***Hotel Modernity: Corporate Space in Literature and Film*. Robbie Moore. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021. pp. vi-221 (cloth).**

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Robbie Moore's *Hotel Modernity* addresses grand hotels as corporate spaces—distinctive architectural and organisational forms—arising out of the formation of joint-stock companies enabled by key mid-nineteenth century legislation and necessitated by that capital-intensive mode of transport, the railroad. The book deals with the period from 1870 to 1939. Moore is concerned with the new forms of subjectivity arising in corporate space, pointing out that while department stores and banks were both also transformed in this era,

> [o]nly in hotels […] did the individual live within corporate space: sleeping in its beds, being fed and tidied by its functionaries, borrowing its books, lounging in its parlours. The hotel structured intimate encounters with the impersonal and the anonymous, representing a radically new mode of experience.[1]

Moore has positioned his work uniquely in the literature. He discusses the trans-Atlantic evolution of hotel modernity, which distinguishes his book from influential histories of the hotel, which address America only and which cover different timeframes, from A. K. Sandoval-Strauz's *Hotel: An American History* (2007)[2] to Molly W. Berger's *Hotel Dreams: Luxury, Technology and Urban Ambition in America 1829-1929* (2011).[3] Unlike Monika Elbert's and Susanne Schmid's *Anglo-American Travelers and the Hotel Experience in Nineteenth-Century Writing: Nation, Hospitality, Travel Writing* (2018),[4] Moore's book encompasses the twentieth century. *Hotel Modernity* is also different from its

[1] Robbie Moore, *Hotel Modernity: Corporate Space in Literature and Film* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021), 3. Subsequent references are cited parenthetically.

[2] A. K. Sandoval-Strausz, *Hotel: An American History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

[3] Molly W. Berger, *Hotel Dreams: Luxury, Technology and Urban Ambition in American 1829-1929* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011).

[4] Monika Elbert and Susanne Schmid, eds, *Anglo-American Travelers and the Hotel Experience in Nineteenth-Century Writing: Nation, Hospitality, Travel Writing* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

nearest comparator in the analysis of Anglophone[5] literature inspired by the hotel—Emma Short's *Mobility and the Hotel in Modern Literature: Passing Through* (2019)[6]—which focusses specifically on British and Irish literature.

In no way does Moore's book reproduce Short's. Short thematizes mobility and proposes a construct she describes as the "hotel narrative," so she explores the way the affordances of the hotel structure narrative form.[7] Moore attends to the relationship between space and subjectivity. He analyses key works by Henry James (early and late), F. Scott Fitzgerald, Elizabeth Bowen, Henry Green, and Arnold Bennett, selected because "hotels provoked these writers to rethink the conventions and functions of fictional characters" (3). Indeed, as Moore says, "[t]he broad narrative of the book charts the warping and decentring of the category of 'character' within the corporate, architectural, informatic and technological networks which come to define hotel space in this period" (3).

Short confines herself to literature, and is concerned with expanding Modernism to encompass the middlebrow, as well as the highbrow. Moore adopts a similarly expansive notion of the Modernism, but also extends his analysis beyond literature, to include that emblematically modern representational technology, cinema. Moore and Short touch bases on some texts—notably Elizabeth Bowen's *The Hotel* (1927), Arnold Bennett's *The Grand Babylon Hotel* (1902), and Henry Green's *Party Going* (1939)—but their contributions are complementary rather than overlapping. Short is concerned with gender, and particularly with femininity. She reads Bowen's hotel lobby as a place of comings and goings, eroticised anticipation, interminable waiting, and ultimate disappointment, especially for women guests.[8] Moore, by contrast, draws attention to the cinematic qualities of Bowen's *The Hotel*. Where Short discusses Hotel Babylon proprietor Theodore Racksole in terms of detective fiction, Moore discusses the hotelier's

[5] I note Bettina Matthias's monograph on the hotel in German and Austrian literature, but also that its focus is not Anglophone. Bettina Matthias, *The Hotel as Setting in Early Twentieth-Century German and Austrian Literature: Checking in to Tell a Story* (Rochester: Camden House, 2006).

[6] Emma Short, *Mobility and the Hotel in Modern Literature: Passing Through* (Cham: Palgrave MacMillan, 2019).

