

ISSN 2517-2603

The Elizabeth Bowen Review



Volume 1, May 2018

Editors

Nicola Darwood (University of Bedfordshire, UK)
nicola.darwood@beds.ac.uk
Nicholas Turner (Salford University, UK)
drnicholasturner2013@gmail.com

Editorial Board

Aimee Gasston (Birkbeck, University of London, UK)
Ann Rea (University of Pittsburgh, USA)
Michael Waldron (University College Cork, Ireland)
Frances White (University of Chichester, UK)

Advisory Board

Maud Ellmann, (University of Chicago, USA)
Jessica Gildersleeve (University of Southern Queensland, Australia)
Allan Hepburn (McGill University, Canada)
Chris Hopkins (Sheffield Hallam University, UK)
Petra Rau (University of East Anglia, UK)
Patricia Juliana Smith (Hofstra University, USA)
Nicholas Royle (University of Sussex, UK)
Eibhear Walshe (University College Cork, Ireland)

Editorial policy

All submissions are subject to double blind peer review. We welcome submissions on all aspects of Elizabeth Bowen's life and work. Completed essays (6,000 words including bibliography and footnotes) should be submitted by 31st December 2018 for Volume 2 (to be published in May 2019). If you would like to discuss a possible submission, please contact the editors (details above).

The views expressed in the *Review* are those of the contributors, and are not those of the editors.

© the contributors, 2018

Table of Contents

Nicola Darwood & Nick Turner ~ Introduction	4
Lorna Wilkinson ~ “Thousands of avid glittering eyes”: Myths, Fairy-Tales and Intelligence in the Works of Elizabeth Bowen	6
Ian d’Alton ~ ‘No more autumns’ – Elizabeth Bowen and an Anglo-Irish imagery of dying and dead houses	19
Heather Ingman ~ ‘A Living Writer’: Elizabeth Bowen and Katherine Mansfield.....	30
Imola Nagy-Seres ~ The phenomenological body in Elizabeth Bowen’s interwar novels.....	42
Charlotte Hallahan ~ Smoothing the City-space: The Flâneuse in Elizabeth Bowen’s War-stories.....	52
Diana Hirst ~ Shaking the cracked kaleidoscope: Elizabeth Bowen’s use of Futurism and Collage in <i>To the North</i>	63
Paul Binding ~ Afterword	75
Contributors	78
Acknowledgements	80

Nicola Darwood & Nick Turner ~ Introduction

The Elizabeth Bowen Review is a new scholarly journal devoted to the work of one of the twentieth century's greatest writers. In this first issue, and the issues that follow every spring, you will find essays on a range of fiction, stories and other writings by Bowen, using ever new perspectives and discovering previously unconsidered themes and allusions. Bowen is an exciting writer in the twenty-first century, just as much as she was in her lifetime. *The Elizabeth Bowen Review* aims to transmit our enthusiasm to readers and scholars across the world. Our aim is to produce an inclusive journal which welcomes submissions from all those interested in Bowen scholarship, from doctoral students to established scholars.

The journal is a product of the editors' combined enthusiasm for the work of Bowen, which began at an international conference in Warsaw in June 2016 organised by the Interdisciplinary Research Foundation. Our enthusiasm then led to a second international conference at the University of Bedfordshire, and the parallel creation of the Elizabeth Bowen Society, which was officially launched at the conference. The aim of both of these ventures – a second conference is being planned – is to unite enthusiasts for Bowen's diverse work, to keep the writer 'alive'. The journal is thus part of a wider project: not just to enhance scholarship, but also to unite scholars and readers. We have been delighted to be assured that Elizabeth Bowen is being researched and read across the world. We are also delighted by the support which has been given freely by both the editorial board and the advisory board, without whom this journal would not have been possible.

Bowen's literary reputation has not, however, always been secure. In the introduction to her biography, Hermione Lee notes how there was initially a lack of interest in her project; fallow years followed Bowen's death until the mid-1990s. This can be explained in a number of ways: Bowen's apparent antipathy to feminism, which would have made her work unattractive from the 1960s onwards to some; her focus on love, allowing the novels to be seen as 'women's fiction' or even middlebrow; the enormous readerly and scholarly interest in Virginia Woolf, which may have worked against Bowen; and, even though these qualities may be found in Woolf too, Bowen's apparent snobbishness, and her self-conscious and difficult prose that may alienate readers.

Happily, people now see past these issues: the publication of Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle's magisterial *Elizabeth Bowen and the Dissolution of the Novel* in 1995 reinvigorated Bowen criticism. Since then interest has been sustained: an *Elizabeth Bowen Newsletter* that was published in the 1990s; a conference at the University of Sussex in 2009; and an exciting body of criticism and postgraduate dissertations focusing on themes such as trauma, displacement, memory and identity, and reading Bowen in the context of Ireland and War, and modernist studies. Students and scholars continue to discover the depths and timeliness of Bowen.

The essays in this issue are a testament to this timeliness, and to why we should continue reading and considering Bowen's work. Lorna Wilkinson's investigation into the use of the fairy tale as a narrative foundation in Bowen's art reminds us of

both of the importance of the child's point of view in Bowen's work, and of its connection with a wider cultural heritage. The second essay by Ian d'Alton places Bowen's fiction within the context of Ireland, the Anglo-Irish and the Big House, seeing her as literary interpreter of a very personal history alongside other important Anglo-Irish writers. Heather Ingman makes important links between the work of Bowen and Katherine Mansfield, adding to current scholarship on female modernists and their shared themes, reminding us that, distinctive as Bowen is, she was working with a field of experimental women's writing that has often been overlooked. Imola Nagy-Seres' essay on the phenomenology of the body in Bowen's work reminds us of the sheer intelligence at work in the fiction and its complexity, as well as taking Bowen scholarship in a new direction. The penultimate essay, by Charlotte Hallohan, places the short stories in the context of the Second World War and feminism – always a contentious issue with Bowen scholarship – and argues for the importance of the *flâneuse* in this context. Finally, Diana Hirst locates *To the North* within the context of Futurism and the modernist art technique of collage, providing a reading which argues that Bowen was influenced by techniques more usually found in an artist's studio. This volume concludes with an afterword by Paul Binding which provides a fascinating personal insight into his encounters with Elizabeth Bowen and his own engagement with her novels and short stories.

Above all, the work of the scholars in this publication attests to a passion for Bowen's writing: its lyricism and exciting strangeness; its wit and social comedy; its impressionistic view of a fractured world; its elegance and sense of place. In her novels, short stories and travel writing, Elizabeth Bowen demonstrated an originality and mysteriousness that have transcended place and time, with the result that, nearly a century later, fascinating questions remain to be solved.

We hope that this volume will be the first of many, that the issues explored in these essays will add to the body of knowledge about Elizabeth Bowen, her life and her work, and that they stimulate further research and potential contributions to the second volume of *The Elizabeth Bowen Review*.

