotel. Works that focus on the senses in the modernist era include *Sounding Modernism* (2017), *Sound and Literature* (2020), and many of Abbie Garrington’s works on modernism and touch.

Although my thesis is not strictly a phenomenological reading of Woolf’s hotel writings, I utilise a number of phenomenological works and ideas in my analysis of sensory

²⁹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, (London: Routledge, 2002), p.61.

³⁰ I will expand upon this further in subsequent paragraphs. Furthermore, an unstated method of approach I take is the concept of immediacy versus distance in the hotel space; I felt this approach was necessary due to my analysis of Woolf’s private writings and her published works, as her diaries and letters often contained immediate sensory (and therefore social and political) reactions to the hotel space, while her fiction approached the hotel space from both a writely distance from reality, and a temporal distance from her real life experiences which may have inspired Woolf’s presentation of these issues in her fiction.

³¹ Virginia Woolf, ‘The Cinema’, in *Selected Essays*, ed. by David Bradshaw (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp.172-176 (p.172).

³² Virginia Woolf, ‘Street Haunting: A London Adventure’, in *Selected Essays*, ed. by David Bradshaw (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp.177-187 (p.178).

³³ Virginia Woolf, ‘The Cinema’, p.175.

experiences and the relationship between race, gender, and class that modulate sensory perception and interpretation. Shawn Ross argues that ‘residence at a hotel’ in Forster’s works ‘unearths the sensory dimensions of phenomena that otherwise appear intellectual, ultimately exposing the intimate connections among the characters’ bodies, the rooms they inhabit, and the sociopolitical views they espouse’; in Woolf’s hotels, the sensory experiences of the individual work inversely to unearth the politics hidden in all interactions occurring in the space.³⁴ As my thesis is focused on how sensory experiences are a direct response to the individual’s surrounding environment of the hotel while simultaneously reflecting on social and political issues, phenomenology’s analysis of the individual ‘as an embodied and socially and culturally embedded being-in-the-world’ (as highlighted by philosopher Dan Zahavi) offers valuable insights into sensory perceptions.³⁵ I conceptualise women’s sensory experiences through Sara Ahmed’s exploration of female bodies and affect theory in her books *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004) and *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (2006); utilising Ahmed’s queer spatial studies, I explored how women in Woolf’s works claimed the hotel as a female space by dominating these newly discovered auditory and tactile landscapes. Furthermore, Anna Snaith’s *Virginia Woolf: Public and Private Negotiations* (2000) is useful for my presentation of the hotel as a space ever-traversing the public and private boundary. I engage with the works of phenomenological philosophers of touch, Jean-Luc Nancy and Jacques Derrida, in the second part, allowing a wider definition of what constitutes touch through their concepts of the body, and how touch is felt or not felt by the individual.

In the first chapter, I will explore sound in the hotel space. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, sound underwent a mechanisation process unlike any of the other senses, which not only caused more frequent, continuous sound, but also new sounds, such as

³⁴ Ross, p.96.

³⁵ Dan Zahavi, *Phenomenology: The Basics*, (London: Routledge, 2018) , p.1.

the radio, the gramophone, automobiles, and the railway. Although the hotel often did not feature these latest types of sounds, the hotel space captured this new concept of perpetual, inescapable noise. In Woolf's personal writings, hotel sound transitions into noise depending on the intention and source of the sound; class, race, gender, and spontaneity affect Woolf's engagement with and presentation of the sounds surrounding her. Furthermore, Woolf's proximity to sound affects her presentation of auditory experiences in her works; when she is able to escape both the physical and mental effects of excessive noise through fictionalisation in her novels, sound which was once disruptive can be representative of female liberation and human connection. I begin the chapter with analyses of music and voice through the lenses of spontaneity, vicinity, and race in Woolf's letters and diaries. The chapter ends with explorations of positive depictions of excessive noise and sound in *The Voyage Out* (1915), particularly in relation to female sound and music in the hotel space.

In the second chapter, I focus on touching in the hotel. Just as auditory experiences were transformed and became bombarding in the modernist era, touch was similarly affected; the previously mentioned mechanisation and industrialisation of society also created new tactile experiences through technological advancements such as the X-ray, and through new methods of human connection such as the telephone and radio. As I will explore in this part, the new hotel space thrust individuals together, forcing an unfamiliar type of touching between strange guests, staff, and objects, all incidentally confined to the same space and bearing the imprint of those who had touched the spaces before them. In her private writings and her novels, Woolf wrote of the dichotomy of the emotional and physical distance between hotel occupants and the incessant reaching-out of individuals toward one another to close this distance due to their forced proximity in the space. Firstly, I analyse the presence of female bodies and their sensory experiences in public hotel spaces in Woolf's letters and diaries. Furthermore, I explore the gendered dynamics of object touching and ownership in the hotel

bedroom in *The Voyage Out*, *Jacob's Room* and *Mrs Dalloway* (1925). I end the chapter with an analysis of the difference of reciprocity by Woolf in this reaching-out depending on the race of the toucher that is present in both her private writings and in *The Voyage Out*.

In the final chapter, I explore the senses of taste and smell. While in the hotel, Woolf frequently mentions the hotel restaurant, dining experiences, and food, but the sensory experience of eating and taste is absent in her hotel works. I posit that although a meal and dining experiences can be shared, the acts of tasting and smelling are experienced individually, and as Woolf's hotel works usually focus on connection versus isolation, she neglects both of these senses when writing the hotel. Despite her omission of explicit, individual reactions to taste, I instead explore the food and meals that Woolf regularly eats or associates with the hotel, and the gustatory experiences or flavours those foods represent. Furthermore, I return to the underlying antisemitism that occurs frequently in Woolf's hotel writing in relation to her presentation of hotel food.

Chapter One: Sound and Noise in the Hotel

By utilising theories of sound and the boundary between sound and noise, I will introduce the concept of hotel sound and its presence in both Woolf's autobiographical works and her fiction. I will explore Woolf's frustration with hotel noise as it not only worsens her mental and physical health, but disrupts her writing process, later contrasting this with her use of women's sound in her fictional hotel writings as emblematic of women's emergence from male dominance in the private sphere into the more public, open space of the hotel. The hotel space (and its smaller subgroups of spaces within) sits in a transitory position between public and private realms, with sound afforded the unique ability to travel between its subdivided rooms and into the outside world. Woolf explores the tension between the public and private in the hotel through her presentations of hotel sound and its porosity; in her personal writings, this easy movement of sound is considered disturbing noise, whereas in her fiction, both sound's volume and its ability to traverse the physical boundaries of the hotel space often function as symbolic of female liberation. In public, Woolf chose to acknowledge the importance of sound as a unifying symbol of social connections and freedom, while writing of her frustrations with hotel noise in her private, then unpublished letters and diaries.

There are a multitude of factors to be considered when describing what sound is; it is the sensation produced in the eardrum by vibration, and also that which is heard. Sound is also not always emitted from one source; a crowd of voices or a band playing can come together to make one collective sound. Furthermore, sound is not only an auditory experience or the physical vibration in the eardrum, but it is inseparable from its conceptual and metaphoric associations; David Novak and Matt Sakakeeny highlight in their introduction to *Keywords in Sound* the 'raw 'stuff' of sound' that 'is the tangible basis of music, speech, embodiment, and spatial orientation', and its 'conceptual fields' such as silence, hearing and

voice, that ‘circulate not as passive descriptions of sonic phenomena but as ideas that inform experience’.³⁶ This part will particularly focus on music, hearing and voice, analysing the effect of both the identity of the producer of and the intention behind sound on Woolf’s reception and interpretation of it. Furthermore, I will explore the transition of sound as something neutral or pleasant into the negative categorisation of noise, positing a theory of hotel noise that Woolf expressed her frequent disdain for in her personal writings.

Sound can be further categorised into ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ types of sound, and ‘negative’ sounds are often labelled as noise. However, there is no objective set of criteria that can be used to distinguish sound from noise; Novak highlights in his entry on noise in *Keywords to Sound* that although there are factors, such as ‘simple loudness’, that can transform sound into noise, noise is a ‘relational concept’ that is ‘coloured’, filtered, limited, and changed by contexts of production and reception’.³⁷ Sound can only be objectively deemed noise by the mind and ear of the unwilling listener; Snaith highlights the multitude of factors that complicate the sound/noise boundary, including the ‘tolerance thresholds and positionality of the listener’, the ‘socio-cultural’ and ‘sonic contexts’, the ‘political’, ‘racial’ and ‘class [...] differences’, the specific ‘environment’ and ‘economic circumstances in which the sound is being made’.³⁸ Therefore, I will be adhering to Woolf’s own definition of noise, while considering how the aforementioned factors may shape her own perceptions and experiences with sound.

Critical analyses of Woolf’s relationship with the modernist soundscape and sound usually posit Woolf as an undeniable champion of the new noise of the city.³⁹ James G.

³⁶ David Novak and Matt Sakakeeny, ‘Introduction’ in *Keywords in Sound*, ed. by David Novak and Matt Sakakeeny, (United States: Duke University Press, 2015), pp.1-11 (p.1).

³⁷ David Novak, ‘Noise’ in *Keywords in Sound*, ed. by David Novak and Matt Sakakeeny, (United States: Duke University Press, 2015), pp.125-318 (p.125-6).

³⁸ Anna Snaith, *Writing Noise in Interwar Britain: Literature and the Politics of Sound*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2025), p.105, 107.

³⁹ There are a number of works which explore Woolf’s relationship with sound which will not be discussed due to my engagement with other critical sources. Angela Frattarola’s “Developing an Ear for the Modernist Novel: Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Richardson and James Joyce”, *Journal of Modern Literature*, 33.1 (2009): pp. 132-153.

Marshall references Woolf as a challenger of ‘the negative categorisation of noise’, and while Kate Flint acknowledges that Woolf was ‘far from impervious to the intrusive and disturbing potential of modern noise’, her essay ‘Sounds of the City: Virginia Woolf and Modern Noise’ focuses on Woolf’s ‘celebratory’ treatment of the sounds of the city.⁴⁰ While Woolf may have celebrated the modern city soundscape in some of her works, the hotel is a unique variable affecting her reception of and attitude towards sound; when staying in or close to a hotel, Woolf frequently wrote in her letters and diaries of her complaints of noise and its harmful effects on her. While I largely challenge the general critical position of Woolf as an unwavering celebrant of noise by using the lens of the hotel, I will later contrast her usual contempt with her treatment of female sound in *The Voyage Out*.

Woolf was not the only individual struggling with sound. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many individuals were deeply preoccupied with concerns of public noise, and authors often found themselves at the forefront of both pro-noise and anti-noise movements. Noise was often controlled by the middle- and upper-classes, who had the ‘capacity to ‘buy’ silence’ through legal campaigns and police complaints (which the Woolfs themselves did, as I will explore later in the chapter).⁴¹ James G. Mansell highlights that, of the three main legal acts passed to regulate noise, prominent writers of the period were involved in the campaigns which inspired these laws: Charles Dickens protested frequently against street music prior to the 1864 Street Music Act, H. G. Wells and Aldous Huxley supported the Anti Noise League’s campaigning throughout the 1930s which culminated in

explores *The Years* and *Between the Acts* as vocal texts. Melba Cuddy-Keane has written multiple essays on Woolf’s approaches to listening and the city soundscape, including ‘Modernist Soundscapes and the Intelligent Ear: An Approach to Narrative through Auditory Perception’ (pp.382-98) in *A Companion to Narrative Theory*, ed. by James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz, (Great Britain: Blackwell, 2005) and ‘Virginia Woolf, Sound Technologies, and the New Aurality’ (pp.69-96) in *Virginia Woolf in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction: Music, Cinema, Photography, and Popular Culture*, ed. by Pamela Caughie, (New York: Routledge, 2000).

⁴⁰ Mansell, p.156. and Kate Flint, ‘Sounds of the City: Virginia Woolf and Modern Noise’ in *Literature, Science, Psychoanalysis, 1830-1970: Essays in Honour of Gillian Beer*, ed. by Helen Small and Trudi Tate, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) pp.181-194 (p.181).

⁴¹ Snaith, *Writing Noise in Interwar Britain: Literature and the Politics of Sound*, p.104.

the 1939 model bylaw on noise, and John Betjeman supported the Noise Abatement Society's advocacy for rural quiet in the 1950s and 1960s, leading to the 1960 Noise Abatement Act.⁴² Mathematician Charles Babbage also spearheaded the anti-noise movement, specifically targeting 'tavern-keepers' and 'public-houses' (both of which offered lodging to guests, functioning as precursors to the modern hotel) as 'encouragers' of street music and noise.⁴³ Authors and public intellectuals continually aligned themselves with anti-noise campaigns due to the necessity of a quiet soundscape when writing; Mansell argues that writers willingly 'took on the shape of a normative auditory culture' that was borne out of a 'growing middle-class demand for quiet' as many considered noise to be disruptive to a productive work environment.⁴⁴

Although public obsession with noise began in the late nineteenth century, with contemporary authors often expressing preference for quiet, most modernist artists embraced noise and felt it to be a defining trait of modernity. Mansell highlights in his book *The Age of Noise in Britain: Hearing Modernity* (2017) that noise 'was not just representative of the modern; it was modernity manifested in audible form', and modernist authors reproduced this vocalicity in their works.⁴⁵ Notable attempts to 'make their narrative auditory' include the repeated bar-call 'hurry up please it's time' in T. S. Eliot's poem 'The Wasteland', the reproduced music sheets in *Ulysses* (1922), and the sounds of London surrounding Clarissa Dalloway (such as the sudden exclamation 'There! Out it boomed', as Big Ben chimes in the present tense) in the opening pages of *Mrs Dalloway*.⁴⁶ However, although many modernist

⁴² James G. Mansell, 'Noise' in *Sound and Literature*, ed. by Anna Snaith, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020) pp.154-169 (p.158).

⁴³ Charles Babbage, 'Observations of Street Nuisances', in *The Life of a Philosopher*, (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1864), p.4.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ James G. Mansell, *The Age of Noise in Britain: Hearing Modernity*, (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2017) p.1.

⁴⁶ Angela Frattarola, *Modernist Soundscapes: Auditory Technology and the Novel*, (United States: University Press of Florida, 2018), p.6, Eliot, p.46, James Joyce, *Ulysses: Annotated Student Edition*, ed. by Declan Kiberd (United Kingdom: Penguin Classics, 2011), p.809-810, Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, (Great Britain: Penguin Random House, 2016), p.4.

authors reproduced the sound of the era in their works, some were opposed to the physical manifestations of noise which surrounded them due to its obstruction in the creation of their work. Marcel Proust wrote from a soundproofed, cork-lined bedroom in order to prevent noise from hampering his ability to write, and Henry Miller wrote that ‘most writing is done away from the typewriter, in the quiet, silent moments’, suggesting that even the clicking of the typewriter keys could distract from the writing process.⁴⁷ Despite the aurality of their literature, many modernist authors sought to escape noise in their personal lives, particularly while writing, as it disrupted their focus - including Woolf.

Woolf tackled issues of sound and noise in both her novels and her essays; she directly responded to her literary predecessors' campaigns against noise in her essay ‘Street Music’, which was first published in the *National Review* in 1905. Woolf argues against the label of ‘nuisance’ for street performers and regulations against them by a ‘board’ and enforcement of these regulations by policemen.⁴⁸ Woolf acknowledges the validity of the label ‘nuisance’ in some instances: ‘his music disturbs the householder at his legitimate employment, and the vagrant and unorthodox nature of such a trade irritates a well-ordered mind’.⁴⁹ However, this disturbance is almost secondary to the intention behind the noise; for Woolf, street musicians are to be admired because they are able to cast away modern standards of artistic indecency and discipline and allow creativity and rhythm to take ‘possession of the soul’.⁵⁰ In modern society, expression is ‘indecent’, and artists encourage public expression of ‘thoughts and emotions’ in the public sphere on the ‘pavement’ more frequently and easily than ‘any other profession’.⁵¹ Loud volumes and any imperfections in composition are unimportant, as ‘the gift of conception is certainly superior to the gift of

⁴⁷ *Conversations with Henry Miller*, ed. by Frank L. Kersnowski and Alice Hughes (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994) p.48.

⁴⁸ Virginia Woolf, ‘Street Music’, <<https://www.literaturecambridge.co.uk/news/vw-street-music>> [accessed 31 March 2025].

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

expression'; the spontaneity and very existence of the idea is more important than technical perfections or imposition on others.⁵²

While 'Street Music' may appear to cleanly distance Woolf from her anti-noise literary peers, in her private life Woolf frequently complained of noise, including loud music. She acknowledges the tension between the necessity of public displays of emotion by artists with the regular employment and lives of ordinary citizens, categorising artists as 'unorthodox' and non-artists as 'well-ordered'. However, Woolf fails to acknowledge the effect that street music (and therefore, noise more broadly) has on artists creating a different kind of art: authors and their written works. Charles Dickens' motive behind his protestations against street music become apparent upon reading his daughter's recollections of his writing routine: 'absolute quiet' while writing was 'essential' to him, as even the 'slightest sound' could cause a 'fatal' error while writing.⁵³ Fourteen years after the publication of 'Street Music', Woolf moved into Monk's House in Sussex, where she wrote in a repurposed shed away from the rest of the house, most likely to escape noise; she complains frequently in her diary of Leonard disturbing her with even 'little noise'.⁵⁴ Woolf may have failed to caveat her essay with this clear tension between authors and musicians due to its position in her career; she was only twenty three at the time of the publication of 'Street Music', and had yet to publish her first novel *The Voyage Out* (which would be published ten years later). Perhaps at this time, she had yet to face auditory opposition in her writing processes. Furthermore, Woolf briefly touches upon the issue of the public and private boundary; the street musician's music is not confined to the street, and the sound travels to the households indoors. Although Woolf stresses the importance of an artist's ability to publicly express 'thoughts and emotions', her acknowledgement of the noise's ability to transcend the public sphere suggests

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Mamie Dickens, *My Father as I Recall Him*, (Westminster: The Roxburghe Press, 1896), p.46.

⁵⁴ *The Diary of Virginia Woolf: Volume Three 1925-1930*, ed by Anne Olivier Bell, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1980), p.271.

an awareness of the tension between different modes of artistic expression, one requiring noise and one silence, which she grappled with in her private writings.

One of Woolf's most quoted lines about writing from *A Room of One's Own*, 'a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction', has a glaring omission when considering Woolf's own requirements for writing fiction: silence, or at the very least, quiet.⁵⁵ The rooms in which Woolf most struggled to write were the lounge and drawing-rooms of the hotel, and she wrote of these struggles frequently in her letters and her diaries throughout her life. However, hotel noises also affected Woolf's writing when she did not occupy their rooms:

But why am I writing so fast? I am in a mixed mood, flying before the fury of my own devils. They have started a pumping machine in the hotel basement which shakes my studio: 25 minutes pumping like the tread of a rhythmical Elephant; then 25 minutes silence. I try earstoppers; I try patience; finally I am trying psychology. If, I say to myself, you can imagine that the pumping is the sound of Times clock made audible, which for all your life will measure the day into spaces of 25 minutes, you will take the sound into your bloodstream, where it will become noiseless as the beat of the heart. All is habit. So far I have not triumphed. There! it begins again.⁵⁶

Woolf also used the verb 'triumph' when describing her legal victory over the Imperial Hotel Company, and it reveals the strength of her emotional struggle with hotel noise. No matter the source of a noise, Woolf writes of noise with a zoomorphic effect, as the pumping machine moves 'like the tread of a rhythmical Elephant'. Furthermore, the noise of the pumping machine is one of the first sounds Woolf describes which appears to maintain any consistency or rhythm, yet this rhythm does not prevent the sound from becoming noise.

⁵⁵ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas*, (Great Britain: Penguin Random House, 2016), p.4

⁵⁶ *A Reflection of the Other Person: The Letters of Virginia Woolf Volume IV: 1929-1931*, ed. by Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1978), p.3.

‘Earstoppers’, ‘patience’ and ‘psychology’ do not ease the effects of the noise, and instead she must write quickly (at the time, Woolf was writing her essay ‘Phases of Fiction’) in the twenty-minute intervals of silence.

The voices of hotel guests repeatedly invade the narrative of Woolf’s letters whenever she attempted to write in hotel common rooms. In 1934, she wrote to composer Ethel Smyth from a hotel lounge discussing a group of ‘sporting gentry’ sat nearby. She comments that ‘they will talk, so I can’t write’.⁵⁷ The verb ‘talk’ does not suggest an increased volume from the group’s conversation, yet their voices still inhibit Woolf from continuing her writing. Not only is the sound of their conversation displeasing to Woolf, but the content is too: ‘the lady has just said aloud and cheerfully that she has strained her inside and must see a doctor. Now, I couldn’t say that aloud in the lounge’.⁵⁸ As the letter progresses, the content is dedicated solely to the transcription of the guests’ conversation, with Woolf interjecting: ‘She is going to have whiskey and soda. They have rung the bell. Now I couldn’t do that in the lounge of a hotel. No, I quite agree with you, I have missed the bull’s eye, and hit only half the rim, the white. “Can I have a small whiskey and soda please?”’.⁵⁹ Woolf again notes the woman’s inappropriate actions in the hotel lounge. However, although this could be in reference to the woman’s whiskey and soda, it could also be in reference to her decision to ring the bell; their disruptive conversation is worsened by the loud ringing of the bell, worsening the noise. Furthermore, Woolf obscures the boundary between her commentary and the guest’s words; the sentence begins ‘no, I quite agree with you’ as though Woolf is agreeing with an unwritten comment made by a guest, and then appears to be attached to the second half of the statement as a guest theorises on their darts throw. This obfuscation is further emphasised by Woolf’s switch between using quotation marks for the guest’s speech and omitting them, as

⁵⁷ *The Sick Side of the Moon: The Letters of Virginia Woolf Volume V: 1932-1935* ed. by Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1979), p.296.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.297.

the reader must frequently reassess who is currently speaking. This further highlights the intrusion of the guests into Woolf's narrative, as she struggles to establish her voice in her own letter in competition with the guests. Furthermore, she writes in short, unpunctuated sentences when transcribing their speech, further alienating the guests' voices from her own prose. The letter is only two paragraphs in length, yet almost every sentence is spent discussing the guests; their conversation is so invasive to Woolf that it consumes the content of her letter.

