

# **THE CAFÉ IN MODERNIST LITERATURE**

*Wyndham Lewis, Ernest Hemingway, Jean Rhys*

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## *Summary*

This study explores the representation of the café in literary modernism. As its primary works range from the early 1900s to 1939, I have restricted my choice of exemplary writers in an effort to pay attention to issues of subject, style, and technique in greater detail than a survey would allow. Following a brief history of the literary café, three principal chapters focus upon the following authors in this order: Wyndham Lewis, Ernest Hemingway, and Jean Rhys. Contextualised by the café's fundamental role in the lives of artists, the creation of art, and the great art movements throughout history, the thesis traces the ways in which the novelists engage imaginatively with this important social and cultural space. The study is underpinned by the spatial theory of Henri Lefebvre, Michel de Certeau, and Michel Foucault. From this theoretical platform I assemble a conceptual framework and a spatial vocabulary that facilitates the critical engagement with the literary representation of the café.

Methodologically, the café essentially functions as a lens through which I analyse modernist writers, their texts, and their aesthetic preoccupations. Each chapter can be read as a discrete study that contributes fresh analyses, new insights, and re-evaluations of familiar texts and existing scholarship. However, as a whole, the thesis offers an entirely novel way of reading literary modernism, championing the use of the café as a serious heuristic device.

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## INTRODUCTION

### *The Café in Literary Modernism*

Since the dawn of the European coffee trade, when Augustan poets would entertain their friends in the coffeehouses of London, artists, writers, and intellectuals have been meeting in cafés. More than just places to get food and drink, the cafés of Europe satisfied a wide set of needs. It was in the café that generations argued, new aesthetics were distilled, and movements were formed and contested. Though often humble or parochial in character, the best cafés became places of rendezvous for movements that changed the course of history. The French Revolution, English Classicism, Decadence, Symbolism, Impressionism, Dadaism, Existentialism, Surrealism, Futurism, and Vorticism have all been rooted in the café life of their times. In the early decades of the twentieth century, the period that coincides with the cultural and artistic moment known as modernism, the situation was no different.

In his 1935 book *Provence: From Minstrels to the Machine*, Ford Madox Ford records an exchange with his lover, Janice Biala, the artist he commissioned to provide illustrations to accompany the work. After seeing a particular vista in London, Biala makes an appeal: “Let’s go quickly to a café so that I may get down my impressions while they are new...” Ford’s indignant reply that there are “no *cafés* in London” astonishes her: “But if London does not provide *cafés* for her artists how can she expect to have any art? ... Or any letters? Or any civilisation? Or any anything?”<sup>1</sup> Biala’s response exemplifies both the café’s material importance to the modernist artist as a place to socialise and work, and its symbolic significance through its historical legacy as a generative cultural and artistic milieu. The café’s role in the genesis of culture and creative practice is a theme to which Ford returns to again and again in *Provence*: ‘a café’, he says ‘is a serious place where serious people discussing serious subjects mould

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<sup>1</sup> Ford Madox Ford, *Provence: From Minstrels to the Machine* (ed.) John Coyle (Manchester: Carcanet, 2009), p. 24 [emphasis in original].

civilisations.’<sup>2</sup> In the heady energetic days of early twentieth-century experiments in art, great ‘civilisation-moulding’ projects were being forged in the cafés of Europe. Many artists and writers sat for hours in cafés, they ate and drank in cafés, they talked and argued in cafés, and they thought, wrote, and smoked in cafés; in short, the café was the backdrop for their lives. For some of these writers, the café also served as the backdrop for some of their greatest works of literature.

Because of its centrality to the lives of many modernist writers, the café seems to be an ideal device for expanding our thinking about space and place in literary modernism. It has been nearly 20 years since Edward Said insisted that ‘[a]fter Lukàcs and Proust, we have become accustomed to thinking of the novel’s plot and structure as constituted mainly by temporality that we have overlooked the function of space, geography, and location.’<sup>3</sup> Since then, there has been extensive research into the spatial and geographical aspects of modernist writing. Andrew Thacker’s *Moving Through Modernity: Space and Geography in Modernism* (2003) and Peter Brooker’s and Thacker’s edited collection, *Geographies of Modernism: Literatures, Cultures, Spaces* (2005), are representative titles of what one might call the spatial trend in modernist studies. Such works have variously shown that the stock assumption ‘all stories have to be set somewhere’ is inadequate for understanding the stylistic functions that literary setting performs. This thesis engages with this critical literature, but considers the specific space of the café. My aim is to explore the intersection between the material and the symbolic significance of the café in the texts of the time, and to establish, among other things, what diegetic role the café plays in the work of these authors, how this important establishment figured in their imaginations, and how it is represented.

It should be clear at the outset that my spatial focus in no way implies a jettisoning of history in favour of space. This study pursues an investigation into the spatial history of the café in modernism, an historical account of the particular ways in which the space was conceptualised and represented. The café’s historical development and social legacy, particularly as a meeting place for artistic communities, is central to my analysis. Taking this into consideration, however, the emphasis of this spatial

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>3</sup> Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994), pp. 100-101.

exploration is not with the café's socio-historical role in the development of group formations and artistic affiliations (although a contextually important factor for my discussion). It is rather concerned with how the generative environment of the café figures as a significant literary trope within modernist writing. In other words, although I will take account of the decisive shaping influence of the café upon modernist writers and their writing, the emphasis in this study is not what the café has done *for* literature and literary circles, but what the café does *in* literature. More specifically, it asks: how did modernist writers 'write' the café?

When one thinks of the early sites of modernism, one often imagines the golden-lit café terraces of the Boulevard du Montparnasse brimming with a colourful cosmopolitan crowd, all abuzz with the excited chatter of new ideas, campaigns, philosophies, and politics. Anyone who was anyone during this exciting period spent time in Paris, either making periodic visits or living the expatriate lifestyle for months or years on end. A short and by no means exhaustive list of international artists, writers and poets that enjoyed the hospitality and excitement of the city's famous cafés would include: Pablo Picasso, James Joyce, Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, Ford Madox Ford, Amedeo Modigliani, Mina Loy, Henry Miller, Anaïs Nin, Hilda Doolittle, Ernest Hemingway, Djuna Barnes, John Dos Passos, Katherine Mansfield, Wyndham Lewis, Hart Crane, Jean Rhys.

A popular view of the importance of place in modernism is often understood as the portrayal of otherness and alienation. Places in this view of modernist writing often stand as spatial *tabula rasae* for studies of characters deeply alienated from other people and from the places where they find themselves. In these instances all places come to share the quality of 'not home' for the estranged. Think, for instance, of Franz Kafka's universalised fictional places – like the town or the castle – and how they might serve, like the near-empty stage-settings of Samuel Beckett, as tokens of the modernist conception of place for many readers. However, for a cultural moment that has long been associated with flux, exile, and alienation, it is remarkable to note the constancy and significance that the café played in the lives of modernist writers. This perhaps has something to do with what David Harvey identified as an anxious pursuit of fixity and permanence resulting from a combination of a nascent internationalist consciousness and

the general trend to innovate in art and to ‘make it new’. In an era when transformations in spatial and temporal practice implied a loss of identity with place and repeated radical breaks with any sense of historical continuity, one response, Harvey says, was to reaffirm the identity of place in the midst of growing abstractions of space.<sup>4</sup>

For the many that were drawn to Paris, the café became a staple (and stable) part of life in the city, not only intellectually and creatively but also practically and economically. For the struggling writer with limited accommodations the café was of huge importance for a satisfactorily expansive existence in the city. Serving as an extension of what would invariably be a cramped and dimly-lit apartment or hotel room, the café functioned as a living or dining-room for receiving friends, entertaining, and passing the time of day, or as an office or study where one could hold meetings and write letters. For the writer with modest means, the practice of café living was ideal because for the price of a cup of coffee the habitué had access to everything they might need for a full day and night’s work or leisure: a drink, a comfortable seat at a clean table, cigarettes, food, washroom, newspapers, writing materials, a telephone, heat, and light.

For many an expatriate writer the café not only existed as the cliché that was ‘home away from home’, but it was also many other things at once: both material and symbolic. The journalist and Vienna *Kaffeehaus* wit, Herman Kesten, described the café’s unique nature:

In exile, the coffee house becomes house and home, church and parliament, desert and pilgrim’s aim, a cradle of illusions and a cemetery. [...] In exile, the coffee house is the only continuous locality. I have been sitting in cafés in a dozen exile countries and it was if I was always sitting in the same café, at the seaside, between mountains, in London, in Paris, next to Amsterdam’s canals, between the monasteries of Bruges. I sat in the coffee house named exile and wrote.<sup>5</sup>

Kesten’s experience of the café is representative – many of literary modernism’s luminaries were exiles to some degree or other. Many had swapped their natural

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<sup>4</sup> David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), p. 272.

<sup>5</sup> Herman Kesten, *Dichter im Café* (Munich: Verlag Kurt Desch, 1959) [my translation] pp. 12-13.

homeland for a cultural one, the café. For Kesten, as with many other itinerant writers, the café was at the centre of lived experience. And, as Biala and Ford indicated, it was much more than a simple establishment where one might obtain refreshment. The café was, in an almost literal sense, a medium of discourse, like a newspaper or magazine. People that were separated from the patterns of their society – whether by choice or not – still needed a forum, a place where they could meet and drink and talk. For this reason, it is often a highly complex space. Kesten’s notion of the café as a ‘continuous locality’, for instance, complicates both the idea of home as a foil to the world – bookend to the writer’s journey – and the foreign land as alien.

This project is predicated on the idea that social spaces like the café do not simply exist in culture, but permeated as they are with its beliefs, values, fears, and fantasies, actually define it. This study also makes the assumption that literary texts are cultural precipitates, artefacts suffused with the author’s responses to and engagement with the material spaces of modernity. An investigation such as this, then, requires thinking about space, and the literary space of the café in particular, in rather more complex ways than as simply a mimetic backdrop or an empty stage upon which literary actors are ushered on to perform. To do this, I consider the work of spatial theorists and geographers such as Henri Lefebvre, Michel de Certeau, and Michel Foucault. From their theoretical insights I assemble a conceptual framework and spatial vocabulary that allows for a more versatile understanding, and expansive discussion of the representation of the café in literature. When this heuristic framework is applied in the case studies that follow, the café essentially functions as lens through which explorations of the cultural, ideological, and aesthetic preoccupations of modernist writers and their works are made possible.

### **Thesis Parameters**

The main body of this thesis comprises three case studies. The first of which looks at Wyndham Lewis (1882-1957); the second, Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961); and the third, Jean Rhys (1890-1979). Each chapter focuses upon the status, treatment, representation, and function of the café in their respective works. The spatial theory of Lefebvre, de Certeau, and Foucault is referred to as a way to open up the café for textual

analysis and discussion. The main texts under investigation are Lewis's 1918 novel *Tarr*, and his non-fiction pamphlet *The Caliph's Design: Architects! Where is Your Vortex?* (1919); Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* (1926),<sup>6</sup> and his short story 'A Clean Well-Lighted Place' (1933); Rhys's early short-story collection *The Left Bank and Other Stories* (1927), her novels *Quartet* (1929), *After Leaving Mr MacKenzie* (1930), *Voyage in the Dark* (1934), and *Good Morning, Midnight*, (1939). As organised, the chapters and the texts discussed within them provide a broadly diachronic framework that delimits the study to the period between approximately 1909 (when Lewis first began work on *Tarr*) and 1939 (when Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight* was published). In this way, the study provides a critical reading of the café and its representation over a period of 30 years. Lewis's *Tarr* covers the period of his youth in the cafés of Montparnasse up to 1916 (by which time it was serialised in the *Egoist*); Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* depicts the post-war 'Glamour Years' of Americans in Paris, consisting of extravagant parties and overindulgence: what the poet Hart Crane described as '[d]inners, soirées, poets, erratic millionaires, painters, translations, lobsters, absinthe, music, promenades, oysters, sherry, aspirin, pictures, Sapphic heiresses, editors, books, sailors. *And How!*'<sup>7</sup> Jean Rhys's *The Left Bank and Other Stories*, *Quartet*, *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, and *Voyage in the Dark* similarly cover the 1920s and on into the 1930s; ending with *Good Morning, Midnight*, which is set in the pre-war rumblings of 1937 around the time of the Paris World Exhibition.

The study is also geographically delineated. Although the café is a significant establishment in many cities around Europe, the cafés analysed here are set mostly in Paris; the exceptions are the Spanish cafés of Hemingway's 'A Clean Well Lighted Place' and *The Sun Also Rises*. The primary reason for the focus on Paris's cafés is their prominence, recognition, and fundamental importance to modernist artistic culture and society in the early part of the twentieth century. The novels and short stories chosen for analysis have therefore been selected for their emphasis on Parisian café life. One cannot

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<sup>6</sup> *The Sun Also Rises* was published as *Fiesta* in the UK. For the sake of consistency and simplicity, I refer to the American title in keeping with all of the scholarship and criticism I engage with.

<sup>7</sup> Hart Crane, '316: To Samuel Loveman (Postcard), January 23<sup>rd</sup> 1929' in *Letters of Hart Crane: 1916-1932* (ed.) Brom Weber (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1965) p. 333 [emphasis in original].

of course overstate the influence of Paris upon the lives of Lewis, Hemingway, and Rhys, each of them having spent a great deal of time living and working in the great capital. Although he travelled extensively throughout Europe, between 1902 and 1909 Wyndham Lewis lived mostly in Paris, the city he once referred to as the ‘geographical source of all life and light and true happiness.’<sup>8</sup> Ernest Hemingway moved to Paris in 1921 taking up a position as foreign correspondent for a newspaper. His time in the city made a lasting impact on him. ‘If you are lucky enough to have lived in Paris as a young man,’ he once told a friend, ‘then wherever you go for the rest of your life it stays with you, for Paris is a moveable feast.’<sup>9</sup> Jean Rhys lived in the French capital from 1920, and said that there were only two places in the world that inspired her to write: one was Dominica, her birthplace, and the other was Paris.<sup>10</sup>

By way of post-script to this introduction to the authors, I should perhaps remark that in identifying Lewis, Hemingway, and Rhys as modernist writers I am not attempting to suggest that they definitively represent modernist writing either singly or as a group. I am aware of the degree to which the term ‘modernist’ becomes problematic, particularly in relation to Hemingway. However, my choice of the three writers is predicated on both a temporal framework within which they can be fairly classified as modernist, and on issues of subject matter and style that equally justifies their inclusion under this terminological rubric.

### **The café as scholarly subject**

Although space, place, and geography have been important concerns for modernist studies in recent years, the café has been surprisingly overlooked. Indeed, despite its prominence on the social, cultural, and literary landscape of modernism, the café has yet to be acknowledged as a substantive subject for critical literary investigation. Books about this unique space have generally fallen into two categories: those of a socio-

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<sup>8</sup> Wyndham Lewis, *Rude Assignment* (ed.) Toby Foshay (Santa Barbara, Black Sparrow Press, 1984), p. 250.

<sup>9</sup> A. E. Hotchner, *Papa Hemingway* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2005), p. 57.

<sup>10</sup> Jean Rhys, *Selected Letters: 1931-1966* (ed.) Francis Wyndham and Diana Melly (London: Andre Deutsch, 1984), p. 171 [hereafter *JRL*].

historical bent, charting the café's rise and influence throughout history, and those of a more nostalgic mien, celebrating the institution with collections of anecdotes and photographs. Eminent scholarly examples of the first kind of study are Aytoun Ellis's 1956 book, *The Penny Universities: A History of the Coffee-Houses*; W. Scott Haine's *The World of the Paris Café: Sociability among the French Working Class, 1789-1914* (1996); Markman Ellis's more recent, *The Coffeehouse: A Cultural History* (2004); and Brian Cowan's *The Social Life of Coffee: The Emergence of the British Coffeehouse* (2005). As their titles suggest, these works trace the early beginnings of the coffeehouse in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, its impact upon the society of the time, and its historical legacy. Of the second kind of study, Noël Riley Fitch's work on European cafés: *Literary Cafés of Paris* (1989) and *The Grand Literary Cafés of Europe* (2006) are exemplars of a nostalgic love affair with cafés and café life. These are small books (around 80 pages), often written with the 'literary tourist' in mind. Within them one finds evocative illustrations and photographs accompanied by interesting stories and anecdotes about some famous café habitué or other and the cafés they frequented, most of which can be visited and enjoyed today. Another work of this type is Steve Bradshaw's *Café Society: Bohemian Life from Swift to Bob Dylan* (1978). Much more extensive than Riley-Fitch's works, Bradshaw traces the history of café society through a variety of artistic figures and art movements in London, Paris, and Vienna. His aim is 'to evoke the atmosphere' of revolutionary nights in cafés, 'put them into some kind of historical context,' and to suggest reasons for their demise. 'Not only a book of nostalgia', he says, it is an attempt to put the disappearance of café society into perspective.<sup>11</sup> However, the work is not straitened by academic rigour. While both interesting and informative, it incorporates no critical examination of the café in art or literature, includes no references, and therefore provides no scholarly dimension for the academic reader. Certainly, then, there have been no specific literary investigations concentrating on the café in the literature of its time.

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<sup>11</sup> Steve Bradshaw, *Café Society: Bohemian Life from Swift to Bob Dylan* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1978), pp. 1-2.

## Space and Modernism

In the 1990s, postmodernist theory put space and geography at the centre of debates about new trends in the arts. Turning to cities, urban planning, and architecture for inspiration, Fredric Jameson, David Harvey, Edward Soja, and others argued that the distinctive features of postmodern culture could be described and assessed most effectively by understanding the geographic conditions of late capitalism.<sup>12</sup> In the past fifteen years or so, scholars of modernism have responded, using space, place, and geography to help redefine the parameters of modernist studies. This geographical trend has since developed and taken an inevitable global turn, as exemplified by the recent publication of *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms* (2012), a large compendium, which seeks to expand the scope of modernist studies beyond its traditional Anglo-American and Euro-centric focus. Each essay in this substantial collection attempts to address the question of what modernism looks like when one starts looking for examples from across the globe.

My focus on the cafés of Europe might be read as a contrary turning inward, a move away from the global concerns of recent academic trends. However, as will be seen, particularly in my discussions on Hemingway and Rhys, the space of the café cannot be read simplistically or, indeed, unproblematically as a national institution or representative of national concerns or identity. The cafés of Paris, for example, played host to visitors from across the globe, and the creative cultural process of which they were a part cannot, and perhaps should not, be reduced to a set of state-oriented boundaries. That being said, however, the concept of a global modernism could be seen as problematic in itself. I am reminded of a recent discussion at the *Moving Modernisms* conference at Oxford University in March of 2012, where Majorie Perloff (Professor Emerita of English at Stanford University) suggested that if modernism happened *everywhere* then it kind of happened *nowhere* as well. Perloff's point is that defining Anglo-American or Euro-centric modernism is a challenging project, and it perhaps confounds and compromises modernism's concept value by uncritically appending

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<sup>12</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991); Harvey (1990); Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London; New York: Verso, 1989).

‘global’ to it. Though I do not engage with this argument, my study implicitly suggests that we have not yet completed the task of fully exploring what we might call the ‘canonical’ or ‘hegemonic’ geographies of modernism – including Paris and its complex international and global networks and manifestations.

Looking back, one of the first extended investigations into space and modernism was Andrew Thacker’s 2003 *Moving Through Modernity: Space and Geography in Modernism*. Here, Thacker investigates the connections between space, geography, and movement in modernist writing, and he attempts to locate modernism within a renewed set of spatial and geographical contexts. While acknowledging the enduring significance of the experience and representation of temporality in modernism, Thacker considers the ways in which space, place, and geography occupied the modernist imagination. He outlines a number of theoretical frameworks on space drawn from a variety of thinkers and then sets out to formulate what he calls a ‘critical literary geography of modernism.’<sup>13</sup> Thacker was among the first scholars of modernism to demonstrate the utility of applying the spatial theories of Lefebvre, de Certeau, and Foucault to the reading of modernist texts. His study is arranged thematically, and is principally concerned with both movement *through* space – chapters on the motorcar, the underground tube train, and the bus look at the ways in which technology transformed writers’ relationships with the environment – and movement *between* spaces – both metaphorical and material journeys from inside (the psyche/the room/the metropole) to outside (the body/the street/the colonial periphery) and vice versa. Thacker’s work is valuable for modernist studies because it reveals the many ways in which the writing of the period engaged with space and place, showing how modernist texts create metaphorical spaces ‘that try to make sense of the material spaces of modernity.’<sup>14</sup>

Contrasting Thacker’s general concern with space and geography, my study attempts to inject a more developed spatial focus by specifically examining the café as a key site for modernist writers. Another of Thacker’s main concerns is to discover how modernist representations of space offer ‘an endorsement or contestation of official

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<sup>13</sup> Andrew Thacker, *Moving Through Modernity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

representations of space.’<sup>15</sup> My question is distinctly different. The aim of this study is to use the café as an hermeneutic device, and to focus on what the different representations of this unique space can tell us about particular modernist writers and their individual concerns – whether that be aesthetic, spatial, or beyond into political, ideological, and sociological matters.

One scholar that has developed a spatial focus of this kind is Victoria Rosner with her 2005 work: *Modernism and the Architecture of Private Life*. Here, Rosner proposes that the spaces of private life are a generative and influential site for literary modernism, observing a telling preoccupation with domestic interiors in many (specifically) British modernist texts. Looking at the confluence between private space, architectural history, psychic life, and modernist writing, she provides a concise historical view of the role that domestic architecture and British design history have played in the formation of both modernist literary aesthetics and middle-class private life. Focussing principally on Virginia Woolf and the Bloomsbury Group, Rosner often narrows her spatial focus right down to a single room in the private home. She takes the space of the study, for instance, and reads it through a history of design, use, and literary aesthetics. Revealing its long associations with masculinity, Rosner thus offers an enlightening reading of the complex manifestations and literary influences of this gendered space. One criticism that might be levelled at Rosner’s focus is the often class-specific nature of the private spaces she reads, which potentially excludes those writers of more modest means and diverse backgrounds. But the café has no such limitations as an heuristic device. Because it is public and generally an open and expansive institution, the café makes no class distinctions, excludes no one, and therefore offers itself as subject to a more inclusive range of writers.<sup>16</sup>

2005 also saw the publication of Peter Brooker’s and Andrew Thacker’s edited collection: *Geographies of Modernism: Literature, Cultures, Spaces*. Following the fundamental questions of modernist studies: ‘when was modernism?’ and ‘who was

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>16</sup> Here I do not ignore the fact that despite changing attitudes towards women and their place in the public sphere during the opening decades of the century it was still seen as undesirable for a woman to enter a café and drink alone. However, while a woman’s presence in a café was disagreeable it was not prohibited. This will be discussed further in my chapter on Jean Rhys.

modernist?’ the editors here sought to complete the interrogative triad with ‘where was modernism?’ The contributions in the collection are largely interdisciplinary projects that reveal the depth and breadth of a geographical approach to modernism, cumulatively drawing our attention to broader geographical cultures (and continents) of influence and dialogue than the familiar London-Paris-New York axis of modernist studies. Along with essays that reach outwards from the metropolitan centre and introduce, for example, the influence or presence of Russia, Africa, and the Caribbean in modernist works, there is an essay by Scott McCracken that is similar in focus to this thesis in that it takes a single place and subjects it to detailed analysis. ‘Voyages by Teashop: An Urban Geography of Modernism’ looks at the impact of Lyons and ABC teashops on metropolitan London in the early twentieth century. McCracken’s premise is that material geography and the built environment operate as determining influences on consciousness and conduct. He suggests that the appearance of teashop chains on the high street had a notable influence on the literary imagination, and consequently became a standard reference point in literature of the time. He finds that many writers ‘mention the chains by name or make the teashop a key locus for urban encounters.’<sup>17</sup>

Drawing on Henri Lefebvre’s method of rhythmanalysis for reading the urban landscape, McCracken suggests that the city before and after the rise of the teashop chain constitutes for the city dweller two very different types of experience. The first experience relates to the high street’s material configuration before 1900. Lined as it was with independent shops and trades, distinct localities were identifiable by their unique topographical layout. McCracken defines this urban configuration as ‘the realist city.’<sup>18</sup> By 1900, the chain teashop had established itself all over London, reconfiguring the city as a network, which brought together its disparate parts through its ‘trademark sign (above the shopfront) or the traffic (in the form of the company’s vans and lorries) between nodes.’<sup>19</sup> McCracken suggests that the ‘multiple presence of dozens of outlets of the same chain creates a simultaneity of perception that later characterizes the visual

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<sup>17</sup> Scott McCracken, ‘Voyages by Teashop: An Urban Geography of Modernism’ in Peter Brooker & Andrew Thacker (eds.) *Geographies of Modernism: Literatures, Cultures, Spaces* (London: Routledge, 2005) pp. 86-98 (p. 86).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.

montage of [...] the cubists.’ This, he argues, ‘amounts to a kind of modernist geography that engenders a radically new spatial apprehension of the city.’<sup>20</sup> McCracken then examines how these new experiences and cultural tendencies of the city translated to literature in depictions of the teashop in works by Somerset Maugham, Dorothy Richardson, and James Joyce. McCracken concludes that the teashop became such a resonant location in the literature of the early twentieth century because it was a ‘threshold’ space that inhered in both the new street rhythms of the city and everyday life as experienced by the subject. ‘To have a cup of tea in an ABC or Lyons’, he says, ‘is to experience the borderline between the subject’s consciousness of the everyday and [their] subjection to the powerful economic forces that position [them] in the city.’<sup>21</sup>

There were no chain cafés or teashops of note in Paris, so the sense of simultaneity produced by multiple branded sites of which McCracken speaks does not manifest itself here. The cafés frequented (or avoided) by the writers discussed in my case studies are distinct in character, location, and clientele; and much more analogous in configuration to McCracken’s ‘realist city’. However, this thesis does claim that the café was a resonant location in early twentieth-century literature as a kind of threshold space – to use McCracken’s term. Because of its specific relationship with art and artists, and because of its function as a place where society was played out and experienced, it operates at the junction between art and life.

While no other research has been done that specifically addresses the space of the café in literary modernism – McCracken’s work on the teashop perhaps comes closest in terms of theme and focus – there is another type of establishment that has received some critical literary attention, and that is the brothel. There are two articles that investigate this transgressive institution though neither of the studies draws on any spatial theory in their analyses of the space. I briefly summarise them here to give an idea of the different kinds of readings a spatial focus on a particular site or institution can provide.

Much like Rosner’s work on private spaces, Robert Scholes suggests that the brothel was an important and generative site for modernism. In his essay, ‘In the Brothel of Modernism’ (1991), Scholes states that the brothel is representative of one of the many

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 97.

crossing points between high and low in modernist art. He argues that in the modernist cultural situation, ‘the brothel offered an ideal textual space [...] where the drive for perpetual formal innovation could be combined readily with the need to represent the full degradation of modern life.’<sup>22</sup> Looking principally at Picasso’s 1907 painting, *Les Femmes d’Alger (O.J.)* and the ‘Circe’ chapter from James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, Scholes investigates the significance of prostitution in their work. And he finds that the brothel, so often structured voyeuristically in terms of male subjectivity and female objectivity, is a space that divides women writers from their male counterparts due mainly to its standing as a privileged site for male modernists that also excluded women who were not themselves prostitutes.<sup>23</sup> More controversially, Scholes presents this finding as being representative of modernism as a whole, contending that:

[M]odernism – as distinguished from modern writing and painting, or writing and painting in the modern period – has a distinctly masculinist structure that is embodied most clearly and powerfully in its images of the brothel: a structure in which extremes of formal innovation are linked with this specific cultural site, with its powerful division of sexual roles.<sup>24</sup>

Scholes cites as evidence for this conclusion the scant list of women writers who produced brothel texts, pointing out that the list of male artists and writers is ‘both long and distinguished.’<sup>25</sup> However, it hardly needs highlighting that the brothel’s strength as textual space and heuristic device is not due to its exclusivity as a site of male privilege written about only by male writers. On the contrary, this is perhaps its biggest weakness. It is only because of its exclusivity that the brothel (as textual space) supports what can only be an *a priori* assumption on Scholes’s part that modernism was a distinctly and exclusively masculine endeavour – what would his conclusions have been had he chosen the Ladies’ washroom as his focus? Much like Ronser’s study, but to a far greater degree,

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<sup>22</sup> Robert Scholes, ‘In the Brothel of Modernism’ in *In Search of James Joyce* (Illinois, University of Illinois Press, 1991), pp. 178-207 (207).

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 207.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 207.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 207.

Scholes's spatial study is impaired by the exclusivity of the space under investigation. A more balanced, inclusive, and therefore expansive view of the spatial aspects and varied character of literary modernism can be drawn only when we investigate a social space that, like the café, is both open and egalitarian.

Austin Briggs is another scholar who takes the brothel space as the subject of analysis. In his essay, 'Whorehouse/Playhouse: The Brothel as Theater in the "Circe" Chapter of *Ulysses*' (2002), Briggs, like Scholes, reads the brothel as an important productive site for literary experiment. Drawing on the long historical and cultural associations prostitution has had with plays and playhouses, players and playgoers, Briggs argues that the 'drama' of Joyce's 'Circe' chapter in *Ulysses* is set in the red-light district of Nighttown and the brothel with 'wonderful appropriateness.'<sup>26</sup> Briggs contends that Joyce uses the brothel space as a site through which he subverts the assumptions of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century realism that saw the brothel or the prostitute's body as representative loci where real life could be engaged in the raw. By insisting on the theatricality of the brothel in 'Circe' through the elaborate tableau arrangements, the stage directions, the transformational role-playing, and the dramatic form itself, Briggs argues that 'Joyce offers a contrary view with characteristic wit and insight.'<sup>27</sup>

Together, all these previous studies reveal the wealth of unique insight that can be gained via spatial investigation into modernist texts. Separately, each study has its limitations. The most general of these is that the spaces chosen, such as the study or the brothel, do not seem to be as widely representative of modernism's actors as when compared to the café. That is, the overtly gendered spaces of the brothel and the study necessarily exclude woman writers of the period, and will always therefore struggle to provide an expansive and inclusive reading of literary modernism. In comparison, the café, in narrative terms, provides a uniquely heterogeneous public space. Throughout Europe, cafés have played host to thousands of artists and writers: male and female, rich and poor. The café is a complex site that represents a space outside of the limiting spheres of home and work while often incorporating elements of both. It is a site of

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<sup>26</sup> Austin Briggs, 'Whorehouse/Playhouse: The Brothel as Theater in the "Circe" Chapter of *Ulysses*' in *Journal of Modern Literature*, XXVI, 1 (Fall 2002), pp. 42-57 (p. 56).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

revelation and performance, in which discrete characters come into direct discursive contact with one another. The café, as well as being largely open and egalitarian, is also a codified, regulated, and ritualised space. Part of my goal in each case study is to draw out these implicit themes and their respective treatment in order to make critical judgements about the writers' ideological and aesthetic predilections. As a place used and written about by writers from all echelons of literary society, the café provides many varied accounts of the experience of the space, written from different sociological perspectives, with different aesthetic goals in mind, applying different textual strategies, and producing or contesting a range of different ideologies. In the case studies that follow, conflicting mythologies of the café and their meanings are foregrounded in order to illuminate the often veiled, but always profound and ambivalent, polysemy of the café as narrative space.

### **Reading the Café: Spatial Theory**

This spatial investigation of modernist writing is underpinned by the work of a few notable theorists, principally Henri Lefebvre, Michel Foucault, and Michel de Certeau. In this section I take each scholar in turn and summarise their key spatial theories and concepts, while discussing how they might help us 'read' and interpret the space of the café in literary modernism. But, before we get into their specific theoretical models, it is important first to briefly define two fundamental concepts found in geographical and spatial theory that will help take us forward: *space* and *place*. Basic components of the everyday world, these two seemingly unremarkable words are charged and expressive in the context of spatial studies. For the majority of geographical and spatial theorists 'space' is metaphorical rather than material. It indicates a sense of movement, of history, of becoming, and often implies creative, imaginative, symbolic, or perceived experience and associations. The theorist Yi Fu Tuan defines 'space' as 'freedom.'<sup>28</sup> 'Place', on the other hand, is often understood to imply a static sense of location, of being, or of

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<sup>28</sup> Yi Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), p. 3.

dwelling. 'Place' is grounded, and often refers to the material or immutable elements of a location: geographical co-ordinates, a fixed address, bricks and mortar, etcetera. 'Place', Tuan says, 'is security.'<sup>29</sup> As we move through the discussion of each theorist here, my interpretation and analytical application of the terms 'space' and 'place' will become more precisely determined.

### Henri Lefebvre: Social Space

In his 1974 *The Production of Space* Henri Lefebvre introduced his concept of 'social space', which essentially posits that space is socially produced, or constructed. His thesis: '(social) space is a (social) product' contends that humans create (through social practices) the spaces in which they make their lives.<sup>30</sup> In contrast to the common historical understanding of space as being a geometrically defined empty area or vacuum merely *containing* objects and practices, Lefebvre's insight is that space is saturated with signifiers of its 'produced' or 'constructed' nature. '[S]pace is never empty', he says, 'it always embodies a meaning.'<sup>31</sup>

It is this fundamental understanding of social space as a cipher (or text) to be decoded that my thesis takes to modernist literature and to the writing (and 'reading') of the café. However, I should stress here that I am taking Lefebvre's methods entirely out of the context for which he initially intended. His objectives are specifically socio-political in nature with the purpose of furnishing a '*science of space*' that would 'give rise to a *knowledge of space*.'<sup>32</sup> Lefebvre explicitly rejects the use of literature as a way into the formal analysis of social space. Although 'literary authors', he says, 'have written much of relevance, especially descriptions of places and sites', he wonders 'what criteria would make certain texts more relevant than others?'<sup>33</sup> For Lefebvre, the problem for literature is one of uncertain and unscientific theoretical parameters: 'any search for

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>30</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* [1974] (trans.) Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 26; p. 71 [hereafter *PS*].

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 154.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 7, [emphasis in original].

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

space in literary texts will find it everywhere and in every guise: enclosed, described, projected, dreamt of, speculated about.’<sup>34</sup> Literature, in other words, will supply ‘inventories of what *exists* in space, or even generate a *discourse on* space,’ but it will never give rise to a knowledge of ‘real’ social space.<sup>35</sup> He warns that ‘[w]hen codes worked up from literary texts are applied to spaces – to urban spaces, say – we remain, as may easily be shown, on the purely descriptive level.’<sup>36</sup> This point is key for my thesis. For my project is a literary one, and my explicit aim is *to describe* the hitherto unexamined space of the café *in* literature, so Lefebvre’s cautions helpfully define my application of his method to the study of these literary cafés. Now, I will briefly summarise Lefebvre’s view of space and then describe three aspects of his approach to the spatial analysis of space that I employ.

For Lefebvre, space is an overtly political concept. He explains:

Space has been shaped and moulded from historical and natural elements, but this had been a political process. Space is political and ideological. It is a product literally filled with ideologies. There is an ideology of space. Why? Because space, which seems homogenous, which seems to be completely objective in its pure form [...] is a social product. The production of space can be likened to the production of any given particular type of merchandise.<sup>37</sup>

Lefebvre uses the example of religion to demonstrate the ideological aspects of space. He asks ‘[w]hat is an ideology without a space to which it refers, a space which it describes, whose vocabulary and links it makes use of, and whose code it embodies?’<sup>38</sup> His answer is that without the physical site of the church or temple the ideology disappears: ‘[w]hat would remain of the Church if there were no churches?’ His point is that ideology achieves longevity and consistency through its intervention in social space and its

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., pp. 14-15.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>37</sup> Henri Lefebvre, ‘Reflections on the Politics of Space’, in *Antipode*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (May 1976), pp. 30-37 (p. 31).

<sup>38</sup> *PS*, p. 44.

production. When thinking about the literary representation (or construction) of the café, it is worthwhile to be mindful of the ways in which an author's aesthetic project will leave traces of such ideological predilections in their rendering of the space. I refer to this construction of ideology in my chapter on Hemingway where I posit that he imbues his representations of cafés with his own moral code.

A significant feature of Lefebvre's conception of social space is that it is inherently composite and complex, mingling heterogeneous space together in one physical location. This means that a specific site like the Café du Dôme in Paris, for instance, can be analysed into many different social spaces with quite distinct associated meanings: a small business supporting the livelihood of a family; a place of gainful employment for a waiter; the centre of neighbourhood life; a place to buy refreshment; a meeting place; a signifier of a particular group identity. Lefebvre's method also reveals the apparent solidity and immobility of the place to be 'replaced by an image of a complex of mobilities, a nexus of in and out conduits.'<sup>39</sup> He uses the example of a house 'permeated from every direction by streams of energy which run in and out of it by every imaginable route: water, gas, electricity, telephone lines, radio and televisions signals, and so on.'<sup>40</sup> Such spaces connect and intertwine:

*Social spaces interpenetrate one another and/or superimpose themselves upon one another. They are not things, which have mutually limiting boundaries [...] Visible boundaries, such as walls or enclosures in general, give rise for their part to an appearance of separation between spaces where in fact what exists is an ambiguous continuity. The space of a room, bedroom, house or garden may be cut off in a sense from social space by barriers and walls, by all the signs of private property, yet still remain fundamentally part of that space.*<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., pp. 86-87.

In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre introduces three aspects of social space that provide a way into this complexity, and they are of particular utility for my analysis of the café.

The first of Lefebvre's conceptual triad is *Spatial Practice*, which refers to the multiple activities or *practices* that form spaces in society.<sup>42</sup> Embracing features of production and reproduction, it also refers to the spatial actions of each individual in society and their relation to that specific space. Spatial practice, Lefebvre says, 'embodies a close association, within perceived space, between daily reality (daily routine) and urban reality (the routes and networks which link up the places set aside for work, 'private' life and leisure).<sup>43</sup> Broadly, then, we might say that this first concept refers to what people do in space. Essentially, Lefebvre indicates that 'the spatial practice of a society is revealed through the deciphering of its space.'<sup>44</sup> Using this fundamental idea, my project aims to reveal modernist artistic preoccupations, issues, and complexities, through readings of writers' *representations* of spatial practices, that is, how the café is perceived and used in literature. And, despite Lefebvre's warning about literature's shortcomings in the analysis of society's spaces, my readings of literary space will go some way to providing informed speculations as to the spatial practices of the period.

Lefebvre's second conceptual notion is that of *Representations of Space*, which is linked to official relations of production and order. Lefebvre explains that this is space as conceptualised by 'scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers'.<sup>45</sup> This is the dominant space in any society, and it concerns the 'official' creation (or production) of space via, for example, state-sponsored projects. Through the drawing up of plans, maps, and diagrams, 'representations of space' play a part in social and political practice by modifying the spatial quality or meaning of a city or landscape according to certain preconceived ideologies. The construction of, say, a palace or a national monument works towards what Lefebvre calls a 'system of verbal (and therefore intellectually worked out) signs.'<sup>46</sup> Such spaces are 'designed specifically to signify and

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

'be' readable.'<sup>47</sup> He gives the visual example of the vertical lines of architectural monumentalism, which, when contrasted with horizontal lines, imply 'hauteur.' Lefebvre argues that these spaces' impression of intelligibility conceals far more than they reveal. He says, although officially 'the vertical' intends to express 'collective will and collective thought', it actually hides what it really is – 'namely arrogance, the will to power, a display of military and police-like machismo, a reference to the phallus and a spatial analogue of masculine brutality.'<sup>48</sup> This concept essentially relates to the ideological character of the construction of social space, and since all novels and stories have some kind of purpose (aesthetic, moral, political, etcetera.), Lefebvre's 'representations of space' helps one to be mindful of the inherently ideological processes involved in the rendering of literary space.

However, the spatial descriptions of the writers I explore here might be best understood as representations of *representations of space*. I am aware of course that novelists are not geographers, and that the literary depiction of space is more than just a mimetic exercise. That is, I recognise that all descriptions of café space will be necessarily ekphrastic and far from cartographically exhaustive or exact since all spatio-visual details are filtered through a writer's specific aesthetic concerns and preoccupations. Nevertheless, despite the fact that writers are the literary 'planners' and 'architects' of the spaces they describe, I use the concept of Lefebvrian 'representations of space' when referring to what I judge to be an accurate mimetic rendering of a particular social space, which represents the writer's best attempt at depicting the actual material spaces of modernity. This judgement will often be based upon corroborating historical evidence external to the story or text being analysed.

The final aspect of Lefebvre's triad of social space is *Representational Spaces*, which concerns space as 'directly *lived* through its associated images and symbols', and is therefore the space of inhabitants and users.<sup>49</sup> Lefebvre associates 'representational spaces' with artists, writers, and philosophers, and to 'the clandestine or underground of

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

social life'.<sup>50</sup> In contrast to 'representations of space' that have a practical and substantial impact upon the production of space in terms of architectural projects embedded in an ideological context, 'the only products of representational spaces', says Lefebvre, 'are symbolic works.'<sup>51</sup> These works 'are often unique' and can set in train 'aesthetic' trends that provoke a series of manifestations and incursions into the imaginary that after a time 'run out of steam.'<sup>52</sup> In terms of the sociological history of space, the cafés of Paris can be understood as 'representational spaces' that have over the years held symbolic value for artists and writers, and been influential in the genesis and cultivation of aesthetic movements and trends in the arts and society. I think also by 'unique works' Lefebvre means artistic productions such as novels, paintings, and plays, those cultural artefacts that capture the imagination and imbue sites with symbolic associations.

In this thesis, I understand 'representational spaces' to be the culmination of a writer's aesthetic, ideological, and political conception of space made manifest through their spatial descriptions. 'Representational spaces' are artistic responses to the material spaces of modernity; as such, they are generally unique to the writer and offer us readers a particular vision of culture and society as they perceived it or wanted it to be. Such conclusions are made by paying attention to the stylistically emphasised spatial features of a café as well as to those aspects that go unremarked or ignored. It is when description of café space goes beyond the plainly mimetic exercise of depicting space that the Lefebvorean representational space is invoked or established.

### Michel Foucault: Space and Power

If Lefebvre's work reveals that space is socially produced, Michel Foucault's work on power and discourse uncovers the power structures involved and connects them to the material structures (e.g. buildings) in society. For Foucault, space *is* power, and power is always located somewhere within society. As such, Foucault admitted in the course of an

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

interview that '[g]eography must indeed lie at the heart of my concerns.'<sup>53</sup> His general conclusions on the subject reveal an understanding of space analogous to Lefebvrian 'social space.' Foucault says:

A whole history remains to be written of spaces – which would at the same time be the history of powers (both these terms in the plural) – from the great strategies of geo-politics to the little tactics of the habitat, institutional architecture from the classroom to the design of hospitals, passing via economic and political installations. It is surprising how long the problem of space took to emerge as a historico-political problem. Space used either to be either dismissed as belonging to 'nature' [...] or else it was conceived as the residential site or field of expansion of peoples, of a culture, a language or a State [...] Anchorage in a space is an economic-political form which needs to be studied in detail.<sup>54</sup>

In fact, Foucault's theory of spatiality in general shares much with Lefebvre's thinking: in that space is inherently social, and can be traced historically; it is political in nature; and occurs in many different forms – body, room, house, institution etcetera.

Much like Lefebvre's view of the 'constructedness' of social space, for example, Foucault drew attention to the fundamental distinction between nature and culture, and the inevitable constructedness of apparently natural aspects of human experience. He demonstrated how the human body might be involuntarily subjected to systems of power through discourse. His work on the spatial organisation of power in prisons and the architecture of schools, for example, is emblematic. Foucault's work often uses spatial metaphors to 'grasp precisely the point at which discourses are transformed in, through and on the basis of relations of power'.<sup>55</sup> In this sense, he traces how spatial metaphors and material spaces interact on the basis of relations of power. The panopticon in

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<sup>53</sup> Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977* (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1980, p. 77.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 149.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 69-70.

*Discipline and Punish* is a prime example of a structure that is both a material presence and a trope (or metaphor) for the gaze of disciplinary power in modern societies.<sup>56</sup>

In my study of the literary space of the café, Foucault's work helps to uncover the often subtle and sometimes explicit impositions of power in depictions of space. As mentioned in relation to Lefebvre's 'representations of space' and 'representational spaces', in writing a story or novel, writers are the architects and creators of a world – regardless of their commitment to rendering reality. In this sense, Foucault's work warns us to be mindful of the implicit imposition of power that pervades a literary text – the author is in control and 'dictates' the nature of the representation. In my opening chapter on Hemingway for example, we often find that his descriptions of cafés make little or no attempt to capture the fundamental qualities of a particular place, choosing instead to present the café in his own image, as it were. Such portrayals betray a will to power and a desire to control a space. My chapter on Rhys, on the other hand, portrays cafés in a way that emphasises the material elements of a café that serve as extensions of patriarchal power. Just as the panopticon functions as a specular instrument of discipline and control, the infinitely reflecting mirrors of the café keep Rhys's lone women café habitués exposed and vulnerable. Of course, both Hemingway and Rhys are 'controlling' and 'ordering' space but they do so with different formal strategies and different aesthetic goals.

#### Michel de Certeau – Spatial Stories

In *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), Michel de Certeau, like Foucault, takes power as his subject, or rather, outlines a theory of how people contest and reclaim autonomy from various forms of power encountered in their daily lives. De Certeau draws upon Foucault's analysis in *Discipline and Punish* of the diffuse disciplinary powers that seep osmotically through society, producing a generalised and pervasive subjugation. But rather than focussing on the 'productive apparatus' that produces the discipline (prisons, hospitals, schools, etcetera), de Certeau argues that '[i]f it is true that the grid of

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<sup>56</sup> See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (trans.) Alan Sheridan (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), pp. 195-228.

“discipline” is everywhere [...] it is all the more urgent to discover how an entire society resists being reduced to it’.<sup>57</sup> His analysis looks not to grand political strategies or revolutionary projects, but to the Foucauldian ‘little tactics of habitat’<sup>58</sup> on the dominated subject’s side – the practices of everyday life of the ordinary individual. And it is through these ‘ways of operating’, he argues, that users of space are able to ‘reappropriate the space organized by sociocultural production.’<sup>59</sup>

My study of the café principally draws on two aspects of De Certeau’s work. The first is his insistence upon the relationships of power that suffuse people’s habitation and use of space, which extends Foucault’s ideas of power, space, and history. And the second is his notion of ‘spatial stories’, which is helpful in connecting the material space of the café with the linguistic form of their representations in modernist narratives. The concept ‘spatial stories’ brings language and practice together by arguing that ‘[e]very story is a travel story – a spatial practice’, and that all stories ‘traverse and organize places; they select and link them together; they make sentences and itineraries out of them.’<sup>60</sup> De Certeau says ‘narrative structures have the status of spatial syntaxes.’<sup>61</sup> In this sense, his spatial stories connect Lefebvre’s conception of social space with the formal practices of the literary text.

At the outset of *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau introduces two corresponding sets of distinctions that guide his approach to the concept of spatial stories: a demarcation between ‘space’ and ‘place’; and a related division between narrative discourses he labels ‘tours’ and ‘maps’.<sup>62</sup> For de Certeau, in line with the distinctions I outlined above, a place ‘implies an indication of stability’ and is governed by the law of the ‘proper’, which is where elements are situated in their own ‘proper’ and distinct locations.<sup>63</sup> In a place, ‘elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence [which]

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<sup>57</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1984), p. xiv [hereafter *PE*].

<sup>58</sup> Foucault (1980) quoted above. See fn. 54.