Nick Turner and Nicola Darwood
May 2017

~~~~~

## Lorna Wilkinson ~ “Thousands of avid glittering eyes”: Myths, Fairy-Tales and Intelligence in the Works of Elizabeth Bowen

In the mid-1940s, Elizabeth Bowen and V.S. Pritchett exchanged a series of pensive letters discussing the nature of art. In one of these letters, Bowen details her complex thoughts on the figure of the artist and her/his role in modern society:

Obviously intelligent people are on the increase: education, I suppose. This sounds supercilious: I do not feel supercilious, but I feel slightly frightened – the intelligent people seem to be closing in on the artist like the rats on the selfish bishop who hoarded corn in the famine time. We all know what happened to the bishop; they picked his bones white. The rats were in the right; at any rate they were the instruments of vengeance. The bishop was in the wrong; he had been unsocial. But really nobody could call – and as far as I know nobody does call – you or me Bishop Hattos: we don't hoard. Whatever comes in goes out again. [...] So I really must get rid of that original rat nightmare, and the idea of that closing-in circle of thousands of avid glittering eyes. (1948: 21)

Bowen's peculiar reference here is to the legend of the Mouse Tower, a German folk-tale in which Hatto II, tenth-century Archbishop of Mainz, hoards corn during a famine and brutally murders the starving peasants who reproach him. His grisly comeuppance is to be besieged by thousands of rats, which chase him to the Mouse Tower in the Rhine and there eat him alive.<sup>1</sup>

The reflective letter seems significant for two reasons. First, it expresses Bowen's sense of artistic threat, the idea of herself and her work being scrutinised by “intelligent” readers with “thousands of avid glittering eyes”. The threat is increasing, Bowen contends, with the prevalence of education, suggesting the academic environment to be damaging to art, with readers' critical gazes encroaching upon the writer's creative store. This gaze evokes in Bowen a feeling of guilt, of being “in the wrong”, as though she may inadvertently “hoard” some creative potential that her work consequently lacks. Second, in an attempt to capture the intensity of her “nightmare”, she oddly reaches for a violent folk-tale, a story of myth and magic, which appears to convey emotions she cannot otherwise articulate; Bowen admits that the notion of herself and Pritchett as “Bishop Hattos” is illogical, but apparently struggles to “get rid of” it.

This article probes connections between art, education and fairy-tales in Bowen's fiction. Bowen, a writer dogged by the label “realism”, will be shown to draw artistic inspiration from a plethora of fantastical narratives, such as Grimms' fairy-tales, Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* and the legend of the Fisher King. I begin by tracing the stories that inspire specific scenes and characters in Bowen's work, before demonstrating that she uses these traditional stories, which enable her to access

---

<sup>1</sup> A full version of this tale can be found in Volume 2 of Joseph Snowe's *The Rhine: Legends, Traditions, and History* (1839: 333–337).

otherwise ineffable feelings, to think through a perceived rift between academia and art. Furthermore, it appears that she deliberately incorporates mythic images into her fiction to underscore a need for more creativity in modern education.

### **“See me as so much gingerbread”: Echoes of fairy-tales**

The longstanding tendency to view Bowen as a realist writer has doubtless been fuelled by her much-recognised debt to Jane Austen, from whom she acknowledges learning “what an art it is to make little things largely felt [in fiction]” (2008a: 230).<sup>2</sup> In recent decades, however, certain critics have begun to consider “realist” too reductive a label for Bowen’s work. For example, Chris Hopkins (2006: 39) and Vike Plock (2012) have argued that her writing blurs realist and modernist techniques, while Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle have gone so far as to suggest that viewing Bowen’s fiction as realism has led to critical misunderstandings of her work (1995: xvi), and Keri Walsh has drawn intriguing parallels between Bowen’s short stories and the twentieth-century surrealist movement (2007).

Indeed, while conceding that Bowen is influenced by Austen’s work, as well as by later and more contemporary writers such as Henry James and E.M. Forster,<sup>3</sup> I posit that the far more magical narratives of myths and fairy-tales are also crucial sources of inspiration to the Anglo-Irish writer: sources that have been significantly neglected in Bowen scholarship. This neglect seems surprising, considering the critical tendency to identify many of Bowen’s short stories as examples of Irish Gothic writing (Denman, 1992: 63–65; Killeen, 2014: 27; McCormack, 1998: 137), a body of fiction recognised as holding resonance with the fairy-tale tradition (Botting, 1996: 10). Certainly, Bowen’s novels and short stories repeatedly borrow from traditional fairy-tale tropes, her characters tapping into universal conditions and themes in a manner that resists the “realist” label.

For instance, the figure of the wicked matriarch, concomitant with fairy-tale, is epitomised in Madame Fisher in *The House in Paris*, a 1935 novel that shows a particular affinity with the traditional tale of “Hansel and Grethel”. While the gingerbread cottage in the popular story attracts lost children for the witch to eat, Madame Fisher’s house in Paris invites in travelling girls over whom she then acquires “terrific power” (Bowen, 1998a: 103). The novel features a pair of child heroes, reminiscent of Hansel and Grethel, in the characters of Leopold and Henrietta; and, as the witch fixates upon Hansel, waiting for him to grow fat enough to eat, so does Madame Fisher display a sinister fascination with Leopold, anticipating his maturing into “the reincarnation of his father” (Wells-Lassagne, 2009: 102). In Grimms’ rendition of the traditional German story, birds are at once maleficent and altruistic: they eat Hansel’s trail of breadcrumbs and lead the children to the witch’s cottage, but a duck aids the siblings’ later escape. Naomi Fisher in *The House in Paris*, nicknamed “Kingfisher” after a river-bird (Bowen, 1998a: 42: 49), has a similarly vacillating narrative role, seeking out young women to bring to her mother’s home and acting as Madame Fisher’s mouthpiece, but ultimately aiding Karen and Max, the novel’s lovers, at her own expense. Indeed,

---

<sup>2</sup> Hermione Lee (1999: 215), Maud Ellmann (2003: 42) and Victoria Glendinning (1993: 31) are just some of the numerous critics who have compared Bowen’s work to Austen’s.

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, Hermione Lee (1999: 21, 58 and 60) and Sunil Kumar Sarker (2007: 1008) for comparisons of Bowen and Forster, and Hermione Lee (1999: 60), Patricia Craig (1986: 53) and John Halperin (1985) for discussion of James’s influence on Bowen.

Naomi is repeatedly likened to a bird in the novel, comparing herself to “a swallow” (19) and being described as “a wounded bird” (113).

Most pertinent to the comparison between texts, however, is the scene in which Leopold and Madame Fisher finally meet. Here, she talks to the boy of the presence of fairy-tales in real life and tells him to “see me as so much gingerbread” (200), likening herself to the object of temptation in “Hansel and Grethel”; as wicked matriarch, Madame Fisher is bait but also nourishment.

This mention of gingerbread appears to be Bowen’s attempt to highlight the novel’s allusion to the fairy-tale. Indeed, she would later speak of a personal attachment to Grimms’ tales in particular, stating: “The 210 [stories] released by the brothers Grimm, I refuse to discuss in scholarly terms. They hold me too close – I like them too well” (2008b: 302). The “Hansel and Grethel” witch also haunts Bowen’s short story “Look at All Those Roses” (1941). Here, the protagonist is drawn to a picturesque cottage described as a “trap baited with beauty” (1999a: 573), inside which dwells Mrs Mather: a sinister, quasi-magical character who has seemingly imprisoned her vapid daughter Josephine. The protagonist instinctively declines food, reinforcing the sense of fairyland enchantment through her fear that “if she eats she [too] may have to stay here forever” (1999a: 578).

Incarnations of the “wicked matriarch” are thus embedded in Bowen’s fiction. In her novels, older women repeatedly adopt maternal roles towards young people unrelated to them, instigating turbulent relationships. Anna and her ward Portia are at odds throughout *The Death of the Heart*, while Eva in *Eva Trout* has viciously turned against her mentor, Iseult, before the start of the narrative; in parallel to this, Eva is later murdered by her adopted son. In *The Hotel*, the middle-aged Mrs Kerr cruelly manipulates the young Sydney Warren, who so admires her. Meanwhile, Ellmann has remarked upon “how many fathers are absent, dead, or simply unaccounted for in Bowen’s fiction” (2003: 3), which is consequently strewn with fatherless girls, including Portia in *The Death of the Heart*, Pauline in *To the North* and Lois Farquar in *The Last September*. These are Bowen’s Cinderellas and Snow Whites, girls with what may be seen as “the characteristically weak or absent father of so many fairy-tales” (Shippey, 2003: 257), a trope holding resonance for Bowen, whose father spent several years in a psychiatric institution following a breakdown in 1905.<sup>4</sup>

Crucially, it seems that Bowen does not consider the fairy-tale genre to be limited to traditional tales, but also recognises modern fairy-tales in the form of longer narrative texts. In both *The Hotel* (Bowen 2003: 172) and her short story “The Visitor” (1999b: 130), characters describe George MacDonald’s 1883 children’s fantasy novel *The Princess and Curdie* as a “fairy tale”, and Bowen also uses this label when speaking of John Ruskin’s novel of 1851, *The King of the Golden River* (2008c: 295 and 296). Two other novels that surely fall into this category are Lewis Carroll’s “Alice” books of 1865 and 1871, echoes of which can be found in Bowen’s fiction. Lee has remarked upon Henrietta in *The House in Paris* being an incarnation of Carroll’s Alice (Lee, 1999a: 81, 82, 96, 97), but I propose that Bowen’s novel *The Heat of the Day* (1948) has an even greater intertextual engagement with Carroll’s

---

<sup>4</sup> The figure of the wicked matriarch is likely a less personal element, for, although Bowen did have a stepmother following her mother’s death, she was purportedly “very fond” of her (Doody, 2009: 6).

work, for, just as Madame Fisher's mention of fairy-tales and gingerbread hints at *The House in Paris's* debt to "Hansel and Grethel", so does *The Heat of the Day's* reference to "Cheshire cats, leaving grins behind them" (Bowen 1998a: 122) allude to this novel's dependence on Carroll's fictional worlds.

The offhand reference to "Cheshire cats" occurs during a scene between Roderick, a young man keen to uncover his family's past, and Cousin Nettie, a peripheral character who may be viewed as an incarnation of the Cheshire Cat. Believed mad, Nettie is confined to Wistaria Lodge, an institution she describes as being "Too far [from anywhere] for anyone to come" (Bowen, 1998c: 206). In this scene, she hosts a tea-party reminiscent of the one in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, an allusion furthered by her embroidering a purple rose throughout the scene, chiming with the rose-painting scene in *Alice's Adventures* (Carroll, 1993: 51), and by Wistaria Lodge's being a psychiatric institution while, in Carroll's *Wonderland*, the Cheshire Cat exclaims: "'we're all mad here'" (1993: 41). As the Cheshire Cat coolly aids Alice's navigation of *Wonderland*, Nettie imparts crucial information that helps Roderick make sense of his family's past. Both she and Carroll's character are mystical helpers who occupy liminal ground between madness and sanity; and, as the Cat physically fades into invisibility, Nettie fades in and out of her family's consciousness, cyclically forgotten and remembered.

Similarities with Carroll's books may be observed from the very first pages of *The Heat of the Day*. In the first scene of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Alice observes the agitated White Rabbit checking his watch in a field, before following him down the rabbit-hole to *Wonderland* (Carroll, 1993: 2). *The Heat of the Day*, meanwhile, opens with Harrison being observed in a park, noticeably troubled and repeatedly checking his wristwatch (Bowen, 1998c: 10 and 20); he then proceeds to Stella's apartment, where he makes a shocking claim, the suggestion that her lover, Robert, is a Nazi spy, which upturns Stella's reality and figuratively leads her down the rabbit-hole to a world where nothing is as it seemed: a disturbed, emotional wonderland that is reflected in the physical instability of the London Blitz. Stella anticipates Harrison's arrival here by watching the door of her room through a mirror (24), paralleling the way in which, at the start of Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass*, Alice discovers the doorway to the *Looking-Glass* world – a similarly unstable universe – in a mirror (Carroll, 1994: 4).

Carroll's work is seemingly important to Bowen's ideas on fiction. When she died in 1973, she was working on a collection of memories, fictions and ideas, published posthumously in 1975, entitled *Pictures and Conversations*. The title of the work comes from a passage early in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*: "once or twice [Alice] had peeped into the book her sister was reading, but it had no pictures or conversations in it, 'and what is the use of a book,' thought Alice, 'without pictures or conversations?'" (Carroll, 1993: 1). Bowen's rich descriptions and focus on realistic dialogue mean that her fictions are similarly comprised of pictures and conversations; perhaps her title reflects how, to Bowen as to Alice, the parts of the story that seem most extraneous and detachable, the "pictures and conversations", are in fact the key source of its value. It is worth noting that, a year before *The Heat of the Day* was published in 1948, photography historian Helmut Gernsheim discovered evidence of Carroll's long-forgotten photography hobby in a London antique shop. Although these findings were not published until 1949, they nevertheless draw a timely parallel with Bowen's choice of allusions. Indeed, they

were probably a talking-point in artistic circles during the time when Bowen was living in London and writing the novel.

### **The Fisher King**

Bowen certainly appears to be influenced by the interests of contemporary artists in her turning to one particular folk-tale: that of the Fisher King, a fertility icon and guardian of the Holy Grail in Arthurian legend. The Fisher King's first literary appearance, in Chrétien de Troyes's twelfth-century work *Perceval*, presents him as an omnipresent guide, shape-shifting between roles of fisherman and king. Wolfram von Eschenbach's thirteenth-century poem *Parzival* rebirths him as a "Grail King" named Anfortas, maimed in punishment for his weakness for women. The Fisher King was introduced to the twentieth century by Jessie Weston, whose *From Ritual to Romance* (1920) identifies his connection to fertility (Weston, 2005: 60), illustrating that the king's maiming in the medieval texts led to the land becoming infertile. Two years after the publication of Weston's book, T.S. Eliot famously appropriated the image of the Fisher King as a fertility god in *The Waste Land*, and the figure's appearance in Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) and C.S. Lewis's *That Hideous Strength* (1945) have also been critically noted.<sup>5</sup> Literary circles of the first half of the twentieth century were thus aware of the Fisher King legend; however, nothing has yet been written on the multiple allusions to the Fisher King in Bowen's works.

Bowen's earliest, and most evident, use of the Fisher King appears in *The House in Paris*. Bowen's portrayal of Madame Fisher and her daughter, Naomi Fisher, contains strong allusions to this figure, not least through their surname. Jean Radford has noted that the fictitious street in which Madame Fisher's house stands, the "Rue Sylvestre Bonnard", has been named after a character in Anatole France's 1881 novel *Le Crime de Sylvestre Bonnard* (Radford, 1999: 40); in France's novel, Sylvestre is devoted to researching the Golden Legend, a medieval collection of hagiographies that has since been linked to the tale of the Fisher King by Giles Morgan (2006: 64). While the street name is not an explicit reference to the Fisher King, it suggests that Bowen is thinking about figures from medieval legends. Perhaps a more obvious link between Madame Fisher and the Grail King is the fact that, while the former lies ill and confined to her bedroom, the guardian of girls travelling far from home, the Fisher King in von Eschenbach's version of the tale lies wounded in his castle, guarding the Holy Grail. Ellmann (2003: 119) and Wells-Lassagne (2009: 102) have suggested that Madame Fisher engineers Max's affair with Karen in the novel; in which case, such a contrivance might be said to reflect the Fisher King's tricking Lancelot into bed with Elaine in the Lancelot-Grail cycle (see Lacy, 1992–1996). Meanwhile, Naomi seems drawn from the Arthurian figure's more altruistic aspects: her nickname, "Kingfisher" (42), suggests a play on "Fisher King", and, like the king in Chrétien de Troyes's poem, she guides the protagonists in their quest, selflessly helping Max and Karen to be together despite her own love for and engagement to Max. Her being compared to a "wounded bird", noted earlier in this article, in particular emphasises her connection to the wounded Fisher King.

---

<sup>5</sup> Jeffrey Hart has claimed that Hemingway's protagonist Jake Barnes is probably inspired by Eliot's Fisher King (1978: 560), while in Lewis's novel the character Elwin Ransom is repeatedly called "Mr Fisher King".

### **Patriarchy and societal sterility: Why Bowen needs fairy-tales**

So far, this article has traced echoes of myth and fairy-tale in Bowen's fiction; however, the Fisher King may shed light on what exactly she tries to achieve through these allusions. Like the story of the Mouse Tower, referenced in Bowen's letter to Pritchett, the Fisher King legends centre upon themes of infertility, maiming and physical restriction. Madame Fisher and Naomi, both attached to the image of the wounded king, represent polarised negative stereotypes of women: the cruel, lascivious widow and the downtrodden spinster. As the Fisher King tales call for the healing of body and land, then, Bowen's mythical allusion may highlight a different type of wound: one caused by the societal roles imposed upon women.

This idea can be expounded by returning to Cousin Nettie in *The Heat of the Day*. Recounting her life as a young bride at Mount Morris, Nettie tells Roderick:

'what [Francis] had wanted me to be was his wife; I tried this, that and the other, till the result was that I fell into such a terrible melancholy that I only had to think of anything for *it* to go wrong, too. Nature hated us; that was a most dangerous position to build a house in – once the fields noticed me with him, the harvests began failing; so I took to going nowhere but up and down stairs, till I met with my own ghost'. (Bowen 1998a: 217)

Nettie's belief that her actions and emotions magically influenced the land's fertility certainly echoes the Fisher King stories, and her words subtly critique the perception of marriage and motherhood as "natural" ideals for a woman. Nettie's childlessness is implicit in the description of wifely duties and withering harvests: by failing to have a child, she has, it seems, gone against nature itself. This notion of perverting nature is further reflected in the purple – and thus unnatural – rose Nettie embroiders. She expresses a sense of being watched by her husband's land – "the fields noticed me" – and of having "nowhere" to go. Life at Mount Morris, a house entailed upon the patriarchal line, restricts Nettie until she encounters her "own ghost", which can be seen as symbolic of both her cyclical torment and the split between herself and the wife she is expected to be.

The legendary king thus seems to provide Bowen with a way to ponder restrictions placed upon women; and yet, the Fisher King imagery is not limited to Bowen's female characters. In *The Heat of the Day*, the accused spy, Robert, is scarred by an old war wound, while Harrison, his shadowy counterpart, is rather peculiarly asked if he fishes (Bowen, 1998c: 77). Both these characters suffer from the pressure of the patriarchal gaze: it is suggested in the novel that Robert's desire to spy stems from a childhood spent under cruel paternal scrutiny (186), and he is eventually driven to his death by Harrison's authoritarian observation. Upon Robert's death, Harrison disappears for a while before returning to adopt Robert's narrative role, revealing that his first name is also Robert and indicating that he will become Stella's new lover. It is intimated that Robert has somehow been reborn in Harrison, much as, in Weston's study, the Fisher King's ritualistic death and rebirth ensured the rotation of the seasons. This uncanny replacement of Robert with Harrison alludes to the immunity of patriarchy; while Cousin Nettie is socially ostracised for her childlessness, frozen in what Harriet S. Chessman has pronounced "a static and nonsignificant world" (1983: 72), without descendants, Robert and Harrison, both also childless, are guaranteed the security of a different form of succession: the

continuation of male power. However, Robert's association with the wounded Fisher King taints the patriarchal order with an implication of stasis; this, Bowen seems to suggest, is an artificial type of fertility, unnatural and stagnant. Both Nettie and Robert, women and men, suffer under a male-led social gaze, and it seems that, by including images of the Fisher King, maimed and sterile, Bowen underscores the downfalls of a society in which men are given dominance.

It is notable that Bowen is not typically viewed as a feminist writer. On the contrary, she explicitly stated, "I am not, and never shall be, a feminist" (Bowen, 2008d: 378), and spoke of her exasperation with "What must inevitably be called Virginia Woolf's feminism" (Bowen, 1950: 91); her novels have even been regarded as "hostile to feminism" (Joannou, 1995: 130). However, while eschewing the notion of "feminism", Bowen appears to thread the idea of female restriction into her fiction through the use of the Fisher King. Indeed, she immediately moderates her declaration never to be a feminist by arguing, in the same essay, that a female "viewpoint" is indispensable to the public sphere (2008d: 378). Thus, as she reaches for the tale of Bishop Hatto to express a sense of threat that she cannot rationalise, Bowen may use the Fisher King to express a discomfort towards androcentrism that is too innate to be recognised as "feminism". Discussing traditional stories such as fairy-tales, Bowen proposes that the tales she read as a child hold all the inaccessible secrets to her subconscious mind: "If I *could* read my way back, analytically, through the books of my childhood, the clues to everything could be found" (1999c: 51). The interpolation of these stories in her fiction perhaps allows her to express primal feelings that cannot be consciously scrutinised, much as, she insists, Grimms' tales cannot possibly be discussed "in scholarly terms".<sup>6</sup>

### **Art versus education**

But feminism does not appear to be the ultimate impetus behind Bowen's use of fairy-tales. I wish to suggest that Bowen's notion of fairy-tales and latent feelings being united against scholarly analysis reflects a sense of discord between academia and emotion, which, for her, loosely extends to a rift between male and female modes of understanding. This article began with Bowen's letter to Pritchett, in which she writes of a clash between artists and "intelligent people". The cold, critical gaze of scholars is, it appears, at odds with the instinctive form of understanding required for art. That Bowen held this opinion is evinced in many of her writings; she discusses there being a distinction between "the imaginatively creative" and "the merely cerebrally inventive" author, holding in greater esteem those who create their own organic literary style than those who academically copy existing narrative formulas (1962: 206). Bowen herself appears to rely on intuition rather than intelligence when writing fiction, telling Pritchett: "If I wrote less – I don't mean quantitatively, but with less intensity – I might think more; if I thought more, I might write less". (Bowen, 1948: 20). Angus Wilson's conviction that Bowen "was never the slave of the academic world as Virginia Woolf [...] too often was" (1999: x) further underscores the organic, sensuous quality of her writing. In contrast, Bowen criticises Aldous Huxley's development of character in his works: "in a great glare of

---

<sup>6</sup> This refusal to discuss fairy-tales "in scholarly terms" may also intimate why she did not speak of their influence on her writing in the same way that she acknowledged her debt to writers such as Forster or Austen: the traditional stories held her "too close" and should thus be latently incorporated into her fiction without being consciously addressed.

intellectual hilarity his characters dangle rather too jerkily” (1950: 146). Huxley’s self-consciously clever writing, it seems, curtails the naturalness of his creations. As suggested earlier, fairy-tales for Bowen stand for something deeply unconscious and emotional, and cannot be accessed by academic jargon; in this sense, introducing echoes of fairy-tales into her fiction may be a personal way of protecting her work against the efforts of critics.

Continuing from this, parallels can be drawn between the glittering eyes of Bowen’s “intelligent” literary critics and the threat of the authoritarian male gaze, which leads to Nettie’s exclusion and to the eventual tragedy of *The Heat of the Day*. Here, Harrison’s cold omniscience, his position as an “intelligence” officer with unlimited access to factual information, indicates a distance between male knowledge and the intuitive female understanding and creativity we have seen displayed by Nettie. Similarly, following a visit to Germany in 1954, Bowen condemns the German university as an:

intellectual-professional forcing house. No one goes there who is not thought likely to stay the course in an out-and-out cerebral career. And this seemed to me to be bearing hard, in particular, upon the young women. For a woman in her young days, life should be opening up, not narrowing down. (2008e: 95)

There is a sense here of Bowen regarding modern intellectual discourse as somewhat male-centred, cerebral rather than creative and eclipsing or “narrowing down” the potential of the female voice: a notion perhaps compounded by her witnessing what Anna Bogen terms “the elitist male circles of high modernism” (2016: 31).

These ideas appear to be nascent in Bowen long before the 1950s, however. From 1914 until 1917, she attended Downe House, a boarding school in Berkshire that seems to have been strikingly inhospitable to emotion; indeed, a place where, according to Ellmann, Bowen was taught “how not to exhibit feeling” (2003: 30). Reflecting on her schooling, Bowen describes how Downe House’s headmistress, Olive Willis, went so far as to inform the pupils that “it did not matter if [they] were happy so long as [they] were good” (1999d: 16); inner feelings were not considered worthy of attention, so any “serious or emotional talks” on passionate topics such as “art, Roman Catholicism, [or] suicide” had to be conducted secretly in the passageways at night (1999d: 15). At school, Bowen recalls, “the greatest crime [...] was silliness” (2010a: 218), and “emotion [had to be...] banked up in the holidays” (1999d: 17), as though inaccessible during the school term. Stoicism was the favoured attitude, and Bowen ostensibly coped well with the “prosaic” atmosphere, describing herself as “insensitive” and a “toughish, thick child” (1999d: 20). While Bowen speaks fondly of her time at this school, the sense of there being a discrepancy between the sterility of academic learning and the emotional sensitivity required to experience art seems to have lingered beyond childhood and troubled her as an adult, pervading her fiction.

In endeavouring to explore this dichotomy, Bowen arguably attaches traits of emotion and sensuality to certain liminal female characters in her fiction, who struggle both in their academic situation and in their navigation of the male world, and who are often described using fairy-tale or mythical imagery. In *The Death of the Heart*, Lilian is a sensitive character ostracized by academic institutions. A girl in her teens, she belongs “to a junior branch of an emotional society, in which there is

always a crisis due” (Bowen, 1998b: 59). Her proclivity for strong emotions repeatedly interrupts her schooling: she has “had to be taken away from her boarding school because of falling in love with the cello mistress, which had made her quite unable to eat” (51), and, later, the novel’s young protagonist, Portia, records in her diary that “Lilian was bilious in lessons and had to go out, she says when she has feelings it makes her bilious” (110). That Lilian’s passions lead to her literal expulsion from the academic environment highlights the clash Bowen perceives between emotion and cerebral intelligence. A “removed and mysterious” figure (51) who is likened to the “Lily Maid” from Arthurian legend (51),<sup>7</sup> Lilian is intuitive, feels communion with other characters and seems to have a primal talent for healing, as seen when, comforting Portia in a moment of crisis, her touch sends a “sedative animal feeling” up Portia’s arm (268).

Another of Bowen’s narratives that connects school with the repression of female emotion is her short story “The Apple Tree”. In this tale, nineteen-year-old Myra is traumatised by the memory of a pupil’s suicide at her boarding school when she was twelve. Describing the experience, Myra explains: “I don’t think we [pupils] knew we were unhappy; we never spoke of that; we should have felt ashamed” (Bowen, 1999e: 521), emphasising the stigma associated with emotion. She adds that “From being [at school] so much, we began to feel that this was the world” (521) and “there seemed to be no other world outside the school” (522), hinting that the female pupil, Doria, was literally unable to thrive in a world limited to the academic sphere. Myra, having repressed the emotion triggered by this experience, has been left a “mannerless, sexless child, the dim something between a mouse and an Undine, this wraith not considerable as a mother of sons, this cold little shadow” (515). Her stifling school experience has instigated her loss of female identity and of fertility, and she is likened to an “Undine”, a fairy-like creature and, perhaps more pertinently, the focus of Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué’s 1811 German fairy-tale novella; again, Bowen reaches for fairy-tale images to suggest a lack of space for women and emotion in the academic sphere. In the traditional German story, the Undine is a water spirit who marries a knight in order to gain his soul; Myra’s traumatic childhood experience has comparably left her feeling empty, and her midnight encounters with Lancelot, a character named after another knight, augment her association with the original tale. The story is titled “The Apple Tree” due to Doria’s committing suicide at the apple tree in the school grounds, conjuring a parallel with the title of Bowen’s essay on her time spent at Downe House, “The Mulberry Tree”. Bowen may therefore be implying that the malady at Doria and Myra’s school, the stifling environment without scope for feeling, is a universal condition found in girls’ schools of the time.

“The Apple Tree” was first published in 1934; Bowen’s final novel, *Eva Trout* (1968), shows her still to be grappling with themes of art, emotion and academia more than three decades later. In this novel, we discover that Eva’s classmate, “a fairylike little near-albino who for some reason had been christened Elsinore” (1999f: 52), attempted suicide when they were at school. When Eva later encounters her as an adult, Elsinore is “ethereal” and “like ectoplasm” (132), with “frosted lips” (141) as though dead; her appearance resembles a creature from a fairy-tale and her name elicits images of Shakespeare’s haunted castle in *Hamlet*, marking her as one of Bowen’s many liminal, displaced women. As Doria’s suicide in “The Apple Tree” is

---

<sup>7</sup> According to legend, the Lily Maid is the tragic Elaine, who dies of heartbreak.

prompted by Myra's ending their friendship, so was Elsinore's suicide attempt triggered by her separation from Eva, whom she loved. In both these instances, death has been favoured over the experience of emotion; indeed, to feel something within an academic environment seems impossible.

Meanwhile, Eva's English teacher, Iseult, named after a figure from Arthurian legend, enacts a failed attempt to reconcile art with education. Early in her career, Iseult is simultaneously involved in education and is "a young artist" (Bowen, 1999f: 61); she is portrayed as a passionate character who frames her love for her husband through images of flowers and nature: "She never foresaw their marriage, its days and nights, other than as embowered by dazzling acres, blossom a snowy blaze and with honeyed stamens" (22). Later, however, Iseult rejects Eva, her former student, and claims to have lost interest in teaching (226); she also fails to write her book (228), leaves her husband and is declared by another character to have undergone an "emotional hysterectomy" (226). Her attempts to combine her passionate nature with a career in pedagogy have resulted in her becoming disconnected from both. At the end of the novel, Iseult's reconciliation with her husband suggests her to have chosen art and emotion over education, a choice reified by the death of Eva, who was a symbol of Iseult's academic career.

In her early days, Iseult is described as a "D.H. Lawrence reader", and Bowen's ideas about art and intelligence seemingly hold an affinity with those of Lawrence, whose famous novel, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, depicts a clash between the sterile intellectualism of the modern world and a natural form of understanding concomitant with fertility. Lawrence elucidates his belief in a distance between academia and emotion in his essay "The Novel and the Feelings", in which he claims that "we wear our education just as externally as we wear our boots [while ...] in some other part of my anatomy, the dark continent of my self, I have a whole stormy chaos of 'feelings'" (1985: 202). Speaking of Lawrence on the BBC Home Service, Bowen contends that his "ideas have such force and luminousness that they come through [...] and fling themselves at your mind" (2010b: 250), and, in an essay, indicates Lawrence to be at odds with modern academia: "who cares now that Lawrence was an anti-intellectual? The intellectuals during the decade and a half of Lawrence's eclipse, have had time to prove themselves; but have they taken us very far?" (1950: 159). She named her short story "Women in Love" after his novel of 1920.

Another of Bowen's early short stories, "Daffodils", involves an English teacher despairing over her pupils' regurgitating her teaching without displaying true understanding or original ideas of their own, being unable to realise the beauty of Wordsworth's daffodils, rather like Bowen's own aforementioned distinction between "the imaginatively creative [...] and] the merely cerebrally inventive writer". In contrast, in *Eva Trout*, the schoolgirl Eva expresses a desire to see daffodils and a belief in their existence despite never having witnessed them (Bowen, 1999f: 54), an interest marking her as the sort of imaginative character antithetical to academic learning. A similar fusion of flowers, emotion and academia is found in Lawrence's *Women in Love*; here, we encounter a scene where the teacher Ursula's botany lesson, in which the pupils are studying flowers, is interrupted by Birkin, with whom she is in love. He is soon joined by his lover, Hermione. The trio's dialogue focusses on the beauty of the flowers but is tainted by the women's strong feelings for Birkin (Lawrence, 1982: 87), so that flowers are substituted for emotion within an academic

environment. Arguably, the “luminousness” of Lawrence’s conceptualisation of the sensuous and the intellectual help Bowen reify her own ideas; as illustrated, there certainly seems to be an overlap between the two writers’ opinions on the topic.

Bowen’s sense of a rift between art and academia would surely be complicated by her involvement in both. Her husband, Alan Cameron, was Secretary for Education in Oxford, while she herself taught at Vassar College in America in the 1960s. Furthermore, many of her essays, book reviews and radio interviews must be classified as literary criticism; indeed, Allan Hepburn has recently published a collection of her prolific writings on literature (2016). Like Cousin Nettie encountering her “own ghost” on the stairs, then, Bowen seems to enact a form of duality, of being both the watcher and the watched – or the rat and Bishop Hatto. This likely compounds her feeling of unease and her wish to reconcile art and intelligence, instinct and analysis. Myth/fairy-tale represent the primal aspect of the human that rejects the rational; and yet, as Bowen notes, the fairy-tale genre adheres to its own self-contained “primitive, rigid laws” (2008f: 294). Simultaneously obstreperous and regimented, conflated with memories of childhood emotion while also depicting scenes of violence, coldness and stoicism, traditional stories provided Bowen with a way to capture and potentially resolve her anguish over the art–intelligence dissonance.

### **In conclusion**

Bowen, far from being a “realist” writer, draws from a plethora of fantastical narratives, ranging from Grimms’ fairy-tales to Arthurian legend to modern children’s novels. James Clements has argued that, rather than regressing to nineteenth-century realism, mid-twentieth-century British novelists instead sought to integrate a sense of “mysticism” and amorphism into their works, wishing “to return to what they considered to be the increasingly interior novel to the world, but not to a dry world of empirical facts and events; instead, they sought to unveil a world of inherent moral value” (2012: 3). Bowen’s fiction, which dates from slightly earlier than the texts studied by Clements, likewise unsettles labels such as “realism” or “experimentalism” through its expansive interweaving of magic and mundanity, of inner and exterior worlds. Though uniquely complex, the characters in Bowen’s writing are designed to tap into the realm of universals through their allusions to tropes and myths. Bowen states that characters encountered in her childhood reading provided her with “prototypes under which, for evermore, to assemble all living people” (1999c: 51). She also commends Eudora Welty’s ability to make characters “at once their own and universal” (1962: 153), and announces that “the [most] enduring novels treat of subjects which are rarely unique” (1962: 155), suggesting that the key to successful fiction-writing is to take a universal theme and interpret it in an original manner. Traditional tropes are thus important to Bowen throughout her *oeuvre*, indicating that, in order to better understand the writer’s motivation and style, we need to look beyond the supposed “realism” of her novels or the “Gothic” inheritance of her short stories.

Bowen does not reach for myth and fairy-tale simply to enhance a story. Rather, she uses them to express an area of perceived conflict that resonates powerfully with her: traditional stories enable her to flag up a wound in modern education and society, to think over innate anxieties. By looking at a broader range of literary influences, new light can be shed on the preoccupations of Bowen and, potentially, of other writers in

the early- to mid-twentieth century. In Bowen's case, her debt to fairy-tales exposes her sense of there being a clash between creativity and academia, which is connected, but not restricted, to a rift between female and male modes of understanding. By exploring the fairy-tale allusions in her fiction, then, we can begin to understand the threat of those "thousands of avid glittering eyes".

## Bibliography

- Bennett, A. and Royle, N. (1995). *Elizabeth Bowen and the Dissolution of the Novel*. London: Macmillan.
- Bogen, A. (2016). *Women's University Fiction, 1880–1945*. Oxford, UK: Routledge.
- Botting, F. (1996). *Gothic*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. London: Routledge.
- Bowen, E. (2010a). 'Downe House Scrap-Book 1907–1957'. In: A. Hepburn, ed., *Listening In: Broadcasts, Speeches, and Interviews by Elizabeth Bowen*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 215–219.
- (2010b). 'The Living Image –1'. In: A. Hepburn, ed., *Listening In: Broadcasts, Speeches, and Interviews by Elizabeth Bowen*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 243–255.
- (2008a). 'What Jane Austen Means to Me'. In: Hepburn (2008), 225–230.
- (2008b). 'Enchanted Centenary of the Brothers Grimm'. In: Hepburn (2008), 297–305.
- (2008c). 'Introduction to *The King of the Golden River*, by John Ruskin'. In: Hepburn (2008), 295–296.
- (2008d). 'Woman's Place in the Affairs of Man'. In: Hepburn (2008), 377–379.
- (2008e). 'Without Coffee, Cigarettes, or Feeling'. In: Hepburn (2008), 92–100.
- (2008f). 'Comeback of Goldilocks et al'. In: Hepburn (2008), 290–294.
- (2003). *The Hotel*, new ed. London: Vintage.
- (1999a). 'Look at All Those Roses'. In: Lee (1999b), 571–582.
- (1999b). 'The Visitor'. In: Lee (1999b), 128–141.
- (1999c). 'Out of a Book'. In: H. Lee, ed., *The Mulberry Tree: Writings of Elizabeth Bowen*, new ed. London: Vintage, 48–53.
- (1999d). 'The Mulberry Tree'. In: H. Lee, ed., *The Mulberry Tree: Writings of Elizabeth Bowen*, new ed. London: Vintage, 13–21.
- (1999e). 'The Apple Tree'. In: Lee (1999b), 513–525.
- (1999f). *Eva Trout, or Changing Scenes*, new ed. London: Vintage.
- (1999g). 'Daffodils'. In: Lee (1999b), 10–18.
- (1998a). *The House in Paris*, new ed. London: Vintage.
- (1998b). *The Death of the Heart*, new ed. London: Vintage.
- (1998c). *The Heat of the Day*, new ed. London: Vintage.
- (1974). *Pictures and Conversations*. London: Alfred A. Knopf.
- (1962). *Afterthought: Pieces About Writing*. London: Longmans, Green & Co.
- (1950). *Collected Impressions*. London: Longmans, Green & Co.
- (1948). 'Letter to V.S. Pritchett'. In: V.S. Pritchett, ed., *Why Do I Write? An Exchange of Views between Elizabeth Bowen, Graham Greene, and V. S. Pritchett*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. London: Percival Marshall, 20–26.
- Carroll, L. (1994). *Through the Looking-Glass*, new ed. London: Penguin.
- (1993). *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, new ed. Dover, UK: Dover Publications.

- Chessman, H.S. (1983). 'Women and Language in the Fiction of Elizabeth Bowen'. *Twentieth-Century Literature*, [online] Volume 29(1), 69–85. Available at: [www.jstor.org.lib.exeter.ac.uk/stable/441144](http://www.jstor.org.lib.exeter.ac.uk/stable/441144) [Accessed 13 Dec. 2013].
- Clements, James. (2012). *Mysticism and the Mid-Century Novel*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Craig, P. (1986). *Elizabeth Bowen*. London: Penguin.
- Denman, P. (1992). 'Ghosts in Anglo-Irish Literature'. In: R. Welch, ed., *Irish Writers and Religion*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Savage, MD: Barnes & Noble, 62–74.
- Doody, N. (2009). 'Elizabeth Bowen: A Short Biography'. In E. Walshe, ed., *Elizabeth Bowen*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Newbridge: Irish Academic Press, 1–11.
- Eliot, T.S. (1972). *The Waste Land and Other Poems*, new ed. London: Faber & Faber, 21–46.
- Ellmann, M. (2003). *Elizabeth Bowen: The Shadow Across the Page*. Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press.
- von Eschenbach, W. (13<sup>th</sup> century). *Parzival*. Translated and edited by A.T. Hatto, 1980. London: Penguin.
- Glendinning, V. (1993). *Elizabeth Bowen: Portrait of a Writer*, new ed. London: Phoenix.
- Grimm, J. and Grimm, W. (2004). 'Hansel and Grethel'. In: *Grimms' Fairy Tales*, new ed. London: Collector's Library.
- Halperin, J. (1985). 'Elizabeth Bowen and Henry James'. *The Henry James Review*, [online] Volume 7(1), 45–47. Available at: [www.muse.jhu.edu/article/364865/pdf](http://www.muse.jhu.edu/article/364865/pdf) [Accessed 2 Feb. 2017].
- Hart, J. (1978). 'The Sun Also Rises: A Revaluation'. *The Sewanee River*, [online] Volume 86(4), 557–562. Available at: [www.jstor.org/stable/27543481](http://www.jstor.org/stable/27543481) [Accessed 4 June 2014].
- Hemingway, E. (2004). *Fiesta: The Sun Also Rises*, new ed. London: Arrow Books.
- Hepburn, A. ed. (2016). *The Weight of a World of Feeling: Reviews and Essays by Elizabeth Bowen*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- ed. (2008). *People, Places, Things: Essays by Elizabeth Bowen*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press.
- Hopkins, C. (2006). *English Fiction in the 1930s: Language, Genre, History*. London: Continuum.
- Joannou, M. (1995). *"Ladies, Please Don't Smash These Windows": Women's Writing, Feminist Consciousness and Social Change 1918–38*. Oxford, UK: Berg Publishers.
- Killeen, J. (2014). *The Emergence of Irish Gothic Fiction: Histories, Origins, Theories*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press.
- Lacy, N.J., ed. (1992–1996). *Lancelot-Grail: The Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation*. Translated by C.J. Chase. Oxford, UK: Garland Publishing.
- Lawrence, D.H. (2007). *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, new ed. Ware, UK: Wordsworth Editions Ltd.
- (1985). 'The Novel and the Feelings'. In: B. Steel, ed., *Study of Thomas Hardy and Other Essays*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 199–206.
- (1982). *Women in Love*, new ed. London: Penguin.
- Lee, H. (1999a). *Elizabeth Bowen*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London: Vintage.
- ed. (1999b). *Elizabeth Bowen: Collected Stories*, new ed. London: Vintage
- Lewis, C.S. (1996). *That Hideous Strength*, new ed. New York: Scribner.
- McCormack, W.J. (1998). 'Irish Gothic'. In: M. Mulvey-Roberts, ed., *The Handbook to Gothic Literature*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. New York: New York University Press, 135–149.

- Morgan, G. (2006). *St George*. Harpenden, UK: Pocket Essentials.
- Plock, V. (2012). 'Sartorial Connections: Fashion, Clothes, and Character in Elizabeth Bowen's *To The North*'. *Modernism/Modernity*, [online] Volume 19(2), 287–302. Available at: [www.muse.jhu.edu/article/480188](http://www.muse.jhu.edu/article/480188) [Accessed 3 Jan. 2017].
- Radford, J. (1999). 'Late Modernism and the Politics of History'. In: M. Joannou, ed., *Women Writers of the 1930s: Gender, Politics, and History*. Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 33–45.
- Sarker, S.K. (2007). *A Companion to E.M. Forster*, vol. 3. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers.
- Shippey, T. (2003). 'Rewriting the Core: Transformations of the Fairy Tale in Contemporary Writing'. In: H.R.E. Davidson and A. Chaudhri, eds., *A Companion to the Fairy Tale*. Woodbridge, UK: D.S. Brewer, 253–274.
- Snowe, J. (1839). *The Rhine: Legends, Traditions, History, from Cologne to Mainz*, vol. 2. F.C. Westley.
- de Troyes, C. (12<sup>th</sup> century). *Perceval, or, The Story of the Grail*. Translated by Ruth Harwood Cline, 1985. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press.
- Walsh, K. (2007). 'Elizabeth Bowen, Surrealist'. *Éire Ireland*, [online] Volume 42(3–4), 126–147. Available at: <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/224842> [Accessed 17 February 2018].
- Wells-Lassagne, S. (2009). "She-ward bound": Elizabeth Bowen as a Sensationalist Writer'. In: S. Osborn, ed., *Elizabeth Bowen: New Critical Perspectives*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Cork: Cork University Press, 96–112.
- Weston, J.L. (2005). *From Ritual to Romance*, new ed. New York: Cosimo.
- Wilson, A. (1999). 'Introduction'. In: Lee (1999b), ix–xiv.

