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Beyond Boundaries: Embodiment and Selfhood in Hilary Mantel's Novels

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BEYOND BOUNDARIES:
SPACE AND SELFHOOD IN THE NOVELS OF HILARY MANTEL

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The novels of Hilary Mantel present a rare, extraordinarily complex text of the female body. Grounded in Tonbridge hall, an all-girls dormitory, in the 1960s, *An Experiment in Love*'s Carmel grapples with the boundaries of bodily selfhood (or the experience of developing self and identity through focusing on the body) as a young woman living independently for the first time. She attempts to cope with the inevitable sexualization of her body by others and her fear of being subsequently identified only by her body as the female physique and its sexual potential. In her quest to assess the body anew, she plies the boundaries of physical and mental, of pain and pleasure, ultimately deconstructing, inscribing, and recreating her body. Mantel's further complicates the difficulty of awareness of one's own embodiment in *Beyond Black*. The text is not so much a narrative as a dissection of the existence of temporal and spatial definitions, consisting of the characters' physicality - their constructions - as much as plot progression. The story evolves in fragments as well as a whole: in linear, forward narrative as well as sporadic, shared, often cyclical memories and exposition. The feminine form -- flexible, yielding, and unstructured -- is presented through the female characters' abilities to reach beyond the confinements of not only their own bodies through telepathy but also beyond their own lives, even their own mortal world, through their communications with the dead and the afterlife.

INTRODUCTION

The Mind lives on the Heart
Like any Parasite --
If that is full of Meat
The Mind is fat.

But if the Heart omit
Emaciate the Wit --
The Aliment of it
So absolute.
(Dickinson 585)

In approaching the weighty matter of Hilary Mantel's novels of the body, *An Experiment in Love* and *Beyond Black*, Emily Dickinson's poem #1355 illustrates at once the dynamics of many relationships of the texts of both interpersonal and the *inner*-personal nature. Captured in Dickinson's verses is the historicized but nonetheless misunderstood, or perhaps miswritten, premise of western philosophical conception of selfhood: the belief that the self is located within the mind, hearts, or head; the implicit assumption that it is sustainable beyond or without the body; and the hierarchal dominion of the mind over the body, not in the anatomical configuration but in the social and philosophical valuing of the supposedly separable, distinct parts. These origins, as explained by Elizabeth Grosz, date back to Plato's "claims that the word *body (soma)* was introduced by Orphic priests who believed that man was a spiritual or noncorporeal being trapped in the body as in a dungeon (*sema*)" (5). From these ideological roots of dichotomous opposition of the self and body emerged the presumed hierarchy and belief that the mind should exert some control over the body or the physical desires and appetites. The foundational configuration of the body found in the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle establishes within the very form of the human a model of hierarchy that persists through imperialism,

colonization, and the oppression of humans by one another. Aristotle furthered the application of Plato's structure by "distinguish[ing] matter or body from form, and in the case of reproduction, believed that the mother provided the formless, passive, shapeless matter which, through the father, was given form, shape, and contour" (Grosz 5). While the insinuation that the mother is essentially an empty vessel to be filled is inarguably sexist, it does contain a key to understanding the feminine experience of embodiment, specifically as Mantel writes it.

The feminine as Aristotle sees it is characterized by an absence of "contour" or "form" – in other words, delineations of space, or boundaries. While I maintain that these delineations of mind/body spaces and the consequential assumptions of woman's lesser role are not inherent to selfhood, the fact that they're social constructions does not lessen their existence or power; these binaries and hierarchies perhaps exist even more predominately than more "natural" assumptions (i.e. the unified self) *because* they're socialized, and so are constantly reiterated rather than assumed or taken for granted. The ancient (and subsequent) philosophical assumption of woman as being less bound, less defined and distinct, then is real in the sense that it is common; these qualities, however baseless initially in the writings of Aristotle, have been ingrained not only into society but also the individual. The falsities imposed against the body in two-thousand-year-old writing and subsequent traditions have in fact *rewritten* the body on a very personal as well as a highly social level. In terms of form and boundary, the masculine and feminine – themselves both perfect examples of artificial, manufactured binaries perpetuated into realities – are distinct. Words

such as *tailored, structured, formal, hard, rigid, firm,* and *strict* all imply bold, indisputable boundaries and connote masculinity; on the other hand, words like *soft, flowing, wavy, sinuous,* and *supple* all imply flexibility or lack of defining boundaries, thus connoting femininity. That female embodiment should be based on boundaries are viewed as (and subsequently experienced as) fluid, manipulated, and confronted (rather than assumed) then seems appropriate, almost inevitable, and thus emerges the experience of the women of Mantel's novels.

Grounded in Tonbridge hall, an all-girls dormitory, in the 1960s, *An Experiment in Love*'s Carmel grapples with the boundaries of bodily selfhood (or the experience of developing self and identity through focusing on the body) as a young woman living independently for the first time. Her body becomes a focus of her energies as she attempts to cope with the inevitable sexualization of it by others and her fear of being subsequently identified only by her body, as woman, as the female physique and its sexual potential. Her struggle to cope with the social valuing of her body over herself and her desire to assert autonomy over her body (in place of the control of her mother, the nuns at her school, and the patriarchal standards) lead her to dissect the body politic through her own experimentation with boundaries; in her quest to assess the body anew, she plies the boundaries of physical and mental, of pain and pleasure, ultimately deconstructing, inscribing, and recreating her body.

Written ten years after *An Experiment in Love*, Mantel's further complicates and explores the difficulty of awareness of one's own embodiment in

Beyond Black. The text is not so much a narrative as a dissection of the existence of temporal and spatial definitions, consisting of the characters' physicality - their constructions - as much as plot progression. The story evolves in fragments as well as a whole: in linear, forward narrative as well as sporadic, shared, often cyclical memories and exposition. The feminine form as one that is more flexible, yielding, and unstructured is written into the female characters, all of whom except Colette are psychic; their ability to reach beyond the confinements of not only their own bodies through telepathy but also beyond their own lives, even their own mortal world, through their communications with the dead and the afterlife.

Though both novels address embodiment at different ages – one at early adulthood, the other at middle-age – and to different degrees of complexity and psychological depth, the problematic nature of defining, recognizing, and marking the boundaries of one's own body in relation to self and surroundings emerges in both as unique to women. Building upon Adrienne Rich's foundational writings of the *lesbian experiences* and the *lesbian continuum*, I find that these both exist within the novels, but also exist in part of a greater structure, which I term the *lesbian environment*. Essentially, the multifarious nature of the women's experiences of bodies are not contained or singular, but are organic, communal experiences that never occur totally within and of the self. Further, the setting of the lesbian environment serves as a facilitator of bodily exploration without the "normal" enforcement of the heteronormative expectations and inscriptions. The lesbian environment and lesbian experiences, however, need not be read as

indicative of lesbian sexual desire, or sexuality at all; sex is largely irrelevant to the text, though the reader may feel a need to look for it in the texts. Mantel writes each text to explore all facets of the lesbian existence aside from sexual desire, lending to each book various instances in which the characters, just as the reader might, question the sexuality of women within the environment. After Sue, one of the characters of *Experiment* says that she can't imagine ever marrying, Carmel wonders if she might be a lesbian. Almost on cue, Sue explains, "I don't say that I wouldn't like to, if the circumstances were right. But you can't count on someone asking you, can you?" (*Experiment* 167). This serves to deemphasize the relevancy of pinpointing sexuality or fitting it into a category; in fact, both texts work to detach sexuality from women, not to write them as asexual but to create more space between the individual female identity and the society's immediate association of her with her sexuality.

In *Beyond Black*, discussion of potential for interpreting lesbian sexuality tends to focus on the relationship between Colette, Alison's assistant, and Alison, as seen in a telepathic discussion between her and a colleague. Mandy, a fellow psychic, explains that "it's bad to go out with someone in [their] line, but [. . .] worse to go out with a punter" (*Beyond Black* 144), or a person who works the microphones at shows. Alison goes on to explain that the relationship with Alison is "[n]ot a thing, not a sex thing," (*Beyond Black* 144). Again, Mantel seems to write this conversation as a means of addressing any reader suspicions, continuing with a sort of "what-if" response, as though trying to drive home the point. Mandy goes on prodding at the possibility of sexual desire in her psychic

exchange with Alison: "I'm not judgmental, God knows. Takes all sorts. Live and let live. Who am I to moralize? Al, you can tell me. We go back, you and me. You want a little love in your life, yes you do, you do" (*Beyond Black* 146). Alison responds, "Mandy, do you know the pleasures of lesbian anal sex? No. Nor me. Nor any other pleasures" (*Beyond Black* 146). As with the excerpt from *Experiment*, this refocuses the attention, diverting it from preoccupation with the potential for lesbian sexuality and redirecting it to the text's primary aim – the experience of embodiment among women in relation to a exclusively female environment. The text not only dismisses the need to label female sexuality but also the social focus on female sexuality in general as a quantifying component of their identity and their relationships.

To say that the novels resists all labels, however, would not be too overly broad-handed; stigmatization and categorization of women's lives and experiences in the texts becomes insignificant and superficial. The characters and their worlds defy the typical in almost all aspects, but also simultaneously represent the complexity of all women; that they are at once exceptional and highly relatable debunks the larger social tendency to write women as *types* of women - types of conditions, disorders, or "norms" - and the habit of reading women and their bodies as groups rather than individual, significant existences.