<sup>59</sup> *PE*, p. xiv.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

thus excludes the possibility of two things being in the same location (*place*).<sup>64</sup> De Certeau's concept of the 'proper' also relates to the official and legitimised use to which a place or activity belongs. A space, however, is based not upon stability but on vectors of direction, movement, and velocity:

Space is composed of intersections of mobile elements. It is in a sense actuated by the ensemble movements deployed within it. Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities.<sup>65</sup>

Movements and actions underlie the creation or 'actualisation' of space. 'Space', writes de Certeau, 'is a practiced place.'<sup>66</sup> He likens space to 'the word when it is spoken', that is, when it is actualised and 'transformed into a term dependent upon many different conventions' as distinct from its 'proper' meaning in the dictionary. De Certeau uses the example of a city street 'geometrically defined by urban planning' (its proper or official meaning or function) that is then 'transformed into a space by walkers' in much the same way that 'an act of reading is the space produced by the practice of a particular place: a written text, i.e. a place constituted by a system of signs.'<sup>67</sup>

For de Certeau, the opposition between space and place refers to two different sorts of determinations in stories. For my study, these determinations are useful for analysing exactly *how* a café might be rendered textually, what effects these differing stylistic forms might produce, and how we might interpret them. The first concept, 'place', determines a focus on fixity: what he calls 'the *being-there* of something dead', so that an inert object serves as the foundation of place. While, the second concept, 'space', is determined by what de Certeau calls '*operations*' attributable to the actions of 'historical *subjects*'. He says, 'a movement always seems to condition the production of space and to associate it with a history.'<sup>68</sup> De Certeau is careful to suggest that 'space'

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 117.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 117.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 117.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., P. 117.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 118 [emphasis in original].

and ‘place’ are not unchanging binary terms. ‘[S]tories’, he says, ‘carry out a labor that constantly transforms places into spaces or spaces into places.’<sup>69</sup>

From this differentiation between space and place, de Certeau contends that it would be possible to construct a typology of the ways in which stories enact either an ‘identification of places’ or an ‘actualization of spaces.’<sup>70</sup> The identification of place can be read in narratives in which we witness ‘the putting in place of an immobile and stone-like order (in it, nothing moves except discourse itself, which, like a camera panning over a scene, moves over the whole panorama)’.<sup>71</sup> Conversely, the actualization of space, to employ the same cinematic analogy, involves the movement of the camera/observer in and through a site or situation. These narrative features rely on opposing modes of discourse that de Certeau labels the ‘map’ and the ‘tour’. ‘Map’ discourse is represented by the fixed camera/narrator/cartographer and the identification of place, whereas the ‘tour’ is an experiential discourse associated with the actualization of space. Like cartographic representations, map discourses order precisely where elements or features occur; within them the complexity of social space is constrained by a visual discourse (*seeing*) that presents a ‘tableau’ or ‘knowledge of an order of places’.<sup>72</sup> In my study, I associate such narratives with the explicit establishment of power in that they capture and fix space, transforming what is open, undetermined, and free into the immobility of a known and visually perceived place. Such perspectival forms make gods out of the spectator (narrator) who becomes the person upon whom the whole world converges. Tour discourses on the other hand refuse to present visual tableaux and are instead rooted in ‘spatialising actions’ (*going*) that organise movements. In such tour discourses, a narrator emphasises the relativism of subject positions and processes – power in such narratives is diffuse. The difference is between a discourse that depicts where elements are located (there is ... on the left ... one mile to the west lies), and one that is more experiential, describing space through a set of organising actions ‘(“you enter, you go across, you turn...”)’.<sup>73</sup> Again, as with place and space, de Certeau is keen to stress the

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 118.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 118.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 118.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 119.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 119.

mutability of these discourses and that most narratives combine elements of both map and tour.

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Following a brief overview of the history of the literary café, the chapter on Wyndham Lewis investigates the status of the café as a Lefebvrian representational space that stands as both an image of the degradation and impotence of early twentieth-century café society and as the nucleus of its salvation. Lewis conceives of the Montparnassian café society as over-run with crowds of fakers, the well-to-do dressing up (or, rather, dressing 'down') and imitating the lives and art of nineteenth-century bohemia. But Lewis also understands the café to be a place of innovation and revolution; and in keeping with the café's seventeenth- and eighteenth-century coffeehouse legacy as representative of the public sphere – arenas for the open debate of any and all subjects – it is in the café that Lewis chooses to present heated arguments about Art, Life, the state of society, and its rescue. Lewis's presentation of the café is typical of his dialectical thinking and aesthetic strategy in general. His paradoxical spatial conception proffers a vision of the possible reclamation and revivification of culture whilst simultaneously acknowledging the improbability of such a utopian endeavour. Lewis is also shown to be a distinctively spatial thinker. With reference to de Certeau's theory of map and tour discourses, the energy and power of Lewis's dialectical aesthetic is found exhibited throughout his stylistic representations of space.

The second case study, on Hemingway, explores the café as an ideological apparatus. Through my readings of Hemingway's unique representation of the space, I posit a spatial dimension to the critical paradigm known to scholars as the 'Hemingway code', which basically consists of standards and forms of conduct that Hemingway's characters are said to operate within. I propose that Hemingway's cafés function in a similar way; they too can be considered moral, often instantiating and reflecting his own moral system. As one might expect with any system of values or principles of conduct, all cafés (like all behaviours) are measured against an ideal image of 'goodness'. For Hemingway, I argue, this exemplary image is the café known as the 'Clean Well-Lighted

Place' with its biblical overtones. I also read the constancy of Hemingway's spatial ideology as a kind of imperialist imposition – as a Foucauldian expression of power and authority. Universalising and utopian, Hemingway's ideology travels; through his café representations, his moral code transcends and effaces the particularities of cultural difference and geographical location in order to impose control. Regardless of where in the world a café may be, they are always distinctively Hemingwayesque rather than, say, French or Spanish. In short, Hemingway values his ideologically conceived 'space' over the mimetic specificity of 'place.'

The chapter on Jean Rhys looks at the related consequences of the café as an ideologically codified and regulated space. Like Hemingway's cafés, Rhys's cafés are ideologically loaded except that the ideologies are not hers. Despite there being no laws or regulations prohibiting women from entering and sitting alone in the cafés of Paris, their appearance in some quarters was still seen as disagreeable. The fact that Rhys draws lone female characters and ushers them into many a drab café, necessarily means that she describes and depicts acts that are socially awkward and potentially transgressive. Rhys's Dominican background, her hyphenated position between metropolitan and colonial spheres, is also shown to be a crucial part of her aesthetic as I discuss a café scene in *Good Morning, Midnight* (a novel not usually considered in a post-colonial context) that includes a detailed analysis of the café's name and menu, focussing on the significance of labels and the power implicit in the process of naming. This focus concludes that Rhys destabilises essentialist notions of national and cultural identity, which exposes and thus undermines various power structures. Overall, Rhys's representations of the café as a regulated, codified, and gendered space reveal the supposed emancipatory life of twentieth-century bohemia to be a myth, serving only to protect a culture of male privilege.

The history of bohemia and its associations with café society serves as an important background to this thesis in the sense that the writers I discuss would have been well aware of the artistic café society that preceded their time in Paris – in many ways it was partly this legacy that drew them to the cafés in the first place. What follows is a brief history of the café that attempts to acquaint the reader with some salient aspects of the character and symbolism passed down to modernist writers through generations of

café society. This concise chronicle will also help further contextualise Lewis's, Hemingway's, and Rhys's responses to and representations of the material spaces of modernity.

## *A History of the Literary Café*

**café** (‘kaefei, formerly ll kafe). Also vulgarly or jocularly pronounced (keif) or (kaef), and written in the form of *café*; cf. CAFF. [Fr. *café* coffee, coffee-house.]

1. A coffee-house, a restaurant; strictly a French term, but in the late 19<sup>th</sup> c. introduced into the English-speaking countries for the name of a class of restaurant.

*(The Oxford English Dictionary)*

The café has its origins in the seventeenth century with the arrival of coffee and its trade in Europe. The first coffeehouses established themselves in the mercantile society of London in the 1650s. In these institutions sociality flourished and they became synonymous with trade, news, writing, and conversation. English coffeehouses were typically masculine spaces devoted to the dissemination of gossip and information through newspapers and talk, and to business activities such as insurance.<sup>1</sup> This exclusive model soon spread throughout Europe but was not in the end the dominant template. The first successful coffeehouse in Paris was the Café Procope, established in 1676 by the Sicilian, Francesco Procopio dei Coltelli.<sup>2</sup> Seeking a way to differentiate his operation from the ordinary wine-shop or cabaret, he furnished the café with ‘tapestry, large peers of glass [mirrors], pictures, marble tables, branches for candles, and other ornaments’.<sup>3</sup> Along with coffee he also sold chocolate, perfumes, preserves, candied fruit, maraschino, *crème de roses*, *limonades*, fruit wine, *eaux de franchipanes* and ices (a novelty he brought from Italy). Such opulence and abundance attracted a higher status clientele and instituted the high-class café model – a hybrid between tavern, restaurant, and

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<sup>1</sup> Markman Ellis, *The Coffee-House: A Cultural History* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2004), pp. 178-184.

<sup>2</sup> Situated initially on the Rue de Tornon, the Procope moved in 1686 to the Rue des Fossés-Saint Germain where it still trades.

<sup>3</sup> Jean de La Roque, *Voyage to Arabia the Happy* (London: G. Strahan and R. Williamson, 1726), p. 289.

coffeehouse – that would prosper throughout Continental Europe. The Procope’s enterprise was also rewarded with luck, when in 1689 the Comédie Française opened on the far side of the street. The café soon filled with actors and fashionable theatre-goers, and thus the first literary café was established. In 1721, Baron Montesquieu published his *Persian Letters*, imaginary letters of a Persian visitor to France, which give a sense of the character of café life at the Procope. The Parisians, he wrote, liked to go to cafés to play chess or to hear the latest news. He found that the consumption of coffee made those who drank it ‘witty’, but was shocked at the puerilities that these ‘geniuses’ amused themselves with. ‘For example’, he says, ‘when I arrived in Paris, I found them warm to dispute over [...] an old Greek poet, whose birthplace and time of dying no one has known for two thousand years.’<sup>4</sup>

Entrepreneurs in Paris were not slow to imitate the Procope. By the 1750s, the coffeehouse was in decline in London but the café society of Paris was still young and flourishing. Numbering around 3,000 cafés in 1789, Paris saw an explosion in the quantity of establishments: 4,500 by the 1840s, 22,000 in 1870, and by the late 1880s an official census recorded that Paris had 30,000 cafés. During the *fin de siècle* and *belle époque*, the number of cafés remained at around 30,000 to 33,000.<sup>5</sup> As well as increasing in number, cafés also increased in variety. Not all the cafés were as ostentatiously rich and luxurious as the Procope. Many were former wine-shops furnished to look like richer cafés, with gaudy imitation marble tables, cheap glass and gilding. Many of these emporia were called ‘brasseries’ since they sold beer, which came from copper brewing vats.<sup>6</sup> Robert L. Herbert informs us that beer was not particularly popular in Paris before 1848 because bourgeois ‘Parisians associated it with peasants and small-town folk.’<sup>7</sup> It was perhaps this association that attracted the more unconventional crowd to the brasseries. One such place was the Brasserie des Martyrs, a noisy and smoky café in Montparnasse, which was a café for rebels and outsiders, painters, writers, and failures.

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<sup>4</sup> Baron Charles de Montesquieu, ‘Letter XXXVI’ *Persian Letters* (Los Angeles: Indo-European Publishing, 2010), pp. 44-45.

<sup>5</sup> W. Scott Haine, *The World of the Paris Café: Sociability Among the French Working Class, 1789-1914* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), pp. 3-4.

<sup>6</sup> The French ‘brasser’ means ‘to brew’.

<sup>7</sup> Robert L. Herbert, *Impressionism: Art, Leisure, and Parisian Society* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 66.

From the 1830s, it enjoyed the patronage of unconventional figures like Charles Baudelaire, Gustave Courbet, Claude Monet, and Henry Murger. It was from the cafés of these times that the mythos of bohemian café society originated.

Bohemia in the French imagination was associated with outsiders living apart from conventional bourgeois society, and untroubled by its disapproval.<sup>8</sup> In 1848, Murger established himself as the unofficial publicist of *la Bohème* with his novel, *Scènes de la Bohème* (*Bohemians of the Latin Quarter* in the English translation), which is filled with sanguine tales of honour and high-spiritedness exhibited by young artists in the face of poverty, hunger, and homelessness. The novel romanticises the habitués of the Café Momus and ‘all those who, driven by an unstinting sense of calling, enter into art with no other means of existence than art itself.’<sup>9</sup> Cafés were central to their impoverished existence. With the support of a sympathetic café patron, the impecunious crowd of bohemian artists would sit in the second floor rooms of the Café Momus discussing art and philosophy from breakfast till midnight, and their only expenditure might be one cup of coffee for the day. Murger’s minor reputation as a writer in bohemian circles suddenly bloomed into widespread fame when his stories were turned into a play under the longer title *La Scènes de la Vie de Bohème*.<sup>10</sup> An immediate success with audiences and critics, it paved the way for a flood of articles about bohemia – what it was, where it was, and who was a part of it – and effectively began the myth of bohemia that led to people going in search of it. Throughout the years bohemian cafés like the Brasserie increasingly became resorts for sightseers and journalists; places where the bourgeoisie might enjoy enticing glimpses of a forbidden lifestyle.

Soon after the revolution of 1848, Paris began to express its nascent bourgeois prosperity when Napoleon III instituted a grand scheme to transform the city into a spectacular endorsement of his power and success as emperor. With the appointment of

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<sup>8</sup> For more on bohemian life and culture see Jerrold Seigel, *Bohemian Paris: Culture, Politics, and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Life, 1830-1930* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); Elizabeth Wilson, *Bohemians: The Glamorous Outcasts* (New York: Tauris Parke Paperbacks, 2003); Peter Brooker, *Bohemia in London: The Social Scene of Early Modernism* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

<sup>9</sup> Henry Murger, *The Bohemians of the Latin Quarter* (trans.) Ellen Marriage and John Selwyn (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), p. xxiii.

<sup>10</sup> For more on Murger’s impact, see Robert Baldick, *The First Bohemian: The Life of Henry Murger* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1961).

Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann in 1853, the geography of the city was changed utterly. The old medieval streets, squalid tenements, and open sewers were demolished and replaced by grand boulevards, avenues, opulent buildings, public parks, and an extended sewer system. A great transformation in the culture and lifestyles of all classes was effected. Many artists documented the change, Baudelaire's 'The Swan' famously lamented: '[t]he old Paris is gone (the form a city takes / More quickly shifts, alas, than does the mortal heart).<sup>11</sup> In its creation of luxurious apartments and open spaces, the demolition also steadily decreased the quantity and quality of housing available to the workers of Paris. The café was becoming more and more integral to everyday life and existence. Some commentators bemoaned the idea that domesticity had shifted from the home to the street. In 1860, the Goncourt Brothers noted that:

Social life is beginning to undergo a great change. I can see women, children, husbands and wives, whole families in the café. The home is dying. Life is threatening to become public.<sup>12</sup>

Development in the name of consumption and progress would inevitably win out. The new uniform streets connected the centre of Paris to its outlying districts and beyond, permitting higher volumes of carriage traffic and thus more trade and substantially more wealth.<sup>13</sup> The *Exposition Universelle* of 1867 drew more tourists and income, and would continue to do so as visitors reported their astonishment at a city so dramatically changed.

This increased wealth was manifest on the city's streets. Haussmann's vast extension of gas lighting caused a sensation. Paris could now be enjoyed at night: the *Grands Boulevards* were bejewelled with resplendently lit cafés and glittering department stores, earning Paris the title, *la ville lumière*. On the *terrasses* of the boulevard cafés the *haut monde* would sit watching itself pass by. At fashionable establishments like Tortoni's, the Café de la Paix, the Café de la Régence, and the Café Riche, aristocrats,

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<sup>11</sup> Charles Baudelaire, 'The Swan' in *The Flowers of Evil* (trans.) James McGowan (London: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 175.

<sup>12</sup> Edmond and Jules De Goncourt, *Pages from the Goncourt Journal* (ed. and trans.) Robert Baldick (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 53.

<sup>13</sup> For a discussion of Paris's reconstruction in relation to the arts, see Herbert, pp. 1-32.

diplomats, and the cultivated bourgeois would join artists and writers like the Goncourts, Honoré de Balzac, Alexandre Dumas, and Édouard Manet. Edward King, in his impressions of Paris published after the fair of 1867, insisted that '[t]he huge Paris world centres twice, thrice daily; it is at the café; it gossips at the café; it intrigues at the café; it plots, it dreams, it suffers, it hopes, at the café.'<sup>14</sup>

As the city's prosperity grew during the Second Empire, spending on the arts increased; painting had become recognised as a source of national prestige and was firmly controlled by the academies of the state. Right up until the end of the nineteenth century the *École des Beaux Arts* was a stifling presence as the only legitimate means of the public exhibition of art. Artists that took exception to the strict rules of taste passed down by the academy moved away from the more opulent cafés that seemed to represent bourgeois inclinations. Manet, for instance, would go looking for models in more squalid parts of the city that no habitué of Tortinis would ever consider setting foot in. He often visited the Café Molière, a popular rendezvous for a circle of progressive artists like Edgar Degas and James MacNeil Whistler (who was said to carry a copy of Murger's *Vie de Bohème* wherever he went).<sup>15</sup>

Manet emerged as a leader of a new modern style that answered Baudelaire's challenge to artists to put aside mythology and history and look to modern life and the city for inspiration.<sup>16</sup> It was following the controversial showing of Manet's *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe* (1862-1863) at the *Salon des Refusés* exhibition that a small group of like-minded artists, accepting Baudelaire's sentiments about the 'heroism of modern life,'<sup>17</sup> began to congregate at the Café Guerbois on the Rue des Batignolles in Montmartre. Claude Monet, Alfred Sisley, Camille Pissarro, and Paul Cézanne would often venture in from the country. Degas and Pierre-Auguste Renoir, who lived in the city, were regulars. As was Émile Zola, a fervent supporter of Manet's work – especially his *Dejeuner*

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<sup>14</sup> Edward King, *My Paris, French Character Sketches* (Boston: Loring, 1868), p. 113.

<sup>15</sup> Horace Gregory, *The World of James MacNeil Whistler* (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1959), p. 55.

<sup>16</sup> Charles Baudelaire, 'On the Heroism of Modern Life' from 'the *Salon* of 1846' in *Selected Writings on Art and Literature* (London: Penguin, 2006), pp. 47-107.

<sup>17</sup> For more on the importance and reception of Manet's *Dejeuner sur l'herbe* see Herbert, pp. 170-177.

painting.<sup>18</sup> Other writers like Louis Edmond Duranty, and Stéphane Mallarmé would also attend. Manet celebrated the café in a lithograph entitled *Interior au Café Guerbois* in 1869, while Zola described the café (albeit with a different name) in his 1886 novel, *His Masterpiece*:

The Café Baudequin was situated on the Boulevard des Batignolles, at the corner of the Rue Darcet. Without the least why or wherefore, it had been selected by the band as their meeting-place [...] They met there regularly on Sunday nights; and on Thursday afternoons, at about five o'clock, those who were then at liberty had made it a habit to look in for a moment.<sup>19</sup>

Manet and his followers came to the Café Guerbois because they were interested in discussing art and the technical language of painting, rather than the Bohemian gestures of the Brasserie as exemplified by Murger. Remembering his time at the Guerbois fondly, Monet wrote of the stimulating café conversations:

Nothing could be more interesting than these *causeries* with their perpetual clash of opinions. They kept our wits sharpened; they encouraged us with stores of enthusiasm that for weeks and weeks kept us up until the final shaping of the idea was accomplished. From them we emerged tempered more highly, with a firmer will, with our thoughts clearer and more distinct.<sup>20</sup>

The café was fundamental to the art of the time; Roger Shattuck has stated that Impressionism was 'the first artistic movement entirely organised in cafés.'<sup>21</sup> The comradeship of the Café Guerbois had been reflected by the willingness of the Impressionists to paint side by side, often painting portraits of each other. They discussed

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<sup>18</sup> Zola undertook to praise Manet's work in long article published in the *Revue du XIX e siècle* of January 1, 1867.

<sup>19</sup> Émile Zola, *His Masterpiece* (trans.) Ernest Alfred Vizetelly (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1986), p. 65.

<sup>20</sup> Claude Monet quoted in John Rewald, *History of Impressionism* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1946), p. 146.

<sup>21</sup> Roger Shattuck, *The Banquet Years: The Origins of the Avant-Garde in France 1885 to World War I* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969), p. 11.

technique, imparted knowledge, and inspired each other. The group of artists and writers that spent time with each other at the Guerbois had set a precedent for artistic café life that would be eagerly sought out for years to come.

By the late 1870s, many of the former patrons of the Guerbois had switched allegiances to the Café de la Nouvelle Athènes in Montmartre. The café space served again as an inspirational site for discussion and a source of art. In 1876, Degas produced *L’Absinthe*, a melancholic painting that captures the alienation and ennui of modern life with its depiction of two forlorn habitués (his friend, the artist, Marcellin Desboutin; and the actress Ellen Andrée) sitting in the Nouvelle Athènes staring blankly out (*Fig. 6*). Because of its artistic patrons, like the Guerbois, the café gained in reputation. It was to the Nouvelle Athènes that the young Irishman George Moore went seeking the company of Manet and the famous group of artists that gathered there. On his arrival in Paris, he recalled in *Vale* (1914):

I felt that my business was the discovery of a café where I could pass the evening –nothing to me seemed more essential than that. [...]

In the Middle Ages young men went searching for the Grail; to-day the café is the quest of a young man in search of artistic education.<sup>22</sup>

Manet became good friends with Moore, and would paint his portrait against the background of the café.<sup>23</sup> In his *Confessions of a Young Man* (1886), a book that introduced his English contemporaries to his version of *fin de siècle* Decadence, Moore included a panegyric to the importance of the Nouvelle Athènes in his creative life:

I did not go to either Oxford or Cambridge, but I went to the ‘Nouvelle Athènes’. What is the ‘Nouvelle Athènes’? He who would know anything of my life must

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<sup>22</sup> George Moore, *Vale*, (New York: D. Appleton, 1914), p. 140.

<sup>23</sup> For a reproduction of this sketch see Steve Bradshaw, *Café Society: Bohemian Life from Swift to Bob Dylan* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1978), p. 87.

know something of the academy of the fine arts. Not the official stupidity you read of in the daily papers, but the real French academy, the *café*.<sup>24</sup>

Moore goes on to insist that ‘though unacknowledged, though unknown, the influence of the “Nouvelle Athènes” is inveterate in the artistic thought of the nineteenth century.’<sup>25</sup> Today, of course, the role of the *café* in French artistic and intellectual life is proverbial. Moore’s memoir can be understood alongside Murger’s *La Vie de Bohème* as one of the formative antecedents of the mythology of Parisian *café* culture.

A key figure whose life served as a model for bohemian existence was the poet Paul Verlaine. Verlaine was influenced by Baudelaire’s poetry and his fascination with sensual and aesthetic pleasures, the practical indulgence of which ultimately characterised Verlaine’s excessive and unconventional lifestyle. Verlaine became addicted to absinthe as well as to poetry. When it was time for his evening aperitif, he would often call at the *Café du Gaz*, or the *Café de Bobino*, or the *Café d’Orient* and talk about art, politics, and the day’s affairs over a glass of the cloudy green liquor. In later years, crowds would pack the small *cafés* of the Boulevard Saint-Michel; students and admirers would buy him drinks and sit in silent anticipation to hear the shattered man recite a verse or two. Verlaine’s decadent existence – his alcohol and drug addiction – would eventually be the death of him. Describing the vagabond figure he cut when sat in a *café* in his final years, Jules Renard wrote, Verlaine looked ‘like a drunken god. All that is left of him is our cult. Above clothes in ruins – a yellow tie, an overcoat that must stick to his flesh in several places – a head out of a building stone in process of demolition.’<sup>26</sup>

Renard’s image of the artist as drunken deity is one that resounded with the artists and writers of the early twentieth century. The ghost of Verlaine haunted the *cafés* and streets of Paris. The places he visited became landmarks on a literary map of the city. Young artists in search of bohemian life would make pilgrimages to the *cafés* he frequented, or indeed, any place that was associated with this spiritual embodiment of artistic bohemia. When Hemingway first moved to Paris in 1921, for instance, he took a

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<sup>24</sup> George Moore, *Confessions of a Young Man* [1886] (London: Heinemann, 1926), p. 85.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>26</sup> Jules Renard, *The Journal of Jules Renard*, (ed. and trans.) by Louise Bogan and Elizabeth Roget (New York: Tin House Books, 2006), p. 49.

room in the hotel where Verlaine had died. Recording this in his posthumously published memoir, *A Moveable Feast* (1964), he associates himself with the idea of the bohemian artist:

All of the sadness of the city came suddenly with the first cold rains of winter, and there were no more tops to the high white houses as you walked but only the wet blackness of the street and the closed doors of the small shops, the herb sellers, the stationary and the newspaper shops, the midwife – second class – and the hotel where Verlaine had died where I had a room on the top floor where I worked.

It was either six or eight flights up to the top floor and it was very cold...<sup>27</sup>

Penning this memoir near the end of his life, Hemingway clearly indulges in some myth-making of his own and seeks to concretise his past by using the well-established narrative of the bohemian artist. The model of the poor, garret-living artist goes right back to Henry Murger's band of impoverished but virtuous bohemians. Hemingway's origin story contrives to pick up thematically and artistically where he fancies Verlaine left off – 'where Verlaine had died' is now 'where I worked.' His dank and dreary portrait of Paris is intended to contrast the plight and heroism of the artist who, like Verlaine, held art above all.

Jean Rhys, too, invokes Verlaine. In *Good Morning, Midnight*, the character Sasha Jansen apparently stays in a hotel that Verlaine once rented. Walking into the entrance, Sasha tells us:

A white-haired American lady and a girl who looks like her daughter are talking in the hall.

'Look here, look at this. Here's a portrait of Rimbaud. Rimbaud lived here, it says.'

'And here's Verlaine...Did he live here too?'

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<sup>27</sup> Ernest Hemingway, *A Moveable Feast* [1964] (London: Arrow Books, 2004), p. 2 [hereafter, *AMF*].

‘Yes, he lived here too. They both lived here. They lived here together. Well now, isn’t that interesting?’<sup>28</sup>

In the context of the novel’s often cynical and ambiguous tone, Rhys’s depiction is sardonic and certainly not intended to elevate her character in the way Hemingway’s does. The hotel’s association with Verlaine and Rimbaud may be true, but it is more than likely a ruse concocted by the owner, explicitly for duping naïve American tourists like the woman and her daughter. Throughout her work, Rhys consistently undermines or resists enduring romantic visions of bohemia with darker, more pessimistic conceptions.

Wyndham Lewis also references Verlaine in a letter to Augustus John in which he is delighted to have completed work on *Tarr* because it means he now has, along with his painting, a couple of legitimate outlets for his artistic prowess. ‘I think it is a great thing to have ready to one’s hand a good many forms, – novel, jaunty or vernacular essay, story like Verlaine’s etc’.<sup>29</sup> Citing Verlaine here, Lewis, like Hemingway, attempts to situate himself as a young writer within a certain narrative genealogy of art and artists.

Verlaine died in 1896, and during the last twenty years of his life, up until the end of the century, the focal point of café society would swing according to the vagaries of circumstance between the hills of Montmartre and Montparnasse. Artistic movements formed, argued, settled, and dissolved; bohemian lifestyles continued. From the beginning of the twentieth century, much artistic activity revolved around the Café Rotonde, the Café du Dôme, and La Closerie des Lilas on the Boulevard Montparnasse. Amadeo Modigliani was a regular at the Rotonde, while Trotsky joined in passionate discussions with writers and painters at the Dôme.<sup>30</sup> Although the friends Pablo Picasso and Guillaume Apollinaire spent much of their time at the Lapin Agile in Montmartre, they would make a weekly trip across the city to the Lilas where Paul Fort’s new review, *Vers et Prose*, held its wild soirees.<sup>31</sup> And it was also to the Lilas that the police would go searching for Apollinaire, whom for a time they suspected of stealing Leonardo Da

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<sup>28</sup> Jean Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* (London: Penguin Modern Classics, 2000), p. 33-34 [hereafter, *GMM*].

<sup>29</sup> Lewis, Wyndham, *The Letters of Wyndham Lewis 1882-1957* (ed.) W.K. Rose (London: Methuen, 1963), p. 65 [hereafter *LWL*].

<sup>30</sup> Roland Penrose, *Picasso: His Life and Work* (London: Granada, 1981), p. 185.

<sup>31</sup> Shattuck (1969), p. 263.

Vinci's *Mona Lisa* from the Louvre in 1911. For, it was at the café that Apollinaire was heard to have declared that 'all museums should be destroyed because they paralysed the imagination.'<sup>32</sup> This seditious remark was enough to bestow upon him the questionable distinction of being the only person arrested over the theft of the world's most famous painting. That Apollinaire's declaration was remembered and noted by journalists, as well as taken seriously by the authorities, reveals that café *causeries* still held great import, and that the café was indeed a space, as Ford Madox Ford declared: 'where serious people' discussed 'serious subjects'.<sup>33</sup>

It was around this time (1910) that Wyndham Lewis returned to London from Europe and set about working on his novel, *Tarr*, which caricatured the expatriate café society in Paris. Contrary to Ford's declaration in *Provence* that there are "no cafés in London"<sup>34</sup> there were a few, and one in particular held some importance for both Lewis and Ezra Pound. The Vienna Café was situated just south of the British Museum on New Oxford Street in Bloomsbury, and because of its proximity to the reading rooms of the museum it was a popular meeting place for scholars, artists, and museum officials. It was at the Vienna Café in 1910 that Pound first met Lewis. In Canto LXXX, Pound celebrates the café and laments its loss, and records that it was through Laurence Binyon – poet, translator, orientalist, and keeper of prints and drawings at the museum – that he made Lewis's acquaintance:

And also near the museum they served it mit schlag

In those days (pre 1914)

The loss of that café

Meant the end of a B. M. era

(British Museum era)

Mr Lewis had been to Spain

Mr Binyon's young prodigies

Pronounced the word: Penthesilea

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<sup>32</sup> Penrose (1981), p. 178.

<sup>33</sup> Ford (2009), p. 58.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

There were mysterious figures  
That emerged from recondite recesses  
And ate at the WIENER CAFÉ<sup>35</sup>

Pound's commemoration of the 'end of an era' serves to firmly locate a group of people not only in time but also in place. The Vienna Café emblematises a set of like-minded artistic-intellectuals with Pound clearly channelling the kinds of associative connections that the Paris cafés and their artistic habitués spawned; his vision is not too dissimilar to the narrative of Manet and the Impressionists at the Café Guerbois or the Nouvelle Athènes as memorialised by George Moore, for instance.

Lewis recalls that the Vienna Café eventually 'tottered and fell' in 1914 because it was staffed and owned by 'German[s] or Austrians, "alien enemies."' <sup>36</sup> Of his affection for the establishment, he wrote to Pound: 'I think by the way of Blessing the Vienna Café,' <sup>37</sup> referring, of course, to possible inclusion in his now infamous 'Blesses' in *Blast*. <sup>38</sup> Twenty years after it closed, the café still held some importance for Lewis; meditating on its significance, he wrote:

I have always thought that if instead of the really malefic 'Bloomsburies,' who with their ambitious and jealous cabal have had such a destructive influence upon the intellectual life of England, something more like the Vienna Café habitués of those days could have been the ones to push themselves into power, that a less sordid atmosphere would have prevailed. The writing and painting world of London might have been less like the afternoon tea-party of a perverse spinster. <sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Ezra Pound, 'LXXX' in *The Cantos of Ezra Pound* [Fourth Collected Edition] (London: Faber & Faber, 1987), pp. 506-507.

<sup>36</sup> Wyndham Lewis, *Blasting and Bombardiering* (London: John Calder, 1967), p. 280, [hereafter, *BB*].

<sup>37</sup> *LWL*, p. 66.

<sup>38</sup> But it seems that the war mitigated even the most rebellious of temperaments; Lewis perhaps thought it imprudent to bless anything vaguely pertaining to 'alien enemies' at that time. For whatever reason, the Vienna Café was not included in the list of 'Blesses'.

<sup>39</sup> *BB*, p. 273.

Lewis's conception of the café here is similar to Biala's and Ford's as both a material and metaphorical font of culture, civilisation, and art; and he seems to suggest that the Vienna Café's demise had a grave impact on London's art and letters of the subsequent period.

Following World War I, Lewis, along with many other artists and writers, would continue to patronise the cafés of Paris. The centre of Parisian artistic café society was now set firmly in Montparnasse. The old favourites, Le Café du Dôme, La Rotonde, and La Closerie des Lilas, were more popular now than ever, due largely to the conspicuous influx of Americans during the twenties. In 1924, Robert Forrest Wilson wrote of a 'Parisian district, which (so far as its American citizenry is concerned) has for its focus, community centre, club and town-hall the Café du Dôme.'<sup>40</sup> There had always been an American contingent in Paris, of course, but this new horde was different. Henry James is a prominent example of the earlier, nineteenth-century American visitor that sought out Paris as a pilgrim to the shrine that was European culture and history. While still revering the city as cultural and intellectual centre, this new generation sought a culture that was not characterised by stuffy old tradition but by Life – active, free, and full. They went to Paris seeking a community of like-minded people, not a communion with the past. For the majority, life in Paris was exciting, unrestrained, and, with the favourable exchange rate, affordable.<sup>41</sup>

On the crest of this American wave, new cafés were established and shaped by the boisterous, emancipated sociality that it brought. The Dingo American Bar and Restaurant was one of the first to specifically target *les Américains*; it opened in 1923 (Hemingway records that The Dingo was where he first met F. Scott Fitzgerald). Le Sélect opened in 1925, and was the first café in Paris to stay open for 24 hours a day; and La Coupole opened in 1927. These cafés were all renowned hotspots that attracted tourists like moths (and still do, all except the Dingo operate today). That the Americans could afford almost anything they wanted in Paris was no doubt the main reason for the sybaritic lifestyles they enjoyed, but their hedonism was also partly a reaction against

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<sup>40</sup> Robert Forrest Wilson, *Paris on Parade* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1924)

<sup>41</sup> Hemingway records that you could purchase 12 Francs to the Dollar in 1922. Ernest Hemingway, 'American Bohemians in Paris' (*The Toronto Star Weekly*, March 25, 1922) reprinted in William White, (ed.) *By-Line: Ernest Hemingway: Selected Articles and Dispatches of Four Decades* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1967), p. 23.

prohibition, which was in place in the United States from 1920 to 1933. In the unrestrained atmosphere of Paris, the cafés were where tourists could taste forbidden pleasures.

An attitude of snobbery burgeoning on contempt for the average American tourist was soon cultivated among the longer-term expatriate residents, however, who thought that these vacationers were benighted provincials trying to get in on their cosmopolitan act. ‘By 1928,’ wrote F. Scott Fitzgerald, ‘Paris had grown suffocating. With each new shipment of Americans spewed up by the boom the quality fell off, until toward the end there was something almost sinister about the crazy boatloads.’<sup>42</sup> Fitzgerald’s statement also marks the manifestation of a shared feeling of nostalgia among expatriates; a belief in a Parisian Golden Age – untainted by the blight of the tourist horde, a magical time when only the talented and authentic lived and worked there. There was of course a kernel of truth to this belief; the tourists were, after all, attracted in part by the stories and scandals of the previous café generations. Artists and writers initially went to the Paris cafés to prove themselves and to soak up the creative ether, but the great mass generally satisfied itself with fun and frivolity.

The ‘Jazz Age had had’, according to Fitzgerald, ‘a wild youth and a heady middle age.’<sup>43</sup> But it would all end with a crash. Right up until 1929, Paris and its cafés had been overwhelmed. Fitzgerald wrote of the newcomers that year as ‘fantastic Neanderthals who believed something, something vague that you remember from a very cheap novel.’<sup>44</sup> By 1930 the hordes were retreating. The loss of the dollar dealt a blow to café proprietors across the city who found business falling-off sharply. In the decade’s ‘wild youth’, as Fitzgerald put it, ‘even when you were broke you didn’t worry about money, because it was in such profusion around you.’<sup>45</sup> In the thirties there was less loose cash around, and those hangers-on that depended upon cheques from home quickly returned.

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<sup>42</sup> F. Scott Fitzgerald, ‘Echoes of the Jazz Age’ in *The Jazz Age* (New York: A New Directions Bibelot, 1996), pp. 1-15.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

By some accounts, however, the city's nightlife was as brilliant as ever. Figures like Josephine Baker enjoyed great success in the cabarets of Paris. Henry Miller came to stay in 1930 when most of his compatriots were leaving. His existence could not have been more different from the affluent lifestyles of the exiles that preceded him. In a way, he was enacting a bohemian lifestyle that harked back to Murger and *Scènes de la Bohème*. Miller's novel, *Tropic of Cancer* (1934), records his desperately penurious but artistically fecund existence in and around the cafés of Montparnasse. The soirées continued, but his surreal depiction of the Café du Dôme portrays a Paris changed, spoiled, and hung over:

In the blue of an electric dawn the peasant shells look wan and crumpled; along the beach at Montparnasse the water lilies bend and break. When the tide is on the ebb and only a few syphilitic mermaids are left stranded in the muck, the Dôme looks like a shooting gallery that's been struck by a cyclone. Everything is slowly dribbling back to the sewer. For about an hour there is a deathlike calm during which the vomit is mopped up. Suddenly the trees begin to screech. From one end of the boulevard to the other a demented song rises up. It is like the signal that announces the close of the exchange. What hopes there were are swept up.<sup>46</sup>

By the mid-thirties, the crowds that thronged the café terraces were no longer Americans looking for art and life, but German refugees fleeing persecution. In *Good Morning, Midnight*, Jean Rhys makes reference to such disenfranchised figures as she describes a café 'where the clients paid for the right, not to have a drink, but to sleep.'<sup>47</sup> At this time Hemingway occasionally visited Paris, but only as a place to relax en route to or from the serious business of reporting on the Spanish Civil War.

*Les années folles* of Paris and its cafés was over. Today, Parisian cafés still have the power to enchant, but only as material reminders of the extraordinary history of exciting transformations in the production of art, ways of living, and cultural practice that they bore witness to. It is to the innovative modernist literary representations of these

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<sup>46</sup> Henry Miller, *Tropic of Cancer* (London: Flamingo, 1993), p. 165.

<sup>47</sup> *GMM*, p. 35.

cafés that we now turn, beginning with a tour of Wyndham Lewis's satirical depiction of Montparnasse's 'Bourgeois-Bohemian' café society.

*Wyndham Lewis:  
The Spatial Form of Bourgeois-Bohemian Café Society*

Kreisler was in a sense a recluse... But cafés were the luminous caverns where he could be said, most generally, to dwell...

Wyndham Lewis, (*Tarr*)<sup>1</sup>

Such a strange thing as our coming together requires a strange place for initial stages of our intimate ceremonious acquaintance.

Wyndham Lewis, (*Enemy of the Stars*)<sup>2</sup>

### **Prologue**

In his autobiography, *Blasting and Bombardiering* (1937), Wyndham Lewis describes his fictional proxy, ‘Cantleman’, visiting a number of cafés during the War marches in London of July 1914.<sup>3</sup> Cantleman is conducting ‘crowd-experiments’ and finds the space of the café to be a lucid retreat from the opacity of the ‘jelly-fish’ crowds.<sup>4</sup> During his initial foray into the masses he finds its character to be that of ‘sluggish electricity,’ it is ‘aimless’ and without meaning. But after withdrawing ‘into a Neapolitan café’ he produces his notebook and is able to satisfactorily compose and commit his thoughts to paper. It was Cantleman’s intention to capture the immediacy of his sensations, and Lewis wants us to understand that these fragments from the ‘Crowd-master’ are exactly

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<sup>1</sup> Wyndham Lewis, *Tarr: The 1918 Version* (ed.) Paul O’Keefe (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 2001), p. 77 [hereafter, *T*].

<sup>2</sup> Wyndham Lewis (ed.) *Blast*, No. 1, July 1914 (London: Thames & Hudson, 2009), p. 59.

<sup>3</sup> *BB*, pp. 63-84. The ‘Crowd-master’ appears in *Blasting and Bombardiering* in slightly altered form; the original was published in *Blast* 2, 1915.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

that: contemporaneous and immediate, not simply hazy recollections reconstructed in 1936. He writes:

Remember that I wrote that in 1914. It was written *on the spot*. It was almost as contemporary as the notes jotted down by Cattleman in his cafés, into which he went aside, out of the crowd, to report *sensations*, as soon as he got one.<sup>5</sup>

This chapter is about Lewis's conception of café society and its relation to modernity and the metropolis. Like his biographical counterpart, Cattleman, Lewis uses the café to evaluate and critique his cultural milieu. In fact, as will be established, the café was central to his diagnosis and experience of life in the opening decades of the twentieth century.

The first part of the chapter shows how Lewis worked much like a modern day spatial theorist, mapping and evaluating his urban environment. In what I show to be a scathing critique of modern café society, Lewis produces what we would now call a Lefebvrian 'representational space' with a satirical bent. I also show how the narrative discourses of the 'map' and the 'tour' as theorised by Michel de Certeau provide helpful ways to understand how Lewis's prose succeeds. The second part of the chapter focuses on the café. Idealising the space Balzac famously described as 'le parlement du peuple,'<sup>6</sup> Lewis portrays the café as a fertile space for the revivification of an ailing public sphere, yet its potential is often undermined by the realities of modern life. Finally, I demonstrate how Lewis employs the café in his fiction as a kind of spatial dispatch box from where he delivers trenchant, often didactic, philosophies and lectures.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>6</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *The Edition Definitive of the Comédie Humaine: The Quest of the Absolute* (trans.) George Burnham Ives (Philadelphia: G. Barrie & Son, 1899), p. 172.

## Introduction

From 1901, following a period of study at the Slade School of Art, Lewis spent many of his formative years on the continent. He stayed for short periods in Holland, Munich, and Madrid; he spent summers in Brittany, travelled in Spain, and returned now and then to London. But from 1902 to 1909 he was mostly in Paris, the city he claimed to be ‘his university,’<sup>7</sup> drawing, painting, and frequenting the famous cafés. Contemporaries recall him as a romantic figure in Montparnasse and the Latin Quarter, caped in black with a large black hat, carrying slim, soft-leather-bound books of poetry.<sup>8</sup>

By the time of Lewis’s artistic apprenticeship, the Parisian café had long-served as Parnassus for culture’s prime movers. Artists, writers, and thinkers associated with the cafés of Paris had played a significant part in strengthening the fame of the city as cultural metropolis and ‘Capital of the Nineteenth Century.’<sup>9</sup> At the start of the twentieth, these cafés remained the chosen places for progressive artists and thinkers to meet and discuss new ideas, but their fame had attracted parasitic swarms of tourists, poseurs, and pseuds wishing to bask in the creative ether. The practice of moving to Paris in order to sit in cafés like the artists of old had become a clichéd rite of passage and, to the more sophisticated residents, a stultifying and unwelcome development. Lewis called this period Paris’s ‘late sunset.’<sup>10</sup> The poet Leon-Paul Fargue mocked the scene:

Every obscure poet or painter who wants to be successful [...] has to do a little military service in those [...] pavement academies that teach Bohème lifestyle, contempt for the bourgeois, sense of humour and heavy drinking.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Jeffrey Meyers, *The Enemy* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980) p. 15.

<sup>8</sup> *LWL*, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Walter Benjamin, ‘Paris – Capital of the Nineteenth Century’ (1935) in Peter Demetz (ed.), *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings* (New York: Schocken Books, 1986) pp. 146-162.

<sup>10</sup> Wyndham Lewis, *Rude Assignment: An Intellectual Autobiography* (ed.) Toby Foshay (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1984) [hereafter *RA*], p. 121.

<sup>11</sup> Leon-Paul Fargue, *Le piéton de Paris*, 1939 (Paris: Gallimard, 1998) pp. 140-1, quoted in Christoph Grafe and Franziska Bollerey (eds.), *Cafés and Bars: The Architecture of Public Display* (London: Routledge, 2007) p. 69.

The café terraces ('pavement academies') of Paris filled with those affecting the art touch. Costumed in the livery of the destitute, exchange-rate tourists played out their lives through scripted romantic visions of the impecunious café-dwelling artist. In 1908, Max Beerbohm observed that Paris was now a pasteboard parody of its former glories: '[a]ll reality seems to have gone out of it, leaving only a hard artificial glare for the bedazzlement of tourists.' It was 'less like a city than a stage set.'<sup>12</sup> With its pulse seemingly diminished, one chronicler even pronounced the death of Parisian bohemia in 1913, concluding that it existed now only as 'the palest ghost of a legend, formless and indistinct.'<sup>13</sup> In the districts of Montmartre, the Latin Quarter, and Montparnasse, superficiality reigned; being seen was far more important than any genuine engagement with the spirited intellectual praxis of café culture.

Lewis thought this café-centric superficiality extremely damaging to civilisation as he understood it. These sham-artists trivialised and devalued the work of 'real artists' and their contribution to society, and he was keen to expose them. In the early essay 'What Art Now?' (1919) Lewis distinguishes the fickle fashion-following pseudo from the true artist:

The brainless little loafer who has got into art school because he was too lazy to go anywhere else hears of this or that development in art. He hears that So-and-So (capital S) "is painting all black." He rushes to the nearest café with the news [...] The particular attitude of mind and of speech [...] is confined to the unproductive café-haunting microbe, many of whose attitudes and imbecilities are attributed to artists [...] He is just the public's idea of an artist.<sup>14</sup>

Such banality and inauthenticity was a constant concern for Lewis and became a familiar railing point in much of his work. In his 1930 novel, *Apes of God*, through Pierpoint he provides a similar estimate of this state of affairs:

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<sup>12</sup> Max Beerbohm, 'At the Empire' in *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science, and Art*, Vol. 106, No. 2766 (31<sup>st</sup> October 1908), pp. 538-539 (p. 538).

<sup>13</sup> Orlo Williams, *Vie de Bohème: A patch of Romantic Paris* (London: Martin Secker, 1913) p. 5.

<sup>14</sup> Wyndham Lewis, 'What Art Now?' (1919) in *Creatures of Habit and Creatures of Change: Essays on Art, Literature and Society 1914-1956* (ed.) Paul Edwards (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1989) p. 48.

The traditional “Bohemia” has changed radically since the War. The reason is this. Everyone able to afford to do so has become a “bohemian”. This is the term still employed by the more naïf of the transformed majority. But of course traditionally that person was called a “bohemian” who could not afford to be anything else. The tramp, or the cynic by choice, upon a vast scale, constitutes a novel type.<sup>15</sup>

This phenomenon was not restricted to the cafés of Paris, however. In 1916, the Austrian journalist Anton Kuh lamented the imminent demise of the Viennese ‘literary café’ (*Literatur-Café*). A once fertile cultural space, which he thought had lost its ‘philosopher’s mien and [...] self composure’ and had thus become ‘bourgeois and harmless’.<sup>16</sup>

For Lewis, this whole situation was potentially catastrophic for art and for society. He, too, saw the infiltration of the bourgeoisie into these former bohemian spaces and sardonically labelled the changed cultural landscape ‘bourgeois-bohemia’. He interpreted the phenomenon as symptomatic of a creeping cultural sclerosis and incipient societal deterioration. The posturing and pretence was a submission to the instinct of the crowd. Such relinquishing of control left society open to ideological manipulation by advertising, the media, and political demagoguery. Lewis saw this assault on independent thought as a component of modernity’s systematizing and rationalizing processes, which had as their consequence political control over the majority of people, who were gradually becoming, so he argued, standardised units or childlike tyros. But not only was this personally insulting, it also devalued Lewis’s keen sense that the café should be a space representative of genuine engagement with the public sphere. Targeting such a society, it is the bourgeois-bohemian café culture of spendthrift romantics, aspirant intellectuals, and impecunious artists that he satirises in his first published novel, *Tarr* (1918).

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<sup>15</sup> Wyndham Lewis, *Apes of God* [1930] (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965) p. 127.

<sup>16</sup> Anton Kuh, ‘Spirit of the Age in the Literary Café’ [1916] in Harold Segel, *The Vienna Coffeehouse Wits 1890-1938* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1993), pp. 303-305 (p. 305).