This also further demonstrates Woolf's fascination with the leisure class and their social performances in hotels. Veblen touches upon conventions of speech in *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, as 'elegant diction [...] is an effective means of reputability', as word usage and conversation topics '[differ] appreciably from the pulpit to the market-place'.⁶⁰ Woolf highlights the woman's inability to determine topics of conversation and noise levels appropriate to the hotel lounge environment, revealing her position as an outsider to the middle- and upper-classes. Moreover, in their reconfiguration of the tourist gaze, John Urry and Jonas Larsen observe that other tourists themselves 'influence and discipline' the gaze, as they 'spend much time gazing at fellow tourists' in a 'status and taste game', debating 'appropriate ways of being a tourist'.⁶¹ While Urry and Larsen focus on visual surveillance of tourist activities in this context, Woolf's gaze extends multisensorily; it is the woman's volume of speech and choice of conversational subjects that reveal her unfamiliarity with the leisure class social etiquette.

Another example of aural narrative intrusion centres on the discussion of the expected behaviour of tourists dependent on class. A woman named Mrs. Snowden invades a letter Woolf wrote to her sister Vanessa Bell thirteen years earlier in 1921: 'And if I could live in

⁶⁰ Veblen, p.182.

⁶¹ John Urry and Jonas Larsen, *The Tourist Gaze 3.0*, (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2011), p.201-202.

hotel lounges I think I should be—Yes, here are more people come in. Mrs. Snowden has settled down beside me after a very tiring day, she says—When you know a waiter by name, in fact shake him by the hand, what does it mean? Its the clergy who do it'.⁶² Once again, Woolf does not use quotation marks to clearly signify Mrs. Snowden's speech; instead, the em-dash acts as a visual marker of Mrs. Snowden's intrusion upon Woolf in the physical space of the hotel, the physical space of her text in the letter, and her mental space in which she is constructing her narrative. Mrs. Snowden's remark reinforces the leisure class etiquette Woolf expected to govern social interactions within the hotel; by quipping that only the clergy (whose pastoral role placed them outside of these conventions) would know the name of, greet and shake hands with a waiter, Mrs. Snowden exposes the subordination of hotel staff to upper-class guests. Moreover, she mocks the hypothetical transgression of the leisure class' hotel social codes, mirroring Woolf's criticism of the woman's inappropriate noise. Urry and Larsen highlight that the 'mindsets, habitual practices and social relations travel unreflexively along with [tourists]', and that these ideals help form 'culturally coded patterns of tourist behaviour', 'revolv[ing] around class, gender, ethnicity and sexuality' and 'generat[ing] shared conventions about what should be seen and which actions are appropriate'.⁶³ Mrs Snowden exemplifies this, bringing her expectations of appropriate class relations to the hotel and discussing these conventions with Woolf.

Woolf was frequently plagued by noise when staying in hotels. In 1905, Woolf was awoken by a hotel maid 'carrying on a long & emphatic speech in Spanish'.⁶⁴ The adjective 'emphatic' captures the forcefulness of the woman's speech. Furthermore, the emphatic nature of her speech ironically contrasts with the language in which it was delivered; her

⁶² *The Question of Things Happening: The Letters of Virginia Woolf Volume II: 1912-1922*, ed. by Nigel Nicolson, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1976), p.458.

⁶³ Urry and Larsen, p.192.

⁶⁴ *A Passionate Apprentice: The Early Journals of Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Mitchell A. Leaska, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1990), p.263.

speech was forceful and clear, and yet it was in a language which Woolf did not understand.⁶⁵ Woolf's use of irony here emphasises the volume of the maid's voice, as it was clear enough to be heard yet not understood. She faced a similar awakening during a hotel stay in Manchester in 1925: 'I was kept awake by business men talking in low steady almost continuous voices in the room above till 1-30'.⁶⁶ Woolf's lack of punctuation in the sentence emphasises the 'continuous' noise of the businessmen's voices, as the sentence flows uninterrupted like the noise of their conversation. Furthermore, the 'low' and 'steady' voices of the businessmen contrasts that of the 'emphatic' voice of the maid, yet both disturb Woolf's sleep. This suggests that it is not only the volume of a sound that can affect its value to the listener, but the length of the sound; although the businessmen's voices are quieter than the maid's, they still disrupt Woolf's sleep, as both noises are 'long' and 'continuous'. Furthermore, both noises are familiar yet indecipherable to Woolf; the businessmen's voices are 'continuous', yet the noise they produce is 'low' and 'steady' like that of a machine, and the maid spoke in Spanish, which Woolf did not understand. Although Woolf did not mention any specific ailments caused by these noises, as a connection between Woolf's sleep and her physical and mental health has been previously established, it is undoubtable that these episodes affected her health too, emphasising the ill effects of hotel noise.

Woolf further highlighted the connection between hotel noise and her health in her diary in 1932: 'I've lain in one of those interesting torpors on my bed [...] The Greeks, who don't dine till 9, are now at it-that is are chattering, hooting [...] Now & then a few single words become audible [...] Now the loudspeaker begins, & will so reel hoarsely through a few bars, & then suddenly stop. Everything rattles & jerks as if it were a jingling ill jointed but rapid cart'.⁶⁷ This familiar yet indecipherable nature of noise is also seen again, as 'now

⁶⁵ 'Emphatic (adj.), sense 2,' *Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford University Publishing, <<https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/1170368500>>.

⁶⁶ *The Diary of Virginia Woolf: Volume Two 1920-1924*, p.101.

⁶⁷ *The Diary of Virginia Woolf: Volume Three 1925-1930*, p.97-8.

& then a few single words become audible'; comprehensible words occasionally break through the cacophony of noise. Woolf utilises a number of phonetic techniques to create an auditory experience when reading the passage. She further utilises plosives and repetitive phonics in order to highlight the invasiveness of the noise. The closely spaced double consonants and vowels in 'chattering', 'hooting' and 'rattles' emphasise the grating and relentless nature of the noise as the sounds repeat. Furthermore, Woolf's use of onomatopoeia in 'chattering' and 'hooting' gives an aural quality to the text; by using words which directly imitate sounds, Woolf recreates her surrounding aural landscape in her usually silent text. Woolf also utilises both assonance and consonance in the final sentence, with repeated 'j' and 'ing' sounds in 'jerks as if it were a jingling ill jointed but rapid cart'. Furthermore, Woolf emphasises not only the individual sounds, but their coming together to create noise and a discordant soundscape; the metaphor of the soundscape as an 'ill jointed but rapid cart' represents the difficult enmeshment of the different noises creating an uneven, noisy soundscape. Just as Woolf transcribed the conversations of the guests around her, Woolf writes this entry in the present tense, repeating the word 'now' three times and writing down each sound as she hears it. By rooting the narrative retelling of the sounds in the real-time in which Woolf was experiencing them, the noisy soundscape is inescapable and must be lived through second by second and sound by sound just as Woolf experienced it.

Noises and their emitters frequently take on zoomorphic forms in Woolf's personal writings, later seen in the form of rats during the construction of the Imperial Hotel. Woolf wrote in her diary during a trip to Turkey in 1906 of an irritating servant in a hotel: '[the servants] are old, & slow, & full of antiquated gentilities, picked up in the days when they served in private families. There is a sombre old woman, who crawls about the place like a spasmodic fly; she buzzes into a room, & cannot find her way out again without crawling

over your hands & face so to speak, with her unnecessary questions.⁶⁸ Woolf once again highlights the unpredictability of noise; the woman's movements and 'questions' are 'spasmodic', irregular and erratic. This is further emphasised by the word 'buzzes', which represents both the woman's chaotic movements and her continual questioning of Woolf. The woman's noise is so invasive that it manifests itself zoomorphically and physically crawls over Woolf's 'face', leaving Woolf unable to escape her questions. Furthermore, the servants are unable to handle the changes to their sphere of work; while they used to serve 'private families' in private homes in which they were free to roam and talk, the many rooms of the hotel sit in an uneasy blend of private and public space, and so their presence is invasive. Their new clientele, the leisure class of travellers to which Woolf arguably belonged, were uncomfortable with the forced proximity of different classes within the hotel.

However, Woolf's most troublesome ordeal with hotel noise occurred in her own home. In March 1924, Virginia and Leonard Woolf moved into 52 Tavistock Square in Bloomsbury.⁶⁹ From the back windows of 52 Tavistock Square, the Woolfs could see the Hotel Russell and the Imperial Hotel, and in April 1924 Woolf wrote of her joy at observing something 'more beautiful - the Russel (Woolf's misspelling) Imperial Hotel in the evening sunshine; pink & yellow like the Brighton front'.⁷⁰ However, Woolf's idyllic view of the two hotels was disrupted both visually and sonically when construction began on the Royal Hotel in 1925. A 'large open space, full of old bricks and rubble' at the back of Tavistock Square had been cleared by the Imperial Hotel Company in order to begin building the Royal Hotel.⁷¹ Leonard wrote in his fourth autobiographical work that since they had moved in, as Virginia was a 'bad sleeper' who 'habitually used earstoppers', and was generally 'so disturbed by

⁶⁸ *A Passionate Apprentice: The Early Journals of Virginia Woolf*, p.354-5.

⁶⁹ *The Diary of Virginia Woolf: Volume Two 1920-1924*, ed. by Anne Olivier Bell, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1978), p.297.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p.300.

⁷¹ Leonard Woolf, *Downhill All The Way An Autobiography of the Years 1919 to 1939*, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1975), p.124.

noise', she had slept successfully in the basement due to fears that 'the noise of traffic' would keep her awake.⁷² However, she was soon awoken in the middle of the night due to the noise of 'several rats scampering round her bed on the floor'.⁷³ These rats were 'displaced refugee[s]' who had been disturbed by the clearing of the area for the site of the Royal Hotel, and Leonard described them as the 'harbingers of much trouble' as the noise caused by the Imperial Hotel Company continued to worsen.⁷⁴ On 21st December 1925, Woolf wrote of workmen 'hammering, their engines throbbing outside on the hotel'.⁷⁵ The double consonants in the verbs 'hammering' and 'throbbing' emphasise the harsh repetitiveness of the construction noise. Woolf notes in passing in her diary in May 1926 that 'already (it is now 10 past 2) men have appeared at the hotel with drainpipes'.⁷⁶ To combat the noise during construction, the Woolfs had 'double windows' placed into their sitting-room, which 'looked straight into the area of devastation and the scaffolding, in order to keep out the creaking of the cranes, the clanking of lorries, the cries and curses of the builders.'⁷⁷ The installation of double-glazed windows slightly shielded the Woolfs from the construction noise, yet the once 'beautiful' view of the Imperial Hotel and the 'pink & yellow' sunset as admired by Virginia was now polluted by the 'devastation' of the unfinished hotel. Leonard employs a similar technique to Virginia with the repeated consonance of 'c' and 'cr', further emphasising the recurrent, unending noise of the hotel's construction. The everyday noise of construction plaguing the Woolfs was the sound of modernity; Mansell highlights that 'the middle of the nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth' was 'associated with a rising tide of everyday noise brought about by continuing industrialisation, urbanisation and technological revolution', and Novak argues that noise is the 'keynote sound of industrial development and

⁷² *Ibid*, p.123.

⁷³ *Ibid*.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*.

⁷⁵ *The Diary of Virginia Woolf: Volume Three 1925-1930*, p.52.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p.85.

⁷⁷ Leonard Woolf, *Downhill All The Way*, p.124.

mechanization’, with ‘anti-social and physiologically damaging effects’.⁷⁸ The construction of the Royal Hotel highlights the harmful effects of the growth in everyday noise caused by continuing urbanisation; it became the third hotel visible from 52 Tavistock Square (with over 900 rooms), invading her aural landscape further as noise from the hotel did not abate upon completion of its construction, but in fact worsened.

However, while all noise irritated Woolf, hotel construction noise was uniquely aggravating. In 1931, local hopeful Labour politician F. R. Hancock had a home built at the top of Mill Hill in Rodmell, extremely close to Monk’s House. The ‘2 bungalows’ were so disagreeable to Woolf that she felt she had to ‘record the horror’ of them in her diary.⁷⁹ She further described them as ‘hideous’, remarking that he ‘shan’t have [her] vote’ because of them, and nicknaming them ‘Hancock’s horror’.⁸⁰ Woolf also commented on numerous construction projects in 1932; firstly, in January, she wrote of a ‘great erection of girders on the bank opposite’ near Asheham, foreseeing ‘another view of the downs’ becoming ‘lost forever’ to a hangar complex excavating chalk and clay.⁸¹ Secondly, in March, Woolf commented again on the ‘vast elephant grey sheds’, and on the future construction of ‘60 cottages’ of social housing in Rodmell.⁸² However, Woolf reframed her perception of the projects, ‘intend[ing] to see [the hangar complex] as Greek temples’, noting that there were ‘still [...] great empty spaces’ where she could ‘walk, alone, & come to terms with [her] own head’.⁸³ Woolf reserved her objections to construction noise to the building of the Royal Hotel, criticising only the visual and spatial intrusion of the hangars and new homes. Noise from hotel construction presaged the noise that followed upon its completion; the hotel housed the leisure classes, who within its walls would create an abundance of purposeless,

⁷⁸ Mansell, p.154 and Novak, p.125.

⁷⁹ *The Diary of Virginia Woolf: Volume Four 1931-1935*, ed. by Anne Olivier Bell, (London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982), p.44.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p.17, 44, 46.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, p.62.

⁸² *Ibid*, p.85.

⁸³ *Ibid*.

uncreative sound, funnelled directly into Woolf's home through their close proximity. Contrastingly, the social houses and hangar complex suggest sound from lower classes, as the 'manual labour' required at the complex 'is the exclusive occupation of the inferior class'.⁸⁴

Just as the rats served as the 'harbingers' of the Royal Hotel, the sound of its construction also foreshadowed the noise yet to come. The Woolfs clashed with the Royal Hotel, which ended in a legal battle against the Imperial Hotel Company. Leonard Woolf explained the cause of the noise in his autobiography: 'at the back [of the hotel] was a long ballroom the windows of which were immediately below the windows of our sitting room' and when these windows were opened in the evening a 'jazz band' would play 'full blast from 8 to 12', causing a 'Bedlam of noise, funnelled into our room even with the double windows closed', making their '[lives] impossible'.⁸⁵ The verb 'funnelled' not only expresses a purposefulness on behalf of the Imperial Hotel Company in constructing a direct funnel of noise into the Woolfs' home, but also a willful intention of the sound itself. Furthermore, 'funnelled' evokes the image of the funnel horn of a gramophone, emphasising the purposefulness of the band's playing like that of a record player. This image also highlights the modernity of the noise plaguing the Woolfs, due to both the symbolism of the modern invention of the gramophone and the noise arising from both growing urbanisation symbolised by the hotel and its construction. The 'everyday noise' of the twentieth century (as highlighted by Mansell) shifted from industrial noise to urbanised noise, epitomised by the newly built Royal Hotel, as the hotel guests and staff moved into the newly built Royal Hotel, where virtually all sound within was created to serve the desires of its middle- and upper-class clientele.

The influence of location and class upon Woolf's reception to and presentation of music is further illuminated through comparison with the old woman singing opposite

⁸⁴ Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, (Digireads, 2019), p.5.

⁸⁵ Leonard Woolf, *Downhill All The Way*, p.124.

Regent's Park Tube Station in *Mrs Dalloway*. The jazz band's playing lacks spontaneity, making music on a schedule of '8 to 12' for guests in the enclosed ballroom of the hotel, the music 'funne[ling]' into Woolf's sitting room through the architectural layout of the buildings. Contrastingly, the old woman in *Mrs Dalloway* sings 'without direction, vigour, beginning or end [...] with an absence of all human meaning'; her singing follows no timed schedule and holds no clear, prescribed purpose, emerging from a 'mouth, a mere hole in the earth, muddy too, matted with root fibres and tangled grasses'.⁸⁶ Her mouth is grounded in the earth, and her song is imperfect, 'muddy' and 'matted' with the 'root fibres and tangled grasses' from its sources, reflective of the 'laughable', 'labouring' music of the 'disreputable' violin player whom Woolf wrote of in 'Street Music' and admired for allowing his music to take 'possession of the soul so that nakedness and hunger are forgotten'.⁸⁷ For Woolf, music performed without regard for an audience is the most authentic form of music; the jazz band's repetitive performances were the antithesis of this ideal. Her opposition to both the noise of the hotel construction and the music from the jazz band can be reframed in the context of 'Street Music'; the construction noise and the playing of the band do not stem from a regular sound of the city, an uninhibited passion or 'the gift of conception', but from the necessity to entertain the upper-classes occupying the hotel. In 'Street Music', Woolf notes that to give a street musician a 'copper' would be a 'perfectly incongruous payment', and that payment would awaken these musicians from 'musical ecstasy'.⁸⁸ The jazz band play every night not for 'love', but for money, which Woolf notes would be disagreeable to a truly passionate musician. Furthermore, this music is repeated for hours night after night without the spontaneity of the 'possession of the soul' which, to Woolf, is essential to an artist. The hotel in which the jazz band played was not built out of necessity; Woolf could already see two

⁸⁶ Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, p.79.

⁸⁷ Virginia Woolf, 'Street Music', <<https://www.literaturecambridge.co.uk/news/vw-street-music>> [accessed 31 March 2025].

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

different hotels from the windows of 52 Tavistock Square when she first moved in, and the faceless Imperial Hotel Company ignored the Woolfs' complaints of the noise and then attempted to force them from their home after the legal settlement. Not only was the Royal Hotel's construction and the jazz band disruptive to Virginia's life; the noise emitted was not created by passion, but by consumerist culture driven by the leisure class. Woolf celebrated public displays of music in her published works, understanding the importance of creative passion and art, and kept her personal complaints of real, musical noise to her private writings.

Virginia Woolf wrote of the lawsuit in her diary on December 12th 1929, explaining the progression of their complaints into a lawsuit: in October, the 'music was very bad', and Leonard complained frequently to the hotel of the noise.⁸⁹ At the end of November, the music 'became so bad' and 'intolerable', they were 'unable to sit in the room'.⁹⁰ Just as the noise of the rats drove Virginia out of sleeping in the quiet basement, the noise of the jazz band and the party drove the Woolfs out of their sitting room. Woolf categorises not specifically the volume of the music as 'bad', but the music itself; as the music becomes loud enough to be considered noise, any of its technical qualities are disregarded, and it is wholly 'bad' music, and it is the music which '[improves]', not its volume. Woolf wrote of the noise and the lawsuit as a '[waste of] all [her] time', labelling the hotel and the band as 'devils'.⁹¹ Both Leonard and Virginia emphasise the harmful mental effects of excessive noise, as Leonard describes the noise as arising from 'Bedlam' and Virginia writes that the noise is 'driving us crazy'.⁹² Noise can not only upset one's physical (as evidenced by the disruption to Woolf's sleep) and mental health, and can also spread into other areas of life even once it has subsided; Woolf's time has been 'wasted' and stolen from her not only when it is actively

⁸⁹ *The Diary of Virginia Woolf: Volume Three 1925-1930*, p.272.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *A Reflection of the Other Person*, p.115.

⁹² *Ibid.*

being made and driving her out of her sitting room, but also in the action needed to stop the noise through the lawsuit. The lawsuit was particularly distressing to Virginia, as she frequently expressed in both her diary and in letters to friends, complaining once of the ‘pressure at which we live’, and the ‘upset’ caused.⁹³ The lawsuit allows the noise to follow Woolf outside of her home, as she must cancel visits to friends in order to attend hearings and consult with her lawyers. However, the court case eventually ended in success for the Woolfs, as Virginia wrote in a letter to a friend: ‘we have won our case, did we tell you?—they want to settle it and pay expenses and screw all windows: a triumph’.⁹⁴ The Imperial Hotel Company attempted to buy the Woolfs’ home and force them to leave soon after they lost the case, but failed.⁹⁵

In further contrast to music which takes ‘possession of the soul’, Woolf also encountered music performed by a leisure class guest in a hotel stay in Greece:

So I thank the Lady who has just finished stamping a waltz [sic] on the piano [...] This hotel is patronised solely by natives [...] I conceive that the mother & the daughter who plays are here to buy clothes for the coming season; they may be little officials in Sparta or Nauplia. But in the capital they are ladies – after 11.30 P.M. that is. It is not necessary to speak gently, & smile sweetly in the early morning, any more than it is necessary to lace oneself into silk, & tie bows in ones hair. But sometimes nature rushes out like a pent river. The mother had to lean against the door the other day to support her stout frame while she shrieked Greek like a fish wife [...] Now the daughter has still good reason to conciliate the world; so she not only bows & smiles with some graciousness, but directly her meal is finished, she hastens to the drawing room, & there alone – for doesn’t she love music for itself, its own sake – she

⁹³ *The Diary of Virginia Woolf: Volume Three 1925-1930*, p.272-3 and *A Reflection of the Other Person*, p.115.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p.131.