CHAPTER ONE:
THE EXPERIENCE OF SELF AND SURROUNDINGS THROUGH BODY BOUNDARIES

In studying the presence of body for the female characters of *Beyond Black* and *An Experiment in Love*, certain parameters of the generic situation of bodies and boundaries must be established prior to focusing on the situations of the text. Feminist critics have done a great deal to further body theory and to counteract the historically masculine theory that came first, with one of the most immediate goals being to reconstitute the limiting dichotomies upon which centuries of Western philosophy and understanding have been built – the inside/outside, self/other, mind-body divides. The very existence of these dichotomies is not inherently flawed. It is, however, the attempt to universalize these models and perpetuate the idea of the ubiquitous, genderless experience of them that is problematic. They can, employed and applied accurately, serve as strong models for individually-assessed selves. Firstly, they have been traditionally framed in very masculine, narrow interpretations, one of the most recognizable of such being the containment model set out by Mark Johnson:

> Our encounter with containment and boundedness is one of the most pervasive features of our bodily experience. We are intimately aware of our bodies as three-dimensional containers into which we put certain things (food, water, air) and out of which other things emerge (food and water wastes, air, blood, etc.). (Johnston 21)

The issues to be taken with this assumption are numerous, though its inapplicability to women stands out immediately in that it neglects experiences of intercourse, pregnancy and childbirth – experiences which even if never literally had, as in the case of Mantel's characters, most of whom never have children, are

still present in a woman's understanding of her body. Menstruation and potential for pregnancy as well as the role of sexuality in containment all introduce issues unique to women and untouched in Johnson's understanding. Christine Battersby writes on the disconnect between Johnson's containment theory and women by reminding us that "feminist philosophers know that in terms of actual practice philosophers throughout the history of the discipline have taken (and continue to take) male-life patterns, personalities and life-experiences as ideals and/or norms" (343). As other feminist critics have done, Batterbsy expresses that she does not experience her body as a three-dimensional container into which things are put and things emerge, concluding as I have that this tidy summation of how people experience their bodies is, though critically popular, disadvantageously narrow. It allows for virtually no complication of the very basic object-owner relationship it presents. Further, it ignores that even in the container model, there is an inner and outer container, and that alone, as seen through Mantel's characters, creates a plethora of potential complications in how the two connect.

Beyond Black and *An Experiment in Love* can be approached in terms of each novel's parallel characters; while the majority of Mantel's better-known novels are historical fiction, these two instead highlight interpersonal experiences of women's bodies, though in different situations and at different stages of life. The first of the pair, *Experiment*, addresses young women starting college in the 1960s in pursuit of masculine degrees and careers in science. The majority of the novel is set in Tonbridge Hall, the all-girl dormitory where the characters live. The characters are dealing with post-pubescent bodies in adult scenarios and

newfound independence and are confronted with the public view of them and their choices; their lives are framed by the social changes and conflicts of 1960s and the personal demands of transitioning into new environmental structures and roles. In *Beyond Black*, published ten years after *Experiment*, a more matured, creatively developed novel, still working with a woman-only environment, the transitional issues of young adulthood have fully ripened into older, multi-layered issues of anxiety and trauma. Just as the characters in Mantel's second novel are more mature, so too have the subtexts developed: where the characters of *Experiment* are confronting their recently discovered public roles and crises of self largely connected with societal structures, those of *Beyond Black* are well beyond those years and are instead mucking through deeply self-reliant, tumultuous psychological complexities. Society and the public realm appear to be retrospectively surpassed issues; the women, Alison and Colette, exist in a more private, almost post-societal state: they are self-acknowledged oddities, misfit women unoccupied with conformation. Where *Experiment*'s characters – Karina, Carmel and Jules – are consumed with outward movement (socially, personally, and emotionally) and how their bodies function in it, the older women of *Beyond Black* are accepting, or creating, their rejection and are moving inward, pulling away from the public realm and social norms. Focusing inward on their own experiences, they seek to interpret, fight, heal or coexist with their pasts and preexisting selves. Where the earlier novel shows the relationship between embodiment and identity formation, the latter works to express the intricate web of ties between embodiment and reconciling with elements of the self that cannot

be inscribed or changed, those that remain core or insuppressible.

All the women of the novels are ultimately faced with some crisis of self, and self is expressed, rejected, tolerated, ignored, abused and manipulated through embodiment, which returns to the question of dichotomies of selves and presumptions of boundaries. While most feminist critics do agree that divisive inner/outer and mind/body divisions don't represent a natural or essential state of boundaries, it remains that these boundaries can exist for individuals and are in fact default for much of humanity. In other words, just because it is a patriarchal, social creation does not negate its existence; most sensed boundaries – bodily or not – are socio-psychological. While consenting that these boundaries aren't inherently exclusive of each human's understanding of self, they exist in the way that all linguistic elements exist: through applied meaning. Just as a fence doesn't have to be a demarcating boundary but could very well be, like a tree or rock, a thing to go around, we have understood it to be a boundary, so it is. For the women of Mantel's texts, the boundaries of bodies are quite understood, exaggerated and exist uniquely for each character; they function not as simple dividers of self or walls of a containment but as malleable, evolved reactions to each self's experiences and needs.

The fact that identity is manifested bodily for the women of the novels, or women, period, offers no surprise. As Judith Butler explains, their sequence of association follows natural order: "The identification of women with 'sex' [. . .] is a conflation of the category of women with the ostensibly sexualized features of their bodies and, hence, a refusal to grant freedom and autonomy to women as it

is purportedly enjoyed by men" (27). Butler goes on to state that there aren't two genders but one: there is only the feminine gender, for the masculine is the default, generic, general presumption of personhood and standard. Because women and femininity are identified by their bodily perceptions and, thus, the role society finds their bodies/selves best suited for, that women of Mantel's novels turn to their bodies first when dealing with issues of identity or society needs little explanation. Just *how* they use their bodies, though, is the issue to be handled. The question presented by Mantel's texts is essentially thus: How does an individual's understanding of the body as self, part of self, opposition to self, or means of self form, and how is it dealt with throughout the novels?

In *An Experiment in Love*, the evolution of self and body is explored through female characters in their first years of college, transitioning from teenagers to young adults, developing and internalizing their understanding of what their new roles in the world will mean, both for themselves as well as the public. In pursing an academic and eventual career in a predominately male environment, Carmel's awareness of the physical presence of her sexuality is heightened and her identity suddenly afflicted by its gender. Rich writes about this situation with her usual poignancy: "The fact is that the workplace [. . .] is a place where women have learned to accept male violation of their psychic and physical boundaries as the price of survival; where women have been educated -- no less than by romantic literature or by pornography -- to perceive themselves as sexual prey" (1769). Entering into a career world, Carmel feels compelled to balance her masculine drive for success and scientific occupation by asserting a

proportionate display of femininity. Susan Bordo looks at the use of the body to balance gender in masculine professions: "[E]ven as young women today continue to be taught traditionally 'feminine' virtues, to the degree that the professional arena is open to them they must also learn to embody the 'masculine' language and values of that arena - self-control, determination, cool, emotional discipline, mastery and so on" (2368). As a means of adaptation, Carmel must find a form of self, both internally and externally, that can at once embody the necessary femininity, which includes being attractive and small enough to comparatively connote her gender, along with the necessary masculinity, which needs to display discipline and power over self, rather than feminine weakness or emotional indulgence. She must pursue slenderness and restrict appetite, and through these acts a pursuit of femininity "intersects with the new requirement for women to embody the 'masculine' valued of the public arena. The anorectic [. . .] embodies this intersection, this double bind, in a particularly painful and graphic way" (Bordo 2368).

Carmel is faced with not only the Otherness of her gender in a woman-hostile workplace but also the inherent sexuality and objectification of the female body. In reaction to this, Carmel's self gradually morphs, slowly dividing from a relative whole into two ever-distanced counterparts, resulting a mind-body split, with the self being strongly affiliated with the mind and the body becoming an Other, a semi-detached embodiment of the feminine burden. Bordo writes about the experience of the bodily burden in her analysis of Delmore Schwartz's poem, "The Heavy Bear." In the poem, Schwartz writes about the body as a bear - an

"inescapable animal" described as "clumsy" and "mov[ing] where I move, distorting my gesture, / A caricature, a swollen shadow" (1). The body in the poem has become an unwanted companion that cannot be shed. In choosing a bear, Schwartz emphasizes not only the weight and cumbersomeness of the body, but also the animalistic qualities; in other words, an absence of intellect and emotion is filled by the "lesser" physical hunger for food and sexual contact.

The poem's bear metaphor models the deprivation inherent in the splitting of the self; in order to other the bear, the newly relocated self must not only distance itself from needed elements, like food and sexuality, but create outright disgust with them. In order to sufficiently appreciate the detriment of this sort of division of self, the construction of these radical boundaries, one must consciously recognize the fault in traditional mind/body models perpetuated throughout Western history, which project a model of not only the supremacy of the mind but almost its independence. Traditionally, the mind has been depicted as the epicenter of the self, the container of life and soul, with the body as a perishable, impermanent, less important extension. The mind and heart, which is likened to the mind, has been expressed as a thing that can live past bodily death through immortalization of words, preservation of teachings, and the continuation of a specific mind's legacy. The heart, or the emotional center of the mind-self, is given the ability to transcend all boundaries of body, time, and space, represented as an immortal part of self that can cross the globe and sustain itself for centuries. These ideas date back to the ancient Greece and the original ideas of rationalism and ataraxia; by prioritizing the mind of the bodily senses and viewing happiness

as a state free of bodily pain, mind and heart became the core of life and self. Viewing the mind as an independent core of self and the body as an optional, material extension is problematic both socially and medically: first, it creates a hierarchal foundation for every human from which they can base other structures of beliefs, such as the oppression of women (who were and still are associated with the body) and other people. By delegating emotion and intellect solely to the mind, the body becomes inherently inferior and is animalized in addition to the already feminized weakness associated with it. Secondly, the hierarchy favoring the mind prioritizes its care over the care of the body - a logical act assuming the mind can survive without the body, but a dangerous practice in reality where they are mutually dependent. Thus we face that when this hierarchy is exaggerated and the mind seeks to enforce a hierarchal power over the body, the ensuing deprivation ultimately results in the failure of the structure (through acceptance of mutual dependence and reunification) or absolute destruction of the self (death).

Bordo writes of Schwartz's bear-body as "clumsy, gross, disgusting, a lumbering fool who trips [you] up in all my efforts to express myself clearly, to communicate love. Stupidly, unconsciously, dominated by appetite, he continually misrepresents my 'spirit's motive,' my finer, clearer self" (3). Though Bordo writes of the bear as a controlling force, it has clearly become a target of the mind, a place to deposit all blame for mistakes or flaws of self; the mind is clearly the more supreme of the two, the bully, despite the bear's - the body's - physical strength, at least philosophically.