A spatial investigation into Lewis's work is not without its critical precedents. Over the years, many critics have discussed Lewis's fascination with spaces and places: hotels, inns, and private rooms in particular have received much attention. For instance, Fredric Jameson observes that 'Lewis was in some deep Bachelardian fashion haunted his whole life long by rooms and houses, by dwelling space as such.'<sup>17</sup> In the chapter 'Agons of the Pseudo-Couple' from his discussion of Lewis's work, *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist* (1979), Jameson argues that Lewis's 'obsession with rooms and buildings stands as a kind of "return of the repressed" of contingent and material content,' which reinserts itself in anthropomorphic form in his writing to the extent that 'rooms and houses come to live the momentary life of a minor and episodic character.'<sup>18</sup> Jameson notes also how Lewis instils rooms with the power of proxy so that they become 'surrogates for their inhabitants.' He states that in *Tarr*, a 'room, Bertha's, momentarily substituting for the latter in Tarr's agon with her, comes to emit its own characteristic note, "cheap and dead, but rich with the same lifelessness as the trees without."<sup>19</sup>

Scott W. Klein picks up on this particular trope in his book, *The Fictions of James Joyce and Wyndham Lewis: Monsters of Nature and Design* (1994), describing how rooms reflect 'the specific ethos of the individuals who inhabit and create them.'<sup>20</sup> He also, like Jameson, observes an obsession with rooms, declaring that 'spaces – primarily rooms – have been central to Lewis's fictions,'<sup>21</sup> providing his characters with a variety of containing frames. He finds, for instance, that rooms in the early works 'are microcosms of psychological involution, places of contained interaction threatened by the divisions of their inhabitants. They are often places of violence.'<sup>22</sup> Referring to Arghol's defenestration of his books in *Enemy of the Stars* (1914) and Kreisler's rape of Bertha in

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<sup>17</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979) p. 42.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>20</sup> Scott W. Klein, *The Fictions of James Joyce and Wyndham Lewis: Monsters of Nature and Design*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) p. 119.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

*Tarr*, Klein argues that the ‘claustrophobic walls’ of rooms operate as ‘the metaphoric intersection of the social constraints of the external world, with the lack of constraint of the inner.’<sup>23</sup> He illustrates the point with reference to a passage from the short story ‘Beau Séjour’ in Lewis’s *The Wild Body* (1927), in which the character Ker-Orr wanders into and withdraws from a room that has become a locus for sexual aggression:

A few days after my conversation in the orchard I entered the kitchen of the Pension, but noticing that Carl was holding Mademoiselle Péronette by the throat, and was banging her head on the kitchen table, I withdrew.<sup>24</sup>

The walls of rooms, Klein notes, hide from fictive view heinous acts, ‘that are as horrifying and comical as the subordinate clauses within which they are described by the narrators who stumble upon them.’<sup>25</sup>

In his chapter on Lewis in *Style in Modern British Fiction* (1978), John Russell examines this screening or shielding quality of rooms, supposing that for Lewis ‘it is in rooms [...] that the civilised man hews out his perch of observation, rooms being both workshops and symbols for the protected mind.’<sup>26</sup> Tarr is the artist, or ‘civilised man,’ who is able to transform an anonymous room into a ‘creative “still space;”’ a sally port, from which he is able to swim out into the vortex.<sup>27</sup> Conversely, the non-creative ego, like that of Otto Kreisler in *Tarr*, ‘has no such aptitude for making a space into a refuge of work and meditation.’ As a consequence, Russell says, ‘isolation is terrifying to a fraud of an artist like [Kreisler]’. *Tarr*’s narrator informs us: ‘[a]nd it was this room, yes, this room that cut him off from the world...’<sup>28</sup>

In *Art Beyond the Gallery* (1985), Richard Cork analyses prominent examples of English artistic activity outside the narrow confines of the gallery space in the early decades of the twentieth century, providing perhaps the fullest documentary of Lewis’s

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 118.

<sup>24</sup> Wyndham Lewis, *The Wild Body* (p. 54) quoted in Ibid., p. 119.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 118.

<sup>26</sup> John Russell, *Style in Modern British Fiction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978) p. 125.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 125.

fascination and association with space and interiors to date. He records how ‘time and again’ Lewis’s first attempts at fiction ‘display a peculiar alertness to the places his characters inhabit,’<sup>29</sup> particularly the early Breton short stories, such as ‘The Pole’, ‘Some Innkeepers and Bestre’, and ‘Les Saltimbanques.’<sup>30</sup> And, like Klein, he finds violence, often sexual in nature, within these habitations. Cork notes, for example, how James Pringle, the ‘itinerant landscape painter’ from the short story ‘Unlucky for Pringle’ (1911), ‘roams the lodging-houses of London in a state of permanent rapture over the rooms he investigates, occupies and then abandons for new territorial conquests.’<sup>31</sup> These successive invasions arouse ‘an almost erotic satisfaction,’ and on many occasions, Cork says, ‘[these lodgings] are guarded by ‘peaceful landladies,’ who never suspect that Pringle ‘has come for a debauch’ when he moves through their properties with a strange smile on his face.’<sup>32</sup> ‘Their drab apartments had served better than any boudoir,’ wrote Lewis.<sup>33</sup>

These critical studies demonstrate how spaces and places under Lewis’s unique treatment are much more than innocuous or perfunctory backdrops against which narrative events are staged. Rooms are often vital to the overall aesthetic effect of his fictions. Scholars have revealed that spaces are frequently energised as momentary episodic characters that can be variously understood as sexually charged chambers of psychic and physical violence, anthropomorphic avatars intimately suffused with the personalities of their inhabitants, as well as shell-like spaces that shelter the creative subject from the perils of intersubjectivity.

This overview also reveals that such critical attention has tended to focus primarily upon *private* rooms and *private* dwelling spaces, often overlooking the public spaces that feature in his work. Such preoccupation with private spaces and interiors perhaps demonstrates a critical desire to perpetuate the accepted practice of reading literary modernism in ways that privilege the interiorised narrative. Critics have tried to reconcile Lewis’s overt eschewal of psychological subjectivity – his famed ‘external

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<sup>29</sup> Richard Cork, *Art Beyond the Gallery* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985) p. 177.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 177.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 177.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 177.

<sup>33</sup> Lewis quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 177.

method' – with the techniques representative of such canonical modernists as Virginia Woolf and James Joyce. To read Lewis in this way, however, may lead us to overlook what he was trying to achieve with his use of such public spaces as the café.

Some studies have certainly noted Lewis's activities within the public realm. Jeffrey Meyer's biography, *The Enemy* (1980), for instance, reminds us of Lewis's enthusiasm for London's restaurants and cafés (as Lewis himself reminded us, of course, 'Blessing' 'All A.B.C. Tea-shops (without exception)' in *Blast* no. 2).<sup>34</sup> Cork's study also records a number of Lewis's public artistic endeavours, most pertinent of which is his decoration of the Restaurant de la Tour Eiffel where he was invited to 'create his own Vorticist equivalent of the cafés and restaurants he admired.'<sup>35</sup> But no attention has been directed specifically towards the cafés that feature in his work.

This chapter goes some way towards redressing this imbalance by examining the particular spatial form of Lewis's depiction of café society. This endeavour is important because of Lewis's vehement objection to bourgeois-bohemia, and in order to fully appreciate this we need to study the spaces that this society occupied. Therefore, I will not only look at the café but also all the associated spaces that make up Lewis's conception of 'bourgeois-bohemia.' The best place to start my exploration is with a close reading of Lewis's introduction to this society from the opening of his first novel *Tarr*.

With a view to capturing the particular historical moment, I forego reference to the much-revised 1928 text and delimit my study to the Black Sparrow Press edition of *Tarr* edited by Paul O'Keefe (2001), with the assumption that this version, based on the earlier 1918 Knopf edition, is reflective of Lewis's most immediate response to the period in terms of presentation and style. I concur here with John Xiros Cooper who counters Lewis's assertion that the 1928 revision possesses a 'greater precision' with the contrary view that '[t]he offending roughness of the earlier text is itself very precise in terms of the jagged explosiveness of *Blast*, the periodical produced at the time Lewis was first composing the novel.' This notion is also supported by Lewis's own recollection of the pre-war period during the novel's final stages of composition (1914-15) as being such

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<sup>34</sup> Jeffrey Meyers, *The Enemy: A Biography of Wyndham Lewis* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), p. 26, 57 (*passim*).

<sup>35</sup> Cork (1985), p. 219.

‘a moment of great popular excitement’ that he had been ‘infected by it’ –the resulting fervour provoking his blush-worthy “‘patriotic” preface’.<sup>36</sup> Such temporally-induced textual symptoms are therefore here understood to be rather more virulent and contagious at the ‘infection’s’ height, and presumed also to extend beyond the embarrassing prefatory outbreak.

### **Mapping Bourgeois-Bohemia**

Throughout *Tarr*, Lewis depicts café culture with a particular spatial emphasis. ‘Bourgeois-Bohemia’ is the name he gives to the space invaded by the crowd of café loafing pseudo-artists. This jarring oxymoronic descriptor, so typical of Lewis, inheres an oppositional tension that is reflected throughout his textual rendering of space.<sup>37</sup> Bourgeois/bohemian = conventional/unconventional, conservative/avant-garde, conformist/free-spirited, static/dynamic. Behind these particular tensions lie what may well be the ultimate Lewisian dialectic: that between, on the one hand, the vision of the order and coherence that might be, whether in art, the universe, society, or the individual, and, on the other, the recognition of the fragmentation and division that obtain in these same realms. As we proceed, it will become apparent that such oppositions suffuse many of the spaces in the novel, both at the level of text as well as subject matter, creating a highly charged energetic prose.

The novel’s ‘Overture’ provides a striking introduction to Lewis’s Paris:

PARIS HINTS OF sacrifice. = But here we deal with that large dusty facet known to indulgent and congruous kind. It is in its capacity of delicious inn and majestic Baedeker where western Venuses twang its responsive streets, and hush to soft growl before its statues, that it is seen. It is not across its Thébaïde that the unscrupulous heroes chase each other’s shadows. They are largely ignorant of all but their restless personal lives.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> *RA*, p. 162.

<sup>37</sup> For a discussion on the dualist and oppositional tendencies in Lewis’s work, see SueEllen Campbell, *The Enemy Opposite* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1988).

<sup>38</sup> *T*, p. 21.

This opening depicts a side of the city that is being slowly sacrificed and given up as an oblation to the twin gods of commerce and tourism. The famed City of Light is ironically reduced here to the status of ‘delicious inn’ – a familiar and banal establishment, principally for the accommodation of tourists and travellers. The autochthonous, indigenous, or French inhabitants do not form part of this narrative. Lewis’s target is the moneyed art-crowd living it up in sybaritic splendour on the favourable exchange rate – amongst them, Americans whose accents ‘twang’.

This is a vision of Paris that, because of the large touristic element, is now primarily experienced through, and even created by, Baedeker’s *Paris and its Environs* (1907). Lewis suggests that the city has become as two-dimensional as a mapped-out itinerary in a guidebook; its significance and value measured only in the pages it fills with ‘majestic’ sights and attractions. What is evidenced here is an appreciation of the complex relationship between the material and cultural environment, or what Henri Lefebvre would later theorise as the polyvalence of social space:

Though a *product* to be used, to be consumed, [space] is also a *means of production*; networks of exchange and flows of raw materials and energy fashion space and are determined by it.<sup>39</sup>

Paris, as Lewis understands it, is a space produced (and perhaps reduced) by the unbridled forces of modernity, namely: consumption and tourism. This ‘produced’ space creates, in turn, its own artificial and superficial consumer society. As such, this culture is parasitic rather than creative or productive, its goals commercial rather than intellectual.

By choosing to reference the Paris Baedeker, Lewis pre-empts Lefebvre’s comments about the obvious mystification inherent in guidebooks and maps that document “‘beauty spots’” and historical sites and monuments’. As Lefebvre says: ‘if the maps and guides are to be believed, a veritable feast of authenticity awaits the tourist.’<sup>40</sup> But this is deceptive; the very form of the guide’s mediation fundamentally flaws the

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<sup>39</sup> *PS*, p. 85.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

promise of an original and authentic experience. The act of guide-mapping (the inclusion or exclusion of sites in a Baedeker) distorts and reduces the hypercomplexity of the city's spaces. Giving prominence to certain sites, the guide informs the visitor what to value, and consequently manufactures a specific conception of the city. Such received narratives are limiting and stagnating. The city's energy and originality are trammelled beneath the ever-increasing footfall of tourists along well-trodden paths. One of the purposes of Lewis's satire is to confront and to expose such empty bromides.

The means through which Lewis achieves this goal is to adopt the very processes he criticises. In this opening paragraph, he presents his own satirical Baedeker, parodying the techniques of such a guide. Mapping for us the 'Knackfus Quarter', he rationalises and compartmentalises the city like a literalised segmentation of the marketplace, rendering it fragmented and divided. Lewis's use of the odd-looking '=' punctuation marks also adds to the textual presentation of this sectioning out of space. We are immediately presented with a schematised itinerary in which the hypercomplexity of metropolitan space is reduced to a simplified geometry of distinct international territories, operations, and practices:

The Knackfus Quarter is given up to Art. = Letters and other things are round the corner. = Its rent is half paid by America. Germany occupies a sensible apartment on the second floor. A hundred square yards at its centre is a convenient space, where the Boulevard du Paradis and Boulevard Pfeifer cross with their electric trams. = In the middle is a pavement island, like vestige of submerged masonry. = Italian models festoon it in symmetrical human groups; it is also their club. = The Café Berne, at one side, is the club of the "Grand messieurs du Berne." So you have the clap-trap and amorphous Campagna tribe outside, in the Café twenty sluggish commonsense Germans, a Vitagraph group or two drinking and playing billiards. These are the most permanent tableaux of this place, disheartening and admonitory as a Tussaud's of The Flood.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> *T*, p. 21.

Michel de Certeau is another theorist who offers a helpful way to open up and interpret this passage, particularly his theory of ‘spatial stories’ and the dual discourses he labels ‘map’ and ‘tour’. Lewis’s ‘Overture’ creates a dynamic picture of Bourgeois-Bohemia that seems to oscillate between fixity and flux, map and tour. Recall that map discourse is the practice of ‘seeing’, described by de Certeau as ‘the putting in place of an immobile and stone-like order’ where only the discourse itself moves.<sup>42</sup> Such narratives detail precisely where elements or features occur, presenting a ‘tableau’ or ‘knowledge of an order of places’.<sup>43</sup> Lewis’s use of ‘tableaux’ to describe the Quarter implies intimate knowledge and establishes his narrative as authoritative. In the next chapter, we see how Hemingway also employs this mode of discourse as a way to impose his authority over the social spaces he inhabits. Through such rationalizing and ordering, Hemingway transforms the cafés he writes about from complex anonymous places into known and personalised spaces. With Lewis, the map discourse surveys the city’s bourgeois-bohemian enclaves and cartographically fixes them within satirical cross-hairs. This ‘fixing’ is evident in ordering phrases that locate objects in distinct locations such as ‘[a] hundred square yards at its centre’, ‘[i]n the middle’, or ‘at one side’. The effect also arrests the expected pace of a vibrant, fast-moving metropolis, presenting instead a static and stultified topography. As an evaluation of the city, we might read such phrasing as emblematic of the degenerative cultural sclerosis Lewis envisioned.

In opposition to the map, de Certeau’s ‘tour’ discourse is the discourse of ‘going’, evidenced in narration that organises movements and operations.<sup>44</sup> As well as literally mapping or ‘setting’ the scene in the ‘Overture’, there is also the sense that Lewis is taking us on a tour. The narration is partly experiential. As reader/walkers we are clearly situated within the Quarter (as opposed to hovering above it) when we are told that ‘letters and other things are round the corner’. The phrase ‘you have [...] outside’ also implicates us as participants in an excursive narration. The Italian models that occupy the pavement island are clearly mapped, but they also enliven the account. The verb ‘festoon’ animates the scene, evoking a sense of movement (note also, how in a de

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<sup>42</sup> *PE*, p. 118.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

Certeauan manner the models have transformed this place through their daily operations into their own space, their ‘club’). The same can be said of the Café Berne and its “Grand messieurs...” who have similarly created their own space. Though set firmly in place, they are also animated: ‘drinking and playing billiards.’ Hence, throughout the passage, Lewis simultaneously fixes his targets whilst also acting as tour guide, providing an experiential discourse that actualises and brings to life the spaces of bourgeois-bohemia.

By mixing these discourses, Lewis presents a Parisian Quarter that is held in dramatic tension with description alternating between cartographic fixity and organised movement. Consider the following passage: ‘[a] hundred square yards at its centre is a convenient space, where the Boulevard du Paradis and the Boulevard Pfeifer cross with their electric trams.’ Here, the present-tense form of the stative verb ‘to be’ shapes the first part of this description, thus mapping and ‘setting’ the scene. Then, the use of the word ‘cross’ oscillates between both its intransitive and transitive cases evoking an active diorama of the space: one can ‘see’ or locate the intersecting boulevards, but one also gets the impression of the inevitable movement (or ‘crossing’) of electric trams through the scene.

Another aspect to Lewis’s ‘mapping’ and ‘touring’ is the concomitant practice of labelling, a technique that serves to further fix and satirise. He adopts the authoritative role of arch-anthropologist in the way he classifies his subject matter into the taxonomic categories of ‘human groups’ and ‘tribe[s]’. A more developed example of this kind of ethnographic classification is when throughout *Tarr* Lewis renames these tribes’ habitats. Although we are in Paris, he nevertheless replaces all other familiar place names with his own fictitious designations. The method is not an attempt to disorient, but rather to exaggerate and to enhance the overall effect of his satire. Lewis assumes that his readers are well acquainted with the area he describes. His monikers are therefore suggestive caricatures that reflect and amplify the character and practices of the Quarter. When read along Foucauldian lines, acts of cartographic categorization and labelling may be understood as systems of subjugation; for, the ownership or appropriation of a name is often the wilful establishment and enforcement of power and control. In my chapter on Jean Rhys’s cafés, we see that names and labels are important: Rhys uncovers and

challenges such acts of branding and domination. Here, in Lewis's 'Overture', we find that he employs these tactics in order to ridicule his quarry.

One of the most significant examples of Lewis's mocking and derisory tactics is his supplanting of 'Knackfus' for Montparnasse. In the 1935 essay, 'Beginnings', he explains that 'he put *Knackfuss* [sic] for *Montparnasse*' in an attempt to 'germanise' Paris.<sup>45</sup> However, this is not only a wry reference to the distasteful preponderance of Germans occupying the Quarter. His labelling of Montparnasse as 'the Knackfus Quarter' might also have suggested another connection for early twentieth-century readers. It was Paul Edwards who first pointed out that there was a Leipzig art publisher going by this name, but further investigation into this 'Herr Knackfuss' reveals that Lewis could well



Fig. 1 – Knackfuss, 'Yellow Peril' (1895)

Not only was he a publisher, Hermann Knackfuss was also a painter and an art historian of questionable repute who died in May 1915 around the time Lewis was completing the 'Overture' chapter in *Tarr*.<sup>46</sup> During his studentship at the Slade School of Art and his time studying in Germany, Lewis might well have become acquainted with Knackfuss's monographs on Dürer, Rembrandt, and Titian among others; if not, he would most certainly have been familiar with a lithograph by Knackfuss entitled, *Völker Europas wahret eure heiligsten Güter!* [*Peoples of Europe protect your most sacred possessions!*] (Fig. 1). The image is a nationalist allegory, commissioned by Kaiser Wilhelm II in 1895 that became known

<sup>45</sup> Wyndham Lewis, 'Beginnings' (1935), in *On Art: Collected Writings 1913-1956* (eds.) Walter Michel and C.J. Fox (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969), p. 296 [emphasis in original].

<sup>46</sup> Paul O'Keefe, 'Afterword' in *T*, pp. 361-365.

infamously as ‘Yellow Peril’ because of its depiction of the pagan mysticism of the East threatening the Christian powers of Europe. The archangel Michael, patron saint of the Germans, leads the defence, rallying the other seemingly reluctant European powers, notably Britannia (being coaxed by the hand), Marianne, and Mother Russia. While, looming in the distance is a flaming Buddha borne darkly on a column of clouds.

*Peoples of Europe* was the Kaiser’s favourite picture to the extent that he entrusted his diplomats with presentation copies for delivery to rulers and other dignitaries; the image was even emblazoned on his official postcard correspondence right up until the 1920s. He considered the work a masterpiece, and ‘whenever a crisis arose in the Far East he would crow that his predictions about the predatory Orientals were coming true.’<sup>47</sup> The Kaiser’s patronage of such a hackneyed artist seemingly reflected his conservative tastes and unsympathetic view of modern art. He denounced anything that was remotely progressive in style or theme, and thought that ‘aspiring artists would do well to study the giants of the past, especially those of the German renaissance.’<sup>48</sup> The parochial subject matter of the painting apparently did nothing for his international reputation. Tolstoy, for example, who considered him ‘ridiculously pretentious and ignorant’, cited the Kaiser’s enthusiasm for Knackfuss’s picture as proof of his ‘intellectual bankruptcy’.<sup>49</sup> Lewis doubtless would have shared the sentiment.

The effect of renaming Montparnasse as ‘Knackfus’ seems to be two-fold. Firstly, it embodies the banal and unsophisticated art practised by Hermann Knackfuss and esteemed by the Kaiser, and projects it onto the bourgeois-bohemian pursuits of the neighbourhood café-dwellers. Thus, when Lewis writes that ‘[t]he Knackfus Quarter is given up to Art’, he implies that is given up to the sort of ‘art’ representative of Herman Knackfuss: pedestrian, crude, and conservative. Secondly, in a perceptive observation of the commercialisation of space and the limits of cultural protectionism, Lewis appropriates the name of an artist whose most infamous work propagandised about the dangers of national dilution and cultural effacement, and turns it into an ironic signifier of its very action in the way that ‘Germany’ has taken over this area of Paris.

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<sup>47</sup> Cecil Lamar, *Wilhelm II: Vol. 2, Emperor and Exile 1900-1914* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996) p. 39.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

Another act of cartographic renaming is imposed upon the two streets that cross in the middle of the Quarter: the Boulevard du Montparnasse and the Boulevard Raspail, which Lewis renames as the Boulevard du Paradis and Boulevard Pfeifer, respectively. While explanations for their fictitious designations can be at best only conjectural, speculation is still worthwhile because these imaginative appellatives clearly form an important part of Lewis's project. Such attention is also warranted because Lewis's often peculiar collocations and word choice are instances of what David Trotter has described as a recurring strategy in modernist texts, in which 'minor disturbances of linguistic structure alert us to the possibility that we may have to work very hard indeed in order to understand what the writer might mean for us to infer.'<sup>50</sup>

Paul O'Keefe has already surmised that Parnassus, the Greek mountain (*Mont Parnasse*) sacred to Apollo and the Muses, could be deemed a 'paradise', a heavenly space for artists, writers, and thinkers. And it seems clear that this would indeed be the case for Lewis who held a genuine affection for the cafés and terraces that lined this famous boulevard. O'Keefe is more uncertain about the derivation for 'Pfeifer', but he does record that it is the German term for 'piper'. I would take this further and suggest



Fig. 2 – Manet, *The Fifer* (1895)

that 'Pfeifer' is a mocking signifier. For, if we understand that Lewis believes that the art practised in the Knackfus Quarter portends or embodies society's blight or ruination then we/art/culture will most certainly have to 'pay the piper', a phrase that refers to bearing the consequences of an action or activity that one has enjoyed – in this case the practising of 'bad' art. Also, in homophonic translation, 'Pfeifer' sounds out 'fifer' (which is of the same German derivation) and is, as we know, a small shrill flute used most especially in military bands. Fifing is a non-combatant military occupation. And the fifer, though costumed in the finest ornamental military regalia, engages in no

actual fighting: adolescent boys, rather than combat-ready soldiers, occupy the role. Édouard Manet's 1866 painting, *The Fifer* (Fig. 2), offers an illustrative example, depicting such a character. Interestingly, after years in private collections, the painting

<sup>50</sup> David Trotter, *The English Novel in History 1895-1920* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 70.

was eventually exhibited to the public at the Musée du Louvre in 1914 – around the same time Lewis was writing *Tarr*, and he may well have drawn on the image. When placed in the context of Lewis’s overtly belligerent, masculinist, and militaristic world of *avant-garde* art, we may now understand the jibe. The juxtaposition made is between the manly, advanced-guard artists exacting explosive art and action on one side and, on the other, the pseuds and tyros whose callow and superficial art is comparable to the child-fifer shrilly blowing hot air. In effect, if ‘Paradis’ offers one aspect of Montparnasse/Knackfus, then ‘Pfeifer’ represents all that is counter. In keeping with the ‘Overture’’s general oppositional structure – played out at the level of syntax (in the antithetical tour and map discourses) – Lewis renames these crossing boulevards and instils a similar sense of tension, which is overtly spatial, borne out as it is at ‘street level.’

Situated to one side of the intersection made by these crossing boulevards is the social centre of the Quarter and Lewis’s principal target: the Café du Dôme, which today still stands at 108 Boulevard du Montparnasse. ‘*La Dômiers*’ was the *blason populaire* given to the international and predominantly German set that populated its tables in the opening decade of the 1900s. In *Tarr*, it is re-imagined as the Café Berne, which is a rather inventive device demonstrating astute spatial thinking on Lewis’s part because, as I will suggest, the choice of café name is both demonymic and toponymic in origin.<sup>51</sup>

The most likely source of the appellation is the Swiss capital city of Berne, the official language of which is German. Lewis’s re-branding, then, is an overt reference to the café’s proliferation of Teutonic habitués, but it is also more nuanced than that. Lewis could very well have named the café after a German city, but this would not have accurately reflected the composite international make-up of the café’s patrons. Instead, he chooses a German-speaking enclave of the multi-lingual and multi-cultural Swiss nation, thereby making a neat demographical analogy to the Dôme’s/Berne’s populace. As Otto Kreisler reports of his first visit to the Café Berne:

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<sup>51</sup> The word *demonym* comes from the Greek word for ‘populace’ (*demos*) with the suffix for ‘name’ (*-onym*); *toponymic* derives from ‘*topos*’ meaning ‘place’.

He was taken round to the Berne after dinner. He did not realise what awaited him. He found himself in the headquarters of many national personalities. Politeness reigned. Kreisler was pleased to find a permanent vat of German always on tap. [...]

The Café Berne creates a space of shared identity for a diverse group of nationalities under the collective noun ‘Grand messieurs du Berne’, much like the Swiss whose sense of national distinctiveness comes from their sharing of the same geographical place rather



Fig. 3 - The Café du Dôme

than any straightforward common linguistic or cultural identity. The sense of belonging to the country is thus founded rather upon such things as common historical background and shared values. This is mirrored in the multi-national space of the café where, although he is himself German, Kreisler’s kinship with the café’s Teutonic contingent is not assured since he does not share the values or opinions of the ‘Grand messieurs’. As he says: ‘[t]he Germans he met here spoke a language and expressed opinions he could not agree with.’<sup>52</sup> Like the real-life *Domiers*, the habitués at the Café Berne are not so much Germans as ‘*Berniers*’.

As well as its demographic suggestiveness, the choice of ‘Berne’ also has a particular topographic suitability. That is, the location of the café in the built environment of Paris, and the location of the Swiss city in its natural surroundings have a spatial symmetry. The historic city of Berne lies on a narrow peninsula bounded on three sides by a river (*Fig. 5*). It is a distinctive geographical setting that echoes the metropolitan topography of the Café du Dôme (*Fig. 3*), which is itself partially circumscribed by three streets (the Boulevard du Montparnasse, the Boulevard Raspail, and the Rue Delambre) that Lewis often portrays in *Tarr* as flowing like rivers (more of which in a moment).

Interestingly, geo-etymologists suggest that the name ‘Berne’ for the Swiss city derives from the Celtic ‘berna’, meaning ‘cleft’ (meaning both ‘to divide and ‘to

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<sup>52</sup> *T*, pp. 88-89.

adhere’), which they suppose is in toponymic reference to the distinctive oxbow river that literally ‘cleaves’ the peninsula – on which the historic city stands – from the surrounding landscape. We imagine the original settlers choosing the site for the practical purposes of access to food, protection, and transportation, etcetera. Like any settlement that partitions itself off from a surrounding environment, it would have also provided a sense of communal identity through the shared ownership of place. Similarly, as we know, the Café Berne creates a sense of shared identity as the club of the “Grand messieurs Du Berne.”<sup>53</sup> Intriguingly, the cognomen ‘club’ also claims descent from the word ‘cleft’, so we understand that the form ‘club’ represents a unity achieved for the purposes of division.

The effect of Lewis’s description of the Café-Berne-as-club portrays the Quarter not as an open and unregulated bohemian paradise (as its inhabitants saw themselves) but as a closed and conventional conclave. The club at the Berne is an exclusive and exclusionary clique cleft in its way from the rest of Paris and the Quarter. Now, whether or not Lewis was aware of the etymological suggestiveness of his choice of name for the café, it is safe to say that the double meaning of ‘Berne’ and ‘club’ is eminently appropriate and only arises as a consequence of the peculiar attention he pays to subtleties of space and place in his depiction of bourgeois-bohemia. The Swiss city of Berne is used here as a geographical referent that inheres and expresses not only the distinctive demography of the café’s habitués but also its unique topographical features.



*Fig. 4 – The Swiss city of Berne*

Lewis’s readiness to integrate and to juxtapose natural geographical metaphors and imagery with the modern metropolis is remarkable throughout the novel as a whole. Such devices subvert and shock our expectations. Unravelling preconceived notions of

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<sup>53</sup> *T*, p. 21.

the metropolis as a product of human consciousness – as an intelligently manufactured system of objects and of communicative processes – Lewis presents Paris as an unconscious and contingent primitive wilderness. His favoured trope is to describe streets and boulevards as flowing like water. This protean element has the ability to convey the unbridled influx of modernity into the city, along with its concomitants: commercialism and tourism. Like the powerful erosive effects of the sea upon littoral zones, these forces intrude upon the city's spaces and transform the metropolitan landscape. Despite the fact that the city grows and diversifies, the implication is that these forces are unthinking and indiscriminate, and that something of value is lost or eroded as a consequence.

The water trope is deployed from the beginning of the novel where the Knackfus Quarter is described as 'disheartening and admonitory as a Tussaud's of The Flood.' What Lewis invokes here is the flux of modernity in all its apocalyptic power. As the Quarter hosts more and more tourists and pseuds, the Boulevard du Paradis and Boulevard Pfeifer become rivers of currency, crowds, and commercialism. The rising floodwaters shape and divide the neighbourhood topography, forming at their confluence a 'pavement island, like vestige of submerged masonry.' The image is of some kind of lost city; lost to the inundation of bourgeois-bohemians.

Water is a vital element of *Tarr* in general, and this can be seen even in the preface where Lewis contextualises his motivations for writing the novel and producing for us 'this disagreeable German', Kreisler. Though keen to distance himself from any suggestion of 'primitive partisanship aroused by the war', Lewis is eager to proclaim the book's timeliness. The deftness with which he reaches for the water metaphor in his writing suggests that it is deeply entrenched, even naturalised, as part of his thinking about space:

Germany's large leaden brain booms away in the centre of Europe. Her brain-waves and titanic orchestrations have broken round us for too long not to have had their effect. As we never think ourselves, except a stray Irishman or American, we should long have been swamped had it not been for the sea. The

habits and vitality of the seaman's life and this vigorous element have protected us intellectually as the blue water has politically.<sup>54</sup>

I would even suggest that the name of his protagonist, 'Tarr', references 'the habits and vitality of the seaman's life': 'tar' being an informal term for sailor – someone adept at traversing these modern 'waters', as Tarr seems to be. At one point we are told that 'Tarr felt the street was a pleasant current, setting from some immense, and tropic gulf... He ambled down it puissantly, shoulders shaped like these waves; a heavy-sided drunken fish.'<sup>55</sup> He is also described as hanging on in front of a shop 'before pushing off, as a swimmer does to a rock, waving his legs. Then he got back into the street [...and] let himself drift down it.'<sup>56</sup> Such a description perhaps prompted the critic John Russell to observe that Tarr uses his studio as a protective 'sally port from which he is able to *swim* out into the vortex.'<sup>57</sup> Later, Lewis uses the water metaphor to invoke a dissipating commercial economy in his characterization of the habitués of the Café Berne whose 'monthly monies flowed and ebbed [...] small regular tides frothing monotonously in the form of beer.'<sup>58</sup> These exchange-rate tourists are likened to sediment borne on a tide of economic prosperity that end their journey in the Berne: a 'living lump of soil of the Fatherland dumped down at the head of the Boulevard Pfeifer.'<sup>59</sup>

Water is a common motif employed by many modern writers struggling to capture the flux of the metropolis. In 1909, for example, Ford Maddox Ford ('Hueffer' at the time) described the view of a highway seen from his window as an endless stream:

[I]nnumerable motes of life settled in a stream, in a never-ceasing stream, in a stream that seems as if it must last for ever ... And all these impressions are so fragile, so temporary, so evanescent, that the whole stream of life appears to be a

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<sup>54</sup> 'Preface', *T*, p. 13.

<sup>55</sup> *T*, p. 50.

<sup>56</sup> *T*, pp. 48-49.

<sup>57</sup> Russell (1978), p. 127 [my emphasis].

<sup>58</sup> *T*, p. 119. The number of water metaphors that invoke money and its movement is actually quite astonishing: 'currency,' 'flood the market,' 'laundered money,' 'liquid assets,' 'solvency,' 'slush fund,' 'float a loan,' 'bank,' 'washed up,' 'deposit,' 'sinking fund,' 'capital drain,' 'pool,' 'stay afloat,' and 'frozen assets,' to name but a few.

<sup>59</sup> *T*, p. 89.

procession of very little things, as if, indeed, all our modern life were a dance of midges.<sup>60</sup>

In 1876, Henry James identified early the flood of modernity in specific relation to the Parisian café:

The boulevards are a long chain of cafés, each one with its own little promontory of chairs and tables projecting into the sea of asphalt. These promontories are doubtless not exactly islands of the blessed, peopled though some of them may be with sirens addicted to beer, but they may help you pass a hot evening.<sup>61</sup>

And E.M. Forster, in *Howards End* (1910), employed the water metaphor in an attempt to portray the disorienting and unsettling recomposition and formlessness of the city: ‘the kind of scene that may be observed all over London, whatever the locality – bricks and mortar rising and falling with the restlessness of the water in a fountain.’<sup>62</sup> Indeed, the metaphor is so powerfully redolent of the dynamism of the city that over 60 years later the theorists Lefebvre and de Certeau both employed it in their works on space. Lefebvre, in one of his writings on rhythmanalysis, recounts a view from a Paris window that could just as well be describing the view overlooking the Knackfus Quarter: ‘here, on the square, there is something maritime about its rhythms.’<sup>63</sup> De Certeau uses the metaphor in his epigraph to *The Practice of Everyday Life* when invoking the anonymous constituents of the modern city, the ‘multitude of quantified heroes who lose names and faces as they become the ciphered river of the streets.’<sup>64</sup>

Returning to *Tarr*, and to Lewis’s use of water as a signifier for the irresistible forces of modernity, we find an exemplary demonstration of his spatial thinking and the

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<sup>60</sup> Ford Madox (Hueffer) Ford, ‘Modern Poetry’ in *The Thrush* 1:1 (1909), pp. 39-53 (p. 49).

<sup>61</sup> Henry James, *Parisian Sketches: Letters to the New York Tribune 1875-1876* (eds.) Leon Idel and Ilse Dusoird Lind (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1958), p. 190.

<sup>62</sup> E.M. Forster, *Howards End* (ed.) Oliver Stallybrass (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), p. 59.

<sup>63</sup> Henri Lefebvre, ‘Seen from the Window’ in *Writings on Cities* (ed. and trans.) Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p. 226.

<sup>64</sup> *PE*, p. x.

transformative power of the flood in his virtuoso description of the bourgeois-bohemian hangout, the Restaurant Lejeune, which:

like many others in Paris, had been originally a clean, tranquil little creamery, consisting of a small shop a few feet either way. Then one customer after another had become more gluttonous. He had asked, in addition to his daily glass of milk, for beefsteak and spinach, or some other terrific nourishment, which the decent little business at first supplied with timid protest. But perpetual scenes of sanguine voracity – weeks of compliance with the most brutal and unbridled appetites of man – gradually brought about a change in its character. It became frankly a place the most carnivorous palate might be palled. As trade grew, the small business had burrowed backwards into the house – the victorious flood of commerce had burst through walls and partitions, flung down doors, discovered many dingy rooms in the interior that it instantly filled with serried cohorts of eaters. It had driven out terrified families, had hemmed the apoplectic concierge in her “loge,” it had broken out onto the court at the back in shed-like structures. And in the musty bowels of the house it had established a broiling, luridly lighted, roaring den, inhabited by a rushing and howling band of slatternly savages.<sup>65</sup>

This extraordinary paragraph emblematises connections Lewis makes between space, society, and culture. While expressing the disconcerting and seemingly instantaneous changes that the material spaces of the city are subject to under irrepressible forces, it also illustrates the concomitant effects on society. The increasing greed of the Lejeune’s customers creates a commercial pressure that forces a change in the purpose and material structure of the establishment that in turn feeds back into, and transmogrifies, its clientele. Such bourgeois appetites undermine the bohemian ruse; the genuinely impecunious are hardly likely to be in a position to demand anything, let alone viands so lavish as ‘beefsteak and spinach.’ Like the water metaphor, the anthropomorphic portrayal of the building as a burrowing animal invokes an unthinking and instinctive process rather than a consciously controlled intellectual operation. Thus, through this

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<sup>65</sup> *T*, pp. 96-97.

metamorphosis a curious dialectic is formulated between primitive and civilised modes. We find that while the business modernises and evolves, becomes a commercial 'success,' the loss of tranquillity, the lack of propriety and restraint suggested in 'brutal' and 'unbridled'; the amoral privileging of commercial demands that drive 'out terrified families' and replace them with a swarm of 'slatternly savages,' refers to a concomitant devolution of its civilised modern-city-dwelling patrons: a return to an uncivilised and instinctual mode of being.

The tacit stability of place is also violently undermined by the 'victorious flood of commerce' as the infinite array of middle-class appetites overwhelms the finite dimensions of the creamery causing it to burst through walls and break out in shed-like structures. Not only aesthetically distasteful in terms of both the building's sprawling expansion and the savage behaviour of its habitués, it is also portentous for society in general. This is an establishment, remember, 'like many others in Paris.' For Lewis, the Lejeune is a microcosm of the incipient societal degeneration he apprehends as a result of the flood of modernity.

The Flood analogy is highly revealing of the complexity of Lewis's response to modern society. The biblical connotations evoke a duality that mirrors Lewis's dialectical thinking. For, while the deluge expresses a culturally cataclysmic and impoverished experience of the present, it also proffers a redemptive vision of the future. It is in *The Caliph's Design: Architects! Where is your Vortex*, published the year after *Tarr* in 1919, that we find Lewis's sardonic attempt to address the lack of connection between society, space, and art, and to perhaps kick-start the redemption. A resumption of the revolutionary enthusiasm of his earlier 'blasts', *The Caliph's Design* sought to develop Vorticism's innovative programme by extending it into the realm of space. From the parable of the Caliph who demands plans for a new city be drawn overnight according to his Vorticist design, Lewis promotes an aesthetic that sought not only to resist the contingent world and the chaos of recent history but also to create forms that would transform and re-order the damaged social sphere. Lewis suggests that here, now, in the

aftermath of the War, society could and should be remodelled in order that the ‘scene of life’ may ‘increase gusto and belief in that life.’<sup>66</sup>

Lewis set himself up as the archetypal ‘modern’, and insisted that in order for art to remain vital it must be fully immersed in this flood of modernity. One of his criticisms of the work of his fellow modern artists was that studio-based art was too divorced from life: ‘*You must get Painting, Sculpture, and Design out of the studio and into life somehow or other if you are not going to see this new vitality desiccated in a Pocket of inorganic experimentation.*’<sup>67</sup> Recalling this same argument in *Rude Assignment*, he again invokes the flood metaphor stating that these moderns ‘were content to galvanise a tiny area, where intelligence and taste could subsist and survive, as if in an Ark intact upon the surface of the deluge.’<sup>68</sup> If one is to be truly modern, it follows that one must ‘swim out into the vortex’<sup>69</sup> and engage with the powerful forces of modernity.

Instead of relying on painting and sculpture to lead the way, however, he looks to the material spaces of the city – its architecture – to launch society’s regenerative process. Suggesting that architects and artists switch roles, since the former have failed to create a suitable urban environment, he demands that painting, sculpture, and design abandon the isolation of the (Ark-like) studio and intervene in life directly. For he recognises that the future of the plastic arts depends upon the existence of a sophisticated and receptive public sphere for its social and cultural effectiveness.

It is life at which you must aim. Life, full life, is lived through the fancy, the senses, the consciousness. These things must be stimulated and not depressed. The streets of a modern city are depressing. They are so aimless and so weak in their lines and their masses, that the mind and senses jog on their way like passengers in a train with blinds down in an overcrowded carriage.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Wyndham Lewis, *The Caliph’s Design: Architects! Where is your Vortex?* (London: The Egoist, 1919), p. 16 [hereafter, *CD*].

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7 [emphasis in original].

<sup>68</sup> *RA*, p. 171.

<sup>69</sup> Russell (1979) previously cited above. See fn. 57.

<sup>70</sup> *CD*, p. 16.

It is evident that Lewis's representations of the bourgeois-bohemian spaces in *Tarr* informed and even initiated this visionary polemical response. In this view, his portrayal of Paris is a critical evaluation of the inauspicious state of the urban metropolitan scene. Its bourgeois-bohemian habitués are certainly a desensitised lot, whose mindfulness and self-control have ceded to the whim and contingency of instinct. Like Lewis's image of passengers in a train with the blinds down, they too are at the mercy of external forces, and thus open to political manipulation.

The description of the Lejeune stands as a material example of the degenerative effects of commercialism and consumption on the society and culture of Paris. Expounding upon his motivation for the writing of *The Caliph's Design*, Lewis states: '[t]he biggest visual fact, *the City*, was my starting point. The haphazard manner in which everything struggles and drifts into existence filled me with impatience.'<sup>71</sup> He insists that a 'complete reform [...] of every notion or lack of notion on the significance of the appearance of the world should be instituted' in order that '[a] gusto, a consciousness should imbue the placing and the shaping of every brick.'<sup>72</sup> The Lejeune is clearly an example of a building that such reform targets. Again returning to a natural metaphor, Lewis continues with a critique of London's Regent Street that could well have been written as a critical summary of the biotic expansion of the Restaurant: '[a] central spectacle [...] should not grow like a weed, without forethought, meaning or any agency but the drifting and accident of commerce.'<sup>73</sup> In *Rude Assignment*, Lewis again emphasises the irrational, organic growth of the metropolis under the flood of modernity: '[o]ur scene,' he says, 'is composed of a disorderly wilderness of brick and concrete, springing-up fungus-like in response to some commercial urge.'<sup>74</sup>

If *The Caliph's Design* stands as Lewis's material and architectural vision of the ideal city, then I want to suggest that the café represents the human face of this ideal. In other words, whereas *The Caliph's Design* presents Lewis's aspirational *topos*, it is the café that represents his aspirational *demos* or public sphere.

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<sup>71</sup> *RA*, p. 169.

<sup>72</sup> *CD*, p. 15.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>74</sup> *RA*, p. 171.

### **Café Tarr and the Public Sphere**

The café was perhaps the defining symbol of early twentieth century Parisian culture, and indeed the bourgeois-bohemia that Lewis was so keen to criticise. As a Lefebvrian hypercomplex social space, the café is a nodal point that connects various lines of force across the metropolis, such as commerce, capital, tourism, and sociality. It is a place where oppositions meet (it is both public and private, inside and outside, local and international); and therefore a space of tension, teetering as it does on the edge of both the bourgeois and the bohemian. For Lewis, this tension invests the café with a dynamic and energetically charged potential that represents renewal and the possibility for social and cultural transformation. It is therefore unsurprising to find that the café is not only central to his first novel, but that it also bookends it, too. The action of the narrative begins in a café with Frederick Tarr delivering a caustic lecture to Alan Hobson, and it ends in a café with a heated exchange between Anastasya Vasek and the book's titular character. There are a further fourteen café scenes in the novel, and an elementary tally reveals that the total of sixteen café scenes accounts for approximately one-fifth of textual space of the 1918 version.<sup>75</sup> Indicative as it was, therefore, of much of what Lewis sought to evaluate – the metropolis and modernity and the bourgeois-bohemia it spawned – the café was well placed to function as the focus of his attention. Yet the significance of the café is far more than its status as cipher. In order to understand why he saw it as so important to his project, we need to examine three aspects of Lewis's conception and appreciation of the idea of the café. Firstly, we look to its historical legacy; secondly, his own experience of it, and thirdly, how both these aspects allowed him to use the café as a device with which to criticise bourgeois-bohemia.

Lewis's unique portrayal of the café space channels its historical past of loquacious cafés and coffeehouses of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe: those merry meeting places of expansive political debate and democratic expression. The café of Lewis's youth draws on a long genealogy of spaces devoted to the art of communication, civil assembly, and argument. The café in this form is fundamental to his

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<sup>75</sup> In the 1928 revised and extended version of the novel, this amounts to 85 pages, or 25.4%.

vision of a kind of new intellectual republic that would eventually lead a modern social and cultural revolution. Ultimately, the café for Lewis is an arena where social interaction could and should ferment social action.

Since its first appearance on the streets and boulevards of Europe's cities, the coffeehouse has been associated with pioneering social, political, and cultural developments. The sociologist Jürgen Habermas was the first to explicitly connect the coffeehouse with the creation of a discernible public sphere. Habermas argued that the coffeehouse, along with a few other nascent seventeenth-century spatial phenomena (the salon and *tischgesellschaften* [table societies], for instance), was the essential prerequisite for the emergence of a public sphere characterised by open and progressive socio-political debate.<sup>76</sup> Historians have paid particular attention to the institution as forum for the emergence of a popular political consciousness. Steven Pincus and Brian Cowan, for example, have engaged with the micro-politics of coffeehouse society, explaining how it forged the way for a more inclusive and secular political culture.<sup>77</sup> Indeed, most historians today acknowledge the central and innovative role of the coffeehouse in political history; some going as far as Margaret Jacob to extol its virtues as 'one of the preconditions for the emergence of modern democratic society in the West.'<sup>78</sup>

Crucial to this cultural upheaval was unregulated conversation. The coffeehouse presented what Habermas called an 'ideal-speech situation'.<sup>79</sup> It was a space open to all-comers; an urban and commercial venue and, most importantly, it was a place in which rational debates on diverse matters, ranging from literary worth to high politics, could be carried out in a sober and rational way among equals. For Thomas Babington Macaulay, the coffeehouses of Restoration England were 'the chief organs through which the public

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<sup>76</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (trans.) Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), particularly the chapter 'Institutions of the Public Sphere', pp. 31-51.

<sup>77</sup> See Brian Cowan, 'The Rise of the Coffeehouse Reconsidered', in *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 47, No. 1 (2004), pp. 21-46; and Steve Pincus, "'Coffee Politicians Does Create": Coffeehouses and Restoration Political Culture', in *The Journal of Modern History*, No. 67 (December 1995), pp. 807-834.

<sup>78</sup> Margaret C. Jacob, 'The Mental Landscape of the Public Sphere: A European Perspective', in *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, No. 28 (1994), pp. 95-113 (p. 96).

<sup>79</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action* (trans.) Christian Lenhardt and Shierry Weber Nicholson (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), p. 88.

opinion of the metropolis vented itself.’<sup>80</sup> All across Europe, cafés and coffeehouses witnessed the formulation of radical ideas and various social and political movements. Standing atop a table in the Café de Foy in Paris 1789, the Revolutionary journalist and politician Camille Desmoulins exhorted the people to take up arms and storm the Bastille. It was in Café Durand that Émile Zola penned ‘J’accuse’, his great indictment of the French government’s handling of the Dreyfus affair. ‘J’accuse’ was published in *L’Aurore*, a paper that was read at every café table in Paris.<sup>81</sup> The café’s legacy as a literary as well as a political forum; its sense of excitement and urgency was what so inspired Lewis, as is evident from his early experiences in the cafés of Paris.

Despite the satirical scorn that colours his evocation of Paris in *Tarr*, in *Rude Assignment* Lewis remembers his time as a student in the city as a heavenly period of indolent curiosity and enthusiastic debate. Describing it as ‘*la nouvelle Athènes*’ (and perhaps invoking the famous café of the same name), he re-imagines the capital as the classical city: cradle of civilisation and centre for the arts, learning, and philosophy. Paris, he says, ‘was the great humanist creation of the French [...] the perfect place to live in [...] expansive and civilised.’ Its ‘multitude of café-terraces’ – embodiment of the renowned symposia of Athens’ Lyceum – was ‘divinely disputatious.’<sup>82</sup> Lewis’s perception of the café here echoes the contemporary feeling coffeehouse habitués held for their esteemed institution. The poet Samuel Butler, for instance, employed the same classical analogy and proclaimed the coffeehouse ‘a kind of Athenian school’, and wondered whether coffee was the drink ‘Lycurgus himself used when he compos’d his laws.’<sup>83</sup> While Thomas Shadwell wrote that: ‘[e]ach coffee-house is fill’d with subtle folk, who wisely talk and politickly smoke.’<sup>84</sup> Reminded of how Lewis was once described as ‘the lonely old volcano of the Right’,<sup>85</sup> it is entirely befitting to imagine him ‘smoking’ away in a café.