[7] Short, *Mobility and the Hotel*, 60.

[8] Short, *Mobility and the Hotel,* 102.

growing omniscience in the textual fabric of the hotel. Where Short describes "frustrated mobility" in *Party Going*,[9] Moore describes the panoptic power of the hotel manager and how his guests relate to it.

Moore begins the introduction with a choice facing Henry James in 1879, between a "musty" inn or the more modern Marine Hotel, the family-run or the company-owned establishment (1). James chose the inn, but Moore's book focusses on the hotel: it is about "the new forms of […] subjectivity generated within corporate space" (2). Moore defines his terms clearly: distinctively modern hotels are owned by corporations and joint-stock companies; they are grand in scale and standardised; and they commodify goods and services *en masse*. They feature a rationalised labour force and architectural plan. They also participate in economies of advertising and spectacle, in the "theatre of consumption" (12), because "despite their rational, departmentalised and cellular design, corporate spaces were invested with libidinal energies" (12). Moore's outline of his parameters (the period, the hotel type, the authors) and his methodology illustrates the depth and breadth of his research:

> The readings in *Hotel Modernity* begin with details: with close readings of novelistic and cinematic descriptions of space, as well as travel writing, business documents, interior decoration books, architecture periodicals, hotel trade journals, hotel management guidebooks and advertisements. Incorporating the multidisciplinary insights of recent hotel research, the book pays close attention to the interactions of the human body with space; to furniture, materials and surfaces, layout and management; taking the hotel not as a singular space but as a compound of functional zones serving different social purposes, and creating different narrative possibilities. Amassed, these details tell a story about corporate capitalism and modernity. […] the development of the hotel provides a way of mapping the progress of capitalist modernity. (17)

Like Short, Moore structures his book with reference to the spaces of the hotel: the lobby, the corridor, the dining room, the lounge, the bar, the bedroom, the laundry, and the kitchen. Both Short and Moore consider the gendering of space.

[9] Short, *Mobility and the Hotel,* 104.

Short's analysis is particularly strong on women, but arguably less strong on men. In his first chapter, Moore, on the other hand, offers a compelling reading of the lounging "long legged men" who expansively take up space in the enormous modern lobbies and piazzas of early Henry James, much to the resentment of women guests who have to tolerate their untidy intrusiveness and their smoke—their miasmas. Moore positions these men as outraging Victorian proprieties: collapsing the "genteel ideal of the well-mannered body [as] self-control[led] and self-possess[ed]," "confound[ing] the margin between self and other, and by melding into hotel divans and architectural structures, […] the margin between human and stuff" (18). The result is that "hotel lobbies and hotel bodies are shown to be disruptive agents in Victorian culture with ambivalent social potential" (18).

If the hotel lobbies were "sticky and contaminative" and belonged to men, the parlours and the reading rooms, frequently allocated to women, were notable for their "stain resistance," their blankness and barrenness, as Moore describes in his second chapter (59). Unlike the Victorian home, the hotel parlour resisted signs of prior inhabitation. This means that these spaces defied the reading habits that dominated the Victorian realist novel—reading habits trained to "contingence, redundant detail, friendly familiar untidiness" (65). Instead of individuality, Victorian readers found only evidence of the corporation in hotel parlours (65). This came to carry the freight of broader cultural anxieties about identity and financial fraud (69). If the hotel's interiors could not be read reliably, nor could the moral content of people's characters. That the corporation itself became person-at-law added to these anxieties: "The proliferation of financial instruments and the growth of the corporate form meant that one could no longer trust surface appearances to divine a business's character and therefore its creditworthiness" (72). In the corporate hotel space *démeublé,* character, including creditworthiness, became unstable. As Moore says in analysing James's "Guest's Confession" (1872), "the sitting-room is entangled in the language of fraud because its own identity is ungrounded" (75).