For Carmel, as well as other characters of *Experiment*, her narrative begins

in childhood where she's constructed as a whole self comprised of all its parts, mind and body not yet separated or defined apart from each other. Though cued gradually, the initial conflict of self of the novel stems from a web of masculine ideals being forced onto the girls: in the environment of the 1960s, the education of girls developed mostly out of slightly adjusting the already-existent male-created models. In one of the points of the book, the voice of Carmel transcends the narrative boundary; while set in the 1960s, not in the present framing at the beginning and end of the book, the narrative voice steps out of the involvement in the plot and, as if speaking directly to the reader and breaking from the page, explains, "When men decided that women could be educated -- this is what I think -- they educated them on the male plan" (*Experiment* 164). The narrator goes on to explain the inherent dysfunction of this model: "Women were forced to imitate men, and bound not to succeed at it. And this is what we were, when we grew up at the Holy Redeemer; not so much little nuns, but little chappies with breasts" (*Experiment* 164). This excerpt from the novel specifically speaks to the name of the school; through indoctrinating them with masculine and patriarchal values to the point of emulation and internalization, the redemption they are seeking, or are supposed to be seeking, is for the inherent problems of their sex; they are being redeemed of their female flaws through their indoctrination of the masculine models of thought, be they religious, academic, or a conflation of the two.

Critical to the situation in the novels is the way in which the body gives the mind a sense of space and sensual perceptions of the surrounding

environment. Carmel's anorexia externally creates an image that contradicts the internal desire: while she tries to separate the self, identified with the head, from the cumbersome body, she starves the body into a smaller form that, on appearance, looks as if it's pulling in closer, tighter, therefore decreasing the boundaries by closing in on itself. However, in doing so, it creates other layers of boundaries externally, as is the preoccupation of many of the women both *Beyond Black* and *Experiment*. The boundaries they create within themselves correspond with or reflect the boundaries they feel need to be constructed externally, whether through the filling of space, as with Alison, or the creation of empty space, as with Carmel and Colette.

In approaching the topic of women in space, there has already been a great deal written, though a large part of it incredibly sexist and single-minded in scope. Erik Erikson, widely heralded within his field, wrote presumptuously that "in the female experience an 'inner space' is at the centre of despair even as it is the very centre of potential fulfillment" (598). Erikson goes on to describe the emptiness of unfilled internal space (and thus unfilled feminine potential) as the "female form of perdition (598), explaining that each menstrual cycle is mourned as lost potential. While this presentation of all women as founding their happiness and personal successes in their uterine "fulfillment" is blatantly anachronistic today, it nonetheless represents the foundation upon which many patriarchal views of female space have been built – views which women, past and present, may and have internalized. This is not to say that women have accepted these views, but that they are aware and responsive to widely held societal suggestions about how

they should experience their bodies, whether it be maternally or sexually; just as any group cannot ignore mass prejudices against them, to whatever extremity, and is deeply affected by such consensuses. The wide acceptance and celebration of Erikson's writing at the time of its publication and his historical position for his work, though, provides a real example of the overarching acceptance of male perceptions of women's body, set in the same period as Carmel's character, who, along with the other women of Tonbridge, expresses a great deal about the situation of menstruation and maternal potential, saying, "[E]ach corridor of Tonbridge Hall seethed with fertility panic [. . .]. [A]fter a weekend away, there was always an undertone, a buzz-note of inquiry, an eyebrow raised – you are? You could be? You're not? Late again!" (*Experiment* 165). If anything, the women's shared fear of pregnancy stands out as one of her healthiest ways of connecting to her body. Though the anxiety is clearly founded in matters other than the bodily experience of pregnancy, focusing on the social and personal effects, it is a means of sharing some part of the bodily experience with the other women, in opposition or reaction to them, which will later be explored.

The issue of bodily space, specifically external space, functions as another catalytic element in the dynamics of boundary development: just as the self can choose to create internal divisions, distinguishing and separating from the Othered body, external boundaries can occur simultaneously, responsively or coincidentally. In manipulating the body, the creation of internal and external boundaries can feed off or provoke the other, or even work in conflict. In the case of Carmel, the internal delineations between parts identified as socially

vulnerable, disadvantageous and burdensome are neglected and those considered closer to the 'true self' receive priority; the external boundaries result from the internal. For the characters of *Beyond Black*, however, the relationship are much more complex. Boundaries form alongside and in competition with each other, sometimes resulting from each other reciprocally, though never in symmetrical balance. In other cases, a character evolves through different states and morphs as new influences are encountered, or in some cases, as old influences are exaggerated. External space, then, exists as positive and negative, filled and unfilled; its visibility, or at least its ability to be perceived in some form, make it at once more relational to the others, to the world, and to the reader. As opposed to the self's creation of internal space and boundaries, those of the exterior are experiences not only by the self but by all, and can be, without any words, expressive and interpreted. Commenting on how women use space, Sandra Lee Bartky writes:

> [A] space seems to surround women in imagination that they are hesitant to move beyond: this manifests itself both in a reluctance to reach, stretch, and extend the body [. . .] and in a typically constricted posture and general style of movement. Woman's space is not a field in which her bodily intentionality can be freely realized but an enclosure in which she feels herself positioned and by which she is confined." (Bartky 66)

For the sake of exploring Mantel's novel, Bartky's assertion of the female experience of form and space serves as a basic evaluation of the "normal" parameters observed around most women, which in itself contains many complicated contradictions and issues. First, the 'normalcy' of these functions does not connote that they are healthy or ideal, and subsequently violation of

these outlines of female spaces, or 'abnormality,' does not imply or assess any level of emotional health. In other words, marking these assertions as 'normal' grants them no negative or positive value, only a commonness. In her study of how men and women occupy space differently, Marianne Wex photographed men and women in public places to note the difference in how they experience their surroundings through feminine and masculine embodiment. The collection clearly displays men stretching, holding their bodies - hands, arms, legs and all - in ways that consumed more space. Women, on the other hand, hold their bodies inward, constricted their range of motion and generally pulled away from contact with other elements of their environment; they appear concerned with proximity to other people as well as objects, rejecting contact and looking more 'contained.' Wex's project was, to some degree, in radical opposition to the old-fashioned, patriarchal ideals of Erikson's (and his like-minded peers); while he emphasized that women were biologically designed to mourn emptiness of the non-maternal body, an approach cooperative with gender essentialists of the time, Wex and her contemporaries sought to prove that "female space manipulation is entirely a function of socialisation, and can thus be modified, in ways that allow public -- and hence also private -- body-space to be reclaimed" (Battersby 347). While all of these present an array of opinions on *how* women experience bodies and space, their assessment on why they experience still frames only a limited number of sources; by negotiating whether body-space functions are socially or biologically derived and by debating whether or not social source implies reversibility, the variation of the female body-space experience is lost. Regardless of intention, all

of these studies homogenize the ways in which women develop their relationships with the world, with each other, and with their selves through the body, as well as the ways in which their relationships to the body are influenced by the external world.

While *Experiment*, the more junior of the two novels, presents more than one character's experience, *Beyond Black* really complicates the situation of female embodiment, almost infinitely. The very narrative of the text is at once permeable and impenetrable, unfamiliar and dark with boundaries of reality imperceptible. Characters may or may not exist, and the dead and living become indistinguishable at points; all boundaries of the women in the novel – of body, mind, life, death, psychic, cognitive, supernatural, imaginary – blur, merge and tear. While Colette can be likened to an older, more complex, sharply created reinvention of *Experiment*'s Carmel, Alison presents an entirely new, unmatched experience of embodiment, at once isolated and all encompassing: "The car flees across the junctions, and the space the road encloses is the space inside her: the arena of combat, the wasteland, the place of strife behind her ribs. [. . .] Night closes in on the perjured ministers and burnt-out pedophiles, on the unloved viaducts and the graffitied bridges" (*Beyond Black* 2). This excerpt juxtaposes the topography of Britain's suburbia with the experiences of the body, living or postmortem, for both their owners and those who come to later embody them, a pattern of comparison that continues throughout the novel. This pattern surfaces in British national experiences, particularly the death of princess Diana, which leads to great emotional strife in admiring citizens as well as the spirits of the

dead which, in turn, manifest themselves in the physical pains and attacks on Alison as well as other psychics. The spirit world, contrary to every popular or romantic belief of a rewarding afterlife, works much like a dumping ground for souls, filled with noise and chaos, something like a crowded subway platform to which the trains never arrive. People and dogs wander around eternally lost and confused, calling out names of loved ones they can't find in the afterlife, and thus Alison's fate lies in her unique ability to hear their calls and their subsequent demands that she help them reconnect.

Significantly, though, the spirit world exists not as a freeing realm of boundless elevation, as most representations suggest, but rather as more confining that this world; the spirit world functions as little more than storage, as containment, for the bodiless souls. This said, the two worlds become defined in terms of how they experience – or allow humans to experience – embodiment. The living world is that in which we are whole, physically present, and almost *compact*; we experience a very sensory-based life and define the world around us in terms of spatial relation. The living, depicted in the book as preoccupied with their containment by structures and larger objects, see the world as in/out, open/closed, and safe/unsafe based on their proximity to others and the barriers that exist or can be created to determine or control that proximity. Though neither the living nor the dead have a particularly glamorous life in this darkly composed world, those of life, rather than be shown as privileged or in their prime, are burdened by their corporeality and the attached perception of the world through the body. Those who live in spirit, uncontained, develop different spatial and

relative understanding of the world: permeability shifts, boundaries dissolve, and the consequence of spatial division, separation or enclosure lifts. Adult spirits can fit in sock drawers and crevices, enter closed spaces without creating openings in the barriers; their formlessness lends them the ability to act without visibility, to, in the case of Morris, assault and molest women without their being able to spot his approach. Of the experience of women, the only characters on which Mantel focuses, John Berger captures the complication of even "ordinary" female existence in Western society:

> To be born a woman has to be born, within an allotted and confined space[. . .]. The social presence of women is developed as a result of their ingenuity in living under such tutelage within such a limited space. But this has been at the cost of a woman's self being split into two. A woman must continually watch herself. She is almost continually accompanied by her own image of herself. Whilst she is walking across a room or whilst she is weeping at the death of her father, she can scarcely avoid envisaging herself walking or weeping. From earliest childhood she has been taught and persuaded to survey herself continually. (Berger 64)

The "freedom," or the unbound and unstructured environment of the spirits is based on their bodily detachment and thus creates the overarching scenario in which the characters are mired: life exists only through the body and subsequently life can only be understood through embodiment, while death is transcendent. In realizing this and possessing an uncommon awareness of the two worlds, or means of relating to the world, the psychics of the novel, and in the case of Collette who has no psychic abilities, the relationship with the dead – itself a connection complicated with mind/body issues and abuses – serves as a means of seeing and sampling the Other unembodied world. That the psychics of the novel should be cast almost exclusively as women (with the exception of Merlyn and

Merlin, who are framed as frauds) represent the focus of the text and explores the dynamics of female boundaries, fluidity, possession and objectification in ways untouched: Mantel looks at the way women are universally used for service to others, including other women, especially for their permeability: "The biggest part of the trade was young girls. They always thought there might be a stranger on the horizon, love around the corner. [. . .] Men, on their own behalf, were not interested in fortune or fate. [. . .] As for the dead, why should they worry about them? If they need to talk to their relatives, they have women to do that for them" (*Beyond Black* 8). It seems everyone – men, spirits, women and all – use Alison and the other the same way. Their bodies, then, become self-experienced, especially in their exploration of the unembodied spiritual world, and other-experienced, in terms of other living people as well as the bodiless dead use her - as a whole, mind and body – to connect them to what they cannot otherwise reach. That, however, is not to suggest that her role is so simple; she is not merely a conduit but a pulled, stretched, and abused person who goes through emotional torment as well as physical, all the while having to question whether her pain is "real" or psychosomatic, or both, which will be examined more closely later.