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<sup>80</sup> Thomas Babington Macaulay, *The History of England: From the Accession of James the Second*, Vol. 1 (Leipzig: Bernard Tauchnitz, 1849), p. 361.

<sup>81</sup> Noël Riley-Fitch, *Literary Cafés of Paris* (Washington and Philadelphia: Starrhill Press, 1989), p. 14.

<sup>82</sup> *RA*, p. 121.

<sup>83</sup> Charles W. Davis (ed.), *Samuel Butler: Characters* (Cleveland: Case Western Reserve, 1970), p. 257.

<sup>84</sup> Thomas Shadwell, ‘The Woman-Captain,’ 1679, in Montague Summers (ed.), *The Complete Works of Thomas Shadwell*, 5 Vols. (London: Fortune Press, 1927), Vol. 4, pp. 15-16.

<sup>85</sup> W.H. Auden and Louis MacNeice, *Letters From Iceland* (London: Faber, 1937), p. 247.

Lewis also recalls how the café terraces ‘swarmed with people from every corner of the earth’ including ‘an immense student population,’ who ‘could ‘sit all day long (and often did) for the cost of one cup of coffee without being interfered with and observe the crowds, or be entertained by his neighbours.’<sup>86</sup> However, with the inexorable commercialisation of the cafés and his eventual move away from Paris, Lewis’s final valedictory gloss nostalgically consigns this period of cultural excitement to history: ‘that Paris will always remain for me – *that* Paris, for now it is a different one – the geographical source of all life and light and true happiness.’<sup>87</sup>

Lewis’s wistful recollection of Paris is closely and importantly tied to the literature he read as a student in these cafés. As part of an instalment for a radio series called ‘Crisis,’ recorded for the B.B.C.,<sup>88</sup> Lewis was asked to present a talk detailing the decisive literary influence on his life as a writer (the formative ‘crisis’ to which the programme’s title refers). After some thought he identified not one book, as provisionally directed, but ‘a solid mass of books’ that he says ‘revolutionised [his] technique of approach to experience;’ a ‘great volume of creation produced in the nineteenth century by a group of men over a space of fifty or sixty years [of which] there is no parallel since the Renaissance,’<sup>89</sup> namely: ‘the creative literature of Russia.’<sup>90</sup> He then added a spatial dimension, claiming that while reading these Russian books as a student in Paris he ‘lived for some time wholly in that Russian world,’ elaborating that: ‘my “crisis” – if we wish to attain that over-forcible expression – was even more than a collection of books: it was a world [...] I was not suddenly stopped by a wall of books. Rather I passed imperceptibly into a warmer, richer, atmosphere.’<sup>91</sup> The effect was such that he claims he ‘was for some years spiritually a Russian’ and after moving back to London, though the

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<sup>86</sup> RA, p. 121.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 250.

<sup>88</sup> Taped on 13<sup>th</sup> March 1947 and broadcast on 16<sup>th</sup> March 1947. Much of what he presented was later used verbatim in chapter XXVII of *Rude Assignment*, pp.156-159, and I therefore quote from here where applicable.

<sup>89</sup> RA, p. 157.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 156.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 157.

‘muscovite spell had lost much of its primitive strength,’ he says: ‘it was partly, still as a *Russian* that I wrote my first novel “Tarr.”’<sup>92</sup>

This aspect of the Russian influence upon Lewis’s writing of *Tarr* is perhaps well known, and the Dostoyevskyan parallels have been variously documented,<sup>93</sup> but what has received little or no attention is the primacy Lewis accords to a particular social space within this influential Russian World.

Trying adequately to determine exactly what it was about this imaginative realm that struck him so, Lewis deduces that ‘the impact of such books was due to much more than their vitality,’ and suggests that Ivan Karamazov from Dostoyevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880) ‘supplies the correct answer.’ He then quotes a passage from the novel in which the brother expatiates on the young men who sit ‘drinking and talking in the corners of Russian taverns’:

They’ve never met before, and when they go out of here they won’t see each other again for the next forty years. But what do they talk about for the moment that they’re here? Nothing but universal problems: Is there a God? Does the Immortal soul exist? Those who don’t believe in God discuss socialism and anarchism, and the reorganisation of mankind on a new pattern; which are the same questions, only tackled from the other way up.<sup>94</sup>

Such topics of conversation seemed to the impressionable Lewis of a substance far more weighty and consequential than ‘the Dogs,’ football, or women.<sup>95</sup> Thus, responding to Karamazov’s vignette, Lewis dryly concludes:

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<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 161 [Lewis’s emphasis].

<sup>93</sup> See, for instance, Hugh Kenner, *Wyndham Lewis* (London: Methuen, 1954), p. 27, on the novel’s ‘Russian’ complexities; or Timothy Materer, *Wyndham Lewis the Novelist* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1976), p. 54, for the opinion that early reviewers’ references to Dostoevsky ‘were prompted by the character of Kreisler.’ Also, Scott Klein argues that *Tarr* ‘takes the psychically charged worlds of Dostoevsky and Goethe as its models’ to the extent that it ‘may be thought of as perhaps the finest ‘Russian’ or ‘German’ novel in the English tradition.’ See Scott W. Klein, *Tarr* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. xvii-xviii.

<sup>94</sup> *RA*, p. 159 [Lewis quotes from Constance Garnett’s translation].

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159.

That was what ‘Russian boys’ had their minds filled with apparently, and what these books showed them ardently discussing in taverns as they drank, as if the fate of the universe hung upon their words. [...] Here was a more serious world altogether, thought I.<sup>96</sup>

It is not just the gravity of the subjects under discussion that is of significance here; the social space of the tavern is clearly fundamental to Lewis’s conception of this world, because what the tavern enables and, indeed, what Karamazov describes is the momentary formation of an engaged, coherent, and conscious public sphere. The tavern in this formulation is a kind of cultural analeptic. Like the stimulating parley characteristic of the café, it is a unique space of expansive debate, vigour and vitality; socially inclusive, and culturally egalitarian, it is a space where atomised individuals and a convoluted, fragmentary body politic coalesce to revivify the disintegrating social nexus.

Rebecca Beasley describes the socially engaged artist-intellectual in her essay, ‘Russia and the invention of the Modernist Intelligentsia’ (2005), in which she argues that:

Russian literature [...] played a vital role in establishing an aspirational model for the intellectual who was neither the disinterested, elitist aesthete of anti-modernist propaganda, nor the anachronistic Fordian liberal intellectual, but a politically committed, culturally sophisticated activist.<sup>97</sup>

It is my claim that Lewis was just such a cultural sophisticate, and that his idealised conception of the café is informed by Karamazov’s model tavern as much as it was by the coffeehouses of the past. As a place of vitalised and engagé talk, it serves as the spatial aspect of the aspirational model Beasley describes. So fundamental is this relationship to Lewis’s early imaginings of Paris life that he concludes: ‘Paris for me is partly the

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 159.

<sup>97</sup> Rebecca Beasley, ‘Russia and the Invention of the Modernist Intelligentsia’ in Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker, (eds.) *Geographies of Modernism: Literatures, Cultures, Spaces* (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 19-30 (p. 29).

creation of these books. I now realise that if I had not had Tchekov [*sic*] in my pocket I should not have enjoyed my *Dubonnet* at the [Café] ‘Lilas’ so much.’<sup>98</sup>

For Lewis, then, it was the imaginative transposition of Karamazov’s tavern to the cafés of Paris that formed a compelling architectonic vision of cultural engagement and renewal. Indeed, as we have seen, it is clear from his Vorticist experiments onward that Lewis urged an interventionist art intellectually committed to (in Karamazov’s words) ‘the reorganisation of mankind on a new pattern.’ Throughout much of his work, Lewis sought to defend a conception of art that gave it a central role in the remaking of life on a more conscious pattern. He saw the public sphere, and the café, as a discursive space in which competing ideologies could confront one another by means of rational debate rather than by violent conflict.

Because of the café’s long-standing and widely-held reputation as an intellectual arena and public testing ground for revolutionary ideas, the café was the natural setting in which Lewis could situate his characters in order to present ideas about art and philosophy. In *Tarr*, it is the eponymous Englishman who embodies such beliefs about the café as a potentially revolutionary and revivifying space. For Frederick Tarr, the café is a place for conversation, but not just any old vapid chitchat: it should be of a weight and significance as described by Karamazov. Tarr is continually dismayed, however, that the intellectual calibre of his café encounters does not meet the weighty and erudite Karamazovian standard. So while the novel opens promisingly in a café with Tarr holding forth on the Dostoevskyan ‘universal problem’ of Art versus Life, it is soon apparent that this will not be anything like the intellectual discussion he hoped for. To put it simply, the cafés of *Tarr*’s Paris are the places where Lewis’s idealistic notions confront the disillusioning realities of modern life. To illustrate this we need to look more closely at café conversation in the novel. The following section will engage in a close reading of key interchanges in the text, paying attention to their value status and form. As a preface to this, I attend briefly to the café’s unique spatial characteristics that allow for such conversations to play out.

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<sup>98</sup> RA. p. 159.

## Spatial Form of the Café

Following the introductory satirical Baedeker of bourgeois-bohemian Paris, the narrative proper of *Tarr* begins with Alan Hobson and Frederick Tarr meeting awkwardly on the Boulevard du Paradis and going to the Café Berne for a drink. Once inside, Lewis continues his critique of this ersatz bohemia. As the beneficiary of an expensive Cambridge education, Hobson is generally criticised for living an indolent and inauthentic bohemian lifestyle. In Hobson's dress Tarr observes the 'Art-touch':<sup>99</sup> his shabby Harris tweeds, and large floppy 'wideawake' hat sitting atop lengths of untroubled tresses betray an advantaged upbringing. He is a bourgeois-bohemian, the quintessence of aestheticist inauthenticity – affecting the bohemian appearance of the artist while exercising none of the labour. As such, he muddies the clear, hard distinction between Art and Life that so exercises Tarr, who finds this 'pseudo-neediness' to be 'sentimental indulgence' and believes that '= Every man should be forced to dress up to his income.'<sup>100</sup> Hobson counters by highlighting Tarr's own bourgeois-bohemian entanglements with Bertha Lunken, which provokes Tarr's acerbic lecture on Art and Sex.

In his brief assessment of this opening café scene in his book, *Bohemia in London* (2007), Peter Brooker states that 'the contretemps between the two men takes place in a Paris café but might just as well have been in Fitzroy Square or Percy Street where Lewis sat writing, throwing punchy insults.'<sup>101</sup> Once we understand the significance of the café space however, we find that it is not merely incidental but instrumental to the nature and circumstance of such encounters. Taken literally, Brooker's statement asserts that such an intellectual confrontation could have taken place either in a private residence or in the street outside.<sup>102</sup> But it is perhaps not so controversial to argue instead that one's behaviour can be, and very often is, dictated by one's immediate environment; whether one is at home, on the street, or in someone else's lodgings, conduct is adjusted

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<sup>99</sup> *T*, p. 22.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>101</sup> Peter Brooker, *Bohemia in London* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 15.

<sup>102</sup> Number 29 Fitzroy Square was home to Virginia and Adrian Stephen between 1906 and 1911, and Number 4 Percy Street was Lewis's home between 1913 and 1915.

accordingly. One might consider, for example, the distinct contrast between Tarr's loquacity in this opening café scene and his reserve in private at Bertha's salon later that day. Bewitched by her room's strangeness he sits without 'saying anything,'<sup>103</sup> examining it as 'you do a doctor's waiting room,' observing perforce 'a certain formality' from which 'more inaction followed.'<sup>104</sup>

Key to the form of café conversation in this encounter is the café's unique status as a liminal space. Occupying a position on both sides of the public/private sphere the café transcends but critically does not dissolve the border between the two states. An account of Parisian café life by Florence Gilliam, *France: A Tribute by an American Woman* (1945) illuminates very well some of the characteristic social effects of this liminality:

Every gradation of social life, every type of dress, every shade of poverty and riches, every occupation and every interest can mingle there without embarrassment, condescension, obligation, or implication. Some go to meet friends, to encounter new and stimulating acquaintances; others to be alone in the crowd. I know of no look in the world – unless it be the sightless gaze turned to one another by riders in the subway – that is so impersonal as the one on the face of a person in a café, not in immediate contact with the other occupants. The man who writes a letter there, composes verses, reads his paper, or just studies his drink in lone contemplation, attracts no attention whatsoever. On the other hand, if he chooses to engage some stranger in conversation about politics or art or the weather, he may easily enter upon an exchange of views that would be quite out of place on the street, and yet is as devoid of personal connotations as if it took place while waiting for a bus.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> *T*, p. 54.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>105</sup> Florence Gilliam, *France: A Tribute by an American Woman* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1945) pp. 42-43.

It is this commingling of spheres that facilitates such casual free exchange and prepares the ground for ideas to flourish. Gilliam's account of the Parisian café also reveals that it was above all a place for exuberant badinage:

Mostly the cafés are for talk; and this is talk for talk's sake, in its richest form. It is dominated by no obligation to listen to the monologue of a host or hostess, or hearken to the dicta of any lion of the occasion [...] Much of the talk is intensely serious, and no subject is beyond its range.<sup>106</sup>

In his book, *The World of the Paris Café* (1996), W. Scott Haine describes three values upon which such sociability depended:

The first was selectivity – that is, the freedom of participants in café sociability to converse with whomever they wished. The second value was autonomy – the right not to be interrupted by third parties once you had begun to talk with a particular person or group. The third involved the idea of tolerance – that is, the concept that no one in the café should take offence at the minor irritations and insults that accompanied socializing in a small space amid a dense urban agglomeration.<sup>107</sup>

Such an ethos is essential to the character of café conversation in *Tarr*, sustaining and explaining some of the novel's curious adversarial exchanges that oscillate ominously between awkward propriety and severe pique, as in a later scene with Tarr and Kreisler at the Café d l'Aigle where Tarr has sought out his rival for Bertha's affections. Here, in somewhat of a theatrical play, mocking grins and 'alarming diabolical smile[s]' rally back and forth across the café table:

“You can get out of your head any idea that I have turned up to interfere with your proceedings,” [...] “Affairs lie entirely between Fräulein Lunken and yourself.”

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>107</sup> Haine, pp. 150-151.

Kreisler met this assurance truculently.

“You could not interfere with my proceedings. I do what I want to in this life!”

“How splendid. *Wunderbar!* I admire you!”

“Your admiration is not asked for!”

“It leaps up involuntarily! *Prosit!* But I did not mean, Herr Kreisler, that my desire to interfere, had such a desire existed, would have been tolerated. Oh, no! I meant that no such desire existing, we had no cause for quarrel. *Prosit!*”<sup>108</sup>

We are all too well aware, of course, just as Kreisler is, that ‘interfere’ is exactly what Tarr intends to do. Despite Kreisler’s stating candidly his desire “to be left *alone*,” Tarr merely orders another drink and sits back undeterred.<sup>109</sup> The tenuousness of the habitués’ unspoken right to public privacy is exposed and easily infringed, but it is this knife-edge that maintains the tension in the above. As a public and (generally) social space available to anyone with money enough to purchase a coffee – and although he pushes his luck – there is no official rule prohibiting Tarr’s conduct, which is why Kreisler’s private question: ‘[w]hy was this Englishman sitting there and talking to him?’ remains exactly that: private and unanswered. The restrained indignation and sarcasm disguised as politeness here demonstrates the café’s ability to sustain disagreeable encounters.

Such an exchange is quite unsustainable, for example, in a private residence. Recalling Tarr’s visit to Kreisler’s room on the following night, there is no such civil restraint: “Why have you come *here*?”<sup>110</sup> is the abrupt response to Tarr’s imposition succeeded immediately by the order to vacate, “Quick! Out!”<sup>111</sup> Unlike the café, the domestic interior shows no such ambiguity; it is Kreisler’s ‘territory,’<sup>112</sup> a fact upon which Tarr reflects: ‘[t]he room, somehow [...] seems on its owner’s side, and to be vomiting forth the intruder.’<sup>113</sup> Recognizing his disadvantage, Tarr sets forth the logic of contested space:

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<sup>108</sup> *T*, p. 222.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 222 [emphasis in original].

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 238 [emphasis in original].

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 239.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 247.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 240.

Should he insist, forcibly and successfully to remain, it can only be for a limited time. He will have to go sooner or later, and make his exit, unless he establish himself there and make it home, henceforth; a change of lodging most people are not, on the spur of the moment, prepared to decide on.<sup>114</sup>

Tarr's comical speculation indicates an understanding that such overt territoriality is justifiably honoured only when linked to official proprietorial status. He says, '[t]he civilised man's instinct of ownership makes it impossible for any but the most indelicate to resist a feeling of hesitation before the idea of resistance in another man's shell!'<sup>115</sup>

In contrast, Kreisler's aggressive response would be unacceptable within the space of the café. Confirmation of this comes the following evening when Kreisler is undone enacting a similar performance of territorial violence against Louis Soltyk that proves to be both unsuccessful and counterproductive. This time unleashed in service of his trespassed 'honour' rather than his room, Kreisler forsakes café etiquette with a smack to each of Soltyk's cheeks and subsequently finds himself ejected from the Café Souchet by the policing garçons 'like a drunken workman.'<sup>116</sup> We might also remind ourselves that this is the second branding Kreisler has occasioned upon Soltyk's cheeks. The first incident occurred on the street outside the Café Berne a few days earlier. Without policing waiters, it quickly turned violent and ended with Kreisler snapping Soltyk's cane and flinging the splintered pieces in his face. The street's openness and lack of close supervision ensured that no civil discussion could be maintained.<sup>117</sup>

So, to return to Brooker's claim. While we can certainly re-imagine the opening café scene playing out as a disputatious encounter between Lewis and Roger Fry rather than Frederick Tarr and Alan Hobson, it is highly improbable that such an encounter could be sustained on Fitzroy Square or in Lewis's private apartment at Number 4 Percy

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p. 240.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., p. 240.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., p. 251.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., p. 255.

Street. The character of the opening confrontation is shaped and sustained by the café's unique liminal status that positions it on both sides of the public/private sphere.

### **Café Conversation**

Fredric Jameson has described Tarr and Hobson's meeting as staging 'revulsion with the social.' Averring that it portrays a 'symptomatic hesitation and reluctance in the face of the most insignificant human contacts,' he says that 'the more heightened moments of scandal or violence prove to be nothing but the convulsive effort to free one's self from one's interlocutor, or [...] to obliterate him in an explosion of rage and black bile.'<sup>118</sup>

I would argue that this is a misreading of the motivating force behind Tarr's contumelies. For when we focus our attention upon the status of conversation in this meeting, it becomes apparent that the revulsion is not with 'the social' qua 'the social,' but with the state of sociality and social culture as represented by Hobson as bourgeois-bohemian café loafer. With this emphasis, what we find is that Tarr, no less than Lewis himself, is undoubtedly a strong believer in the power and efficacy of social interaction and public debate. At the start of chapter 2, for instance, we are told that '[a] great many of Frederick Tarr's resolutions came from his conversation. It was a tribunal to which he brought his hesitations.'<sup>119</sup> With 'tribunal' esteeming and elevating conversation to the level of a court of justice, we are also told that '[c]ivilised men have for conversation something of the superstitious feeling that ignorant men have for the written or the printed word.'<sup>120</sup> It is therefore Hobson's persistent inability and ignorant refusal to show any respect for the art of café conversation that leaves Tarr 'unsatisfied' and, significantly, 'with much more to say.'<sup>121</sup> Tarr's revulsion, then, if we are to use the word, is with lustreless and impoverished chat. For, it is clear that he is not a character revolted by or determined to free himself from social encounters when we next find him running

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<sup>118</sup> Jameson (1979), pp. 37-38.

<sup>119</sup> *T*, p. 36.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

into Guy Butcher and asking him whether he has ‘time for a drink.’<sup>122</sup> His nature is in fact the opposite, as someone with an enthusiasm for public debate, Tarr is eager to immerse himself in ‘the social’ and to engage in a more edifying interchange.

Further evidence of Tarr’s dislike for unproductive and worthless talk occurs later when after moving to Montmartre, he finds himself in a café on the Place Clichy in the disagreeable company of another bourgeois-bohemian. A fellow Englishman with an affected manner playing the role of artist ‘annoyed Tarr by pretending to be alarmed every time he was addressed’<sup>123</sup> and wore a “‘wide awake’” hat that ‘was large, larger than Hobson’s’:

Tarr gazed at the conclusive figure in front of him, words failing. Words failed, too, for maintaining conversation with it. He soon got up, and left, his first apéritif at Montmartre unsatisfactory.<sup>124</sup>

This is exemplary of what Tarr sees as the deadening effect of bourgeois convention where such encounters are merely a banal masquerade of life. He says as much to Hobson earlier on when he criticises the conventional lives these so-called bohemians live:

It’s the same with the café fools I have for friends – there’s a Greek fool, a German fool, a Russian fool: –an English fool! = There are no ‘friends’ in this life any more than there are ‘fiancées.’ So it doesn’t matter. You drift on side by side with this live stock – friends, fiancées, colleagues and what not.<sup>125</sup>

Cutting such an ersatz figure, Tarr finds it impossible to have any kind of meaningful interaction with the sham artist. Like Hobson, pilloried as the ‘poor froth blown off the decadent nineties,’ this English ‘Café-fool’ libels the artist with his affected and outmoded appearance. Costumed in ‘the wardrobe-leavings of a vulgar bohemianism,’<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., p. 205.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., p. 206.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

he belies a truer nature and relinquishes any individuality and autonomy being as he is a dedicated follower of fashion rather than of intellect.

Conversation in the café, then, must be consequential and worthwhile. Although the opening discussion ends unsatisfactorily for Tarr, the value status of café conversation is nevertheless made clear. While Tarr and Hobson's encounter begins with the pair sitting 'for some minutes with stately discomfort of selfconsciousness, staring in front of them'<sup>127</sup> it is not a discomfort born out of aversion. The narrator explains that '[t]heir drink was like a Quaker's meeting.' Such an association attaches a distinct gravitas to their transaction. 'It was a fastidious question of the spirit moving you', the narrator continues, referencing the Quakers' practice of sitting in silent congregation until compelled by the Holy Spirit to speak. In this form of worship, when a speaker is moved to open discourse the Quakers believe that it is not themselves that speak but rather the Holy Spirit that speaks through them. Such meetings are not programmed with an itemised agenda and nor is there any restriction on the subject matter. Though, since it is 'The Spirit' that speaks, any musings are treated with reverence and solemn contemplation. In relation to Lewis's conception of the café, we might compare such talk to that of the Russian tavern and Karamazovian topics. And so it is, with the material for trivial conversation quickly exhausted, and having 'no social machinery but the cumbrous one of the intellect,' Tarr is compelled to take the 'subject that was foremost in his existence' and impose it on their talk.<sup>128</sup>

Tarr is trying to effect a change in Hobson's diffuseness or 'vagueness,' and so imposes a serious subject upon the meeting in an attempt to bestir him from his bohemian fantasy: 'Tarr was tearing, as he saw it, at the blankets that swaddled this spirit in its inner snobberies.'<sup>129</sup> Tarr's contempt is for what Hobson represents and not Hobson himself, thus his vituperation is not dispatched only for maliciousness' sake, as Jameson's analysis would have it. Even towards the end of his barrage in which he condemns Hobson as 'concentrated, systematic slop,'<sup>130</sup> in Tarr's view it is a kind of tough-love deployed as the 'heavy stick' of the poet from Baudelaire's fable,

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

‘Assommons les pauvres!’ / ‘Let’s beat up the poor!’ (1869), whose bullish guiding apothegm is ‘Men are equals only if they prove it, and he alone is worthy of liberty who can conquer it.’<sup>131</sup> His aim is to get a rise out of Hobson and ‘accomplish something’<sup>132</sup> as the poet does of the beggar, but his efforts are frustrated by Hobson’s indifference: “‘Am I idle did you say? Yes, I suppose I am not particularly industrious. But how does that affect you?’”<sup>133</sup> The potential energy consequently builds to a pressurised crescendo, which is finally discharged against Hobson’s hat – the only physical act of violence in the scene:

“But I feel it my duty at least to do this for your hat. Your hat, at least, will have had its little drama to-day.” Tarr knocked his hat off into the road. = Without troubling to wait for the results of his action, he hurried away down the Boulevard du Paradis.<sup>134</sup>

This is perhaps proof of Tarr’s willingness, in the words of T. E. Hulme ‘to fight about’ ideas.<sup>135</sup> The encounter nevertheless fails to live up to expectations and Tarr is thus left ‘unsatisfied’, but after his erudite conversation with Guy Butcher at the Café l’Univers on the character of English Humour, his conversational needs are slaked; instead of rushing from the café toward further confrontation, he is now possessed by a ‘sensation of peculiar freedom and leisure.’<sup>136</sup>

One cannot miss the overt theatricality in these exchanges. There is a performative dimension evident in Lewis’s café conversations; speakers launch into lengthy and dramatic orations that would be just as appropriate for the stage, and are received with equal histrionic relish. In fact, the propinquity of café and theatre has an

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<sup>131</sup> Charles Baudelaire, *Baudelaire in English* (eds.) Carol E. Clark and Robert Sykes (London: Penguin, 1997) p. 253.

<sup>132</sup> *T*, p. 35.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>135</sup> ‘The best way of gliding into a proper definition of my terms would be to start with a set of people prepared to fight about it – for in them you will have no vagueness.’ T.E. Hulme, ‘Romanticism and Classicism’ in *Speculations: Essays on Humanism and the Philosophy of Art* (ed.) Herbert Read (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987) pp. 111-140 (p. 114).

<sup>136</sup> *T*, p. 44.

established history. It was Richard Sennett who drew our attention to the literal proximity of café and theatre in eighteenth-century Paris and London, describing how both institutions shared a cultural regime of speech and gesture. For example, the terms ‘making a point’ and being ‘settled’ derive from this era. In the café, one would suddenly stand when one had a ‘point’ to make, and would be subsequently ‘settled’ by the raucous noisemaking of the patrons when the speaker became tiresome.<sup>137</sup> Such exuberance was still prevalent nearly two hundred years later, as Gilliam attests:

In cafés, celebrities may collect groups around them, though in most cases it is not because they are celebrities, but because their talk is the best in the place. Wits may stroll from table to table, dropping gems; but the great portion of wit grows out of the talk that is flying around, and cannot be isolated from its setting.<sup>138</sup>

The image of ‘strolling wits’ reveals the Paris café as a site for intellectual funambulism and showmanship. When Tarr launches into his lecture, he achieves a similar feat: a description of his oratorical flight is given from Hobson’s point of view, gifting him an aerodyne wit, it presents him as a café celebrity of sorts, reminiscent of Gilliam’s account:

As Tarr’s temperament spread its wings, whirling him menacingly and mockingly above Hobson’s head, [...] [he] did not think it necessary to reply. = He was not winged himself. = He watched Tarr looping the loop above him. He was a droll bird! He wondered, as he watched him, if he was a *sound* bird, or *homme-oiseau*? People believed in him. His exhibition flights attracted attention. What sort of prizes could he expect to win by his professional talents? Would this notable arriviste be satisfied?<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (London: Penguin, 2002), pp. 73-87 (p. 83).

<sup>138</sup> Gilliam, p. 44.

<sup>139</sup> *T*, p. 27.

We might also consider Hobson's convulsing and crowing 'thrice' like a 'rooster,' before finally letting himself go 'in whoops and caws, as though Tarr had been pressing him to perform.'<sup>140</sup> Or the theatricality of his response to one of Tarr's criticisms: "'I? My Voice –? But that's absurd! = If my speech –'" Hobson was up in arms about his voice in mock vehement surprise.'<sup>141</sup> Tarr's immediate reaction to the histrionic display is to adopt a role to counter Hobson's 'Pierrottesque and French variety': '[He] needed a grimacing, tumultuous mask for the face he had to cover. = The clown was the only role that was ample enough.'<sup>142</sup>

### **Café as Despatch Box**

As well as seating his characters at café tables as the most appropriate space to discuss art, Lewis also chose the café as a place where through the mouth of Tarr he might make public his own philosophical pronouncements. Arguably, *Tarr* is a didactic novel and it is the café settings that enable it to be so. Tarr's role as café wit and satiric malcontent really steals the show. Casting Hobson as both 'crowd' and 'cultivated audience,'<sup>143</sup> he ensures that he is the lone spectacle. Imposing the subjects that are only of interest to him on the conversation, in some instances he even takes it so far as to elide Hobson from the discussion, and answers for him: "'You reply, 'what is all the fuss about?'" Andrzej Gasiorek has identified this style as Tarr deploying 'a declamatory mode of address that replaces dialogue with the monologism of the self-obsessed mind'<sup>144</sup> (I would also add that it is a mode of address decidedly apropos to the setting: the monologic style of the café wit or celebrity, as described by Gilliam). This polemical impetus accrued its critics. Early on, the novel was criticised for the flatness of Tarr's characterization. Upon reading the manuscript, Harriet Shaw Weaver commented: '[t]he

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>144</sup> Andrzej Gasiorek, *Wyndham Lewis and Modernism* (Devon: Northcote House, 2004), p. 30.

characters appear to me mechanical automatons, wound up in order to spout forth opinions.’<sup>145</sup> Lewis responded with an acknowledgement of sorts:

The criticism you made I made myself to a friend of mine about those first chapters. I make Tarr too much my mouthpiece in his analysis of Humour etc. = Only what you say does not apply to the fourth chapter, of Part I, in which there are, I think, no opinions, only an analysis of character and action.

[...]

You must really consider the first three chapters as a sort of preface. But I will admit that Tarr has just a trifle too many of my ideas to be wholly himself, as I conceived him.’<sup>146</sup>

The fact that the writing of *Tarr* was not a wholly objective undertaking is further confirmed when we examine Lewis’s motivations for producing the novel. As he explained:

I wished to leave behind me a little specimen of my hand, that was the idea – upon the big scale, in a great literary form, to show the world – what a great writer they had lost! A romantic consideration!<sup>147</sup>

The chapters that gave rise to the objections such as Weaver’s are of course the café scenes, for it is in these spaces that Tarr and his opinions dominate.

Paul O’Keefe has suggested that the bases for Tarr’s lectures on Art and Sex in Chapter 1 and on Humour in Chapter 2 were essays produced by Lewis in 1911, which, he says, would explain the ‘rather blatantly authorial tone of Tarr’s conversations’.<sup>148</sup> Might the café be fundamental to his decision to include these essays? As a place where it is usual for altiloquent declamations on a range of subjects to be heard, might Lewis’s use of the café be motivated by an aesthetic attempt to integrate and naturalise his own

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<sup>145</sup> *LWL*, p. 76.

<sup>146</sup> Letter to Harriet Shaw Weaver dated March 1916. *LWL*, p. 76.

<sup>147</sup> Wyndham Lewis, ‘Beginnings’ (1935) in C. J. Fox and , p. 296.

<sup>148</sup> *T*, ‘Afterword’, p. 364.

philosophical thoughts as represented in the essays? Tyrus Miller has argued that Lewis's early authorial intrusions soon become intentional and integral to his future projects. Despite his concession to Weaver, rather than purging his work of personal rhetoric and theory, Lewis would in fact accentuate what Miller calls the 'infection of character and author, and of action and ideology.'<sup>149</sup> The shift in Lewis's attitude can be traced in his telling response to Sturge Moore, whose criticisms, like Weaver's, focused on the early café scenes: '[a]ll I can suppose is that I am really Tarr's hero.'<sup>150</sup> The café, therefore, functioned as Wyndham Lewis's despatch box.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has shown that space is a fundamental feature of Lewis's experience and diagnosis of society and culture in the early part of the twentieth century. Long *avant la lettre*, Lewis was thinking and working as a spatial theorist. He understood the innate and complex connections between the spatial and the social: how the one shapes the other. His first novel, *Tarr*, must be read as a socio-cultural critique that works on spatial terms, that is, his depiction of bourgeois-bohemia is deliberately presented using cartographic techniques, with special attention paid to metropolitan topography and demography.

Space features as a sense-making structure within *Tarr*, as is evidenced in his choice of metaphors and inventive appellations. The flood of modernity is a significant trope employed throughout. A metaphor that is both apocalyptic and redemptive, 'The Deluge' shapes the built environment of the city, transforming it and its inhabitants. More generally, water is undeniably a favoured metaphor for Lewis and other modern writers.

Lewis's conception of Parisian café culture may be understood in Lefebvrian terms as a *representational space*: symbolic and imaginative. Channelling the legacy of loquacious coffeeshouses of the past and the improving tavern conversations of Russian literature, Lewis delighted in being part of the café's long history as a space for artistic innovation. However, the unstoppable flood of modernity brought with it the commercialisation and rationalisation of space. The influx of exchange rate tourists

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<sup>149</sup> Tyrus Miller, *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction, and the Arts Between the World Wars* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), pp. 110-111.

<sup>150</sup> *LWL*, p. 100.

posing as artists saw this representational space manifest a negative side, which is characterised in his portrayal of 'Bourgeois-Bohemia.' His depictions of the impact of commerce upon the city's spaces here prompted him to compose an restorative vision of architectural renewal in his subsequent work, *The Caliph's Design: Architects! Where is Your Vortex?*

Reflecting the material philosophy of *The Caliph's Design* and its topographical aims, I suggested that for Lewis the café was the space most capable of rejuvenating the public sphere – the city's *demos*. As the most frequent setting in *Tarr*, I showed how the café is fundamental to the shape and form of conversation in the novel, dictating not only the content of what is said but also the manner in which it is articulated. Beyond the text as narrative form, I also proposed that the café functioned as the platform from which Lewis 'the war-ready artist' could present himself and his ideas. Delivering his views through his fictional characters there was no more appropriate space to stage these rhetorical monologues than the café.

Ultimately, Lewis's utopian visions for the city should always be juxtaposed with the disillusioning reality of modern metropolitan life and culture. There exists in his work a constant dialectical tension between a vision of what society may be and what unfortunately exists. The café is the space where this contrast is most obvious. As a hypercomplex Lefebvorean social space, it oscillates between many oppositional states: public/private, bourgeois/bohemia, derivative/innovative, commercial/intellectual, consumption/production, fixity/flux. This duality runs deep and can even be found in his visual representations, as I demonstrate in the following epilogue.

This investigation has revealed that Wyndham Lewis was sensitive to the signifying power of space and its implications for society and culture. Lewis uses space, particularly the café, to evaluate his cultural milieu, acknowledge the burgeoning tide of modernity, and criticise its lamentable affects.

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## Epilogue: Café Painting

As ambitious and elevated as Lewis's societal aspirations may have been, it is apparent from the outset that he was sceptical about humanity's capacity to rise up out of its vegetative torpor. An illustration of this uncertainty is revealed in Lewis's early painting

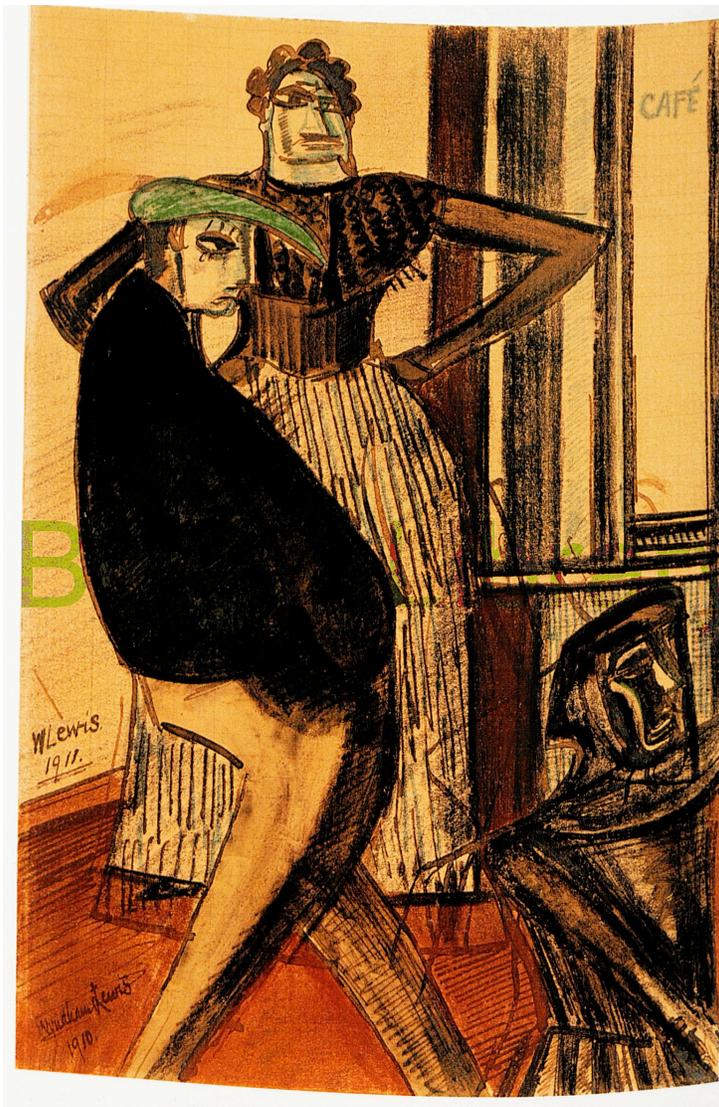


Fig. 5 – Lewis, *Café* (1910-11)

of one of these unique social spaces: *Café* (1910-11). In his monograph of the artist, *Wyndham Lewis: Painter and Writer* (2000), Paul Edwards discusses this painting, but the setting is incidental to his analysis and argument, which concentrates principally on the primitivist forms occupying the space and what they reveal about Lewis's technical concerns for the feel and movement of the body.<sup>151</sup> Informing us that this piece was apparently a preliminary sketch for a larger work entitled *Port de Mer* (1911) – a now lost oil painting exhibited in December 1911 –

Edwards suggests that *Café* was perhaps a product of Lewis's

<sup>151</sup> Paul Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis: Painter and Writer* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 25.

inspirationally fecund summer in Brittany in 1908.<sup>152</sup> This is quite possible, but if we consider Lewis's reflection that 'this period in retrospect responsible for much, is a blank with regard to painting'<sup>153</sup> alongside the fact that its creation coincides both with his return from Paris (in 1909-10) and his precursory work satirizing Parisian café society in *Tarr*,<sup>154</sup> it is perhaps just as likely that inspiration came from one of the many cafés he frequented during his time as a student in the capital.

Although the geographical location of the café remains unidentifiable, looking initially to the décor of the café and dress of the figures – no mirrors, gilding, or finery – we can certainly infer that this is a smaller working-class establishment (of the Left Bank, perhaps) as opposed to one of the more opulent institutions of the Parisian *Grands Boulevards*. We can also presume that the woman with her hands on her hips is the proprietor of the establishment, judging by her commanding position above the other two figures. From here at the front of the café (and the top of the canvas) she maintains authority (a fine visual model for a number of domineering landladies and *patronnes* that pervade Lewis's prose work). Also reinforcing this sense of jurisdiction are the strong architectural lines of the café entrance behind her – repeated in the vertical lines of her dress – that simultaneously bolster her authority and physically associate her with the space through geometrical echo. We might then find that the



Fig. 6 – Degas, *L'Absinthe* (1866)

dominant pose, disapprobative air, and minatory gaze, all heavily accented by an arched brow, are indeed directed, as Edwards finds, towards the (possibly) seated figure (possibly) talking to someone beyond the frame in the bottom right-hand corner. With the café as subject, however, we can perhaps take this reading further and conjecture a narrative of sorts.

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>153</sup> RA, p. 121 – I have taken into account that Lewis's comment could of course simply refer to his dissatisfaction with the paintings that he produced during this time. However, immersed in memories of Paris, as he must have been during the writing of what would become *Tarr*, I find the Parisian café a more compelling stimulus for the painting.

<sup>154</sup> At this time referred to as *The Bourgeois-Bohemians* – See O'Keefe's 'Afterword' in *T*, p. 362.

The zigzagging line contouring the watched-figure's head and back contributes a sense of activity suggesting a lurch forward, while the raised left shoulder implies that the left arm is raised just off canvas (the brown flooring visible to the left of the body reinforces the notion that this arm does not mirror the right in similar downward attitude) further suggesting gesticulatory animation of some sort. Considered along with the open mouth we might presume the presentation here of a number of typical café activities: a heated debate with an unseen disputant, perhaps, or, just as plausibly, a monologue, or even a drunken recital directed at no one in particular. In any case *Madame* seems to



Fig. 7 – Manet, *The Plum* (1877-78)

disapprove of the spectacle, and Lewis is apparently not particularly interested in presenting it. Perhaps the portly, cow-eyed worker slinks out of the café because he is wearied by this late display. Or, more likely, considering Lewis's focus is on him and his apparent

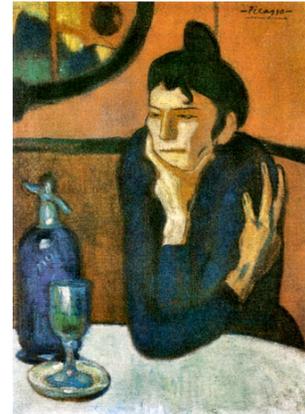


Fig. 8 – Picasso, *The Absinthe Drinker* (1901)

isolation rather than the goings-on in the foreground, it might be that Lewis

intends the heavy-lidded, objectless gaze to represent the café-dwellers' capacity for blinkered indifference amid the multitude of distractions in the modern milieu. Certainly, the fact that the proprietor looks past, or rather, straight through, this pot-bellied figure supports such a view, and, further, demonstrates what Richard Sennett in *The Fall of Public Man* labels 'the paradox of visibility and isolation' so characteristic of modern public life.<sup>155</sup>

Sennett locates the origins of this paradox in the nineteenth century with the rise of café culture and the increased presence of solitary individuals in public spaces observing the lives of those around them, and identifies the individual's expression of a right to 'public privacy.'<sup>156</sup> Such novel scenes inspired many artists of the time, and it became a subject typical of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century depictions of the café. For example, Degas' *L'Absinthe* (1876); Manet's *The Plum* (1877-78) and his *Interior of*

<sup>155</sup> Sennett (2002), p. 27.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 217.

a *Café* (1880); Van Gogh's *Agostina Segatori in the Café du Tambourin* (1887) and *The Night Café* (1888); Gauguin's *Night Café at Arles (Mme Ginoux)* (1888); Lautrec's *At the Café* (1899); and Picasso's *The Absinthe Drinker* (1901)<sup>157</sup> are just a few of the numerous works that draw on the paradox of isolation and alienation being expressed in a place consecrated to social interaction.

Lewis's café painting adds to the robust artistic tradition of capturing café life and shares certain thematic features with these earlier works. The overwhelming sense of cheerlessness and apathy pervading each space, for example, is common to all the paintings: the glum face of Lewis's rotund fellow – his drawn mouth and heavy eyelids – is also strikingly similar to the sullen countenance of Degas' woman in white. Another common feature among such paintings is the use of close focus upon a lone sitter that enhances the sense of isolation and confinement in the public space. Lewis's *Café* adopts a similar close focus but his painting is perhaps compositionally equivalent to Degas' *L'Absinthe*, Manet's *Interior of a Café*, or Van Gogh's *The Night Café* which, with their wider-angled depictions of multiple figures in propinquity yet devoid of any visible social or personal contact, contrast isolation and visibility in such a way as to add anomie into the mix. Perhaps combining the two techniques, the tight cropping of Lewis's composition intensifies the spatial proximities of his figures, particularly the glum fellow in the centre, and amplifies the sense of social dissolution.

As one might expect from a later period of painting, Lewis's work also differs in key areas. The first and most obvious difference is quite simply the movement of the central figure (induced by the positioning of the left leg and emphasised by the forward thrust of the stomach), because what comes across most strongly in the earlier works is the apathetic, almost catatonic quality of the sitters (they are all sitters). But leaving this pot-bellied figure aside for the moment and shifting our attention back to the other two characters, we also find a latent energy in Lewis's café that the earlier paintings, with their melancholic stasis and hopelessness, do not exhibit. For example, a point of energy clearly emanates from the focussed yet unreturned gaze of the proprietor, which portends

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<sup>157</sup> According to a recent study, Picasso was very much influenced by the café scenes painted by Degas, and between 1900 and 1903 he devoted over a dozen canvases to the subject. See Elizabeth Cowling and Richard Kendall, *Picasso Looks at Degas* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010) p. 88 (*passim*).

conflict, but therefore also suggests the possibility for future social interaction –albeit confrontational. The aggression here is arrested in stasis, a theme that would come to typify Lewis’s later Vorticist works.<sup>158</sup> A second source of energy derives from the severity of the cropped scene, which, by literally cutting through the figure in the bottom-right, interrupts the pictorial narrative (we know not why he attracts such a glare) and suspends what we naturally infer to be a dialogical process (every speaker *usually* has a listener). The scene is therefore deprived of logical fulfilment or completion. Compare this with the cropping of the male figure to the right in Degas’ *L’Absinthe*, while similarly truncated, there is no sense or indication that we are missing out on some pertinent fact or detail of his present condition.

The lack of resolution and refusal of closure in Lewis’s *Café* demonstrates a kind of ambiguous potentiality (it maybe goes too far to call it hope): for the unreturned gaze anticipates reciprocation, as does the open-mouthed animation of the gazed-upon fellow – there is purpose and agency here – so although social relations appear disconnected it is perhaps a momentary rather than perpetual condition and thus the possibility for reconnection and revivification remains. Compare this open-endedness with another of the nineteenth-century works: Van Gogh’s *The Night Café*, for instance, which, with its depiction of empty bottles, wineglasses, disordered chairs, and a few late night drinkers washed-up over café tables, is like a scene of aftermath. Any vitality or potential has dissipated; the dazzling electric lamps, the only source of vibrancy, blaze in contrast to the torpor of the day-worn figures below, whose energies at 12.15am have by now waned, been borne away like the previous day on a tide of absinthe. The oppressive energy of this café is a stark Dantean image of finality.<sup>159</sup> Likewise, with Degas’s

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<sup>158</sup> Violence: ‘Vorticism was based on the concept of the violence of the whirlpool about a centre of stillness, [Lewis’s] own Vorticist paintings and the novel *Tarr* [...] are works of extreme violence in which the violence itself is, as it were, violently arrested in stasis.’ In Walter Allen, ‘Lonely Old Volcano: The Achievement of Wyndham Lewis’ in *Encounter*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (September 1963), pp. 63-70 (p. 66).

<sup>159</sup> Van Gogh’s explanation of the painting suggests that he intended to portray a sense of finality and aftermath rather than something *in process*. Writing to his brother, he says: ‘I tried to express the idea that the café is a place where one can ruin oneself, go mad or commit a crime. So I have tried to express, as it were, the powers of darkness in a low public house, by soft Louis XV green and malachite, contrasting with yellow-green and harsh blue-greens, and all this is an atmosphere like a devil’s furnace, of pale sulphur. Vincent Van Gogh, Letter ‘No. 534’ in *The Complete Letters of Van Gogh*, Vol. 3 (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000), p. 31; cognizant of this explication, the painting brings to mind the famous caution on the entry gate to hell in *Dante’s Inferno* which reads: ‘Abandon all hope, ye who enter here.’

painting and many of the other works, one gets the sense that the figures share this same immutable fate and will sit hopelessly captive in front of their drinks all day and night.

Contrasted with the inertia of the nineteenth century café compositions, then, in which desolate figures are condemned to silence and inaction in a confined and oppressive public space, Lewis's café painting draws out the inevitable tensions that inhere in a site that is literally 'on edge,' a liminality existing as both public space *and*



Fig. 9 – Van Gogh, *The Night Café* (1888)

private place. Privacy enables autonomy, whereas public life is to an extent regulated and controlled: his figures therefore confront the same paradox (of visibility in isolation) as neither impotent subjects in an alienating milieu nor entirely autonomous individuals. Endowed with little more than *the potential* for change – the development or fulfilment of which is far from a certain thing – the café

constrains them to oscillate between restriction and independence. Such ambivalence refuses benign rhythms, presenting instead an ominous and, perhaps, violent space. This undermines old romantic notions of bohemian *Weltschmerz* or *acedia* – symptoms of *fin-de-siècle* inertia – and reveals Lewis's understanding of the café as a kind of battleground for renewal. *Café* ultimately depicts a charged and dynamic space of tensile oppositions, where 'being' wrests 'becoming,' 'fixity' vies with 'flux,' and 'stasis' contests 'movement.' Such oppositional tropes have been seen to typify the general character of Lewis's work. It is from within this highly tense atmosphere that, in the café scenes of *Tarr*, Lewis

attempts to whip-up and cajole into action what he sees as society's dormant potential.