⁹⁵ *The Diary of Virginia Woolf: Volume Three 1925-1930*, p.152.

belabours the small sharp piano with merciless fists. It is to do her bidding, you hear at every stroke; & if it is disobedient, a good blow will teach it to know better next time. Meanwhile she smiles unperturbed; & gradually the room fills, & she hesitates & yields & has her little triumph.⁹⁶

Although Woolf does not directly categorise the two women's sounds as noise, her language is revealing of her assessment of her fellow hotel guests. Woolf emphasises the difference in both the women's demeanour and the noise they produce depending on both their location and the time of day; before 11:30pm while they remain in the hotel, the mother and daughter do not find it 'necessary to speak gently' or dress femininely in 'silk' and 'bows'. The women attempt to resist the true 'nature' of their noise, but it would frequently '[rush] out like a pent river'. Woolf parallels the women's femininity with their diminished presence in the city's soundscape; while in the capital the women must speak 'gently' and dress in feminine clothing, the hotel offers the women the freedom to shake off this femininity and to dominate the soundscape of the hotel. Woolf utilises plosives and repetitive consonance in order to emphasise the aggressive nature of the woman's piano playing; her playing is 'stamping', and she 'belabours the small sharp piano with merciless fists'. The woman takes on the role of an abusive teacher, as a press of the keys is a harsh 'blow' to 'teach it to know better next time'. Unlike the street musician, whom Woolf admires for their ability to play publicly an imperfect piece of music, the young woman's belligerent piano playing invades the hotel's soundscape due to her need for an audience in a public space. Like the jazz band's playing in the Royal Hotel, the woman's piano playing is considered noise due to the performative nature of her playing; she must play in the public space of the drawing-room and attract an audience. Woolf stresses that the woman would only play piano 'there alone', as she did not 'love music for itself, its own sake'; she is not 'possessed' with

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, p.338-9.

the spirit of the music but instead reenacts the same scene to the same audience in order to ‘conciliate the world’. Moreover, this extract reinforces Matthias’ observation that the hotel often served as a stage for the leisure class’ social performances; only once the audience has gathered in the drawing-room and witnessed her musical display is her ‘triumph’ achieved.

However, this critique becomes more complex when considering that the hotel is populated ‘solely by natives’. Her scrutiny is no longer directed towards her fellow members of the British leisure class, but towards the local guests through the traveller’s gaze.

Hotel Sound in *The Voyage Out*

Woolf did not always write of hotel sounds as noise; a marked difference can be seen in hotel sounds in her fiction writing. In *The Voyage Out*, the ‘young, inexperienced and inquisitive’ Rachel Vinrace, while travelling with her father on his boat, decides to disembark with her aunt and uncle, Ridley and Helen Ambrose, to stay in their villa in the fictitious South American town Santa Marina.⁹⁷ Ridley Ambrose is a scholar working on translating the works of the Greek male poet Pindar, and as his frustration towards his work grows, the aural atmosphere in the villa becomes oppressive for Rachel and Helen:

There were many rooms in the villa, but one room which possessed a character of its own because the door was always shut, and no sound of music or laughter issued from it. Every one in the house was vaguely conscious that something went on behind that door, and without in the least knowing what it was, were influenced in their own thoughts by the knowledge that if they passed it the door would be shut, and if they made a noise Mr. Ambrose inside would be disturbed. Certain acts therefore possessed merit, and others were bad, so that life became more harmonious and less disconnected than it would have been had Mr. Ambrose given up editing Pindar, and

⁹⁷ Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out*, (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.207.

taken to a nomad existence, in and out of every room in the house. As it was, every one was conscious that by observing certain rules, such as punctuality and quiet, by cooking well, and performing other small duties, one ode after another was satisfactorily restored to the world, and they shared the continuity of the scholar's life.⁹⁸

The male-occupied study remains silent, with no 'music' or 'laughter' emanating from behind its closed doors. In her discussion of Edmund Husserl's *Ideas*, Sara Ahmed highlights that 'the study, the room dedicated to writing or other forms of contemplation, conjures up such a vivid image of a masculine domain at the front of the house', and she imagines the furniture in Husserl's study clearly 'even though [she does not] and will not know how he arranged his room'.⁹⁹ Helen and Rachel are aware that 'something' is happening behind the doors of Ridley's study, but the lack of sound emanating from behind the shut door of the room prevents the women from creating a clear image. While female writers sought a quiet public space in the absence of a room of their own, male writers typically wrote in dedicated studies in their home, implicitly placing on their female family members the burden of both maintaining domestic silence and suppressing their own creative voices. Just as Ahmed is forbidden textually from understanding the inner workings of Husserl's study, Helen and Rachel are forbidden from entering the study of their own family member, and are compelled into silence by its mystery. The women remain conscious that if they make a 'noise', he would be 'disturbed', and so they observe the 'rules' of 'punctuality and quiet' in order to coexist with Ridley. Helen, Rachel and their house servants remain silent so as not to disturb Ridley's work in restoring one male 'ode after another'; the modern female voice is suppressed to aid Ridley's restoration of another man's work. Moreover,

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, p.191.

⁹⁹ Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), p.30.

Woolf emphasises the repetitive nature of his translation, further linking back to her preference for spontaneity in creative works; Mansell highlights the culture of female noise abatement surrounding Woolf in the early twentieth century: sounds which were classed as noise were those ‘associated with female labour, both in the office, such as typewriting, and in the home, such as vacuum cleaning’.¹⁰⁰ The women are expected to perform unnamed ‘small duties’, cook ‘well’ and remain ‘quiet’ in order to ease the ‘continuity’ of Ridley’s work and aid the restoration of Pindar. Woolf emphasises the prioritisation of male creative expression over women; the domestic labour that sustains Ridley’s life, thereby enabling his writing, is expected to be performed efficiently and silently, ensuring that he can write undisturbed. While Rachel played the piano on the voyage there, there is little mention of her and Helen’s creative pursuits in their early months in the villa, as they support Ridley’s writing instead of their own. Even in the comfort of their home, women’s noise remains secondary to men’s comfort. Anti-noise groups and campaigns became increasingly ‘bound up with a social ordering of class and gender relations in which quiet, male, European, intellectual culture was situated as a norm against which other sounds were judged’.¹⁰¹ Ridley and his work are the ‘norm’, and as this norm requires silence, Rachel and Helen must obey this norm and live by his ‘continuity’ instead of living independently.

The women soon tire of the oppressive, lifeless atmosphere in the villa; after spending a few months there, largely isolated from prolonged human contact except for occasional trips into the town to ‘see life’, Rachel and Helen decide to visit the unnamed hotel at the centre of the novel, which houses many of their fellow British tourists.¹⁰² They sneak up to the uncurtained ‘long windows’ and observe the guests in various public rooms of the hotel. The first room which they look into and observe guests is the drawing-room, where ‘a thin

¹⁰⁰ Mansell, p.164.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out*, p.106.

woman was flourishing up and down the piano'.¹⁰³ Elicia Clements argues that, in *Between the Acts* (published posthumously in 1941), the 'outer world imposes a constricting order that forces the subject into servitude', with music '[entering]' to contrast the audience's thoughts of 'working, serving, pushing, striving, earning wages [...] when ears are deaf'.¹⁰⁴ In the novel, music is a 'signifying process that can break open the assumptions and totalitarian methods of easy and clear communication'.¹⁰⁵ Similarly, the hotel and its music enter *The Voyage Out* to provide an escape from a different kind of servitude and communication: the patriarchy. The hotel's varied soundscape and open windows and doors contrast the 'rules' of 'quiet' and 'shut' doors of the domestic villa; in the hotel, women are free to occupy every room, making noise as they see fit.

Female sound frequently dominates the soundscape in the novel. Rachel and Helen hear the 'distinct voice of a widow' questioning her son while observing the woman's playing, but the man's answer to her question is 'lost in the general clearing of throats and tapping of knees' at the end of her piano piece.¹⁰⁶ The first sounds heard from the hotel are made by women; the flamboyant 'flourishing' piano playing, and a voice that is distinctly and recognisably a widow. The man's voice is lost to the sound of praise of the woman's piano playing. While travelling on the boat, Rachel chose her room due to its contents: 'by virtue of the piano [...] Rachel considered it her room'.¹⁰⁷ The piano in the villa is in a 'fortress' room, 'cut off from the rest of the house', therefore shielding Rachel's compositions and playing from both her housemates and the outer world.¹⁰⁸ The sound of piano music accompanied by the image of the woman playing signals to Rachel that the hotel is a space which she can

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, p.109.

¹⁰⁴ Elicia Clements, 'Virginia Woolf, Ethel Smyth, and Music: Listening as a Productive Mode of Social Interaction', *College Literature*, 32.3 (2005), p.64, and Virginia Woolf, *Between the Acts*, (London: Penguin Group, 2000), p.110.

¹⁰⁵ Clements, p.64.

¹⁰⁶ Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out*, p.109.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, p.31.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, p.136.

occupy and fit into; it can become a room of her own to create music in, just as she claimed the room on the boat as her own. Furthermore, the position of the piano in the public drawing-room of the hotel, wherein people listen to the woman playing and ‘[tap] their knees’ in subdued applause, represents a community that Rachel will find in the hotel that was absent both on the boat and in the villa.

In the lounge of the hotel, Rachel and Helen hear ‘through the open window [...] an uneven humming sound like that which rises from a flock of sheep pent within hurdles at dusk’.¹⁰⁹ The sound of the men and women in the lounge symbolises both the individuality and community found in a hotel space; there is uniformity between the guests as their collective sounds produce an unidentifiable hum, but individuality in the sound’s unevenness, as their voices do not quite blend together to produce a steady, monotonous sound. This unevenness could also emerge from the blend of both male and female voices in the space, contrasting that of the male-only, private, and silent study. Furthermore, the ‘shut’ door of the study from which no ‘music’ or ‘laughter’ is heard contrasts the openness of the hotel, where the windows are ‘long’ and ‘uncurtained’, and the window of the lounge is ‘open’ for the sounds of the hotel to travel to Rachel and Helen’s ears. In its first appearance, the hotel offers Rachel and Helen a place of community as revealed to them through its sounds, which they are cut off from in the villa.

Later in the novel, Rachel takes to the piano at the behest of her fellow party guests in the hotel, replacing the ‘old man’ who had played a ‘waltz’ and a ‘polka’ before leaving.¹¹⁰ Rachel originally plays ‘an air from a sonata by Mozart’, and is met with a complaint that it is ‘not a dance’.¹¹¹ She encouraged the dancers to ‘invent the steps’, ‘[marking] the rhythm boldly’ and playing a wide variety of music: ‘old English hunting songs, carols, and hymn

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p.110.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, p.184.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, p.185.

tunes', resulting in 'every person [...] tripping and turning' to her playing.¹¹² Emma Sutton remarks that the 'scene provides an alternative rhythmic model to the predominantly male literary canon in the novel', with Rachel 'unconventionally stressing the rhythm of the Mozart sonata'.¹¹³ The silence that accompanies Ridley and Pindar in the study in the villa contrasts the lively music and rhythmic reinvention by Rachel in the hotel; the private home remains a patriarchal domain, while the hotel offers a public stage for women and their musical reworkings of the male 'canon'.¹¹⁴ Moreover, as Sutton highlights, Rachel's spontaneous compositions 'literalises the vision' of musical 'invent[ion]' Woolf conceived of in 'Street Music'.¹¹⁵ While the young woman in Woolf's diary 'belabour[ed]' the piano and waits for the room to '[fill]', Rachel simply 'play[s]' the piano and gracefully 'pass[es]' from genre to genre, 'playing to herself' even once her 'audience' had left.¹¹⁶

In her fiction, Woolf actualises the ingenuity of musical composition that the young woman and the Royal Hotel could not achieve in her personal life, using the character of Rachel Vinrace and her emergence from silent, patriarchal influence in the domestic sphere into the loud and open space of the hotel, contrasting the uninspired playing of the Greek woman and the commercially driven noise from the jazz band.

Conclusion

Hotel noise plagued Woolf in her personal life, both in the private sphere of her home and in the various transitory spaces inside the hotel. The construction of the Royal Hotel, the jazz band playing within and the subsequent lawsuit caused Woolf both physical and mental anguish for many years, as she documented frequently in her letters and diaries. Furthermore,

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p.185, 186.

¹¹³ Emma Sutton, 'Putting Words on the Backs of Rhythm': Woolf, 'Street Music', and "The Voyage Out", *Paragraph*, 33.2 (2010), p.190.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out*, p.186, 187.

while travelling, Woolf frequently complained of noisy soundscapes intruding upon her both in the hotel bedroom and in hotel common rooms. Contrastingly, in Woolf's fiction, hotel sound rarely transitions into noise, and music in the hotel is a powerful tool for female freedom of expression and for community between individuals. Woolf recognises the importance of the hotel space and the soundscape within it in the modern world in *The Voyage Out*, while in her private diaries expressing her physical concerns and mental frustrations with hotel noise to prevent hampering her message. In her published works, Woolf chose to use the hotel as a space to champion sound and music due to its importance as a space for female expression and liberation, a point which I will expand upon in the second chapter. The young woman's uninspired piano playing and the ceaseless noise from the Royal Hotel's jazz band did not reflect Woolf's idealistic vision of musical innovation found in 'Street Music'. Instead, Woolf turned to her fiction to experience sound and music instead of noise; the hotel plays an important role in Rachel's auditory development, as she escapes from the confines of male silence and private piano playing in the villa to the public soundscape stage in the hotel, reinventing the patriarchal canon which has previously silenced her. Woolf utilises the hotel to explore women's changing role in society from silent counterparts to dominant figures in not only the societal soundscape, but in the spatial and tactile landscapes of embodied experience, confining her mental and physical challenges with sound to her private writings to avoid underscoring the importance of sound to modernist artistic expression and societal liberation.

Chapter Two: ‘We got into touch all round; but our depths were not invaded’

In this part, I will explore the impact of the hotel space upon the sense of touch in Woolf’s life and works. While Woolf, although not without difficulty, is able to escape noise in the hotel, touch extends beyond the initial act of physical contact and leaves emotional impressions on both spaces and individuals. In her personal writings, Woolf maintains a physical distance, preventing skin-to-skin touch with her fellow guests, but is often profoundly affected by sharing the space with other (particularly female) bodies. I will utilise Sara Ahmed’s studies of emotions and the body, Jean-Luc Nancy’s philosophy of the body and touch, and Derrida’s commentary on Nancy’s works to explore this physical and emotional non-touching in Woolf’s letters and diaries, and to establish Woolf’s own philosophy of touch and its presence in her hotel writings. I will also discuss antisemitism and touch in the hotel space; Woolf depicts antisemitic stereotypes of the wealthy Jew, intertwining them into the impersonal middle-class space of the hotel. In the hotel, hundreds of different bodies engage with and touch upon the objects and space, each leaving an imprint behind once they have passed through the hotel which cannot be removed by the most meticulous maid. In *Jacob’s Room* and *Mrs Dalloway*, Woolf critiques the male desire for dominance of the hotel space and explores both class and gender power dynamics in the act of cleaning the hotel bedroom, while in *The Voyage Out*, Woolf explores female assertiveness over the space of the hotel bedroom. While physical touch in the hotel has the ability to linger, the sharing of space in the common spaces of the hotel and the emotional impact of this distant touch is transitory.

Frédérique de Vignemont and Olivier Massin highlight that there is no comprehensive definition of touch as its issue is ‘conceptual’ in nature; there is no ‘consensus’ on or

‘*explanandum* of the various biological, psychological, and psychophysical theories of touch’.¹¹⁷ These obscurities of touch have been reflected upon for thousands of years, as Jacques Derrida highlights in his book *On Touching-Jean-Luc Nancy*: ‘Aristotle, foresaw all the obscurities of the tangible: touch isn’t clear, *ouk estin endēlon*, he says furthermore; it’s *adēlon*, inapparent, obscure, secret, nocturnal’.¹¹⁸ As both the act of touching itself and its definition are hard to define, I will look at a number of theoretical works in order to reach multiple, flexible definitions of touch which do not necessitate physical contact between two individuals: as the presence and emotional effects of one body on another sharing a space. Furthermore, I will discuss critical explorations of the modernist perception of touch, and I will explore Woolf’s philosophy of touch both inside and outside of the hotel space.

Philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy and scholar Sara Ahmed create a framework of touch as an emotional, imperceptible and ceaseless act, which Woolf also presents in her hotel works. Nancy wrote frequently on touch in works such as *Corpus* (1992) and *Being Singular Plural* (2000), questioning philosophical classifications of touch. In Nancy’s model of touch, the act of separation and non-touching are an important aspect of touching itself; in *Being Singular Plural*, Nancy argues that ‘all of being is in touch with all of being, but the law of touching is separation; moreover, it is the heterogeneity of surfaces that touch each other’.¹¹⁹ All life is in touch with one another, but touch is defined by the separation between individuals, and it is their differences which most affect each other. Nancy highlights the nature of the ever-reaching body (which Woolf similarly conceptualises in *The Voyage Out* and *The Years* (1937) in later paragraphs) in his work *Corpus*: ‘the body-place isn’t full or empty, since it doesn’t have an out-side or an inside’.¹²⁰ As the body has no outside or inside separating it

¹¹⁷ Frédérique de Vignemont and Olivier Massin, ‘Touch’, in *Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Perception*, ed. by Mohan Matthen, (Online Edition: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp.294-313 (p.294).

¹¹⁸ Jacques Derrida, *On Touching-Jean-Luc Nancy*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), p.4.

¹¹⁹ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. by Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O’Byrne, (California: Stanford University Press, 2000), p.5.

¹²⁰ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), p.15.

from other beings and objects, all bodies are able to reach, interact, and touch each other despite the lack of physical, skin-to-skin contact.¹²¹

In engaging with Nancy's work, Jacques Derrida further expands upon the act of touch occurring through methods other than physical contact in his essay 'Le toucher Touch/to touch him', later developing upon this concept in his book *On Touching-Jean-Luc Nancy*: 'If two gazes look into each other's eyes, can one then say that they are touching? Are they coming into contact—the one with the other?'.¹²² Furthermore, Steven Connor posits the act of writing as a form of touching through comparison with the skin: as the skin '[provides] a background' like 'the paper on which words are scrawled or stamped, the skin is always in the background [...] but its more fundamental condition is to be that on top of which things occur, develop or are disclosed'.¹²³ Derrida posits the eye as a tactile organ, as the eye reaches out to establish contact with another being, and Connor highlights the tactility of the act of writing. Therefore, Woolf's observations when in hotel common spaces reveal the interconnectedness of two of the senses: she shares the space with other bodies, which brings them into a contact further deepened through her gaze, and immortalises these shared encounters by writing them down in her diaries and letters. The tourist gaze becomes tactile, a method of establishing both intimacy with fellow tourists and locals while also exposing them to social judgement.

In her works *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* and *Queer Phenomenology*, Sara Ahmed asserts that individuals are formed and influenced by the mere act of reaching out towards one another and nearby objects, and that the emotions evoked by the sharing of space with other individuals act as a form of touching upon one another. Ahmed argues that bodies '[tend] toward objects that are reachable, that are available within the bodily horizon', that

¹²¹ This is also present in Woolf's works in the form of the atom or 'aura', as I will explore in a subsequent paragraph.

¹²² Derrida, *On Touching-Jean-Luc Nancy*, p.2.

¹²³ Steven Connor, *The Book of Skin*, (London: Reaktion Books, 2004), p.36-7.

this itself is an act of contact, and that bodies are therefore influenced by this non-touching, reinforcing Nancy's position.¹²⁴ In *Queer Phenomenology*, Ahmed expands upon this concept of shared space and her 'model of affect as contact': 'We are affected by "what" we come into contact with. In other words, emotions are directed to what we come into contact with: they move us "toward" and "away" from such objects. [...] emotions shape what bodies do'.¹²⁵ Ahmed argues that the way in which people react towards both objects and other bodies sharing the same space, and the emotions and responses that this experience invites, is a form of contact, and therefore a mode of touching. Woolf offers a related conceptualisation of all of the aforementioned theorists' conceptions of touch in her writings, and the hotel space allows Woolf to explore the effect of a number of different stimuli.

Modernist artists frequently created tactile experiences in their works. Futurist writer F.T. Marinetti wrote of the potential healing power of tactile experiences in 'The Manifesto of Tactilism' in 1921.¹²⁶ Chad Bennett writes of the 'rich and varied tactile experience' in reading Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons* (1914).¹²⁷ Broader concepts of touch in the modernist era and its works have been explored by Allyson C. DeMaagd in her book *Dissensuous Modernism: Women Writers, the Senses, and Technology* (2022) and by Abbie Garrington in her article 'Touching Texts: The Haptic Sense in Modernist Literature' and expanded upon in her book *Haptic Modernism: Touch and the Tactile in Modernist Writing* (2013).¹²⁸ In her aforementioned article, Abbie Garrington explores the shift in conceptualisation and experience of touch in the modernist era. Just as the individual's

¹²⁴ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p.2.

¹²⁵ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), p.1.