But there were also opportunities presented by this corporate blankness. Moore "connects the stain resistance of hotel public spaces with the amnesiac practices of consumption and disposal that were carried out [there]" (18). These are emblematised by the book stock of the reading rooms. Reading rooms rarely contained permanent or curated collections, but rather transient accretions of

Tauchnitz editions, books printed especially for the travelling trade, designed to be picked up in a reading room, transported with the traveller when they left the hotel, and abandoned in another reading room or railway station down the track. Moore discusses James's early short fiction including *The Reverberator* (1888), which "sets these amnesiac spaces […] against […] suffocating permanence [to explore] the emancipatory potential of the hotel's disposable culture—and the pleasures of minor, interstitial experience" (18), represented by "a [t]rail of [f]orgotten Tuachnitzes" (80).

In Chapter 3, Moore moves from Henry James to F. Scott Fitzgerald, saying that "the shift from James's [New York] to Fitzgerald's city was more than one of generations and fashions. Capitalism had changed gears." (92). Where the capital of the old Waldorf was concrete and immovable—it lay in land and bricks and mortar—the capital of the Ritz hotel was liquid and transcendent: it lay in its brand. "The Ritz," Moore says was "a fiction of global finance: a licensing apparatus for a loose, decentralised and self-propagating franchise" which extended to everything imaginable, from hotels to golf courses to cigars (18). The Ritz model appealed to F. Scott Fitzgerald, who was, as Fitz, also a branded entity. Moore discusses "The Diamond as Big as the Ritz" (1922), in which a family confronts the problem of a diamond too large to sell, "as an allegory for capital's struggle to escape the physicality of bricks and mortar" (19). Moore notes the elision and social erasure of black labour in both "The Diamond as Big as the Ritz," and in the white, minimal aesthetic of the Ritz hotel itself. This evasiveness about materiality "culminat[es] in the evaporated surfaces of its rooftop gardens" (19) in *The Beautiful and the Damned* (1922) and in one of the Plaza's "translucent indoor-outdoor spaces" in *The Great Gatsby* (1925) (113). Unlike the old Waldorf, hotels like the Ritz escape their imbrication in materiality and survive the wrecking ball, achieving

> a kind of vampiric deathlessness beyond material bounds. It was part of the nowhereness of a white space like the Ritz that its architectural container was fungible and disposable, while its "spirit"—the intangible property of its brand—lived on. The roof garden was the purest expression of this evanescent quality of New York hotels: an architectural frame that was also an escape from architecture; an anywhere and a nowhere whose white luminescence foretold the dynamite of the demolition crew. (15-16)

In Chapter 4, Moore reads Elizabeth Bowen's *The Hotel* as having been influenced by cinema (128). He asserts that "Bowen understood the blankness of corporate hotel space as analogous to a studio set" (19). He says that she set out to "refurnish" such spaces (contra Virginia Woolf's and Willa Cather's efforts to strip the novel bare), so that "rather than elevating individual consciousness and the play of emotions, Bowen's characters stand almost on an equal footing with objects. While human faces in her novels often appear flat, void, unreadable, her objects flash with life" (123). Bowen's *The Hotel*, then, is about "queerly important" *mise-en-scène* (132). Further, it matters that Bowen's *The Hotel* is set in a corporate space, as opposed to a homier *pensione.* The de-individualised nature of furnishings matters, as the corporate hotel becomes the setting for a "novelistic thought experiment about the relationship between humans and matter in the age of mechanical reproduction. [This setting] forces the hotel guests to interact with rented objects that are stubborn and troublemaking" (124). Moore points out how Bowen's characters, in addition to being flat, and too numerous, are strangely and anachronistically located in the hotel *mise-en-scène* in ways that suggest a contemporary crisis in terms of proprieties of gender and class. He highlights the comedic and disruptive potential of hotel corridors in both Charlie Chaplin's work and Bowen's: "Bowen's cinematic hotel, […] with its […] comic doubles and slapstick routines, [collapses] characters' careful demarcations of territory. Bowen's novel finds the spatialised class relations of the hotel to be a brittle construct, ripe for collapse" (19). But Moore's analysis of *The Hotel* in terms of cinema is more profound than that:

> Bowen's roaming camera-eye glides through *The Hotel*, like Murnau['s *Der Letze Mann*] with [its] innovative crane- and tracking-shots, down empty corridors and elevator shafts. The hotels of Bowen and Murnau are mechanistic spaces, mechanistically perceived. […] the machinery of the hotel itself seems to direct the action. The genteel guests discover themselves to be comic bit-players and dupes in a merciless architectonic engine. In this way, *The Hotel* reimagines the hierarchical social world of its literary predecessors in a post-war, post-Edwardian context of class anxiety and *déclassement*. (123)