Fig. 10 – Manet, *Interior of a Café* (1880)

## *Café Hemingway: The Spatial Dimension of the Hemingway Code*

*What is an ideology without a space to which it refers, a space which it describes, whose vocabulary and kinks it makes use of, and whose code it embodies?*

Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*<sup>1</sup>

In his memoir of life in 1920s Paris, *A Moveable Feast*, Ernest Hemingway describes stopping in at a favoured café to write. His visit has the routine quality of ritual. Upon entering he hangs his coat and stows his hat and orders a *café au lait*. And no sooner has he seated himself at a table in this ‘warm and clean and friendly’ place than he takes out his notebook from his jacket pocket and begins to compose a story.<sup>2</sup> Almost two pages are then devoted to the physical method of writing and to the psychology of the writer in relation to his physical surroundings. He tells us, ‘I was writing about up in Michigan and since it was a wild, cold, blowing day it was that sort of day in the story. [...] [I]n one place you could write about it better than in another.’<sup>3</sup> Unlike the journalism that he could write ‘anywhere,’<sup>4</sup> he suggests that this café is a space particularly conducive to his fictional work.

Hemingway’s reminiscence portrays the gradual immersion into total artistic focus that begins with the café and ritual. His writing is at first intervallic, interrupted by

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<sup>1</sup> *PS*, p. 44.

<sup>2</sup> *AMF*, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

sipping at a rum St James, looking up at a girl sat across from him, and by the regular sharpening of his pencil. The story ‘was writing itself,’ he says, ‘and I was having a hard time keeping up with it.’<sup>5</sup> But this is the unruly indiscipline of inspiration. The practiced artist has his method and must bring order to chaos. When he finally gets lost in his work, discipline and control are brought to bear: ‘I was writing it now and it was not writing itself and I did not look up nor know anything about the time nor think where I was nor order any more rum St James. [...] Then the story was finished.’<sup>6</sup> Hemingway insists that art should be undertaken with painstaking control, and that it should be hard work. Any romantic associations with fugue states in which the artist is taken over by unconscious inspirational flights are flatly rejected or else immediately bridled. It is only when one’s eyes are open, both physically and mentally, that one is able to convey successfully the ‘truth’ of one’s experience.<sup>7</sup> For Hemingway, writing is a craft and he is a craftsman. He is self-possessed and sedulous, and his method is characterised by a worldly discipline and focus.

This café scene reveals a special relationship between space and conduct: how Hemingway conducts himself within a space, and how that space in turn ‘conducts’ his writing. Furthermore, it shows how he imposes himself on the space – ‘all Paris’, he says ‘belongs to me.’<sup>8</sup>

This chapter explores the relationship between Hemingway, conduct, and the café. Hemingway has a special affinity with this unique space; in his fiction, he uses the establishment in very particular and significant ways. Underpinning much of the critical approach in this discussion is Henri Lefebvre’s notion (expressed in this chapter’s epigraph) that ideology is dependent upon space. Also important is his related concept of ‘representational space’, the idea that space takes on imagined metaphysical qualities via the operations of its users that then inform its perceived function and value. As such,

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> Reflecting on method in *Death in the Afternoon*, Hemingway writes: ‘I had read many books in which, when the author tried to convey it, he only produced a blur, and I decided that this was because either the author had never seen it clearly or at the moment of it, he had physically or mentally shut his eyes, as one might do if he saw a child that he could not possibly reach or aid, about to be struck by a train.’ Ernest Hemingway, *Death in the Afternoon* [1932] (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1948), p. 2 [hereafter, *DIA*].

<sup>8</sup> *AMF*, p. 3.

spaces become sites imbued with the multivalent ideological, political, social, moral, and psychological characteristics and meanings of their occupants/users/habitué. In Hemingway's writing, it is the café that is peculiarly and strikingly 'representational.' His depictions and articulations of space are often representative of his own ideological assumptions. More specifically, the café instantiates and reflects his own moral value system known to scholars of Hemingway as the 'Hemingway code.'

Basing the analysis around this key trope, I expand the scope of the existing theory by postulating that the code has a spatial dimension. In doing so, I will argue that space is an important, generative, and somewhat neglected aspect of Hemingway's work, and that the café is the place *par excellence* through which we can understand this spatial aspect.

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Many thousands of pages of Hemingway scholarship have amassed over the past eighty-or-so years, but it is perhaps surprising to find that very little work has been done on the significance of space and place in his writings.

When space or place is discussed it is often for its significance in Hemingway's real life rather than in his work. Such emphasis, therefore, tends to be on Hemingway the man and his place (or favourite places) in the world rather than on space and place as elements of the artist's craft. A prominent example of this is Noël Riley Fitch's work, *Hemingway in Paris: Parisian Walks for the Literary Traveller* (1989), which is both a guidebook to Hemingway's Paris of the 1920s and an attempt to convey the 'particular effect that Parisian places had on one writer's life and work.'<sup>9</sup> Here, Riley Fitch writes for two types of reader. The first is the 'curious novice', for whom she aims to provide 'a more personal, intimate introduction to Paris – a knowledge beyond the Eiffel Tower and Notre Dame.' And the second is 'the seasoned traveller and expert who wishes to connect his reading and appreciation of the arts to particular buildings and to personal experience.'<sup>10</sup> In order to achieve these goals, Riley Fitch surveys Paris through

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<sup>9</sup> Noël Riley Fitch, *Hemingway in Paris: Parisian Walks for the Literary Traveller* (Wellingborough: Equation, 1989), p. 21.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

Hemingway's biography, his writings, and an assortment of collected anecdotes from various sources. She lists the significant Parisian spots visited or frequented by him and the constellation of artists and luminaries that he drew into his orbit. She also provides maps with suggested walks of Paris that take in the many now famous places (including the cafés, bars, and restaurants) patronised by Hemingway and indeed referenced, fictionalised, and mythologised in his work. Riley Fitch's role as tour guide provides the reader with access to the actual material spaces used and written about by Hemingway, but it is in essence a guidebook and therefore has no aspiration toward critical examination of these spaces in relation to the texts.

More recently, the collection of essays edited by Mark Cirino and Mark P. Ott, *Hemingway and the Geography of Memory* (2010) displays a similar interest in Hemingway's real life encounters with place but with an eye to understanding his practice of filtering experience through the scrim of fiction. It therefore offers a more critical approach to the fusion of experience of space and place with artistic creation. However, it is the function of memory (and thus temporality) rather than geography that is the principal focus of the collection, as Cirino and Ott make plain: '[r]eturning to a place inspires a celebration of memory, providing a clarification of an essential truth of human existence, a contrast between then and now.'<sup>11</sup> The essays in the collection are divided into four sections that emphasise this focus: 1: Memory and Composition, 2: Memory and Allusion, 3: Memory and Place, and 4: Memory and Truth. The discussions in the first two sections broadly cover how Hemingway understands and interrogates the operations of his own memory. The third section 'investigates not only the geography of memory but also the memory of geography.'<sup>12</sup> And the fourth section is predominantly concerned with the fallibilities, inaccuracies, and interesting possibilities of memory in the art of the writer's fiction.

It is the section on 'Memory and Place' that is most relevant to situating the present study although it is clear again that, generally speaking, it is a focus on Hemingway's experiences of place rather than places and spaces as aesthetic signifiers

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<sup>11</sup> Mark Cirino and Mark P. Ott (eds.), *Ernest Hemingway and the Geography of Memory* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2010), p. x.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xv.

that underpins the discussions. For example, in the essay ‘Expatriate Lifestyle as Tourist Destination: *The Sun Also Rises* and Experiential Travelogues of the Twenties’, Allyson Nadia Field discusses what she sees as the parallels between Hemingway’s first novel and the profusion of personal guidebook-style exposés of expatriate Paris that came out during the period. She argues that ‘[w]hile not explicitly a guidebook, *The Sun Also Rises* can be considered part of the tradition of travelogues [...] that offer experiential guides to a lifestyle rather than monuments or museums.’<sup>13</sup> Positioning the narrator, Jake Barnes, as a *de facto* tour guide because of his ‘emphasis on his environment and recurrent references to the streets, bars, and cafés frequented by his expatriate companions,’ she says that ‘Hemingway contributes to a body of travel literature describing the places that constitute the infamous expatriate lifestyle.’<sup>14</sup> Field’s ultimate purpose is to read Hemingway’s novel against the travelogues and guidebooks of the 1920s. The famous cafés that the artist writes about are consequently discussed as points in a fictional travel itinerary. The study therefore has no concern with the specific ways in which Hemingway engages with or uses space and place in his work.

There are a couple of articles that specifically focus on the cafés as aesthetic signifiers. Both are by William Adair and are actually slightly differing versions of the same paper. The first is titled ‘*The Sun Also Rises*: Memory of War’, published in the spring of 2001, and the second is the suggestively titled ‘Cafés and Food: Allusions to the Great War in *The Sun Also Rises*’, published in the autumn of 2001.<sup>15</sup> In both articles Adair reads the various café scenes, café names, landscapes, and foods in Hemingway’s first novel as symbolic referents to what he labels as the novel’s ‘pre-story past’ – those incidents and events that have “‘already happened” to Jake Barnes and his generation,’ circa 1914-1922.<sup>16</sup> However, the focus on historical events (or temporality, again) trumps spatiality. For, in his analysis if a café has any importance at all it is only nominally and because it references something else, which in this case is the Great War.

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<sup>13</sup> Allyson Nadia Field, ‘Expatriate Lifestyle as Tourist Destination: *The Sun Also Rises* and Experiential Travelogues of the Twenties’ in *Ibid.*, pp. 83-96, (p. 83).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>15</sup> William Adair, ‘*The Sun Also Rises*: Memory of War’ in *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol. 47, No. 1 (Spring, 2001) pp. 72-91; William Adair, ‘Cafés and Food: Allusions to the Great War in *The Sun Also Rises*’ in *The Journal of Modern Literature*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Fall 2001), pp. 127–133.

<sup>16</sup> Adair (Spring, 2001), p. 73; Adair, (Fall, 2001), p. 128.

For example, in both articles, Adair suggests that the opening café scene in the Café Versailles – where Robert Cohn kicks Jake under the table – alludes to the conflictual negotiations between David Lloyd George, Georges Clemenceau, and Woodrow Wilson at Versailles in 1919. He says ‘[p]erhaps no one was kicked under a table in 1919 at Versailles [...] Still, Lloyd George grabbed Clemenceau by the collar and demanded an apology for accusing him of “making false statements.” Clemenceau offered to settle this matter of honor with “pistols or swords.”’<sup>17</sup> The cafés, spaces, and places in Hemingway’s work, then, are here granted significance not for their spatial or material characteristics but for what ‘pre-story’ memories or incidents they are taken to symbolize or invoke.

In sum, no scholars have thus far tried to engage critically with Hemingway’s use of space and place as I do here, and particularly with regard to his ideological assumptions.

### **The Hemingway Code**

An important and much discussed critical theory in Hemingway scholarship is the idea of the ‘Hemingway code.’ Deriving from a general philosophy that could be described as Existentialism *avant la lettre* with a distinct Epicurean tone, the code is Hemingway’s personal value system that sought to give meaning and significance to a world seemingly devoid of such qualities.<sup>18</sup> Broadly characterised in his work by self-control, honour, compassion, and fair play, as well as by an emphasis upon sensuous gratification as hard work’s reward, the code attempts to brook the disparity between man (Hemingway’s code heroes are typically male) and his condition, providing order, stability, security, and relative comfort in a contingent, uncertain, and ultimately finite existence.

Behind much of Hemingway’s fiction looms the crisis of existence, what various critics have by turn labelled ‘the shadow of ruin,’<sup>19</sup> ‘the ultimate horror,’<sup>20</sup> and ‘the

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 7; p. 128.

<sup>18</sup> For a discussion of Hemingway and Existentialism see John Killinger, *Hemingway and the Dead Gods* (Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1960).

<sup>19</sup> Robert Penn Warren, ‘Ernest Hemingway’ in *Selected Essays* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1964), p. 86.

void.<sup>21</sup> Hemingway himself referred to this as the great *nada* (nothingness) at the centre of things. The aesthetic principles, strategies, themes, and attitudes deriving from this lone existential encounter have become known generally as the ‘Hemingway code.’

Hemingway’s code was undoubtedly informed by his struggle to understand morality within the framework of an increasingly defunct Christian doctrine. Readers familiar with Hemingway’s life know that he converted to Catholicism in the 1930s and that in spite of his suicide in 1961 he died a Roman Catholic. Commentators, however, generally agree that while ‘technically’ a Roman Catholic, Hemingway never really entirely accepted Christianity. Carlos Baker says that Hemingway was a sceptic and generally superstitious in the presence of mysteries, and views Hemingway’s religion as a kind of nonintellectualized humanism, which prompted him to turn to and then away from the church.<sup>22</sup> For Hemingway, God is dead and the traditional ethic is invalid. Every man is thus directed to himself for the formation of a new ethic, which will stand in an intimate relation to him alone. As E. M. Halliday poetically formulates it: ‘We are part of a universe offering no assurance beyond the grave, and we are to make what we can of life by a pragmatic ethic spun bravely out of man himself in full and steady cognizance that the end is darkness.’<sup>23</sup> The focus of the code is very much about one’s own conduct, as Jake Barnes in *The Sun Also Rises* says, ‘[m]aybe if you found out how to live in it you learned from that what it was all about.’<sup>24</sup> This formulation is of course a subjective response but it is a response that is constantly tested against the realities of practical living and modified accordingly.

It was during the 1930s – by which time Hemingway had over ten publications to his name – that critics began to discern an apparent value system running through the

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<sup>20</sup> Carlos Baker, *Hemingway: The Writer as Artist* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 123.

<sup>21</sup> Ihab Hassan, *The Dismemberment of Orpheus* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 80.

<sup>22</sup> Carlos Baker, *Hemingway: A Life Story* (St. James’s Place, London: Collins, 1969), p. 12.

<sup>23</sup> E. M. Halliday, ‘Hemingway’s Ambiguity: Symbolism and Irony’ in *Hemingway: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1962), pp. 52-71 (p. 54).

<sup>24</sup> *TSAR*, p. 129.

work. In 1938, Delmore Schwartz identified ‘a definite code by which characters are judged and by which they judge each other,’<sup>25</sup> outlining the code’s pertinences as follows:

Courage, honesty, and skill are important rules of the code [...] To be admirable, from the standpoint of this morality, is to admit defeat, to be a good sportsman, to accept pain without an outcry, to adhere strictly to the rules of the game and to play the game with great skill. To be repugnant and contemptible is to violate any of these requirements. It is sportsman-like morality, or equally, the morality of sportsmanship. It extends its requirements into the region of manners and carriage, and one must speak in clipped tones, avoid pretentious phrases, condense emotion into a few expletives or deliberately suppress it – noble, to borrow a pun from William Carlos Williams, equals no bull.<sup>26</sup>

Other critics soon followed Schwartz with similar assessments. In the same year, Edmund Wilson noted ‘a principle of sportsmanship’ upon which the drama of Hemingway’s fiction hinges.<sup>27</sup> Reading *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) he identified ‘a code in all the drunkenness and social chaos,’ which he articulated as: ‘We suffer and we make suffer, and everybody loses in the long run; but in the meantime we can lose with honor.’<sup>28</sup> He also found that this code ‘supplies a dependable moral backbone’ to Hemingway’s subsequent collection of short stories, *Men Without Women* (1927).<sup>29</sup> Most significantly, perhaps, Wilson also suggested that this moral code defined the mid 1920s, setting the ‘favorite pose for the period’, and drew a tantalising association between the characterological and spatial aspects of the code, ‘Hemingway’, he says, ‘expressed the romantic disillusion’ of the time, ‘it was the moment of gallantry in heartbreak, grim and nonchalant banter, and heroic dissipation. The great watchword was ‘Have a drink’; and

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<sup>25</sup> Delmore Schwartz, ‘Ernest Hemingway’s Literary Situation’ [orig. pub. in *Southern Review*, 3 (Spring, 1938) pp. 769-782] in Jeffrey Meyers (ed.), *Hemingway: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), pp. 243-256 (p. 246).

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 246.

<sup>27</sup> Edmund Wilson, ‘Ernest Hemingway: Gauge of Morale’ [orig. pub. *Atlantic Monthly*, No. 164 (July, 1939), pp. 36-46] in Jeffrey Meyers (ed.), *Hemingway: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), pp. 297-313 (p. 300).

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 300.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 300.

in the bars of New York and Paris the young people were getting to talk like Hemingway.’<sup>30</sup>

The notion of the code as an integral part of Hemingway’s work was firmly established by Robert Penn Warren in 1949 in his introduction to a new edition of *A Farewell to Arms*.<sup>31</sup> Building on existing theories, and focusing again on character and biography, Warren postulates the code not only as definitional of an era, but, more significantly, as a singularly defining aspect of all of Hemingway’s work. He finds Wilson’s “principal of sportsmanship” [...] at the center of every story or novel,<sup>32</sup> and understands the code as Hemingway’s philosophical and aesthetic response to ‘the shadow of ruin, physical or spiritual,’<sup>33</sup> that lies behind existence. For Warren, the world Hemingway writes about is a violent one, chaotic and brutal, and the code is a means of attaining a sense of decorous victory in the face of death or defeat. He says that the typical Hemingway characters represent ‘some notion of a code, some notion of honor, that makes a man a man, and that distinguishes him from people who merely follow their random impulses and who are, by consequence, “messy.”’<sup>34</sup> The idea of self-control, order, and the avoidance of mess are key here. There is often in Hemingway’s work a preoccupation with hygiene and cleanliness versus dirt and disease, which speaks to a general modernist concern with the subject as stable and rational and ordered.<sup>35</sup> The structure, and discipline imposed by the code are, therefore, a means of protecting oneself from the disorienting and entropic exigencies of modernity, whilst simultaneously furnishing life with a sense of significance that precludes recourse to unsatisfactory supernaturalism. As Warren says:

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 301.

<sup>31</sup> First published in the Modern Standard Author’s Edition of *A Farewell to Arms*, Warren’s essay was later reprinted in his own *Selected essays* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1964), pp. 80-118, all references are to this version.

<sup>32</sup> Warren (1964), p. 86.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>35</sup> For discussions on modernist aesthetics, disease, and psychosis see, for instance, David Trotter, *Paranoid Modernism: literary experiment, psychosis, and the professionalization of English society* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) and Louis Arnorsson Sass, *Madness and Modernism: Insanity in the Light of Modern Art, Literature, and Thought* (New York: Basic books, 1992).

...[T]he code and discipline are important because they can give meaning to life that otherwise seems to have no meaning or justification. In other words, in a world without supernatural sanctions, in the god-abandoned world of modernity, man can realize an ideal meaning only in so far as he can define and maintain the code. The effort to do so, however limited and imperfect it may be, is the tragic or pitiful human story.<sup>36</sup>

The kind of existence Hemingway's code endorses is a life lived in and for the present through the immediacy of the senses. With the tenure of existence limited to this life (without God there is no everlasting soul nor attendant promise of eternal paradise) one must luxuriate in the temporal, the finite, taking conscious pleasure in the quotidian. Warren again: 'if there is at center only nada, then the only sure compensation in life, the only reality, is gratification of appetite, the relish of sensation.'<sup>37</sup> It is from this relishing in the world of the senses that the spatial dimension of the code follows. It is my contention that the café stands as the material, utopian ideal of this earthly compensation. For the Hemingway hero, the supernal café is one's sensuous reward for hard work and careful abidance of the code.

To date, many scholars have focused upon the characterological and biographical aspects of the code in Hemingway's work, but no one, it seems, has given much thought to its spatial dimensions. Space, place, and geography are of great importance to the man from Oak Park, Illinois, as any student of his biography knows: the rivers and streams of Michigan; the mountains and lakes of Italy; the cafés, bars, and restaurants of Paris; the bullrings of Spain; the dry grassy plains of East Africa; and the fishing boats and swells of the Gulf Stream are some of the most distinctive settings in the Hemingway oeuvre. 'Unless you have geography, background,' he once told George Antheil, 'you have nothing.'<sup>38</sup> In his short-fiction, novels, journalism, and correspondence, Hemingway's representations of space and place demonstrate facets of his moral philosophy, and certain significant sites consistently represent and thematically engage with particular

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<sup>36</sup> Warren (1964), p. 88.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>38</sup> George Antheil, *Bad Boy of Music* (London: Hurst & Blackett Ltd, 1947), p. 218.

aspects of the moral code. My purpose here is to argue that the café is the one unique physical site that most distinctly demonstrates the spatial dimension of the code.

For Hemingway, the café has major significance as an idealised site; indeed, there exists such a thing as the perfect café, a utopian establishment that embodies, in Lefebvorean sense, all the qualities of the code. The consistency with which such cafés are characterised in Hemingway's work by recurrent themes of goodness and wellbeing, comfort, stability, solace, and sensuous gratification, leave the reader in no doubt that the café is loaded with ideological significance.

One can read the universal presence of this ideology as an imposition – as an expression of power and authority. Universalising and utopian, Hemingway's ideology travels. Through his café representations, his moral code transcends and effaces the particularities of cultural difference and geographical location in order to impose control. Regardless of where in the world a café may be they are always distinctively Hemingwayesque rather than, say, French, Spanish, Italian, or Swiss. In short, Hemingway values his ideological space over the specificity of place.

Regarding Hemingway's technique, we recognize that style is, in a sense, a manifestation of conduct. We find that aesthetic values in his work are charged with significance, and are at times virtually equated with ethical values. His direct, telegraphic, limpid style speaks to this. There is also a distinct spatial grammar that Hemingway employs when talking about writing. In *Death in the Afternoon* (1932), for example, he writes: 'prose is architecture, not interior decoration, and the Baroque is over.'<sup>39</sup> In Hemingway's view, floridity or circumlocution in writing (what he calls 'scrollwork or ornament'<sup>40</sup>) demonstrate egotism, excessiveness, and lack of control. These superfluities hamper the directness and immediacy of reported experience, leading to vague or opaque sensation. Opacity is evasive and can be characterised as a form of dishonesty; and dishonesty not only violates the code but also undermines 'true' art.

Hemingway's cafés have their own ideology, they instantiate the tenets of his code, physically embodying and symbolising the highest achievements of this value system. As I explore the cafés in *The Sun Also Rises* and 'A Clean, Well-lighted Place', I

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<sup>39</sup> *DIA*, p. 191.

<sup>40</sup> *AMF*, p. 7.

will demonstrate that we can read these scenes and sites to access Hemingway's moral philosophy. By using the café as text, by engaging in a close reading of Hemingway's idea of the café, we can, I argue, ascertain as full an understanding of the code as any exploration of character.

### **Space as Ideology: Hemingway's Universal Café**

For some, the café may be viewed as a purely functional establishment, a place that one 'pops-in' for quick refreshment or restorative on the way to some other destination. For others, the café is the destination itself. Hemingway's idea of the café definitively falls within this latter category. For Hemingway and many of his fictional characters, cafés serve as hard work's reward and are thus desirable ends in themselves.

There is a telling passage in *The Sun Also Rises* where Jake, Bill, and Robert have stopped overnight in Bayonne on their way to Pamplona. In the morning, Jake describes the scene:

In the morning it was bright, and they were sprinkling the streets of the town, and we all had breakfast in a café. [...] It was hot, but the town had a cool, fresh, early-morning smell and it was pleasant to be sitting in the café. A breeze started to blow, and you could feel that the air came from the sea. There were pigeons out in the square, and the houses were a yellow, sun-baked colour, and I did not want to leave the café.<sup>41</sup>

References here to temperature in 'hot' and 'cool'; to tactility, in the blowing 'breeze'; and to vision, in the 'pigeons out in the square'; as well a final integrated description that combines heat, vision, and the feel of the sun in 'the houses were a yellow, sun-baked colour,' indicate that Jake's reasons for wishing to remain in the café are sensate. His description, however, is in no way *sensuous*. The sensorial response is what we readers achieve and project following absorption into his vignette. That is, Hemingway's external technique allows the reader to respond without stating directly Jake's emotional

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<sup>41</sup> *TSAR*, pp. 79-80.

responses. Hemingway theorised this as ‘the sequence of motion and fact which made the emotion,’<sup>42</sup> which, as many critics have observed, is virtually identical to T. S. Eliot’s ‘objective correlative’.<sup>43</sup> There are significant differences in their practices, however. Carlos Baker offers the point that Eliot generally fashions his ‘objective correlatives into a series of complex *literary* symbols’, whereas Hemingway’s correlatives are ‘to be traced back not to anterior literature and art objects, but to things actually seen and known by direct experience of the world.’<sup>44</sup>

In the story, the visit to the café in Bayonne is conceived merely as a pit stop; and Jake and the group continue their journey that morning onto Pamplona. The fact, therefore, that Jake announces his reluctance to leave the café is significant. In contrast, he expresses no such disinclination later in the novel when he is petitioned by the Englishman, Harris, at the end of what is often read as the quintessential fishing trip in Burguete, to “[s]top over another day. Be a good chap.” He replies: “We really have to get into town”.<sup>45</sup> The fishing that is seen as so idyllic does not seem to draw Jake in the same way that the pleasant little café does.

The triumph of café experience over the quintessential leisure pursuit, fishing, is again demonstrated in a journalistic piece Hemingway wrote for the *Toronto Daily Star* entitled ‘Fishing the Rhône Canal’. At the end of the article Hemingway departs from his main subject and discusses a café encountered on his way back from the fishing. It is an establishment that captures his imagination. The striking thing about this particular café is that it is sited within a train station, which, like the café in Bayonne, is not the writer’s ultimate destination. In fact, the transitional, liminal, and functional character of a train station makes it a place one would never really consider a destination in itself. It is,

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<sup>42</sup> *DIA*, p. 2.

<sup>43</sup> ‘...a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that *particular* emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.’ T. S. Eliot ‘Hamlet and his Problems’ (1919) in T. S. Eliot, *The Sacred Wood* (London: Methuen, 1920), p. 92. For comprehensive discussions of Hemingway’s technique in this regard see Susan F. Beegel, *Hemingway’s Craft of Omission: Four Manuscript Examples* (Ann Arbor; London: UMI research Press, 1988), pp. 90-91 *passim*; and Robert Paul Lamb, *Art Matters: Hemingway, Craft, and the Creation of the Modern Short Story* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010), pp. 70-72 *passim*.

<sup>44</sup> Baker (1972), pp. 56-57 [emphasis in original].

<sup>45</sup> *TSAR*, p. 111.

rather, what one might call – along with bus stations and airports, etcetera – a *de facto* non-destination:

I was in Aigle, which is a very good place to be. I have never seen the town of Aigle; it straggles up the hillside, but there is a café across the station that has a galloping horse on top, a great wisteria vine as thick as a young tree that branches out and shades the porch with hanging bunches of purple flowers and that bees go in and out of all day and that glisten after a rain, green tables with green chairs, seventeen percent dark beer. The beer goes foaming out in great glass mugs that hold a quart and cost forty centimes, and a barmaid smiles and asks about your luck.

Trains are always at least two hours apart in Aigle, and those waiting in the station buffet, this café with the golden horse and wisteria-hung porch is a station buffet, mind you, wish they would never come.<sup>46</sup>

Again, it is the idyllic and sensate café that elicits a desire for the experience to be prolonged. And, again, it is the presentation of ‘motion and fact’ rather than sensation itself that generates our sensorial response. We assume Hemingway, like the café’s other visitors, wished he, too, could postpone his onward journey. For he and they already find themselves at a quite satisfactory destination.

No matter where they happen to be in Europe – e.g. France, Spain, Italy, or Switzerland – Hemingway and his characters always seem to find themselves at such perfect cafés. This fact has little to do with proficient guidebooks or luck or even the physical attributes of the cafés themselves. The reason Hemingway and his characters always end up in the perfect café is because it is a conceptual ideal that travels – it is a space that Hemingway defines, carries with him, and imposes upon his articulation of space and place.

The publication of *The Sun Also Rises* set off a spate of touristic pilgrimages to the various locations visited by Jake Barnes and his compatriots including, of course, the

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<sup>46</sup> Ernest Hemingway, ‘Fishing the Rhône Canal’ (*The Toronto Daily Star*, June 10, 1922) in William White (ed.) *Dateline: Toronto* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1985), pp. 169-171 (pp. 170-71).

many cafés featured in the novel. However, while the most ardent of literary travellers may have been able to seek out and sit in every one of the cafés that inspired Hemingway's descriptions, they could never actively experience the space he described. For, the physical sites themselves – the bricks, mortar, tables, chairs, co-ordinates, etcetera – are less important as 'real' places than they are as Lefebvrian *representational spaces*. Hemingway's café depictions are generally abstracted and removed from the realities of their physical settings. That is, the characteristics of his ideal cafés transcend and to a certain extent erase the mimetic actuality of their geographical location. They tend to signify not in time and place but universally as ideological space.

Looking back to the cafés in Bayonne and Aigle, we see that Hemingway's café descriptions syntagmatically assemble concrete and distinctive spatial fields, which both emphasise the sensuousness typical of their compensatory value to the code hero and give the impression of an assured and dependable knowledge of the place described. Such spatial credence is constructed via presentation of what Carlos Baker calls 'the way it was': the concrete apprehension of the 'sense of place, the sense of fact, and the sense of scene.' The well informed or 'insider's view' is standard Hemingway procedure. His authoritative conveyance of place, and his knowing (or seeming to know) the ins and outs of any location he describes projects power and control.

Hemingway thus holds dominion over the places he writes. His concatenated units of description order place and space logically and rationally. Lefebvre's notion of the hypercomplexity of social space is muted here in favour of uncomplicated spatial organisation – every feature has a place and every feature is in its place. We might associate this method with de Certeau's 'law of the "proper"'<sup>47</sup> and his 'identification of place'<sup>48</sup> and the related mode of discourse, which he terms the *map*. In de Certeau's conception, map discourses order precisely where elements or features occur, presenting a 'tableau' or 'knowledge of an order of places'<sup>49</sup>. We should recognise that 'mapping' in this sense is a desire to impose control. In Bayonne, Jake's narrativisation of place tends toward this topographical style of visual description. From the café terrace he surveys the

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<sup>47</sup> *PE*, p. 117. De Certeau's French articulation, "proper", can also translate as 'clean,' 'neat,' and 'tidy'.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

scene and plots the landscape, creating boundaries and ‘proper’ places. But he also imparts knowledge and information beyond the immediately visual that implies local geographical insight (including meteorological aspects), noting features unseen like the sea from where the cool breeze issues. For Jake there are no spatial unknowns.

Aigle’s station café is similarly mapped and transformed into the immobility of a known and visually perceived place. Hemingway, the well-travelled *journaliste au courant*, is as familiar with Aigle’s dependable train timetable (‘Trains are always...’) as he is with the café, providing an authoritative account of what a visitor would encounter as assuredly as if he were reciting a programme of scheduled events or pointing out the fixed topological representations on a map.

Now, despite the meticulous presentation of ‘the way it was’ and the ‘facts’ of place in the above excerpts, the cafés are curiously devoid of any place-bound distinctiveness. Although the quintessence of place is in itself an ambiguous notion, Hemingway’s descriptions refuse even the most vague adumbration of Bayonne-ness or Aigle-ness. What he seems to present are distinct and idyllic café spaces that at the same time eschew any particularities of place. Baker makes a similar observation. Hemingway, he says:

[m]akes it almost a fetish to know them [places] with an artist’s eye, and has trained himself rigorously to see and retain those aspects of a place that make it *that place*, even though, with an odd skill, he manages at the same time to render these aspects generically.<sup>50</sup>

The café in Bayonne, for instance, could be situated anywhere on the Mediterranean coast. And although Hemingway tells us he was ‘in Aigle’, which is ‘a very good place to be’ he has, nevertheless, ‘never seen the town’ stopping only in the station café. Such an admission underscores Hemingway’s valuation of the café space (that is, what it represents) over its place (where it is geographically located). The little Swiss café is presented as a code hero’s paradise on earth, and, indeed, it could be almost anywhere on earth. Its Aigle-ness or Swiss-ness cedes narrative priority, bearing no consequence upon

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<sup>50</sup> Baker (1972), p. 50.

Hemingway's ultimate conception of the spatial experience. Hemingway's reminder that the café is a 'station buffet, mind you', emphasises the supernal power that this space holds despite its humble location.

Hemingway's idea of the perfect café, then, is an homogenising vision of space. His selective and carefully crafted assemblages of 'facts' supplant the *sui generis* of place with a particular ('Hemingwayesque') conception of ideal space. Such a universalising tactic bespeaks power and authority. His technique, now theorised as a de Certeauan map discourse, is emblematic, for it brings to mind J. B. Harley's declaration that 'maps are pre-eminently a language of power.'<sup>51</sup> Harley's view partially derives from Foucault whose critique of Western epistemologies (in turn derived from Nietzsche) posited that 'the quest for truth was not an objective and neutral activity but was intimately related to the "will to power" of the truth-seeker. Knowledge was thus a form of power, a way of presenting one's own values in the guise of scientific disinterestedness.'<sup>52</sup> The key advantage of a known and ordered landscape is domination and control, and describing (or mapping) Bayonne and Aigle in the distinctive and authoritative way that he does, Hemingway projects a similar will to power.

It is perhaps entirely fitting, then, that on his walk into Aigle Hemingway should invoke the imperialistic forces that have over the years left their various marks on Swiss topography. Walking on the straight white road he wonders about the Roman conquerors that built it, and Napoleon's Grand Army that would later march along it. He fancies that 'Napoleon's batman' must have 'gotten up at sunup before the camp and sneaked a trout or two,' and that 'some Helvetian in the road gang' must have tried the stream for 'a big one'.<sup>53</sup> His rhetorical purpose here is to evoke fishing as a timeless pursuit connecting particular men of all eras. But in light of what we now know of his spatial aesthetic, the connection induced is less about fishing and more thoroughly realised in the analogous imperialist tactic of conquering and appropriating space.

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<sup>51</sup> Harley, J. B., 'Maps, Knowledge, and Power', in S. Daniels and D. Cosgrove (eds.) *The Iconography of Landscape* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 277-312 (p. 301).

<sup>52</sup> Mark Poster, 'Foucault and History', *Social Research*, Vol. 49, No. 1 (Spring, 1982), pp. 116-42 (p. 118).

<sup>53</sup> Hemingway (1985), p. 170.

It was not, of course, the belligerence or military might of occupying forces that left their enduring mark on conquered regions; it was due, rather, to those surveyors responsible for rationalising and organising the newly acquired lands. One is reminded of the *agrimensores* marching alongside the Roman army, whose survey grids, made functional in centuriation, expressed a power that ‘homogenis[ed] everything in its path.’<sup>54</sup> Or Napoleon’s geographers, those ‘instruments and advocates of imperialism’, who ‘became indispensable to the post-conquest social, political and economic integration of the conquered regions...’<sup>55</sup> Universalising and utopian, Hemingway’s café descriptions similarly appropriate and homogenise space. His idealised vision travels with him, appropriating, organising, and defining places, and transforming them into idealised spaces.

**A Café Morality: “This is a good place...”**<sup>56</sup>

The cafés in Hemingway’s work are calibrated on a scale of morality. There are ‘good’ cafés and there are ‘bad’ cafés, and the distinction Hemingway makes is not simply based upon an evaluation of the establishment’s attendant comforts like good service versus bad service, or good décor opposing bad, etcetera (although, as we shall see, these are important factors), but, rather, upon the basis of its moral character. On this moral spectrum the good café will generally be a clean, steady, dependable place of rationality and Apollonian control, playing host to a principled (code-following) and upstanding clientele. And the bad café will be a dirty, protean den of iniquity; and its habitués, a licentious crowd of Dionysian moral bankrupts.

In both his journalism and his fiction, Hemingway set himself up as the arbiter of taste when it came to knowing the scene, the cafés, and the people. He could recite the names of all the streets; he knew the exact location of all the ‘good’ places and the best

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<sup>54</sup> *Agrimensores*: official land surveyors. Centuriation: in Roman colonization, to divide and assign land. Samuel Y. Edgerton, Jr., ‘From mental matrix to *mappamundi* to Christian empire: the heritage of Ptolemaic cartography in the Renaissance’, in David Woodward (ed.), *Art and Cartography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 10-50 (p. 22).

<sup>55</sup> Anne Godlewska, ‘Napoleon’s Geographers (1797-1815): Imperialists and Soldiers of Modernity’ in Anne Godlewska and Neil Smith (eds.), *Geography and Empire* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), pp. 33-54 (p. 53).

<sup>56</sup> *TSAR*, p. 9.

route to take to get to them. He was also on friendly terms with the ‘best’ bartenders and waiters who worked in them. Proclaiming oneself as insider or ‘in the know’ – whether feigned, imagined, or exaggerated – comes with an attendant contempt of those who are not: those tourists, outsiders, and pretenders.

Indeed, if Hemingway, as Edmund Wilson put it, ‘set the favourite pose of the period,’ it was a pose he himself undermined by his depiction of a hierarchy of cafés in which the most popular were depicted as less the sites of a creative bohemia than the ‘Mecca of [...] bluffers and fakers in every line of endeavor from music to prizefighting.’<sup>57</sup> Like Wyndham Lewis, Hemingway regarded most of his fellow café-dwelling expatriates as poseurs dressed up as artists, and he singled out the Café Rotonde’s crowd worthy of particular scorn. Of the hundreds of Americans that would pack the café, he wrote: ‘[t]he scum of Greenwich Village, New York, has been skimmed off and deposited in large ladlesful [sic] on that section of Paris adjacent to the Café Rotonde.’<sup>58</sup> Positioning himself as the authority on who were or were not to be considered authentic artists, he added:

You can find anything you are looking for at the Rotonde – except serious artists. The trouble is that people who go on a tour of the Latin Quarter look in at the Rotonde and think they are seeing an assembly of the real artists of Paris. I want to correct that in a very public manner, for the artists of Paris who are turning out creditable work resent and loathe the Rotonde crowd.<sup>59</sup>

Hemingway clearly distinguishes himself as one of those ‘serious artists’ turning out such creditable work, and therefore not to be associated with the ‘immoral’ café or its habitués, the Rotonders.

Hemingway’s derision of the Rotonde as a superficial tourist destination makes tacit reference to his café hierarchy, which takes more explicit form in *The Sun Also Rises*. On taking a taxi from the Hotel Crillon (on the Right Bank of the city) to the Café

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<sup>57</sup> Ernest Hemingway, ‘The Mecca of Fakers’ (*The Toronto Daily Star*, March 25, 1922) reprinted in William White (ed.) *Dateline: Toronto* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1985), p. 119.

<sup>58</sup> Hemingway (1967), p. 23.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25.

Select (on the Left Bank, in Montparnasse), Jake reports that '[t]he taxi stopped in front of the Rotonde. No matter what café in Montparnasse you ask a taxi-driver to bring you to from the right bank of the river, they always take you to the Rotonde.'<sup>60</sup> Jake resents being mistaken for an ignorant tourist unwise to the nuances of the various cafés, and who, as a consequence (the taxi-driver assumes) will find satisfaction in the most vulgarly popular establishment of the Boulevard Montparnasse. Getting out of the taxi and walking past the Rotonde to the Select, he conflates the contemptible habitués and the equally deplorable space, anthropomorphising the café, referring to 'the sad tables of the Rotonde.'<sup>61</sup>

Hemingway's placing of cafés in a hierarchy becomes explicit on a separate occasion when Jake describes his walk home after leaving the Café Select:

I went out onto the sidewalk and walked down toward the Boulevard St Michel, passed the tables of the Rotonde, still crowded, looked across the street at the Dôme, its tables running out to the edge of the pavement. Someone waved at me from a table, I did not see who it was and went on. I wanted to get home. The Boulevard Montparnasse was deserted. Lavigne's was closed tight, and they were stacking the tables outside the Closerie des Lilas.<sup>62</sup>

Here, Jake's brief, yet suggestive, observations 'actualise' (in the de Certeauian sense) Montparnasse's cafés. The narrative animates the cafés, transforming them from static, dead 'places' into active 'spaces'. This action creates (Lefebvrian) *representational spaces* that reveal to us the nature and clientele of the establishments, which then informs a café hierarchy. The late night crowds still up drinking in the Rotonde and Dôme betray a frivolousness and lack of purpose. Unlike the newspaperman, Jake, who is conscientiously on his way home to bed, the majority of this crowd apparently have no work or responsibilities for the morning of the coming day. The anonymous compatriot whose acknowledgement Jake ignores represents the amorphous expatriate café culture of

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<sup>60</sup> *TSAR*, p. 37.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.

poseurs, vaguely familiar faces, and superficial relationships that, as a professional and ‘insider,’ he is keen to distance himself from. The Closerie des Lilas, one of Hemingway’s personal favourites, is evidently a more respectable café, keeping ‘decent’ hours.

In his memoir of life in 1920s Paris, *A Moveable Feast*, Hemingway reinforces this notion of decency, referring to the Lilas as a ‘good café’ that was ‘warm inside in the winter and in the spring and fall it was very fine outside with the tables under the shade of the trees.’ He then contrasts it with the shallowness of the popular expatriate cafés:

People from the Dôme and the Rotonde never came to the Lilas. There was no one there they knew, and no one would have stared at them if they came in. In those days many people went to the cafés [...] to be seen publicly and in a way such places anticipated the columnists as the daily substitutes for immortality.<sup>63</sup>

The Lilas is ‘good’ because it is quieter and less showy. He discusses only ever seeing one poet in the Lilas – Blaise Cendrars – on only one occasion. And as for the typical clientele, he says:

Most of the clients were elderly bearded men in well worn clothes who came in with their wives or mistresses and wore or did not wear thin red Legion of Honor ribbons in their lapels. [...] These people made it a comfortable café since they were all interested in each other and in their drinks or coffees, or infusions, and in the papers and periodicals which were fastened to rods, and no one was on exhibition.<sup>64</sup>

Here, the artist finds his ideal spot among the local Parisians well apart from the expatriate tourists. Many of those he sits with are former French soldiers, recipients of the highest order of honour the country can bestow. They are, in Hemingway’s idealising eyes, moral men, poor, honestly presented men of the code (discounting perhaps those

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<sup>63</sup> *AMF*, p. 47.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 46-47.

men with mistresses!). And this along with their consequential talk of world affairs makes the café Lilas a decent, comfortable space.

Hemingway's idea of a café morality is so significant that *A Moveable Feast* actually begins with reference to this spatio-moral hierarchy. The opening chapter, 'A Good Café on the Place St-Michel,' positions the eponymous 'Good Café' in distinct moral opposition to the 'evilly run'<sup>65</sup> Café des Amateurs. The Good Café is 'pleasant...warm and clean and friendly';<sup>66</sup> and is of course the café that Hemingway the 'professional' frequents. The 'evil' Café des Amateurs, on the other hand, is a place of dirt and intemperance 'where the drunkards of the quarter crowded together;' it is 'the cesspool of the rue Mouffetard,' but unlike the cesspools of the street, Hemingway wryly informs us, 'no one emptied the Café des Amateurs.'<sup>67</sup> The transgressive and recalcitrant nature of the café's crowd is further conveyed in the description of its 'yellowed poster stating the terms and penalties of the law against public drunkenness,' which was 'as flyblown and disregarded as its clients were constant and ill-smelling.'<sup>68</sup> Note that the constancy of café dwellers implies that they have no responsibilities or work. They are like the café's name implies: 'amateurish' parodies of professional working artists.

The good café on the Place St. Michel is a stable place of clear thinking and perspicacity, the place where Hemingway, the 'good' writer, goes to write his distinct lucid prose. It was evidently important to him because it drew the discerning writer through the cold wind and rain past a host of other Latin Quarter cafés, a distance of almost two kilometres to sit and enjoy its atmosphere conducive to the artist and the art of writing.<sup>69</sup>

The idea of the 'good' café is so important to Hemingway, in fact, that he pays homage to this idealised concept in his short story, 'A Clean, Well-lighted Place.' The clean, well-lighted place of the title is a Spanish café. And before the story is over, the illuminated little establishment comes to embody all the positive aspects of Hemingway's

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>69</sup> According to Google Maps™, Hemingway's apartment on the Rue Cardinal Lemoine is approximately 1.8km and twenty minutes' walk to the Place St-Michel.

ideology: order, cleanliness, truth, honour, dignity, compassion, security, solace, and sensuous gratification. Operating as a moral beacon amid the dark enveloping beyond of *nada* or nothingness, it stands as the perfect exemplar of what I have termed the spatial dimension of the code.

### 'A Clean, Well-lighted Place'<sup>70</sup>

First published by *Scribner's Magazine* in 1933, the much-anthologized 'A Clean, Well-lighted Place' is a significant work in the Hemingway oeuvre. Accumulating pages of critical attention and acclaim over the years, it even enjoyed the imprimatur of James Joyce who commended it as 'masterly'. 'Have you read A Clean, Well-lighted Place?' he asks his readers, 'it is one of the best short stories ever written', adding, 'there is bite there.'<sup>71</sup>

Bite indeed. The story is perhaps Hemingway's starkest treatment of the crisis of existence that underpins much of his work. Robert, for instance, thinks the story stands as the 'best description of what underlies Hemingway's world of violent action.'<sup>72</sup> It is interesting to note that the café is the arena in which universal themes of death, despair, aging, and meaninglessness all converge in this skilfully compressed short story. What we find with 'A Clean, Well-lighted Place,' therefore, is a tale in which the fundamental driving force behind Hemingway's code-derived world-view is articulated through space and place, particularly the café.

The story opens with an old man sat drinking late in a café after everybody else has gone. Two waiters (one young, one old), sit watching, discussing him:

"Last week he tried to commit suicide," one waiter said.

"Why?"

"He was in despair."

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<sup>70</sup> First published in *Scribner's Magazine*, Vol. 93, (April, 1933), pp. 204-208. It was later included in the collection, *Winner Take Nothing*, published in October 1933.

<sup>71</sup> James Joyce, review of *Winner Take Nothing* in Jeffery Meyers, *Ernest Hemingway: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), p. 24.

<sup>72</sup> Warren (1964), p. 91.

“What about?”

“Nothing.”

“How do you know it was nothing?”

“He has plenty of money.”<sup>73</sup>

The old man’s despair is not about ‘nothing,’ of course, as many commentators agree. The nothing (or *nada*, in Spanish) contains ‘huge actuality.’<sup>74</sup> It is a creeping intangible dread that is made up in part of both the acknowledgement of advancing age and the fear of an inexorable demise into nothingness. ‘Death’, as Warren observes, ‘is the great nada.’<sup>75</sup>

The old drinker’s sleeplessness is triggered by this fear of the dark of the night. For it is at night that the mind is not well-lighted or well-ordered. As Jake Barnes says about his weakness for Brett Ashley in *The Sun Also Rises*: ‘it is awfully easy to be hard-boiled about everything in the daytime, but at night it is another thing.’<sup>76</sup> This night dread is a familiar motif and malady in Hemingway’s work that goes back to the writer’s actual wounding in Italy during World War I when his dugout was hit by a mortar at night. His subsequent fear of night time is articulated in the short story ‘Now I Lay Me’ (1927), where a soldier forces himself to stay awake for fear that if he falls asleep in the dark his soul would go out of him. Both the older waiter and the old man in ‘A Clean, Well-lighted Place’ share this same fear.

The narrative unfolds through conversation about aging, faith, and loneliness based upon the naïve young waiter’s understanding of *nada*-as-nothing versus the wiser, older waiter’s understanding that *nada* is ‘a Something called Nothing.’<sup>77</sup> The younger waiter is impatient to close the café and get home to his wife, so after pouring the old man a brandy he then denies him a second and turns him out. He cannot understand why

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<sup>73</sup> Ernest Hemingway, ‘A Clean, Well-lighted Place’ [1933] in *The Complete Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1998), pp. 288-29, [hereafter ACWLP].

<sup>74</sup> Baker (1972), p. 124.

<sup>75</sup> Warren (1964), p. 92.

<sup>76</sup> TSAR, p. 30.