~~~~~

Ian d'Alton ~ 'No more autumns' – Elizabeth Bowen and an Anglo-Irish imagery of dying and dead houses

Bowen's Big House: a life and a limb

Hermione Lee's 1981 literary biography of Elizabeth Bowen has two entries in its index for Bowen's Court: one in plain typeface, one in italics.¹ This encapsulates how this building has come to be seen. The house had its own existence as a sturdy reality in the landscape, which is the plain typeface entry. But it also possesses an italic, imaginative, historical and literary significance as the eponymous 'biography' of the house and its inhabitants, originally published in 1942. Bowen's Court the house is frequently cited as an exemplar in the history of the Big House in Ireland: not because of any innate architectural merit or the political and economic importance of its inhabitants, but rather because historians and writers find that they are seduced by the descriptive power, style and literary quality wielded by Elizabeth Bowen in the book *Bowen's Court*. Photographs of the house, which are relatively few anyway, are

1 H. Lee, *Elizabeth Bowen* (London: Vintage, 1999), 260.

almost redundant. With an artist's eye, Bowen places the house in its geographic setting: a limestone area of south-west Ireland, a land of middling fertility, with many rivers and streams and no lakes, and framed by, to the north, the imposing Galtee Mountains and Ballyhoura Hills. Interior life seems to have trumped a spectacular landscape: in *Bowen's Court*, the author contrasted '...the intense centripetal life' of these Anglo-Irish houses with the '...plastic emptiness' of the country...' around it (Bowen, 1984: 14, 20).

Inheriting the house on the death of her father in 1930, the England-based Bowen and her husband, Alan Cameron, stayed there sporadically until he retired in 1952, when they returned to live there for what they thought would be a long time. Cameron, however, died that year. Bowen stayed on, stacking up financial problems as a generous hostess, trying to keep the money coming in by frantic writing. Something had to give: eventually, the house had to go. Attempts to keep it in the family failing, it was sold in 1959 to a local Catholic farmer (Glendinning, 2009: 351, 356-7). Bowen thought it would be lived in again, with children. But this did not happen: the '... great stone box ...' in Virginia Woolf's description (Lee, 1999: 37), was torn down. It may have been a decision based on hard-headed considerations of money. Yet there are those who would see in that action a final reckoning in the wars over land that had bedevilled Ireland for centuries. Elizabeth put a brave face on this disaster: according to her lover, Charles Ritchie, she was not afraid to revisit the site in later years (Glendinning, 2009: 465).

Bowen lived with the house, and with her husband Alan Cameron, for nigh on the same length of time: thirty years. Examining, though, Victoria Glendinning's 1977 biography *Elizabeth Bowen: Portrait of a Writer* it is striking that the references to Cameron barely outnumber those to the house. In Lee's book, the sense of imbalance is even greater: mentions of the house and the eponymous 1942 book easily outnumber those of Cameron (Glendinning, 1993: 252-4; Lee, 1999: 260-1). Did these, in some manner, measure the relative significance of house and husband in Bowen's world-view? When Cameron died, she grieved, for a while; when the house was sold, she seemed quite matter-of-fact about it, writing to Charles Ritchie in December 1959 that 'By all means tell anybody who's interested that Bowen's Court is now sold and a thing of the past' (Glendinning, 2009: 352). That insouciance did not last. In subsequent years, she passed through the human stages of bereavement for the house: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance, though not necessarily all of them, and not in order. There was certainly denial: with the house physically gone, Bowen nevertheless maintained that 'One cannot say that the space is empty' (Curtis Brown, 1975: xxxii). Acceptance of a sort was there by 1963: 'And so great and calming was the authority of the light around Bowen's Court that it survived war-time. And it did more than that, it survived the house. It remains with me now that the house has gone' (Bowen, 1984: 457). If there was depression, it stemmed not from the loss of the house, but from the duties and obligations it had placed upon her, and the etiolated process of getting rid of it (Glendinning, 2009: 333). Anger was not directed at Bowen's Court, but manifested itself in an irritation at being reminded of its loss: 'so we hear that you have had to sell your Irish castle' (Glendinning, 2009: 355). For Bowen, the house was a complexity of separate character and integral limb: 'I shall feel happier when this surgical business of detaching myself from Bowen's Court, in mid-January, is over' she wrote revealingly to Ritchie from Rome, just before Christmas 1959 (Glendinning, 2009: 354). In her short story 'The Back Drawing-Room' (1926) it is the burnt-out Big House that is the

ghost in the tale; its erstwhile inhabitants are apparently still alive: ‘...they’re in Dublin, I think, or England’. This inversion of the Irish gentry as ‘living ghosts’ (Corcoran, 2004: 33-4) makes them almost less human than their houses. This has consequences. Within the gentry’s *zeitgeist* it lays upon the house the ultimate burden of dying and death; this is the subject of this essay, principally through readings of Bowen’s novels *The Last September* (1929) and *A World of Love* (1955), the chronicle *Bowen’s Court*, as well as some of her short stories, and comparisons with two other Irish writers, Molly Keane and Iris Murdoch.

The place of the Big House in the Irish gentry’s world

There would be, in Bowen’s words, ‘no more autumns’ for the ‘Big House’ Danielstown in *The Last September*, burnt down in the Irish war of independence (1919-1921) (Bowen, 1998: 206). And to interrogate why the death of the house is so significant to Bowen, we must understand something of the nature of those houses’ lives. Over the course of the nineteenth century they grew in importance, as the gentry withdrew from time to place, and in historian Oliver MacDonagh’s phrase, ‘the physical precincts’ became ‘...central to identity’ (MacDonagh 1983: 28). It is difficult for modern society, largely urban and suburban, mobile, practical, functional, to capture how human the house was to the Anglo-Irish. It takes an adopted daughter of these houses, Gillian Bence-Jones, in an unpublished poem about Edith Somerville’s house, Drishane in County Cork, to offer empathy and understanding:

The house rang, in cuckoo-clamour;
He sang all evening; a blacksmith
Beating our worries to better shape.
With the power of Spring he spelled out
That the frail hold on the old house
Would nevertheless be strong enough...

...The double cuckoo, caroling
Somewhere in curtain trees disclosing view;
Plays orchestra to perfection;
Lawn, haven and point. The house solidly
Attends; weather-slatted, fanlighted,
Wrapped in a gentle Georgian dream (Rauchbauer, 2008).

What made the Big House a central character in the lives of those who inhabited it was its larger-than-life feel, its dominance in the lives of those who lived in it. Thus, scholars can identify a range of characteristics, often diametrically opposed. For one, the Big House was ‘...a place of isolation, exclusion and enclosure...’ (Cronin, 1991: 146). For another, it acted as ‘...a symbol of unity, a stage setting for an image of cohesion’ (Kennedy, 1989: 27). The latter speaks to a present-tense meaning for the house; yet it was also ‘...a receptacle of illusion, a richly evocative symbol of its occupants’ encapsulation in the past’ (Kreilcamp, 1998: 168). Bowen seemed to veer towards the notion of the house as a canvas, a set, a screen against or upon which the everyday tiny dramas of Anglo-Irish life could be portrayed and projected, a ‘representative if miniature theatre’ (Bowen, 1984: 455). Here, in the introverted Lilliputian worlds of Somerville’s & Ross’s *The Irish RM* and *The Real Charlotte*, the landed classes weave an intricate social filigree and indulge, amongst themselves, in

a variant of Freud's 'narcissism of small differences' (Bowen, 1984: 259, 436; Bence-Jones, 1987; Akenson, 1988: 149).

The Big House as sentient being

Yet the house was never just a setting or a stage: it was an actor, too. Bowen showed awareness of this in those novels and short stories that treat of her people, the minor Anglo-Irish gentry of the south of Ireland. In these, she utilizes a process of transference, anthropomorphizing the Big House. She puts literary flesh on stone bones. This is not only a device, though; it speaks to Carl Jung's theories of the persona and our use of archetypes, mental frameworks to interpret and explain the world around us. For her, it was Bowen's Court's death by demolition in 1961 that ultimately defined it, and in many respects, her. Humanizing the house in this way illuminates its centrality to the gentry's cultural world as a sort of permanent member of the family. A revolutionary Irish arsonist in George MacBeth's satirical poem 'A conversation with Grandfather' poses the question:

.....Yes, I'm sorry
For those bricks and mortar, crashing joists
And ancient floorboards. Houses don't have feelings,
Do they? Lucky for us that they don't (MacBeth, 1990).

But the arsonist was wrong. For Bowen and many of her kind, the Big House did have feelings. Almost sentient organisms, they are often, in Gearoid Cronin's phrase used with regard to Danielstown, '...the real central character of the story' (Cronin, 1991: 146). As Gemma Clark perceptively points out, the houses in *The Last September* are given human names: *Danielstown*, *Mount Isabel*, *Castle Trent*, as is the house *Ballydonal* in Lennox Robinson's 1926 play, *The Big House*, three years younger than *The Last September* (Clark, 2014: 84; Murray, 1982). This anthropomorphic sense runs through Bowen's other writings: in *The House in Paris* she wrote of 'sending vibrations up the spine of the house'. In *The Heat of the Day*, Holme Dene, the house of the spy, Robert Kelway is '...a house made for surveillance, a man-eating house' (Bowen, 2015: 57; Bowen, 1949: 248).

These houses are complex characters, often multi-gendered and multi-generational; Danielstown, for instance, has several distinct *personae*. At once, it could play to being ancestor, parent, guardian and child. As a venerable aged relative, it acquires status through sheer longevity. This puts it in a powerful and privileged position. Bowen was well aware of this: 'A Bowen, in the first place, made Bowen's Court,' she wrote, 'since then, with an alarming sureness, Bowen's Court has made all the succeeding Bowens' (Bowen, 1984: 32). Then again, the Big Houses are, in Max Deen Larsen's (1992) phrase '...essentially female structures that embody the principles of order, security, and stability and create meaningful space for birth, nourishment, sleep and death' (Deen Larsen, 1992: 261; Bachelard, 2004: 24, 51-78). Similarly, Molly Keane's fictional Aragon '...was a very female house both within and without and wore the more exquisite moments of the year with a wonderful grandeur and quietness....there was a calm and kindness about its lines...' (Farrell, 1985: 16-7, 94). These are mothers; when a mother is lost, as Bowen's was to cancer when the author was thirteen, then the houses, 'pavilions of love' as she described them (Bowen, 1975: 29), perhaps achieve a greater significance than is warranted by the

mere stones. Yet there is also a sort of ambiguity, related to the internal geography of these houses: Phyllis Lassner's argument that the '...portraits of empty but claustrophobic houses challenge our stereotypical associations of family homes with a nurturing and beneficent female essence' may not be too wide of the mark (Lassner, 1989: 160).

Like mothers, too, these are refuges, but they are also always under pressure. Bowen's notion of the Big House, no matter what its physical size, from the large Danielstown in *The Last September* to the smaller Montefort in *A World of Love*, is something unable to accommodate emotionally all who seek shelter in it. '...Life works to dispossess the dead, to dislodge and oust them. Their places fill themselves up; later people come in; all the room is wanted' (Bowen, 1978: 56; Wills, 2009: 135). In this reading, Bowen's houses were more like lonely, austere, desiccated, touchy maiden aunts than broad-bosomed matronly smiling mothers (Walshe, 1998: 61). So: if the Big House is something other than maternal, is it then a protector, or guardian, perhaps? In *The Unicorn*, Iris Murdoch establishes Gaze Castle as a '...big, self-absorbed house' yet a dangerous one, also with its 'staring windows' (Murdoch, 2000: 30, 16). Again, in her novel about the Irish Easter 1916 rebellion, *The Red and the Green*, the house Rathblane with its 'formidable sinister stillness' is almost sentiently policing its inhabitants (Murdoch, 2002: 185; Cronin, 1990: 2, 126). Bowen, unlike her own coping with her father's mental illnesses by a campaign of 'not noticing' (Bowen, 1984: 416) has Danielstown, like a stern and competent guardian, noticing everything too: '...the vast facade of the house stared coldly over its mounting lawns' (Bowen, 1998: 7). Right at the start of the book, the house is defined as an observer. Two of its occupants drive out, and the house watches: '...looking longest after them, like an eye, a window glittered' (Cronin, 1991: 147; Bowen, 1998: 65). The real-life south-west facing Bowen's Court had many glittering windows. The primacy of this protectorate is established as early as the second page, where '...the mansion piled itself up in silence...' over the visitors' voices (Bowen, 1998: 8). And if the house is a character, then in Bowen characters can be houses, too: the description in *The Last September* of Gerald Lesworth's affections as 'rare and square – four-square – occurring like houses in a landscape, unrelated and positive...' is reflected in her last novel, *Eva Trout*, (1969) where the house, Larkins, is also four-square: 'its gaze was forthright' (Bowen, 1998: 40; Bowen, 1999: 16).

The anthropomorphic house could be what its inhabitants wanted it, or needed it, to be. The house, though, could exist autonomously: 'life in the big house, in its circle of trees, is saturated with character' (Bowen, 1950: 198). The house could exact a heavy price, though; relationships were not universally benign (Bowen, 1984: 14, 20; Cronin, 1991: 147; Fleming, 1965: 17, 36; Bowen, 1950: 197). Uneasiness often seeps out like damp in a wall. The heroine of Lennox Robinson's 1926 play *The Big House*, Kate Alcock, in a mirror image of a Sinn Féiner's declaration of fealty to Ireland, may have fiercely claimed *her* Big House as her life, her faith, her country (Murray, 1982: 153). Yet when it is burnt, her father – one smoking ruin slumped in the midst of another – is relieved: 'I'm just damned glad it's all over and there's no reason to make an effort any more...', mirroring his English-born wife's hatred of the house (Murray, 1982: 192). This trope has stamina: in Jennifer Johnston's later novel *The Gates* the wreck of the Major could only rail against *his* Big House: 'I hate it. I've always hated it' (Johnston, 1974: 172).

Bowen made great efforts to hold Bowen's Court close, however. There was certainly no shortage of reasons to let go. The house gobbled up resources, both material and psychological: the tyrannous invalid aunt forever banging on the bedroom floor for attention; the spoilt child always demanding sweets; the complacent, too-visible, sentry in a hostile territory. Perhaps it held much more for Bowen than just its role as ancestor, nurturer or protector. Her marriage to Alan Cameron, a decorated First World War hero and an intelligent administrator with a deliberate line in boring stories, but also a diabetic and an alcoholic, was childless (d'Alton, 2009). Yet, the *house* Bowen's Court can be seen either as the mother she lost, 'I was the child of the house from which Danielstown derives', she wrote in 1942 (Glendinning, 1998: 2); or, more empathetically, as the child she never had, wayward, expensive, exasperating, but also loved and loving, a refuge, a point of hope (Osborn, 2009; d'Alton, 2010). The book *Bowen's Court* was the house's offspring, so to speak, and thus a grandchild to Bowen's imagination: the house, as she says, '...was made happy by the presence of our relations...' (Bowen, 1984: 449). This family chronicle with a literary sense was described as 'an act of *pietas*' by Roy Foster, and by Neil Corcoran as '...an act of imaginative family elegy and empathy' (Foster, 2001: 150; Corcoran, 2004: 23). As Bowen relates it, it is a superb story; but it is also a subversive history, and not in the sense discussed by Neil Corcoran, that of Bowen being hostile to 'Anglo-Irish "repining"' (Corcoran, 2004: 25-6). The subversion that this writer observes in Bowen lies in the representation that history and emotional capital piles up in a sort of accumulated balance sheet. 'With the end of each generation', Bowen wrote, 'the lives that submerged here were absorbed again. With each death, the air of the place had thickened: it had been added to' (Bowen, 1998: 34; Bowen, 1984: 451). Thus, the loss of a burnt house is not just that of *now* – of stones and mortar, or paintings and silver. In the last sentences of *The Last September* the door of burning Danielstown may have 'stood open hospitably upon a furnace', but Sir Richard and Lady Naylor were seeing much, much more than red-hot stones (Bowen, 1998: 206). This was truly a funeral-pyre for all the generations of a lost family.

The imagery of definitive ending, of finality, in *The Last September* ran counter to the worldview of the Irish gentry. That worldview was cyclical, rather than linear. Echoing Yeats, 'the soul of man lived many lives' (Lyons, 1983: 232). In 1920, the Irish gentry had been here many times before – 1641, 1688, the 1780s, 1798, the 1820s, 1867, the 1880s and 1916 – and had survived. Or so it seemed. Cultural stasis is the balance between remembering the future and imagining the past. This transcendental level is reflected in the fiction: the Big House renews its life by drawing in the spirits of the dead, as with the son Ulick, killed three days before the Armistice, in Robinson's play, or the nearly-ghost republican who brushes past Lois in the garden of Danielstown.

Yet when the house faced death, or died, then the effect was shocking, stripping away permanence, dropping its inhabitants into an unknown void, leading to dislocation, angst and misery, and an overwhelming sense of loss, even a species of 'survivor guilt'. Bowen's Court escaped the turbulent 1919-23 period almost unscathed (Bowen, 1984: 447; Glendinning, 1993: 40, 68), but three neighbouring houses were burnt in a single night, which was the genesis of the similar scene in *The Last September*. Bowen, in Italy at the time, steeled herself for Bowen's Court to be gone, too: in a preface to a 1952 edition of the novel, she wrote 'Nevertheless, so often in my mind's eye did I see it burning that the terrible last event in *The Last September* is more real than anything I have lived through' (Glendinning, 1993: 68).