In Chapter 5, Moore argues that hotel managers became authors/narrators/auteurs in literary and cinematic works produced between the 1900s and the 1930s. The

chapter begins with a discussion of a short film trick featuring a magically electrically enabled hotel, in which all has been automated. The hotel seems to function without staff, except for the manager, owner of "the hidden hands" that run a hotel or make cinema (152). In *The American Scene* (1907), Henry James reported a similarly technologically enabled "master-spirit" (154). Moore locates James at the centre of a giant "telecommunications interchange," with a chorus of voices under the control of the manager conductor (154-5). Further, the manager becomes a textual editor, who "superintend[s] the narrative world of the hotel" (159).

Moore then moves on to the "manager poets" of Arnold Bennett's *Babylon Hotel* (1902) and *Imperial Palace* (1930), observing the hotel manager's growing omniscience, facilitated by the ubiquity of the managerial apparatus of information technologies such as guest documentation, record keeping, and accounting (161). Despite these unpoetical devices, Evelyn Orcham, the manager of the Imperial Palace, perceives himself as a creator who has intellectual property rights over his hotel, a fantasy that is rudely disrupted by the shareholders (163-4). Bennett worked in the film industry, which challenged his own individuated sense of authorial agency (166-7). Moore suggests that *Imperial Palace*, and the concept of the film auteur, may have been reactions to the corporate nature of film production. Auteurism arose in the 1960s, but Moore claims that "we can trace this structure of feeling back to the interwar period, to the emergence of a technical-scientific-commercial-managerial class" represented by Orcham (168). Orcham's

> power of vision underlines the resemblance of the managing director to a film auteur. He maintains his sovereign subjecthood by standing apart from or above the scene and framing his staff with a directorial eye. If James's hotels were telegraphic, the *Imperial Palace* […] is immanently cinematic. (169)

Illustrating how individual auteurism dissolves in the corporate setting, Moore attributes *Grand Hotel* (1932) to MGM rather than to the director Edmund Goulding. Moore points out that the film "lacks a charismatic manager figure" (175). Instead, "the supra-human qualities of the hotel's management are signalled by the [justly famous] overhead shot," and by the way the mobile camera

editorialises, revealing which of the cameo performers are significant (175-6). This, Moore says, represents an evolution of "Orcham's distancing and abstracting gaze […] working as an advertisement for the corporate apparatus of MGM and the grand hotel itself" (176).

Moore ends his book with Henry Green's *Party Going*. The "hotel anxiety" that informs this novel is of becoming anonymous, and it can only be allayed by being noticed by the omniscient gaze of the hotel manager (178). But, finally, Green resists the manager's panopticism. *Party Going* thematizes networked relations between characters and rooms, so that "the porous spaces of the hotel become […] a way of imagining the 'physiological intersubjectivity' of its inhabitants" (181). *Party Going* also signals the obsolescence of the grand hotel itself (183). In a coda entitled "Hotel Purgatory," Moore outlines the impact of the coming of the automobile and the antecedents to the motel. He concludes with a discussion of the ways the hotels with which he has dealt are haunted because this is "a means of grappling with the decentring of individual agency in hotel space," and with "the non-human or supra-human agency that adhered within the corporate person […] To live inside a hotel corporation was to live with this non-human presence, to sense its 'awful intelligence'" (185-6).

Now for a final evaluation. It has been a pleasure to review this book, and I cannot really do justice to Moore's fascinating and multifaceted monograph. It is erudite and insightful. It synthesises a compendious research effort into a narrative that is compellingly argued and cogently theorised. It is engagingly written and immensely readable. It combines lucid and sophisticated analyses of historical documents, literature, and films with well-chosen illustrations. It is full of small delights, like the insight that Orcham's laundresses resemble Busby Berkeley chorines. It interacts with existing hotel literature in a way that reveals a mature command of the field, but which is also fresh and original. It stands head and shoulders above its competitors. *Hotel Modernity* makes a major contribution to the scholarly literature on hotels and on literary and cinematic modernity, as well as on the history of the notion of the subject and of "character." It is extremely rewarding. Buy it now.