<sup>77</sup> Baker (1972), p. 124.

the old drinker cannot simply ‘buy a bottle and drink at home’<sup>78</sup>, or go to a *bodega* [wine-shop or wine cellar] or bar instead. The older waiter can. He sympathises with the old man, he knows of the insomnia-inducing Nothing that haunts old age. A man cognizant of the spatial dimension of the code, he recognises the difference between a *bodega* and a *café*, and therefore understands why the old man is drawn to the light of the clean, well-lighted place. The two waiters eventually close the shutters and the younger one goes home. Left on his own, the older waiter recites parodic versions of the Lord’s Prayer and the Ave Maria. And the story ends after he makes an unsatisfactory visit to a bar and goes home to bed where he awaits the comforting light of dawn and the onset of sleep.

Although the story has been the subject of much analysis, the clean, well-lighted place of the title – the *café* – has not been accorded the significance it deserves. Indeed, in a write-up of a recent (2007) roundtable discussion on Hemingway, George Monteiro neglects the distinction between a *café* and a bar that Hemingway’s old waiter is at pains to make. When summarising the action of the story, Monteiro gets it wrong by claiming that after closing the *café* the waiter, instead of going to a bar, goes on to another *café*. Granting Monteiro the benefit of the doubt that he may well have been speaking from memory, only serves to highlight the point that not enough has been made of the significance of the *café* as a unique and distinctive place in this story.<sup>79</sup> In another article, the action is summarised as follows: ‘[t]wo waiters sit in a Spanish *café*. [...] The two converse about a customer after he leaves, an old man who has recently attempted suicide, and whom the two waiters, at the insistence of the younger, have put out of the bright, cheery *bodega* so they can close for the night.’<sup>80</sup> Here, the term *bodega*, in blatant disregard of the dialogue, is casually deployed as a synonym for *café*, which again ignores the older waiter’s explicit differentiation.

Through the course of this discussion it will be shown that there is indeed a difference between the *café* and the *bodega*, and that this difference exemplifies the

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<sup>78</sup> *ACWLP*, p. 290.

<sup>79</sup> See George Monteiro et al. ‘A Frost/Hemingway Roundtable Co-Sponsored by the Robert Frost Society and the Hemingway Society, 28 December, 2007, Modern Language Association, Chicago, II’ in *Hemingway Review*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (Spring, 2011), pp. 99-117.

<sup>80</sup> See John S. Wright ‘“Jack-the-Bear”: Dreaming Ellison’s Spiritual technologies’ in *Boundary 2*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (Summer, 2003), pp. 175-194 (p. 190).

spatial dimension of the code. To begin with it will be necessary first to give an example of the critical consequences of not attending to the significance of the café.

Such indifference to the distinction between the two types of drinking establishment does not mean that critics have altogether ignored the importance of place or space in this story, but it does mean that such readings have remained limited. This is because many have ignored the specificity of the setting, conferring it only emblematic importance. Hemingway's biographer, Jeffrey Meyers, for example, finds that the illuminated café represents:

[A] kind of peace, order, security and refuge that stands in opposition to the old client's deafness, isolation, loneliness and despair. The war, the destruction of idealism and the loss of God have led inevitably to the concept of *nada*: no tangible thing, but a palpable and overwhelming sensation of nothingness. The theme is subtly expressed through a series of suggestive polarities: light and shadow, sleep and insomnia, confidence and despair, courage and fear, dignity and degradation, faith and scepticism, life and death.<sup>81</sup>

Meyers rightly acknowledges the importance of the setting as symbolic of refuge, peace, order, and security, but his reading of the café remains at the level of symbol. That is, the specificity of place is incidental to his analysis. Instead of seeing these qualities as intrinsic to the café *qua* café, for Meyers, the place is a blank upon which such meanings are projected. Meyers merely abstracts the particularities of the café whereas I want to demonstrate that the café itself has symbolic significance in its own right. Meyers' oversight is merely one practical illustration of a much larger critical lacuna that I wish to redress.

If we conceive the café as symbolic of the spatial dimension of the Hemingway code, we realise that it is not simply *any* clean, well-lighted place, but *this* clean, well-lighted place (the café) that is absolutely central to Hemingway's creative vision in this story. What, then, are the crucial attributes of the café that the older waiter is so keen to

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<sup>81</sup> Jeffrey Meyers, *Hemingway: A Biography* (London: Paladin, 1987), p. 259.

stress? In order to answer this, a brief reflection on the Hemingway code and the code hero will serve as a prefatory illustrative analogy.

The code is about wide-eyed and honest acceptance of the realities of the world as one can actually demonstrate them, and decidedly not about the faith-based comforts of a speculative afterlife. The code operates in a world circumscribed by an eternal and inescapable nothingness. This is an all-embracing condition that one cannot step outside of – death is the one dependable universalizing fate. As such, the code can only be oppositional to *nada* in the sense that one's mortality must be confronted in order to attain a sense of decorous victory in the face of this very nothingness. This is about conscious self-discipline. The code hero does not oppose nor deny his finitude; rather, he accepts his fate and looks upon the void with courage, honour, and dignity. In contrast, a person not of the code may (wittingly or unwittingly) disavow these realities by living a blinkered life, one distracted or shaded by illusion. For instance, one may wilfully seek forgetfulness through alcoholic diversions – the hope, perhaps, is that the void will be rendered imperceptible in the shadow of drunken ignorance. Or one may also simply be ignorantly unaware of their existential condition – one of those, as the old waiter says, who 'lived in it and never felt it'<sup>82</sup> (the naïve young waiter clearly falls into this category). In either case the shades are drawn on reality, and the light of awareness is devitalized and diffuse.

Understanding the code in this way, we could say that a crucial aspect of living a life consistent with the Hemingway code is perspicacity. For, it is clear-sightedness and clarity of thought that enables one to first acknowledge, then comprehend, and finally face one's existential lot. I therefore want to suggest that this is exactly what the clean, well-lighted place embodies and facilitates – and it is this instantiation, moreover, that I term the spatial dimension of the code. In this conception, the *bodega* or bar should be understood as representing antithetical values of darkness, disavowal, and diversion.

The final exchange between the two waiters illustrates this very well. The younger waiter's naïve remark that the old drinker could go on somewhere else because "there are *bodegas* open all night long," prompts the following response from the older waiter who is keen to distinguish between the two types of establishment:

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<sup>82</sup> ACWLP, p. 291.

“You do not understand. This is a clean and pleasant café. It is well lighted. The light is very good and also, now, there are shadows of the leaves.”

“Good night,” said the younger waiter.

“Good night,” the other said. Turning off the electric light he continued the conversation with himself. It is the light of course but it is necessary that the place be clean and pleasant. You do not want music. Certainly you do not want music. Nor can you stand before a bar with dignity although that is all that is provided for these hours.

The characteristics the waiter checklists as commendable and favourable cultivate not only comfort, but also acuity of vision and thought. His final point that one cannot stand before a bar with dignity suggests a spatio-moral element to his reasoning. There are five specific material elements that make up the waiter’s refutation and all relate to perspicacity: light, cleanliness, pleasantness, no music, and shadows of leaves.

The light is clearly an important factor in the waiter’s defence of the café, referring to it here three times. In purely physical terms, when a place is well lit it aids perception and facilitates better apprehension. Providing sharp outlines and illuminating detail, people and objects are thus presented with a degree of exactness and honesty. A sense of security and ease is also consequent upon such light because it extinguishes any unknowns; and comfort or pleasantness naturally accompanies a safe environment.

The emphasis on cleanliness similarly concerns perspicacity and comfort. In Hemingway’s view, a clean place indicates a measure of control and order, while mess and dirt impart confusion and unpleasantness. A place that is unkempt and disarrayed also says something about the conscientiousness of its management as well as its clientele. These would be the kinds of undisciplined and impulsive people Warren describes as “‘messy,’”<sup>83</sup> and therefore not typically adherents of the code.

The waiter’s insistence that ‘[y]ou do not want music. Certainly you do not want music’, is also underpinned by the need for comfort and lucidity. For Hemingway’s waiter, it may be thought that music functions to invade thought and prevent clear

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<sup>83</sup> Warren (1964), p. 86.

thinking. George Orwell, writing of 'Pleasure Spots' in 1946, seems to have arrived at a similar conclusion. Reflecting on some vision of the future for leisure resorts he had just read that predicted, amongst other garish and artificial accoutrements, 'music seeping through hundreds of grills connected with a central distributing stage', he concludes that '[m]uch of what goes by the name of pleasure is simply an effort to destroy consciousness'. He identifies five characteristics of such a future paradise, which he suggests can already be glimpsed on 'a pleasure cruise or in a Lyons Corner House':

1. One is never alone.
2. One never does anything for oneself.
3. One is never within sight of wild vegetation or natural objects of any kind.
4. Light and temperature are always artificially regulated.
5. One is never out of the sound of music.

He then writes that:

[t]he music – and if possible it should be the same music for everybody – is the most important ingredient. Its function is to prevent thought and conversation, and to shut out any natural sound, such as the song of birds or the whistling of the wind, that might otherwise intrude. [...] The music prevents the conversation from becoming serious or even coherent, while the chatter of voices stops one from listening attentively to the music and thus prevents the onset of that dreaded thing, thought.

Orwell rounds off his critique with reference to the kind of disavowal discussed above:

It is difficult not to feel that the unconscious aim in the most typical modern pleasure resorts is a return to the womb. For there, too, one was never alone, one never saw daylight, the temperature was always regulated, one did not have to worry about work or food, and one's thoughts, if any, were drowned by a

continuous rhythmic throbbing.<sup>84</sup>

Relating this back to the café we can infer from both Orwell and Hemingway that music is understood to compromise perspicacity.

Finally, although the shadows of the leaves do not expressly affect perception, what they do in this place of heightened sensation is function as a symbolic reminder of mortality, of the shadow of death. In this way they facilitate the old man's honourable confrontation with his existential condition, with *nada*. Together, what all these characteristics tell us is that the clean, well-lighted place is not a place of illusion, denial, or disavowal. Unlike a luridly or darkly lit place that frustrates and impedes sensation, making indistinct one's environment, and casting objects and people unnaturally, the well-lit café serves to heighten acuity. In the dark of night the light comforts while at the same time compels the habitué to ruminate on his own finitude via the shadows of the leaves that envelop him. The old man *is* deaf; he *is* lonely; he *is* isolated; he *is* old! And it is more than likely that his life will be over sooner rather than later. These are the realities he must face and then dutifully accept; and accept them he does, with honour and dignity as per the code: '[t]he waiter watched him go down the street, a very old man walking unsteadily but with dignity.'<sup>85</sup>

We are now in a position to understand why in the old waiter's view one cannot stand before a bar with dignity. The bar's main purpose, unlike the café, is not to provide material comfort or a kind of existential solace but to sell alcohol. Put another way, we could say that its *raison d'être* is to provide the means through which one might become insensible to reality – to disavow one's mortality and avoid facing up to one's existential fate. In terms of the spatial dimension of the code, the bar stands as the antithesis of the clean, well-lighted place. It is not a place of thoughtful repose or comfort gained honourably. It is obtained rather through the numbing amnesiac powers of alcohol and the disavowal of the dark, of *nada*. We can assume from the way the older waiter stands at the bar to order that there is no outside terrace with waiters who fetch drinks. This

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<sup>84</sup> George Orwell, 'Pleasure Spots' in Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (eds.) *The Collected Essays and Journalism and Letters of George Orwell, vol. 3, As I please 1943-1945* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), pp. 102-106.

<sup>85</sup> ACWLP, p. 290.

counter-service set-up requires one to be shut indoors under bright light, and consequently oblivious to the night outside. The old waiter's comment that "[t]he light is very bright and pleasant but the bar is unpolished" says much. Even though the light is described as pleasant, the fact that it is 'very bright' indicates that it may be somewhat lurid and unnatural. The unclean, unpolished bar demonstrates that the barman is indifferent to certain standards and, like his bibulous clientele, messy. The dirty countertop is perhaps a result of these barflies spilling their liquor, which is something the controlled and dignified old drinker at the café does not do: "[t]his old man is clean," the older waiter observes, "[h]e drinks without spilling."<sup>86</sup> These negative characteristics of the bar lead the old waiter to the unambiguous conclusion that '[h]e disliked bars and *bodegas*. A clean, well-lighted café was a very different thing.'<sup>87</sup>

The difference between a bar or *bodega* and a café, then, is that the clean, well-lighted café instantiates the positive values of the Hemingway code, such as order, cleanliness, truth, honour, dignity, compassion, security, solace, and sensuous gratification. Through its display of light and shadow, it also facilitates the code hero's dignified confrontation with *nada* as well as assuages his consequent despair. Conversely, the bar's brightly lit room is closed off to the night outside, and it is dirty: traits consistent with impercipient, intemperance, uncontrol, as well as dishonourable and undignified avoidance and disavowal of *nada*. Any comfort, solace, or security are bought cheaply at the bar and last only as long as the numbing effects of the alcohol that is consumed.

In the next section it is the clean, well-lighted café's positive attributes that I wish to explore further. Ascribing a pattern to these characteristics, I want to suggest that the clean, well-lighted place may be understood as a kind of secular church.

### **The Café as Secular Church**

Recounting the story, we know that the old man has just last week tried to commit suicide and it is to the clean, well-lighted café that he has turned. I have suggested that this is

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 289.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., pp. 290-91.

because the place instantiates the positive attributes of the Hemingway code and facilitates one's honourable confrontation with one's mortality – with *nada*. The old man's fear of this ultimate horror is triggered by the dark of night, and it is the café's light that temporarily abates his dread. Sitting at a clean table on the terrace 'in the shadow the leaves of the tree made against the electric light,'<sup>88</sup> the old drinker is provided with comfort, solace, protection, and even guidance. In this way, the café functions as a kind of secular church providing the kinds of ministrations normally associated with a typical religious church.

Religion – particularly the Catholic religion – and religious tradition feature extensively in Hemingway's work, as Leo J. Hertzell states: 'Catholicism is an element of some importance in all of the longer narratives [...] and appears frequently in the short stories.'<sup>89</sup> Part of the reason for this was his regard for the language and style of the Old Testament. Speaking in the 1930s of his writing influences, Hemingway told Samuel Putnam it was through reading the King James Version of the Old Testament that he learned how to write. And when Putnam asked if he would put Shakespeare alongside the Bible as a model for writers, Hemingway replied: 'Yes, Shakespeare –but above all, the Old Testament. That's all any writer needs.'<sup>90</sup> Despite his fondness for the elevated form of the Bible, however, Hemingway never really accepted the doctrine of faith and was not particularly religious in the Christian sense. Converting to Catholicism in the 1930s because of his devout second wife, Pauline Pfeiffer, he was always a perfunctory rather than ardent Catholicism. Carlos Baker states that Hemingway's tergiversations on faith ended with a conclusive turning away from the Church 'arriving finally at a kind of non-intellectualized humanism while protesting that he missed the ghostly comforts of institutionalized religion as a man who is cold and wet misses the consolations of good whisky.'<sup>91</sup> The use of religious references and metaphors by Hemingway, then, might be understood as an attempt to reinstitute or reclaim religion's gravitas for his work without recourse to 'ghostly' supernaturalisms.

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 288.

<sup>89</sup> Leo J. Hertzell, 'The Look of Religion: Hemingway and Catholicism' in *Renascence*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (Winter 1965), pp. 78-79 (p. 78).

<sup>90</sup> Samuel Putnam, *Paris was our Mistress: Memoirs of a Lost and Found Generation* (New York: Viking Press, 1947), pp. 128-129.

<sup>91</sup> Baker (1969), p. 12.

This is certainly Hertzell's conception of Hemingway's relationship with religion:

Hemingway gives his Catholicism no flicker of light beyond the infinite, the human and the temporal. He writes as a naturalist, and there is no supernatural dimension in his fiction. The Catholic Church is treated something like bullfighting is treated – it is presented as a colourful institution with richness, tradition, ritual and discipline, but it provides no convenient miracles. What this amounts to is that Hemingway uses the religion chiefly as a kind of literary ingredient.<sup>92</sup>

One need not delve too deep to find the religious ingredients in his art. The titles for many of his works, for example, are extracted from Biblical and religious sources. The epigraph to *The Sun Also Rises* is taken from the book of Ecclesiastes; *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940) comes from John Donne's seventeenth 'Meditation;' The short story title 'Now I Lay Me' is an ironic play on a Christian child's bedtime prayer; the title for his memoir *A Moveable Feast* is drawn from the Christian tradition of a holy day which is not calendrically fixed, and alludes to the celebration of the Resurrection; while the title of the short story, 'The Light of the World' refers to the description Jesus gave of himself in John 8:12: 'I am the light of the world. He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.'<sup>93</sup>

The religious references are also evident in 'A Clean, Well-lighted Place,' as a few scholars have noted. Warren, for instance, referring to the story's themes of faith, despair, and the search for assurance and order, asserts that 'in this phase [of his work] Hemingway is a religious writer.'<sup>94</sup> In the essay 'Hemingway as Psalmist' (1987), George Monteiro discusses the scriptural influences on three of Hemingway's works: 'Neothomist Poem' (1927), *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), and 'A Clean, Well-lighted Place', and he finds that the twenty-third psalm is of particular significance. Looking at 'A Clean, Well-lighted Place' he proposes, for instance, that the old man sitting in the

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<sup>92</sup> Hertzell (1965), pp. 78-79.

<sup>93</sup> John 8:12, *The Bible*, King James Version.

<sup>94</sup> Warren (1964), p. 92.

shadow of the leaves is ‘a deliberate echoing of the shadow image of the twenty-third psalm (‘though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death’).’ And notes an even closer echo of Luke 1:79, on the purpose of John the Baptist: ‘To give light to them that sit in darkness and *in* the shadow of death.’<sup>95</sup> He also highlights what he calls ‘the remarkable literalisation into action of one of the most familiar metaphors employed in the twenty-third psalm – ‘my cup runneth over.’’<sup>96</sup> This occurs when the young waiter has finished pouring the old man a brandy, and the old man then motions with his finger and asks for “‘A little more,’” prompting the following dramatisation: ‘The waiter poured on into the glass so that the brandy slopped over and ran down the stem into the top saucer of the pile.’<sup>97</sup>

The efforts of scholars like Monteiro and Hertzell have worked to highlight very well the frequent and extensive use Hemingway makes of religion in his work. However, such investigations, with their focus simply on instances of scriptural reference and allusion remain analytically at the level of text. I want to expand on the scope of these endeavours.

I want to suggest that in ‘A Clean, Well-lighted Place’ Hemingway uses religion to elevate the café to the status of a church. The scriptural references and allusions imbue the café with a sacredness and gravity, which reflect both the ideological importance and the reverence Hemingway feels for this apparently humble space. There are several distinct elements to the story that lead us to this conclusion.

Like every church, the café has a clergy: in this case the waiters. The opening description of them points to their ministerial status and concern for their ‘congregation’ (here: the old drinker):

[t]he two waiters inside the café knew that the old man was a little drunk, and while he was a good client they knew that if he became too drunk he would leave without paying, so they kept watch on him.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> George Monteiro, ‘Hemingway Psalmist’ in *Journal of Modern Literature*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Summer, 1987), pp. 83-95 (p. 92) [emphasis in original].

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>97</sup> *ACWLP*, p. 289.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 288.

Like shepherds, the waiters keep watch on their flock. Treading the path of the code is no easy task, the effort to define and maintain it, as Warren says, ‘however limited and imperfect it may be, is the tragic or pitiful human story.’<sup>99</sup> Despair is the old man’s tragic story. The waiters – the older waiter in particular – are at the café to provide ‘code guidance’ in accordance with a ‘café liturgy,’ much like a priest might provide spiritual guidance. The younger waiter may be understood as a trainee or seminarian. His naïve understanding of *nada* and his impatience with the old drinker are reflective of his neophyte status. Together, the waiters want to ensure that the old man does not digress and dishonour himself, that is, leave without paying, or lose control and get too inebriated. Sensuous gratification is a key element of the Hemingway code, but control is also important. To emphasise the strictures of the code the waiters are there to encourage a level of conformity and maintain the dignity of the code.

At one point the older waiter even articulates his role at the café as a kind of hieratic office. Arguing with his naïve young novice, he emphasises the solace-giving importance of the café late at night when the *nada*-fearing ‘congregation’ may need the comforting light or his clerical intercession: “I am one of those who like to stay late at the café,” he says, “[w]ith all those who do not want to go to bed. With all those who need a light for the night.” Like the purpose of John the Baptist who gives ‘light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death’ (Luke 1:79), the wise waiter clearly understands the café and his pastoral duties similarly: “[e]ach night I am reluctant to close up because there may be some one who needs the café.”<sup>100</sup>

Though he may perceive his role as such, it should be understood that it is the café space that confers upon the waiter his hieratic status. The café-as-church represents all the positive aspects of the spatial dimension of the code. It is in this comfortable, controlled, and illuminated space that the code hero not only attains solace and sensuous gratification, but finds also that code adherence is a little easier. In the same way a person of faith feels closer to God in a church (and comports themselves accordingly), the code hero is more aware of the exigencies of the code in the well-lighted café.

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<sup>99</sup> Warren (1964), p. 88.

<sup>100</sup> *ACWLP*, p. 290.

Once outside the café, however, the code hero may struggle to maintain a dignified path. For example, when he is outside the café, the waiter's status changes: he moves from one who operates within the spatial dimension of the code to one without such a stable framework to support him. The café space and his role within it provide him with protection and solace, too. He no longer functions as a member of the 'code clergy;' he can neither minister nor perform his careful 'order of service.' Nor can he adequately keep his own fear of *nada* at bay. Indeed, at the end of the story, stood *outside* the café when the shutters are pulled down and the light is turned off, the waiter articulates the fear common to him, the old drinker, and 'all those who need a light for the night':

What did he fear? It was not fear or dread. It was a nothing that he knew all too well. It was all nothing and a man was nothing too. It was only that and light was all it needed and a certain cleanness and order. Some lived in it and never felt it but he knew it all was *nada y pues nada y nada y pues nada*.<sup>101</sup>

Once the waiter has exited the clean ordered space, and the physical comfort of the café is extinguished, the darkness draws around and sensitises him to his own existential lot. Outside of his 'church' and no longer hieratically engaged, the waiter is just another congregant like the old drinker beset by fear of that great 'Nothing.' And subsequently, in an oblation to *nada*, he recites parodic versions of the Lord's Prayer and the Ave Maria:

Our *nada* who art in *nada*, *nada* be thy name thy kingdom *nada* thy will be *nada* in *nada* as it is in *nada*. Give us this *nada* our daily *nada* and *nada* us our *nada* as we *nada* our *nadas* and *nada* us not into *nada* but deliver us from *nada*; *pues nada*. Hail nothing full of nothing, nothing is with thee.<sup>102</sup>

In traditional Catholic Mass, of course, the original Lord's Prayer is typically recited not by the priest but by the congregation. His resort to common prayer here confirms his demotion from celebrant to congregant. The prayer is a parodic entreaty for protection

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 291.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 291.

(for himself, for others) against the enveloping nothingness. Outside in the dark and in a condition readied for ensuing anxiety or fear, it is at this point that the waiter goes to the bar in search of assurance. We might even conceive of the waiter's visit here as a momentary fear-driven lapse into willful disavowal, but, as we have seen, the bar is no clean, well-lighted place. It can provide no such reassurance, comfort, or solace. One reason for this is that, unlike the café, the bar lacks certain understood principles of conduct or form.

For example, like the formulary of the church that prescribes practices of worship, there is also what one might call a 'liturgy of the café,' which prescribes an 'order of service.' This is already evident in the older waiter's conduct and prayers discussed thus far, but becomes even more apparent when we contrast the waiter's notion of his priestly duties (responsibility, sympathy and concern for the old man, etcetera) with the indifference of the barman who serves him in the bar at the end of the story:

He smiled and stood before a bar with a shining steam pressure coffee machine.

"What's yours?" asked the barman.

"*Nada.*"

"*Otro loco más,*" said the barman and turned away.

"A little cup," said the waiter.

The barman poured it for him,

"The light is very bright and pleasant but the bar is unpolished," the waiter said.

The barman looked at him but did not answer. It was too late at night for conversation.

"You want another *copita*?" the barman asked.

"No, thank you," said the waiter and went out. He disliked bars and *bodegas*. A clean, well-lighted café was a very different thing.<sup>103</sup>

There is a distinct lack of fellowship or sympathy in the barman's transaction with the older waiter. And *transaction* is the word; it is a cold and mechanically pragmatic proceeding, devoid of the kinds of welcoming pleasantries one might expect or hope for.

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., pp. 290-91.

There is no salutary greeting on the waiter's entry; and the barman's terse interrogative gives no indication that anything other than alcohol will be available or indeed proffered – there will be no conversation, certainly. Where, in the café, the waiter kept a watchful eye on the old drinker, here the barman unconcernedly turns his back on his client. The barman's lack of concern and/or judgement is also evident when despite thinking that the old waiter is 'Otro loco más' [another crazy one] he still pours a drink for his 'crazy' client without regard for the consequences of serving alcohol to someone that may be a little unhinged. And he even offers another *copita* [glass] as soon as the first is emptied. We have already noted that the unpolished bar is the result of such disregard: disregard for standards, for clientele; and now: disregard for an 'order of service' that reveals to us another significant difference between the bar and the café in this story.

### **Reading the Twenty-third Psalm in 'A Clean, Well-lighted Place'**

Finally, a few words on the twenty-third psalm. While scholars have noted Hemingway's use of biblical references in 'A Clean, Well-lighted Place,' particularly his allusions to the twenty-third psalm, they have not expounded any further than this; that is, usage has been noted but its significance has not been adequately explored. If we accept my suggested paradigm: that the clean, well-lighted café represents a kind of church with waiters as *de facto* priests and an old drinker as a code congregant 'who needs the café,' then the context for such scriptural reference and allusion could not be more appropriate. With this new comprehension of the story we might now understand the literalisation of the 'cup runneth over' metaphor as the old drinker's thankful response in recognition of the café and its 'code clergy' for his anointment. In fact, looking at the Psalm in its entirety from this point of view, we find a highly suggestive overarching theme for Hemingway's idea of the 'good' café in general. First, a reminder of the Psalm:

<sup>1</sup> The LORD *is* my shepherd, I shall not want.

<sup>2</sup> He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:  
he leadeth me beside still waters.

<sup>3</sup> He restoreth my soul:

he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

<sup>4</sup> Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil:  
for thou *art* with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

<sup>5</sup> Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies:  
thou anointest my head with oil,  
my cup runneth over.

<sup>6</sup> Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life:  
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

The psalm is typically understood as a meditative prayer of trust in God and commitment to Him. Its principal idea is expressed through the line: 'I shall not want', which is demonstrated and supported by two allegories: the first is God as shepherd, and the second is God as host of a great and bounteous feast. Reciting these lines, the psalmist acknowledges the spiritual sustenance and solace concomitant with being watched over and provided for.

The kind of comfort and solace that the psalmist attains via faith in God can be compared and likened to the consolations Hemingway associates with his concept of the perfect, or clean, well-lighted café. Both the psalm and Hemingway's notion of the café are about provision, satiation, and comfort.

The natural imagery of the psalm – the green pastures and still waters – is evident in all Hemingway's ideal cafés. It can be seen in the shading trees that enclose Hemingway's favourite Parisian café, La Closerie des Lilas,<sup>104</sup> or in the 'great wisteria vine' and 'purple flowers' that shade the Café Aigle; or, indeed, in the tree that shades the terrace of the clean, well-lighted Spanish café. It should perhaps be pointed out that it is not at all usual or commonplace to have a café terrace furnished with such verdure. The waters at these cafés may not be so still but they are there: in the form of great foaming quarts of dark beer in steins cold and beaded on the outside; and they provide the same sense of calm repose and have the same restorative action.

The psalm's 'valley of the shadow of death' is understood here as *nada* and one's unavoidable condition as a being subject to death. In the psalm, where protection from

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<sup>104</sup> *AMF*, p. 46.

this shadow is derived from God and everlasting life, here a brief but tangible sanctuary can be realised at the café. This is key: despite the sad fact of one's ultimate finitude, a table can always be readied at the supernal café where one's spirit can be lifted and one's vitality restored. In the café, a concerned waiter takes the role of shepherd and host. The 'staff' of the café, like the staff of the psalm, is a source of comfort; albeit here it is literal, secular, temporal, waist-coated, and tray carrying. Where the psalmist envisions the perfect life as dwelling in the 'house of the LORD forever'; for Hemingway, it is dwelling in the perfect café.

We began this discussion with a claim about Hemingway's conception of the café: that with 'A Clean, Well-lighted Place' he has paid homage to his ideal vision of the café; that it is ultimately a 'good' place of control, dignity and honour, and has an importance and gravity comparable to that of a religious space like a church. The use of religious symbols as 'literary ingredients' reinforces this notion, which continues through his allusions to the twenty-third psalm. It is when we finally appreciate the psalmist's sense of solace, satiation, provision, paternalism, protection, and moral guidance, that we come close to understanding the nature and the extent of Hemingway's reverence for the café, and its power to console, instruct, and satiate the habitué's 'soul.'

### **The Café as Code Barometer**

If 'A Clean, Well-lighted Place' represents a skillfully compressed homage to Hemingway's idealised café (and his most complete demonstration of this concept) then his 1926 novel, *The Sun Also Rises*, may be said to contain some early indications of this same idea. The novel follows the frivolous activities of a group of American expatriates in Paris and Spain, and it is striking how often the café functions as the backdrop for their escapades. This section examines a few key café scenes and argues that, as before, the café reflects the spatial dimension of the code; but more specifically, the café functions here as a kind of code barometer that instantiates not only the moral progress of the characters but also the overall trajectory of the novel. Once again, for Hemingway, the café is a representational space, which he imbues with a moral dimension. Ultimately, then, this section will reveal the short sightedness of one early reviewer, who, in the

*Cincinnati Enquirer* on 30<sup>th</sup> October 1926, considered it a flaw of the novel that ‘most of the author’s narrative is employed in ushering his characters in and out of cafés...’<sup>105</sup>

*The Sun Also Rises* is a novel about geography and space; it is also a novel about morality. My purpose here is to show how the latter is articulated through the former. That is, I will again explore the spatial dimension of the Hemingway code and how the café is central to it. Geographically, the novel follows the travels and travails of American journalist Jake Barnes and his circle of friends. It is structured around a movement from the expatriate café culture of Montparnasse to the feverish San Fermin Fiesta in Pamplona, with a pastoral interlude in between. The character-to-character tensions that are set up in the cafés of Paris are eventually released in the frenzy of fiesta in Spain. Looking at Hemingway’s notebooks and early drafts of the novel, Frederic Joseph Svoboda remarks how Hemingway was especially mindful of geography and setting in his crafting of the story, calling it in part ‘a travel book’ and ‘a novel whose settings have received particular attention.’<sup>106</sup>

The novel’s conspicuous moral dimension has also been widely recognised and explored.<sup>107</sup> *The Sun Also Rises* is one of the principal texts that scholars use in discussions of the Hemingway code,<sup>108</sup> and it is also the novel that Hemingway himself called a ‘very moral’ book.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Review quoted in James Nagel, *Critical Essays on Ernest Hemingway’s The Sun Also Rises* (New York: G.K. Hall, 1995), p. 3.

<sup>106</sup> Frederic Joseph Svoboda, *Hemingway & The Sun Also Rises: The Crafting of a Style* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1983), p. 38.

<sup>107</sup> See, for example, Carlos Baker, *Hemingway: The Writer as Artist* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), Baker observes that *The Sun Also Rises* has ‘a sturdy moral backbone.’ pp. 82-3, p. 92; or Scott Donaldson, ‘Hemingway’s Morality of Compensation’ in *American Literature*, Vol. 43, No. 3 (November, 1971), pp. 399-420; or John W. Aldridge’s ‘Afterthoughts on the Twenties and *The Sun Also Rises*’ in Linda Wagner-Martin, *New Essays on The Sun Also Rises* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), in which he discusses the socio-historical context of the novel, including the reassessment of moral values following WWI; or John W. Crowley, *The White Logic: Alcoholism and Gender in American Modernist Fiction* (Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), who argues that Hemingway uses drink to ‘establish a hierarchy of moral merit for his characters.’ (p. 51).

<sup>108</sup> See, for example, Schwartz (1938), Wilson (1939), Warren (1964), and Baker (1972) [All previously cited].

<sup>109</sup> Carlos Baker, *Hemingway: A Life Story* (London: Collins, 1969), p. 429.

The narrator of the story, Jake Barnes, is a character very much concerned with conduct, behaviour and, like his creator, the proper way to do a thing.<sup>110</sup> As such, he is the ‘code hero’ and moral compass of *The Sun Also Rises*. It is Jake that explicitly states the moral code of the novel:

No idea of retribution or punishment. Just exchange of values. You gave up something and got something else. Or you worked for something. You paid some way for everything that was any good. I paid my way into a lot of things that I liked, so that I had a good time. Either you paid by learning about them, or by experience, or by taking chances, or by money. Enjoying living was learning to get your money’s worth and knowing when you had it. You could get your money’s worth. The world was a good place to buy in.<sup>111</sup>

Part of the Hemingway code is recognising that nothing in life is without some sort of cost; that good times and good feeling must be earned or paid for. ‘The bill always came’, says Jake, ‘[t]hat was one of the swell things you could count on.’<sup>112</sup>

The café is central to this aspect of the code and Jake’s enjoyment of life. It is established early on that the good café is for Jake one of hard work’s rewards, and that his use and understanding of the space is in contrast to his friends’. It is through Jake that we see how the café should be ‘properly’ utilised. As a code hero, Jake displays an emphasis on self-control and conduct. He generally only unwinds at a café after a hard day’s work and never stays too late. Throughout the Paris section of the novel, Jake’s conscientious work ethic is evidenced repeatedly in contrast to the dissipated café dwelling of his fellow expatriates.

Hemingway’s real-life disdain of the loafing crowd at the Café Rotonde stems from the notion that theirs is an unearned, and therefore immoral, life of leisure. Unearned in terms of the endowments that support them, and the favourable exchange

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<sup>110</sup> ‘[Hemingway] was always intensely interested in how to do a thing. He was absorbed by method.’ Charles A. Fenton, *The Apprenticeship of Ernest Hemingway* (London: Vision Press; Peter Owen, 1954), pp. 150-1.

<sup>111</sup> *TSAR*, p. 129.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129. Also, see Donaldson (1971) for an in-depth discussion of what he calls ‘Hemingway’s Morality of Compensation’.

rate that allows them to live even more profligately than they otherwise would. And it is immoral because they are generally superficial and fraudulent people. He says:

The fact that there are twelve francs for a dollar brought over the Rotonders, along with a good many other people, and if the exchange ever gets back to normal they will have to go back to America. They are nearly all loafers expending the energy an artist puts into his creative work in talking about what they are going to do and condemning the work of all artists who have gained any degree of recognition. By talking about art they obtain the same satisfaction that the real artist does in his work. That is very pleasant, of course, but they insist upon posing as artists.<sup>113</sup>

Their association with real artists is also unearned and undeserved in Hemingway's eyes, as Scott Donaldson says, '[t]o the writer, single-minded in his dedication to the craft, the time-wasting of café habitués represented the greatest sin of all.'<sup>114</sup> Dispelling for his readers the myth that genuine poets still socialised and wrote in cafés just like their nineteenth-century forebears, Hemingway imagines how even back then Baudelaire must have 'sweated and carved at the Fleurs du Mal alone with his ideas and his paper as all artists have worked before and since.' And he contrasts how 'the gang that congregates at the corner of the Boulevard Montparnasse and the Boulevard Raspail have no time to work at anything else; they put in a full day at the Rotonde.'<sup>115</sup>

We are presented with these two contrasting lifestyles when Robert Cohn, the struggling writer and man of inherited wealth, visits Jake in his office in chapter 2 of *The Sun Also Rises*. In order that his work is not disturbed too much, Jake takes Cohn to the café below his office. Their diverging ideas about what makes a good café are subtly hinted at when Cohn surveys the bottles of alcohol stacked in bins around the café walls, and comments '[t]his is a good place'. His judgement is evidently that a good café is one that has lots of alcohol on site. That Jake's assenting reply, "[t]here's a lot of liquor,' I

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<sup>113</sup> Hemingway (1967), p. 25.

<sup>114</sup> Donaldson (1971), p. 403.

<sup>115</sup> Hemingway (1967), p. 25.

agreed', is not to Cohn's statement but to his tacit observation displays delicate and tactful disagreement. For Jake, this is not a 'good' café in the sense that we have been discussing so far. A café is never about overindulgence or intemperance for a man of the code. Jake, rather, uses this café strategically in a professional capacity. Explaining why he brought Cohn from his office to the café, he says:

I had discovered that was the best way to get rid of friends. Once you had a drink all you had to say was: 'Well, I've got to get back and get off some cables,' and it was done. It's very important to discover graceful exits like that in the newspaper business, where it is such an important part of the ethics that you should never seem to be working.<sup>116</sup>

The ruse nevertheless fails to get rid of Cohn, and, with no other responsibilities or commitments in his frivolous life, Cohn ends up sleeping on a couch outside the office while Jake gets back to his cables, working hard 'for two hours.'<sup>117</sup> Once he has finished writing the dispatches, Jake then goes not to the café below his office to unwind but to the Café Napolitain where he sits on the terrace watching the crowd go by.<sup>118</sup>

All Jake's hard work in Paris is in an effort to *pay* for his Fiesta, so that he can watch the bullfighting, go fishing, and relax in the Spanish cafés in the knowledge that he has earned the (moral) right to do so. With this in mind, it is when Jake begins his vacation that he is in a sense 'rewarded,' and starts to experience genuinely idyllic 'good' cafés. We have already discussed, for instance, the café in Bayonne that Jake finds so pleasant that he 'did not want to leave.'<sup>119</sup> When they get to Pamplona, the principal establishment frequented by Jake and the group is the Café Iruña, a café of supernal qualities comparable to those idyllic cafés already encountered (The Café in Aigle, the Closerie des Lilas, and, of course, the clean, well-lighted place). It is undoubtedly one of Hemingway's 'perfect' cafés.

After their first meal, following their arrival, Jake and Bill take coffee there 'sitting

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<sup>116</sup> *TSAR*, p. 9.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

in comfortable wicker chairs looking out from the cool of the arcade at the big square.’<sup>120</sup> The real-life Café Iruña celebrates Hemingway’s patronage today with ‘Hemingway’s Corner,’ and it is perhaps little wonder. Through Jake, Hemingway is positively adulatory when conveying the café’s comfort, referring to the Iruña’s white wicker chairs no less than six times throughout the Pamplona section of the novel. As fiesta approaches, Jake gives a summary description of the Iruña and café life:

We sat in the white wicker chairs on the *terrasse* of the café [...] The tall gray motor-buses were the only life of the square except for the pigeons and the man with a hose who sprinkled the gravelled square and watered the streets. [...] During the morning I usually sat in the café and read the Madrid papers [...] We all had vermouth at the café. It was a quiet life and no one was drunk. [...] We all felt good and we felt healthy.<sup>121</sup>

In contrast to the heavy drinking, drunkenness, and petty squabbling in the cafés of Paris, this tranquil and idyllic depiction of the Café Iruña represents the apotheosis of group positivity and good feeling within the novel. In this ideal café Jake and his companions also display the controlled drinking of code adherence. Such is the spirit of life in the Iruña that Jake admits he ‘felt quite friendly to Cohn,’ adding ‘[y]ou could not be upset about anything.’<sup>122</sup> Barometrically speaking, the café reads ‘good.’

As well as being able to register the prevailing atmosphere, the café also has an ability to forecast. On one occasion (through Jake) we find Cohn remarking on the Café Iruña’s agreeableness. Jake recalls: ‘I was sitting at the Iruña reading the papers when I saw Robert Cohn coming across the square. He came up to the table and sat down in one of the wicker chairs. ‘This is a comfortable café,’ he said.’<sup>123</sup> And when a minute later Cohn compares the Iruña unfavourably to the Café Suizo across the square, claiming it to be a ‘better café than this one,’ Jake is quick to counter: ‘It’s not so good in the daytime,’

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., pp. 130-131.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., p. 87.

he says, 'Too hot.'<sup>124</sup> Jake's rejoinder foretells of the heated encounter later when the Café Suizo gets 'too hot' and Cohn punches Jake.

Significantly, following the affectionate portrait of group bonhomie, Chapter 14 ends with the ominous line: '[t]hat was the last day before the fiesta.'<sup>125</sup> As well as juxtaposing the madness of Montparnasse, this crucial café description contrasts with the tranquility-disturbing headiness of the festival that follows. When the Fiesta explodes at the start of Chapter 15, the dynamic of the Café Iruña changes markedly. In order to take advantage of the influx of tourists, it transforms into a militarily pragmatic and functional space with profit, rather than patron comfort, as its main objective. Jake says:

I walked down the hill [...] to the café on the square. [...] The marble-topped tables and the white wicker chairs were gone. They were replaced by cast-iron tables and severe folding chairs. The café was like a battleship stripped for action. Today the waiters did not leave you alone all morning to read without asking if you wanted to order something. A waiter came up as soon as I sat down.<sup>126</sup>

The café as barometer registers 'changeable' here, readied for whatever 'action' the Fiesta might bring.

More than just a reflective device, however, the café is a *moral* barometer. At this stage in the novel, Hemingway reinforces the significance of impending moral dilemmas by using the Café Iruña to impose moral judgements on Jake. That is, when Jake operates within the bounds of the code, the café is a place of inclusiveness, comfort, and solace. But when the code is transgressed, the café is dismissive and becomes an uncomfortable space to be in.

For example, at this early stage of the Fiesta the code has not been contravened. Despite the Iruña's severe transformation and superficial loss of comfort, it continues to encourage and maintain a sense of festal fraternity, manifesting a thoroughly inclusive experience for Jake and his group. As the town awaits the first bullfight of the Fiesta,

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., p. 132.

Jake describes the unique galvanic atmosphere at the café:

After lunch we went over to the Iruña. It had filled up, and as the time for the bullfight came it got fuller, and the tables were crowded closer. There was a close, crowded hum that came everyday before the bullfight. The café did not make this same noise at any other time, no matter how crowded it was. This hum went on, and *we were in it and a part of it.*<sup>127</sup>

Jake's feeling of complete physical and sensory immersion in the café conveys a profound connection with Pamplona and the fiesta. This inclusiveness and harmony can be partly attributed to the code and Jake's vaunted status as one possessing '*aficion*.'<sup>128</sup> His passion for bullfighting is the shibboleth that grants him and the group privileged insider access. Jake reports how the hotel owner, Montoya, would smile 'as though bullfighting were a very special secret between the two of us [...]. He always smiled as though there were something lewd about the secret to outsiders, but that it was something that we understood.'<sup>129</sup> It seems that one either was an aficionado or one was not, and if one had to ask how then one clearly did not belong. Jake tells us:

Somehow it was taken for granted that an American could not have *aficion*. He might simulate it or confuse it with excitement, but he could not really have it. When they saw I had *aficion*, and there was no password, no set of questions that could bring it out, rather it was a sort of oral spiritual examination with the questions always a little on the defensive and never apparent.<sup>130</sup>

Inclusion in this enigmatic world of *aficion* confers status and guarantees character even when confronted with evidence to the contrary. Thus: 'Montoya could forgive anything of a bullfighter who had *aficion*. He could forgive attacks of nerves, panic, bad

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., p. 140, [my emphasis].

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., p. 114. For a discussion of *aficion* and shared codes of identity in the novel, see: E. Arnold and Cathy N. Davidson 'Decoding the Hero in *The Sun Also Rises*' in Linda Wagner-Martin, *New Essays on The Sun Also Rises* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 93-96.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., p. 114.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., p. 115.

unexplainable actions, all sorts of lapses. For one who had *aficion* he could forgive anything. At once he forgave me all my friends.’<sup>131</sup> Even though Jake’s distinctly non-aficionado friends offend the code, he says, they ‘were simply a little something shameful between us, like the spilling open of the horses in bullfighting.’<sup>132</sup>

We find that the Café Iruña respects the code, recognising Jake’s *aficion* and insider status. Like Montoya’s collusive nod of approval to Jake at *torero* Pedro Romero’s bullfight<sup>133</sup> or his giving the group good rooms overlooking the square,<sup>134</sup> the café acknowledges Jake and extends the same kind of hospitality to him and his friends. Following the bullfight, Jake and Bill make for the Iruña where, despite the crowds of people, the ‘waiter saved chairs for the others’ so that all could sit together sipping absinthe.’<sup>135</sup> As previously noted, the café at fiesta time is operating with a view to profiteering, so this sympathetic gesture is not insignificant. When the making of money is paramount, it is clearly not in the café’s interest to keep empty chairs.

But as the Fiesta progresses, this state soon changes. The café is equally attuned and demonstrative when Jake later violates both the code and Montoya’s trust unforgivably by introducing Pedro to his drunken friends despite Montoya’s earlier petition to keep him away:

Just then Montoya came into the room. He started to smile at me, then he saw Pedro Romero with a big glass of cognac in his hand, sitting and laughing between me and a woman with bare shoulders, at a table full of drunks. He did not even nod.<sup>136</sup>

The Café Iruña affects to mirror Montoya’s disapprobative gesture, and now shuns the group: ‘[i]nside the café was crowded and very noisy. No one noticed us come in. We

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., pp. 115-6.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., p. 116.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., p. 142.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., p. 114.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., pp. 153-4.

could not find a table. There was a great noise going on.’<sup>137</sup> Contrasted with their earlier experience of the café, the dynamic has shifted dramatically. Where before there could be heard an excited and expectant ‘hum’, now there is only inscrutable ‘noise’; where previously the waiter had saved them places, now no one notices them and there are no seats available; and where there was a closeness that made Jake feel they ‘were in it and a part of it’, this time the group are detached – decidedly neither in it nor a part of it.

Remembering the contrast between the café and the bar discussed earlier, we find Hemingway now using this distinction to colour further the characters’ demise. Moving on to find a different drinking place, it becomes clear just how apart they are when they arrive at the Bar Milano. Jake’s report of the place contrasts with the raucous crowd of the Iruña, he says: ‘[t]he bar was not full. There was nothing going on.’ The party is evidently not where they are. Bill Gorton’s denouncement that ‘This is a hell of a place’ alludes to their fall from privileged empyrean heights. It comes as no surprise that later the bar is the site of Bill and Mike’s distinctly dishonourable and un-code-like ejection for fighting.

The exclusion from the Iruña and the subsequent descent into the chthonic Bar Milano decisively marks the turning point in the novel. From here onwards the tensions that have slowly been building are explosively released, and again, we find that the café is central to the portrayal of the ensuing pyrotechnics.

The Café Iruña becomes the site of both Jake’s self-abnegation – as he arranges for his love, Brett, to be with another man – and the site of his definitive violation of both the code and Montoya’s trust by encouraging Romero to go off with her. When Jake gets up to leave the couple, the café crowd is definitively responsive. His very public shame is perhaps sharpened by its taking place in the space he values so highly. In typical understated fashion, Jake says: ‘the hard-eyed people at the bullfighter table watched me go. It was not pleasant.’<sup>138</sup> On returning to find the pair gone, his regret is mirrored in the subtle action of the café waiter who collects their empty glasses and mops the table as though erasing the last traces of Jake’s honour and privileged status.

It is in what one might deem to be the ‘neutral’ space of the Swiss café, the Café

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid., p. 156.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., p. 162.

Suizo that Jake's final judgement is delivered at the hand of Robert Cohn. Their encounter becomes 'too hot' after Jake lies to Cohn about the whereabouts of Brett. Cohn strikes Jake once, dropping him to the floor, and then two more times knocking him unconscious. A carafe of water poured over Jake's head extinguishes the fervour and signals the end.

Jake's description of the aftermath in the café registers the full impact of the incident:

I walked away from the café. They were sitting at the table. I looked back at them and at the empty tables. There was a waiter sitting at one of the tables with his head in his hands. Walking across the square to the hotel everything looked new and changed. I had never seen the trees before. I had never seen the flagpoles before, nor the front of the theatre. It was all different.<sup>139</sup>

The desolate scene of empty tables at the café captures the group's isolation and detachment from the Fiesta; the disconsolate waiter conveys the sense of local, Pamplonan, distress at the actions of these pugnacious foreigners. Everything looks new and changed and different to Jake because he can no longer consider himself an insider or honorary local – the consequences of his violation of the code are conclusive – he is now an outsider, like a tourist in a new town to whom nothing is familiar.