Killing the Big House

Danielstown in *The Last September* does not just die: it is killed. For those who inhabited the real Danielstowns, some 300, yet only about 5 per cent of all Big Houses in the south of Ireland deliberately destroyed between 1920 and 1923, this was traumatic (Bielenberg, 2013: 204; Dooley, 2001: 171-97). Bowen was not the only observer of the death of these hearths, and she was by no means the only writer to humanize the Big House: Robinson's play, *The Big House*, is subtitled 'Four scenes in its life' (Murray, 1982: 137). Robinson, through his observer Rev. Brown, was '...extraordinarily interested in watching this house and the fight it's making.' One of his characters, Despard, asks 'What the dickens is it fighting for?' Robinson's answer: 'Its life' (Murray, 1982: 143). This is elemental to an extraordinary degree. Like humankind, natural decline and decay could ultimately be accepted; but death by violent destruction was of a different order (Cronin, 1990: 126). The resonance with the just-finished Great War – 'they shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old' – was obvious. In a sort of counterpointed collusion, those who killed the Big House had perhaps personalized it, too. The imagery that had Bowen describing Danielstown's destroyers as its 'executioners', and which made Yeats, in his drama *Purgatory* (Bowen, 1998: 22, 206; Crohn Schmitt, 1997) declaim that

.....to kill a house
Where great men grew up, married, died,
I here declare a capital offence

was reflected on the other side. It seems that beneath the specifics, the surface reasons, there lurked something deeper and darker in the executioners' sub-consciousnesses, characterized by Gemma Clark (2014) as 'a symbolic purging of the historic enemy' (Clark, 2014: 68).

To the rebels, the house may have been alien too; a co-conspirator, always on the same side as its inhabitants (The Irish story, 2017). The gentry were not unaware of this: Elizabeth, Countess of Fingall, wrote in 1937 that her house had '...windows staring across the country like blind eyes ... looking out across the country which they possessed but never owned' (Fingall, 1937: 29). In Murdoch's *The Unicorn*, Gaze Castle is 'belonging yet not belonging' to the landscape of which it is a part (Murdoch 2000: 15). In Anthony Coleman's words, 'Formidable, reasonable, stately, the Big House spoke in a strange accent; it did not speak to the Gaelic heart' (Coleman, 1992: 124). On those few occasions when it could, though, it was a powerful voice; it is said that when raiders arrived to torch Curraghmore, the house of Lord Waterford, they fled when the flitting moon shone suddenly on the gilded cross on a coat of arms over the door (McDowell, 1992: 286). The rebels had, maybe, to work hard to overpower the Big House; the thoughtful IRA revolutionary leader Ernie O'Malley recounted carrying out manouevres in demesne lands to rid his volunteers of '...their inherent respect for their owners' (Clark, 2014: 75). It did not always work: it is said that when the IRA violated Bowen's Court and took a vote *inside* it on whether to burn it down, the vote was against the act (Corcoran, 2004: 25, n. 9). This also points to the almost innocent welcoming quality of the Big House, emphasized in Bowen's short story 'The Back Drawing Room': 'the gates', she says, 'stood wide open with an expression of real Irish hospitality' (Bowen, 1981: 205). This left the house open to vulnerability and threat; Bowen's use of *chiaroscuro* in *The Last September* reflects that sense of partially-glimpsed menace that was a constant companion to the Anglo-

Irish in the 1920-23 period. British army patrols, unseen, are framed by sound, light and dark: '... a pale light showed up the sky in the darkness ... the jarring echoed down the spines of the listeners' (Bowen, 1998: 31). Lois goes out to the avenue, where a man in a trench-coat is close:

High up a bird shrieked and stumbled down through dark, tearing the leaves ... The shuttered-in drawing-room, the family sealed in lamplight, secure and bright like lowers in a paperweight ... Now on the path: grey patches worse than the dark ... (Bowen, 1998: 33).

They may all be outsiders in this land; but in 1920 the sad thing is that they are ultimately frightened, rather than frightening:

The house seemed to be pressing down low in apprehension, hiding its face...It seemed to gather its trees close in fright and amazement at the wide, light, lovely unloving country, the unwilling bosom whereon it was set (Bowen, 1998: 66).

The colours of the imagery in *The Last September* are orange, red, russet, yellow and rust-brown, all autumnal shades, but principally those of fire. 'Behind the trees', Bowen wrote, 'pressing in from the open and empty country like an invasion, the orange bright sky crept and smouldered' as these houses awaited their 'executioners' (Bowen, 1998: 22, 206). Fire was an ever-present menace. Accidental burning was a constant threat (Irish Unionist Alliance, 2013): seventy-six Big House fires are recorded in the Irish rural provinces of Munster and Connacht, for instance, from the late eighteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries (National University of Ireland, Galway, 2011). And fire was not just an accessible way of killing the house; it was also *the* symbolic purgative (Clark, 2014: 61). It opened the house 'to the Irish sky', in J. G. Farrell's formulation; to destruction by those other fundamental elements of water, wind and earth, comprehensively and definitively reclaiming the landscape (Farrell, 1970: 446; Clark, 2014: 92).

The occupants were often forced to watch the funeral-pyre. In June 1921, Lord and Lady Bandon, acquaintances of the Bowens in County Cork, had to witness the deliberate destruction of their home, Castle Bernard; the feisty elderly countess defiantly sang *God Save the King* in her nightdress on the lawn as the Castle behind her burned. In Molly Keane's *Two Days in Aragon*, Sylvia Fox is unluckier: tied to a laurel tree she has to face the house as it is consumed by fire, '... so that she might watch her own soul burning' (Farrell, 1985: 253; Elliot, 1991: 195). Fire may be an agent of renewal, as well as destruction; but not many of these phoenixes rose again from the ashes.

At the last, few of those houses had glorious ends. Like their Anglo-Irish inhabitants, and much more prosaically, they cowered in the countryside, thankfully unnoticed, lucky to survive, living on, dying in their beds, simply fading away. Their decline had started well before the Irish revolution. It was obvious that many houses, their economic justification largely gone by the early 1900s, were already dying: even though the erstwhile landlords still had control of nearly 2 million untenanted acres in 1922, this was a relatively small proportion of the total farmland (Dooley, 2004: 29; Dooley, 2001: 127-31, 171-205). The burnings may have had an aura of romanticism about them, but the delanding of the gentry, rising labour costs,

economic inutility and the local taxation policies of the new Irish Free State government and its successors after 1921 were probably responsible for far more deroofting than the incendiaries ever were. Bowen never wrote off the Big Houses; she maintained that they could have a role as spaces in which big questions and deep divisions in Irish society might be mediated (Bowen, 1950: 199-200), and she would perhaps have not been surprised to see the Guinness 'Big House', Farmleigh, near Dublin, bought by the Irish Republic in 1999, and now used for precisely that purpose. The Big House was not so alien after all. Bowen's Court was never a wholly no-go area for the natives: 'Footsteps of people taking the shortcut through the demesne were heard, now and then, under the windows' (Bowen, 1984: 450), mirroring the phrase in *The Last September* where the ghost-like republican is close to Danielstown, '...making a short cut through their demesne' (Bowen, 1988: 34). The 'mass path' through the Bowen demesne said to have been used by Catholics in Penal times was in full view of the house, an intimation perhaps of a live-and-let-live attitude on the part of the family (Corcoran, 2004: 25, n. 9), but also evidence of the slackening of the anti-Catholic penal laws by the time Bowen's Court was built in 1775.

An afterlife?

But what of the houses after death? Bowen's house Montefort in *A World of Love* stands as a metaphor for the 'Descendancy' (Butler, 1976) that many Anglo-Irish felt they had become after the Second World War. In this 1955 novel, Bowen has voided the stage of death altogether; the house has become almost a ghost in the landscape that it once dominated. 'Montefort? Pity that place has gone', remarks a neighbour who should have known better; and a casual visitor remarks that they had 'No idea there was anyone living here' (Bowen, 1978: 37, 80). To all intents and purposes, this miniature mansion is already gone, taking its inhabitants with it. And if the Big Houses always sheltered their quota of ghosts, the revolutionary burnings between 1919 and 1923 turned some of the houses themselves into nothing but ghosts, like Kilbarran in 'The Back Drawing-Room' (Bowen, 1981: 209-10). Often, they had to endure down-market and brash newcomers, replete with dampcourses and central heating. In Bowen's locale in north Cork, the Evanses of Carker abandoned their Big House in the 1950s and built a bungalow in front of it. Yet the house was restored in the early 2000s (National University of Ireland Galway, 2011). Castle Bernard was never rebuilt: a later earl of Bandon had constructed a bungalow close to it, too. Bowen, an urbanite and suburbanite for most her life, did not have to see Bowen's Court suffer that indignity. She wrote that she was glad that her house had '...had a clean end. It never lived to be a ruin' (Bowen, 1984: 459). Ozymandias-like, only a few stones are left today. But the house did not die; in an afterword to the book *Bowen's Court* written three years after its demolition, it is referred to in the present tense, as if it were still there. This is the house, not as ghost, but as a preservation of memory. Bowen ascribed 'livingness' rather than life to houses: an old rectory in her Kentish childhood was described as follows: 'Yet gone, it is not as though it had never been' (Bowen, 1975: 16-7), and she uses the present tense to avoid confronting another death: '... it is part of the character of Bowen's Court to be, in its silent way, very much alive when I think of Bowen's Court, there it is (Curtis Brown, 1975: xxxv; Bowen 1984: 459). And, indeed, there it still is - it remained on the Irish Ordnance Survey maps of north Cork for many years after it had been razed; it lives in the pages of the book *Bowen's Court* and in the work of scholars. Even if there are 'no more autumns' for Bowen's Court, in an imaginative sense it continues to be

resurrected every last September at a commemorative Anglican evensong in the little Bowen church at Farahy in the countryside of north Cork (Walshe, 1998: 7-8).

Bowen's Big House has proven very difficult to kill.

Bibliography

- Akenson, D. (1988) *Small Differences: Irish Catholics and Irish Protestants, 1825–1922*. Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Bachelard, G. (2004) *La Poétique de l'Espace*. Paris, Quadrige/PUF.
- Bence-Jones, M. (1987) *Twilight of the Ascendancy*. London, Constable.
- Bielenberg, A. (2013) 'Exodus: the emigration of southern Irish Protestants during the Irish war of independence and the civil war'. *Past and Present*, 218, 1, 1 February, 199-233.
- Bowen, E. (1949) *The Heat of the Day*. New York, Knopf.
- (1950) 'The Big House'. In: *Collected Impressions*. London, Longmans, Green and Company Ltd.
- (1975) *Pictures and Conversations. Chapters of an Autobiography. With other Collected Writings*. London, Allen Lane.
- (1955: 1978) *A World of Love*. New York, Avon Books.
- (1981) 'The Back Drawing-Room'. In: Bowen, E. *The Collected Stories of Elizabeth Bowen*. New Jersey, Ecco Press.
- (1942: 1984) *Bowen's Court & Seven Winters*. London, Virago.
- (1929: 1998) *The Last September*. London, Vintage.
- (1968: 1999) *Eva Trout*. Vintage, London.
- (1935: 2015) *The House in Paris*. New York, Random House.
- Butler, H. (1976) 'The Bell: an Anglo-Irish View'. *Irish University Review*, 6, 1, 66-72.
- Clark, G. (2014) *Everyday Violence in the Irish Civil War*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Coleman, A. (1992) 'The Big House, Yeats and the Irish context'. In: Rauchbauer, O. *Ancestral Voices: the Big House in Anglo-Irish literature*. Dublin, Lilliput.
- Corcoran, N. (2004) *Elizabeth Bowen: the Enforced Return*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Crohn Schmitt, N. (1997) 'The Landscape Play: W.B. Yeats's 'Purgatory''. *Irish University Review*, 27, 2, Autumn-Winter, 262-275.
- Cronin, G. (1991) 'The Big House and the Irish Landscape in the Work of Elizabeth Bowen'. In: Genet, J. (ed.) *The Big House in Ireland; Reality and Representation*. Dingle, Brandon Books.
- Cronin, J. (1990) *The Anglo-Irish Novel Volume II*. Belfast, Appletree Press.
- Curtis Brown, Spencer (1975) 'Foreword', to Bowen, E. *Pictures and Conversations. Chapters of an Autobiography. With other Collected Writings*. London, Allen Lane.
- d'Alton, I. (2009) 'My name is Alan Charles Cameron... – The Farahy Address, 9 September 2007'. *The Irish Review*, 40-41, Winter, 171-176.
- (2010) 'Courting Elizabeth Bowen: *Elizabeth Bowen: New Critical Perspectives*, ed. Susan Osborn (Cork 2009); *Love's Civil War: Elizabeth Bowen and Charles Ritchie: Letters and Diaries 1941-1973*, ed. V. Glendinning, with J. Robertson (London 2009)'. *The Irish Review*, 42, Spring/Summer, 128-136.

- Deen Larsen, M. (1992). 'Saints of the Ascendancy: William Trevor's Big House Novels'. In: Rauchbauer, O. *Ancestral Voices: the Big House in Anglo-Irish Literature*. Dublin, Lilliput.
- Dooley, T. (2001) *The Decline of the Big House in Ireland*. Dublin, Wolfhound.
 — (2004) *'The land for the people': The Land Question in Independent Ireland*. Dublin, UCD Press.
- Elliot, M. (1991) 'Molly Keane's Big Houses'. In: Genet, J. (ed.) *The Big House in Ireland: Reality and Representation*. Dingle, Brandon.
- Farrell, J. G. (1970) *Troubles*. London, Jonathan Cape.
- Farrell, M. J. [Molly Keane] (1941: 1985) *Two Days in Aragon*. London, Virago.
- Fingall, E. (1937) *Seventy Years Young*. London, Collins.
- Fleming, L. (1965) *Head or Harp*. London, Barrie and Rockcliff.
- Foster, R. (2001) *The Irish Story*. London, Allen Lane.
- Glendinning, V. (1993) *Elizabeth Bowen: Portrait of a Writer*. London, Phoenix.
 — (1998) 'Introduction'. In: Bowen, E. *The Last September*. London, Vintage.
 — (ed., with Robertson, J.) (2009) *Love's Civil War. Elizabeth Bowen & Charles Ritchie. Letters and Diaries 1941-1973*. London, Simon & Schuster UK Ltd.
- The Irish story (2017) <http://www.theirishstory.com/2011/06/21/the-big-house-and-the-irish-revolution/#.Vxy98XiDpHg> [Accessed 22 November 2017].
- Irish Unionist Alliance (1913) *The Defence of Irish Country Homes*. Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, D/989/C/1/17.
- Johnston, J. (1974) *The Gates*. London, Coronet.
- Kennedy, D (1989) 'The Big House in Irish Literature'. *Bulletin of the Irish Georgian Society*, xxxii.
- Kreilcamp, V. (1998) *The Anglo-Irish Novel and the Big House*. Syracuse, Syracuse University Press.
- Lassner, P. (1989) *Elizabeth Bowen*. Savage MD, Barnes & Noble.
- Lee, H. (1999) *Elizabeth Bowen*. London, Vintage.
- Lyons, F. S. L. (1983) 'Yeats and the Anglo-Irish Twilight'. In: MacDonagh, O., Mandle, W. and Travers, P. (eds.), *Irish Culture and Nationalism, 1750–1950*. Canberra, Palgrave MacMillan.
- MacBeth, George (1990) 'A Conversation with Grandfather'. *Harvard Book Review*, 17/18, 3.
- MacDonagh, O. (1983) *States of Mind: a Study of the Anglo-Irish Conflict, 1780-1980*. London, Allen & Unwin.
- National University of Ireland Galway. (2011a) Connacht and Munster Landed Estates Database. Available from: http://landedestates.nuigalway.ie/LandedEstates/jsp/anded_estates_database [Accessed 17 March 2017].
 — (2011b) Connacht and Munster Landed Estates Database. Available from: <http://landedestates.nuigalway.ie/LandedEstates/jsp/estate-show.jsp?id=2885> [Accessed 17 March 2017].
- McDowell, H. (1992) 'The Big House: a Genealogist's Perspective and a Personal Point of View'. In: Rauchbauer, O. *Ancestral Voices: the Big House in Anglo-Irish Literature*. Dublin, Lilliput.
- Murdoch, I. (1963: 2000) *The Unicorn*. London, Vintage.
 — (1965: 2002) *The Red and the Green*. London, Vintage.
- Murray, C. (ed.) (1982) *Selected Plays of Lennox Robinson*. Gerrard's Cross, Colin Smythe.
- Osborn, S. (ed.) (2009) *Elizabeth Bowen: New Critical Perspectives*. Cork, Cork University Press.