The issue of coexisting worlds of opposite corporeality, however, becomes, like the mind/body relationships of the novel, one in which division, separation, and unification can all occur at once: characters go far beyond their own relationships with self and experience existence as an act or manifold rather than singular state. Rather than be limited to their own internal experiences of

self, they must also share in the same experiences of others, as well as the divisions of the infrastructure of different realities. Essentially, they possess the ability – or the burden – of being capable of inner and outer body experiences of multiple people in multiple worlds within the same moment. Those who are left to observe but not experience or understand, like Collette, become increasingly aware of their restriction to the living world and , subsequently, their bodies. Ultimately these terms of worldly comprehension manifest in Alison and Colette; as they internalize the extraordinary dynamics of the realms of living and dead and recognize (or avoid) their location within them, their own bodily boundaries adapt to reflect what they perceive around them.

The world as Alison experiences it has few concrete boundaries: the body, walls, life, society, and normalcy are all permeable, fluid, and beyond any command. Tangible boundaries are malleable, though not at her will, and the intangible ones such as family, love, and safety have been compromised or failed to exist at all since her childhood. In her own rape and molestation, her mother was at best not present, at worst a facilitator. As the abuse began, Alison found the most reliable means of protection and comfort - boundaries of perception fundamental to childhood development - in her first spirit, Mrs. McGibbet: "Alison was perhaps five years old when the little lady first appeared, and in this way she learned how the dead could be helpful and sweet" (*Beyond Black* 94). Wearing a pink cardigan and always calling Alison "darlin'," Mrs. McGibbet represents any child's ideal of a nurturer, and, unlike the spirits of "the trade," she doesn't ask Alison for favors or to find people but comes around solely to provide

for Alison an augmented mother figure, someone to create and enforce boundaries of childhood/adulthood, right/wrong, and to protect her from the men that her own mother wouldn't, as evidenced by her instructions to a fourteen-year-old Alison on employment:

> "How long you expect me to keep you fed and housed, how long, eh? Lie on your back and take it,t hat what I had to do. And regular! Not just Oh-it's-Thursday-I-don't-feel-like-it. You can forget that capter, miss! That sort of attitude will get you nowhere. Make it regular, and start charging proper. That what you've got to do. How else you think you're going to make a living?" (*Beyond Black* 111).

Should the reality of Mrs. McGibbet be questioned as a possible imaginative coping mechanism, a means of supplementing her negatively mothered life, the source of this must also be examined. Does it imply that Alison suffers from schizophrenia, or is the childhood act of creating imaginary companions normal? Does the "normalcy" matter compared to the function? More oddly, though, this is possibly a learned behavior: Alison's mother, Emmie, talks to an entity named Gloria long before Mrs. McGibbet shows up. Gloria, initially invisible to Alison, eventually begins to appear to her too, though in the darkest ways: drowning in bathtubs, at other times cut in pieces. Emmie's conversations with Gloria appear to function similarly, though she seems a sympathetic friend figure rather than mother. There also, though, reads an implication that Gloria once existed and, for whatever reason, is loathed by the men who frequent the house, most notably Keith and MacArthur (who later in the novel present themselves as spirit friends of Morris). Gloria, then, could have been Emmie's creation, a means of providing herself with friendship as well as irritating the men who may very well have killed

Gloria, whenever she existed, as implied by their anger about her mention and the reoccurring suggestions that they have been responsible for others' deaths. Emmie's discussions with Gloria are punished by Keith who "pin[s] her mother up against he wall" and "gave her mum a little bounce, raising her by the hair near the scalp and bobbing her down again" (*Beyond Black* 97). Seeing spirits that no one else can see, then, is presented as a possible learned behavior, a traumatic response or coping mechanism that may have been learned from her mother. As to certainty on the issue, though, the text acknowledges the possibility and nature of the issue in an interview recorded on tape between Alison and Colette:

> COLETTE: So who did you feel, Alison, when you first knew you had psychic powers?
> ALISON: I never … I mean I never really did. There wasn't a moment. How can I put it? I didn't know what I saw, and what I just imagined. It -- you see, it's confusing, when the people you grow up with are always coming and going at night. (*Beyond Black* 112)

The boundaries between real and unreal visions, normal and abnormal mental health, and authentic or inauthentic psychic abilities are, as with majority of boundaries in the texts, diluted and deconstructed. The subjection of Alison's experiences and situation to questions of reality and truth become irrelevant and existence of the concepts themselves objectionable. The observer, as seen through Colette, cannot understand the situations of the participant; for both parties - participant and observer, Alison and Colette - the situation of the boundaries becomes hyper-exaggerated in the self, thought in radically different ways and with different outcomes.

Alison, who experiences boundlessness of the living and dead worlds as

ongoing trauma, struggles to establish a sense of whole, unified, impenetrable self. Constantly invaded by spirits, their verbal and mental assaults prove less disturbing and problematic for her than those that are physical; she can resist or ignore their insults and grotesque expressions, but the physical sensations of pain, scarring, nausea, sweating, vomiting and headaches that they bring are less tolerable. Though Alison uses baths and ointments to create some relief, her primary means of coping with the physical torment of the spirits revolved around the stomach, through which she says they spirits come, enter her, though her description seems to be more cognitive, thus modeling the unification of mind and body in Alison's realization of self, which she strives for. Coping with the shaky world means holding oneself together and solidifying ones presence in the world, which she accomplishes through manipulating her body into the most corporeally undeniable presence she can. Her constant consumption of food serves her on multiple levels, aiding her thickening of the self as well as providing the emotional solace of eating and nurturing the self, as well as the pleasure of taste. Alison's experience of self in crisis - and her self and her world *is always* in crises, vulnerable sans boundaries - also effects her desire to render herself unreachable, impenetrable, through the thickening of the exterior, though this never really succeeds; she always finds herself wracked with more spirits, more pain. Similarly, this also creates a means of controlling the space around her: by expanding the most external part of the body, Alison creates a barricade, a wall of flesh and self that she hopes will contain her inner-most self. To secure herself, she must become overly present: "Alison was a woman who seemed to fill a

room, even when she wasn't in it. She was of an unfeasible size, with plump creamy shoulders, rounded calves, thighs and hips that overlowed her chair; she was soft as an Edwardian, opulent as a showgirl" (*Beyond Black* 3). Also importantly, her inner-self and outer-self are not two opposing forces that collide and battle, as seen in Carmel's anorexia and Colette's self-conceptualization, but are cooperative, indistinct, transferable parts of the whole self. Further, Alison's "mind" never becomes a delineated part of self, or, as is most common in Western thinking, the core of self, but is instead an element of the whole self; she experiences all things through the whole self, without ever dividing, halving, prioritizing or recognizing parts.

Colette, on the other hand, finds herself absolutely stuck in the physicality of the living world. Though her life is consumed with "the trade," which in addition to the business can be read as the 'trade' or shift between worlds, she never gains access, not even vicariously, to any other than that which she was born in. Where Alison seeks to anchor herself in this world through her body, Colette feels burdened by the inescapability of her body, her normalcy, and her confinement to mortality and ordinariness, as evidenced by all textual references to her body. Colette is described throughout *Beyond* Black in various ways, all amounting to the same concept: she is "a cotton bud poised" (5), "flat and neutral" and having "indefinite features [. . .] neither male or female" (47), with hair that's "matt beige" and "beige hair flip[ping] cheekily at chin level" (49). As the novel progresses, Colette works to make herself thinner, a finer specimen of control but also a lesser physical presence. A clear gap presents itself in the

theory and criticism that discusses anything like Colette's pursuit of thinness: for one, the majority of writing on the subject of bodily manipulation toward thinness or slightness writes, as previously discussed, of sexual suppression and focuses on youth, women the age of *Experiment*'s Carmel, not the late-thirties. Further, the writing surrounding slightly older women tends to focus on the body as representation of the voice, as in the work of Susan Bordo's writings on the protest function. The protest function of the body exists through altering the body to accept or reject a culturally created gender expectation, whether it be through anorexia or binge eating; the effect is a change in the space the body takes up but more importantly in the relationship of the body to its owner's gender. The mind manipulates the body to speak what cannot said by voice, and in many cases to protest. The protest, however, is not something that can be done without being detrimental to both the mind and body. The reciprocity of the relationship becomes a mutual exchange of damage rather than enhancement. This sort of destructiveness within the protest function is what Bordo determines to be the ultimate, concluding downfall in her analysis of the process:

> Functionally, the symptoms of [thinning] isolate, weaken, and undermine the sufferer; at the same time they turn the life of the body into an all-absorbing fetish, beside which all other objects of attention pale into unreality. On the symbolic level, too, the protest collapses into its opposite and proclaims the utter capitulation of the subject to the contracted female world (2371).