Once the Fiesta is done and all the violent tensions have dissipated, Jake's favoured café once again registers the change and the return to tranquility.

In the morning it was all over. The fiesta was finished. [...] The cafés were just opening and the waiters were carrying out the comfortable white wicker chairs and arranging them around the marble-topped tables in the shade of the arcade. [...] I sat in one of the wicker chairs and leaned back comfortably. The waiter was in no hurry to come. [...] The fiesta was over.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., pp. 166-7.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., p. 199.

Jake once again finds himself in the cool comfort of the Iruña where the furniture and the waiter's casual manner signal the shift in the café's objective from profiteering to relaxed comfort. It seems that Jake's ideal café is more forgiving than the hotel owner, Montoya, who remains beyond placation and avoids the group on their last day.<sup>141</sup> What might account for the Iruña's dispensation?

The headiness of the festival has affected the behaviour of its participants and even the space. According to Hemingway's drafting notes for the novel, '[the Fiesta] had the effect of speeding up the natural tendencies through this insistence on the unimportance of consequences.'<sup>142</sup> Although, this idea is perhaps not directly portrayed in the final draft of the novel it is, as Svoboda argues, presented through Jake's narration:

...[I]t was necessary that they make their shifting in values gradually. They could not start paying café prices. They got their money's worth in the wine shops. Money still had a definite value in hours worked and bushels of grain sold. Late in the fiesta it would not matter what they paid, nor where they bought.<sup>143</sup>

Hemingway's notion of the perfect café is that it is a space of stability, comfort and control. The Café Iruña's festal transformation temporarily destabilises the space thus removing the one controlling force that might have kept Jake from disregarding consequences and deviating from the code. During the Fiesta there was no space associated with moral guidance and self-control, hence maintaining code discipline became more difficult. As we saw with the clean, well-lighted place, code adherence has a natural affinity with Hemingway's ideal café.

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., p. 199, 'Montoya did not come near us.'

<sup>142</sup> Quoted in Svoboda (1983), p. 39.

<sup>143</sup> *TSAR*, p. 132, quoted in Ibid., p. 39.

## Conclusion

It was back in 1939 when W. H. Mellers noted that ‘many of Mr. Hemingway’s stories [...] have their setting in hotels, bars, or the waiting rooms of railway stations.’<sup>144</sup> Yet few critics since have really paid attention to the importance of place and space in Hemingway’s work. This chapter has shown that spatiality has an essential function in his writing. And the one space that has the ability to signify this above all is the café.

His notion of the café is developed and distinct. The concept ‘café,’ for Hemingway, is a Lefebvrian representational space imbued with ideology, capable of representing a moral hierarchy: in his stories, good cafés come to represent ‘the good’ – all that is ideal and aspirational, whilst the unsavoury ones inherently bespeak iniquity. At the apex of this moral spectrum is the ideal café – the place that reflects all the positive aspects of Hemingway’s own philosophy. That such a place had the ability to embody qualities such as comfort, stability, solace, perspicacity, and dignity was something Hemingway celebrated in a kind of written homage to the ideal café: his ‘A Clean, Well-lighted Place’ of 1933.

Through a close reading of this particular story, I have revealed Hemingway’s veneration for this space, and suggested that he elevates the eponymous café to the status of church. This ostensibly humble little café has its own clergy in the guise of waiters; it has a congregant in the figure of a despairing old man; and a liturgy in the form of an ‘order of service’. The place itself provides a kind of existential solace for its habitués. It is only when one is outside its protective and comforting walls that darkness and the fear of *nada* begin to take hold.

In order to appreciate more fully the status of café as sacred space, I explored the biblical references in this story and read them alongside the twenty-third psalm. As well as highlighting specific literal parallels – green pastures, light, staff, and bounteous provender – my particular contribution here was to interpret the experience of Hemingway’s café dweller as akin to that of the psalmist.

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<sup>144</sup> W.H. Mellers, ‘Untitled Review’ [orig. pub. *Scrutiny*, Vol. 8, (December 1939), pp. 335-44] in Jeffrey Meyers (ed.), *Hemingway: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), pp. 269-288 (p. 274).

Hemingway's esteem for the café has been a long affair, as I showed by exploring the cafés of his first novel, *The Sun Also Rises*. Whereas in 'A Clean, Well-lighted Place' the café represented Hemingway's vision of the perfect café, here the café is depicted in both positive and negative states. I revealed how this feature is in fact integral to Hemingway's technical presentation of the narrative. Again referring to the spatial dimension of the Hemingway code and its concomitant spatio-moral hierarchy, I suggested that the Café Iruña could be read as a kind of 'code barometer' conveying and instantiating moral judgements as the story unfolds.

Nearly all of Hemingway's cafés, then, are imaginatively transformed in a de Certeauian sense from places into spaces. The Café des Amateurs, for example, is not merely a café sited on the rue Mouffetard – through Hemingway's eyes it is a den of iniquity, an immoral space; the same goes for the Café Rotonde – not simply an eating and drinking establishment located on the Boulevard Montparnasse – it is a superficial tourist destination filled with diluted parodies of real artists. Hemingway's idealised vision of the perfect café is a space that often has little to do with its actual geographical location. His is a universalising representation that transforms a place into *his* very own space. Such spatial constructions conspicuously shape and inform his fictional work.

The need for a consistently clean and controlled space that he can find comfort in wherever he may find himself can be understood alongside his code. Both are a defence against the dizzying entropic exigencies of modernity – and the café represents the *spatial dimension* of this code.

Focussing on Hemingway's vision of the perfect café in such detail has prompted some suggestions for further enquiry. For instance, it is interesting that the café, so characteristic of the urban public sphere, is idealised here via its natural, almost bucolic, elements. Hemingway emphasises luxuriant and verdant flora: the purple-flowering wisteria, and the tree-shaded terraces, etcetera. Also, the qualities celebrated in the ideal café – peace, calm, quiet, solace, integrity, and simplicity – appear somewhat incongruous with our default notion of the modern urban café scene as fast-paced, dynamic, commercial, functional, ephemeral, and superficial. This perhaps points to a nostalgic conservatism in the man otherwise fêted as the tough guy, free spirit, and icon of the hedonistic and cynical 1920s.

Once again, using the café as a departure point for an investigation has allowed us to appreciate the fact that modernist writers were sensitive to the fundamental importance of space and its ability to signify. In this particular instance, Hemingway uses space to instantiate the defining tenets of his ‘existentialist’ philosophy.

*Jean Rhys:  
Cafés, Margins, and the Myth of Bohemia*

*They must see the start of some funny things, these women perched up in cafés, perched up like idols. Especially the ones at the Dôme.*

Sasha Jansen, (*Good Morning, Midnight*)<sup>1</sup>

*The city and the urban sphere are thus the setting of struggle; they are also, however, the stakes of that struggle. How could one aim for power without reaching for the places where power resides, without planning to occupy that space and to create a new political morphology.*

Henri Lefebvre, (*The Production of Space*)<sup>2</sup>

If, as the previous chapter argued, Hemingway's cafés are ideological spaces created in the author's image, then the café for Jean Rhys is something entirely different. Fascinating and enlightening, 'the café' as an important constituent of her work has been remarkably overlooked. Rhys's café scenes offer a valuable and expansive insight into the key themes that define her oeuvre. Rhys spent many years living in Paris enjoying the famous cafés. In her unfinished biography, *Smile Please* (1979), she enthused over the contentment she derived from sitting in the Café Rotonde:

'Paris' ... it was after this that I made up my mind that I'd have to get a job of some sort. There were papers at the Rotonde, on long sticks, and I'd look hopefully down the advertisements every day. I preferred the Rotonde to the Dome, it was quieter. I thought it lovely to be able to sit in peace with a cup of coffee and look at all the papers without being harried or stared at in any way. [...] In fact it was just this

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<sup>1</sup> *GMM*, p. 145.

<sup>2</sup> *PS*, p. 386.

feeling of freedom and the blue sky and the light which made me feel happy and carefree for the first time for so long.<sup>3</sup>

But in her fictional articulations, cafés are spaces in which masculinist ideologies and codes are confronted, interrogated, and exposed.

Despite changing attitudes towards women and their place in the public sphere during the first three decades of the twentieth century, it was still seen as an undesirable practice for a woman to enter a café and sit and drink unchaperoned. The historian W. Scott Haine notes a 1907 Parisian ordinance that prohibited both vagrants and unaccompanied women from entering cafés.<sup>4</sup> At the beginning of *A Moveable Feast* Hemingway apparently finds it so significant that a girl should enter the café alone that he immediately remarks upon it, '[a] girl came in and sat *by herself*'.<sup>5</sup> In *Quartet* (1928), a man watching Marya 'steadily and heavily' cannot even contemplate her being unaccompanied and thinks to himself: '[d]oubtless a rendezvous.'<sup>6</sup> All of Rhys's heroines may be read as these café habitués, notable simply by their being in a café alone. The fact that Rhys chooses to situate her lone female protagonists in cafés, then, means that she necessarily describes and depicts acts that are socially awkward and potentially transgressive.

In the early short story 'In the Rue De L'Arivée,'<sup>7</sup> from *The Left Bank and Other Stories* (1927), Rhys describes a few hours in the life of a woman in the twilight of youth, living in the heart of expatriate Paris. The narrative of this lone female café habitué might be read as an adumbration of much of Rhys's subsequent work. Here the heroine, Dorothy Dufreyne '(Dolly to her friends when she had any),'<sup>8</sup> sits in a little café halfway up the Boulevard Montparnasse:

One evening at eleven o'clock, sat a Lady drinking her fourth *fine à l'eau* and

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<sup>3</sup> Jean Rhys, *Smile Please* (London: Penguin, 1979), p. 142.

<sup>4</sup> Haine (1996), p. 21.

<sup>5</sup> *AMF*, p. 3, [emphasis added].

<sup>6</sup> Jean Rhys, *Quartet* (New York; London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997), p. 38 [hereafter *Q*].

<sup>7</sup> Jean Rhys, *The Left Bank and Other Stories* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1927), p. 113-121, [hereafter, *LB*].

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

thinking how much she disliked human beings in general and those who pitied her in particular. For it was her deplorable habit, when she felt very blue indeed, to proceed slowly up the right-hand side of the Boulevard, taking a *fine à l'eau* – that is to say a brandy and soda – at every second café she passed. There are so many cafés that the desired effect could be obtained without walking very far, and thus by moving from one to the other she managed to avoid the curious stares of the waiters and the disadvantage of not accurately knowing just how drunk she was. ...<sup>9</sup>

Published in 1927, the short story is set in the Montparnasse of Hemingway's 'lost generation,' the very same area of Paris whose cafés Wyndham Lewis celebrated as 'divinely disputatious.'<sup>10</sup> How is it that Rhys depicts such a profoundly different experience of cafés and café life? For Dolly, as for many of Rhys's heroines, the boulevard cafés are not places of display, but of concealment; the lone female drinker is not a celebratory symbol of woman's metropolitan liberty, but a humiliating mark of abject weakness and failure; they are not symptomatic sites of intellectual exchange or artistic creation as with Lewis and Hemingway, but, rather, solitary places of palliative intoxication. Here, Dolly eschews the fashionable and frivolous synopticon of contemptuous glances on the terraces of the popular cafés like the Dôme and Rotonde, only to become a fugitive from the 'curious' and judgemental stares of the waiters in the half-deserted cheap cafés off the main thoroughfare.<sup>11</sup>

Looking in more detail at how Rhys describes this exclusionary and regulatory process reveals this experience to be an effect not just of specific gender relations and the uneasy place inhabited by the lone female café dweller, but of a moral economy in which wealth and poverty become indices of the acceptable and unacceptable; and of a structure of concentric identity relations in which the mythology of bohemian café-culture is exposed as an exclusionary and alienating realm of insiders and cliques, which essentially transposes a series of secure local identities and conventions to the hyperreal world of

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. 113-4.

<sup>10</sup> *RA*, p. 121.

<sup>11</sup> It is not one of these popular places swarming with the shingled and long-legged and their partners [...] No, it is small, half-empty, cheapish. Coffee cost five centimes less than in the Rotonde, for instance.' (*LB*, p. 113).

Montparnasse. Recall, for example, Lois Heidler from Rhys's 1928 novel, *Quartet*. A woman who 'took Montparnasse very seriously indeed [...] she liked explaining, classifying, fitting the inhabitants (that is to say, of course, the Anglo-Saxon inhabitants) into their proper place in the scheme of things.'<sup>12</sup>

There is a persistent critical view in the scholarship on Rhys that locates her principal subject matter firmly within the realm of the marginal: the degraded and unseemly spaces and places of the city. However, this is a view that requires some modification. Using the café as a lens allows us to refine the details of this critical trope, questioning exactly what the term 'marginal' means in these contexts and reevaluating its application. A distinctive feature of Rhys's work is the special attention given to the naming of particular cafés as well as districts, *arrondissements*, and streets etcetera. With the unique focus on cafés in her work we discover a roll-call of the most distinguished and popular establishments to be found in Paris: The Café du Dôme,<sup>13</sup> The Closerie des Lilas,<sup>14</sup> Café Buffalo,<sup>15</sup> The Capoulade,<sup>16</sup> The Rotonde,<sup>17</sup> The Select,<sup>18</sup> and the The Deux Magots,<sup>19</sup> are all frequented, avoided, condemned and lauded. It is not that Rhys's modernism does not speak from a self-consciously marginal position, raising issues of gender, economic, colonial, and class difference. It is rather that when her depictions of popular social spaces diverge from the received, expected, or celebrated (e.g. Hemingwayesque) models, they are reductively understood as representative of Rhys's own marginal status rather than pertinent observational critiques and demythologisations of expatriate fantasies about European cosmopolitan life.

The heroines of Rhys's interwar novels and stories perpetually haunt the cafés of London and Paris. The novel *Quartet* opens with Marya Zelli sat in the Café Lavenue in Montparnasse, having just spent the better part of an hour and a half sipping coffee, smoking, and reading a newspaper. *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie* (1930) ends in a little

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<sup>12</sup> *Q*, p. 48.

<sup>13</sup> *GMM*, p. 60 & *ALMM*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>14</sup> *GMM*, p. 61.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

<sup>18</sup> *Q*, p. 69.

<sup>19</sup> *GMM*, p. 138.

café in the Rue Dauphine with the heroine, Julia Martin, sitting alone (ironically, *after* Mr. Mackenzie has just left *her*) drinking Pernod in the ‘hour between the dog and wolf.’<sup>20</sup> The prevalent locations in *Voyage in the Dark* (1934) are hotels and boarding houses, but there is, however, a revealing scene in Oddenino’s Imperial restaurant, a swanky London haunt, where Anna Morgan listens to Melville Gideon sing and play the piano, and becomes intimidated by a fellow diner.<sup>21</sup> In *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939), the café is the dominant narrative space of the text. The topography of the novel is marked out by cafés whose proprietors are either ‘neutral’ or ‘hostile;’ and Sasha Jansen’s perambulations by the ‘avoidance of certain cafés’, and the use only of cafés where she has ‘a perfectly clean slate.’<sup>22</sup> Thus, Sasha describes her life, contrary to its outward simplicity and monotony, as:

[R]eally a complicated affair of cafés where they like me and cafés where they don’t, streets that are friendly, and streets that aren’t, rooms where I might be happy, rooms where I never shall be, looking-glasses I look nice in, looking-glasses I don’t, dresses that will be lucky, dresses that won’t, and so on.<sup>23</sup>

This curious dynamic is highly revealing of Rhys’s distinctive experience of cafés and café culture, particularly her encounters with ideological and behavioural codes embedded within these spaces. The first part of this chapter will consider Rhys’s depiction of the female café habitué’s relationship with the café and the café culture of expatriate Paris. Connecting the material structure of the café with pervasive power structures, I present her café portrayals as an articulation of a process of Foucauldian surveillance and regulation, which constructs the lone woman as deviant and dangerous. What we find as implicit in Hemingway and Lewis’s depictions of the café as exclusively or ideally male is depicted as a primary experiential condition in the work of Jean Rhys. For her heroines, the cafés of Paris are not sites of more or less sympotic exchange or artistic creation, but sites of observation, judgement and exclusion.

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<sup>20</sup> Jean Rhys, *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* [1930] (London: Penguin, 1971), p. 138 [hereafter *ALMM*].

<sup>21</sup> Jean Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark* [1934] (London: Penguin Modern Classics, 2000), p. 101.

<sup>22</sup> *GMM*, p. 40, p. 14, p. 34

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

The chapter then examines these Foucauldian power relations through the particular discourses of colonialism and imperialism. Rhys's treatment of the sexual politics of modernism is now widely recognised as inseparable from the colonial context of her work, as Helen Tiffin says, '[t]he parallel between male/female relationships and imperial nation and underdog is obvious.'<sup>24</sup> Undoubtedly extrapolating from her experience and insights as one estranged, we find that Rhys evinces a focus in her fiction on the recognitions, transformations, and undosings the coming into consciousness of imperial history entails for Europe's subjects and cultures.<sup>25</sup> A close reading of a café scene from *Good Morning, Midnight* – a novel not usually discussed in a colonial context – reveals that her hyphenated position between colonial and metropolitan spheres is crucial to her aesthetic, and that her particular brand of modernist cosmopolitanism is inseparable from an ambiguous Creole identity.

The concluding section will refine some of the existing arguments about the marginality of Rhys and her characters. Some recent critics have assumed that since Rhys was on the margins of the Left Bank international set when she lived in Paris in the twenties, her work must have necessarily eschewed it, too. However, a distinctive feature of Rhys's style is the special attention given to particular expatriate cafés, as well as the streets, districts, or *arrondissements* where they are to be found. Establishing the exact location of these cafés and the clientele that frequented them reveals that Rhys does indeed depict the Left Bank of the expatriate community but that she does so from a deliberately chosen position of resistance against what she saw as an Anglo-American fantasy about cosmopolitan living.

The previous chapter revealed how the significance of the café in Hemingway's work has been surprisingly ignored, and thus it sought to redress the spatial critical lacuna. Rhys, by contrast, is a writer whose engagement with space and place has received a fair amount of scholarly attention, particularly the literal geographical place(s) occupied and represented by the artist herself and her work. Rhys articulated part of the

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<sup>24</sup> Helen Tiffin, 'Mirror and Mask: Colonial Motifs in the Novels of Jean Rhys', in *World Literature Written in English*, vol. 17 (April 1978), pp. 328-41.

<sup>25</sup> Helen Carr argues that Rhys's work draws on 'particular historical and personal circumstances of her life.' She says, '[c]olonialism and its aftermath played a crucial role in the shaping of [her artistic] consciousness.' See Carr, p. 22.

challenge facing future critics in a 1959 letter to Francis Wyndham when she wrote: '[a]s far as I know I am white – but I have no country really now.'<sup>26</sup> It has since become clear that Rhys's marginal position *between* both Caribbean and European spheres is crucial to her aesthetic.

Taking up Rhys's marginality and the movement in her fiction between these two spheres, Andrew Thacker is particularly interested in Rhys's treatment of spatial flux and the absence of fixity. He finds that her work 'exhibits a passage through modernity that constantly subverts any discourse of place as settled attachment.'<sup>27</sup> He recognises that Rhys's use of urban liminal spaces is symptomatic of this, adding that 'peculiar attention [is] given to certain representational spaces such as cafés, restaurants, or hotel rooms.'<sup>28</sup> But Thacker leaves these spaces tantalisingly unexplored; positing simply that Rhys's characters' existence in liminal spaces 'only parallels the broader location of [her] fiction between the geographies of the Caribbean and Europe.'<sup>29</sup>

Similarly bringing together these two aspects of Rhys's modernism – her Creole identity and her depictions of urban landscapes – Anna Snaith considers Rhys's metropolitan representations in a colonial context, arguing that:

[T]he unease with which Rhys and her protagonists [...] experience London's streets is about the discomfort not just of the single woman, but of the single *colonial* woman, who occupies a doubly transgressive position in the metropole.<sup>30</sup>

Snaith's view is that Rhys's London in *Voyage in the Dark* is shaped and informed 'not only by the ruptures of imperial history but also by the geographical power struggles which characterised Caribbean history.'<sup>31</sup> In this colonial context, Rhys's 'association of the city with sterility, exploitation and uniformity results from more than her own and her

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<sup>26</sup> *JRL*, p. 172.

<sup>27</sup> Thacker (2003), p. 193.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 196.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 193.

<sup>30</sup> Anna Snaith, 'A Savage from the Cannibal Islands: Jean Rhys and London' in Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker (eds.) *Geographies of Modernism: Literatures, Cultures, Spaces* (London: Routledge, 2005), pp.76-85 (p. 76).

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

protagonists' poverty,' Snaith says, 'it is at the heart of her critique of imperialism.'<sup>32</sup>

Focussing on Rhys's problematic status as both woman and white Creole in Europe, Deborah Parsons also champions the significance of the urban environment in Rhys's fiction, arguing that the cities of London and Paris are at times either merged in their hostility to Rhys's characters as a 'universalised non-place', or differentiated as specific places that serve to emphasise characters' placelessness in relation to them.<sup>33</sup> Parsons also contends that Rhys merges the migrant and the flâneur, and rewrites the 'traditional 'metropolitan script'' from the 'perspective of a *flâneuse* – the female counterpart of the *flâneur*.'<sup>34</sup>

Although she does not deploy the specific *flâneuse* trope, Christina Britzolakis focuses on the urban spectacle and similarly reads Rhys as an astute observer of urban life who engages 'with ethnography as a critical and diagnostic tool.'<sup>35</sup> Her study leads her to investigate what she calls the 'Rhysian spaces of the hotel, the exhibition and the street'<sup>36</sup> (notable for its absence here is the café). She finds that Rhys treats urban space



Fig. 11. – André Kertész, *Café du Dôme* (1928)

as a 'cryptogram, which interrogates the self-legitimizing claims of modernity and draws attention to the constitutive role [...] of a history of exhibitory practices.'<sup>37</sup>

Earlier studies on Rhys focussed very much on the gendered nature of urban spaces.

Judith Kegan Gardiner read *Good Morning, Midnight* as 'a sustained critique of polarisations about sex, class, and moral value that oppress women and the poor.'<sup>38</sup> One particular aspect of this reading is Rhys's critique of the patriarchal domination of

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>33</sup> Deborah Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, City and Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 134.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 135.

<sup>35</sup> Christina Britzolakis, 'This Way to the Exhibition: Genealogies of Urban Spectacle in Jean Rhys's interwar Fiction' in *Textual Practice*, Vol. 21 No. 3 (2007), pp. 457-482 (p. 458).

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 458.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 477.

space.<sup>39</sup> Kegan Gardiner argued that ‘in the public world’ of the novel ‘almost all space is male space; women enter at risk and are expelled by male choice.’<sup>40</sup> Even the private space of Sasha Jansen’s hotel room is ‘polarised by gender and by sexual tension.’<sup>41</sup>

Taking off very much from this point in the opening chapters of her book, *Still Crazy After All These Years: Women, Writing and Psychoanalysis* (1992), Rachel Bowlby similarly considered the woman in the modern urban environment. Unpicking the bias of male dominated space, she looked at the woman-on-the-street’s spatial negotiations, exploring how the texts written about her ‘construct possibilities and limits, openings, and impasses.’<sup>42</sup> Bowlby observed that Rhys situates her women in social and psychical places such as rooms and hotels that are ‘oppressively constant and claustrophobic.’<sup>43</sup>

It is clear that space and place has received a fair amount of consideration in discussions of Rhys and her fiction, however, it is remarkable that the café has been largely ignored as a substantial material trope of her work. This oversight seems all the more unfortunate given the attention paid to liminality and marginality. Scholars have been keen to point out how Rhys’s protagonists often occupy liminal metropolitan spaces, and yet the liminal space *par excellence* – the café – has not generated the attention it deserves. My focus on the café not only allows considerable refinement of existing views, but also draws together and unifies some of the key themes associated with Rhys such as identity, power, and her relationship with modernism itself.

### **The Myth of Bohemia**

The persevering image of expatriate café culture of the bohemian Left Bank in the

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<sup>38</sup> Judith Kegan Gardiner, ‘Good Morning, Midnight; Good Night, Modernism’ in *Boundary 2*, Vol. 11, No. 1/2, Engagements: Postmodernism, Marxism, Politics (Autumn, 1982 – Winter, 1983), pp. 233-251 (p. 233).

<sup>39</sup> Helen Carr argues that Rhys would never use ‘such abstract - one might say patriarchal - language as ‘patriarchy,’ although one can argue ‘a concept of patriarchy, if not the word, is present in her work.’ Carr, (1996,) p. 55.

<sup>40</sup> Gardiner. p. 235.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 235.

<sup>42</sup> Rachel Bowlby. *Still Crazy After All These Years: Women, Writing and Psychoanalysis* (London; New York: Routledge, 1992), p. vii.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

twenties is one of liberating and liberated lifestyles, free from convention and the kinds of conservative stagnation and asceticism characteristic of ‘back home.’ Yet, in Rhys’s work, it is primarily within the bohemian cafés of Montparnasse that, paradoxically, we encounter narratives of surveillance, regulation, and exclusion. The 1928 novel, *Quartet*, initially announces itself as the story of an expatriate café-dwelling insider. The opening paragraph situates the heroine, Marya Zelli, firmly within a central (and by no means marginal or shabby) Left Bank locale, ‘the Café Lavenue [...] a dignified and comparatively expensive establishment on the Boulevard du Montparnasse.’<sup>44</sup> It also marks her as a frequenter of the area – for she is ‘often on the Boulevards St Michel and Montparnasse’<sup>45</sup> – and accords her the identity of an emancipated woman, ‘[s]he had been sitting there for nearly an hour and a half, and during that time she had drunk two glasses of black coffee, smoked six caporal cigarettes and read the week’s *Candide*.’<sup>46</sup> Marya goes on to meet the well-connected local artist Miss De Solla, and begins a relationship with the prominent English expatriate Hugh Heidler – renowned patron of Montparnasse artists and writers – and his wife Lois. Early on in the novel, Marya looks out from her hotel balcony towards Montmartre and thinks how ‘significant, coherent and understandable it all became after a glass of wine on an empty stomach.’<sup>47</sup> This mythic idea of Paris is at one with George Moore’s depiction of the city in *Confessions of a Young Man*, half a century earlier, as an open field of intellectual dreams in which the outsider, crucially through at least some engagement with the indigenous café culture, can experience for himself the rich and liberating world of cultural modernity.<sup>48</sup>

Moore’s notion of Montmartre cafés as the vanguard universities of the new intellectual culture assumes an open-handed meritocracy within the café; one in which ‘anyone could enter and each man paid for his own beer.’<sup>49</sup> This image of Montmartre in the 1880s differed from the expatriate Montparnasse of the 1920s in the degree to which the visitor in Moore’s Paris could feel himself very much part of an indigenously French

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<sup>44</sup> *Q*, p. 7.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>48</sup> Moore (1926), pp. 21-22, and, on the importance of the café in Montmartre, p. 110 (*passim*).

<sup>49</sup> Shattuck (1969), p. 9.

intellectual and social world. Conversely, the social and intellectual society that gravitated around the *carrefour* of the Boulevards Montparnasse and Raspail, in the twenties, was an ambiguous combination of English speaking avant-garde writers and artists, dilettante tourists, and ex-military ‘doughboys’ living it up on the high exchange rate. Hart Crane wrote to a friend describing Montparnasse as ‘[d]inners, soirées, poets, erratic millionaires, painters, translations, lobsters, absinthe, music, promenades, oysters, sherry, aspirins, pictures, Sapphic heiresses, editors, books, sailors. *And How!*’<sup>50</sup> Rhys was clearly sceptical about the degree to which the expatriate culture of Montparnasse represented a truly bohemian lifestyle. In the short story ‘In the Rue De L’Arrivée’, she describes Dolly Dufreyné’s ‘pathetic and charming illusions’ as including the beliefs that:

Gentlemen were Different and to be trusted, that Ladies must not make a Fuss – even when drunk – and that the Lower Classes were the Lower Classes. She believed that Montparnasse, that stronghold of British and American middle classes, was a devil of a place and what Montmartre used to be.<sup>51</sup>

Much like Lewis’s account of a superficial and conventional ‘bourgeois-bohemia’, the ‘bohemia’ of Montparnasse, Rhys suggests, is not so devilish a place as to undermine either traditional class or gender relations. Marya, in *Quartet*, realises this – following her alcohol-induced revelation regarding the significance of Montmartre – she undermines the mythic image when she reflects: ‘one realised all sorts of things. The value of an illusion, for instance, and that the shadow can be more important than the substance.’<sup>52</sup>

The characteristic and hegemonic view of Montparnasse café culture is of an emancipated open society, free from convention, transcending traditional class and national boundaries. It is characteristic in Hemingway’s work, for instance, to find his male heroes depicted as insiders in both the touristic Anglo-Saxon expatriate cafés and the more traditionally ‘local’ ones. His café dwellers are insiders on two counts: both at home with fellow expatriates and with ‘real’ locals, whether in Paris, Pamplona, or Aigle.

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<sup>50</sup> Crane (1965), p. 333.

<sup>51</sup> *LB*, pp. 115-116.

<sup>52</sup> *Q*, pp. 20-21.

In this sense he marks his characters as the true inheritors of George Moore's example. Rhys, on the other hand, depicts women as doubly excluded from intellectual Parisian café culture. Her heroines experience both indigenous and expatriate cafés as problematic on the grounds of both gender and economics. In Rhys's fiction, precisely those idealised social relations that Hemingway depicts as ritualised modes of inclusion instead operate as powerful modes of exclusion.

*Quartet*, for example, may be read as the story of a trophy mistress of a Montparnasse bigwig who rebels, and in doing so is rejected by that society. Having been adopted by Heidler and paraded around the local cafés, Marya finds herself the object of a network of gossip in which she is positioned as the home-wrecker. To this extent, Marya Zelli enters the world of literary Montparnasse through one of the two routes that Shari Benstock argues were available to women in the 1920s: 'as lovers or literary patrons'; not, that is, as artists or writers.<sup>53</sup> As the relationship breaks down (essentially through Marya's inability to 'play the game'<sup>54</sup> properly), Heidler becomes, in the public eye, the assumed victim of an uncontrollable outsider – a woman of dangerous habits and sexual appetites. However, while Marya is aware that 'everybody' (by which she means everybody who is anybody in the expatriate community) 'cuts [her] dead along the Boulevard Montparnasse,'<sup>55</sup> it is primarily in the cafés that this regulatory process takes place.

Rhys presents the café as a space in which surveillance, observation, and regulation are inscribed in both the physical structure and the hierarchical specular networks at work within it.<sup>56</sup> A good way of appreciating this construction might be Bentham's Panopticon, as theorised by Michel Foucault in his seminal *Discipline and Punish*. The Panopticon is a type of institutional building that allowed an observer to observe all inmates of the institution, crucially without them being able to tell whether or not they were actually being watched. The design consists of an outer circular structure, which houses the inmates, and a central 'inspection house' from which the unseen overseers can scrutinise

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<sup>53</sup> Shari Benstock, *Women of the Left-Bank 1900-1940* (London: Virago, 1987b), p. 381.

<sup>54</sup> *Q*, p. 70, 73, 90.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>56</sup> 'Specular' *adj.* *OED*: In senses 2. Of vision: Obtained by reflection only; not direct or immediate. 3. Having the reflecting property of a mirror. 6. Of or pertaining to sight or vision; esp. *specular orb* (poet.), the eye.

the inmates. Bentham described the Panopticon as ‘a new mode of obtaining power of mind over mind, in a quantity without hitherto example.’<sup>57</sup> Foucault theorised this power of mind over mind thus:

Hence the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action; that the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary; that this architectural apparatus should be a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation independent of the person who exercises it; in short, that the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers.<sup>58</sup>

In Rhys’s cafés, specular networks are similarly modelled on the commanding view in which her café dwelling females are often ‘caught up in a power situation of which they themselves are the bearers.’ Such a situation accounts for much of their feelings of perpetual persecution and their often ready-complicity in their own subjection. The café interweaves both the material and symbolic manifestations of disciplinary power.

For example, reflexive and regulatory café speculation is often mediated through a ubiquity of mirrors, producing a hierarchy of the gaze in which the dominant look is that of the *patron*.<sup>59</sup> When, in *Quartet*, for example, Hugh, Lois, and Marya finally confront the fact of their sexual triangle in a local café, the proprietor adjudges the situation as one in which Marya is the sexual predator: ‘Monsieur Lefranc cast one astute glance at [Lois’s] deeply circled eyes, another at Marya’s reflection in the glass and told himself: ‘Ça y est. I knew it! Ah, the *grue!* [tart/prostitute]’<sup>60</sup> An almost identical structure of

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<sup>57</sup> Jeremy Bentham, ‘Panopticon Preface’ in Miran Bozovic (ed.) *The Panopticon Writings* (London: Verso, 1995) p. 29.

<sup>58</sup> Michel Foucault, ‘Panopticism’ in *Discipline and Punish* (trans.) Alan Sheridan, (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 201.

<sup>59</sup> *Patronnes*, on the other hand, tend to be far more sympathetic: ‘Pernod is very bad for the stomach’ [...] the patronne said disapprovingly. [...] Fancy caring what happened to the stomach of a stray client.’ (*Q*, p. 95).

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

observation appears in *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie* when Julia Martin interrupts the eponymous ex-lover as he eats at his local restaurant. Here, the proprietor, Monsieur Albert, approaches Mackenzie's table as Julia takes a seat:

Monsieur Albert was a fair man, an Alsatian. His eyes telegraphed, 'I understand; I remember this woman. Do you want to have her put out?'

Mr Mackenzie's face instinctively assumed a haughty expression, as if to say, 'What the devil do you mean?' He raised his eyebrows a little, just to put the fellow in his place.

Monsieur Albert moved away. When he had gone a little distance, he turned. This time Mr Mackenzie tried to telegraph back, 'Not yet, anyhow. But stand by.'<sup>61</sup>

In both cases the regulatory gaze of the patron subjects the heroine; deems her a problem and an unwelcome intrusion on the space over which he presides. The specular structure of the café, its profusion of mirrors, assists the patrons, waiters, and habitués in their surveillance and subsequent prejudgments of Rhys's characters as recognisable types whose assumed relationship with their eating or drinking partners are those of the prostitute, the *femme fatale*, or unrelenting ex-lover. In other words, just like the Panopticon, the café's architectural form is essentially a trap from which these women cannot escape judgement.

When Marya faces the prospect of a final severing encounter with Heidler towards the end of *Quartet*, she is fully aware that she will be prejudicially disempowered by the social space in which the meeting will take place:

When and where? In some café, of course. The unvarying background. Knowing waiters, clouds of smoke, the smell of drink. She would sit there trembling, and he would be cool, a little impatient, perhaps a little nervous. Then she would try to explain and he would listen with a calm expression. Top dog.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> *ALMM*, p. 22.

<sup>62</sup> *Q*, p. 137.

Rhys's café is thus a repressively inflexible ('unvarying') and hierarchical space in which the woman is always already alienated, disempowered, and disciplined; one which functions as the social arm of the protected culture of male privilege – what, in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, Julia Martin calls that 'organised society, in which she had no place and against which she had not a dog's chance.'<sup>63</sup>

If a woman seen drinking with a man is all too often assumed to be either wife or predator, then the lone female café habitué is assumed to be either desperately lonely and 'triste', or a *grue*.<sup>64</sup> The notion of an open intellectual and artistic café society falls down when the very fact of entering a café places the customer in a sexual and economic nexus which *a priori* disbars her from entering into the dispassionate relations of the intellect by which the symptomatic is defined. Rhys's depiction of the space as representational of unequal and restrictive power relations undermines the received model of liberating bohemia. She therefore counters what we might call the official, Lefebvrian, 'representation of space' of the café as a free intellectual playground.

### **Café codes of behaviour**

Florence Gilliam's account of café life in the 1920s advised that dispassionate café relations are ideally anonymous.<sup>65</sup> That is, the fact of one's social standing or similar personal attributes should have no bearing on the thriving and extempore nature of café life and conversation. As we have seen, in Rhys's cafés power is dispersed and regulated through the visible; it is a place where, as Carol Angier puts it, 'looking is judging.'<sup>66</sup> Constantly prejudged, in the café, Rhys's protagonists are never permitted the liberty and autonomy of anonymity or privacy. In *Good Morning, Midnight*, for example, any right Sasha might have to public privacy is undermined as her public behaviour is constantly regulated and policed by other café dwellers: sometimes by acquaintances, often by strangers.

It seems that there is a 'code' at work here. Already identified in Hemingway as a

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<sup>63</sup> *ALMM*, p. 17.

<sup>64</sup> *GMM*, p. 39.

<sup>65</sup> Gilliam, p. 42.

<sup>66</sup> Carol Angier, *Jean Rhys: Life and Work* (London: Andre Deutsch. 1990), p. 380.

positive construction, in Rhys it is experienced negatively. This kind of behavioural structure and its attendant restraint on expression and ‘messy’ practice ensures Sasha Jansen’s conduct is understood as transgressive and therefore marginal. *Good Morning, Midnight* begins with Sasha recalling crying while having an after dinner drink in a café the previous night. She is upbraided for this display by a woman on the next table who complains ‘[s]ometimes I’m just as unhappy as you are. But that’s not to say I let everybody see it.’<sup>67</sup> This is a reprimand that Lois Heidler in *Quartet* would have endorsed judging by her precepts: ‘I don’t believe in making scenes about things, forcing things. I believe in letting things alone. I hate scenes.’<sup>68</sup> And: ‘I don’t think women ought to make nuisances of themselves. I don’t make a nuisance of myself; I grin and bear it, and I think that other women ought to grin and bear it, too.’<sup>69</sup> Sasha’s right to privacy in public is therefore conditional; both Lois Heidler and the woman assert that public behaviour should be stoically controlled, and private emotions remain just that, private. Censured for behaving freely, Sasha is making a scene by not comporting herself within the terms of the prescribed café code.

George Horsfield demonstrates this prescriptive view of public behaviour to an unreasonable degree in *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie* with an overcritical reflection on Julia Martin’s looks. Scrutinising her as she drinks a *fine* in London’s Café Monico, he speculates about the life of a woman ‘like that’ and wonders ‘what she appeared herself to be.’ Due to her drooping mouth and eyelids and a small swollen ‘blue vein under her right eye,’ he decides that she looks ‘older and less pretty than she had done in Paris.’<sup>70</sup> The ‘suggestion of age and weariness’ fascinates him to the conclusion that ‘she must have some pathetic illusions about herself or she would not be able to go on living.’ Apparently bewildered at how Julia dare let herself age, Horsfield reflects: ‘People ought not to look so obvious; people ought to take the trouble to look and behave like all other people. And if they didn’t it was their own funeral.’<sup>71</sup> The real crime here, of course, is not the aging process itself but the perceived shamelessness with which it is exhibited in

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<sup>67</sup> *GMM*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>68</sup> *Q*, p. 64.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>70</sup> *ALMM*, p. 65.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

the place where it matters most, the public space of the café.

Another instance of encountering such a café code occurs in *Good Morning Midnight* when Sasha visits a small backstreet tabac and suffers an entirely different café experience to the kind represented and celebrated by Hemingway. Rhys's confrontation of the café code exposes its darker side, and reveals it not to be an aspirational and comforting framework as Hemingway does, but, rather, as suffocatingly dogmatic as any externally imposed ideology. While Hemingway's characters flourish under the security and guidance of the code in utopian cafés, Rhys's women find it oppressive and discomfoting.

In the previous chapter we saw how Hemingway's Jake Barnes is welcomed as an insider in the cafés and wine shops of Pamplona and elsewhere, and how in *A Moveable Feast* Hemingway presents himself as a welcome habitué of any of the French or locally populated (rather than Anglo-Saxon) cafés of Paris. Rhys's Sasha Jansen does not experience these cafés in the same way at all. Wandering the streets of the Left Bank, Sasha goes into a little tabac: '[t]he woman at the bar gives me one of those looks: what do you want here, you? We don't cater for tourists here, not our clientèle.'<sup>72</sup> Again, the café is Panopticon-like in the experience it extrudes. Simply by entering the café, Sasha becomes complicit in the resident power structures, and hence participates in her own duress. Although she has lived in Paris before and is more familiar with the city than any sightseer, she imagines herself identified as a tourist, an outsider.

Sasha then becomes anxious about being the lone women in a café with a desire to drink. While the old man in Hemingway's 'A Clean, Well-lighted Place' is largely sympathised with and celebrated as a lone drinker, in *Good Morning, Midnight*, Sasha feels compelled to justify her companionless presence in the café. She thinks that asking the way to the nearest cinema will show that directions, and not drink, were her priority and therefore reveal her to be 'a respectable woman.'<sup>73</sup> But of course, this little tabac is not imbued with the gravitas of a church. The waiter here is simply a waiter – he does not hold the same kind of sympathetic sacerdotal role as Hemingway's waiters do; he is professionally indifferent: '[a]nd a lot he cares – I could have spared myself the

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<sup>72</sup> *GMM*, p. 87.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

trouble.’<sup>74</sup>

The extent of the contrast between the two visions of the café is revealed when the waiter has finished telling Sasha the way to the cinema:

‘Another Pernod,’ I say.

He brings it. He fills my glass almost to the brim, perhaps in anticipation of another tip, perhaps because he wants to see me drunk as soon as possible, or perhaps because the bottle slipped.<sup>75</sup>

One cannot help but find an echo here with the ‘cup runneth over’ scene in ‘A Clean, Well-lighted Place’, where Hemingway’s young waiter pours on into the old man’s glass so that the brandy slops over and runs down the stem into the top saucer of the pile.<sup>76</sup> The religious metaphor resonates and signifies in Hemingway’s café, but Rhys provides no such suggestive dramatisation. For Sasha, even a full glass of Pernod is not a positive experience. She sees no deeper cosmic relevance in the waiter’s action than chance and accident; her response decants the act of any significance whatsoever, further adding to Sasha’s negatively charged experience.

As the scene comes to a close with Sasha finally drunk, the narrative, too, seems a little inebriated as the spatial order of the little café breaks down:

Sometimes somebody comes in for stamps, or a man for a drink. Then you can see outside into the street. And the street walks in. It is one of those streets – dark, powerful, magical. ...<sup>77</sup>

The description evokes a kind of prose version (albeit much darker) of Umberto Boccioni’s celebratory Futurist painting, ‘La Strada Entra Nella Casa’ [‘The Street Enters the House’] (1912), in which workmen, horses, and other constituents of the street merge, mingle, pervade, and occupy the same interior space as the figure of a woman

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>76</sup> *ACWLP*, p. 289.

<sup>77</sup> *GMM*, p. 89 (note that either sex may enter the tabac to buy stamps but only ‘a man’ for a drink).

looking down from her balcony. Like Boccioni's vision, Rhys's narrative enacts a violation of de Certeau's 'law of the proper' as boundaries are breached and spaces interpenetrate; things are most decidedly *not* in their 'proper place.'<sup>78</sup> The lack of rational order and control, and the ceding of power to external forces is the 'messiness' that Hemingway fears, and that his code seeks to constrain. It is hard to imagine Hemingway ever allowing the street to be more powerful and imposing than he or his steadfast protagonists. Mobile and mutable, however, is Sasha's default condition and she embraces it:

'Oh, there you are,' it says, walking in at the door, 'there you are. Where have you been all this long time?'

Nobody else knows me but the street knows me.

'And there you are,' I say, finishing my Pernod and rather drunk. 'Salut, salut!'<sup>79</sup>



Fig. 12 – Boccioni, *La Strada Entra Nella Casa* (1912)

As the door of the tabac swings back and forth and the street eventually walks in, Rhys deconstructs expected relations between interior and exterior. One might even say that the notion of exterior is jettisoned entirely. For the concepts 'outside' or 'exterior' can imply freedom, which is counter to Rhys's aesthetic objective. The use of the preposition 'into' (the street) as opposed to 'onto', for instance, suggests an understanding of the street as enclosed and confining. In a narrative rationalised by definite interior/exterior relations, one may experience liberation or expansiveness by looking or getting 'out' *onto* the street, but in Sasha's Paris the theme is subjection, repression and impasse; everything is inside: one moves from one interior (in a café) to another ('in' a street) –there is no outside, there is no escape.

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<sup>78</sup> *PE*, p. 117.

<sup>79</sup> *GMM*, p. 89.

## Labelling

In keeping with the theme of power structures and systems of regulation and control, it is the process of projecting and imposing identities and labels that concerns us now. Following Helen Tiffin, who finds that '[t]he parallel between male/female relationships and imperial nation and underdog is obvious,'<sup>80</sup> I want to suggest that the hierarchical specular networks at work within the café, overwhelmingly dominated by the patriarchal authority to repress, designate and label, can be understood as systems of power and control coextensive with the subjugating powers of imperialism and colonialism.

The matter of naming is something that reverberates throughout Rhys's work and life. It is helpful to remember that she was christened Ella Gwendoline Rees Williams, and later (on the stage or in married life) was known as Ella, Vivien or Emma Grey, Ella Lenglet or Ella Hamer. Gwendolen is the spelling on her tombstone, and the one she used in her autobiography, *Smile Please*. But, as Carole Angier tells us, she was christened Gwendoline.<sup>81</sup> She also apparently hated the name Gwendolen (which she learned means 'white' or 'fair' in Welsh), just as she hated being the palest of her siblings (five in all surviving): they had brown eyes and hair, and she had blue eyes, fair skin and lighter hair.<sup>82</sup> It seems Rhys inhabited a world where she scarcely knew the freedom of anonymity, of not being different or standing out, even amongst her own siblings.

Rhys's characters, too, occupy this world, where their mere presence in a public social space is conspicuous. Her female café-dwellers are not permitted anonymity; their unknown, unspecific status threatens to destabilise the status quo of incumbent power structures. Within the logic of the will to power, this instability is countered and mitigated through a process of categorisation and labelling. In *Quartet*, for example, in a scene set in Montparnasse's famed Café Select, Marya Zelli is subject to an obnoxious and unprovoked visual appraisal by a drunken (male) friend of the Heidlers:

He fixed a severe, slightly bleared blue eye on Marya and declared that he thought

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<sup>80</sup> Helen Tiffin, 'Mirror and Mask: Colonial Motifs in the Novels of Jean Rhys', in *World Literature Written in English*, vol. 17 (April 1978), pp. 328-41.

<sup>81</sup> Angier (1990), pp. 9-11.

<sup>82</sup> Jean Rhys, *Smile Please* (London: Penguin, 1979), p. 14.

she was a hussy. He was very drunk.

‘I’m young and innocent,’ said Guy, ‘but I know a hussy when I see one.’<sup>83</sup>

Thus Marya is taxonomically described and mapped. The female body is often seen as an undiscovered ‘promised land’ despite eliding the fact of its already being someone’s ‘homeland.’ As Maggie Humm notes in relation to Rhys’s fiction, an ‘insistent theme in colonial writing is its tendency to abstract relationships as mappable geographic space,’ for ‘the map is the colonial signifier of a dominated race, its economy, and topography.’<sup>84</sup>

The link between cartography and imperialism at the turn of the nineteenth century has been well explored. Edward Said, for example, notes: ‘Imperialism and the culture associated with it affirm both the primacy of geography and an ideology about control of territory.’<sup>85</sup> A typical ‘*spatial strategy*’ deployed in the colonial occupation of space is what Derek Gregory identifies (following Said) as ‘*dispossession through naming*’;<sup>86</sup> that is, the formal act of replacing historically indigenous appellations with titles and labels indigenous to, or culturally reflective of, the imperial occupying force. Gregory says:

[T]he very act of naming was a way of bringing the landscape into textual presence, of bringing it within the compass of a European rationality that made it at once familiar to its colonisers and alien to its native inhabitants.<sup>87</sup>

Such transformation of the colonised into discourse has implications beyond the instrumental, as Edward Said has demonstrated. In such a process the colonised is typically passive and spoken for, does not control its own representation but is represented in accordance with a hegemonic impulse by which it is constructed as a stable and unitary entity. This is not all: bringing it within the confines of knowledge,

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<sup>83</sup> *Q*, p. 69.

<sup>84</sup> Maggie Humm, *Border Traffic: Strategies of Contemporary Women Writers* (New York and Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1991), p. 74.

<sup>85</sup> Said (1994), p. 93.