¹²⁶ Marinetti believed that an increase in engagement with tactile senses and experiences of touch would result in the 'perfecting of spiritual communication between human beings through the epidermis'. F. T. Marinetti, 'The Manifesto of Tactilism' (1921) <https://peripheralfocus.net/poems-told-by-touch/manifesto_of_tactilism.html>.

¹²⁷ Chad Bennett, 'Scratching the Surface: *Tender Buttons* and the Textures of Modernism', *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory*, 73.1 (2017), p.21.

¹²⁸ Allyson C. DeMaagd *Dissensuous Modernism: Women Writers, the Senses, and Technology* (Florida: University Press of Florida, 2022), Abbie Garrington, 'Touching Texts: The Haptic Sense in Modernist Literature', *Literature Compass*, 7.9 (2010) and Abbie Garrington, *Haptic Modernism: Touch and the Tactile in Modernist Writing* (Great Britain: Edinburgh University Press, 2013).

relationship with hearing and sound was changing at a societal level at the start of the twentieth century, Garrington argues that the modern understanding of touch as tripartite ('combining touch, kinaes-thesis and proprioception') emerged from a need to articulate the 'new experiences of the human body in these years'.¹²⁹ Garrington cites 'cinema and mechanised transport' and scientific development as the key evolutions in the modernist era which shifted human sensory experience; I will argue that the modern hotel (the emergence of which was aided by mechanised transport) not only acts as a microcosm of other new sensory experiences, but offers its own unique tactile experiences.¹³⁰ For Garrington, 'sensory bombardment produces writerly anxiety' in Woolf's work, and this bombardment is most often felt in 'moving through the city'.¹³¹ However, the hotel encapsulates this sensory bombardment in one stationary space through a variety of stimuli and experiences.

In both Woolf's private writings and public novels, her idea of touch is not limited to the temporary act of skin-to-skin contact. In a diary entry in 1918, after spending time in Ashenham due to poor health, Woolf describes her first outing into London as an attempt 'to get into touch with London again'.¹³² For Woolf, touch is not surface level contact, but a penetrating act of establishing familiarity with her surroundings and other individuals. After spending time away from London, it is necessary for Woolf to walk its streets again in order to reestablish her connection with the city; it was not enough for Woolf to return to her home in London, she must go to her 'three usual points' of 'Mudie's', 'London Library', and the 'Seventeen Club', observe her fellow Londoners and have 'tea' with a friend.¹³³ Woolf cannot remain in touch with London after time away; it is a relationship that must be cultivated and requires regular upkeep to ensure that she is in sync with the city. Woolf uses the phrase 'get

¹²⁹ Garrington, 'Touching Texts: The Haptic Sense in Modernist Literature', p.811.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, p.810.

¹³¹ *Ibid*, p.816.

¹³² *The Diary of Virginia Woolf: Volume One 1915-1919*, ed. by Anne Olivier Bell, (London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovic, 1977), p.121.

¹³³ *Ibid*.

in touch' again in a diary entry while staying in The Hotel Cendrillon in France throughout March and April in 1925:

And then the whole hotel atmosphere provided me with many ideas: oh so cold, indifferent, superficially polite, & exhibiting such odd relationships: as if human nature were now reduced to a kind of code, which it has devised to meet these emergencies, where people who do not know each other meet, & claim their rights as members of the same tribe. As a matter of fact, we got into touch all round; but our depths were not invaded.¹³⁴

By looking at the above extract through Ahmed's theories of embodied emotions, Woolf's conception of emotional touching is clear; their emotions impress upon both the atmosphere of the hotel and the ability to reach out to and cultivate friendships with their fellow guests, and the space itself becomes 'cold', 'indifferent', and uncondusive to the formation of lasting relationships due to the odd behaviour of its inhabitants. Despite the inherently unwelcoming atmosphere, a familial bond is created and acknowledged through their shared occupation of the space; a hotel 'code' is abided by in order to 'meet these emergencies' of their human desperation for social connection. This social code is maintained by the reciprocal tourist's gaze, as each regulates their behaviour to navigate the 'emergenc[y]' of encountering fellow hotel guests, ensuring their interactions never extend to the 'depths'. Their close proximity and tribal, territorial bond drives a desire to connect with one another; Woolf 'got into touch all around' with the guests at the hotel, but none managed to invade the 'depths' of one another. Woolf once again posits touch as a layered sense: there is a deeper, emotional connection with a place, object, or individual that can be formed beyond physical contact, but this intimacy is not guaranteed. Furthermore, this extract highlights the difficulty of touching in the hotel in Woolf's works; while Woolf is able to easily 'get into touch' with London by

¹³⁴ *The Diary of Virginia Woolf: Volume Three 1925-1930*, p.8.

revisiting its familiar places, no amount of 'getting into touch' with the hotel guests or surroundings increases intimacy or familiarity with the space.

Woolf's conceptualisation of touch changed in her lifetime as she followed scientific development, inadvertently anticipating Nancy's assertion that the body does not have an 'out-side' or 'inside'. In *The Voyage Out*, St John Hirst and Terence Hewet discuss the concept of human interconnection on an unseen level; Hewet concludes that 'one is never alone, and one is never in company'.¹³⁵ After Hirst questions him, Hewet explains his meaning: 'something about bubbles-auras-what d'you call 'em? You can't see my bubble; I can't see yours; all we see of each other is a speck, like the wick in the middle of that flame. The flame goes about with us everywhere; it's not ourselves exactly, but what we feel; the world is short, or people mainly; all kinds of people'.¹³⁶ He posits the idea that his 'bubble could run into some one else's bubble'.¹³⁷ Hewet explains his concept of who and what exactly a person is, and where this core central self lies in the body. The human body is only a 'speck' of an individual, acting as a solid 'wick' in the midst of an unobservable, moving 'flame' that contains human feeling. It is this bubble or flame that reaches out to other people in order to touch and form emotional connections, not the physical body. Hewet concludes that the consequences of this imperceptible touching and '[bursting]' of bubbles would lead to an 'e-nor-mous world'.¹³⁸ Woolf utilises scientific concepts and language of atomic attraction and collision in order to portray the depths of human touch; one human 'bubble' '[running] into' another is symbolic of one atom hitting another. This atomic contact, occurring due to a touching of the emotional bubble of two individuals, leads to a merging of the two and an expansion of their personal 'world' and understanding. Here, Woolf combines both Ahmed's connections between bodily and emotional touching, and Nancy's boundaries

¹³⁵ Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out*, p.119-120.

¹³⁶ *Ibid*, p.120.

¹³⁷ *Ibid*.

¹³⁸ *Ibid*.

of the body; it is possible for one person's body or 'aura' to collide with another, forming physical and emotional bonds and an interconnected, 'e-nor-mous world'.

In *The Years*, published twenty-two years after *The Voyage Out*, Woolf returned again to the relationship between touch, the individual, the outside world, and the atom several times. Firstly, earlier on in the novel, Eleanor Pargiter contemplates the atomic composition of objects: 'Take this cup for instance; she held it out in front of her. What was it made of? Atoms? And what were atoms, and how did they stick together?'.¹³⁹ Her understanding and conceptualisation of the atom develops throughout her life:

Atoms danced apart and massed themselves. But how did they compose what people called a life? She clenched her hands and felt the hard little coins she was holding. Perhaps there's 'I' at the middle of it, she thought; a knot; a centre; and again she saw herself sitting at her table drawing on the blotting-paper, digging little holes from which spokes radiated. Out and out they went; thing followed thing, scene obliterated scene.¹⁴⁰

While Woolf highlights the direct, surface-level contact occurring between Pargiter and the cup and coin, she focuses on the minute touches happening on the microscopic level, as the atoms travel 'out and out' towards other objects and bodies. In the first extract, set in 1908, Eleanor contemplates the atomic composition of the cup she is holding. In the second extract, set in the 'present day' of the 1930s, Eleanor's scientific understanding appears to have advanced, as she questions not only the atomic structure of objects, but her own atomic structure and relationship to the world outside of her own body. Woolf once again obscures the boundary between the self and the physical body, and the outside world as Eleanor questions the exact physical position of where 'I' lies; in 1908, Eleanor can only conceptualise of the atoms outside of herself, and in the 1930s, not only does she contemplate

¹³⁹ Virginia Woolf, *The Years*, (Great Britain: Penguin Random House, 2016), p.142.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p.338.

the movement of own atoms, but their relation to the atoms outside of herself. Catriona Livingstone highlights that in Woolf's conception of the individual, 'on the other end of the scale from the solid, singular self, the self exists as a potentially limitless network of connections', and these connections are a form of atomic, far-reaching touch.¹⁴¹ The holes on the blotting paper are symbolic of the imagined self, and its spokes are these 'limitless' connections, which are made possible through shared space and the touching of atoms, echoing Nancy's assertion that 'all of being is in touch with all of being'. Just as the touching of emotional bubbles leads to bursting and an enormous, shared world in *The Voyage Out*, atomic collision in a shared space highlights a perpetual reaching out towards one another and an endless act of touching as 'scene [obliterates] scene'. For Woolf, an individual's invisible 'aura' of emotion and their very atomic composition are an act of touching, of individuals reaching out towards and impacting each other despite the lack of skin-to-skin contact. Furthermore, this extract reveals Woolf's conception of the relationship between the body and an object; the body and the external world are linked together by atoms, and this movement and exchange of atoms allows tactility on a deeper level than the definition of touch offers. Ahmed argues that at the point of contact, an object no longer 'stand[s] apart' from the body, and so not only do objects leave 'impressions' on a person, '[shaping]' bodies through 'contact', but people leave traces on the objects they touch; therefore, individuals can connect by touching the same (or similar) objects, or even through 'co-inhabiting' the same space at different times.¹⁴² Moreover, connections can also be made by individuals touching the same object but at different times. For example, like Eleanor Pargiter's transformative contact with her cup, cups in *The Voyage Out* (alongside the act of drinking itself) are a reflection of the deeper level of human connection that can be found through tactile objects: Hirst and Hewet sit with their 'coffee-cups' between them, Mrs Paley frequently asks for

¹⁴¹ Catriona Livingstone, *Virginia Woolf, Science, Radio, and Identity*, (England: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.76.

¹⁴² Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p.54.

more ‘cups’ to serve tea to the growing number of fellow hotel guests at her table, the Thornburys and Miss Allan hold ‘their cups in their hands’ as they question Hewet, the Flushings ‘tended to become communicative’ ‘over their cups of tea’.¹⁴³ The act of touching a cup ‘[shapes]’ the individual and their actions in the shared hotel spaces; holding onto a cup reflects an openness to conversation, even causing the Flushings to ‘become communicative’ through the object contact. Woolf expands upon her conceptualisation of and model of touch as an ever-reaching, all-consuming, and ceaseless act in her hotel writings, examining the effect of class, gender, race, and the public/private divide on tactile experiences. As I will explore later in the chapter, contact with objects in hotel rooms can create connections not only between staff and guests, but also between successive room occupants, as the hotel room and its contents accumulate the ‘impressions’ of all who pass through it. Just as Eleanor observed that ‘thing followed thing, scene obliterated scene’ on the atomic level of touch, hotel guests continually succeed one another, their touch leaving ‘impressions’ that connect them not only to past and future guests, but to the staff whose labour is required to maintain the rooms.

Touch, Gender and Class: The ‘Gnome-like’ Women

As discussed earlier in the chapter, Woolf wrote of the inability to connect both physically and emotionally with fellow hotel guests despite the desire to form tribes and ingroups. Woolf frequently presents outsider women occupying the hotel space with warmth and fascination despite the transitory nature of human relationships and touch in the hotel space. In the previous part, I discussed Woolf’s important assertion in *A Room of One’s Own* that ‘a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction’; in both her

¹⁴³ Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out*, p.198, 133, 227.

personal writings and fiction, women boldly claim temporary ownership over the hotel space and its objects, freely and publicly occupying both common spaces and private rooms with an ease and confidence not present in her male characters. Throughout decades of diary and letter writing, Woolf frequently wrote of the women she encountered occupying public hotels. In a letter to Vanessa Bell in 1921, Woolf expresses her desire for herself and Vanessa to become ‘travelling matrons’ once they’ve grown ‘old’, asserting that ‘its best to be a widow (I mean in an hotel)’.¹⁴⁴ Although a ‘matron’ could be married, never married, or widowed, and was usually in a position of authority, Woolf couples this term with ‘widow’; while widowhood did not prevent remarriage, the two terms together nevertheless suggest the absence of a husband as a defining feature of freedom within the hotel. Middle- and upper-class matrons and widows could have access to and control over financial resources with no husband automatically assuming control, allowing them to travel independently and to secure a room of their own in the hotel. This room could be temporary, or it could be on a more permanent basis; in the 1920s, ‘affluent groups, celebrities, artists, and others who savored hotel services and could afford them on a full time basis moved in[to]’ hotels, and this style of living became ‘even more popular’ in the 1930s.¹⁴⁵ Widows were among those who partook in hotel living; Woolf’s mother-in-law, Marie Woolf, lived in hotels in her later life after her husband died. For Woolf, to be a matron or widow in a hotel is to embody female autonomy: freedom of movement in the public space, financial control, and liberation from expectations of male marital contact and touch.

In two letters in May 1930 (one to Bell and one to Sackville-West), Woolf once again muses upon her delight of sharing the hotel with widows; Woolf writes to Bell that ‘the old ladies of England are a perpetual joy. They swarm in every hotel, knitting, writing letters, widows mostly. But, warned by E. S., I have made no friends’, and Woolf writes to

¹⁴⁴ *The Question of Things Happening*, p.458.

¹⁴⁵ Rutes and Penner, p.98.

Sackville-West that she ‘adore[s]’ the ‘life’ of hotels, as they are filled with ‘endless grey haired single ladies with friends, all with wedding rings, and I daresay dead husbands’, who cause her to feel that ‘England is incredibly prosperous’.¹⁴⁶ In *Queer Phenomenology*, Ahmed offers a framework for analysing the relationship between touch and space and societally nonconformant groups: the ‘line’ is facing the ‘direction that is already faced by others’, and hence those who are ‘online’ embody, react and engage with space and objects in ways which do not deviate from the societal norm.¹⁴⁷ Veering from these cultural rules is ‘to go ‘off line’ and ‘to turn toward ‘one’s own sex’ and away from ‘the other sex’.¹⁴⁸ While Ahmed’s theory relates directly to queer desire, without consideration of their sexuality, Woolf’s hotel women orient towards each other and ‘swarm’ the masculine space of the hotel as their own. Woolf assumes that their husbands are ‘dead’, further reinforcing her association of female independence in the hotel with freedom from male contact and touch. While their wedding rings would usually signify marriage, Woolf’s assumption alters the symbolism of their rings; when viewed as a collective image of large groups of single women in a hotel lounge, the rings instead are a material remnant of their former marriages and thereby suggest widowhood, suggesting the financial independence available to upper-class widows who occupied hotels. The ‘endless’ numbers of women ‘swarm’ and fill the rooms, so strongly dominating the space that the ‘off line’ women claim it as their own, female space, effectively becoming the ‘online’ social group of hotels. Moreover, the women engage in tactile activities in the hotel, actively and comfortably occupying the space by ‘knitting’ and ‘writing letters’. Despite the ‘perpetual joy’ their image inspires, Woolf’s admiration of these women remains at a distance, as she heeds her friend Ethel Smyth’s advice to make ‘no friends’ when in the hotel, echoing her earlier acknowledgement of the difficulty of ‘[invading the depths]’ of other individuals in the space.

¹⁴⁶ *A Reflection of the Other Person*, p.164.

¹⁴⁷ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p.15.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p.71.

Her admiration commingled with ridicule of ‘off line’ hotel women is also present in her earlier letters; in 1904, Woolf writes of the ‘strange race that haunts Hotels-gnome like women, who are like creatures that come out in the dark. An hotel is a sort of black cave. This one is really very good of its kind’.¹⁴⁹ Woolf dehumanises the women: they are inhuman, ‘gnome like [...] creatures’, further emphasising their disconnect from other, human hotel guests. They ‘haunt’ the hotel space, which Woolf describes as a ‘black cave’. Her caricature of these women aligns with the ‘cultural hostility towards older women and spinsters’ explored by Glenn Clifton; older women were sometimes viewed as collectively part of the ‘traditional cultural authorities’ in opposition to ‘gender equality’ as the ‘next step in the forward march of history’.¹⁵⁰ These women are not only perceived as ‘off line’ from society and from the aspirations of the younger generation, but have become their own distinct, ‘strange race’, separate from wider society. However, Woolf’s language does not simply deride the women, but approaches them with cautious fascination. The ‘black cave’ of the hotel operates as a home or space of belonging for these women, which they inhabit with the same ease that Woolf admired the older ladies for in the previous paragraph. Just as the old woman in *Mrs Dalloway* sings from ‘a mere hole in the earth’, these women emerge from the ‘black cave’ of the earth; while both are separated from conventional society, they occupy their space with certainty, allowing the old woman to create and sing and these women to unify and belong. Her final assertion that the hotel is ‘very good of its kind’ suggests a fascination not only with these ‘black cave’ hotels, but with the off line women who inhabit them. For Woolf, ‘very good’ hotels are a space that different, strange women do not merely occupy, but fully inhabit.

¹⁴⁹ *The Flight Of The Mind: The Letters of Virginia Woolf Volume I: 1888-1912*, ed. by Nigel Nicolson, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1975) p.138.

¹⁵⁰ Glenn Clifton, ‘The New Old Woman of the 1930s: Aging and Women’s History in Woolf, Sackville-West, and Holtby’, *Intervalla*, 4 (2016), p.72-73.

While some hotel women are creaturely in their appearance and comportment, many break more traditional conventions through their sexuality, marital status, and gender expression. In a hotel in Argyllshire in 1938, Woolf is ‘warmly welcomed by the 20 old fishing men and women’, who are ‘practically sexless’ and Woolf had ‘often taken one for a dog and vice versa’.¹⁵¹ Like the previously mentioned ‘gnome-like women’, the fisherwomen are unfeminine, animalistic, and practically indistinguishable from dogs. Despite their beastly appearance, the fisherpeople greet Woolf warmly and welcome her into the space. Furthermore, in a diary entry in 1931, Woolf writes of a ‘surprising’ pair of guests: ‘2 young men in trousers are women’.¹⁵² Woolf identifies one woman as Mrs Pilkington, but describes her ‘stride and gestures’ as male, and wearing a ‘check shirt’.¹⁵³ The other woman had a ‘feminine face’ and ‘was the woman of the two’, ‘but’ she was wearing ‘trousers’.¹⁵⁴ By aligning the couple with male and female genders and thereby portraying them as a homosexual couple, Woolf implies a romantic relationship between the two women, clearly placing them in Ahmed’s conception of the ‘off line’ sexual attraction. Furthermore, Woolf notes that ‘nobody stared’ at the two women, highlighting the freedom of social and sexual expression also found by queer women.¹⁵⁵

Although Woolf usually watched her fellow female hotel guests from afar, in April 1929, she reflected in her diary on a shared female dining experience in a hotel restaurant:

I saw many odd parties in the hotel. How can they come here tonight, I said? There was the old woman gorged like a vulture. The woman with her foot cocked under the table at this [drawing of a foot at a forty five degree angle from the ground] angle, all through dinner: the young spark in grey with the pink carnation; the two prominent

¹⁵¹ *Leave The Letters Till We’re Dead: The Letters of Virginia Woolf Volume VI 1936-1941*, ed. by Nigel Nicolson, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1980), p.249.

¹⁵² *The Diary of Virginia Woolf: Volume Four 1931-1935*, p.18.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

eyed daughters in velvet; & all kinds of emotions, of ridicule & interest crossing the vast room perpetually from one table to another.¹⁵⁶

Although not explicitly ‘off line’ in their social status or appearance, all of Woolf’s fellow diners were ‘odd’ women (although ‘spark’ can be defined as both an elegant woman or a foppish man, suggesting another androgynous guest).¹⁵⁷ While the collective hotel space was uniquely welcoming to women, the hotel restaurant in particular was one of the first spaces to accommodate the emergence of women into the public sphere and the increase in mixed sex public dining; In her book *Grand Hotels*, Elaine Denby cites the ‘central winter garden and the restaurant’ in Claridge’s hotel in Mayfair ‘served both sexes as dining and socializing in such public places was becoming more commonplace’, highlighting the social importance of Woolf’s image of the ‘odd parties’ in the hotel.¹⁵⁸ Furthermore, in the previous part, I discussed Ridley Ambrose’s study in *The Voyage Out* as emblematic of the patriarchal oppression of silence imposed on women in relation to Sara Ahmed’s work in *Queer Phenomenology*. Ahmed explains that in perceiving an object ‘as an object’, this object is then perceived ‘*in a certain way*’, and these certain ways are ‘different directions’ that represent emotional reactions to an object.¹⁵⁹ This perception and direction then gives an individual a ‘position’ that affects their interaction with the object: ‘if I have this impression, then I might pick up the object, or get closer to it [...] orientations involve directions toward objects that affect what we do, and how we inhabit space’.¹⁶⁰ The women observed by Woolf are oriented toward one another in the newly claimed public space of the hotel restaurant, collectively sharing the new experience through their emotional touching; their curiosity and ‘ridicule’ ‘[cross] the vast room’ incessantly, as each table exchanges these emotions and is

¹⁵⁶ *The Diary of Virginia Woolf: Volume Three 1925-1930*, p.222.