While, with some legitimacy, this could be applied to Carmel, it certainly serves to identify or recognize Colette's situation very little. For one, Colette's manipulation is not as extreme, though that such qualifying factors are less important than the issue of dysfunction, which is heavily implied in Bordo's

theory but less applicable to the Colette or any of the characters of *Beyond Black.* Simply put, Colette does not follow the same conditions outlined in this and most other criticism; she maintains function, grows and changes personally, continues with life and development. The theory in which women must ultimately succumb to their own drives, fall victim to the failure of their own intentions, is outmoded, narrow and dismissive of reality and text in which women exist for lifetimes with these "conditions." Further, as we see throughout both novels, the relationships between the self and, should such divisions occur, the mind and body, never follow necessarily linear, direct paths of progression or regression; their plights are complex, varying, irregular and, most importantly, not stagnant. Their relationships exist with them in their lives, encounter the same things and people they encounter, and evolve - again, in an indirect, noncircular and nonlinear way - constantly.

Colette's plainness and thinness allow her, in contrast to Alison's extravagant flamboyance, a means of pursing invisibility, not for the purposes of suppression or representation of a constrained voice, but as a means of exploring worlds inaccessible to the self who tethered to the body. Where Alison uses shiny, loudly colored silks, ounce upon ounce of fragrant oils, and her physical prominence as anchorage, Colette explores herself in terms of bodily absence: "When I'm gone I leave no trace. Perfume doesn't last on my skin. I barely sweat. My feet don't indent the carpet" (*Beyond Black* 4). Of Colette's lack of presence, Alison says, "'It's as if you wipe out the signs of yourself as you go. [. . .] You polish your own fingerprints away" (*Beyond Black* 4). This presents

Colette as almost an bodiless, spirit-being, though is written as quite human, reiterating the indistinguishable, permeable qualities of the boundaries of the text. The bodily slightness fails Colette as a means of achieving spiritual connection; the connections she does achieve are irrelevant to her form. It does, however, ultimately aid her in differentiating herself from Alison and in recreating her conceptualization of her adult self in response to her environment, which will be discussed in the next chapter. Unlike Alison, though, Colette's experience of the self is not unitary or whole in any way; she divides herself, centralizing the self in the identification of the mind, as does Carmel in *Experiment*. Because she, like Carmel, views the body as a barrier between her and her goal - the ability to transcend or at least understand the disembodied other realm - she must internally separate herself from it to some degree, which also serves to exaggerate the space surrounding the self; oddly, this works much the same with Alison and Colette. Where Alison creates spatial boundaries by occupying the space surrounding her with flesh, Colette does so by making the self smaller and therefore broadening the negative, empty space between her and the world. Though both Carmel and Colette manipulate the external space and, subsequently, their spatial relations to their environments in the same way, it is to entirely different outcomes and for radically different purposes. Whereas Carmel's body is problematized through the male view, Colette's becomes an obstacle upon her introduction to an exclusive, Other existence that she cannot reach.

The mind-body relationship as presented in Mantel's work evolves and changes tremendously between (and in) the two novels, becoming complex,

sometimes reciprocal, and often abusive as the divisional space intensifies, along with the characters' senses of need to further separate themselves from the disadvantages of the body. While feminist body critics have long recognized anorexia as a means of rejecting femininity, most of the criticism cites reasons for that rejection that do little to represent the struggles of Mantel's characters. For the most part, this criticism focuses on young women's anorexia, casting it as a means of delaying the transition into adult femininity and all that comes with it, essentially equating bodily development with development of feminine embodiment and objectification, such as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic*. Though their work created several landmarks in field of body criticism, they too build a great deal of their stronger positions upon the weaker assumption that anorexia and other conflicts of body/self boundaries result from young girls "[l]earning to become a beautiful object, the girl learns anxiety about - perhaps even loathing of - her own flesh. Peering obsessively into the real as well as metaphoric looking glasses that surround her, she desires literally to 'reduce' her own body" (2030) Without devaluing the legitimacy of this approach, it is important to recognize that it speaks to very specific conditions of some women, specifically those of the Victorian era, and has been since applied too broadly to experience of all young women's relationship with anorexia. The fault of the theory as it has been appropriated since its publication is that it oversimplifies the issues at hand: firstly, it marks the rejection of feminine embodiment, self-identification and compliance with conventional objectification as being directly precipitated by a desire not to mature. This, then, narrows the

scope of problems attached to or potentially emerging from female embodiment; the experience extends far beyond feeling like a sexual object or a person of sexual potential. Further, by constantly illustrating the suppression of the body as this ignores that anorexic women can have complex, functional and even healthy sexualities; that they can in fact create new sexualities from the experience of bodily suppression, and that they can at once be frustrated by and accepting of their sexuality. At the most basic level, it demeans the feminine experience by reducing it to one that is inherently correlative and dependent on the masculine gaze and cooperation with masculine functions.

Though Carmel's anorexia stems partially from the recognition that she cannot detach the body and a subsequent desire to establish distance from herself and, at the least, a feminine body that is socially inferior and owned, she doesn't reject sexuality, nor is the manipulation rooted in psychological inability to accept adult femininity. She was not molested in her childhood nor does she fear sexual interaction with men; in fact, as her body becomes thinner, she finds that her sex life with Niall becomes more pleasurable for both of them, with her enjoying the sex and him complimenting her on her ever-more slight frame. In one scene of the book, following a period in which Carmel had felt disconnected in her relationship, Carmel greets him with a thinner, gaunter body, which he appreciates just before they have sex: "'Carmel,' Niall said, 'I can feel all your ribs.' Later, he said, 'I wish I could afford to buy you roses'" (Mantel 180). Though their mutual pleasure in her emaciation cannot be construed as healthy, it nonetheless communicates that her sexuality, nor the sexual appreciation of her

body by others, suffers through the illness, but rather grows. More importantly, it highlights that her anorexia is an adaptive response to social demands of masculinity in the positions she hopes to occupy, not an essential malfunction from within; societies privileging of the masculine standard – from grade school on – degrades and problematizes Carmel's female body, not some self-generated issue with maturation or her own femininity. More complex, though is that though her crisis of body identification comes from an internalization of a social standard, it isn't the normally blamed beauty standards of incredibly thin women (such as Twiggy, the iconic model of Carmel's time), but from a focus feminine exclusion, which she interprets through and applies to the body. The significance of this isn't that it allows for blaming patriarchy, but that it shows the complexity of how the women of Mantel's works relate to their bodies beyond the most generic and commonplace ideas that have been so widely disseminated. While critics have long held the belief that binaries are problematic because they are bound to ultimately merge in some way, through Carmel we see the self, the sense of one's own existence beyond binaries, recognizing the radical projection of difference between men and women and then dividing itself in response, only to pull back into a self that is both an encompassment of and disillusionment with them. Carmel, frustrated with how society will identify her with its own symbolic reading of her body, pulls herself into a mind/body, masculine/feminine, binary-founded position of self/mind/masculine goals battling the Other/body/feminine, creating a more androgynous appearance that can be read as the combination of two genders, the absence of gender, or the masculine female.

The body-self relationships, means of self-identification and subsequent dilemmas of boundary and self in the novels can be divided into two categories of influence: those than stem from self-experiences and those than stem from connections with other women. Self-experiences are those that occur to the women throughout life, the elements most traditionally examined in looking at psychological occurrences: issues of abuse, event-based trauma, sexuality as it is experiences alone or with men, childhood events, familial structure and happenings, elements of socialization and societal inclusion and exclusion, and unshared physical sensations such as pain, nausea and pleasure. These experiences receive the most focus in traditional literature and are generally categorized as essential components of self formation; it is unsurprising that they prove to be a distinct category of influences in the body boundary situations of the women in Mantel's novels. On the other hand, though, are the interpersonal experiences between women that so uniquely present the characters with another category of factors. That is not to imply that Mantel's work is the first to create female characters that have these types of relationships, but that Mantel's work instead takes these relationships to deeper levels and illustrates, instead of simple connections between female relationships and self-identification, specific connections between women's relationships to each other and their reactive adaptation of body boundaries.

CHAPTER TWO:
INTERBODY EXPERIENCE IN THE LESBIAN ENVIRONMENT

After establishing a basis for viewing the bodies of Mantel's characters as they relate to the internal and external influences, there remains the prominent, equally complex presence of another connective and influential source of bodily recognition, existence, experiences, and understanding: that which is interpersonal, or more specifically, *between* women Mantel's novels' unique exploration of the female experience of the body is facilitated in part by their characters' environments, which are practically all female. The significance of this as it influences the texts' capacity for female introspection will require longer exploration, though its uniqueness, both because it is rare and creates uncommon framework for the narrative. The female body in Western culture has become conceptualized as almost inextricably linked to the male. Beyond the rhetoric of objectification and sexualization, the female form has become, like masculine and feminine, a half of a pair, an exchange of presence and absence; what is *x*, is not *y*, and *x* exists in spatial and linguistic relation to *y*. That Mantel should design environments with few to no male characters in itself creates the need for new approaches to how women's bodies exist in relation to each other, even beyond those which have set forth to do so before, because these have been situated within the context of compulsory heterosexuality (Rich) and patriarchal opposition (Wittig). That does not imply that Mantel's characters exist in realms uninfluenced by patriarchy or heterosexual standards, but that their relationship to them is more detached and isolated than what has been most commonly theorized

thus far.

First, with writing about women's bodies within female-only environments comes the need to establish and define terminology, specifically the use of the term *lesbian* to describe environments and experiences. Though this could prove an effective term for exploring the texts and creating framework for understanding the situation, the term as applied here does not default to the same meaning for all; feminist theorists of varying and often opposing ideologies have created a diversity of meanings and functions, some of which are more relevant to my use of it than others. In recent criticism, many writers seem to be popularizing Monique Wittig's definition of lesbianism, as explained below by Judith Butler:

> If we thought we understood that lesbians were women who more or less conduct their sexual lives with other women, we have misunderstood what it is to be a lesbian. For Wittig, "woman"—and even sometimes the plural "women"—is a category that belongs to the social contract, which is heterosexuality. This means that the category has been devised and implemented to keep the presumptive status of heterosexuality in its place at the foundation of culture. That category must be assaulted and nullified, rendered obsolete, if we are to understand what it means to be a lesbian. A lesbian [. . .] is one who conducts the nullification of the category of gender. (Butler, *WMP* 523)

While this interpretation proves relevant in its classification of lesbianism as not necessarily associated with sexual partnership with women, instead focusing on the environmental creation of a lesbian identity, it is nonetheless hostile and generally dismissive of a great deal of the female population. And though both Butler and Wittig appear to include the possibility of lesbian sexuality their criticism, the quote is taken in a different context here, not to forego or avoid the

significance of lesbian sexuality, but to craft the criticism to the characters and relationship of the novels. Wittig creates lesbian as a term to signify the shunning of patriarchal oppression and heteronormative functions of woman as she would fall into those relationships, but to do so is to prioritize one's own personal and exclusive agenda, and it counteracts the communality of the universal minority perspective Witting writes off. To divide women this way is to demarcate a boundary between women that have surmounted traditional roles (in our outside of a relationship) and expectations and those who, for reasons often associated with class, race and social position, have not. Further, this denies to a majority of women who, in some way, qualify at Wittig's definition of "belonging to a social contract" the ability to transcend positions or to ever exist as a complex, dynamic person who can know many of the positives of lesbian experiences, regardless of social structures or boundaries she may coexist with. By creating an either/or situation – one that allows for no gradual chance but only instantaneous, wholly transgressive fence-jumping – Wittig has created a category of lesbian that surely only few will ever entirely qualify for.