- Rauchbauer, O. (2008) 'The Post-Yeatsian Irish Country-house Poem: Analyses, Backgrounds and Contexts'. Unpublished paper, Royal Irish Academy conference, 'The Big House in Twentieth Century Irish Writing', Dublin, 15 October.
- Walshe, E. (ed.) (1998) *Elizabeth Bowen Remembered. The Farahy Addresses*. Dublin, Four Courts.
- Wills, C. (2009) "Half Different": the Vanishing Irish in *A World of Love*. In: Walshe, E. *Elizabeth Bowen*. Newbridge, Irish Academic Press.

~~~~~

## Heather Ingman ~ 'A Living Writer': Elizabeth Bowen and Katherine Mansfield.

The title of this essay, 'A Living Writer', is Elizabeth Bowen's own, from a detailed and perceptive assessment of Katherine Mansfield's achievement in the preface to her collection, *Thirty-Four Short Stories by Katherine Mansfield*, published by Collins in 1957. If Virginia Woolf was haunted by Mansfield – 'Mansfield remained for Woolf a presence in absence, a faint ghost, throughout the years she survived her' (Smith, 1999: 29) – Bowen, living longer than both writers, was equally conscious of Mansfield's influence on her work, and it is the contention of this essay that the story of Mansfield's influence on Bowen forms part of the history of the relationship between Bowen and Woolf. Though she never knew Mansfield, Bowen became increasingly friendly with Woolf, of whom she was always slightly in awe, in the last decade of Woolf's life, meeting her first in London in 1932, hosting the Woolfs at Bowen's Court in Ireland in late April 1934 and staying at Monk's House in June 1940 and February 1941, shortly before Woolf's death. The fact that Bowen never met Mansfield allowed her to achieve, in her 1957 preface to Mansfield's stories, a balance and a perspective on Mansfield that was not often available to Woolf, entangled as the latter was in her own emotions of rivalry, resentment and loss. This essay discusses general stylistic and thematic affinities between Bowen's early modernist short stories and those of Katherine Mansfield, Bowen's empathy with Mansfield's situation as a colonial outsider in England, their mutual interest in the cinema and their frequent dismissal as middlebrow writers, before going on to look at precise verbal echoes of Mansfield in Bowen's work in the context of both women's writing on war: Mansfield's on the First World War, Bowen's on the Second. The essay argues that Bowen may have been encouraged by a conversation with Woolf in July 1940 to take another look at Mansfield's writing about war.

Though a solid body of research connecting Virginia Woolf and Katherine Mansfield has now developed (notably Moran 1996 and Smith 1999), scholars have been slower to investigate Mansfield's influence on Bowen. In her study of Bowen, Hermione Lee notes the echo of Mansfield's 'Prelude' ('the aloe had not flowered') in Bowen's third

novel, *Friends and Relations* (1931), describing the central failed love affair between Janet and her brother-in-law Edward (Lee, 1999: 63). Using Julia Kristeva's work on intertextuality, Jessica Gildersleeve considers affinities between Mansfield and Bowen in the general context of the modernist short story, and theories concerning female models of literary influence (Gildersleeve, 2015). Gildersleeve concentrates on Bowen's first short story collection, *Encounters* (1923) written, if we are to take Bowen's statement in her preface to that collection at face value, before she had read Mansfield's stories in *Bliss* (1920). It is the contention of this essay, however, that there are precise textual echoes of Mansfield in Bowen's work which suggest that Bowen went on reading Mansfield for a large part of her working life, becoming familiar with material that would not have been available to Woolf, such as Murry's expanded edition of Mansfield's journal, published in 1954.

In her 1949 preface to *Encounters*, Bowen famously tells us that on reading Mansfield's *Bliss*, after she had submitted the manuscript of her first short story collection to the publisher, she was dismayed, seeing at once that she and Mansfield were working along the same lines, and worrying that people would say she had copied her (Bowen, 1986: 120). There are indeed some remarkable thematic and stylistic affinities between Bowen's first collection and Mansfield's work. *Encounters'* opening story, 'Breakfast', set in a boarding house, has obvious parallels with stories from *In a German Pension* (1911), though Bowen's story is less satirical than Mansfield's sketches of Germans eating. Bowen later confessed that she did not like Mansfield's first collection, though she included two stories from it in her 1957 selection, arguing that to omit them would give an incomplete account of Mansfield's development as a writer (Bowen, 1986: 77). There are similarities too around the theme of single women and loneliness in Bowen's 'Daffodils' and Mansfield's 'Miss Brill', first published in the *Athenaeum* in 1920, and one of the stories Bowen selected for her 1957 edition. Both Miss Murcheson in 'Daffodils' and Mansfield's Miss Brill face mockery from the outside world and take refuge in chatting to non-human objects such as daffodils and a fox fur. Bowen's schoolteacher is, however, more resilient than Mansfield's impoverished Miss Brill, and Bowen's story lacks the final note of desolation that makes Mansfield's story so powerful. Overbearing patriarchs feature in 'The New House' and 'Prelude', another Mansfield story selected by Bowen, while distracted mothers are a feature of both 'Prelude' and Bowen's 'Coming Home'. 'Lunch' and 'A Dill Pickle', first published in 1917, both present a conversation between two egotists, a man and a woman, over a meal during which the reasons why the relationships could never work are gradually revealed through dialogue. There are differences: in Bowen's 'Lunch' the man and the woman are strangers; in Mansfield's 'A Dill Pickle' they are meeting up again after a failed relationship in the past. In Bowen the woman cheerfully admits to egotism; in Mansfield the man is the greater, because unaware, egotist.

Not only does Bowen's subject matter in this first collection parallel Mansfield's – children, family relationships, moving house, awkward lovers – but the stories demonstrate from the start Bowen's willingness to explore modernist techniques. Her collection gives us inconclusive states of mind, free indirect discourse, the use of epiphanies and symbols as structuring devices, lack of closure and downplaying of plot in favour of mood and atmosphere: 'Impressionism lightly laced with psychology bought one out of needing a plot', she later admitted (Bowen, 1965: 8). All of this reveals remarkable coincidences of themes and style between the two authors, but at

this stage they are only coincidences if we accept Bowen's assertion that she had not yet read Mansfield.

The extent of Bowen's later knowledge of Mansfield's work is ascertainable from the 1957 preface to her edition of Mansfield's stories, where she quotes not only from the stories, but also from Mansfield's journal and letters, which she would have read in John Middleton Murry's versions (*The Letters of Katherine Mansfield*, 1928-9 and *The Journal of Katherine Mansfield, 1914-1922* first edition in 1927, a fuller edition in 1954). The more recent scholarship examining Mansfield's *Journal* and discussions of the way in which Murry compiled Mansfield's so-called 'journal' (Jones, 2011: 165-77) would not of course been available to Bowen. Bowen must also, to have made her selection, read all eighty-eight of the stories in the edition she cites in her preface, Murry's *The Short Stories of Katherine Mansfield*, published by Alfred A. Knopf in 1937. Certainly, part of Bowen's preface is influenced by Murry's hagiographic tone when he speaks of Mansfield's beauty, suffering and other-worldliness. This becomes, in Bowen's words: 'the peculiar personal magic she emanated: a magic still so much part of her legend' (Bowen, 1986: 70). Despite this romanticisation of Mansfield the person, when she comes to discussing the writing Bowen is perceptive, capturing Mansfield's endless and restless innovations: 'her art was, by its very nature, tentative, responsive, exploratory ... ever on the move, she has left us no "typical" Katherine Mansfield story to anatomize' (Bowen, 1986: 72-3). With none of Woolf's uneasy ambivalence over a rival's achievement, Bowen is able to pay tribute to the 'immense impetus' Mansfield gave to the short story form:

We owe to her the prosperity of the 'free' story: she untrammelled it from conventions and, still more, gained for it a prestige till then unthought of ... she was to alter for good and all our ideas of what goes to make a story (Bowen, 1986: 75).

Her oft-cited description of Mansfield as 'our missing contemporary' comes from this preface.

Bowen's cultural positioning as Anglo-Irish gave her more empathy than Woolf with Mansfield's situation as a colonial outsider in London. She recognized that Mansfield's writing 'grew not only from memory but from longing', from 'that insatiable longing we call homesickness' (Bowen, 1986: 81). And she poses the interesting question as to what kind of writer Mansfield might have become, had she not left New Zealand: 'Did she, by leaving her own country, deprive herself of a range of associations, of inborn knowledge, of vocabulary?' (Bowen, 1986: 77). It is only in recent years that scholarly focus on the shaping influence of Mansfield's colonial context, and her engagement with Maori culture, has begun to emerge (Stafford and Williams, 2006: 142-70; Plumridge, 2015). In order to show 'one of the earlier, possible Katherine Mansfields who, as time went on, was to be crowded out', Bowen includes in her anthology 'The Woman at the Store' (1912), set in the New Zealand outback, despite knowing that in her lifetime Mansfield refused to have this story reprinted (Bowen, 1986: 76). As we shall see, this story had particular significance for Bowen.

There are, then, plenty of reasons for Bowen's continuing interest in Mansfield, aside from the fact that they were women writers working on the modernist short story. As postcolonials the two writers were preoccupied by problems of alienation, exile and rootlessness, Mansfield divided between her complex white settler identity,

metropolitan Europe and the Maori Other, Bowen living on the hyphen between Anglo and Irish, conflicted in her relationships with Ireland, England and Anglo-Irishness. Both Bowen and Mansfield exploited uncanniness and the ghostly in their writing, often locating it in domestic space and in psychological states, notably in Mansfield's 'Bliss', 'At the Bay', 'The Daughters of the Late Colonel', and 'Miss Brill', and in Bowen's 'Foothold', 'The Cat Jumps', 'Look At All Those Roses', 'The Demon Lover' and 'The Happy Autumn Fields'. Both also, though childless, possessed acute insight into the secret lives of children, and the pressures on them imposed by adults, often resulting in their premature awareness of sex and death (among others, Bowen's 'The Visitor' and 'The Tommy Crans', Mansfield's 'Je ne Parle pas Français', 'The Garden-Party', and 'The Voyage'). The two writers shared a love of French literature, especially Flaubert, and, though he was out of favour with most modernists, Mansfield's praise of Dickens in her letters (January 27 and February 1, 1918, among others) and in her *Journal* (February 29, 1920) would certainly have caught Bowen's eye, given his influence on her own work (Nicolson and Trautmann, 1980: 331). In her 1957 preface, Bowen draws a comparison between Mansfield and Dickens in their mutual concern for social justice (Bowen, 1986: 82).

Both writers' reputations were to suffer from the hegemony of elitist masculine modernism and from commercial success, which on occasion resulted in them being labeled middlebrow. Towards the end of her life Mansfield, whose career, in Jenny McDonnell's words, was marked by a 'fluctuation between commercial viability and literary credibility', published seven stories in the popular illustrated paper, *The Sphere*, in order to pay for medical treatment (McDonnell, 2011: 43). In the 1950s, hard up and desperately trying to keep Bowen's Court going, Bowen wrote romances and Christmas stories for the American magazine market (Hepburn, 2008a; Glendinning with Robertson, 2009: 308-9). The two writers also suffered from being regarded with suspicion by the cultural nationalists in their respective countries, Bowen as a member of the Anglo-Irish class after Irish Independence (Laird, 2009: 193-207), Mansfield as a metropolitan modernist suspect in the eyes of the cultural nationalists of the 1930s and 40s, who looked to realism to develop a national literature (Wilson, 2015: 207-18).

Mansfield and Bowen both published essays on the cinema and exploited cinematic techniques in their fiction. In particular, the two writers were wary of the dangers of too close an emotional bond between cinema-goers and silent movie stars. In 'The Stars in their Courses', published in the *Athenaeum* 2 July 1920, Mansfield warned against viewers allowing the daily reality of their lives to be subsumed by a false sense of intimacy with their favourite stars:

People cannot keep their eyes on the agonies of Europe; it is too much to ask. Who shall blame them for seeking sensational distractions from the strain of living? But that this particular distraction should monopolise the hoardings; that there should be presumed an intimacy of affection for two cinematographic actors seldom felt for any man or woman within living memory – that gives us pause.

... what do Douglas and Mary stand for? The one for adventure, the other for Sentiment? Together for Romance? To the people who exult and weep over them they must be symbols of something beyond themselves, something beyond the reality of themselves ... Would it not be nearer the truth to say that

Mary and Douglas are worshipped because we have no Gods at all?  
(*Athenaeum*, 1920, no. 4705: 5).

Bowen's short story 'Dead Mabelle' (1929) closely reflects Mansfield's essay in its exploration of the emotional connection between a silent film star, the eponymous Mabelle, and her avid fan, bank clerk William Stickford, who becomes consumed by daydreams about the star to the point that his daily life begins to feel unreal and he is reprimanded at work for his 'excessive cinema-going' (Bowen, 1999: 280). Bowen is at pains to emphasise that, even before his cinema-going begins, William's sense of self is fragile, undermined by his random reading of philosophy in a lonely bid to educate himself out of his class. Like Mansfield's fascinated cinema-goers, he finds himself taken over by Mabelle, reaching for, in Mansfield's phrase, 'something beyond the reality' of himself: 'She was too real ... She was beyond the compass of one's mind; one's being seemed a fragment and a shadow' (Bowen, 1999: 283). "You're more here than I..." he reflects as, in the aftermath of Mabelle's death and final film, he contemplates suicide (Bowen, 1999: 284). The banal contents of his drawer, containing notebooks, a pencil stump and match-ends where there should have been a pistol, deny William a filmic ending and bring him back to 'the business of living' (Bowen, 1999: 285). 'Dead Mabelle' is Bowen's illustration in fiction of Mansfield's warning to cinema-goers of the danger of allowing themselves to be caught up in a false sense of intimacy with its stars. Though Bowen appears to criticize, or even mock, William in her story, in a later essay, 'Why I Go To the Cinema' (1938), she admits to not being immune herself to enjoying this feeling of intimacy with the cinematic stars: 'how seldom in real life (or so-called real life) does acquaintanceship, much less intimacy, with dazzling, exceptional beings come one's way?' (Hepburn, 2010: 198).

These general parallels between Mansfield and Bowen are solid enough, but the Second World War was to prompt Bowen to a closer reading of Mansfield's work. The war marked a development in Bowen's writing, deepening the complexity of her work and transforming her into a key writer of World War II fiction in her short stories, and in *The Heat of the Day*. Textual evidence suggests that to aid this development Bowen turned back to Katherine Mansfield and to the latter's experience of the previous war, as portrayed in her stories, journal and correspondence. Mansfield's writing was particularly interesting to Bowen at this point, since the latter believed that the short story was better able than other forms to register the immediate impact of war: 'It would still appear to me that the short story is the ideal *prose* medium for wartime creative writing' she argued in her essay, 'The Short Story in England', published in May, 1945. In her view, novels required lengthier gestation, whereas the short story writer, like the poet, 'gains rather than loses by being close up to what is immediately happening [...] Wartime London – blitzed, cosmopolitan, electric with expectation – teemed, I feel, with untold but tellable stories' (Hepburn, 2008b: 310-15).

In order to understand why the Second World War caused Bowen to renew her interest in Mansfield, we first need to look at the latter's wartime experiences, as recorded in her fiction, notebooks and correspondence. The First World War caused a great deal of suffering for Mansfield. She lost her brother in October 1915 in a training accident, and also several close friends, including Rupert Brooke and the writer Frederick Goodyear. She had personal experience of Zeppelin raids in Paris in March 1915 and the later three-week bombardment of Paris in March and April 1918.

In February 1915, she travelled alone into the war zone to visit Francis Carco, stationed in Gray, France, and her story 'An Indiscreet Journey', written in 1915, together with her notebooks and letters, gives explicit accounts of the war in France and the soldiers' suffering as seen at first hand. These would have been especially interesting to Bowen who, for a spell after leaving school in 1917, worked in a hospital for shell-shocked veterans, whose own husband suffered long-term effects of wartime gas-poisoning, and whose fiction is peopled with casualties from the First World War, notably the depressive and ironically named Victor Ammering in *The Hotel*. Mansfield's writing would have been a good source for Bowen of what it felt like to live through war, and the fact that Bowen seems to have recognized this, and borrowed some of Mansfield's comments on the First World War for her own creative purposes, puts her in advance of scholarship, which has only recently begun to focus on Mansfield as a writer about war (Kimber, *et al.*, 2014).

Mansfield's wartime experiences altered her whole outlook, not only on life, but also on how writers should be writing. On 21 November 1919 the *Athenaeum* published Mansfield's unfavourable review of Woolf's *Night and Day*, in which she criticized Woolf's novel on account of its conventional novelistic structure. In a letter to Murry, dated 10 November 1919, Mansfield revealed the principal reason behind her negative reaction to *Night and Day*, namely that the Edwardian setting meant that Woolf seemed to be writing as if the war had not occurred. Mansfield felt this was 'a lie in the soul', a strong phrase expressing her sense of how war had changed art, society and culture for ever:

I feel in the *profoundest* sense that nothing can ever be the same – that, as artists, we are traitors if we feel otherwise: we have to take it into account and find new expressions, new moulds for our new thoughts and feelings (Mansfield, 1929: 247).

Mansfield's letters were available to Bowen in Murry's 1929 edition, where the title of *Night and Day* is left blank, but is easy enough to guess at for an attentive reader of Woolf, which Bowen was. Bowen's deep engagement with Mansfield's assessment of how the First World War had changed literature forever is evidenced by the fact that she drew on these letters in one of her best known stories, 'Summer Night' (published in *Look At All Those Roses*, 1941), set in Ireland during the Second World War. Justin, Bowen's disenchanted intellectual trapped in neutral Ireland, has a similar sense to Mansfield that this war has changed everything. He explains to the obtuse businessman, Robinson:

'We're confronted by the impossibility *of living* – unless we can break through to something else. There's been a stop in our senses and in our faculties that's made everything round us so much dead matter – and dead matter we couldn't even displace' (Bowen, 1999: 590).

Justin goes on to reflect Mansfield's feeling that there will have to be a new language after the war: "We can no longer express ourselves: what we say doesn't even approximate to reality; it only approximates to what's been said." A few lines later, the verbal echo is more pronounced when Justin insists: "our currency's worthless – our "ideas", so on, so on. We've got to mint a new one. We've got to break through to the new form – it needs genius" (Bowen, 1999: 590). What is required, he asserts, is "a new form for thinking and feeling" (Bowen, 1999: 589).

In Mansfield's letter to Murry dated 16 November 1919 she again criticizes contemporary novelists for leaving out the war:

Speaking to *you* I'd say we have died and live again. How can that be the same life? It doesn't mean that life is the less precious or that 'the common things of light and day' are gone. They are not gone, they are intensified, they are illumined. Now we know ourselves for what we are. In a way it's a tragic knowledge. (Mansfield, 1929: 255).

In 'Summer Night', Justin picks up on Mansfield's word 'illumined' in the following: "I say this war's an awful illumination; it's destroyed our dark; we have to see where we are" (Bowen, 1999: 590).

Bowen had plenty of reasons of her own for being interested in Mansfield's work, but the specific return to Mansfield during the Second World War may have been prompted by a conversation with Woolf. 'Summer Night' is mentioned by Bowen in a letter to Woolf dated January 5, 1941:

A book of short stories of mine [*Look At All Those Roses*] is coming out this month or next: they are mostly rather long ago ones, except one long one called *Summer Night* which I should like very much to know what you think about. I wrote it since I saw you (Bowen, 1986: 217).

This must be referring to the walk Bowen took with Woolf through London a few months earlier, on 3 July 1940 (Bell and McNeillie, 1984: 301). The German air raids on the city had not yet begun, but everyone knew they were imminent, and it is moving to imagine these two writers, in whose work London features so centrally, taking the time to preserve its landmarks in their memory. Both writers lost their London homes in the bombing, Woolf in September 1940, Bowen in July 1944. The language the two writers used to describe the war has on occasion curious parallels. In her diary for 24 July 1940 Woolf commented: 'All the walls, the protecting and reflecting walls, wear so terribly thin in this war. There's no standard to write for: no public to echo back: even the "tradition" has become transparent' (Bell and McNeillie, 1984: 304). In *The Heat of the Day* (1949), the narrator, reflecting on the 1940 London raids, observes: 'The wall between the living and the living became less solid as the wall between the living and the dead thinned. In that September transparency people became transparent, only to be located by the just darker flicker of their hearts' (Bowen, 1987: 92). Despite this coincidence of vocabulary, most likely resulting from their conversation of 3 July 1940, the two writers' attitudes to the war diverged considerably. Woolf, while at Rodmell, felt dreary, apprehensive and cut off from London's intellectual life (Lee, 1997: 718-44); whereas Bowen, making a deliberate choice to remain in London, discovered new energies, throwing herself into ARP work, embarking on a new and long-lasting love affair and, more controversially, making several trips over to neutral Ireland to gather information for the British Ministry of Information (Lee, 1999: 147-79). She later declared: 'I would not have missed being in London throughout the war for anything: it was the most interesting period of my life' (Glendinning, 1977: 158).

Their wander through London in July 1940 appears to have been pivotal in sending Bowen back to Mansfield and the First World War. Woolf's diary entry for 5 July 1940 tells us that Bowen's forthcoming trip to Ireland for the British government and

Woolf's literary 'greatness' were among the topics discussed by the two writers during their walk:

We walked from 37 through Temple, along the river, up Thames Street, to the Tower, talking about what? Her going to Ireland on a Government mission; leaving Clarence Terrace; writing, it was my 'greatness' as we circled the town. No, I don't think it was only flattery I wanted. Something warmer (Bell and McNeillie, 1984: 301).

According to Bowen's letter to Woolf of January 5 1941, it was after this conversation that Bowen wrote the story, 'Summer Night'. In other words, after their walk together, Bowen took the trouble to look up Mansfield's published correspondence, with which Woolf was also familiar, in order to borrow Mansfield's critical comments on Woolf's novel for her own wartime short story and then, rather extraordinarily, single out that story for Woolf's attention. In the context of Woolf's pain at the time over Mansfield's review (Lee, 1997: 386; Smith, 1999: 37-8), this seems on the face of it an unkind thing for Bowen to have done.

A more favourable interpretation of Bowen's action here is that, amidst the talk of Woolf's 'greatness', Woolf confessed to Bowen that Mansfield was a much-missed rival whose commitment to her art equalled her own, and whose criticism of *Night and Day* played a crucial part in encouraging her towards modernist experimentation in her next novel, *Jacob's Room* (1922). Viewed in this light, Bowen may have intended her borrowings in 'Summer Night' to be recognized by Woolf as a tribute to Mansfield, a way of keeping Mansfield alive for herself and her friend. Given the date of their London walk, it may even have been Woolf who brought up the subject of Mansfield's writing on the First World War. Woolf remained to the end of her life obsessed with Mansfield, and several times she records in her diary dreaming of Mansfield after her death (Woolf, 2008: 246; 300). Reading Mansfield's letters made her realize 'how gifted she was' (Nicolson and Trautmann, 1977: 546), and she reviewed and was inspired by passages in Mansfield's 1927 journal (Lounsberry, 2016: 191-204). It seems almost impossible that, during their meetings in London, Rodmell and Bowen's Court, Mansfield was not an important topic of conversation between the two writers, one of whom had known her, the other who continued to read and engage with her writing till the end of her life.

'Summer Night' is not the only war story in *Look at All Those Roses* (1941) to contain echoes of Mansfield. In 'Oh Madam', set in a bombed-out London house, Bowen employs the monologue form, much as Mansfield had in 'The Lady's Maid' (1920), to give a voice to a servant whose devotion is exploited by her employer. 'Unwelcome Idea', where Bowen uses dialogue between two middle class women on a Dublin tram to satirise Irish attitudes towards the war, recalls the dialogue between two woman friends in Mansfield's 'Two Tuppenny Ones, Please' (first published in 1917 in the *New Age*) set on a bus during the First World War. Bowen's story features more narration and less dialogue than Mansfield's sketch, and both sides of the dialogue are given to the reader; but there is the same mixture of triviality and seriousness, and in both stories the women veer off from war to discuss the latest fashions. Both stories reveal the callous complacency of those not directly involved in the war.

'Bliss' has come to be one of Mansfield's most commented-upon stories, with scholars drawing ever more meanings from it. It is all the more remarkable,

therefore, that neither Woolf nor Bowen liked this story. On reading it, Woolf wrote in her diary, 'I threw down *Bliss* with the exclamation, "She's done for!" Indeed I don't see how much faith in her as woman or writer can survive that sort of story' (Woolf, 2003: 2). Likewise, Bowen termed it 'one of her few disagreeable stories' (Bowen, 1986: 77). Since neither writer gave reasons (although Woolf speaks of 'superficial smartness'), one can only speculate as to why they disliked this story. In *Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf*, Angela Smith suggests that Woolf was anxious to distance herself from the ambivalent sexuality of 'Bliss' (Smith, 1999: 37). The same may be true of Bowen, whose bisexuality has by now been well documented and was guessed at by Woolf (Nicolson and Trautmann, 1979: 111). Whatever the case, it remains the fact that it is possible to see 'Bliss' as containing within it the seeds of one of Bowen's most skilful war stories, 'The Demon Lover' (1941).

In 'Bliss' a minor character, the effete Eddie, describes his frightening taxi drive to Bertha's house:

'I have had such a *dreadful* experience with a taxi-man; he was *most* sinister. I couldn't get him to *stop*. The *more* I knocked and called the *faster* he went. And *in* the moonlight this *bizarre* figure with the *flattened* head *crouching* over the *lit-tle* wheel ...'

He shuddered, taking off an immense white silk scarf. Bertha noticed that his socks were white, too –most charming.

'But how dreadful!' she cried.

'Yes, it really was,' said Eddie, following her into the drawing-room. 'I saw myself *driving* through Eternity in a *timeless* taxi.' (Mansfield, 1987: 98).

Scholars have adduced an old Scottish ballad, 'The Daemon Lover', as a source for Bowen's story of a man returning from the dead to redeem a promise from a lover (Corcoran, 2004: 150). Taxis, however, are hardly a standard feature of ballads, and perhaps it is permissible to add Mansfield to the list of influences on this story. It seems very likely that Mansfield's story sparked Bowen's interest in writing an uncanny story of psychological possession during the Second World War, using the uncanny as Mansfield had often done (Hanson, 2011: 115-30) to explore the psychological disturbances of war. The same themes of asocial desire and defamiliarization of domestic space run through 'Demon Lover' as in 'Bliss'. It is significant also that Bowen's story links the two wars through its sense of the First World War being unfinished business, as the ghost of Mrs Drover's soldier fiancé returns to take her on a nightmarish and seemingly unending taxi drive through London.

For her 1957 collection of Mansfield's stories, Bowen selected 'The Woman at the Store' as an example of the direction Mansfield's writing might have taken had she not left New Zealand. During the war, Bowen published one of her most accomplished stories, 'Look At All Those Roses' (1941), which possesses many of the same ingredients as Mansfield's story, namely an uncanny atmosphere, hints of female violence, a possibly murdered husband, and a disturbed young girl. This is not to deny the other literary influences on 'Look At All Those Roses' detected by Maud Ellmann in her fine analysis of Bowen's story (Ellmann, 2003: 107). Ellmann, however, does not mention the possibility of Mansfield as an influence. The

landscape of Suffolk is obviously very different from the wilds of colonial New Zealand, but Bowen takes pains to underline the isolation of the Mathers' house:

... for these last ten miles of the countryside looked abandoned; they passed dropping gates, rusty cattle-troughs and the thistly, tussocky, stale grass of neglected farms. There was nobody on the roads; perhaps there was nobody anywhere (Bowen, 1999: 512-13).

Tussock grass appears in Mansfield's story, and Edward's mention of 'poor whites' adds to the reader's sense of dislocation in Bowen's story.

Both stories conjure up an element of the surreal. Angela Smith observes that the interest of Mansfield's story lies 'not primarily in the plot, but in the repression and inarticulacy of the inhabitants of a surreal and brutal landscape' (Smith, 2000: 95). In Bowen's story the overabundant hallucinatory roses come to possess such a sinister quality that Lou wonders whether they are being fertilized by Mr Mather's corpse. In 'Katherine Mansfield, *Rhythm* and Henri Bergson' Eiko Nakano gives a Bergsonian reading of time in 'The Woman at the Store', finding that applying Bergson's distinction between chronological clock time, as apprehended by the intellect, and the personal experience of time as an intuitive, psychological phenomenon illuminates the relationship between past and present in the story (Nakano, 2011: 30-41). A similar approach could be taken to 'Look At All Those Roses' where Lou, hypnotized by the roses, surrenders her rational consciousness to a dream-like intuition of past events, which might include Mr Mather's murder, before being brought back to clock time by the arrival of Edward, in a hurry to rescue her from the house. Both 'The Woman at the Store' and 'Look At All Those Roses' achieve a balance between the dynamic and the static, opening with movement (horses in Mansfield, a car in Bowen), having a lengthy middle section evoking the deathly stasis of the mother and her impaired child, and ending with movement again, as the travellers flee a possible scene of crime.

Both stories suggest the masculine appearance of the mother, underlining her position as head of the household and her remoteness from the niceties of socially-gendered behaviour. In *Radical Mansfield: Double Discourse in Katherine Mansfield's Short Stories*, Pamela Dunbar makes perceptive points about the degendering of the woman in Mansfield's story (Dunbar, 1997: 44-9). In Mansfield the woman carries a rifle and has 'red, pulpy hands' (Mansfield, 1987: 553); in Bowen she is described as 'a shabby amazon of a woman' with 'powerful-looking hands' (Bowen, 1999: 514). Bowen's story is the more ambivalent: the reader has to decide whether the Mathers' house is an empowering maternal space where Lou can find peace after her fractious relationship with Edward, or whether this maternal atmosphere in fact contains a threat. As Lou succumbs to passivity in the Mathers' rose-scented garden, the reader fears that she is experiencing an atavistic retreat to the womb and will become as trapped in this maternal environment as thirteen-year-old Josephine, whose back was injured by her father and who lies immobile in an invalid carriage.

'Look At All Those Roses' and 'The Woman at the Store' alike illustrate a collision between genres: between realism, the social realism of a bickering modern couple in Bowen, the harsh realism of raw colonial life in Mansfield, and Gothic horror. Anthony Alpers remarked of Mansfield's New Zealand stories: 'they were written in a

cultural isolation that was total for their author: no one who read them in London could have known what in fact they achieved' (Alpers, 1980: 155). Bowen's borrowings, however, show that she at least did appreciate Mansfield's achievement.

One final borrowing from Mansfield must be mentioned. Mansfield's tuberculosis, diagnosed in 1917, made it unlikely she would ever return to New Zealand, and in any case her home there had been devastated by her brother's death. Mansfield's review of her life with Murry in her *Journal* (December 1920) expresses her heartache over Murry's absences and infidelities, and the illness that made it impossible for her to realize her dreams of a settled home. The phrase she uses is 'I have no abiding place' (Mansfield, 1954: 230). Bowen's travel memoir, *A Time in Rome* (1960), has two concluding sentences that have long perplexed readers: "My darling, my darling, my darling. Here we have no abiding city" (Bowen, 2010: 242). Behind them lie many separate sources of anguish: her lover Charles Ritchie's marriage in 1948; giving up her London home in early 1952; Alan's death in August of the same year; the loss of Bowen's Court in 1959; and her heartache over her lengthy separations from Ritchie. *A Time in Rome* is less a guidebook than a record of confusion and loneliness, and Eibhear Walshe sees it as revelatory of Bowen's search for belonging in a city that constantly evades her attempts to know it (Walshe, 2009: 152). Victoria Glendinning describes the final two sentences as 'the controlled, undirected cry of the displaced person' (Glendinning, 1977: 215). Under these circumstances it is permissible to wonder to what extent Bowen is consciously echoing Mansfield's sense of psychic homelessness expressed in her journal. Mansfield was much on her mind at this time, since she had had to set aside work on *A Time in Rome* to compose her preface to Mansfield's stories. In a letter to Ritchie, dated 1956, Bowen speaks of feeling possessed by Mansfield as she wrote the preface, being 'caught' by 'the personality of the woman' and becoming 'so deeply involved that the thing became more and more difficult to write' (Glendinning and Robertson, 2009: 222).

Bowen recognised early on the similarity between her aims in the short story and those of Mansfield. The precise verbal echoes that continue throughout her career demonstrate how great and pervasive was Mansfield's influence on her work, especially when, possibly prompted by a conversation with Woolf, she turned back to Mansfield during the Second World War. When Bowen wrote of Mansfield long after her death: 'The effort she was involved in involves us – how can we feel her other than a contemporary?' (Bowen, 1986: 85), she was surely expressing her own feeling of indebtedness to Mansfield, who had kept her company almost to the end of her writing career.

## **Bibliography**

- Alpers, Anthony. 1980. *The Life of Katherine Mansfield*. London: Viking.
- Bell, Anne Olivier, assisted by McNeillie, Andrew, eds. (1984). *The Diary of Virginia Woolf Volume V: 1936-41*. London: The Hogarth Press.
- Bowen, Elizabeth. (1965). *A Day in the Dark and Other Stories*. London: Jonathan Cape.
- (1986). *The Mulberry Tree: Writings of Elizabeth Bowen* ed. Hermione Lee. London: Virago.
- (1987). *The Heat of the Day*. London: Penguin.
- (1999). *Collected Stories*. London: Vintage.
- (2010). *A Time in Rome*. London: Vintage.

- Corcoran, Neil. (2004). *Elizabeth Bowen: The Enforced Return*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dunbar, Pamela. (1997). *Radical Mansfield: Double Discourse in Katherine Mansfield's Short Stories*. London: Macmillan.
- Ellmann, Maud. (2003). *Elizabeth Bowen: The Shadow Across the Page*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Gildersleeve, Jessica. (2015). "Where is she?" Katherine Mansfield and Elizabeth Bowen', 35-47 in Sarah Ailwood and Melinda Harvey eds., *Katherine Mansfield and Literary Influence*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Glendinning, Victoria. (1977). *Elizabeth Bowen: Portrait of a Writer*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.
- with Robertson, Judith eds. (2009). *Love's Civil War: Elizabeth Bowen and Charles Ritchie*. London: Simon and Schuster.
- Hanson, Clare. (2011). 'Katherine Mansfield's Uncanniness', 115-30 in Gerri Kimber and Janet Wilson, eds., *Celebrating Katherine Mansfield: A Centenary Volume of Essays*. New York: Palgrave.
- Hepburn, Allan ed. (2008a). *Elizabeth Bowen: The Bazaar and Other Stories*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- ed. (2008b). *People, Places, Things: Essays by Elizabeth Bowen*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- ed. (2010). *Listening In: Broadcasts, Speeches, and Interviews by Elizabeth Bowen*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Jones, Kathleen. (2011). 'The Mansfield Legacy', 165-77 in Janet Wilson, Gerri Kimber and Susan Reid, eds., *Katherine Mansfield and Literary Modernism*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Kimber, Gerri, Todd Martin, Delia da Sousa Correa, Isobel Maddison and Alice Kelly, eds. (2014). *Katherine Mansfield and World War One*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Laird, Heather. (2009). 'The "Placing" and Politics of Bowen in Contemporary Irish Literary and Cultural Criticism', 193-207 in Eibhear Walshe, ed., *Elizabeth Bowen Dublin: Irish Academic Press*.
- Lee, Hermione. (1997). *Virginia Woolf*. London: Vintage.
- (1999). *Elizabeth Bowen*. London: Virago.
- Lounsbury, Barbara. (2016). *Virginia Woolf's Modernist Path: Her Middle Diaries and the Diaries She Read*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.
- McDonnell, Jenny. (2011). "'The Famous New Zealand Mag.-Story Writer": Katherine Mansfield, Periodical Publishing and the Short Story', 42-52 in Janet Wilson, Gerri Kimber and Susan Reid, eds., *Katherine Mansfield and Literary Modernism*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Mansfield, Katherine. (1929). *The Letters of Katherine Mansfield* ed. John Middleton Murry. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- (1954). *The Journal of Katherine Mansfield 1904-1922* ed. John Middleton Murry. London: Constable.
- (1987). *Collected Stories*. Penguin: Harmondsworth.
- Moran, Patricia. (1996). *Word of Mouth: Body Language in Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf*.
- Nakano, Eiko. (2011). 'Katherine Mansfield, Rhythm and Henri Bergson', 30-41 in Janet Wilson, Gerri Kimber and Susan Reid, eds., *Katherine Mansfield and Literary Modernism*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Nicolson, Nigel and Trautmann, Joanne eds. (1977). *The Letters of Virginia Woolf. Volume III: 1923-1928*. London: The Hogarth Press.

- eds. (1979). *The Letters of Virginia Woolf. Volume V: 1932-1935*. London: The Hogarth Press.
- eds. (1980). *The Letters of Virginia Woolf. Volume VI: 1936-1941*. London: The Hogarth Press.
- Plumridge, Anna ed. (2015). *The Urewera Notebook by Katherine Mansfield*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Smith, Angela. (1999). *Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf: A Public of Two*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- (2000). *Katherine Mansfield: A Literary Life*. New York: Palgrave.
- Stafford, Jane and Williams, Mark. (2006). 'Katherine Mansfield: A Modernist in Maoriland', pp.142-70 in *Maoriland: New Zealand Literature 1872-1914*. Wellington: Victoria University Press.
- Walshe, Eibhear (2009). 'A Sort of Lunatic Giant', 150-61 in Eibhear Walshe, ed., *Elizabeth Bowen*. Dublin: Irish Academic Press.
- Wilson, Janet. (2015). 'The "Burden" of the Feminine: Frank Sargeson's Encounter with Katherine Mansfield', 207-18 in Sarah Ailwood and Melinda Harvey eds., *Katherine Mansfield and Literary Influence*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Woolf, Virginia. (2003). *A Writer's Diary: Being Extracts from the Diary of Virginia Woolf* ed. Leonard Woolf. New York and London: Harcourt.
- (2008). *Selected Diaries* abridged and edited by Anne Olivier Bell, with an introduction by Quentin Bell. London: Vintage.