¹⁵⁷ ‘Spark, N. (2), Sense 1.’ and ‘Spark, N. (2), Sense 2.a.’ *Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford University Publishing, <<https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/9355426968>>.

¹⁵⁸ Denby, p.154.

¹⁵⁹ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p.27.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p.28.

inevitably affected by them. Despite the vastness of the room, their emotions move ‘out and out’ like the atom in an attempt to reach out to one another and establish contact. In her chapter in *Hotel Modernisms*, Bettina Matthias writes that ‘social interaction in literary grand hotels from the early twentieth century is generally characterized by a sense of reserve and discretion, polite anonymity, and adherence to a ‘visual code’ which ‘expresses itself most prominently’ in formal dress attire when in common hotel spaces.¹⁶¹ While Woolf is writing of her real experience, she reflects upon it as though it is a dreamlike fiction, as she felt that ‘everything is unreal & will vanish’, yet was ‘going on precisely the same at this moment’; the hotel scene and its guests as written are as ‘unreal’ as literary characters, and the ‘moment’ Woolf has depicted has a permanence not found in reality, but instead in the pages of her diary.¹⁶² In spite of her frequent emotional and physical distance from other hotel guests, they and Woolf reach out to one another in resistance to the reticence naturally encouraged by the social ‘code’ Woolf had observed in the hotel. Furthermore, there is no ‘polite anonymity’ in the unique appearances and behaviours of ‘off line’ hotel women; in the above extract, the women are ‘odd’, and their uniquenesses are individually described by Woolf. The women who occupy hotel spaces in Woolf’s works do not conform to the social code commonly found in the time period, as observed by Matthias. Although Woolf felt it impossible to ‘invade’ the physical or emotional ‘depth’ of her fellow hotel guests, in her personal experiences and hotel writing, she consistently oriented herself toward ‘off line’ hotel women who have newly emerged into the public sphere, reaching out through her writer’s eye and touching instead through her curiosity and words.

While (as I will explore in subsequent paragraphs) the single male hotel guest struggles to gain ownership over his hotel room, in *The Voyage Out*, Woolf explores the ease

¹⁶¹ Bettina Matthias, ‘Performing Belonging in Early Twentieth-Century Literary Hotels and the Case of Rich Americans’ in *Hotel Modernisms*, ed. by Anna Despotopoulou, Vassiliki Kolocotroni, and Efterpi Mitsi, (Oxon: Routledge, 2023), pp.65-78 (p.66).

¹⁶² *The Diary of Virginia Woolf: Volume Three 1925-1930*, p.222.

with which female guests not only govern hotel common spaces, but also their private hotel bedrooms, effortlessly personalising their rooms. Each bedroom in the hotel follows the 'same pattern' of 'dark red tiles', a 'high bed draped in mosquito curtains', a 'writing-table' and 'a couple of arm-chairs'.¹⁶³ However, the moment a box is 'unpacked', the rooms become almost unrecognisable, as 'Miss Allan's room was very unlike Evelyn's room'.¹⁶⁴ While Evelyn's room contained 'variously coloured hatpins on her dressing-table, 'scent-bottles', 'narrow curved pairs of scissors', 'great variety of shoes and boots', 'silk petticoats lying on the chairs', Miss Allan's room is 'extremely neat' (except for the untidy writing table), containing 'two pairs of everything'.¹⁶⁵ Evelyn's writing-table 'was piled with manuscript, and a table was drawn out to stand by on the arm-chair on which were two separate heaps of dark library books, in which there were many slips of paper sticking out at various different degrees of thickness'.¹⁶⁶ Despite their uniform designs and decor, the presence of the women's objects so strongly individualises their rooms that they become almost unrecognisable. While Miss Allan and Evelyn take ownership of their hotel bedrooms in different ways, both women decorate the room with their belongings with little thought to the rooms' homogeneity or previous occupants; the women resist the uniform, 'online' rooms and personalise their spaces. Evelyn's room is adorned with feminine accessories and articles of clothing strewn out across the room, suggesting comfort in her stay in the room. Contrastingly, Miss Allan's room contains piles of books for study. Furthermore, Miss Allan rearranges the hotel room to create a study for herself; she takes the room as her own, as a place to write, read and research. For her, the hotel bedroom acts as a makeshift room of her own to write and study in. Despite the women's differing perceived levels of conformity to gender roles, with Evelyn's room littered with clothes and accessories and Miss Allan's neat,

¹⁶³ Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out*, p.294.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

studious room, both engage with the hotel bedroom in the same way: filling the room with little thought with their own belongings, occupying it as though it were their own bedroom. Although the hotel featured in *The Voyage Out* is not explicitly a grand hotel, its female characters do not act with 'reserve' or follow the 'visual code' highlighted by Matthias; Woolf's women in both her personal writings and non-fiction visibly occupy hotel spaces with individuality.

Contrastingly, the single male hotel guest struggles to gain ownership over his hotel room, and Woolf explores the tactile, gendered nature of the work of the hotel maid in *Jacob's Room*. Although middle- and upper-class families may have employed live-in servants in their homes, the locale of the hotel changes the number and meaning of these tactile interchanges. While domestic servants would generally have a stable relationship and employment with one family, allowing familiarity between employer and employee, guests in the hotel are transient, with a continuous stream of succession of guests multiplying the number of different bodies and objects touched, constantly changing the nature of tactile interactions. In Woolf's fictional hotels, a servant's touch is a furtive act that occurs separate from and unseen by the hotel guest. While in Greece, Jacob sits in contemplation in the hotel sitting-room while the maid enters his bedroom: 'For he had grown to be a man, and was about to be immersed in things-as indeed the chambermaid, emptying his basin upstairs, fingering keys, studs, pencils, and bottles of tabloids strewn on the dressing-table, was aware'.¹⁶⁷ Despite her distance from Jacob, the chambermaid is able to physically access his belongings without his direct knowledge, and is able to discern his stage in life through touching his possessions. Just as Nancy highlights the lack of boundary between the inside and outside of the body, the boundary between Jacob and his possessions is unclear; his belongings retain traces of him, communicating truths about himself to the chambermaid

¹⁶⁷ Virginia Woolf, *Jacob's Room*, p.191.

through touch despite his physical absence. A discernible distinction between the inside and outside of the body becomes less clear when objects are material extensions of the self. Woolf strengthens the invasiveness of the maid's touch through her use of the verb 'fingering', emphasising the physical, tactile nature of her actions by drawing attention to the maid's fingers and their persistent touching of Jacob's items. Furthermore, this invasive touching extends out of the hotel bedroom to Jacob himself in the sitting-room and Jacob's emotional status due to her awareness gained of Jacob and his position in life through her contact with his belongings. The maid's perception of Jacob's belongings appears to spark curiosity, as she then deeply handles his items to gain understanding of the occupant of the room. Furthermore, in her analysis of Husserl's writing desk, Ahmed uncovers the hidden female labour through touch implicit in the family home: 'the domestic work that must have taken place for Husserl to turn to the writing table, and to be writing on the table, and to keep that table as the object of his attention [...] women, as wives and servants, do the work required to keep such spaces available for men and the work they do'.¹⁶⁸ Woolf redirects the focus from and contrasts Jacob's 'gloomy' ruminations of masculine pursuits and opportunities of 'fine speeches' in 'Parliament', reading the 'Daily Mail', the 'British Empire' and 'Home Rule' in 'Ireland' to the chambermaid cleaning his hotel room.¹⁶⁹ Through this contrast, Woolf highlights the invisible female labour that allows Jacob to sit 'legs extended; the very picture of boredom', contemplating the opportunities available to him that are inaccessible to the maid.¹⁷⁰ Moreover, considering Ahmed's model of contact, the maid's 'position' as both a housemaid and a woman orients her contact with Jacob; her class and her gender allow her unique close access to Jacob's belongings, and affect her insight into and interpretation of his belongings' reflection of his self through her experience with these items in her gendered work.

¹⁶⁸ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p.30-1.

¹⁶⁹ Virginia Woolf, *Jacob's Room*, p.191.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p.189.

Rhonda Mayne discusses a similar invasion of male space in *Jacob's Room*. Charwoman Mrs. Papworth moves from the kitchen into the drawing-room, exposing the spiral of Dick Bonamy and Jacob's 'debate' into a 'a violent *pas de deux*'.¹⁷¹ In *The Voyage Out*, private, masculine activities remain hidden behind closed doors in Ridley's study, whereas the fight between the men in *Jacob's Room* is revealed to the reader through the 'gaze of the laboring woman', highlighting the absurdity of their behaviour and the 'sterility of the male stewardship of the cultural domain'.¹⁷² While domestic female servants are confined to one room (usually the kitchen), leaving little trace of their presence in male-dominated areas, it is female maids who define hotel spaces; the chambermaid '[fingers]' Jacob's belongings and '[empties] his basin', changing the structure of his room. The two men 'never noticed' Mrs. Papworth in their space, while the maid's presence is clear in her tactile 'fingering' and reordering of his belongings.¹⁷³ Furthermore, Mrs. Papworth's employment under Bonamy highlights the difference in freedoms between public and private staff. Mrs. Papworth's hands are 'purple, almost nailless', and Mayne highlights this as an '[illustration of] the damage her body endures' in her labour for Bonamy, as she 'scoured after' his food 'scraps' in the sink.¹⁷⁴ Contrastingly, the condition of the chambermaid's hands is not mentioned, but the tactility of her hands in 'fingering' Jacob's belongings, not out of the necessary labour of cleaning, but from curiosity and an invasion into his private possessions. The private, domestic maid's hands reflect hard labour for an individual male household, while the chambermaid works for the hotel space and not any particular guest, and is able to intrude upon his space and handle his personal effects without express permission. As its occupants change, the chambermaid's duty is to the hotel and its rooms, while domestic staff remain responsible for the daily life of the same individual or family.

¹⁷¹ Rhonda Mayne, 'Mrs. Papworth: The Working-Class Woman in Virginia Woolf's Novel *Jacob's Room*', *Virginia Woolf Miscellany*, 100 (2023), p.53.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ Virginia Woolf, *Jacob's Room*, p.139.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.138, and Mayne, p.53.

Therefore, the hotel chambermaid's disregard of the guest's privacy is reflected in her brazen tactility and felt by the guest (as also demonstrated in the subsequent paragraph); contrastingly, ownership over the domestic space means that in the home its occupants are the ones who act and touch freely, and servants are expected to minimise their visibility and their labour around this.

The usually hidden 'other' of the female staff in the hotel bedroom is more present in *Mrs Dalloway*. Peter Walsh returns to his hotel room after reuniting with his previous love Clarissa Dalloway, and subsequently mourns the impersonal atmosphere of his room:

These hotels are not consoling places. Far from it. Any number of people had hung up their hats on those pegs. Even the flies, if you thought of it, had settled on other people's noses. As for the cleanliness which hit him in the face, it wasn't cleanliness, so much as bareness, frigidity; a thing that had to be. Some arid matron made her rounds at dawn sniffing, peering, causing blue-nosed maids to scour, for all the world as if the next visitor were a joint of meat to be served on a perfectly clean platter. For sleep, one bed; for sitting in, one arm-chair; for cleaning one's teeth and shaving one's chin, one tumbler, one looking-glass. Books, letters, dressing-gown, slipped about on the impersonality of the horsehair like incongruous impertinences. And it was Clarissa's letter that made him see all this.¹⁷⁵

As Ahmed demonstrates, Peter's 'emotions are directed to' what he 'come[s] into contact with'; he enters the hotel room wishing to be 'consoled', yet the hotel bedroom mirrors his own feelings of isolation and loneliness. This is further reinforced by Woolf's use of the term 'impersonality of the horsehair'. Daniel J. Kaping writes that horsehair upholstery was used most frequently in 'quality' pieces throughout the nineteenth century, which could signify Peter's hotel as a middle-class, expensive hotel, and highlights the necessity of the endurance

¹⁷⁵ Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, p.153.

of the furniture; an expensive piece was likely used to ensure it could last through many uses.¹⁷⁶ In an article in British women's magazine, Arden Holt suggested that 'old horsehair' was 'coming back into use' in 1903, twenty-two years before the publication of *Mrs Dalloway*, indicating a growing resurgence in use of the material throughout Woolf's lifetime.¹⁷⁷ Furthermore, in 1935, Catherine Cook Smith wrote for *The North American Review* 'In Defence of Horsehair', discussing its history and current standing in society. Smith highlights that older, Victorian horsehair furniture pieces could have 'breaks', in which the horsehair could be felt through holes in the outer fabric.¹⁷⁸ Smith mused that 'the elderly' were likely '[prejudiced]' against horsehair due to the memory of 'being pricked by horsehair brittles'.¹⁷⁹ Woolf's subtle evocation of the material used in the furniture further emphasises the uncomfortable sensory experience of the hotel room; as Peter directs his feelings of isolation and 'impersonality' in the room to its objects, creating an image of the worn-out, unfriendly horsehair bristles pricking him in his attempts to relax.

In the introduction to *Hotel Modernisms*, Despotopoulou, Kolocotroni, and Mitsi echo that this loneliness is '[confirmed]' by the 'lingering presence' of the 'former guests' of Peter's hotel room instead of 'bringing him comfort or any sense of community' through their reminder of the previous occupants due to the 'porosity' of the hotel space.¹⁸⁰ However, it is important to also consider the act of touching that left this impression. The bareness and frigidity of Peter's room is a necessary 'thing that had to be' in order to keep the rooms clean for the next guest, yet it is precisely this absence of traces of previous occupants that emphasises their past presence even more; there is no trace of human life in a room which Peter is aware 'any number of people' have lived in before him. There is a distance between

¹⁷⁶ Daniel J. Kaping, 'CONSERVATION OF A MID-19TH CENTURY CHILDREN'S SOFA', *Art Conservation Master's Projects*, (2018), p.6.

¹⁷⁷ Arden Holt, 'The Home Beautiful', *The Lady's Realm*, October 1903, p.119.

¹⁷⁸ Catharine Cook Smith, 'In Defense of Horsehair', *The North American Review*, (1935), p.356.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ Despotopoulou, Kolocotroni, and Mitsi, 'Introduction', p.5.

Peter's occupation of the room and the previous guests'. The act of their bodies living in the space (and their subsequent touching of the items in the room) leaves a mark that cannot be seen, but is all the more visible due to the certainty of their presence. Kolocotroni writes that in Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*, 'grand hotel rooms are mini memory-mazes', the 'material traces of the presence or absence in the mind of the loved one', including 'objects', 'form both an inventory of loss and recovery', reminding the narrator of the loss of his grandmother.¹⁸¹ Contrastingly, the objects in Peter's hotel room do not remind him of a specific individual or memory, but instead of the obscured memory traces and unobservable people who have occupied his room before him; the exact nature of their touches can only be guessed at ('any number of people had hung up their hats on those pegs'), recalling unknowable traces of endless numbers of people sharing the same space, and touching the same objects. Furthermore, the objects do not reflect the community that could be found through the former guests due to their singularity; Peter is bombarded by one of each item and piece of furniture in the hotel room, and his necessity to engage with each item as a singular person.

While Peter's bachelor status (and his feelings of loneliness stemming from this) is reflected in the individual objects in his room, Miss Allan's singledom is not reflected in the furnishings or objects in the room, as it contains 'two pairs of everything'. Moreover, while the women in *The Voyage Out* adorn their bedrooms with their belongings with little regard to the servants cleaning their rooms or the previous occupants, Peter views his possessions as 'impertinences'. Furthermore, Peter's reaction to his hotel bedroom and the unseen presence of the hotel staff can be analysed as a masculine desire for ownership and domination over the hotel space. Woolf utilises subtle, sexualised language, as the older, 'arid' matron clinically pores over his bedroom with an asexual, detached nature, forcing the prudish

¹⁸¹ Vassiliki Kolocotroni, 'Hotel Trouble', in *Hotel Modernisms*, ed. by Anna Despotopoulou, Vassiliki Kolocotroni, and Efterpi Mitsi (Oxon: Routledge, 2023), pp.11-30 (p.14).

younger women to 'scour' the room for any traces of the previous guest; the previous guest was likely a male like Peter, as the 'tumbler' for 'shaving' is emphasised. This patriarchal, sexual desire for ownership over the space is reinforced by the reveal that it is 'Clarissa's letter' that caused Peter's feelings of loneliness and temporality in the hotel bedroom. Travelling from Clarissa's domestic home with her husband Richard to the empty hotel room highlights the stark contrast between their relationship and his singleness, as there is no female partner to occupy the space with Peter; moreover, if Peter were married, he would likely not be occupying the hotel space at all, instead a home. Furthermore, Peter imagines the cleaners of the hotel room as female as a projection of his male loneliness upon the sterility of the room; their exactness in their cleaning leaves the room feeling frigid, which is important because of the fact that they are women, and he is a single man. The hidden female labour is desexualised due to Peter's distance from both the maids and from Clarissa; the preparation of the room for his occupation was undertaken by arid and bluenosed female staff instead of a loving wife in a familial home. Alex Zwerdling argues that in the novel, there is a 'gulf between all classes' that is never crossed: 'Clarissa's party is strictly class-demarcated', and 'no Septimus, no Rezia, no Doris Kilman could conceivably set foot in it', and 'even impoverished gentlefolk, like Clarissa's cousin Ellie Henderson', are invited due to social pressures.¹⁸² However, in the hotel, these rigid class boundaries dissipate as the maids move and touch more freely than male guests. The hotel allows people of different classes to occupy the same space; while it occurs at separate times, the maids can both remove all traces of past guests and access the belongings and living space of the current occupants, while the guests feel the presence of the previous residents and of the staff without bodily access to either, granting the female maids tactile and spatial power in the social hierarchy of the hotel.

¹⁸² Alex Zwerdling, 'Mrs. Dalloway and the Social System', *PMLA*, 92.1 (1977), p.73.

Woolf and the Jewish Touch

In Woolf's explorations of tactility in the hotel, the act of touching and acceptance of that touch are filtered through the gender and class position of individuals. Female guests glide into common spaces and private bedrooms alike and occupy these spaces with certainty, the male hotel guest vies for possession of a room and its objects over the female staff, while the bodies and touches of hotel staff are an imposition on guests, whether visible or implied. Class can also interact with race, and race is a transformative modifier of Woolf's acceptance of touch in the hotel; Jewish bodies in particular in the hotel space (and her perceived connection between the hotel, middle-class identity and Jewish bodies no matter their location) are met with hostility repeatedly in Woolf's personal writings and briefly in *The Voyage Out*.¹⁸³ Firstly, I will explore Woolf's perception of foreign hotel staff's touching in her personal writings. Although in both her fiction and non-fiction the presence of staff and their touching of the objects in the guests' bedrooms invades the physical space of the room and removes the mark of ownership and privacy for guests in the room, in her letters and diaries staff are largely ignored, except to acknowledge their sensory impositions.

Woolf wrote in her diary while on holiday in Turkey of a pair of servants who were 'of a piece with the decorous oak chairs, which have been patched together in the back'.¹⁸⁴ Despite her objectification of the workers, suggesting age and immobility, Woolf highlights the frequent invasive touching of both the hotel maid and an older male servant: the maid 'must needs pull all the chairs straight & fold the towels a dozen times', and the male servant could not 'bear to see trouser pockets full of coins' due to antiquated customs, and so he 'lost

¹⁸³ In their article 'A Tale of Two Cities: Virginia Woolf's Imagined Jewish Spaces and London's East End Jewish Culture', Phyllis Lassner and Mia Spiro explore the intersection between Woolf's spatial politics, her critique of middle-class English society and antisemitism. They introduce and examine the concept of 'Jewish space' in Woolf's writings, defined as 'her construction of imagined environments that Jews occupy as opposed to mappable places' of lived Jewish experience in London. While my work analyses these themes, I will posit the hotel as another of these 'Jewish spaces' in Woolf's private writings and novels. (Phyllis Lassner and Mia Spiro, 'A Tale of Two Cities: Virginia Woolf's Imagined Jewish Spaces and London's East End Jewish Culture', *Woolf Studies Annual*, 19 (2013), p.58.

¹⁸⁴ *A Passionate Apprentice: The Early Journals of Virginia Woolf*, p.354.

two gold coins'.¹⁸⁵ Woolf presents the two servants as '[leaning] over the stairs together, [meddling] with innumerable towels'.¹⁸⁶ Woolf emphasises the tactile nature of their invasiveness, as the maid touches the chairs and towels repeatedly. Furthermore, Woolf's use of the verb 'meddle' presents a particular intrusiveness in their tactility. Deeming the staff's touch as undue suggests a sense of ownership from Woolf over the objects; despite her temporary status as a guest, it is the servants whose touch is unnecessary and intrusive. Ahmed discusses the 'proximities that allow white bodies to extend their reach' in multiple works.¹⁸⁷ In 'the white world', being 'not-white' is 'to turn back toward oneself' or 'to become an object', 'diminished by the bodily extensions' of white and heteronormative people who are able to 'extend into spaces that have already taken their shape'.¹⁸⁸ The servants both 'become [objects]' in Woolf's perspective, as she labels them 'decorous oak chairs, which have been patched together in the back'. Their longstanding labour in the hotel has caused them to become materially one with the space; their touch is no longer confined to the remnants of their labour of cleaning as in *Jacob's Room* and *Mrs Dalloway*, but is permanently, invasively embedded in the room. Moreover, just as the 'horsehair' furniture in *Mrs Dalloway* shows material traces of previous guests, the chairs, and the servants who are 'of a piece' with them, are similarly 'patched together in the back', bearing the marks of years of use and service. Moreover, these marks are hidden in the 'back', in an attempt to both hide the material evidence of past guests and of the servants' labour. While Woolf has rendered the servants as immobile objects, their pervasive tactility resists this objectification; they resist her attempts to push their labour out of her visibility. She posits the cause of obsessive tactility as 'because [the maid] hopes to convince you that she was once a "med" [maid] & is competent to become one again'.¹⁸⁹ Woolf's disdain for foreign sound and touch

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p.355.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid*.