Rather, the concept of lesbian experiences that exists within Mantel's novels is more closely related to those which Adrienne Rich first publicized in her essay, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Experience," where she outlines the "*lesbian continuum* to include a range – through each woman's life and throughout history – of woman identified experience" (217). Rich goes on to explain this continuum through examples of "forms of primary intensity between and among women, including the sharing of a rich inner life, the bonding against

male tyranny, the giving and receiving of practical and political support, [and] as marriage resistance" (217). This excerpt describes with fine accuracy the unique worlds of and connections between the women of Mantel's novels, as the second half of Rich's essay wholly encompasses the environment of the characters. While her meaning and writings are congruent with the situation of Mantel's texts, the use of the term lesbian continuum is less appropriate: Rich explained that she "chos[e] the terms lesbian existence and lesbian continuum because the word lesbianism ha[d] a clinical and limiting ring" (217). While this may have been true when Rich created her landmark essay in 1980, Western culture has since become more conscious of that stigma, acknowledging the medicalization and former implications of psychosis associated with lesbianism. While stigmas do exist multiply and deeply, mainstream culture as well as that of academia have since seen rapid confrontation with such associations. HBO's *The L Word*, a drama series about a group of lesbian friends, created a title that mocks the stigmas that Rich had to avoid twenty-four years earlier. In fact, Rich's very writing about the piece has publicized and normalized lesbianism in academic theory since, therefore to some degree 'curing' that clinical ring she wanted to avoid by paving the way for critics and writers since to explore the topic, *her* topics.

Still, the disparity between the lesbian experiences of Mantel's novel and that of which Rich writes lies in the function of the lesbian environment, scarcely touched upon in Rich's work because she speaks of lesbian experiences within the heteronormative, gender-integrated, "normal" world. For most purposes, of

course, this would be the more applicable, but both *An Experiment in Love* and *Beyond Black* find the lesbian experiences of their novels rooted in the lesbian environment – the very structure that makes the characters and their experiences possible. This does not imply that the lesbian environments, specifically that of *Experiment*, are beyond all heteronormative influence, especially considering that the characters are heterosexual, but that they are physically removed from an environment that intensely enforces the heteronormative, rather than allow divergence into other (or Othered) territory. Though they share this aspect, there's certainly bold difference between them. The environment of *Experiment* is founded in Tonbridge Hall, an all girl's dormitory; all points of their daily lives converge at the dorm as a communal, exclusively-female space where they hash out their conflicts with the world outside.

The lesbian environments of the novels, like other aspects, increase from *Experiment* to *Beyond Black*, becoming more profound, distinct and finely crafted. *Experiment*'s Tonbridge hall is, foremost, temporary, more like a shelter than a 'true' environment; the building and environment exist as a containing space existing within the larger, heteronormative reality. The space is constructed of boundaries that delineate it as exceptional, small and an inner element of the larger outer world: the physical boundaries of the environment, the walls of Tonbridge, serve quite literally to shelter the lesbian environment, but might also conceal it, aiding in its invisibility. (Visibility, however, as will be later addressed, is a significant element of the lesbian environment and its ability to function both for those in and for the other adjacent and/or surrounding

environments.) Secondly, the women themselves function at times as boundary keepers of their own environment, both in their ability to enforce as well as weaken them. Entrance into the environment is controlled by the female dorm worker who allows admittance and guests, and surveys all uses of keys to the space. Men who do enter are generalized, marked as 'Rogers,' which almost becomes an innuendo for maleness in the novel. The male presence in the environment, though, is presented as unthreatening; they come in based on female control, being snuck in by girls, and leave according to their hosts' wishes. They're presented as obedient, non-persons; just 'men' to which the women bring in and send out based on their wishes to have them or not. In this way, all of the women in Tonbridge police and control the boundaries of their environment, though the male presence in it seems so neutered and unthreatening that it isn't recognized as compromising the space in any way. Essentially, though, the space is limited not only by its spatial limitation but also by its temporal limits; ultimately, the environment is not a constant state in which they live their lives, but a comfort zone upon which they base their private and personal existences. None of the girls can ever stay in Tonbridge; they will all move out of this environment after finishing college, back into a heteronormative space similar that that which they lived in before. (Though aspects of heteronormativity certainly intrude into the environment, they never seem entirely forced upon the girls, but reclaimed and reused. The women's maintenance of these standards does not counteract the lesbian environment; the integration of heteronormative elements can function as a means of preserving cultural and familial background

as well as a sense of security.) The lesbian environment, then, is small and temporary, serving as a sort of hospital-like place that protects them in the pivotal point of development - early adulthood - but in which they can never stay. Because of its impermanence, compared to the environment of *Beyond Black*, that of *Experiment* seems to be less of a lasting lesbian environment, though that doesn't necessarily devalue it; while the latter of Mantel's novel develops a stronger environment, the age of the characters and the progression of the experiences among the novels is represented by the progression of the space. All of the shared qualities of the novels are, just as the character's ages, more complex, mature and developed in *Beyond Black*, but it may be true that *Experiment*, as with youth, was necessary to establish the prior that would serve as the base for the latter.

The most immediate difference between the two novels' is the permanence of the environment in *Beyond Black*. Rather than serving as a temporary shelter, the world of the women is a point they've reached through surpassing the same heteronormative world that the characters of *Experiment* are about to be forced back into; it seems more of a final state. Within *Beyond Black*, however, are two highly contrasted inner and outer environments, with one contained within the other and both existing on different terms. The first lesbian environment, that of Alison and all of the other psychics, is a supportive, outer environment; the "outer" label stems from the fact that it is unbound, without limit, existing through the women. It has no spatial walls but is ambient and constant. The other, the "inner," exists internally *within* the outer and is the private space that

Alison and Colette alone share. The inner environment's label, then, stems not only from its position as existing inside the outer environment but also its greater intimacy and the boundedness of the space; rather than exist as a freeing, limitless space (such as the outer), it is delineated and constructed by physical boundaries of bodies, walls, flesh, and exclusion, existing within the walls of homes and contained between the boundaries of their bodies. The parameters of the inner environment seem ever-shifting in the novel, mimicking the relationship of Alison and Colette. When they become hostile, the environment becomes restrictive, corset-like. As the 'inner' to an 'outer,' it is less visible, and the characters, particularly Colette, become possessive of it, trying to ensure throughout the novel that it stays inaccessible to the outer, to the psychics that attempt to pit Alison against her. While the overall state of a lesbian environment is a final point in *Beyond Black*, the inner is susceptible to change and tension while the outer is foundational, secure, and unchanging, which Colette finds threatening.

Further, the enclosure of the inner lesbian environment is directly connected to Alison and Colette's preoccupation with the space between and surrounding them, and the actual physical space as well as the space as environment are mutually reciprocal, creating and molding each other. Voids are not lacking at all, but are themselves presences: "[L]ack is that which proceeds to instill a fullness or *presence of absence* [. . .]; in other words, lack itself functions as a presence of absence [. . .] that often emanates or is created ex nihilo, the concrete effects of which prove more decisive than would be thought upon first glance" (Lozano 2). Colette in particular remains vigilant of their - hers and

Alison's - occupation of space throughout the novel, always commenting on each one's ability (or inability) to fit, to squeeze, and to fill the spaces between each other, between walls. Colette becomes overwhelmingly focused on the existence of space as filled or void, experiencing a sort of inter-body claustrophobia. This way of viewing all space, including empty space, as occupied creates a world in which all bodies and objects push against each other, exist adjacent to one another, therefore increasing the significance of boundaries; in a world absent of true void, true boundaries – that is, physically visible delineations – become ever-more significant, in fact necessary. In them lies all power of order; without them, comes the sense that people are ever-merging, at least for Colette.

Alison, quite the opposite, presents the greatest challenge for the sort of anxiety this boundless environment creates because of her overwhelming presence in it: "Colette swooped on [Alison's clothes]; lady's maid was part of her job. She slid her forearm inside Al's black crepe skirt. It was as large as a funerary banner, a pall. As she turned it the right way out, she felt a tiny stir of disgust, as if flesh might still be clinging to the seams" (*Beyond Black* 3). As Colette puts her arm into the empty skirt – presumably a void – she feels as if she's penetrating a boundary, entering a space of Alison's body; her sense of lingering flesh and disgust with the closeness to Alison's body represent her need to respect, even venerate, the separation of their bodies. Even the presence of the clothing, though, creates a struggle: large, seemingly endless masses of scent-soaked fabric tossed everywhere dominate the small physical space of their inner environment, reiterating Alison's ability to seem omnipresent even in her absence.

The structure of the inner lesbian environment is so heavily constructed upon not only presence-in-absence-type relations with space, but such spaces are defined specifically in relation to Alison, whether Alison's relation to self or Colette's to her:

> Alison was a woman who seemed to fill a room, even when she wasn't in it. She was of an unfeasible size, with plump creamy shoulders, rounded calves, thighs and hips that overflowed her chair; she was soft as an Edwardian, opulent as a showgirl, and when she moved, you could hear (though she did not wear them) the rustle of plumes and silks. In a small space, she seemed to use up more than her share of oxygen; in return her skin breathed out moist perfumes like a giant tropical flower. When you came into a room she'd left [. . .] you felt her as a presence, a trail. (*Beyond Black* 3-4).