~~~~~

Imola Nagy-Seres ~ The phenomenological body in Elizabeth Bowen's interwar novels

In the last three decades critics have shown a growing interest in Elizabeth Bowen's *corpus*, whose borders, as the author herself put it, are not easily delineated: 'Bowen terrain cannot be demarcated on any existing map; it is unspecific' (1986, 282). Throughout her career Bowen showed an acute preoccupation with the concept of liminality, those in-between spaces that elude rigid definitions. Borders do exist in Bowen's fiction, but they are not clearly drawn or closed. On the contrary, Bowen was interested in spaces that are open to accommodate otherness. While space can be understood in its geographical sense, this article is more interested in the affective terrain delineated by interacting human bodies. Bowen's fiction shows that intimacy is born in a space created by subjects involved in sensuous (and at times sensual) bodily interplay.

The concept of corporeality has not eluded the attention of Bowen scholars. The majority of critics have focused on the incorporeal nature of Bowen's characters, drawing attention to their lack of agency, either through their ghostlike qualities or

their resemblance to automata. In their influential study, *Elizabeth Bowen and the Dissolution of the Novel*, Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle argued that bodily contours in Bowen's novels are dissolved to such a degree that characters cease to exist as human beings, and that they 'uncannily *become* words and sentences', a characteristic that hints at postmodernism (1995, xvii, italics in original). Bowen's portrayal of disembodied protagonists has also been explained by her fascination with technological innovations. Maud Ellmann has noted that Bowen's interwar novels show modern transport's dehumanising effect, which reduces characters 'to puppets of their own technology' (2004, 98). While Bowen's works undoubtedly corroborate the reading of the human body as both an ephemeral ghost and a lifeless automaton, this article demonstrates that her fiction also presents another side of human corporeality, which has been overlooked by previous criticism. Through the recurrent tensions between characters' ghostly nature and their continuous quest for bodily stability, Bowen compels her readers to reappraise the concept of corporeality, and what it means to exist in the world as an embodied subject. This article reads two of Bowen's interwar novels, *To the North* (1932) and *The House in Paris* (1935), in tandem with phenomenological theories of corporeality, in order to consider the ways in which the embodied nature of humans allows for the forging of affective interpersonal bonds.

Through close reading of relevant passages from *To the North* and *The House in Paris* alongside the phenomenologist theories of the twentieth-century French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961), this article will argue that intimacy takes place between sensing and living bodies that exist in constant communication with the surrounding universe. Bowen's interwar novels, especially *To the North*, reveal the dangers of the body's failure to respond to sensuous stimuli, which can eventually lead to the subject's death. In *The House in Paris* and *To the North*, Bowen exposes the fallacies of two extreme attempts to understand other people's inner experiences. While *The House in Paris* shows the inadequacies of what I will call the hyper-visible mode (the portrayal of the human subject as a perfectly polished, painstakingly detailed and clear photograph), *To the North* draws attention to the perils of *in*-visibility, which becomes coterminous with disembodiment. This article thus reconsiders the repercussions of recent criticism's tendency to focus on the absence of corporeal matter in Bowen's fiction. So far, critics have mostly concentrated on either Bowen's obsession with the body as language (which led to Bennett and Royle's suggestion about the inclusion of the Bowen *oeuvre* in the postmodern canon) or her method of substituting human body matter for animated objects, from furniture to clothes.¹ This article builds on the above-mentioned scholarly works, but also distances itself from them by throwing fresh light on the importance of the sensing, flesh-and-blood human body in Bowen's portrayal of affective relationships in her selected interwar novels.

Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological approach to corporeality elucidates Bowen's interpretation of embodiment on several levels. In the 1940s, Merleau-Ponty proposed the idea that human perception is not a purely mental activity, as the

¹ Elizabeth Inglesby has suggested that in Bowen's fiction objects such as furniture and houses are imbued with feelings, opinions and willpower, and 'have relationships with one another' without the need for a human interlocutor (2007, 307). In a similar fashion, Vike Martina Plock has written on the function of clothes in creating interpersonal ties in *To the North*, arguing that Bowen's passive characters, who appear like 'chessboard pieces', forge bonds through their sartorial accessories (2017, 153).

majority of earlier philosophical schools had considered, but an embodied state. In *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), he explains that the body does not simply represent a medium through which we receive impulses from the environment, but that our corporeality provides the basic condition of how we experience the world. The body, at the centre of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, is a sensible and living entity whose existence unfolds in its constant interaction with the world. This mutual influence between self and other can be grasped through the concept of reversibility, which Merleau-Ponty introduces in his posthumously published work, *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968).² Here, he suggests that our interaction with the world operates as a two-way principle: we are not only touchers and seers, but at the same time touched and seen. In this multi-sensuous mode of relating to the other, sight and tactility are conflated, producing a form of proximity tangible with the gaze (1968, 131). As such, for Merleau-Ponty, the body exists as an organic continuance of the world (comprising other living and non-living entities), without indistinguishably merging into its surroundings.

By drawing parallels between Bowen's and Merleau-Ponty's *oeuvre*, this article does not suggest that they represented direct sources of influence for each other. I have not found any reference to Merleau-Ponty in Bowen's writings, though she was undoubtedly familiar with the works of other phenomenological and existentialist French philosophers such as Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980) and Simone de Beauvoir (1908–1986), contemporaries and (for a while) friends of Merleau-Ponty.³ Despite being a fluent English speaker and often traveling to Britain, Merleau-Ponty is unlikely to have read Bowen's fiction. The purpose of this article is neither to use phenomenology as a critical lens through which to look at Bowen's works, nor to identify phenomenological influences in Bowen's writing. Instead, this article shows one way in which Bowen's fiction and Merleau-Ponty's philosophy can enter into dialogue, through analysing the possibilities and limits of embodied interpersonal communication, which was a central concern for both intellectuals.⁴

Before turning to a reading of Bowen's and Merleau-Ponty's texts, however, it is essential to clarify what Bowen meant by bodily *matter*. Materiality, for Bowen, is not synonymous with unchangeable definitiveness and rigidity. On the contrary, as *The House in Paris* suggests, finalised substantiality shuns, rather than nourishes, intimacy. The novel is divided into three interlinked parts: the first and third sections are entitled 'The Present' and tell the story of two children, Henrietta and Leopold, who spend a day in the Parisian home of Naomi Fisher, the former fiancé of Leopold's dead father. From the middle part, called the 'The Past', the reader learns about the tragic love story of Leopold's parents, Karen Michaelis and Max Ebhart.

² The original French version was published in 1964.

³ Bowen came to know Sartre through her friend Raymond Mortimer (1895–1980), critic and literary editor of the *New Statesman*. In a 1945 letter to her lover, Charles Ritchie, Bowen expressed her interest for Sartre's work: 'If you do see the NS [*New Statesman*], I hope you haven't missed the sharp little rap Raymond delivered to Existentialism in general, Sartre in particular. [...] I do want to read *Huis Clos*...' [Sartre's 1944 play, translated as *No Exit*] (Glendinning, 2008, 80).

⁴ Few critics have read Bowen in conjunction with Merleau-Ponty. Ellmann has briefly mentioned that, in Bowen's fiction, furniture's ability to reciprocate the human gaze can be read as a 'paranoid exaggeration of Merleau-Ponty's theory' (2001, 77). In her unpublished doctoral thesis, Katy Alexandra Menczer has also emphasised the 'hallucinatory or uncanny' nature of visibility in Bowen and Merleau-Ponty (2006, 2). In contrast with Ellmann's and Menczer's argument, this article focuses on the visible as a sight/site of tangible proximity, which allows for, rather than inhibits, the gradual unfolding of bodily intimacy.

While being engaged to Naomi (Karen's best friend), Max falls in love with Karen. Their secret liaison will eventually lead to Karen's pregnancy and Max's suicide. Before this tragic outcome, however, there is an important moment in the novel when Karen muses on her mother, Mrs Michaelis's, reaction to the news of Max's engagement to Naomi. Mrs Michaelis tries to pin down Max's reasons for asking for Naomi's hand; but, as Karen observes, her mother's method of grasping human personality is burdened with an underlying sense of violence originating from false omniscience:

[Mrs Michaelis's] well-lit explanations of people were like photographs taken when the camera could not lie; they stunned your imagination by *being* exact. Would those unmysterious views in a railway carriage make you visit a place, even in dreams? You could not fall in love with the subject of an Edwardian camera-portrait, with polished shoulders, coiffure and curved throat. The lake showing every ripple, the wood showing every leaf, or the stately neck with pearls are too deadeningly clear. It is more than colour they lack. Without their indistinctness things do not exist; you cannot desire them. (1998, 118, italics in original)

Echoing Woolf's famous essay 'Character in Fiction' (1924), Bowen gives voice to her conviction that hyper-visibility does not lead to more accurate knowledge of others. Mrs Michaelis's 'well-lit' explanations, resembling 'Edwardian camera-portrait[s]', might provide a minutely detailed and exact description of people's exterior appearance ('coiffure', 'stately neck with pearls'), but they fundamentally fail to capture human nature, which extends beyond the realm of pure visibility. Mrs Michaelis petrifies people and transforms them into 'deadeningly clear' objects with 'polished shoulders' and 'curved throat[s]', and consequently she ceases to care for the other's feeling body, which, as phenomenologists suggest, cannot be restrained within rigid frames. Through Mrs Michaelis's method of portrayal, Bowen warns against reading techniques that try to draw characters' facial contours with such realistic precision that they leave no room for 'indistinctness', which represents an essential precondition of 'falling in love'. By 'mystery' and 'indistinctness', however, Bowen does not mean complete translucency or retreat into fleeting immateriality. On the contrary, she emphasises the significance of the body as a living, vulnerable, three-dimensional entity that cannot be 'pressed flat without losing form' (1998, 119). As Karen concludes: 'What Mrs Michaelis said about Max and his reasons for wanting to marry Naomi would be, no doubt, true – if you pressed him flat like a flower in a book. But he had a thickness you had to recognize [...]' (119). In this context, the verb 'press' carries shades of violence and expresses a desire for possessiveness, even at the cost of intrusion into the other's body. Through Karen's criticism of her mother's reading methods, Bowen exposes the dangers of restricting people within the fixed boundaries of a realist portrait.

How can we then preserve humans' 'thickness' without a complete refrainment from tactility? Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of reversibility offers a potential answer. In *The Visible and the Invisible*, he argues that the closeness between subject and world can be better comprehended by analysing the phenomenon of self-touch: the tactile encounter between two hands belonging to the same body: '[M]y hand, while it is felt from within, is also accessible from without, itself tangible, for my other hand, for example, if it takes its place among the things it touches, is in a sense one of them, opens finally upon a tangible being of which it is also a part.' (1968, 133) The

'tangible being' is what Merleau-Ponty labels 'flesh', a concept he defines as neither matter nor mind nor substance, but an "element" of Being, 'midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being.' (1968, 139) The 'flesh', in Merleau-Ponty's account, is the liminal space between matter and mind, object and subject, self and world. This 'element', of which both self and other are made, allows for a kind of communion based on gentle but not indistinguishable unity. Merleau-Ponty draws attention to the impossibility of complete unison by elaborating on the unaccomplished nature of reversibility: one's hand cannot simultaneously fulfil the role of toucher and touched, as 'either my right hand really passes over to the rank of touched, but then its hold on the world is interrupted; or it retains its hold on the world, but then I do not really touch *it* [...]' (1968, 147–8, italics in original).

Nonetheless, as Merleau-Ponty emphasises, the impossibility of reversibility is not a 'failure' but a meeting space where communication can take place:

But this hiatus between my right hand touched and my right hand touching [...] between one moment of my tactile life and the following one, is not an ontological void, a non-being: it is spanned by the total being of my body, and by that of the world; it is the zero of pressure between two solids that makes them adhere to one another. My flesh and that of the world therefore involve clear zones, clearings, about which pivot their opaque zones [...]. (1968, 148)

Genuine togetherness does not happen in the perfect interlocking of hands and fingers, but precisely in the hollow between them, the space of care and love where union transforms into delicate touch, firm enough to 'inscribe upon' the touched body, and tender enough to preserve the other's individual borders (1968, 146). In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty describes the relationships between subject and world as a hollow or fold, which 'was made and [...] can be unmade' (2012, 223). The final part of Merleau-Ponty's definition of hollow is particularly important as it suggests a sense of flexibility and softness in the contact between self and other. It is precisely this kind of softness that Mrs Michaelis's approach to Max lacks. Her attempt at confining Max within clearly delineated, rigid frames results in the violent gesture of 'press[ing] him flat', without caring for his three-dimensional corporeality. Mrs Michaelis's framing method remains phenomenologically problematic, because it fails to leave space for the *unfolding* of the myriad possibilities that make up a human being. As Karen recognises, a person's experience cannot be reduced to a singular, clearly definable motive without violently encroaching upon his/her human integrity. Merleau-Ponty also draws attention to the importance of viewing the other as a 'living and upright body', not a 'flat being', but one that has 'depth', thus resisting a 'survey from above' and instead allowing for a coexistence 'in the same world' (1968, 138; 136). Bowen's and Merleau-Ponty's ideas of embodiment can therefore be located in a liminal space between 'deadening' clarity and invisibility, possessive grasp and total refrain from touch.