¹⁸⁷ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p.112.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid*, p.139, and Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, p.148.

¹⁸⁹ *A Passionate Apprentice: The Early Journals of Virginia Woolf*, p.354.

converge here; the maid's imperfect English pronunciation heightens the invasiveness of her sensory outputs, as she breaches Woolf's auditory and tactile boundaries.

In the previous chapter, I explored Woolf's disdain for financially driven ambitions breeding inauthentic and disruptive outputs of noise and sound, from the excessive noise of a band playing for middle- and upper-class pleasures and a young woman playing piano to impress her fellow leisure class hotel guests rather than from inspiration to the continued construction of hotels despite their preexisting abundance in the area. Class and social hierarchies are often central to Woolf's sensory discomfort and criticisms in the hotel, and Woolf criticises Jewish presence in the hotel space through antisemitic stereotypes of the cosmopolitan Jew. Woolf's construction of the hotel Jew participates in the broader cultural ideas of anxieties around Jewish people and their cultural assimilation identified by critics. Deborah Cohen writes that in 'in the late nineteenth century, Jews came increasingly to be identified as a race precisely because they were difficult to differentiate from their fellow citizens', and 'class proved a critical determinant' as 'Jews became ever more invisible as they scaled the social ladder'.¹⁹⁰ This 'confounded observers', who debated and searched for easily identifiable physical and social markers.¹⁹¹ Woolf also sought these markers, and she often perceived Jewish people in the hotel as simultaneously embodying the middle- and upper-class attributes of the hotel she critiqued, while also failing to fully assimilate into its social and sensory environment.

While, as I explored in the first chapter, Woolf objected to all noise in the hotel in her personal life, she was particularly hostile to Jewish voices in the space. Her mother-in-law, Marie Woolf, spent most of her later life living in hotels, where Virginia would regularly visit her, setting many of her encounters with Leonard's family in the space. While her complaints were not limited to the hotel, this environment intensified her hostility towards their voices

¹⁹⁰ Deborah Cohen, 'Who Was Who? Race and Jews in Turn-of-the-Century', *Journal of British Studies*, 41.4 (2002), p.461.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

due to her repeated encounters there. Woolf frequently complains of their excessive noise and talking; in a letter to Vanessa Bell in 1930, Woolf sardonically mentions the multiple ‘speeches’ given at a family gathering in a hotel, and in another letter from the same year ‘like all Jews, [dressed] as if for high tea in a hotel lounge, [...] talking incessantly, talking nasally, but requiring at intervals the assurance that I think it really jolly to have them’.¹⁹² Ute Kemmerling explains the ‘upper-class’ origins of high tea, highlighting the middle- and upper-class social space of the hotel.¹⁹³ Her reference to hotel lounge and high tea, an activity usually done in the hotel, operates as a symbol of Jewish forms of dress, aligning ‘all’ Jewish people with the upper-class atmosphere and activities associated with the space. While Cohen wrote of Jewish people becoming ‘invisible’ as they ascended through classes, Woolf still sought indicators of Jewishness through antisemitic stereotypes of dress, class and behaviours. Moreover, this is the first highlighted instance of the ‘voracious bodiliness’ that Maren Linett identifies in Woolf’s portrayal of Jewish people: an excessive physicality in their sensory displays.¹⁹⁴ Linett explores their depiction as ‘physically over-vital’ when eating (which I will explore in the next chapter) and Woolf’s presentation of their manner of speech as two sensory expressions of this excess.¹⁹⁵ As I established in the previous chapter, Woolf repeatedly associates the hotel with overwhelming and inescapable noise; her association of Jewish people with forms of hotel dress and activities consequently draws Jewish people into this hotel sensory atmosphere, as the noisy and incessant speech she assigns to her Jewish

¹⁹² *A Reflection of the Other Person*, p.249, 222. While afternoon tea and high tea refer to different acts, the former a lighter meal taken before 5:00pm and the latter a heavier meal eaten after 5:00pm, the term high tea is often used in place of afternoon tea by those who are unaware of the rituals of high tea (as highlighted by Carol Bailleul in ‘Afternoon tea or high tea – Tea traditions in England, Scotland, and Wales’, in *Tea Cultures of Europe: Heritage and Hospitality*, ed. by Hartwig Böhne, (Boston: De Gruyter, 2024), pp.261-271, p.265. Due to the historic tradition of afternoon tea meals in the hotel (Felix Bröcker, ‘The importance of tea for European fine dining, in *Tea Cultures of Europe: Heritage and Hospitality*, ed. by Hartwig Böhne, (Boston: De Gruyter, 2024), pp.109-119, p.109), it can be assumed that Woolf is using the terms interchangeably here.

¹⁹³ Ute Kemmerling, ‘Afternoon tea or high tea – Tea traditions in England, Scotland, and Wales’ in *Tea Cultures of Europe: Heritage and Hospitality*, ed. by Hartwig Böhne, (Boston: De Gruyter, 2024), pp.23-40 (p.29).

¹⁹⁴ Maren Linett, ‘“What’ll He Gobble Next?” Jews, Nazis, and Bodily Excess in Virginia Woolf’s 1930s writing’, *Woolf Studies Annual*, 19 (2013), p.2.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

in-laws occurs outside of the hotel, in Virginia's private home. Although the hotel reference refers directly to their dress, it frames Woolf's sensory depiction of Jewish people, as the perceived visual markers of their Jewishness through class and appearance are placed alongside their '[incessant]', 'nasally' talking. Woolf also draws on antisemitic stereotypes for their voices; Francesca Draughon and Raymond Knapp explain that 'a nasal vocal quality was [...] understood as a marker of a "Jewish" voice', and Ruth HaCohen traces 'the accusation of Jews as noisemakers' from early Christianity.¹⁹⁶ Furthermore, Woolf invokes the racial stereotype of the Jewish nose in her characterisation of their speech; her use of the adjective 'nasally' combines both visual and auditory markers of Jewishness.

Woolf further others her in-laws through her presentation of their modes of touch. In October 1930, the Woolfs held an eightieth birthday party for Marie Woolf in a private room in her hotel in Earls Court. Woolf wrote to Ethel Smyth to complain of the 'glum, deliberate, middleaged' atmosphere of the party: 'we stood about in the private room, with bunches of chrysanthemums tied up in orange sashes, and lots of carnations, incredibly unreal, in silver vases [...] touching our hair with our hands'.¹⁹⁷ Woolf has expressed her dislike for the 'deliberate' and lack of spontaneity in her essay 'Street Music'; as discussed in the previous chapter, Woolf's love of music and her unusual toleration of its noisy invasions into the private sphere was eroded once the noise became planned and repetitive in the Imperial Hotel. Similarly, the 'deliberate' atmosphere of the Woolfs' party prompts Woolf to ask if she is '[boring]' Smyth in her recounting of it, contrasting Woolf's previous description of herself as 'fascinated' by a wedding party taking place in her hotel, wishing to join but Leonard would not 'let her stay'.¹⁹⁸ Furthermore, the calculated nature of the room and party creates an oppressive, contrived atmosphere and prevents the party guests from emotionally touching

¹⁹⁶ Francesca Draughon and Raymond Knapp, 'Gustav Mahler and the Crisis of Jewish Identity', *Echo*, 3.2 (2001), n.18 and Ruth HaCohen, *The Music Libel Against The Jews*, (United States of America: Yale University, 2011), p.1.

¹⁹⁷ *A Reflection of the Other Person*, p.241.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid*, p.241 and p.323.

and connecting with one another. The movement of the guests is restricted, and their tactile senses are unable to extend outwards; the 'chrysanthemums' are 'tied up' and the 'carnations' are imprisoned in 'silver vases'. The bunched-up bouquets are symbolic of both the way in which the guests have been forced together in the room, and their physical and emotional rigidity and separation from one another. Chrysanthemums and carnations recur throughout Woolf's works; in *Jacob's Room*, Woolf writes that 'chrysanthemums are the worst' and die quickly, while 'carnations pay best'.¹⁹⁹ This contrast further highlights the deliberate yet unreal atmosphere of the party, as her in-laws match together flowers with different lifespans and purposes. Moreover, Clarissa Dalloway similarly observes 'masses of carnations' when shopping for flowers for her party, further associating them as party decorations.²⁰⁰ However, Clarissa then begins to fantasise of every flower in the shop 'burn[ing] by itself, softly, purely in the misty beds', removing them from the commercial setting of the shop and their prospective decorative role in her party back into the ground and their natural environment.²⁰¹ While Clarissa imagines returning the flowers to the ground, their arrangement in unnatural 'silver vases' at Marie's party makes them feel 'unreal' to Woolf; their life and vibrancy cease when cut. Just like 'Street Music', the flowers are most beautiful and authentic when they 'burn by [themselves]', not when used as decorative objects for the pleasure of others. The guests move collectively, as they each touch their hair with their hands, but this collective moment highlights their distance from one another, as they engage in self-touching and do not reach out to touch one another. Furthermore, Woolf writes a precise, timestamped account of the party and her interactions with the other guests, further highlighting the meticulously choreographed act of the guests and party: 'at 10 I was discussing with Mrs Harold [...] floods at Staines; at 10.15 I was comparing Harrods and the Army and Navy

¹⁹⁹ Virginia Woolf, *Jacob's Room*, p.112.

²⁰⁰ Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, p.12.

²⁰¹ *Ibid*, p.13.

stores with Mrs Edgar [...] then at 10.30 the green baize tables were opened'.²⁰² While street music and spontaneous female connections are impulsive acts of creativity and emotional touching, the Woolfs' party has meticulously bound-together decorations and timed interactions for guests; although Woolf gets into touch with Mrs Harold and Mrs Edgar, their depths are not invaded; conversation topics are limited to the weather and food.²⁰³ In Woolf's work, individuals she perceives and treats as socially and racially foreign to herself rarely reach out to other humans, yet touch objects intrusively and reach out to one another in a contrived, constricted manner. While Woolf does not directly attribute these specific behaviours to racial differences, it is difficult to disentangle these criticisms from her wider pattern of racialising tactile behaviour in the hotel by Jewish and foreign individuals.

When analysed more in relation to touch, Woolf's September 1930 letter to Ethel Smyth in September 1930, more explicitly highlights her perceived connection between the oppressive, impersonal hotel atmosphere and Jewish bodies and their modes of touch, expressing her discomfort at her in-laws' visit to Monk's House: 'here they are, dressed, like all Jews, as if for high tea in a hotel lounge, never mixing with the country'.²⁰⁴ While Cohen discusses non-Jewish observers searching for visible markers of Jewishness, Ahmed further expands upon this idea by exploring how the racialisation of bodies shapes the perception of them and their acts of touching, arguing that those who think 'of race as if it were "in" bodies shapes what bodies "can do"'.²⁰⁵ Woolf similarly presents Jewishness as though it were 'in' the body and therefore determining how Jewish individuals act. Her use of the absolute 'all Jews' reconstructs the behaviour of her small group of in-laws to every Jewish person; it is not specifically Leonard's family who perpetually embody the middle-classness of the hotel,

²⁰² *A Reflection of the Other Person*, p.241.

²⁰³ In both the previous chapter and the next chapter, I discuss some of Woolf's other remarks about this party that are not related to touch. Both these remarks and subsequent paragraphs in this chapter make more apparent Woolf's connection between Jewish bodies and middle-class, oppressive hotel spaces.

²⁰⁴ *A Reflection of the Other Person*, p.222.

²⁰⁵ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p.112.

but ‘all Jews’ who dress this way. This absolute is strengthened in ‘never mixing with the country’, as Woolf situates all Jewish people permanently in the urban environment of the hotel, ‘never’ able to fit in in the country and thereby Woolf’s domestic home. Moreover, the verb ‘mixing’ emphasises the lack of contact between her in-laws and the natural environment, evoking Woolf’s earlier expression ‘we got into touch all round; but our depths were not invaded’, as ‘never mixing with the country’ similarly suggests a contact that never develops into a deeper connection. The race that Woolf perceives to be ‘in’ and reflected by their bodies prevents this actualised touching. In the same visit, Woolf reflects again in her diary on both the middle-class nature of the hotel and its perceived imprint on Jewish people:

Here of course, I begin to see very plainly how ugly, how nosey, how irreparably middle class they all are. Indeed, my aesthetic sense is the one that protests most obstinately—how they cheapen the house & garden—How they bring in an atmosphere of Earls Court & hotels, how impossibly out of place, & stuffy & towny & dressy & dowdy they look on the terrace, among apple trees & vegetables & flowers!.²⁰⁶

In the previous extract, it was their dress that aligned the Woolfs with the hotel; here, Woolf presents the body itself as ‘bring[ing]’ ‘an atmosphere’ with it to Woolf’s home, further connecting this to Ahmed’s discussion of race as ‘in’ the body. Moreover, Woolf further reinforces her connection between the middle-class and the hotel space, once again extending this connection to Jewish people. While Woolf orients herself towards ‘off line’ women in the hotel space, she positions herself as the ‘online’ when discussing the Jewish body; Jewish bodies are racially ‘off line’ no matter their spatial position in Woolf’s works. Within the hotel, their tactile methods are either too hesitant and distant or too intrusive, and when outside it, they are envisioned as carrying the hotel’s unwelcoming atmosphere with them

²⁰⁶ *The Diary of Virginia Woolf: Volume Three 1925-1930*, p.320-1.

into the country. They are 'out of place' not because of their physical position, but because of the race she perceives 'in' their bodies, modulating the ways in which they inhabit and interact with space. This is further reinforced by Woolf's use of antisemitic racial stereotyping in the adjective 'nosey'; Sander Gilman traces the origins and connotations of the Jewish nose in his book *The Jew's Body*, which was considered 'one of the central loci of difference' in identifying and othering a Jewish person, as it was deemed unable to 'vanish' even in 'acculturated' Jews, reinforcing Cohen's argument.²⁰⁷ Her in-laws' physical presence is an invasion into her country home, an invasion Woolf attributes to their Jewishness through her use of the antisemitic racial marker of the nose. Furthermore, this physicality reinforces both Cohen and Ahmed's idea of race on the body; the nose on her in-laws' bodies is a clear marker to Woolf of their Jewishness, thereby informing Woolf's perception of their inability to 'extend into' her space. Furthermore, Woolf constructs the 'shape' of Monk's House with 'apple trees & vegetables & flowers', contrasting it with her 'stuffy & towny & dressy & dowdy' in-laws; through the lens of Ahmed's phenomenology of race, their apparent inability to fit and '[mix]' is interpreted as her decision of what Jewish bodies 'can do'. The 'atmosphere of Earls Court and hotels' is posited as both directly incompatible with the home and the country, and, through her repeated association of the two, as a marker and identifier of Jewishness. In addition, her use of the verb 'cheapen' objectifies the Woolfs, akin to the shabby servants who were like 'oak chairs patched together in the back'. The touch of foreign hotel staff is portrayed as invasive; moreover, Jewish touch within the hotel is portrayed as inappropriate and unwelcome, and in Woolf's perception, the middle-class atmosphere of the hotel and its negative associations are marked on Jewish bodies when outside the space.

²⁰⁷ Sander Gilman, *The Jew's Body*, (London: Routledge, 1991), p.126, 180.

Conclusion

In the shared, more public spaces of the hotel, such as the dining room and drawing-room, Woolf frequently wrote fondly of her shared presence in these spaces with the emerging, usually widowed public woman, echoing her fondness of female sound in the hotel in the previous part. However, Woolf projects the impersonal, middle-class nature of the hotel permanently onto Jewish people, operating as a marker of their racial identity; their (assumed) presence in and connection with the hotel remains visible on their bodies and through their modes of contact even when in the intimate space of the home. Just as for Woolf, the hotel space was entangled with Jewish identity and methods of communication, hotel guests and staff remain marked upon the various hotel spaces. The presence of guests in the hotel bedroom lingers in *Jacob's Room* and *Mrs Dalloway*; in *Jacob's Room*, the chambermaid is able to discern information about Jacob by touching his belongings, and in *Mrs Dalloway* Peter is haunted by the implied previous occupation of his room not only by previous guests, but by the hotel cleaning staff. Hotel employees, while rarely heard, were always a sonic imposition in the first chapter, whereas their ability to invade and touch private hotel spaces is permanently felt, although not tangibly visible. Contrastingly, in *The Voyage Out*, Woolf focuses on female hotel guests, and their ease of occupancy of the hotel bedroom reflects their dominance over the hotel space Woolf often observed from other women in her personal writings. In a space which walks the boundary between the public and private, physical and emotional touch lingers on its contents and its occupants, as the presence of another body is always felt in the hotel. Woolf utilises the sense of touch in order to explore developing social issues and their changing tactile relationships with the world. Jewish bodies and their sensory experiences are unwelcome both inside and outside of the hotel due to their inescapable associations with the space and their unavoidable Jewishness. All types of women occupy both the public and private spaces of the hotel, highlighting not

only their emergence into the public sphere through growing feminist movements, but also the potential for the hotel to be a female-dominated space. Moreover, Woolf explores class and gendered labour through female maids, exploring the strange power afforded to lower-class women due to their freedom of movement in all areas of the hotel not afforded to male guests, who struggle with their lack of subordination in the space. While sound in the hotel had clear boundaries between what was considered sound and noise by Woolf, touch is multifaceted, as she struggled with mixed admiration and aversion to all forms of contact, from all forms of people.

Chapter Three: ‘The meat scarcely needed the disguise of innumerable little red and green vegetables’: Taste and its Visual Aid

In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf remarks that ‘novelists [...] seldom spare a word for what was eaten’, and she decides to ‘defy’ this ‘convention’ by detailing the foods in her luncheon.²⁰⁸ However, the sensory experiences of taste and particularly smell are largely absent from Woolf’s hotel works. Despite the lack of direct sensory perceptions, Woolf writes of hotel restaurants, her experiences dining in them, and of the foods and meals she ate. Lauren Rich links the ‘absence of food in Woolf’s descriptions of Mrs. Dalloway’s party’ to ‘the absence of companionship among the guests’; similarly, in her hotel works, Woolf often forgoes these descriptions to focus on the connection (or lack thereof) between hotel guests, and on the ways in which the environment affects these attempts to connect.²⁰⁹ Therefore, I will instead look at her hotel restaurant experiences, the foods she encounters, and the gustatory symbolism of these foods where there is a lack of gustatory and olfactory relations. Therefore, my analysis of Woolf’s presentation of food in the hotel will encompass other senses, including sight and touch, in order to examine fully the significance of the hotel gustatory experience. The appearance of the hotel restaurant or dining room is essential in cultivating Woolf’s enjoyment of a meal; contrastingly, meals which prioritise aesthetics are unpleasant and distract from the taste of the food itself. Furthermore, Woolf’s antisemitic portrayal of Jewish eating habits in the hotel conflates Jewishness with gluttony, and associates both with middle-class identity. After recounting the ‘partridges’, ‘sauces’, ‘salads’, ‘potatoes’ and other foods and beverages that were set before her at this lunch, she remarks that after a satisfying meal, there is ‘no need to be anybody but one’s self’.²¹⁰ Eating

²⁰⁸ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas*, p.10.

²⁰⁹ Lauren Rich, ‘A Woolf at the Table: Virginia Woolf and the Domestic Dinner Party’, in *Gastro-modernism: Food, Literature, Culture*, ed. by Derek Gladwin, (Clemson: Clemson University Press, 2019), pp.53-66 (p.60).

²¹⁰ *Ibid*, p.10,11.

can reveal aspects of an individual's character to their fellow diners, and eating in the hotel offers these vignettes of character to friends and strangers alike. Rich argues that, for Woolf, 'the domestic dinner party proved a compelling site for exploring the difficulty of intimacy under the conditions of modernity'; in this chapter, I will posit that the commercial and public hotel dining setting further intensifies this difficulty by allowing multiple features of modernity to intersect.²¹¹

The act of eating, food writing, methods of preparation, dining experiences, and food itself were transformed in the modernist period alongside the other previously explored senses of sound and touch. In the introduction to his edited volume *Gastro-modernism: Food, Literature, Culture* (2019), Derek Gladwin offers the term gastro-modernism to define the representation of food in modernist writings, representing the 'social, cultural and ecological concerns' that surround food in the period due to 'expanding food systems in factories and abattoirs, an enlarged social food culture, diet experimentation, changing domestic spaces, and rationed food supplies'.²¹² The industrialisation of animal slaughter led to larger consumption of meat, and colonialism and travel meant that a wider variety of foods were being consumed by more of the Western population. Gastronomic culture is 'literally and metaphorically everywhere in modernist literature', and is often reflective of these wider social and political issues due to the ways in which these issues transformed food culture.²¹³ Furthermore, the act of eating became public in the late nineteenth century.²¹⁴ Gladwin writes that the idea of dining out 'suddenly' became commonplace as 'an enormous influx of cafés and restaurants' became available to the 'expanding middle-class'.²¹⁵ Although the Albemarle Club was founded in 1874 with the intention of accommodating both men and women,

²¹¹ Rich, p.57.