<sup>86</sup> Derek Gregory, *Geographical Imaginations* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1994), p. 168, 171.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 172.

making it knowable, robs the colonised, as Said claims, of contradiction and depth, to be left drained and empty under the gaze of the conqueror.<sup>88</sup>

This tactic, then, works not only on the political and cartographical level but also on the conceptual and, thus, psychological level, asserting propriety over space and its peoples. The colonial past of Rhys's country of birth, Dominica, for example, can be read through its street, road, and parish names. Its two primary population centres: Rouseau (the capital, and Rhys's birthplace) and Portsmouth are indicative of the island's seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French and English rule. The name 'Dominica' itself derives from the Latin *dies Dominica* ("day of the Lord"), and is named for the day of the week (Sunday) the island was 'discovered' by Christopher Columbus in 1492.<sup>89</sup> In today's post-colonial era, governments seeking to erase signs of the colonial legacy use the same device to reappropriate and reassert lost local identities by repudiating and retrospectively renaming imperially imposed 'foreign' place names.

Rachel Bowlby remarks that within *Good Morning, Midnight*, identity is 'like any other marketable item, names can be put on or off according to vagaries of fashion or fantasy.'<sup>90</sup> This is true to an extent, but whether or not such fantasies can be made to stick is dependant upon a power and authority that Rhys's protagonists generally do not possess. Recall, for example, that in an attempt to 'change [her] luck'<sup>91</sup> Sasha has thrown off her given name, 'Sophia,' only for her new identity, 'Sasha,' to be rejected in turn by an unnamed patriarch, presumably her father: 'It's so like him, I thought, that he refuses to call me Sasha, or even Sophie. No, it's Sophia, full and grand.'<sup>92</sup> The implicit authority of this 'old devil' invalidates Sasha's asserted identity (much like Rochester's violent renaming of Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea*) negating her power of self-determination. The same authority is at work later in the novel when, after staring at Sasha across a bar, a man asks his female companion: 'Tu la connais, la vieille?'<sup>93</sup> His labelling Sasha as 'the old girl' is a permanent branding; though her reaction is one of objection and disbelief –

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<sup>88</sup> Said (1994), pp. 83-7, 255-83.

<sup>89</sup> The island's pre-Columbian name was 'Wai'tu kubuli' (which means 'tall is her body').

<sup>90</sup> Bowlby (1992), p. 43.

<sup>91</sup> *GMM*, p. 11 – It is unfortunate that in her introduction to this Penguin edition of the novel, A. L. Kennedy also refuses to use Sasha's preferred name, opting instead for Sophia (see pp. v-xii).

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

‘Me? Impossible. Me – la vieille?’ – the term is accepted and refrained throughout the rest of the novel. The naming delimits her potential and blocks her movement, and her power of self-determination is usurped once again.

The cafés are themselves subject to imposed labelling and projected identity, which, again, impacts upon Sasha’s self-determination. In *Good Morning, Midnight*, continuing a programme in which the cafés of her past cognitively map her present, Sasha revisits a café she used to frequent where, as far as she knows, she has never made a scene, collapsed, or cried.<sup>94</sup> Nicknamed ‘The Pig and Lily,’ it is interesting to note that this label on the map of her past has been designated not by Sasha, but by a former lover:

‘He always called that bar the Pig and Lily, because the proprietor’s name was Pecanelli.’<sup>95</sup>

His naming of the establishment is an assertion of propriety not only over the material space, underlining it as principally a male space, but also Sasha’s psychogeography; her past, and therefore her present, is oriented through these patriarchal structures.

We never learn the actual name of the café that Sasha visits but, christened as it is by this anonymous ‘boy’<sup>96</sup> (the representative patriarch), ‘The Pig and Lily’ becomes the accepted and official epithet. Here the unnamed ‘He’ assumes the role of cartographer, arbiter of language, and definer of terms in a scaled-down version of conquest and renaming. His ‘imperial’ authority clearly goes unchallenged when in a later visit Sasha refers to the café by his designation rather than an epithet or appellation of her own, or ‘Pecanelli’s’, or, indeed, its actual name.<sup>97</sup>

Carol Angier understands the suggestive nickname of the café as the dichotomous ‘poles of Sasha’s story. On the one side her hopes and dreams – the Lily; on the other side reality – the Pig.’<sup>98</sup> Cassell’s *Dictionary of Slang* (2005) confirms, as if confirmation were needed, that the well-known epithet ‘Pig’ is principally used as an insult, based on

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. 130.

<sup>98</sup> Angier (1990), p. 378.

negative stereotyping ‘denoting unpleasantness, esp. to one who is fat, ugly and/or greedy.’<sup>99</sup> From the 1920s onwards, it became a specifically gendered slur, designating ‘a fat, unattractive woman’ or ‘a woman considered to be drunken, promiscuous and sexually available,’<sup>100</sup> the typical notion of the women in Rhys’s cafés. In another sense, ‘pig’ also refers to a figure of authority, specifically a policeman; but from the ’thirties could send up any conventional person, member of the establishment, or authorities. ‘Lily,’ in contrast to the former use of pig, generally denotes ‘the symbolic purity or innocence of the flower’<sup>101</sup> – a virgin, for example. Interestingly, ‘Lily’ also denoted ‘a person or thing of exceptional whiteness.’ The term ‘lilywhite’ is an extension of this sense; originally used in the late seventeenth century to refer to a chimney sweep in an ironic joke at the expense of the soot-blackened face. Particularly apposite to Rhys’s white Creole background, however, is that from the nineteenth century both epithets – ‘lily’ and ‘lilywhite’ – were used in the same ironic sense to refer to a black person. Rhys’s ambiguous position as white Creole makes its deployment in this case doubly ironic.

In her depiction of the ‘Pig and Lily’ Rhys exposes and challenges the politics and histories through which identity is constructed, particularly national identity: what is national identity? Is it reducible to consensus on some politically, or arbitrarily, imposed generalisation; language or food, perhaps; or looks, or what? The Pig and Lily is a place that presents an assortment of clichéd national characteristics, problematising and confusing any notion of a satisfactorily decipherable ‘true’ or stable identity. The establishment’s location, its catchment area, ‘at the back of the Montparnasse station,’ associates it with an allochthonous rather than an autochthonous clientele – ministering to tourists and visitors rather than locals.<sup>102</sup> Any freshly detrained tourist expecting the ‘authentic’ Parisian café experience, however, is sure to be disappointed. Devoid of any traditional or typical French motifs, the café is brimming with other factitious national clichés and stereotypes. In appearance, the café is incongruously ‘[g]ot up to look like an

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<sup>99</sup> Jonathan Green, *Cassell’s Dictionary of Slang* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2005), p. 991.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 991.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 801.

<sup>102</sup> *GMM*, p. 34 – Montparnasse station serves the Atlantic port cities of La Rochelle and Bordeaux, and the Mediterranean port of Marseille. Each brings tourists from all over the world but, historically, also connected Paris to the French colonies.

olde English tavern.’<sup>103</sup> Odder still is that when Sasha was last in Paris it had an Italian proprietor, Pecanelli, who had decided to furnish his olde English tavern with a menu offering neither the expected English nor (a tangentially apposite) Italian range of dishes, serving instead: ‘hot dogs, choucroute, Vienna steak, [and] Welsh rabbit.’<sup>104</sup> And now, five years later, with décor unchanged, ‘a fat, bald man with a Dutch nose’<sup>105</sup> runs it whose speciality is Javanese food. And despite the fact that this menu originates from an island in the Indian Ocean, singled out as looking ‘very exotic’<sup>106</sup> are the ‘English hunting-scenes on the wall’. What is going on here? Rhys’s unexpected reversal of perspective cleverly unseats the imperial nation from the privileged centre – the point from which everything is compared to and ‘othered’– and momentarily apprehends the space from the point of view of the ‘other.’ From a non-Western-European perspective, the scarlet coats (‘pinks’), hunt caps, tan-tops, whips, and horns of the typical English hunt would certainly be exotic and unfamiliar.

The consequence of an accumulation of competing and contradictory characteristics is the effacement of any stable or recognisable identity. Much like the effect of Sasha’s incongruous outfit that at once affirms and negates an identity: ‘it shouts ‘Anglaise’, my hat. And my dress extinguishes me. And then this damned old fur coat slung on top of everything else – the last idiocy, the last incongruity.’<sup>107</sup> Such a *mélange* of signifiers creates confusion between an imagined authenticity or totality – the generalised, stereotypical, expected image of a nation or city – and its complex composite heterogeneous reality. This point is borne out in a comic scene that sees five Chinese tourists enter with quixotic and misguided notions about the place. Wishing to soak up some olde English atmosphere (in Paris?!), they request that before they order drinks the fire be lit in the open grate so they can ‘see the flames dance.’<sup>108</sup> Refused, they ‘file solemnly out again, smiling politely.’<sup>109</sup> The proprietor’s indignant response that: ‘For a long time [...] he has known that everybody in Montparnasse is mad, but this is the last

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

straw'<sup>110</sup> is ironic given the schizophrenic character of his establishment.

The Pig and Lily's blend of cultural and national signifiers reminds us of Doreen Massey's declaration that 'places are always already hybrid;'<sup>111</sup> and questions just what national identity actually is. Rhys clearly saw it as something always in process, challenging classical notions of empire and culture, and subject to a range of global cultural events and influences.

Food is often used to define and represent a particular nation's unique culture and history but like the cartography of a country, a national dish is subject to the same pressures and influences. An examination of the Pig and Lily's menu reveals a wealth of arbitrary and clichéd national associations and identity constructions:

hot dogs, choucroute, Vienna Steak, Welsh rabbit [...] Spécialités Javanaises (par personne, indivisibles): Rystafel complet (16 plats), 25.00, Rystafel petit (10 plats), 17.50, Nassi Goreng, 12.50. ...<sup>112</sup>

The hot dog is of course traditionally associated with the United States but it actually originated in Frankfurt. The national affiliations of Vienna Steak should not be in doubt, yet debates in gastronomic history reveal that the dish may be Milanese in origin.<sup>113</sup> Choucroute is simply the phonologically francophonic term for German sauerkraut, and it is understood that the French annexation of Alsace in 1648 brought it to the attention of chefs in Paris. Welsh Rabbit, despite its name, is not a traditional Welsh dish at all; Eighteenth-century cookbooks reveal that it was thought of as a luscious supper or tavern dish. Essentially cheese on toast, it might rather be understood as a national slur, for if a Welshman went rabbit hunting it was joked that cheese on toast would be his supper.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>111</sup> Doreen Massey, 'Places and Their Pasts' in *History Workshop Journal*, No. 39 (Spring, 1995), pp. 182-192 (p. 183).

<sup>112</sup> *GMM*, p. 38.

<sup>113</sup> Vienna steak is also known as Wiener schnitzel; the Milanese dish is called *Cotoletta alla Milanese*.

<sup>114</sup> The insult is also context dependant, as there exists also an 'English Rabbit' and a 'Scottish Rabbit.' *NB*. The oft-used 'rarebit' is an etymological corruption, as, according to the *OED* 'There is no evidence of the independent use of *rarebit*. And according to the grammarian H.W. Fowler in his *Dictionary of Modern British Usage* (Oxford University Press, 1926): 'Welsh rabbit is amusing & right, & Welsh rarebit stupid and wrong', p. 664.

None of these dishes, then, offers any uncomplicated foundation in terms of realising stable national identities. What it does do is highlight how the ‘other’ has installed itself within the western metropolis. Through a kind of reverse invasion, the periphery has infiltrated the colonial core. The protective filters of time and space have disappeared, and the encounter with the ‘alien’ and ‘exotic’ is now instantaneous and immediate.

The introduction of the ‘ambitious’ Javanese menu seems at first comedic and incongruous, until we presume the national identity of the new proprietor to be Dutch – judging by his ‘Dutch nose.’ The presumption is easily made within the spirit of the novel where, as we have discovered, all identities (including cultural) are determined by visual markers. We are informed that ‘he has only been here for two years,’<sup>115</sup> the ‘here’ of course related to his proprietorship but may also refer to his being ‘here’ in Paris, France. The presence of two Dutchmen in the bar – customers who have perhaps sought out a familiar tongue – also reinforces this assumption. The indispensable fact in this judgement, however, is that from 1800 until 1949 the island of Java formed part of the Dutch colony known as the Dutch East Indies, so at the time Rhys was writing *Good Morning, Midnight* it was still under Dutch governance.

The Indonesian dish ‘Rystafel’ is in fact a Dutch word that literally translates as ‘rice table.’ It is a meal adapted by the Dutch from an elaborate Indonesian feast consisting of many side dishes (explaining the menu’s reference to 16 or 10 plates). Dishes were assembled from the numerous islands of the East Indies in order to create an official banquet representative of the multi-ethnic character of the region. Thus, the Dutch *rijsttafel* (even the orthographic shift here signifies) represents an official attempt to manufacture and augment a colonial Dutch East Indies identity. The Dutch-nosed proprietor has therefore drawn upon his nation’s colonial ties and resources in order to feed his patrons, and in so doing the Pig and Lily’s identity has undergone another process of modification. To return to Massey:

Places [...] are always constructed out of articulations of social relations (trading connections, the unequal links of colonialism, thoughts of home), which are not only internal to that locale but which link them to elsewhere. Their ‘local

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<sup>115</sup> *GMM*, p. 35.

uniqueness' is always already a product of wider contacts; the local is always already a product in part of 'global' forces, where global in this context refers not necessarily to the planetary scale, but to the geographical beyond, the world beyond the place itself.<sup>116</sup>

Bearing the concept of the 'geographical beyond' in mind, we are reminded of Jameson's notion of a 'spatial disjunction,' where

[B]eyond the metropolis, outside of daily life and existential experience of the home country, in colonies over the water whose own life experience and lifeworld remain unknown and unimaginable for the subjects of the imperial power, whatever social class they belong to has as its immediate consequence the inability to grasp the way the system functions as a whole [...] pieces of the puzzle are missing; it can never be fully reconstructed.<sup>117</sup>

In her representation of the Pig and Lily, Rhys telescopes different global spaces and temporalities, momentarily realigning this disjunction to reveal the 'geographical beyond' and the complex and perpetual cycle of cultural influence that reaches out from Europe to the Indies and back again. Rhys makes us aware of the encounter between colonial centre and colonised periphery. This fascinating episode at the 'Pig and Lily' café can now be understood as Rhys challenging the stability of essentialist notions of national and cultural identity within the context of imperio-globalism; revealing how these complex and sometimes arbitrary operations serve to establish hierarchical systems of inclusion and exclusion.

### **Repositioning Rhys**

A significant amount of the critical work on Rhys locates much of her subject matter

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<sup>116</sup> Massey (1995), p. 183.

<sup>117</sup> Fredric Jameson, 'Modernism and Imperialism' in Terry Eagleton, Fredric Jameson, and Edward W. Said, *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), pp. 50-51.

within the confines of the marginal; the cheap and grimy underbelly of the metropolis, what is, in effect, the other side of expatriate bohemia. Once we start paying attention to the material spaces that her characters occupy – the cafés – we realise that this interpretation is no longer justifiable.

A key figure in positioning Rhys as an outsider who portrayed the life of the ‘other’ Paris was Ford Madox Ford. His preface to her short story collection, *The Left Bank and Other Stories*, is less about introducing and recommending the work than locating both writer and text within a particular geographic and aesthetic urban landscape. Complaining about her refusal to include any topographical description that would orient the reader: “‘Where did all this take place? What sort of places are these?’”<sup>118</sup> He admits:

I tried [...] very hard to induce the author of the *Left Bank* to introduce some sort of topography of that region [...] But would she do it? No! with cold deliberation, once her attention was called to the matter, she eliminated even such two or three words of descriptive matter as had crept into her work.

Ignoring Rhys’s reassertion of authority over her fiction he set about ‘butt[ing] in,’<sup>119</sup> adding the ‘missing’ topographical details. Coral Ann Howells reminds us that there is no story by Rhys called ‘The Left Bank’; we should rather understand this as referring to Ford’s prefatory remarks to which he gives the title ‘Rive Gauche’ – whereupon he occupies a large proportion of the preface regaling the reader with his own experiences of the Left Bank, pushing salutation of Rhys to the margins at the end – a move, which implicitly situates Rhys as the writer of the ‘Other Stories.’<sup>120</sup> Ford thus counters Rhys’s own subject matter and style, framing the Paris that she sees from the perceptions and aesthetic assumptions of the white, male, establishment expatriate. His assumed role of narrative cartographer, and arbiter of the ‘the real Latin Quarter’<sup>121</sup> enacts the very processes of colonial authority and domination discussed above in relation to the ‘Pig and Lily’. Even V. S. Naipal’s approving essay, ‘Without a Dog’s Chance,’ makes the same

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<sup>118</sup> Ford, ‘Preface’ in *LB*, p. 26.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>120</sup> Coral Ann Howells, *Jean Rhys* (New York; London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), p. 31.

<sup>121</sup> Ford, ‘Preface’ in *LB*, pp. 12-13.

claim saying that Rhys ‘avoided geographical explicitness. She never “set” her scene...’<sup>122</sup>

But of course, despite Ford’s misgivings, Rhys’s collection does present a figurative topography. Every story has its own microtopography: a café or a room, for example, and each is decisively located: in Paris – (fourteen stories are set in Montparnasse) e.g. ‘the Quarter,’ the Boulevard du Montparnasse, the Place de l’Odeon, the 6<sup>th</sup> *arrondissement* – but also Vienna, Budapest, and Dominica. Take the opening of the fifth story in the collection, ‘Tout Montparnasse and a Lady,’ as a clear example of Rhys setting up the where, the when, and the who:

At ten o’clock of a Saturday evening the ordinary clients of the little Bal Musette in the rue St. Jacques – the men in caps and the hatless girls – begin to drift out one by one. Those who are inclined to linger are tactfully pressed to leave by the proprietor, a thin anxious little man with a stout placid wife. The place is now hired and reserved, for every Saturday evening the Anglo-Saxon section of Tout Montparnasse comes to dance there.<sup>123</sup>

It is clear that this is not a depiction of marginality. Details of the dance come to us via an Anglo-Saxon insider, an authority with intimate knowledge of, and access to, the expatriate comings and goings; not one of the ‘ordinary clients’ excluded from these festivities.

Howells remarks how Ford’s strategies of appropriation succeeded in some respects due to the fact that along with contemporary reviewers’ unquestioning acceptance of Ford’s perspective – the 1927 *TLS* review noted ‘[Ford’s] easy authority about the particular quality of Parisian bohemianism’ – the collection is usually referred to as *The Left Bank*.<sup>124</sup> Indeed, relatively recent criticism seems to have accepted Ford’s portrayal, too. Shari Benstock writes:

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<sup>122</sup> V. S. Naipaul, ‘Without a Dog’s Chance: After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie’ in P. Frickey, *Critical Perspectives on Jean Rhys* (Washington D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1990), pp. 54-58 (p. 54).

<sup>123</sup> *LB*, p. 53.

<sup>124</sup> Howells (1991), pp. 31-32.

Ford tried to establish the political and imaginative boundaries of the Left Bank in the Modernist period, suggesting not only that the Left Bank represented the psychological and intellectual inverse of its opposite territory across the river, but that it symbolised all the “Left Banks of the world.”<sup>125</sup>

Conflating Rhys’s life and fiction, Benstock then argues that Rhys missed these bohemian heights:

Rhys was not destined, then, to discover on the Paris Left Bank the “perfection” that Ford claimed existed there. Instead, she discovered its outer regions where streets smelled of poverty and hunger and lives were desperate and embittered. In the thirteenth *arrondissement* [...] Rhys spent long days of aimless walking through mean and uninteresting quarters, passed nights in cheap hotels, and made weekly visits to the Santé prison (where her husband, Jean Lenglet, was interred for trafficking in art objects of questionable ownership). In short, she discovered a part of the Left Bank unknown to other of its residents.<sup>126</sup>

By ‘other residents’, Benstock means the expatriate community. Helen Carr has pointed out that this topographical reading enacts a ‘striking [example] of Anglo-American imperialism,’ in that it consigns the ‘entire indigenous, and indigent, population of the thirteenth *arrondissement* [...] to the status of non-persons.’<sup>127</sup> The other point I would add is that Benstock’s reading implies Ford’s Left Bank of ‘perfection’ existed, or that it was open to Rhys and it is just that she eschewed it; but, as we have seen, Rhys did portray the social hubs of the expatriate community. Benstock’s illation not only perpetuates the hegemonic myth of Anglo-American bohemia but it also defines Rhys’s fiction as counter, or other, simply because it does not match the expected or standard celebratory model of bohemia as Benstock (or Ford) sees it.

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<sup>125</sup> Benstock (1987b), p. 448.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 449.

<sup>127</sup> Carr, p. 13. Carr also points out that Benstock is guilty of conflating Rhys’s work and life too much. Jean Lenglet’s offence was in fact ‘irregular currency dealing: it was Stephen Zelli in *Quartet* who had been trafficking in stolen goods.’ p. 93, *n5*.

This is an impression of Rhys's work that it seems is difficult to shake off. In her discussion on *The Left Bank and Other Stories*, Deborah Parsons acknowledges Ford's expropriation of Rhys's topography, noting that he 'denies Rhys observational authority twice over.' Firstly because he 'diminishes any particular topographicality [she] may evoke'; and secondly, because the cosmopolitanism that he ascribes her is one of a marginal vagrancy that belongs to the 'mournful' and 'hard up' parts of the city' that he as privileged male middle-class expatriate gets to 'introduce, frame, and situate.'<sup>128</sup> But Parsons then goes on to misrepresent Rhys's position in a similar fashion. She says:

[Rhys] may not portray the 'Latin Quarter' of the expatriate community – the social hubs of the Dôme and the boulevard Saint-Germain – but instead she retreats into the Paris that exists on the margins of this society, its back streets and dilapidating small hotels.

Despite her critical appraisal, Parsons accepts Ford's account of Rhys's portrayal of the marginal 'other' Paris. More recently, Andrew Thacker, has extended this perception of Rhys's work, arguing that it is representative of all her depictions of Paris (following Benstock), he says:

[T]he Paris *rive gauche* portrayed by Rhys is not that of the 'Latin Quarter', but of the thirteenth and fourteenth *arrondissements* further to the south-east of the city, a region more shabby and marginal than the cultural centre of Ford's literary geography.<sup>129</sup>

Just a cursory glance at the topographical details of *The Left Bank and Other Stories* reveals the positioning of Rhys to the margins to be rather forced. The collection is replete with portrayals of the Latin Quarter and its expatriate community. The opening story 'Illusion,' for instance, tells the tale of Miss Bruce 'an old inhabitant of the Quarter'

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., pp. 138-9.

<sup>129</sup> Thacker (2003), p. 209.

with ‘British character and training.’<sup>130</sup> The story that follows, ‘The Spiritualist,’ is set around a little fourth-floor flat in the Place de l’Odeon, which is in the 6<sup>th</sup> *arrondissement*.<sup>131</sup> The story ‘In a Café’ – referred to by Parsons as a glimpse ‘of the urban low-life of Paris’<sup>132</sup> – is set in a café that Rhys does not name, but its identity as an expatriate establishment in the Latin Quarter should not be in doubt: “‘Concert! The best music in the Quarter,’ the placard outside announce[s].”<sup>133</sup> It is frequented by ‘as many foreigners as is usual,’ which, as we come to find out, means Americans. And it is surely unfair to associate this café with an urban low-life when it is described as ‘respectably full’ – a place where ‘[s]tout business men drank beer and were accompanied by neat women in neat hats [and] temperamental gentlemen in shabby hats drank fines à l’eau beside temperamental ladies who wore turbans and drank menthes of striking emerald.’<sup>134</sup>

Parsons argues that with this story Rhys subverts our expectations, ‘[I]like many of the patrons of the café,’ she says, ‘the reader is a tourist hoping for a glimpse of Parisian bohemia. Instead of the entertainment they expect, however, Rhys provides a pathetic and miserable scene of an old musician singing a song about a fallen grue that creates a sense of discomfort in the audience.’<sup>135</sup> In fact, the audience hardly seems uncomfortable, responding as it does with ‘tumultuous applause.’<sup>136</sup> The real subversion of expectations is in the denouement:

The singer came forward with his dancing, tiptoe step to sell copies of his song. ...  
‘*Les Grues. ...Les Grues de Paris!... One franc!*’

He thrust the song on to the table in front of a party of Americans, and a girl with fair hair took a copy, asking him: ‘Any good? How much?’

‘Very nice! Very pretty!’ he assured her.

‘*Les Grues. Les Grues de Paris! One franc!*’

‘Give me two,’ she said with calm self-assurance.

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<sup>130</sup> *LB*, p. 29.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39. The 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> *arrondissements* make up the *Quartier Latin*.

<sup>132</sup> Parsons (2000), p. 139.

<sup>133</sup> *LB*, p. 49 [my emphasis].

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50.

<sup>135</sup> Parsons (2000), p. 139.

<sup>136</sup> *LB*, p. 52.

The pianist chalked on a little black-board and hung up for all the world to see the next number of the orchestra.

‘Mommer loves Popper. Popper loves Mommer. *Chanson Américaine. Demandé.*’

Peace descended again on the café.

The revelation is that expatriate bohemia is merely a tourist attraction, a fantasy that is bought and sold like the song. It is, as Howells, says ‘[a]n ironic celebration of American incomprehension and the power of American money.’<sup>137</sup> So here Rhys is indeed subverting expectations, but the reason is not because the scene is set away from literary bohemia in a low establishment, as Parsons suggests, but because this *is* Parisian bohemia bereft of its quixotic and factitious notions; seen from the inside and seen plainly, it fails to match the myth.

Implicit acceptance of Rhys’s subject matter as ‘the marginal’ has the added effect of bestowing on her an equally marginal knowledge and understanding of the city. That is, it reduces her cognizance of the urban environment to instinctual apprehension, devoid of intellectualisation. Benstock, for instance, argues that:

Rhys represents an extreme example of woman’s marginality in the modern urban environment. Although Paris provided the backdrop for many of her fictions [...] and although she continued to prefer Paris to London, Rhys herself was never comfortable in the city setting. The city’s margins, its peripheral limits, drew Rhys like a magnet: disgusted by the sordid, she was thus nonetheless incapable of resisting it.<sup>138</sup>

Helen Carr has rightly pointed out that Benstock has here turned Rhys’s experience of economic destitution and resulting oppression into personal choice or failure of will. The

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<sup>137</sup> Howells (1991), p. 34.

<sup>138</sup> Benstock (1987b), p. 449.

implication is that Rhys ‘was not in the thirteenth *arrondissement* because she was poor, but because she couldn’t resist the smell of degradation.’<sup>139</sup>

Parsons, too, understands Rhys in this way. Identifying Sasha Jansen as representative of such innate compulsions, she claims that ‘she possesses an instinctive knowledge of the marginal and in-between areas she inhabits and is sensitive to the tone of acceptance, rejection, or indifference that they exude.’<sup>140</sup> In fact, when we look to *Good Morning, Midnight*, for instance, we find that Sasha’s ‘instincts’ are often wrong. Outside of the Pig and Lily she expects the place to be crowded: ‘I arrive thinking of this boy, and screw myself up to go into a room full of people. But the place is empty – dead as a door-nail.’<sup>141</sup> Parsons adds that Sasha resembles ‘a vagrant animal, who makes her way by instinct to places she senses are sympathetic and avoids those that are not.’ Here, again, Sasha’s instinct fails her; she does not avoid unsympathetic spaces as she hopes to. Walking with the (supposed) Russians by two cafés opposite each other in a street near her hotel – ‘one where the proprietor is hostile,’ and ‘one where the proprietor is neutral’ – Sasha admits ‘I must be a bit drunk, because I lead them into the wrong one.’<sup>142</sup>

Finally, Parsons claims that ‘Sasha is far from being a knowledgeable urbanite,’ (referring to one of Sasha’s previous jobs as a guide to American tourists, for which she had to venture into the Right Bank beauty spots of the Place de l’Opera, the Madeleine, and the Rue de la Paix). Parsons says, while Sasha is ‘able to negotiate the habitat of the placeless and dispossessed around Montmartre and Montparnasse’ (no doubt relying on her instincts), ‘she is entirely out of her depth on the Right Bank and cannot follow its ordered street plan; ‘North, south, east, west –they have no meaning for me’<sup>143</sup> But to give Sasha her due we must read on, for to do so reveals that she *is* a knowledgeable urbanite, even on the (supposedly) unfamiliar Right Bank of the city. The loss of compass direction is Sasha momentarily, and perhaps characteristically, ‘losing [her] head’, we know this because she immediately ‘pull[s] [her]self together’<sup>144</sup> and takes the American

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<sup>139</sup> Carr (1996), p. 13.

<sup>140</sup> Parsons (2000), p. 145.

<sup>141</sup> *GMM*, p. 35.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>143</sup> Parsons (2000), pp. 145-6: quoting from *GMM*, p. 26.

<sup>144</sup> *GMM*, p. 27.

tourists (a mother and daughter) dress shopping in the Rue de la Paix, and when they want lunch she ‘take[s] them to a restaurant in the Place de la Madeleine.’ Note that Sasha does not stumble upon a restaurant by chance, she actively ‘takes them’ to one. Following lunch, the mother has a list of esoteric demands including a trip to ‘the exhibition of Loie Fuller materials’; ‘the place where they sell that German camera which can’t be got anywhere else outside Germany’; an improbable ‘hat which will épater everybody she knows and yet be easy to wear’; as well as visiting a certain exhibition of pictures. But she doesn’t remember the man’s name and she isn’t sure where the exhibition is.’ Contrary to the dim view of Rhys’s character, and far from showing ignorance of the city, or reliance solely upon instinct, Sasha reveals herself to be a supremely resourceful city dweller. Questioning ‘waiters, old ladies in lavabos, girls in shops, she ‘manage[s] everything, except perhaps the hat.’<sup>145</sup> And even this last exception reads as though she found the fussy old matriarch a hat but that it does not ‘perhaps’ meet the impossible dual function of being able to épater her bourgeois friends while remaining understated and easy to wear.

While it might be true that homelessness and not-belonging is Rhys’s signature trope, it is not quite right to say that ‘Rhys is a ‘stranger’ in the city.’<sup>146</sup> Rhys and her heroines are not simply indigent outsiders looking for and failing to find a way in to the expatriate community, and as a result remain marginal. On the contrary, we find that the city is not a stranger to them; they consistently display an insider’s knowledge of the cityscape; perhaps even apprehending it with greater fidelity than those expatriates designated as ‘official’ insiders. Her depictions demystify it to reveal its clichéd and superficial construction.

## **Conclusion**

Rhys’s cafés can be understood as Lefebvrian ‘representational spaces’ imbued with ideologies and codes. However, these ideologies and codes are not her own. Where with Hemingway such codes are enabling, advisory, and comforting, for Rhys’s characters

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>146</sup> Parsons (2000), p. 136.

they are oppressive, subjugating, and minatory. The emphasis on self-restraint in café conduct (so typical of Hemingway) ensures that her female protagonists are understood as ‘messy’ and transgressive. Through Rhys’s representations and articulations of the café, such restrictive ideological structures are confronted, interrogated, and exposed.

Taking examples from her early novels, *Quartet* and *After Leaving Mister Mackenzie*, I showed how Rhys exposes a supposedly emancipatory bohemian Paris as an organised society, which serves to protect the culture of male privilege. We saw how such systems of power are inscribed in both the physical structure of Rhys’s cafés (through the ubiquity of mirrors) and the hierarchical specular networks at work within them (the gaze of the patron and other conformist habitués). Rhys’s depiction of the café therefore undermines what we might call the ‘official,’ Lefebvrian ‘representation of space’ of the café as an open intellectual playground as celebrated in Lewis’s and Hemingway’s work.

Recalling Lewis’s *Café* painting, it appears that his café figures confront the same sense of painful visibility experienced by Rhys’s characters. In that discussion, I suggested that the café in Lewis’s painting evokes both social restriction and independence, and that the ambivalence created presents an ominous and, perhaps, violent space that undermines the old romantic notions of bohemia. And I further suggested that for Lewis this tension energised potentialities for movement and progress, but here, for Rhys, this tension is only ever oppressive and binding.

Rhys confronts a dominant café code, as expressed by Hemingway, and exposes its darker side, revealing it not to be an aspirational and comforting framework but as suffocatingly dogmatic. While Hemingway’s characters flourish under the security and guidance of the code in utopian cafés, Rhys’s women find it crushing and discomforting.

These themes of regulation and control were then further explored through Rhys’s use of naming and labelling, particularly in relation to colonial and imperialist tactics of asserting propriety over space. Invoking Derek Gregory’s notion of ‘*dispossession through naming*’, in my discussion of the Pig and Lily café and its menu, I argued that Rhys exposes and challenges the politics and histories through which identity is constructed and often arbitrarily imposed.

Using the café as a lens through which to discuss Rhys’s work has proved

invaluable in revealing central themes characteristic of her work: the female experience of the metropolis, gendered power structures, self-identity, etcetera. It has shown also that far from presenting a narrow topography of Paris, limited to a louche urban underbelly, her texts portray a diverse and inclusive range of spaces and places, marginal and exclusive; rich and poor; shabby and resplendent. That, further, Rhys's stories are not situated outside, or marginal to, the *Rive Gauche*; what her work amounts to is in fact a witty and subversive response to Ford's (and others') *version* of the *Rive Gauche* – the hegemonic, yet factitious, image of the bohemian Left Bank of the privileged Anglo-American expatriate community. Rhys once objected that '[t]he "Paris" all these people write about, Henry Miller, even Hemingway etc was not "Paris" at all – it was "America in Paris" or "England in Paris". The real Paris has nothing to do with that lot'.<sup>147</sup> It was not that Rhys eschewed the (implicitly central) Paris of Ford, Hemingway and Miller for some 'other Paris' (which is naturally peripheral); no, it is rather that Rhys portrayed these central hubs but went on to cast sideways glances at the Latin Quarter and its habitués. The result is a critique from the perspective of the alien-outsider in the 'centre;' a repudiation, and demythologisation of the myth of the Anglo-American café culture of 1920s and 1930s Paris.

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<sup>147</sup> Rhys, letter to Dian Antwill, 1964, in *JRL*, p. 280.

## *Conclusion*

*Neither of us shall be unfaithful to the cafés that are ours.*

Ford Madox Ford, (*Provence: From Minstrels to the Machine*)<sup>1</sup>

Since its inception, the café has played a central role in the society of art and letters. In the early decades of the twentieth century, the crossroads of the great cities were not the streets or boulevards but the crowded and brightly lit cafés. During the high artistic activity of the modernist period, the café functioned as an informal cultural institution where like-minded artists and intellectuals could meet, drink, and discuss the latest developments in art. In this thesis, I have suggested that the café also played a significant role in the literature of the time.

This study was conceived in order to explore how the modernist writers Wyndham Lewis, Ernest Hemingway, and Jean Rhys ‘wrote’ the café. That is, it was designed to find out, given the seeming social and cultural importance of the café on the literary landscape of the time, how modernist writers engaged imaginatively with the space, what it represented to them, how such conceptions were presented in their fictional portrayals of the café, and what, in the end, these spatial notions might reveal about modernist aesthetics and modernist preoccupations in general.

Not only did the work of the spatial theorists Henri Lefebvre, Michel Foucault, and Michel de Certeau help to explicate and expand upon the spatial ideas that emerged throughout my study, it also revealed that modernist writers can be thought of as literary precursors to these late-twentieth-century theorists of space and geography. Long *avant la lettre*, many modernist artists were exploring and articulating the ideological complexities, aesthetics, and politics of urban space in their writing. In the texts discussed

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<sup>1</sup> Ford (2009), p. 57.

here, the café is consistently represented as much more than a mimetic backdrop to narrative action or as simply an empty stage upon which characters are conducted to perform. Lewis, Hemingway, and Rhys each display a distinct sensitivity to the fundamental ideological conflicts and ramifications bound up with space, place, and geography. More specifically, it is evident that the specific site of the café is often conspicuously affective in both the subject matter and the style of the modernist writing discussed.

The first case study, for example, establishes the idea that Wyndham Lewis is a distinctly spatial thinker and writer. He understands the complex relationship between space and society: how the one affects the other. In his novel, *Tarr*, the formation, arrangement, composition, and utilisation of metropolitan spaces is at the centre of his aesthetic and political concerns. Throughout his critique of Montparnassian café society he employs a range of spatial metaphors, and brings to life the conflicts in the texture and topology of the city's spaces, as well as exploring their symbolic implications. His description of Paris as a 'delicious inn', his use of flooding as a trope for the powerful forces of modernity, and his satirical relabelling of the Café du Dôme to the Café Berne (which neatly combined the demographic make-up of the café and its unique topological features), are representative examples of the spatial tenor of Lewis's work.

For Lewis, the café is emphatically 'representational' in the Lefebvrian sense. Lewis respects the café's legacy as an important cultural institution from where much of the great art and ideas of the past have issued. In the café scenes in *Tarr* he exhibits an astute awareness of how the liminal character of the café – its position between public and private spheres – occasions a certain type of enthusiastic and consequential *causerie*. Lewis understands that this expansive and unique quality of the café makes it a place of dynamic potential, a place where art and society might be refashioned and instilled with more preferable tendencies. In Lewis's view, then, the café embodies Ford's dictum that 'a café is a serious place where serious people discussing serious subjects mould civilisations.'<sup>2</sup>

The main argument of the Hemingway chapter is that the well-known 'Hemingway code' is conceived spatially. By focussing on the café I developed the idea

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

that the space instantiates and reflects Hemingway's personal moral code, a critical paradigm in the reading of his work that Hemingway scholars typically associate with the conduct and behaviour of his characters. By attending to the spatial dimension of this code, I have suggested new ways of interpreting Hemingway's fiction. For instance, in his short story 'A Clean Well-Lighted Place', Hemingway depicts what I characterise as the supernal café, the perfect spatial exemplar of his moral code. This café, like many other 'good' cafés that he describes in *The Sun Also Rises* or *A Moveable Feast*, for example, is a tropological space that is a source of moral guidance and existential comfort. As physical instances of his moral code, Hemingway's cafés are distinctly ideological. Supported by Lefebvre's theory that social spaces are often ideologically coded, that is, material embodiments of an ideological system (like the Church, for example), I posited that Hemingway's clean, well-lighted café can be understood as a kind of secular church in the way that it incorporates and stands for his quasi-religious moral code.

The ideological rendering of space has tremendous impact on the style of Hemingway's work. His depictions of cafés often contravene and efface the mimetic presentation of place, and install instead a distinct version of his own spatial ideal. There appears to be a greater aesthetic urgency in his work to employ space to emphasise particular moral or emotional states rather than to imitate geographical or spatial particularity. Cafés in his fiction thus become characteristically 'Hemingwayesque.' I averred that his method bespeaks a will to power, in that it betrays a desire to control space, to erase meaning and impose his own, much like the tactics of imperial cartographers of old.

The chapter on Rhys's work provides a marked contrast with the first two case studies by revealing that her conceptualisation of the café is very different to both Lewis and Hemingway's understandings of the space. Where, for Lewis, the café is a vital site of potentiality – a forum for weighty discussion and argument, in Rhys's fiction, the café is a place of repressive stasis and silent accusation. Where, for Hemingway, the café symbolises sanctuary and self-exploration, for Rhys, the café stands for persecution and self-recrimination. The freedom with which Lewis and Hemingway's characters can enter and enjoy cafés seems simply unavailable to Rhys's protagonists. The act of entering a

café alone is always accompanied by some psychological cost to Rhys's women. They often find that they are transgressing an informal code or order of conduct of the kind Hemingway inculcates in his café representations. Like Hemingway and his characters, Rhys's heroines tend to efface the objective, mimetic features of cafés, and transform them into subjective spaces: they appear 'good' or 'bad', threatening or indifferent, according to the vagaries of individual experience. One consequence of such depictions is that these repressive cafés undermine the received image of expatriate café life as an open intellectual playground, free from the societal conventions of home.

The *louche* imagery in Rhys's portrayals of the metropolis has often been understood as the depiction of an urban underbelly, an aspect of the city peripheral to the fashionable centres of metropolitan life. However, contrary to this popular reading, throughout her fiction, Rhys's characters consistently frequent mainstream expatriate hubs, like the Café du Dôme, The Café de la Rotonde, and the Select. Viewing Rhys's work through the café lens has shown that while marginality may indeed be a signature trope, it is not accurate to say that she or her characters were simply drawn to and occupied marginal locations. It is rather that her depictions of the city's spaces offer an alternative to the glossy Anglo-American fantasy of expatriate café society.

The unique way in which Rhys represents the café also suggested that her hyphenated position between colonial and metropolitan spheres is crucial to her spatial aesthetic. Her ambiguously Creolized identity is one of the impulses behind her explorations of the nature of identity and its construction. In her depiction of the 'Pig and Lily' café, for example, an establishment with a complicated composite identity, she effectively dramatises the arbitrary yet efficient means through which imperial or patriarchal power can assert itself through naming and labelling. The particular attention Rhys pays to delineating the café's décor and even its menu items reinforces her perceptive unpicking of the complex operations that inform, for instance, national identity and its creation. It is through her rendering of space and place, particularly her café representations, that Rhys ultimately presents an astute and destabilising encounter between colonial periphery and metropolitan centre.

Looking at the three case studies together, what seems to be characteristic in the fiction of Lewis, Hemingway, and Rhys is that the meanings attached to the café in their

representations can often be traced back to the café's real-world status as a social and cultural hub, a place where, as Ford said, civilisations are moulded.<sup>3</sup> My brief history of the literary café contextualised the legacy of the space that was handed down to artists and writers of the modernist period. For many modernist writers the café assumed a beguiling aura; it was an emblematic space. It not only represented the great legacy of previous generations of revolutionary artists, artistic innovations, and artistic movements, it also embodied an artistic way of life through associations with key historical habitués – like Henry Murger, Édouard Manet, and Paul Verlaine – and important café-congregating groups – like the Impressionists, and the Symbolists. The history, the politics, the anxieties, and influences of this important space, I suggest, become the fodder for modernist fiction that engaged with the café.

As it is represented in the texts I discuss, the café seems to be both the site and the stakes of a kind of social and cultural power struggle. For, if it is indeed the case that the café's legacy is as a generative site where new aesthetics are distilled and new artistic movements formed – a space where civilisation is moulded – then, for the sake of art and its future, it really matters who occupies the space. Habitués want to know what their fellow café dwellers stand for, what their politics or aesthetic predilections are, whether their views are conflicting, and, perhaps most importantly, what kind of influence they can assert.

In Lewis's writing, this cultural contest is operative within both his subject matter and the form of his prose. Lewis's concern is that the hordes of café-loafing pseudo-artists debilitate civilisation's improving enlightenment project. His is a battle for an intelligent and *engagé* café society, which is rendered spatially in his dialectical model of 'Bourgeois-Bohemian' Paris. The tensions inherent in this paradoxical construction represent the conflict between two visions of society. One is where the café as a creative cultural space is misused and squandered in dissipating and superficial enactments of bohemian life, which result in conventional lifestyles and banal art. The other is an energised and conscious café society, committed to intellectualised innovation in art, life, and culture. In *Tarr*, there is the sense that Lewis visits the café in his fiction in an effort to specifically engage with this conflict. In his style the struggle is portrayed in his

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

rendering of space, and enacted textually through his use of what I identified as an oppositional spatial discourse indicated by the theoretical concepts of ‘space’, ‘place’, ‘tour’, and ‘map’, as theorised by de Certeau.

Hemingway has an equal distaste for the café tourists, a group he lumps together and labels the ‘bluffers and fakers’ of Paris.<sup>4</sup> In his work, the confrontation between an authentic and an ersatz café society is recounted in his depictions of ‘good’ cafés and ‘bad’ cafés. But, where Lewis goes to the café in order participate in this societal struggle, Hemingway visits the café in an effort to escape the conflict. His cafés instantiate a spatio-moral hierarchy whereby the ‘bad’ café represents all the superficial and intemperate elements of society, and the ‘good’ café is a supernal site, an often verdant paradise on earth. This ideal café is a sanctuary, a bulwark against the dizzying entropic exigencies of the outside world, where Hemingway and his cohort can transcend and be protected from these squabbles.

In Rhys’s portrayals, the café dwellers of society – these fashioners of civilisation – appear to be a powerful lot. In her work, she depicts a continuous struggle with the very composition and legacy of the contest itself. The cafés in her fiction are male dominated spaces; they are exclusionary and repressive places where one is observed and judged. Her heroines would be deemed outsiders in both Hemingway’s ‘good’ cafés *and* his ‘bad’ cafés; in Rhys’s world there is no such thing as a paradisiacal café. These informal cultural institutions do not represent sites of more or less sympotic engagement and intellectual exchange *à la* Lewis, because in these places her women are excluded from the conversation at the outset by the very terms of engagement. Foucauldian power structures dominate this society. There is no way out of these omnipresent webs of power, for it is they that define reality. ‘The power is always already there’, as Foucault says.<sup>5</sup> But, by illuminating and dramatising such themes, Rhys’s café portrayals cleverly subvert the mythic idea of the Parisian café, and highlight the fact that the dialogical skirmishes over the cultural importance of the space from both points of view always already exclude the voice of the female café habitué.

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<sup>4</sup> Hemingway (1985), p. 119.

<sup>5</sup> Foucault (1980), p. 85.

A lengthier study of the café in modernist literature might have explored the works of Henry Miller and his surreal representations of penury, dissipation, and debauchery in the cafés of Montparnasse in the 1930s. While living in Paris, in order to encourage his writing output, Miller produced a list of ‘commandments’ and set himself a ‘Daily Program’ that included visiting cafés in the evening to meet friends or to read, as well as ensuring that he put aside plenty of time during daylight hours to ‘sketch in cafés.’<sup>6</sup> A longer study might also have looked at Katherine Mansfield’s work. Her short story, ‘Je ne parle pas Français’ (1918), for example, opens in a ‘dirty and sad’ little café, and is eulogised as a theatre of a singular artistic triumph to which a young Parisian writer keeps returning in the hopes of reliving it. Told from the point of view of a gentleman simultaneously writing and telling a story in the café, it transcribes the quickening of inspiration, and provides a meditation on regret and the literary method.<sup>7</sup> A comparison of both Miller and Mansfield’s work with Lewis, Hemingway, and Rhys’s café depictions would certainly make interesting comparative reading.

A discussion of the café could also have been extended into the realm of philosophy, and included Jean-Paul Sartre’s work. As one of the leading intellectuals in Paris of the time, Sartre insisted on the public role of the writer, and used the Café de Flore for the political exchange of ideas. With his partner, Simone de Beauvoir (whose work could also be considered), it was also the place he spent most of his time; and it clearly influenced some of his philosophical thought. His famous chapter on ‘Bad Faith’ in *Being and Nothingness* (1943), for example, centres on the behaviour and self-identification of a café waiter.<sup>8</sup>

Another study might have taken an altogether different establishment as its spatial focus. One place that springs immediately to mind is the sanatorium and its tenebrous presence in the backwoods of the literary landscape of modernism. It warrants further inspection by virtue of having had such a dramatic role to play in the lives of some influential modernists including Franz Kafka, Ford Madox Ford, and T. S. Eliot; as well

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<sup>6</sup> Henry Miller, *On Writing* (New York: New Directions, 1964), p. 162.

<sup>7</sup> Katherine Mansfield, ‘Je ne parle pas Français’ in *Katherine Mansfield’s Selected Stories*, (ed.) Vincent O’Sullivan (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005), pp. 176-193.

<sup>8</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, ‘Bad Faith’ in *Being and Nothingness* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1992), pp. 86-118.

as in the fiction of the time: a monumental example being, of course, Thomas Mann's *Magic Mountain* (1924). Such a study might explore the spatial form of modernism and the mental life in terms of diagnoses of sickness, wellness; models of amelioration and rehabilitation; as well as the representation of the remedial institution itself.

In this Ph.D., I have championed the café as a useful heuristic device. Finding out about how writers made sense of the unique social and cultural phenomenon of the café can be a way to access underlying structures of epoch-specific thought: not only about how the space figured in the day-to-day lives of these writers and the society with which they associated, but also more theoretical and technical concerns that include the imaginative engagement with space and its representation in literature. Adding a focus on a specific space to the literary critic's toolkit, particularly a space like the café that is so ensconced in the history of art and literature, may benefit future studies of different literary periods. Functioning as a lens through which to explore modernist literature, the café has helped to produce fresh re-readings, valuable insights, and re-evaluations of three well-known and well-researched writers and their texts.

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