While in *The House in Paris* Bowen dismisses hyper-visibility, in other novels published in the 1930s she stresses the dangers of a total lack of visibility which risks annihilating the subject's corporeality and curtailing intimate interpersonal bonds. In *To the North* Bowen is deeply concerned with the possibilities and limits of embodied communication. The novel is set in interwar London, where the young Emmeline Summers lives with her sister-in-law, Cecilia, following the untimely

death of Henry, Cecilia's husband and Emmeline's brother. Emmeline epitomises the modern woman: she manages a travel agency, which she also co-owns, drives a car, and undertakes business trips to foreign countries. Based on this description, the reader might expect to encounter a strong-willed and determined woman; however, this is rarely the case. Through her portrayal of Emmeline Bowen shows the perils of the complete dissolution of the subject's material borders, which can lead to violence in interpersonal relationships.

Emmeline's life changes dramatically when she encounters Mark Linkwater, a young lawyer, with whom she falls in love. As their clandestine relationship gradually unfolds, they meet regularly in Markie's flat and occasionally in public spaces. From the beginning, Markie's intentions are dubious, often imbued with desires for domination. Indeed, several commentators on *To the North*, mostly from a feminist point of view, have remarked upon the unlikable nature of Markie, who seduces and ruthlessly abandons Emmeline, then suddenly reappears in her life expressing his wish to continue their casual love affair without committing himself. Ellmann has called Markie 'satanic', someone who, together with Bowen's other caddish male characters, such as Eddie in *The Death of the Heart* (1938), represents the 'killer of the heart' (2001, 77). As Ellmann and other critics have proposed, the lovers' relationship in *To the North* is heavily invested with gender stereotypes.

Phyllis Lassner has written that the reader is 'given no reason to sympathise with Markie', adding that '[i]n the light of his characterisation, even empathy is dissuaded' (1990, 62). Furthermore, Geneviève Brassard has suggested that despite Bowen's rejection of feminism in her essays, she makes 'narrative interventions that look and sound feminist' (2007, 286). Brassard alludes to Bowen's dismissal of Woolf's version of feminism formulated in the latter's non-fictional writings. For Bowen, Woolf's feminist manifestos represent her least successful writings: 'What must inevitably be called Virginia Woolf's feminism appears most strongly in her doctrinal, non-fiction books; most notably in *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas* – it was a bleak quality, an aggressive streak, which can but irritate [...]' (1950, 81). Despite Bowen's open rejection of Woolf's feminism, Brassard argues that Bowen's portrayal of 'complex women [...], her unflinching eye for and ear for male weakness, and her clinical analysis of women's motivations and actions' actually questions her critique of feminism (286). Similarly to previous commentators, Brassard locates Bowen's feminism in her emphasis on 'male weakness', epitomised by Markie, whose 'opportunistic sexual morality "mark[s]" him [...] as a typical male of the period who worships female purity but still wants women to be sexually available for his needs' (290). Indeed, Markie's wish to possess Emmeline is partly rooted in his selfishness and male pride, but by dismissing his attitude as merely misogynistic, we would miss out on the complexity and ambiguity of male touch in *To the North*. Bowen might have been a feminist, but her version of feminism was definitely far from antagonistic gender models. Instead, she was interested in a form of feminist sensibility that refused to view female–male relationships in strictly hierarchical terms, and embraced the fragility of the human flesh as a basic precondition of intimate coexistence.

While I do not wish to downplay Markie's exploitative behaviour towards Emmeline, it is important to recognise that his emotions cannot be reduced to mere carnal desires imbued with male superiority. After all, he rarely enjoys his lover's docility; on the contrary, he finds her acquiescence viscerally frightening. Bowen's

unpublished correspondence also warns against simplistic readings of Markie's persona. In a letter dated 10 September 1932, Alfred E. Coppard, Bowen's fellow writer and friend, commented on *To the North*: 'It seems a pity that Markie had to share [Emmeline's] death, altho [sic] her own tragic end began to menace me long before the end. It loomed as inevitable somehow, altho [sic] I could not believe it would be suicide. [...] Markie is amazingly well drawn, a disagreeable & yet blameless figure.' (Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin, Elizabeth Bowen Collection, Box 10, Folder 6) Coppard's letter summarises succinctly the difficulty of pinning down Markie, who is at once a 'disagreeable & yet blameless figure'. Bowen shares Coppard's opinion in her reply on 15 October 1932: 'I agree: it was tough on Markie, having to come in on that death' (Harry Ransom Center, A.E. Coppard Collection, Box 25, Folder 7). Markie might not be entirely 'blameless', and he is surely not agreeable, but as Bowen and Coppard acknowledge, his character cannot be easily categorised. He might not represent the most complexly drawn character in the novel, but his attitude to and feelings for Emmeline reveal important aspects of Bowen's ideas about embodiment.

Undoubtedly, Markie's caddishness represents a central concern of the novel, corroborated in several scenes. His possessive attitude is expressed both verbally and in coercive tactile gestures. During one of Emmeline's visits to his flat, Markie, resenting the fact that his lover refuses to understand the 'moral' of his story about the detrimental effects of female employment, firmly presses 'one hand on the back of her neck to make her sit quiet. For she was inclined to get up and stroll round the room, as elusive in mind as in person.' (2016, 176) This passage elucidates the ambiguous nature of touch in *To the North*. While Markie's grip on Emmeline's neck is heavily invested with violence, his gesture is also rooted in his necessity for a bodily sense of security, which the volatile Emmeline cannot offer him. Indeed, throughout their tumultuous affair, Markie constantly feels threatened by Emmeline's physical evaporation.

Markie's dreads become strongly articulated in Paris, where he accompanies his lover on a business trip. While waiting in the hotel hall for Emmeline, who has returned to her room to fetch a fresh pair of gloves, Markie muses poignantly on the possibility of her definitive disappearance:

She might have melted in some corridor of their hotel, her bodily vanishing would [...] hardly have been incredible; for he had been oppressed since last night by sensations of having been overshoot, of having, in some final soaring flight of her exaltation, been outdistanced: as though a bird whose heart one moment one could feel beating has escaped from the hands. (2016, 140)

Markie's desire to hold Emmeline still between his hands is delicately poised between tenderness, an image of care and love, and a sense of violent oppressiveness. The heart imagery subtly illustrates Markie's ambivalent feelings, at the same time suggesting the dangers of Emmeline's corporeal absence, which hovers hauntingly over their relationship, at times hindering the establishment of intimate contact. Though Markie's attitude towards Emmeline cannot be either denied or absolved, it is important to acknowledge that his often seemingly possessive touch is imbued with a sensation of utter despair caused by his inability to hold (on to) the woman's heartbeats without feeling constantly threatened by her dissolution. As such, the novel outlines a model of touch rooted in both female and male vulnerabilities,

complicating existing feminist readings focusing exclusively on women's subordination, and instead working towards a dialogical framework of gender. The relationship between Emmeline and Markie reveals the lovers' mutual fragility, caused partly by their inability to preserve their own bodily contours, while simultaneously reaching out to the other.

To the North thus repeatedly reminds us of the inherent perils in the characters' failures at self-materialisation. Too much transparency and volatility threaten to annihilate the subject and inhibit interpersonal contact, as Emmeline's portrayal suggests. From the beginning of the novel, Emmeline is described as having a 'transparent skin', which is a recurrent motif in the book, and becomes emblematic of the fundamental difference between her and Markie's interpretation of love (2016, 42). During their flight to Paris, Markie contemplates Emmeline's translucency: 'Close in the strong light and distant in roaring silence her face appeared transparent; watching the thoughts come up like shadows behind it he thought of the Scottish queen's ill-fated delicate throat, down which, says a chronicler, red wine was seen to run as she drank.' (2016, 135) 'Strong light' and translucency do not contribute towards a clearer understanding of Emmeline's being; on the contrary, her thoughts remain 'shadows' for Markie, while the parallel between her and the 'ill-fated' Scottish queen foreshadows the novel's tragic end. Emmeline's transparency is harmful because it is associated with extensive openness and subordination, which represent a serious threat to her corporeal integrity. In her interaction with Markie, her bodily reality often evaporates, leaving no space for the unfurling of intimacy.

While Emmeline's translucency frequently serves the purpose of arousing Markie's carnal desire, at times imbued with gentleness and care, volatility proves to be inadequate for creating lasting bonds. Instead of providing a better insight into the other's being, limpidity dissolves the materiality of the viewed subject, rendering it untouchable. Hence, while both invisibility and hyper-visibility (as discussed in relation to *The House in Paris*) act as blocking forces in interpersonal relationships, *To the North* seems to favour a state of semi-transparency. Bowen's emphasis on half-transparency anticipates Merleau-Ponty's idea quoted earlier in this article, in which he defines the subject's interlacing with the flesh of the world as a liminal state between clarity and opacity. In Bowen's novel, Emmeline's semi-transparency coincides with the solidification of her corporeal outlines and the affirmation of her autonomy. When, during a quarrel, Markie, 'tightening his grip on her elbows', accuses her of not thinking and failing to have 'common sense', she reacts with unexpected firmness:

[S]top, Markie, you're hurting me rather [...] A shadow of more than incomprehension, of distaste, even of boredom crossed Emmeline's face which, always transparent to feeling, now seemed, pale and clear in the lamplight, more than half transparent materially. She said: 'You are like an insurance company,' and did not explain why. (2016, 181–2)

Emmeline's 'always transparent' face acquires a new quality, at once 'pale' and 'clear', opaque and limpid, volatile and solid. Her complexion becomes 'more than half transparent materially', suggesting that while she continues to reveal her innermost being to her lover, she also starts to show resistance by hardening her bodily contours. Resistance, in this context, does not necessarily mean hostility but rather the precondition of self-preservation, and by extension, of intimate touch. By

conserving her own borders, Emmeline momentarily withstands her lover's verbal and physical violence, and asserts her own agency.

Moments of self-materialisation, however, prove to be fragile and transitory. As the love affair inevitably approaches its end, Emmeline becomes increasingly alienated from her body. After a sudden breakup with Markie, Emmeline ceases to exist as a living body in the Merleau-Pontian sense. She loses connection not only with her lover but also with her immediate surroundings. She walks the once familiar London streets like a ghost haunted by 'the whirr' of her unanswered calls to Markie (2016, 223). Her body starts to slowly disintegrate: the typist in the travel agency observes how Emmeline 'look[s] all to bits' (222), while the narrator comments on Emmeline's crumbling sense of self: 'Walking the streets blindly she did not know that she thought, till a knuckle grazed on the wall, a shout as she stepped off into the traffic recalled her from depths whose darkness she had not measured' (223). She becomes unable to identify experiences and sense perceptions as belonging to *her*: 'The bleeding knuckle, the angry face of a man shouting down from a lorry were like bright light flashed in her eyes [...]' (223). Emmeline feels her own body parts as separate entities, objects detached from her self: it is not *her* knuckles that get hurt but *a* and later *the* knuckle, whose bleeding she views with unconscious and distant disinterestedness. Emmeline ceases to be the Merleau-Pontian perceiving subject, who, intertwined with the flesh of the world, 'feels that [s]he is the sensible itself coming to itself and that in return the sensible is in [her] eyes as it were [her] double or an extension of [her] own flesh' (1968, 114). The 'sensible' can be no longer located in the eyes of the woman, who 'walk[s] the streets blindly' and fails to attach meaning to the 'bright light flashed in her eyes'. The world no longer represents the extension of her flesh, but transforms into a chaotic whirl, in which her own corporeality comes under increasing threat of annihilation.

Emmeline's disembodied state culminates in the last chapter of the novel, when her inability to "return" to her own body results in her and Markie's tragic death. Physical death, nevertheless, is preceded by the gradual disintegration of the feeling body, which transforms into an insentient automaton. Near the end of the novel, Cecilia, without consulting with Emmeline, invites Markie for dinner in the St John's Wood home of the sisters-in-law. Emmeline, who has not been in touch with Markie for weeks, objects to the invitation but finally decides to attend the dinner. After the dinner Emmeline offers to drive Markie to the station from where he can take a train to Baldock. However, instead of going to King's Cross, Emmeline heads directly to the north. During their journey, Markie's desires rekindle and he tries to win her back by persuading her to accompany him to his flat. But Emmeline, as Markie soon realises, has already ceased to be a living body. The narrative subtly suggests the metamorphosis of woman into machine: her fingers are hard and cold and her agency lost, as her limbs become the mechanical prolongations of the car. Her frozen hands form an uncanny union with the steering wheel, and her silver slippers cause the speedometer to creep up without any human will involved (236). She loses sense of her own faculties and Markie's presence beside her: 'She was lost to her own identity, a confining husk' (242). Her impenetrable husk prevents her from connecting to the living world as her sense perceptions gradually shut down: her skin is unable to register touch, and her pupils, which earlier could at least detect some flashes of light, are now only filled with 'night' (240). Emmeline's insentient body becomes one with the accelerating machine which she can no longer control, causing the imminent accident in which the lovers lose their lives.

Through her persistent focus on the simultaneous necessity for and danger of pinning down bodily matter, Bowen often creates a viscerally unsettling atmosphere in her interwar novels. Her literary methods challenge us as readers to reappraise our own concepts of corporeality, and our understanding of what it means to affectively touch other bodies. Tactile interpersonal encounters reveal the complex, problematic nature of intimacy, which often refuses any critical attempt to confine it within predetermined frames. Affective encounters, as Bowen and Merleau-Ponty suggest, unfold in hollows, that liminal space-time in which borders are not hermetically sealed but infinitely open, at once allowing the subject to touch and be touched by the world, and protecting his/her individuality. A reading of Bowen's novels alongside Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological philosophy demonstrates that our relationships are deeply rooted in the flesh of the world, of which our bodies constitute organic (though not always seamless) components.