Alison's body thus becomes the epicenter, the point of reference, for all dimensional measurements and relationships between her and Colette. The relationship between them seems entirely established in their views and feelings toward each other's bodies, therefore more of an inter-bodily nature more than an interpersonal one. Rather than simply react emotionally and mentally to each others' forms, though, they actually recreate their bodies through these reactions, creating an environment in which physicality becomes malleable, controllable by the other through lesbian bodily inscription. The outer environment – that of the psychics – influences the body only through its attempt to separate the inner environment; Alison's psychic peers often take to task Colette's care of and influence on Alison, but specifically Alison's *body* rather than whole self.

Bodily inscription, a "form of body writing and various techniques of social inscription that bind all subjects[. . .] according to sex, class, race, cultural and age codification, to social positions and relations" (Grosz 141) is

appropriately a major concern for both the inner and outer lesbian environments of the *Beyond Black* because both are intensely preoccupied with the experience of the female body, or specifically, the female bodies in relation to each other. In *Experiment*, inscription occurs mostly as an act perpetrated on the self in reaction to others' bodies in the environment, being mostly self-controlled. The women of Tonbridge hall reinscribe their own bodies for purposes of developing their identities in comparison to other women's bodies and identities; the relationships and role of inscriber in relation to other women's bodies intensifies and becomes much more shared, complex, and communal in *Beyond Black.* The experiences of communal embodiment in *Experiment* pertain more to community influence on the individual and the individual's subsequent responsive manipulation and self-inscription, as will be discussed later. The situation of Alison and Colette, however, is a more complicated, more interpersonal, interbodily experience of the type of day-to-day inscription (rather than radical or singularly mutilating inscription, as with Carmel) explained by Elizabeth Grosz:

> Not only does what the body takes into itself (diet in the first instance) effect a 'surface inscription' of the body; the body is also incised by various forms of adornment. Through exercise and habitual patterns of movement, through negotiating its environment [. . .], and through clothing and makeup, the body is more or less marked, constituted as an appropriate, or, as the case my be inappropriate body, for its cultural requirements. (Grosz 1423)

Lesbian bodily inscription, then, becomes that which is done between women without the prioritization of male or heteronormative inscriptions; the way women write each other's bodies, and write their own bodies in response to other women's bodies.

In the inner environment, the power of the inscriptions lies primarily with Colette or unidentified forces of the past; Alison experiences little to no autonomy in the matter, or so she describes her situation. Her consumption of food occurs either because she needs it, her body demanding it, usually in reaction to a particularly exhausting or draining psychic experience; or she experiences food as an external force upon her, either through the force of dead spirits or the presentation of Colette. This furthers Alison's experience of her body as communal and shared, therefore allowing her connections with others through physicality that counters the unwanted connections with the dead. In hiring Colette, however, the maintenance of her food regimen was part of the responsibilities she specified, specifically the odd or difficult task of catering to her physical needs in the middle of the night and at unusual hours; while business matters consume some of Colette's time, her employment is founded mostly in her responsibilities to Alison's body, whether feeding, massaging, medicating, or dressing it, her occupation is one in which the task of Alison's inscription passes from Alison to Colette, almost entirely. And while these chores are done in the beginning for the purpose of satisfying her job requirements, that soon changes. As the inner environment shifts from strictly professional to lesbian – that is, one in which the two women share intense personal connections exclusive to each other and to women – so does their relationship, thus enabling Colette to become emotionally, even physically, invested in Alison's body. She comes to view Alison's form as representative of Alison as a person, and therefore expresses her emotions, relevant and irrelevant to Alison, on her body.

In the beginning, their relationship is primarily warm, with Colette enjoying the newfound purposefulness of her job, the company of her psychic counterpart, and the involvement in the interesting and highly-charged trade. In this period, she enjoys providing for Alison's body, enthusiastically catering to her needs and in fact offering solace and care to the point of excess, often refused by Alison. She not only brings the food that is asked for, but offers additional food, usually pleasurable foods such as chocolate or comforting foods such as hot tea. She looks Alison's body as a thing of need, a thing to be nurtured, and thus writes her affections and desire to give and attend on her body through perfuming it, softening it with moisturizers and hot baths, feeding it, specifically fats and sugars. Though she may not change the form of Alison's body, she rewrites the meaning of it, inscribing on it her affection, making it a display of how tended to it is.

As the novel progresses, however, and their relationship tenses with their growing frustrations and intolerance of each others' constant presence – in other words, their frustration with the spatial closeness or inescapability of the internal environment itself – so does the treatment of the body. The body becomes a conduit through which they redirect emotions that they don't want to cognitively address, a surface on which they write their emotions, and a boundary of personal autonomy that, in strife, they feel they need to emphasize, overplay, and attack. As Colette shifts her view of Alison's body from gracious appreciation of her charge to more subjective disgust, she tends the body less and abuses it more; hence emerges a desire to reconfigure the power dynamics through interbody

relationships. Colette is ever more chastised by the other psychics for her otherness, her inability to 'see.'

In one particularly telling scene, Alison and Mandy, fellow psychic, discuss the appropriateness or inclusion of Colette in their circle telepathically, at once verbally and physically expressing the same sentiment: "Al's hand moved to the phone and away again, she didn't want Colette to overhear, so she talked to Mandy in her mind" (*Beyond Black* 144). The proceeding discussion is one in which both Alison and Mandy regard Colette as the "the trade" and a "punter" in their discussion of her inability to relate or sympathize, with Alison communicating to Mandy her feelings on Colette, referred to as the general "they" of the nonpsychic community: "They haven't got the language, have they? Don't tell me, sweetheart. They haven't got the range" (144). Thus sets the premise for the dynamics of the inner and outer environments of the novel and their relations to one another. The rest of the internal dialogue goes on to discuss Colette in a way similar to a significant other, detailing the sharing of rent and mortgage and the picking of fights, but within the instance quoted above lies the most poignant insight into the outer lesbian environment: it is a space in which inner-body exchange is total, enabling emotional relationships – even entire conversations – to exist through the permeation of each other's bodies, the entering of each other's minds, and the disallowing of the other, the nonpsychic Colette. Further, they speak of the psychic abilities as a language, implying not only that it's a means of more intimate communication but that it's the grounds for all their communication, and Colette's not "speaking" it is akin to a language barrier.

Lastly, it suggests that the body external and body internal have different languages altogether, furthering the intimacy of the outer environment and the estrangement of the inner, a sort of turning inside-out of the two.

Colette's frustration is with her inability to permeate spatial boundaries and transcend temporal and spiritual realms, as discussed in Chapter One, she is goaded by the other psychics, results in a sense of powerlessness, or lesser power. In the outer lesbian environment of the trade and Alison's peers, Colette finds herself defenseless and practically voiceless, not allowed to counter their comments and relegated to her professional, objective position as Alison's assistant. If anyone, it's Alison who must come to her defense, yet she often seems to treat Colette as strictly an employee; the roles of the inner lesbian environment, then, become stiflingly secretive and secondary to those of the outer, more permanent lesbian environment. Thus, when in the privacy of their home or when left alone, Colette rebuts the implications of Alison's lack of defense and the others' comments through anger; she reclaims her power by reasserting her position over, or possession of, Alison's body through deprivation of food and the verbal abuse of Alison's body through disparaging remarks about her weight, plus general denial of her physical comfort through other small gestures. By forcing Alison onto a drastic diet, Colette seeks to inscribe on her body a punishment for betrayal, a disempowerment, ownership by someone else, and a disconnection from the outer, the psychics, who condemn Colette's treatment of Alison. And while Alison has experienced her body as irrelevant to personal autonomy most of her life – has, in fact, sought to locate control of her

body in other people and other forces – by creating caretaker roles and submitting her flesh to its own demands, it is in the eventual, though small, rejection of Colette's abuses that she attempts for the first time to possess her body as her own for the first time.

The inner lesbian environment, ever more hostile and abusive, eventually collapses; in her prediction of the situation, Alison talks about the environment as a house: "'It can be a warning that the structure you're in won't contain you anymore. Whether it's your job or your love life or whatever it is, you've outgrown it. It's not safe to stay put. The Tower is the house you know. So it can mean just that. Move on" (*Beyond Black* 184). This point in the novel is that in which they try quite literally to move to a new home, only to find that it leads to greater volatility and incompatibility than before, ultimately resulting in Colette's departure and return to her ex-husband, proceeded by Alison's reliving of traumatic events. The outer lesbian environment, however, remains in tact; it Colette's absence, the other psychics sort of close in the hole, coming to take care of Alison in Colette's place, confirming Colette's anxieties.

The generally mature relationships of Beyond Black, though more complex, are perhaps denser than those of *Experiment*. In the lesbian environment of *Experiment*'s Tonbridge hall, there exist at once parallel and dissimilar aspects of inscription; while the environment serves as a space through which women relate to each other through their bodies, the relationships remain very singular and self-contained. Rather than create ownerships of each other's bodies or assert creative force or ability on each other, they experience female

embodiment communally, but internalize and inscribe it individually. Whereas the community of women in *Beyond Black* appears aware of and comfortable, for the most part, in the acknowledgment of each other's physicality, the young women of *Experiment* are in a situation that is more transitional and insecure, experiencing proximity through uneasiness. The newness of the environment and the novelty of their venture into college and young adulthood no doubt accounts for some of their discomfort; they are trying on themselves, their bodies, their roles, and their relationships with their new surroundings, reassessing how they define the body in relation to women-only, as opposed to the exclusively heteronormative environment, all the while never shedding the presence of previously learned standards of male-ideals (which they'll inevitably have to face again, post-Tonbridge). The novel takes places in the first year of the girls university experience, and mostly within the first semester. The awkwardness of the transition into the environment and the subsequent hyperawareness of other women and the self in terms of the body is captured in a description of the dining hall at meal time:

> "Once we were admitted, we moved to our habitual tables: four girls to each side, two senior students at each end. [. . .] Next came the dishes of vegetables, and an oval stainless-steel platter of the evening's meat or fish, placed before one of the senior's to be divided by ten. [. . .] [A] quantity perhaps reasonable by four" (*Experiment* 41).