²¹² Derek Gladwin, 'Introduction', in *Gastro-modernism: Food, Literature, Culture*, ed. by Derek Gladwin, (Clemson: Clemson University Press, 2019), pp.1-18 (p.3).

²¹³ *Ibid.*

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.4.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

women did not widely dine publicly until the 1880s; as mentioned previously, Claridge's hotel uniquely served both sexes in their dining spaces.²¹⁶ The hotel restaurant was a key public dining space for women due both to the increased opportunities of general hotel use (as travel became easier and more widespread, and women broke free from the private sphere) and its status as an early adopter of mixed sex dining. Public eating in the modernist period visually represented women's break from the domestic sphere into the role of consumer. Gladwin concludes that 'modernists engage with the food culture known as gastronomy to express anxieties about modernity as much as to celebrate the excesses modern lifestyles produce'; while Woolf does explore social issues and their ties to gastronomic culture, excesses of food in the hotel are not causes for celebration in her works, but rather reflections of middle-class gluttony.²¹⁷

Many critics have analysed the relationship between modernism and gastronomic writing; essential works include Allison Carruth's book chapter 'Modernism and Gastronomy' (2014), volume two issue one of *Resilience: A Journal of the Environmental Humanities* (2014) and the previously mentioned *Gastro-modernism: Food, Literature, Culture* edited by Derek Gladwin. Works specifically focusing on Woolf and gastronomy include Allie Glenny's *Ravenous Identity: Eating and Eating Distress in the Life and Work of Virginia Woolf* (2000), Alison Light's *Mrs Woolf and the Servants* (2007), Alice Lowe's book chapter "A Certain Hold on Haddock and Sausage': Dining Well in Virginia Woolf's Life and Work' (2011) and Lisa Angelella's article 'The Meat of the Movement: Food and Feminism in Woolf'. However, unlike a number of these works, my aim is not to contribute to diagnoses of Woolf or to comment on her personal eating habits, but to posit the importance of food and gastronomy in the formation of relationships in the hotel space, and to explore the political and social issues behind food and eating in the hotel.

²¹⁶ Borer, p.189 and Denby, p.154.

²¹⁷ Gladwin, p.4. I will expand upon Woolf's engagement with other social issues, such as race, and with the gluttonous middle-class in later paragraphs.

The dining experience, like sharing space in common rooms and bids for intimacy through sound and touch, offers guests a similar opportunity for connection when in the hotel. In Woolf's hotels, the most enjoyable eating experiences often occur when surrounded by large groups of people, emphasising the relationships that can be formed through shared meals in the dining room; however, the aesthetics of both the food and the dining room are key to the enjoyment of a meal, and are often prioritised over her relation of the gustatory sense experience. While staying in a hotel in Turkey in 1906, Woolf wrote in her diary of the oppressive atmosphere in the dining room for smaller groups of guests:

Mild respectable people who wish for a quiet dinner come here & breathe congenial air in the long dismal dining room. There is a great table, spread with cold silver baskets, & laid with accurate covers for the guests who never come. We dine in furtive corners, as though our needs were too modest to require a dinner table, & certainly all our cheer such as it is, is not sufficient to kindle the vaporous room.²¹⁸

Woolf offers more attention to the social composition of the air matters more to Woolf than the smell of any food served; it reflects the 'mild', 'respectable' and 'quiet' attitude of the guests. Yet, their congeniality is insufficient in altering the appearance and atmosphere of the 'dismal dining room'. As previously established, Woolf extends the act of touching beyond the physical and into the emotional; in this case, their 'cheer' is thwarted from both reaching other guests and transforming the atmosphere due to the 'vaporous' nature. Moreover, their emotional 'cheer' takes on a physical, almost tactile quality as it works to 'kindle the vaporous room'. Rich argues that 'shared meals' in Woolf's works 'often function as sites of surprising alienation, fragmentation, and disunity'; in the extract above, this fragmentation is fuelled by the layout and appearance of the room. The 'great' table engulfs the dining room as its centrepiece and imposes upon the guests hidden in 'furtive corners'; the size of the table

²¹⁸ *A Passionate Apprentice: The Early Journals of Virginia Woolf*, p.354.

only emphasises the clear absence of other bodies and guests to share in the beauty and meal with, as the table that could accommodate the largest number of people remains conspicuously unoccupied. Moreover, the table's lavish embellishments of 'silver baskets' and 'accurate covers' are instead 'cold' and unwelcoming to the diners, as they remain untouched and unobserved by other 'guests who never come' to sit and eat at the table; the hotel does not deviate from these rigid arrangements, reminiscent of the timed intervals of conversation and the 'tied up' flowers at Marie Woolf's birthday party. The spontaneity that Woolf values in creativity and connection is absent, as the table's layout never changes, and the rigid structure of the dining room prevents the spatially distant guests from both physically and emotionally interacting. Harriet Blodgett argues that in Woolf's writings, 'beauty [...] derives from sensory perceptions', acting as a 'harmoniser and unifier' for collectives while shifting the focus from the individual sensory experience; the beauty and spectacle of the empty large table and its adornments distract Woolf from recounting the meals and their flavours, yet isolates Woolf and the other guests from each other, as it is so grand and empty that it pushes them into 'furtive corners'.²¹⁹ The emphasis of the shared meal is palpable through the foregrounding of the largest table capable of seating the most guests, yet it only serves to emphasise the 'disunity' between the other diners posited by Rich, discouraging any potential spontaneous connections between different groups as they are pushed apart. The dining room is clearly a focal point of human connection, with a large table and multiple groups who have the desire to 'kindle' the atmosphere in the room foregrounded over the food eaten and its taste, yet it is organised in such a way as to alienate guests from one another.

Similarly, in *Jacob's Room*, Jacob eats an 'excellent' dinner while dining with the Wentworth Williamses in a hotel in Greece that was simultaneously enhanced and impaired

²¹⁹ Harriett Blodgett, 'Food for Thought in Virginia Woolf's Novels', *Woolf Studies Annual*, 3 (1997), p.53

by the aesthetics of the room and food.²²⁰ Woolf details the ornate ‘plated baskets [containing] fresh rolls’ accompanied by ‘real butter’.²²¹ While in the previous extract the ‘silver baskets’ are ‘cold’ and empty due to the absence of other diners and their meals, the presence of both other individuals to share the food with and its freshness prevents the embellishments from being similarly distracting. However, excessive decoration can extend beyond the dining room to the food itself; the ‘meat scarcely needed the disguise of innumerable little red and green vegetables glazed in sauce’. Glenny argues that the food ‘leaves something to be desired’, with the food not reaching Jacob’s ‘superlative’ expectations.²²² While Glenny argues that the meal disappoints Jacob, it is still described as ‘excellent’; a delicious meal can be somewhat complicated by the prioritisation of aesthetics over taste. The ‘disguise’ of ‘red and green’ vegetables and sauce is ‘scarcely needed’, as the meat would be best tasted in its rawest form without the mask of other flavours. This is further emphasised through Woolf’s use of the adjective ‘real’ when describing the butter, contrasting the ‘disguise’ cast over the meat; food is most authentic and ‘real’ without artificial embellishments and flavours. Woolf then moves from the food to the design of the hotel restaurant with the phrase ‘it was strange, though’.²²³ The room had ‘little tables set out at intervals’ on ‘scarlet floor’ marked with ‘yellow’ ‘monograms’.²²⁴ Woolf’s pivot from the artificiality of the meat’s ‘red and green’ disguise to the decor suggests that bright colour in both food and decor also disrupt the gustatory experience. The strong visual aesthetic of both the vegetables and the flooring distract from the gustatory experience of the food. Like the guests’ perfectly timed conversations at Marie Woolf’s hotel birthday party, the restaurant guests are separated into small groups at perfectly spaced intervals, preventing impulsive

²²⁰ Virginia Woolf, *Jacob’s Room*, p.218.

²²¹ *Ibid.*

²²² *Ibid.*, Allie Glenny, *Ravenous Identity: Eating and Eating Distress in the Life and Work of Virginia Woolf*, (New York: St Martin’s Press, 2000), p.113.

²²³ Virginia Woolf, *Jacob’s Room*, p.218.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*

connections over their shared dining experiences from being formed between the hotel guests. Moreover, the ‘disguise’ of the vegetables and sauce prevents an organic, unfiltered gustatory response to the taste of the meat. Sensory experiences in Woolf’s hotels are best experienced spontaneously without any foresight; like the previous extract, Marie’s party, and the inspired piano performance by Rachel in *The Voyage Out* contrasted with the Greek lady’s playing, Jacob’s meal is enhanced by his unplanned decision to eat with his fellow guests, but dampened by the hotel’s attempt to prevent these chance connections.

A planned restaurant meeting also appears in *The Waves* (1931), as Bernard, Susan, Rhoda, Neville, Jinny, and Louis reunite in the restaurant of a Hampton Court inn after the death of Percival. Their shared meal operates simultaneously as a source of temporary unity between the friends (identified by Erin Greer as one of only two instances ‘in the text in which all voices tune into one “conversation,” and the characters collectively experience a moment of coherence’), and as a site of mutual exposure, as this ‘coherence’ lays each character and their inner monologues and anxieties bare at the dinner table.²²⁵ As they enter the inn, they are greeted with a ‘long, bare dining-room’, which is instead almost ornamented by its view overlooking a park ‘fantastically lit by the setting sun’, departing from Woolf’s usual association of the hotel with the urban and unnatural.²²⁶ Where the gaudy decorations and a focus on aesthetics distract from other hotel meals, the seemingly unadorned dining room allows the friends to focus both on their food and on each other. Despite its bareness, we are still offered glimpses of the objects on their table and the decor within the room. Rhoda notes the material details surrounding her: ‘here in this dining-room you see the antlers and the tumblers; the salt-cellars; the yellow stains on the tablecloth’.²²⁷ However, they do not remain material for long, as Rhoda transforms the objects:

²²⁵ Erin Greer, “‘A Many-Sided Substance’: The Philosophy of Conversation in Woolf, Russell, and Kant”, *Journal of Modern Literature*, 40.3 (2017), p.4.

²²⁶ Virginia Woolf, *The Waves*, (London: Penguin Books, 2000), p.190.

²²⁷ *Ibid*, p.199.

But I see the side of a cup like a mountain and only parts of antlers, and the brightness on the side of that jug like a crack in darkness with wonder and terror. Your voices sound like trees creaking in a forest. So with your faces and their prominences and hollows. How beautiful, standing at a distance immobile at midnight against the railings of some square! Behind you is a white crescent of foam, and fishermen on the verge of the world are drawing in nets and casting them. A wind ruffles the topmost leaves of primeval trees. (Yet here we sit at Hampton Court.) Parrots shrieking break the intense stillness of the jungle. (Here the trams start.) The swallow dips her wings in midnight pools. (Here we talk.) That is the circumference that I try to grasp as we sit together. Thus I must undergo the penance of Hampton Court at seven thirty precisely.²²⁸

Urszula Terentowicz-Fotyga identifies ‘two realities’ Rhoda splits her ‘sense of self’ between: ‘the world of the present moment, which she shares with her friends, and the imaginary landscape [...] into which she escapes from the pressures of communal living’.²²⁹ Terentowicz-Fotyga argues that the bracketed interludes marking the urbanness of Hampton Court, with the noise of the ‘trams’ and ‘talk’ of human voices, cut sharply into her ‘imagined landscape’ of ‘wind’, ‘primeval trees’, ‘parrots shrieking’, ‘swallows’, and ‘midnight pools’.²³⁰ However, this ‘split’ and ‘duality’ of her identity is less clearly defined than Terentowicz-Fotyga suggests.²³¹ While at first the asides appear to simply interrupt Rhoda’s imagined dreamscape, both the restaurant objects and these ‘intrusions’ are instead absorbed and transformed by Rhoda, rather than a clear ‘spatial separation of the inner and outer worlds’.²³² The cup is ‘like a mountain’ from her perspective, and the ‘light’ reflected on the

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.199.

²²⁹ Urszula Terentowicz-Fotyga, ‘When the Mind Becomes a Place: The Modernist Psychological Novel’, *Zagadnienia Rodzajów Literackich*, 61.1 (2019), p.17.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*

²³¹ *Ibid.*

²³² *Ibid.*

site of the 'jug' operates as a 'crack' or opening through which she can transform the material reality of the dining room into her idealised fantasy. The room further fragments and dissolves into Rhoda's imagination as the 'antlers' on the wall break into 'parts', just as only the 'side' of the cup becomes the 'mountain'. Moreover, early in their reunion Susan observed the 'necessary' '[clash]' of 'antlers' between the 'old friends' as an important 'prelude' to their reunion; while there is a 'clash' and contact between friends from Susan's perspective, Rhoda can only observe the antlers as separate 'parts', reinforcing her resistance to their communality recognised by Terentowicz-Fotyga.²³³ While (as I explore below) Susan and Neville reach a point of unity and understanding, for Rhoda the meal is woven into the complex tapestry of her desire for more than the individual. Her friends become the 'primeval trees', the adjective revealing the endurance of their bond, their voices the 'creaking' in the forest and the 'prominences' and 'hollows' (later described as 'beautiful') of their faces mirroring the ridges and textures of bark on the ancient trees.²³⁴ Rhoda acknowledges the comingling of the two worlds in 'Yet here we sit at Hampton Court', the adverb 'yet' suggesting an almost bemused wonderment of the strange presence of her imagined dream-world in the definitive reality of Hampton Court. The 'parrots shrieking' are symbolic of the 'trams start[ing]', translating the screeching noise made by the contact between the trams and the tracks into a sonic form more befitting her imagined world. Just as the objects in Peter Walsh's hotel room appeared to reflect his bachelor status and feelings of loneliness, the objects in the dining room and their symbolism are interpreted through Rhoda's state of mind. Rhoda attempts to 'grasp' the encompassing 'circumference' of her merging fantasy and reality, as she gathers the hotel dining room and its objects, Hampton Court, and her friends into a singular, idealised world. Her use of the adverb 'thus' reinforces the necessity of this 'penance', as she utilises the material world around her in the restaurant to construct

²³³ Virginia Woolf, *The Waves*, p.193.

²³⁴ *Ibid*, p.199.

her fantasies. Moreover, the precision of ‘seven thirty precisely’ is reminiscent of timed intervals of conversation at Marie Woolf’s party, reflecting the occasional lack of spontaneity that Woolf occasionally observes in social interactions within the hotel. The dining-room atmosphere almost appears to push Rhoda back down into the ‘individual’, as she attempts to weave even the imperfect ‘the table-cloth and its yellow stains’ into her fantasies, but it is ‘far from being allowed to spread in wider and wider circles of understanding that may at last [...] embrace the entire world’.²³⁵ This imagery evokes the ‘holes’ which, in *The Years*, Eleanor Partiger drew on her ‘blotting-paper’, interpreting human connection through ‘atoms’, as ‘out and out they went; thing followed thing’, and Hewet’s view of the individual in *The Voyage Out* as a ‘bubble’ that ‘could run into some one else’s bubble’, further reinforcing the alignment of Woolf’s formulation of touch as in line with Nancy’s that ‘all of being is in touch with all of being’. The stains on fabric and her ‘[need]’ of ‘bread and wine bottles’ to satisfy her body’s needs are too material to incorporate into her imagination, and so she must fully suffer the sonorous ‘callings’ and emotionally tactile ‘pluckings and searchings’ of her friends.²³⁶ Despite this, she does not wish to escape ‘communal living’ as suggested by Terentowicz-Fotyga, but to break down the boundaries between herself, other people, and the material and immaterial worlds; she wishes to leave ‘nothing [...] unabsorbed’, for the table-cloth to ‘spread in wider and wider circles’ and ‘embrace the entire world’, including herself. The ‘pluckings’ and ‘searchings’ her friends make of her would be unnecessary in this interconnected world in which, as Nancy conceptualised, the body would have no ‘inside’ or ‘outside’ as all is ‘[absorbed]’.

As explored above, the dining table itself is a key space where the visual, tactile and gustatory senses converge, as the friends constantly observe and scrutinise one another’s movements throughout the meal. Woolf evokes the biblical image of the last supper, as

²³⁵ *Ibid*, p.199.

²³⁶ *Ibid*, p.200.

Neville anticipates the group ‘break[ing] these [bread] rolls’ and ‘help[ing themselves] to fish’; rather than fully cohering to the Christian food imagery and idea of communion, Woolf also adds ‘salad’ to the meal, setting the meal firmly in the modern hotel setting and signalling that this communion is not absolute.²³⁷ However, before the meal can begin, Neville feels his ‘credentials’ making a ‘sound’ in his ‘pocket, reassuring him of his ‘superiority’ over his childhood friends, undermining a full communion on equal footing.²³⁸ Despite the ‘turnips and cornfields’ in Susan’s ‘eyes’ which represent Neville’s perception of a lowly rural domesticity he expects to soothe his worries over his own status, her ‘stare’ instead worsens his insecurities over his social standing, and he wonders if the ‘waiter [has] heard of me’, subconsciously longing for and pressuring the socially subordinate restaurant worker to soothe his sense of superiority that his friendships can no longer provide.²³⁹ The dining table, where the hands engage in singular, tactile activities as they handle cutlery and food, gives Susan a setting in which she can clearly display her ‘hands’ to Neville and destabilise his understanding of her and her lifestyle, as she repeatedly calls on him to ‘look’ at her hand on the ‘table’.²⁴⁰ To Neville, her ‘rough’ hands are ‘stuck like a limpet to the same rock’, evidence that ‘change is no longer possible’ for them all as they remain the ‘same’ as ever. For Susan, her hands reflect not constancy, but the accumulation of the days of her life lived, as the ‘healthy colour’ marks her skin in ‘gradations’ from ‘daily’ use.²⁴¹ The physical evidence of her chosen life on her hand acts as a point of comparison for Neville and for Bernard; Neville’s ‘credentials’ sit ‘private[ly]’ on a piece of paper in his ‘pocket’, a ‘faint sound’ that he is unable to amplify.²⁴² Similarly, Bernard notes that his ‘phrases’ have left him ‘very little to lay on the table beside Susan’s hand’, contrasting the abstract evidence of

²³⁷ *Ibid*, p.190.

²³⁸ *Ibid*.

²³⁹ *Ibid*, p.191.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p.193.

²⁴¹ *Ibid*.

²⁴² *Ibid*.

their lives and successes with the material evidence of Susan's experiences written on her body. The dining table is the physical backdrop for these realisations, as is the shared meal itself. While Rhoda felt unable to escape individuality within the group meal, for Bernard the meal produces a strange dissolution of the self: 'But now silence falling pits my face, wastes my nose like a snowman stood out in a yard in the rain. As silence falls I am dissolved utterly and become featureless and scarcely to be distinguished from another'.²⁴³ At the end of the meal, as their conversations slowly peter out, the remaining 'silence' erodes away the features of his face and his individuality, as he loses the means to express himself through 'phrases' once there is no interchange of dialogue left to sustain him. However, Yuriko Morita emphasises the 'plasticity' of Rhoda's and Bernard's 'featureless faces', noting that 'it might be sometimes calming to lose our identities and merge into generality or the obscurity of the crowd'.²⁴⁴ This featurelessness is a direct result of the shared meal: 'what matters? We have dined well. The fish, the veal cutlets, the wine have blunted the sharp tooth of egotism'.²⁴⁵ The quality of the food, and the act of sharing the dining experience with friends, 'blunted' the 'egotism' of Bernard that previously marked him as an individual and allowed him to '[dissolve]' into being 'indistinguishable' from his friends.²⁴⁶ Their usual worries have dissipated (Neville's 'tortures', Louis' '[vanity]'), leaving them 'ready to consider any suggestion that the world may offer' and demonstrating the 'plasticity' observed by Morita as their identities and presuppositions become increasingly malleable; the possibility of Rhoda's dreamscape is reinforced by Bernard's observation of the transformative effect of the meal upon them all.²⁴⁷ Although the meal explores Rhoda's feelings of painful individuality and exposes each of their insecurities and judgements to and of one another, it does not produce

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.200.

²⁴⁴ Yuriko Morita, 'Featureless Faces: Virginia Woolf and Portrait-Painting', *Studies in English Literature*, English 42 (2001), p.34.

²⁴⁵ Virginia Woolf, *The Waves*, p.200.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

the same feelings of ‘disunity’ and ‘alienation’ as observed by Rich in the domestic shared meal; instead, the inn restaurant, at least temporarily, unites them after the death of Percival.

A similar dissolution of personal identity when dining in the hotel occurs in *Jacob's Room*. In contrast to Jacob's ‘superlative’ expectations of the food and his enjoyment of the meal, the Wentworth Williamses are bored by the rigidity of the menu, as Sandra listlessly anticipates the upcoming courses: “‘Quails,” said Mrs Wentworth Williams languidly. “And then goat, I suppose; and then...” “Caramel custard presumably,” said her husband in the same cadence’.²⁴⁸ The set menu recalls Woolf's previous criticisms of lack of spontaneity in the hotel, such as Marie Woolf's party, the jazz band in the Royal Hotel, and the Greek woman's public piano playing. Moreover, the predictability of the food is mirrored in their relationship, as her husband absentmindedly responds in the ‘same cadence’ as Sandra, keeping his ‘eyes fixed upon the window’ instead of on her or on the food.²⁴⁹ While in *The Waves* the shared meal relaxes the certainties of their identities and presuppositions as they became more united and their egos were blunted, the meal here instead further subsumes the Wentworth Williamses into the rigidity they have settled into during their extended hotel stay. Furthermore, the act of sharing in the meal as a couple in this space strips Sandra of her individual identity; while describing Sandra's daydreaming during their meal, Woolf used her forename, and when she is resituated in the reality of the meal, she becomes ‘Mrs Wentworth Williams’. While Woolf frequently associates the hotel with independent and autonomous women, here Sandra is subsumed into her marriage through the monotony of the repetitive dining experience.

²⁴⁸ Virginia Woolf, *Jacob's Room*, p.196.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

Jewish Gustatory Experiences

Throughout her works and private writings, Woolf portrayed Jewish food consumption as gluttonous and animalistic. Phyllis Lassner examines one key instance of this in ‘The Duchess and the Jeweller’, identifying the ‘features that have stereotyped Jews throughout Western literature’ in Woolf’s characterisation of Oliver Bacon, despite her removal of many explicit references to Jewish stereotypes as requested by her New York agent.²⁵⁰ His ‘nose’ is likened to that of an ‘elephant’s trunk’, not yet ‘satisfied’ with his wealth and status already acquired, further echoing Woolf’s fixation on the ‘nosey’ nature and ‘nasally’ speech she attributes to her Jewish in-laws.²⁵¹ As Bacon continues through Mayfair, Woolf further animalises his metaphorical appetite for riches, equating material desires with bodily hunger and encouraging the reader to participate with her in her antisemitic portrayal: ‘imagine a giant hog in a pasture rich with truffles; after unearthing this truffle and that, still it smells a bigger, a blacker truffle under the ground further off’.²⁵² Lassner highlights both the ‘suggestiveness’ and ‘sheer number of words’ used by Woolf to both ‘[elide]’ and ‘[disparage]’ his Jewish identity.²⁵³ Moreover, Lassner highlights the ‘gluttonous and unclean’ connotations of the hog, as it digs into the ‘ground’ and dirt to unearth further truffles, each one ‘bigger’ and ‘blacker’ than the last; Bacon’s search for further riches is akin to the insatiable search for food by the hog.²⁵⁴

Although Richard Dalloway is not an established Jewish character, Woolf draws upon the same antisemitic imagery of the bodily, gluttonous Jew in her characterisation of Richard in *The Voyage Out*, adding a carnivorous dimension to this imagery and his appetite and

²⁵⁰ Phyllis Lassner, ‘The Milk of Our Mothers’ Kindness Has Ceased to Flow’: Virginia Woolf, Stevie Smith, and the Representation of the Jew’, in *Between ‘Race’ and Culture: Representations of ‘the Jew’ in English and American Literature*, ed. by Bryan Cheyette, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), pp.129-144 (p.131-132).

²⁵¹ Virginia Woolf, ‘The Duchess and the Jeweller’, in *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Susan Dick, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1985), p.243.

²⁵² *Ibid.*

²⁵³ Lassner, p.133.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

sexual pursuit of Rachel. While Richard suffers from seasickness, Willoughby measures the stages of his recovery through changing appetites: 'the milk stage, the bread-and-butter stage, and the roast-beef stage', with the final roast-beef stage signalling a return to full health.²⁵⁵ Richard's return of his appetite for food is aligned with his sexual appetite, as he suddenly finds himself 'a man undoubtedly in the prime of his life', then carnivorously 'kiss[ing]' Rachel and impressing the 'hardness' and 'roughness' of his body on hers, emphasising the bodiliness identified by Linett and the predatory, animal nature of this contact.²⁵⁶ At dinner afterwards, Rachel feels 'uncomfortable', and Richard 'slid his eyes over her uneasily', objectifying her as an object of consumption akin to the food laid out before him.²⁵⁷ Willoughby then 'shout[s]' 'beef for Mr Dalloway' and 'you're at the beef stage', marking the emphatic return of Richard's carnivorous appetite after his encounter with Rachel.²⁵⁸ After his unwanted advances, Rachel dreams of being trapped in a tunnel, pursued by 'a little deformed man who squatted on the floor gibbering, with long nails' with a 'pitted' face 'like ... an animal'.²⁵⁹ Kolocotroni argues that these evoke the myth of the 'Minotaur', to whom 'Athenian virgins were sacrificed every year'.²⁶⁰ The man speaks 'gibbering', echoing Woolf's description of her Jewish in-laws 'talking incessantly'. Moreover, his 'long nails' connote the claws of an animal, further reinforcing his non-humanness. Woolf repeats the imagery seen in 'The Duchess and the Jeweller', as Rachel's dream transforms into a waking nightmare: 'all night long barbarian men harassed the ship; they came scuffling down the passages, and stopped to snuffle at her door'.²⁶¹ Just as the hog 'snuffed' for the truffles, the men 'snuffle' at Rachel's door, echoing the animalisation present in Woolf's more explicitly antisemitic depiction of Oliver Bacon. While both of these instances occur outside of the

²⁵⁵ Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out*, p.76-7.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p.80.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p.81.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid*.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p.81.

²⁶⁰ Vassiliki Kolocotroni, "'This Curious Silent Unrepresented Life': Greek Lessons in Virginia Woolf's Early Fiction", *The Modern Language Review*, 100.2 (2005), p.315-6.

²⁶¹ Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out*, p.82.

hotel, the latter takes place aboard the Euphrosyne, which Randi Saloman argues operates as a ‘makeshift’ proto-hotel ‘prepar[ing]’ the reader for the hotel atmosphere ‘characterised by temporary connections’ and the ‘close contact of those who do not know one another well’; the second can therefore be read as a relevant example of Woolf’s employment of antisemitic gustatory stereotypes in the hotel.²⁶² Regardless, both demonstrate the foundations of Woolf’s antisemitic portrayals of Jewish food consumption, which are subsequently reshaped to reflect the specificities of hotel gustatory experiences, including its food, social rituals, and class conventions.

Woolf portrays Jewish eating practices in the hotel space as single-minded, rapacious, and particularly overindulgent in saccharine flavours, constructing them as prioritising consumption over interpersonal connection and partaking in the wider antisemitic stereotypes of the materialist, bodily Jew established above. I will return to two extracts from Woolf’s letters and diaries explored in the last part and reevaluate them in the context of taste instead of touch. Woolf relates the whole evening of Marie Woolf’s birthday party in a private hotel room with an ironic tone, the food including ‘cups of soup’, ‘anchovy sandwiches’ and ‘cold sausage rolls’.²⁶³ The Woolfs eat the food characteristic of their disposition and dress of a ‘high tea in a hotel lounge’; Kemmerling highlights ‘cakes, pastries, and savoury sandwiches’ as staple high tea foods.²⁶⁴ Furthermore, a magazine article from 1929 asserts that afternoon tea foods should be ‘tempting’ and ‘piquant’, offering suitable recipes for anchovy rolls.²⁶⁵ Not only do these foods reflect the middle-class tradition of hotel afternoon teas loathsome to Woolf (a cultural practice she then links with Jewish people through her perception of their dress as befitting high tea in a hotel), but they conflict with her wider palate and eating habits.

²⁶² Saloman, Randi, “[Directly a box was unpacked the rooms became very different”]: Hotel Life and The Voyage Out’, in *Woolf and the City: Selected Papers from the Nineteenth Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Elizabeth F. Evans and Sarah E. Cornishpp, (Clemson: Clemson University Digital Press, 2009), pp.167-172 (p.167).

²⁶³ *A Reflection of the Other Person*, p.241.

²⁶⁴ Kemmerling, p.2,9.

²⁶⁵ Katherine M. Caldwell, ‘For the afternoon tea’, *Maclean’s*, 1 November 1929, p.63.

Woolf did not ‘think fish a good invention any time’, and had a particular dislike of anchovy sandwiches; she wrote that she ‘hate[d]’ and ‘loathe[d]’ them so much that she ‘[hid]’ the sandwiches in her bag on at least two occasions, once in 1932 and another in 1935.²⁶⁶ The only mention of sausage rolls in her private writings is in relation to this party; Woolf emphasises her ‘suffer[ing]’ in her visits to her in-laws, sarcastically describing the ‘terrific’ party and its ‘sausage rolls’.²⁶⁷ While she enjoyed eating soup (often writing of cooking vegetable soups herself), the choice of crockery may have displeased Woolf, as she wrote of her ‘want’ for ‘soup plates’ in her letters, whereas her in-laws served their soup in ‘cups’.²⁶⁸ Marie Woolf, unable to conjure a third ‘epithet’ praising her children, ends her birthday speech, in ‘spontaneous bubbling childishness’, with the exclamation ‘and now lets finish our sausage rolls’.²⁶⁹ Marie struggles to express gratitude to her children, instead turning to her delight in the food. While in *The Waves* the friends are able to temporarily reunite through the process of the shared meal, here the food serves only to expose Woolf’s perception of the lack of authentic connection between Marie and her children. As previously mentioned in chapter two, in her comparison of Woolf’s portrayal of Nazis and Jews, Linett highlights the ‘voracious bodiliness’ of Jews in Woolf’s writing, and her aversion to the perceived excessive bodiliness of Jewish sensory experiences is further emphasised in this extract, as she portrays her mother-in-law’s emotional speech as ‘bubbling’ and ‘[childish]’.²⁷⁰ Moreover, while Woolf usually favours spontaneity in the hotel, Marie’s sudden outburst over the food is instead portrayed with disgust, further revealing her dislike of what she perceives as Jewish sensory expressions. Marie’s fervour for food is reflected bodily in her manner of speech, as her speech ‘[bubbles]’ just as food bubbles in the cooking process, and Woolf is reminded of

²⁶⁶ *Leave The Letters Till We’re Dead*, p.249, and *The Flight Of The Mind*, p.382, p.44.

²⁶⁷ *A Reflection of the Other Person*, p.249.

²⁶⁸ *The Letters of Virginia Woolf Volume III: 1923-1928*, ed. by Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann, (London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), p.34.

²⁶⁹ *A Reflection of the Other Person*, p.249.

²⁷⁰ Linett, p.2.

her equal ‘passion for chocolate creams and sugar cakes’ in her outburst.²⁷¹ Linett highlights that Woolf frequently connects her in-laws’ ‘Jewish vulgarity’ and physicality with a need to ‘buy and eat cake’ in her private writings.²⁷² Although this need does appear outside of the hotel (and Linnett does not mention the space here), Woolf’s inability to separate her most maligned qualities of her in-laws from her most despised aspects of hotel culture (the middle and leisure classes and their behaviours, failures of sensory connection coupled with inappropriate sensory expressions, and lack of room for spontaneity) further emphasises her perceived connection between their voraciousness and the hotel space. Furthermore, cakes and saccharine foods were staples of the hotel lounge afternoon teas Woolf perceived her in-laws to be permanently dressed for. Woolf’s perception of the Jewish inability to bond through the senses is further revealed here; Marie is unable to appropriately thank her children and diverts the guests’ attention to the food in front of them. Moreover, while Marie lacks ‘passion’ for connection with her children, this ‘passion’ emerges freely and ‘spontaneous[ly]’ over food; while Woolf yearns to unite herself impulsively with others through food (and her other senses) in the hotel, the Woolfs remain distanced from others and prioritise order and individual sensory experiences.

Not only do Woolf and her in-laws differ in their preferred flavours, but also in their aesthetics of food. Woolf wrote that her inner ‘aesthetic sense [...] protests’ to the presence of her in-laws in Monk’s House, as they ‘bring in an atmosphere of [...] hotels’, looking ‘impossibly out of place’ and ‘stuffy & towny & dressy & dowdy [...] among apple trees and vegetables’.²⁷³ While Woolf does not directly comment on the taste of the apples and vegetables, they suggest natural, simple flavours, contrasting that of the sweet palate Woolf usually associates with her in-laws. Their perceived middle-classness and clothes befitting the

²⁷¹ *A Reflection of the Other Person*, p.249. I will expand upon the sweet palate of the Woolfs in the next paragraph.

²⁷² Linett, p.2.

²⁷³ *The Diary of Virginia Woolf: Volume Three 1925-1930*, p.321.

hotel do not align with the home-grown foods in Monk's House; moreover, her in-laws' gustatory preferences extend beyond their mouths and reflect upon their appearance, rendering them incongruous when surrounded by the mere image of natural foods. Although her article focuses on analyses of fruit in works produced in the long eighteenth century, Liz Bellamy highlights the important symbol of the apple and apple trees as a 'metonym of Englishness' in the literature of the period, due to the growing interest in foreign fruits and beginnings of mechanisation of fruit production (evident in the transition from outdoor orchards to 'hothouses'), which echoes Woolf's contrast here; the Jewish body is separated by Woolf from English ideals and symbolises the commercialisation of food in the hotel, signifying 'towny', urban foods and afternoon teas in contrast to Woolf's natural ingredients and environment.²⁷⁴ Furthermore, as the Woolfs bring in their hotel palate to Virginia's country home, she remarks that she must 'race off' and 'buy pink, red, and yellow cakes, cakes striped with sugar bars and dotted with chocolate spots' to satisfy their taste buds.²⁷⁵ It is not only the flavours that displease Woolf, but quantity and appearance of the food; the unnatural colours and patterns on the cakes contrast the natural flavours and unaltered appearance of Woolf's preferred foods, as also seen in *Jacob's Room*. Moreover, Woolf's connection between the hotel and middle-class, saccharine flavours exists separately from her connection of it to the Jewish body; she writes to Ethel Smyth of her '[hatred]' of the 'formalities' of meeting in a 'hotel bedroom', containing 'lots of sugar cakes and almond paste taken from a cupboard'.²⁷⁶

²⁷⁴ Liz Bellamy, 'The Uses of Fruit: Literary Symbolism and Technological Change in the Long Eighteenth Century', *Literature and History*, 24.2 (2015), p.2, 6-7.

²⁷⁵ *A Reflection of the Other Person*, p.222.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p.364.

Conclusion

Shared dining experiences in the hotel can operate as a method of connection between individuals, as explored in *The Waves*, while the absence of such connection is felt in Woolf's personal accounts of the empty, organised dining room and Marie's failed birthday speech. Christina L. Svendsen argues that Woolf's antisemitism was 'based on perceptions of taste', 'manners', and 'class' rather than 'race', with Jews acting as a wider 'cultural' representation of Woolf's critiques of society.²⁷⁷ While both Woolf's disapproval of some aspects of hotel culture and antisemitic stereotyping exist independently of one another, these often converge in her representations of Jewish and Jewish-coded individuals, through whom she intensifies her critiques of sensory excess, failed human connection, and class conventions in the hotel. White bodies and their sensory perceptions are regarded more favourably and can act as a source of women's freedom and autonomy, while Woolf projects onto Jewish bodies and their gustatory struggles and experiences the middle-class, gluttonous foods and hotel dining experiences she disdained.

²⁷⁷ Christina L. Svendsen, 'In the Family: Representations of Jewishness By Virginia Woolf and Julia Margaret Cameron', *Woolf Studies Annual*, 19 (2013), p.13.

Conclusion

Throughout my thesis, I have argued that Woolf should be considered alongside many of her contemporaries not only as a hotel writer, but as one of the leading modernist authors utilising the individual's sensory experience in the hotel space to tackle the societal transformations, such as the changing role of women in society, destabilised class boundaries, and the rise of the leisure class, occurring in the time period. Particularly, I have demonstrated throughout that Woolf visualised the hotel as a space for women to emerge into the public sphere and fully immerse themselves in places and sensory feelings previously denied to them. Contrastingly, the Jewish body and its sensory experiences were unwelcomed by Woolf both inside and outside of the hotel. Furthermore, I explored Woolf's representation of the different forms of human connection through the senses in the hotel despite the perceived distance between herself, the staff, her fellow guests, and her own sensory prejudices.

In the first chapter, I presented Woolf's hostility to noise in her personal life in comparison to sound in the hotel as representative of female liberation in *The Voyage Out*; when Woolf was able to distance herself both physically and literarily from sound, it could be a symbol of women's emergence into the public sphere and their ability to dominate the public sonic soundscape through hotel common spaces. However, hotel noise encroached upon Woolf's physical and mental health and her ability to write, and so in her personal writings, no group is permitted to make sound in the hotel; this was particularly evident in the extract in which Woolf derides both the speaking voices and piano playing of two female hotel guests, but I also analysed a number of other examples of Woolf deriding the noises of both male and female residents. I contrasted Woolf's aversion to the jazz band in the Imperial Hotel with positive depictions of female piano playing in *The Voyage Out* in order to highlight her embrace of noise in the hotel when it offers spontaneous musical expression and

provides women a creative outlet free of patriarchal influence. Moreover, by utilising Woolf's essay 'Street Music', I revealed Woolf's particular aversion to manufactured sound that occurred in the middle-class Imperial Hotel; the repetitive music of the jazz band and the hotel's hostility to the Woolfs' noise complaint is emblematic of the consumerist greed driven by the leisure class' desire for entertainment Woolf fought against in the hotel space. Woolf was able to accept the importance of hotel sound to women's liberation when distancing herself from it in her fiction, and so she utilised female music making in *The Voyage Out* as an essential part of Rachel Vinrace's bildungsroman narrative. I was able to establish in my first chapter on sound Woolf's position as a hotel writer, and the inseparability of social issues (such as women's liberation) to the sensory hotel experience.

In the second chapter, I further developed Woolf's engagement with gender and antisemitism in the hotel space through the sense of touch. While Woolf was hostile to connection through sound in her personal life, she was slightly more receptive to touch despite the difficulties she acknowledged in establishing emotional and physical contact in the seemingly hostile hotel space. I established a broader format of tactility in Woolf's works that transcended skin-to-skin contact and encompassed touching through bodies in shared spaces, and in the act of emotionally reaching out towards another individual. While occupying shared common rooms in the hotel, Woolf portrayed socially distinct women in the space, such as widows and lesbian couples. Woolf expanded upon the freedom found in female noise-making in public hotel spaces by acknowledging, through touch, the hotel as a haven for women to simply be; no actions were required, except to simply exist visibly in hotel restaurants and drawing-rooms. She inseparably linked these 'off line' women (a term coined by Sara Ahmed) with the space through her repeated depictions of them in her letters and diaries, solidifying the hotel as a female-centred place. I turned to Woolf's novels *Jacob's Room*, *Mrs Dalloway*, and *The Voyage Out* to explore the male relationship with touch, the

object, and the patriarchal drive for domination over the hotel bedroom. Women in both Woolf's personal writings and her fiction occupy shared spaces and private bedrooms with ease and a sense of belonging. Contrastingly, Jacob Flanders and Peter Walsh struggle to maintain their individuality and to establish dominance in their hotel rooms. Woolf depicted both the class and gendered issues of invisible labour in the hotel through her depiction of the female maid in the male hotel bedroom. Despite their lower-class status, the female maids in Woolf's hotels have more control over the space than the male guests; these women are able to move freely into the bedroom, touch the furniture and the objects belonging to the current occupant, and erase all physical traces of past residents through gendered labour.

Although Woolf presented the agency offered to women through touch in the hotel space in her private writings and published novels, Jewish touch was unwelcome and restrictive. At a Jewish birthday party in a hotel function room, the usual emotional outreaching Woolf experiences in the hotel is subverted; guests instead spoke for short, precise intervals of time and engaged in self-touching instead of reaching towards one another. Furthermore, the middle-class atmosphere of the hotel was reflected through Jewish touch for Woolf, as they brought hotel social conventions with them to Woolf's country home, as she asserted they were unable to mix with the natural and domestic environment. While Woolf's engagement with sound in the hotel was dependent on her proximity to it, her philosophy of touch as a perpetual, emotional reaching out remained consistent in both her personal writings and her novels; her firmly anti-hotel sound stance softens on touch as she often finds herself slightly more receptive to touch and other individuals in hotel common space, yet her resistance to (often foreign) hotel staff and Jewish sensory expressions and their connection to the hotel was solidified in this chapter. In this section, I further reinforced my previous discoveries of Woolf's frequent engagement with (and in the case of

antisemitism, participation in) issues of gender, race, and class through sensory experiences in the hotel.

In the third chapter, I explored the hotel dining experience due to the absence of detailed relations of taste and flavour in her published and private writings. At the forefront of taste perceptions in Woolf's works is the opportunity for human connection in the hotel dining experience, which can be shaped by both her fellow diners and the dining space itself. I explored the effects of regimented decor and visually embellished food on eating in her private writings and in *Jacob's Room*, as a lack of other individuals, organised and empty tables, and brightly coloured foods negatively affected the dining experience. The ability for a hotel meal to connect individuals was demonstrated in *The Waves*, as the friends were able to come together and temporarily set aside their grievances and insecurities by the end of the shared meal. I also explored Woolf's antisemitic depictions of Jewish appetites across her non-hotel and hotel writing, tracing its foundations in 'The Duchess and the Jeweller', and the ways in which this depiction then shifts to the hotel foods and conventions in *The Voyage Out* and in her depiction of her Jewish in-laws. Across these works, Woolf repeatedly presents Jewish people as physically overvital and their tastes as aligning with foods associated with hotel dining and not with her own palate. Food and dining experiences in the hotel can mark either the connection or disconnection between individuals.

My thesis has situated Woolf in growing critical discussions of the modernist hotel and cemented her status as a hotel writer, a sensuous writer, and a societally conscious writer. For Woolf, the hotel and its wide variety of stimuli offer new sensory experiences that differ depending on the identity of the individual, and these experiences offer new forms of connection and methods of exploring a changing society.

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