The very structure of the serving ritual puts the older women in charge of allocating portions to the younger, assigning the control of the body to other women in a way that works as a subtler precursor to the same relationship that later manifested in *Beyond Black.* The narrative goes on to describe that, though

no one could possibly have been full from the small amount allotted to them, there was always a leftover serving of meat which "lay on its platter, and no one could bring herself to speak; for these girls, collectively voracious, were individually all of my opinion, and would rather starve than speak" (*Experiment* 42). On the most basic level, this displays common group mentality as has been documented over and over by sociologists, but beyond that lies the situation of the overall text that extends far beyond the dining hall; the lesbian existence within Tonbridge is one in which woman exists physically rather than verbally, through actions rather than words, and therefore is represented to herself and others through the body more than anything else. Thus emerges the premise of the turning-point, the self-identifying phase of the dormitory in which women experience themselves as reflections or counteractions to each other's physicality, seeking to emulate their likeness or symbolize their detachment from the other girls through reinscribing their bodies, or inscribing their own bodies for the first time. The bodies/selves of each girl at the beginning of the term, then, are the heteronormative ones that were written for them: the weight, the clothing, the maintenance, the haircuts, and the lifestyles that begin with were not of their own choosing, but were assigned to them by society – the greater norm- or their mothers and fathers, all seeking to create in them a standard of ladyhood, daughterhood, or generally prescribed acceptable femaleness. They, embarking into science fields in the early 1960s and allowed their own small spaces (and bigger choices) for the first time, have their first opportunity to rewrite the bodies – the selves, which are overwhelmingly physical – for the first time. Further, the

fact that women are socially constructed as their bodies – that women's bodies are supposed to represent the whole of their person, or at least the most important part of their person – continues within the lesbian environment, thus the women still identify and relate to each other through their bodies on some level, often classifying each other by specific parts: Sue and Lynette are represented by their blonde hair (75), Karina by her stomach, rich Lynette by her coat, Carmel by her thinness and hair. The physicality of women's identities, most often written of as a patriarchal construct tied to the sexualization and objectification of the female and the devaluing of the female intellect, seems heightened in the lesbian environment. To say that it is simply an internalization of the norms they've learned, however, oversimplifies the other elements of the environment, chiefly the volatile nature of the individual identity at a transformative stage of first independence and college; the nature of the unstable self, or an environment of many unstable selves, no doubt lends itself to creating a hyperawareness of selfhood, which cannot be excluded from the body, or the physical (and only visible) part of the self.

Through Carmel emerges the most prominent discursive body of the novel, one that changes throughout the text as Carmel's aversion to asking for more food from the other women becomes a means of redirecting the voice into the body, ultimately encouraging her to relate to the whole world, including the women of Tonbridge, through her body more than anything else, most obviously manifested in her very *public* anorexia. The emphasis on public is intended to emphasize that, unlike the frequently perpetuated ideas of anorexia as a shameful,

secretive condition, it is communally acknowledges and individually unhidden. Though the term 'anorexia' is never used, Carmel doesn't disavow her rejection of food. And while the other girls express varying reactions, ranging from disgust and disapproval to complacency and moderate approval, they generally support her as a person and develop an appreciation for her body. In a scene where they're all discussing the possibility of Sue having an abortion, Carmel and Lynette work on perfecting Carmel's look for an upcoming dinner, which she's prepared a special hand-made sweater for, knitting it and, all the while, becoming thinner herself. Carmel has had an extra hole punched a belt to accommodate her shrinking waist and Lynette has instructed Carmel to try it on, then appraisingly comments, "'Good. Yes. The flowers are spectacular, and you are achieving triangulation'" (*Experiment* 210). Her thinness is openly discussed and recognized without condemnation, therefore developing a communal consensus of acceptance; the attitudes toward each other's embodiment become almost entirely promotional, allowing Carmel to experience her mutilation as positive, reinforced by those whom she's closest to.

Though the self-starvation is a means of harmfully rewriting the body, of mutilating it for purposes of the self, the ever-more emaciated body is an inscription of her newfound autonomy, a lesbian autonomy that evolves from partially shedding the former body that was created for her, thus augmenting the original self. Thus the socially stigmatized inscription may be reread without such presumptions, which Penelope Engelbrecht writes about as a "*mutation of* the mutilation" that occurs when "the mutilation no longer constitutes a purely

negative mutilation *per se*" (13). Essentially, she writes the mutilation is not a free-standing, stagnant presence on the body; it is not temporally bound to its origins nor is its meaning, and it can transcend points of creation. Engelbrecht sees the mutation as being tied to how other women recreate each other's bodies, specifically through admiring and appreciating the mutilation, thus rewriting it as a point of connection and new affirmation of self, as in the case of Carmel's hair. The haircut Carmel gives herself is a sudden, unplanned act of changing the body; she cuts it choppily and unevenly without emulating any facsimile of a 'style,' as we know it, then dies it bright, bright red. An eighteen-year-old chopping her hair off is most commonly interpreted as an act of mutilation, a means of altering the body for the purposes similar to cutting and other forms of mutilation, and Carmel experiences satisfaction from creating pain in herself. The haircut and color, then, done in separate acts of sudden reaction, read as acts of mutilation –acts of violence against not only her body but the heteronormative attractiveness of her long hair.

Carmel describes the dyeing process as almost cathartic: "I colored my hair a flaming red. What I had been after was a discreet enhancement of my moth-wing tufts: when I looked in the mirror I was appalled, but secretly gratified" (*Experiment* 172). Her boyfriend responds with disapproval, asking if it was an accident and clearly reading it as a detriment to her appearance, an injury of sorts (*Experiment* 176). The other women of the community, however, express delight with it, applauding it as a transformation: "'It's so *extreme*,' Julianne said. I glowed. It was the first time that – unequivocally – she had praised me"

(*Experiment* 172). The negative implication of the mutilation, then, becomes associated with the standards of beauty outside of the lesbian environment, the same expectations of Carmel's femaleness that were originally inscribed on her body, the same ones that she reacted to in the mutilation. The space of Tonbridge, then, rejects those standards and embraces the new look, the reinscribed Carmel. There occurs also a conquering of the approval of other women over the approval of Niall, though the issue of placing empowerment is convoluted: Niall is physically present in the lesbian environment yet he, his standards and the outer patriarchal environment they represent are relatively powerless within the walls of Tonbridge. His being there presents no violation of the lesbian environment, but rather he enters as an inoculated force. To assume an assertion of supreme power by Carmel or the other women, however, is problematized by the containment of the triumph to the environment, which is itself spatially and temporally small and will inevitably become unavailable to them. The question, then, as it exists in both novels, is whether the effect of the lesbian inscription, the benefits of mutating the mutilation into a positive, survives beyond the lesbian environment? As both novels take the reader to the point in which the environment breaks – the fire of Tonbridge, the exodus of Colette from Carmel's life - without showing the long-term aftermath, there is not textual evidence for permanence. However, the occurrence, perhaps, is more significant than the temporal sustainability of its effect; that the bodies can be transformed with the environments is not undermined by the whether-or-nots of longevity.

The idea that the meaning of the inscription is misread as negative regardless

of how it's written onto the body – the call that superficial, highly socialized western concepts of how to read the body and acts upon the body – is essentially the core of Mantel's writing. She writes as if seeking to extricate the body from the larger, unappreciative culture that will misread its markings as symbols of widespread, common narratives – the blanket term (and implications) of anorexia, the mass produced ideas of obesity, and the general condemn-then-rehabilitate approach to body manipulation – and to relocate it within a private, personal space where it can be reintroduced, understood without immediately applying the deeply ingrained labels society uses to claim, to categorize, the surface.

CONCLUSION

The overall female experience of the body, then, as Mantel writes it, cannot be singularly defined, and shouldn't be; the creation of body is ongoing and the self - the *whole* self - is ever-morphing in ways that can unifying, divisive, fragmenting, and interpersonal. In division and distinction, the body is inevitably othered; the self's culturally-constucted loyalty, in fact adhesion, to the mind prevails. The othered form, whether one's own or that of another (or both), becomes the bear of Delmore Schwartz's poem. In *Beyond Black*, Alison becomes Colette's "heavy bear who sleeps with me, / Howls in [her] sleep for a world of sugar" (Schwartz 1). And so becomes the standard of the othered body, regardless of ownership: it is burden and obligation, the weight of responsibility, and an indicator of female confinement. There can be no love or affection for the body that one doesn't claim or associate with self in some way, thus making its physical pains unfelt; a detachment that creates a psychological antipathy for the welfare of the body that overshadows actual sensation, whether felt or sympathized with. For Colette, she can only care for Alison when she regards her body as her charge, her duty. As the relationship shifts into one of otherness and estrangement, her ability to sympathize dissipates. In *Experiment*, the same shift applies to Carmel and her own body; she becomes numb to its pain in her process of blaming and objectifying it, in treating it as a thing over which she was to assert power and administer punishment. The reintegration, then, of the body with the concept of self is essential to survival for all/both, and thus the only escape from the bear. The fact that western culture perpetuates the dichotomous

approach to mind and body establishes the intense relativity of Mantel's novels to the cultural self and the culturally ostracized, neglected body.

The abstractness of the subject tends to lead toward hypothetical speculation: If the social construction of bodily boundaries - between mind and body, male and female - were to change, what else would follow suit? Indeed, the construction of selfhood is essential to all subsequent construction of reality, as it is defined in relation to the self, therefore restructuring of the self can occur only on an individual basis. Both novels, however, surmount their bears: Carmel ends *Experiment* as a whole, a self reconciled, accepting the failure of its past divisions, and the inevitability of failure in repeating them. After describing a very ceremonial approach to mealtimes, she concludes, "I think of my life, and the lives of the women I knew, and I say, tapping softly, tapping decisively on the dark and swirling node, that is where we went wrong, just there, that's the very place" (*Experiment* 250). After Colette leaves Alison in *Beyond Black*, Alison goes into a traumatic re-experiencing, puncturing layer after layer of past horrors as she plunges backwards through her life in a psychotic reversal of her narrative: "Back and back. There is an interval of darkness, dwindling, suspension of the senses. She neither hears nor sees. The world has no scent or savour, She is a cell, a dot. She diminishes to vanishing point. She is back beyond a dot. She is back to where dots come from. And still she goes back" (*Beyond Black* 402). For Alison, reality is too easily an unbound space, her psychic abilities untying things that would be easier to keep wound up. The creation of boundaries, then, through inflated, exaggerated bodyhood - through *over*-identifying with the body is

necessary; she experiences her body not as a separate, burdensome beast but as an anchoring, tangible self, a bear she can hold onto.

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