Bibliography

- Bennett, A., Royle, N. 1995. *Elizabeth Bowen and the Dissolution of the Novel*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Bowen, E. 1950 (1949). 'The Achievement of Virginia Woolf'. In: *Collected Impressions*. London: Longmans Green and Co. 78–82.
- 1986. 'Pictures and Conversations'. In: Lee, H. ed. *The Mulberry Tree: Writings of Elizabeth Bowen*. London: Random House.
- 1998 (1935). *The House in Paris*. London: Vintage.
- 2016 (1932). *To the North*. London: Vintage.
- Brassard, G. 2007. 'Fast and Loose in Interwar London: Mobility and Sexuality in Elizabeth Bowen's *To the North*'. *Women: A Cultural Review*. 18(3). 282–302.
- Ellmann, M. 2001. 'Elizabeth Bowen: The Missing Corner'. In: Barbeito, M. ed. *Feminism, Aesthetics and Subjectivity. Essays on Women and Culture in Early Twentieth Century British Literature*. Santiago de Compostela: Universidade de Santiago de Compostela.
- 2004. *Elizabeth Bowen: The Shadow Across the Page*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Glendinning, V. ed. 2008. *Love's Civil War*. London: Pocket Books.
- Inglesby, C.E. 2007. 'Expressive Objects': Elizabeth Bowen's Narrative Materializes'. *Modern Fiction Studies*. 53(2), 306–333.
- Lassner, P. 1990. *Elizabeth Bowen*. Savage, Maryland: Barnes & Nobles.
- Menczer, K.A., 2006. *From Flesh to Fiction: The Visible and the Invisible in the Work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Eudora Welty and Elizabeth Bowen*. Ph.D. thesis, Queen Mary, University of London.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. 2012 (1945). *Phenomenology of Perception*. Translated from French by Landes. A.D. London and New York: Routledge.
- 1968 (1964). *The Visible and the Invisible*. Translated from French by Lingis A. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press.
- Plock, M.V. 2017. *Modernism, Fashion and Interwar Women Writers*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

~~~~~

## Charlotte Hallahan ~ Smoothing the City-space: The Flâneuse in Elizabeth Bowen's War-stories

Elizabeth Bowen's wartime city is a thrilling landscape. The female characters in her short stories encounter spectres, are captivated by hallucinations, and see great cities rising from the rubble. In her collection *The Demon Lover and Other Stories* (1945), Bowen's phantasmagorical London emerges from the breakdown of public and private city-space during the destruction of the Blitz. Women are liberated from the confinements of a domestic environment and gain access to the liminal spaces in the city, which they traverse at their will. While the wartime city is indeed hostile, my readings suggest that Bowen is able to open up new spaces through the phantasmagoria that seep into her fiction. Though the women in her stories are boxed into small apartments, chaperoned through London's streets and trapped in taxis, they are nevertheless able to move in peculiar, new ways. In Bowen's fiction, women escape the linearity of city-streets by finding places that are hidden, traversing fantasy worlds, and confronting the otherworldly. Yet these strange visions can become terrifying and dangerous: they threaten Bowen's characters with confinement and stasis. Shafquat Towheed argues that Bowen's wartime characters are 'forever in transit', that they themselves are identified by their relationship to the 'constantly changing explosive spaces' that surround them (Towheed, 2009: 131). This essay, too, argues that Bowen's characters are defined by the spaces they inhabit. But it also claims that we can best understand this relationship by examining the social and political figure of Bowen's female protagonist, who she often positions as a city-walker, or what we will call a *flâneuse*.<sup>1</sup>

To theorise the urban context of Bowen's female walker, I draw from Deleuze and Guattari's description of the city as a striated, controlled space whose inhabitants are often reduced to sedentary beings. Deleuze and Guattari oppose striated 'smooth' spaces, where people are 'nomadic' and their movements are not dictated by streets and roads. I suggest that we can link the urban nomad, who manages to live a smooth life in the striated city, with the literary figure of the *flâneur*, who roams and observes the streets of the city while committing to no single direction. Though the *flâneur* is implicitly gendered as male, the destroyed city permits a new type of female walker, the *flâneuse*, to emerge. As homes and buildings are flattened the city becomes a smooth space, a space in which women can be nomadic. Through an analysis of three of her wartime short-stories, 'Mysterious Kôr', 'The Happy Autumn Fields' and 'The Demon Lover', I argue that Bowen's fragmented city, as an ambiguous or liminal space, is propitious to nomadic movement. Despite this, Bowen's stories exhibit an anxiety that the *flâneuse* is a temporary figure. In the final section of this essay I note that her characters' liberation exists only in a ghostly or hallucinatory form; it is not permanent or tangible. I will argue that Bowen's story 'I Hear You Say So', set immediately after VE day, exhibits these fears that, as the striated city is rebuilt, her female vagrant will cease to exist.

---

<sup>1</sup>This essay therefore dissents from Bowen's own claim is that her war-stories confront a 'claustrophobia of not being able to move about freely' that she found rife in London (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree*, 1999: 95). I will argue here that Bowen underestimates the mobility of her female characters.

In *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), Deleuze and Guattari outline the difference between smooth and striated spaces. The concept of smooth space crystallises many of the themes explored in Deleuze and Guattari's work: they describe it as 'an intensive rather than extensive space, one of distances, not of measures and properties' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 479). The characteristic experience of smooth space is that of free action, where movement is limitless and an individual holds the agency to change direction and decide their own path. Smooth spaces are occupied by nomads, who freely move across places and are confined by no boundary or border. Holding a smooth space is thus the 'primary determination of nomads' (410). Deleuze and Guattari argue that the ultimate smooth earthly space is the sea:

there is no line separating earth and sky; there is no intermediate distance, no perspective or contour; visibility is limited; and yet there is an extraordinarily fine topology that relies not on points or objects, but rather on haecceities, on sets of relations (winds, undulations of snow or sand, the song of the sand, the creaking of the ice, the tactile qualities of both). (421)

The sea, as an open-ended and uninterrupted space, enables the nomad to occupy their own territory. It is positioned in contrast to the largely striated city, a space which is temporally and spatially mapped and planned (an architectural network of roads, streets and pathways that are enclosed by borders and walls). The city, a state-controlled place, is inhabited by sedentary peoples whose orientation is regulated by the predetermined routes they walk. But Deleuze argues that 'it is possible to live smooth even in the cities, to be an urban nomad' (532). The urban nomad is able to find agency in the city, despite its striated nature: 'A path is always between two points, but the in-between [the nomad] has taken on all the consistency and enjoys both an autonomy and a direction of its own. The life of the nomad is the *intermezzo*' (380). My suggestion is that Bowen aims to locate the smooth places in the wartime city so that she can figure the Deleuzian 'urban nomad'. In her short stories, Bowen's characters find new, liminal spaces in the bombed city which have been liberated in the destruction of urban architectural divisions. The destroyed city thus acts as an 'in-between' space, where the urban terrain is suddenly unrestricted and deregulated. Though the wartime city, littered as it is with rubble and half-demolished buildings, is not literally smooth, its smoothness arises from the disruption of 'striated space in every direction'. The city-space loses its pre-war form and function and becomes a different place all together.

During the Blitz, Bowen's home at 2 Clarence Terrace in Regent's Park suffered heavy damage from falling bombs (Parsons, 2000: 200). Despite this, she remained in the city and became an ARP warden, a job that gave her authority to wander the streets at night. Deborah Parsons posits that women like Bowen were able to 'gain greater physical freedom' through working 'as air raid wardens, ambulance drivers, firefighters', and that this allowed them to adjust to a 'wandering' lifestyle (Parsons: 200). Indeed, in her novel *The Heat of the Day* (1949), Bowen describes the sudden spaciousness of wartime London: 'there was plenty of everything in London—attention, drink, time, taxis, most of all space' (Bowen, 2015: 95). Consequently, Parsons notes that Bowen's city is 'a deserted night city, blacked out and lit only by the moonlight and the rays of searchlights, or a morning city of the smoking, broken remains of streets and houses, about which the homeless wandered' (Parsons: 200). But this essay aims to resist the assumption, made by Parsons, that representations of aimless wandering through the broken city in Bowen's fiction indicates a 'restless

and desperate search for self' (201). As an alternative I posit that, for Bowen, exploring the bombed city often leads to the discovery of a new, nomadic self: a self that can, finally, evade the strict order of the striated city.<sup>2</sup>

Bowen's smoothing of city space is often accomplished by her positioning of her characters as the *flâneuse* (the female version of the *flâneur*). The *flâneur* emerges as a key figure in Walter Benjamin's writings on Baudelaire's poetry: he is often the narrator who operates as a casual wanderer in the city, aimlessly strolling along the Parisian arcades. For Benjamin, the *flâneur* is located on the margins of society. He moves about the city but does not interact with it. He freely observes the crowds, but is also able to remain detached from them, to view them from a distance. Thus, the *flâneur* is an elusive vagrant; he acts as 'the mirror and soul of the crowd, and can enter the personality of anyone else, whenever he likes'. The men surrounding him are 'faceless and anonymous because they reflect each other, and the *flâneur* himself' (Benjamin, 31). If we consider the figure of the *flâneur* with Deleuze and Guattari's ideas in mind, then the *flâneur* manages to live a smooth, nomadic life within the striated city by inhabiting an 'in-between' space; his exterior position means he experiences city-life at his own pace. This essay argues that the figure of the *flâneuse* can only emerge during the Blitz because the city is propitious to nomadic movement.

Benjamin's *flâneur*, however, is always positioned as a bourgeois male. His place of privilege allows him to go unnoticed, and indeed go anywhere, in the crowd. Benjamin's *flâneur* is never the 'object' that is being watched and observed, but always the subject. This subjective space is not as easily occupied by the female city-walker. The geography of the city is composed of coded, gendered spaces: the female is located in private space (the home), whilst the male has the social mobility to roam the public spaces of the city. Thus the female in the city is confined spatially by her gendered, domestic function. In 'The Invisible *Flâneuse*', Janet Wolff has argued that the female *flâneur* (or *flâneuse*) cannot exist, because the male walker is more mobile than the female. According to Wolff, the *flâneur* is gendered male, and this marginalises, or 'makes invisible' the place of women in the city: 'The dandy, the *flâneur*, the hero, the stranger—all figures invoked to epitomise the experience of city life—are invariably male figures' (Wolff, 1990: 47). Such a figure as the *flâneuse*, she argues, 'was rendered impossible by the sexual divisions of the nineteenth century' (47).

The importance of this figure has been asserted recently by Lauren Elkin, who recounts her own experience of walking the cities of Tokyo, Paris, New York and London. Elkin argues for the relevance of the *flâneuse* to contemporary criticism: her urgent movements allow her to locate her own identity within the city: 'I found [the *flâneuse*] using cities as performance spaces, or as hiding places [...] as places to

---

2 Rosi Braidotti has previously written on the female nomad in *Nomadic Subjects* (2001). Braidotti suggests the possibility of a female nomadic subject in an era of late capitalism. She argues 'the undecidedness on the issue of poststructural nonunitary subject' allows marginalised people (women, migrants etc.) to seize agency (23). Though not relevant enough to wartime literature to warrant full discussion here, Braidotti's notion of the nomadic subject is useful for understanding female subjectivity in striated and state controlled space. In the postmodern city, she argues, the nomad is 'a figuration for the kind of subject who has relinquished all idea, desire or nostalgia for fixity... [it] expresses the desire for an identity made of transitions, successive shifts [...] without and against an essential unity' (23). In much the same way, the nomadic women in Bowen's fictions desire space which is always shifting, often rejecting notions of permanence, as I will show later in the paper.

liberate herself from oppression or to help those who are oppressed; as places to declare her independence' (Elkin, 2017: 22). For Elkin, the *flâneuse* is unlike the *flâneur* because she walks to liberate herself from oppression, to find agency on the streets of the city. The *flâneuse* is thus 'saturated with in-betweenness'—she is not an external body simply observing the city (as the *flâneur* is), but rather her own identity is tied to its streets (22). This essay will suggest that Bowen's *flâneuse* works on a similar impulse to locate the 'in-between' spaces of the city: new and liberating spaces unearthed by the explosive context of the Blitz.

The Blitz meant the destruction of the architectural logic of London, with several major buildings, including the Houses of Parliament, Westminster Abbey and Buckingham Palace, hit within the first week of bombing (Feigel, 2015: 15). Houses and flats throughout London were also destroyed by 'explosions and fire' in raids that went on day and night (Feigel, 2013: 15). In the bombed city, women inhabited the 'public' spaces of the city; as well as taking on jobs where they could patrol the night streets, they slept and ate in shelters with other women, men and children (Feigel, 2013: 30). Constant bombing also meant the grid of the city was demolished, with roads and pathways disappearing under the rubble. In her diary, Virginia Woolf lamented 'the desolate ruins of my old squares; gashed; dismantled [...] all that completeness ravaged and demolished' (Woolf, 1989: 353). It is important to consider here that Baudelaire's *flâneur* emerged as a result of the wide, glass-topped arcades created by Haussmann in his reconstruction of Paris. These arcades seemed, according to Benjamin, 'a cross between a street and an *intérieur*' (Benjamin, 1983: 37). Benjamin argues that the *flâneur* can explore the arcades because he sees them and moves through them as if they were his own dwelling. According to Parsons, 'Benjamin's geography of the city is indeed marked by an obsessive attempt to know the city in its entirety [...] a determined project of reacquisition'—or even domestication—'of its fragments' (Parsons, 2000: 7). But in Bowen's stories the striated, confining architecture of the city has been turned to ruins, so that the destruction of the domestic, or '*intérieur*', is a precursor to a new social order.

In *Literature of the 1940s*, Gill Plain addresses how the woman's 'new-found economic independence' in the war conflicted with her 'symbolic function as "home", and her status as possession' (Plain, 2013: 92). Plain argues that during the war 'writing became a mode of resistance and a release, the consolatory fantasies of the imagination permitting an assertion of self' (7). Indeed, in Bowen's introduction to her collection *The Demon Lover and Other Stories* (1945), she states that her stories explore 'the violent destruction of solid things, the explosion of the illusion that prestige, power and permanence attach to bulk and weight, left all of us, equally, disembodied' (Bowen, 1952: 217-18). Luke Thurston examines Bowen's use of the short story to portray the emancipating space of the bombed city. He posits that, unlike the novel, it is 'not governed by linearity or rationality, but is completely dictated by primal and innate human instincts or compulsions', and so it is 'a space of release and liberation' (Thurston, 2012: 6). Likewise, Bowen states that the short story allows for 'cases of oddness or deviation, of solitude, crisis, forlorn hope or, at least, eccentricity' (Bowen, *The Demon Lover*, 1957: 319). The short story thus offers Bowen technical narrative freedoms, allowing her to deviate from the 'steadying' logic of the novel, with 'its calmer, stricter, more orthodox commands' (Bowen, 1959: 94). Instead, her short stories allow her to capture the exhilarating, fast-moving environment of wartime London in her own pace.

Claire Drewery argues that modernist short stories authored by women are characterised by a 'liminality', 'an acute awareness of shifting, transient states, exclusionary categories, marginality and superfluity and conditions which are intimately tied to subjectivities' (Drewery, 2011: 11). According to Drewery, these stories often eschew conciliatory conclusions. They instead assert the possibility of 'the revelatory moment as a moment of insight', which is itself allowed by the intensified double vision of the liminal. This argument is useful for our understanding of Bowen's war-time work: the 'insight' here is the hidden city-space (London's 'double') which is only revealed in the *flâneuse's* supernatural or ghostly encounters. Access to the 'liminal' city, to ghosts, hallucinations and mythical places, allow for a nomadic experience of city-space, where the characters transcend the linear. The short story, in this case, is an inherently nomadic form. This is an argument that is also reflected in Frank O'Connor's work on the short-story. This particular form (and not the novel), he argues, permits 'outlawed figures wandering about the fringes of society' to come to the front of the narrative. 'The novel', he posits, 'can still adhere to the classical concept of civilised society, of man as an animal who lives in a community, as in Jane Austen and Trollope it obviously does; but the short story remains by its very nature remote from society—romantic, individualistic, and intransigent' (O'Connor, 1963: 20-21).

Bowen's wartime fiction carves out a liminal, supernatural space for this female nomad. In 'Mysterious Kôr' (1945) we see a young couple (Pepita and Arthur) walking the streets of London in the moonlight. As they wander the empty and broken pathways, Pepita imagines that London is similar to 'Kôr', a place she imagines as 'a completely forsaken city, as high as cliffs and as white as bones, with no history' (Bowen, 'Mysterious Kôr', 1980: 729). Kôr is an indestructible, fantastical city. It is a city with iron-strong defenses that seems, in the face of doom, to be 'the only city left. The abiding city' (730).

Kôr appears as a 'heterotopia', a concept defined by Michel Foucault as a space which is both physical (of our world) yet is misaligned to social and cultural order (it is other-worldly). The heterotopia is thus 'a sort of simultaneously mythic and real contestation of the space in which we live' (Foucault, 1986: 24). It is interesting that, for Pepita, it is the damaged version of London which presents the possibility for a heterotopia. This version of London has been dismembered; it 'looked like the moon's capital—shallow, cratered, extinct' (728). Pepita's imagining of this heterotopia coincides with the destruction of pre-war buildings, and instead introduces a stronger, more beautiful place: 'If you can blow whole places out of existence', she claims, 'you can blow whole places into it' (730). In 'Mysterious Kôr', the liminal, freeing space of Kôr is blown into existence by the bomb. In her memoir *Seven Winters*, Bowen describes how, in her childhood, she often imagined the rising of Kôr coinciding with the doom of London:

I saw Kôr before I saw London; I was a provincial child [...] I was inclined to see London as Kôr with the roofs still on. The idea that life in any capital city must be ephemeral, and with doom ahead, remained with me [...] (Bowen, 1962: 234)

Though Parsons writes that Bowen's London represents an 'inexpressible non-place', I argue that 'Mysterious Kôr' depicts an emerging, new London, a double vision of the city. In Kôr, Pepita imagines that she can walk 'down the wide, void, pure streets,

between status, pillars and shadows, through archways and colonnades' (739). Like the *flâneur*, Pepita fantasises that she can wander these mystical streets in her own time, at her own pace. Thus, Kôr is the ultimate smooth space, where Pepita's movement in the 'endless halls' is unrestrained, where she can stand and observe the city in its entirety by simply mounting an 'extreme tower' (739-40). Though Arthur chaperones Pepita through the ruins, it is particularly the sighting of Kôr (a city that Arthur cannot see, that she observes on her own) that establishes her position as the *flâneuse*.

Though Bowen's London is freeing for Pepita, for Arthur London is an alienating and confusing place. Deborah Parsons argues that the blitzed city becomes 'the site of utter disorientation for the male characters' (Parsons, 2000: 207). Men, she argues, 'cling to, or are entrapped by, symbols of the past and view the uprootedness of the wartime urban condition with nihilistic horror' (192). Indeed, in 'Mysterious Kôr', Arthur is confused at first by Pepita's preoccupation with Kôr: 'I hope you don't know what you're saying,' he interjects; 'does the moon make you funny?' (730). He is irritated at her admission that she 'could laugh' at imagining Kôr rising out of London's ashes. 'I thought girls thought about people,' he protests. Arthur complains that Pepita should be compassionate, that her joy or freedom in the ruin of lives and homes, in observing death and destruction, is perverse and unnatural. In finding the possibility of Kôr in the destruction of London it is Pepita, not Arthur, who occupies the place of the *flâneur/flâneuse*—as Pepita states at the end of the story, Arthur was 'the password, but not the answer: it was to Kôr's finality that she turned' (740). Bowen's characters become the *flâneuserie* because they are not fixed in one, singular and solid place. Instead, they communicate with another London: a fantastic, supernatural double of the linear city. They do not merely walk from one point to another; their movements are nonlinear and multidimensional.

For Bowen, the smooth space of the bombed city opens up new spaces and new ways of thinking; it allows women to see things that lie outside the realms of reality. We can see this in the phantasmagoria that seeps through Bowen's fiction, in the ghosts and hallucinations that continually haunt her characters. Bowen's stories signal a return to the Victorian or Edwardian ghost story; her strange apparitions conjure up parallels to the Gothic, providing a thrilling city landscape for women to explore. Judith Walkowitz argues that the Victorian thriller or horror story often acted as a 'cautionary tale for women, a warning that the city was a dangerous place when they transgressed the narrow boundary of the home and hearth to enter public space' (Walkowitz, 1992: 3). But in many of Bowen's short stories it is the domestic space itself which is haunted by the frightening figure of the ghost. Bowen distorts the Victorian ghost story so it, instead, signals the danger of being confined *inside*, in the home.

'Mysterious Kôr' takes place under the moon's white rays, which 'drenched the city and searched it; there was not a niche left to stand in'. For Pepita, the light of the moon is 'white acid' that unpleasantly exposes the bare, bombed city (729). Later, when Callie tells Pepita that she is glad that the moon was out for the lovers' walk, Pepita replies, 'Why? [...] There was too much of it' (736). Pepita's aversion to the moon is a consequence of the danger it poses to the smoothing out of the space of the bombed city; hers is an anxiety that is grounded in claustrophobia, in feeling too exposed. The moon is thus 'remorseless' in that it exposes and regulates Pepita's movements, causing her anxiety that she is being watched. The moon, which

saturates the city in light, acts as an all-seeing eye, opening up the space of London and corroding away all hidden places. It even permeates the private space of Callie's apartment. As Callie sleeps under the moonlight, she 'allowed one hand to lie, blanched, in what would be Pepita's place. She lay and looked at the hand until it was no longer her own' (734). In the striated city the individual is subject to the movements and changes of the city, and as Callie looks at her hand as she lies motionless in bed, she sees her own identity being stripped from it by the light above. Plain argues that Callie's isolation in the story is ensured by her 'desperate adherence' to pre-war social propriety: 'Pre-war and wartime are juxtaposed as irreconcilable economies of desire. [...] At the story's conclusion it is Callie who awakens to a perception of guilt over her naive belief in romance and her clumsy trespass into the lover's space' (Plain, 2013: 76). But more than this, Callie's inability to shake off her pre-war sensibilities also means she cannot assume the role of the nomad. She is stuck, a 'child of a sheltered middle-class household', which means that 'repugnance and shyness ran through her limbs'. Bowen describes Callie as 'an unlit candle', unable to imitate Pepita's excitement and freedom amongst the landscape of war.

'The Demon Lover' (1945) depicts domestic space as horrific. In the story, Mrs Drover returns to her abandoned household. It has been deserted by her family due to heavy bombing. Seeing a mysterious letter on the table, Mrs Drover is horrified to find that the letter is from her ex-fiancé, who was presumed dead during the First World War. Terrified that her lover, portrayed by Bowen as a spectral figure who never reveals his face, might return, she makes a quick exit in a taxi. Mrs. Drover's house is established by Bowen as a hostile, unwelcoming place; the furniture seems to have grown a life of its own in its abandonment. Bowen personifies the furniture as fierce, violent beings: 'The piano, having gone away to be stored, had left what looked like claw marks on its part of the parquet', the wallpaper holds a 'bruise', and the china handle 'hit[s] the wall' (Bowen, 'The Demon Lover', 1980: 661). Maud Ellmann analyses Bowen's representation of household furniture, which, she argues, 'is a survival that betokens the resurgence of the past within the present', a past 'they are compelled to re-enact' (Ellmann, 2004: 142). Spirits haunt Mrs. Drover's house: 'It is possible that she was not alone now. She might be being waited for' (665). Ultimately, the furniture (and especially furniture inside the haunted house) recalls a past that threatens to confine Bowen's female characters inside the domestic space. For Mrs. Drover, returning to the environment of the pre-war home is a potentially perilous event; it results in her eventual kidnapping in a taxi that makes off with her 'into the hinterland of deserted streets' (666). Inevitably Mrs. Drover is trapped in the taxi, a space where she has no agency over her movement or direction. Mrs. Drover's return to the home ends with her worst nightmare: being confined forever.

In another of Bowen's wartime stories, 'The Happy Autumn Fields' (1945), the ghostly encounter instead provides solace and escape from the falling bombs. On discovering some yellowed photographs and diaries in the bombed ruins of her home, Mary hallucinates about the idyllic past they conjure while her ceiling falls down around her. Jolted from her hallucination by a pain in her arm, she finds herself imprisoned in the much less pleasant crumbling house: 'This environment's being in semi-ruin struck her less than its being some sort of device or trap; and she rejoiced, if anything, in its decrepitude' (Bowen, 'The Happy Autumn Fields', 1980: 677). Much like Pepita in 'Mysterious Kôr', Mary fantasises about a resilient, strong place that would never fall in the face of bombs. The figures of her hallucination

reside in a country mansion, where the 'the towering vases upon the consoles, the albums piled on the tables [...] all had, like the Leaning Tower of Pisa, an equilibrium of their own'. In her imaginary house, 'nothing would fall or change' (680). Like Pepita, Mary can superimpose the image of the resilient house over the ruined and broken one around her. Only in the ruins of her home (a smooth space) can she picture this heterotopia.

But these ghostly encounters suggest an anxiety that liberation might only be temporary. Ghosts are transitory beings: they fade in and out; they are ephemeral illusions. Hallucinations, similarly, often constitute an eventual return to the real world. After the war ends, it is only a matter of time before new buildings take the place of the ruins. The smooth spaces of the bombed city suit the exploration of the female *flâneur*, but Bowen is not optimistic about the permanence of this figure. If we consider 'The Happy Autumn Fields' with this point in mind, then Mary's liberation comes in her hallucinations of Sarah and Henrietta's idyllic country life. When she is forced out of it she realises that it is 'saddled with Mary's body': 'she looked, as far as the crossed feet, along the form inside which she found herself trapped: the irrelevant body of Mary, weighted down to the bed, wore a short black modern dress, flaked with plaster' (677). Here Bowen figures Mary as a ghostly subject, detached from the materiality of her own body. Mary sees this other, imagined life as the real one: she claims to have 'a sister called Henrietta' (684) and implores her real lover, Travis, to 'leave [her] alone' (678). However, as the story nears its end, Travis debunks Mary's hallucination, and explains that what she is seeing, really, is all illusion. He explores the papers that Mary has found and tells her that the figments of her imagination existed generations before, that both Henrietta and Sarah 'died young', while Eugene 'was thrown from his horse and killed' (684-85). Here, a logic tied to masculinity disrupts Mary's vision and drags her back to reality. Masculinity has the power to define what counts as real, contradicting Mary's commitment to the spectral self. Although Bowen's war landscape is liberating for her female characters, this is a brief liberation, one that is, like the characters of Mary's dream, doomed. Just as the short story operates as an ephemeral glimpse into the smooth space of the bombed city, Bowen's ghosts suggest that the imaginative freedom the city's female inhabitants experience during the Blitz can only be momentary.

Bowen's stories are haunted by the knowledge that at the end of the war the female nomad would disappear. Indeed, Feigel notes that after the war the new Labour government 'started to put in place the reforms they had promised', and so 'the buildings damaged by war were gradually repaired' (Feigel, 2013: 291). Bowen's *flâneuse* originates in the dislocation of the bombed city, and so the rebuilding of the city, the renovation of streets and straight lines, of demarcated space, threatens to confine her once again. Written immediately after the war ended in 1945, the story 'I Hear You Say So' explores feelings of uneasiness and apprehension as citizens struggle to settle into their post-war lives. Bowen's characters are 'puzzled and infantile' as they face the first 'emanations of the peace' (Bowen, 'I Hear You Say So', 1980: 751). The narrative darts between these people's conversations as they hear the nightingale's first song of the year. Bowen's snapshots of peace-time paint London as a confusing, strange place; a place that is, it seems, even more disorientating than the wartime city. In the 'tense and aimless, tired and tender' evening 'people stare wonderstruck' into their own windows, which are suddenly brightly lit and 'wide open' (752). The mandatory blackout has ended, and so homes are suddenly exposed

to view, their 'fearlessly lit-up windows' standing out like 'exclamations' (752). Just as the moon's sharp rays in 'Mysterious Kôr' invade Callie's apartment, the too-bright artificial lights now erode all hidden and private space. The 'stereoscopic sharpness' of this light, of 'standing lamps' which 'overflowed, spilling hot light into the warm dark', turns London's homes into a public space: 'each of these theatres was its own drama—a moment perpetuated, an integration of all these living-unliving objects in surviving and shining and being seen' (752).

Even those who venture outside cannot remain unseen. In this city at peace 'the air did darken, but it remained transparent: couples walking together or standing on the bridges never quite ceased to discern one another's features, or the white reflections from the north in one another's eyes' (751). In a city readying itself to repair the damage of war, the Deleuzian nomad who can 'rise up at any point and move to any other' suddenly becomes implausible. The parklands are made up of 'trodden exhausted grass'; it seems that there is no patch left to explore, no path that has not already been established by other walkers (751). Even those relaxing on the ground 'became blotted into the monotone of the grass', as if being subsumed by the space underneath them. In his foreword to *A Thousand Plateaus*, Brian Massumi explains that the 'nomad's mode of distribution is the *nomos*: arraying oneself in an open space (hold the street), as opposed to the *logos* of entrenching oneself in a closed space (hold the fort)' (Massumi, 1987: xiii). But the characters in 'I Hear You Say So' cannot array themselves in any space; they cannot occupy the city; they are instead occupied (or in this case, even absorbed) *by* it. Even their homes, where they might 'hold the fort', are exposed as part of the striated city. Bowen's characters can no longer traverse unmapped space alone in a world filled with the 'slow lightning' of car headlights (756). They are assaulted, instead, with the noise and commotion of traffic which 'drowns everything' (756). This is a stark contrast to the version of the city we see in 'Mysterious Kôr', where it is the moon that drowns everything in its light: 'a searchlight, the most powerful of all time' (MK: 734). In 'Mysterious Kôr' it is the 'glassy-silent' night, where 'not a beam, not a voice, not a note from a radio' escapes, that allows Pepita to find the city of Kôr on London's streets (MK: 728). In 'I Hear You Say So', however, Bowen's fear that peace-time will restore a pre-war spatial logic, transforming paths that were becoming smooth into an exposed and regulated city-space, is realised.

Bowen's ghost story, transforming the city into phantasmagoria, is no longer feasible in peace-time. As the figure of the *flâneuse* is halted by the sudden onslaught of sound and light, so peace-time impedes Bowen's narrative experimentation with the ghost story. This reincarnation of the Victorian ghost story during the war allows for the peculiar to seep through her fiction: phantom cities, ghostly lovers, strange hallucinations. In these earlier stories, Bowen's female characters are able to locate a truth in the peculiar, in visions and figures that lie in-between or beyond the streets of the city. But in peace-time the ruins no longer have a purpose: the 'hulks of buildings, of terraces that were still nailed up, blind, uninhabitable and hollow, were nugatory' (752). The 'unconscious people', who might once have been able to explore the ruins, 'could have stumbled against them: [the ruins] seemed to belong to another time' (752). In the stable and unchanging cityscape of peace-time, the ruined buildings only serve to indicate, like ruins of ancient civilisations, that their time has now passed. Unlike the dangerous, collapsing ruins of Mary's house, where she is able to enter into a hallucination (and access an 'in-between' space), these ruins are

dull and stationary. It seems that they, like the people that surround them, will never move again.

Despite the nugatory landscape of the city, the nightingale's 'absolute' song teases the characters with the notion that some remnants of nomadism might linger (753). In this Keatsian allusion, the nightingale is able to move freely through the air and escape the striation of the city. But its song remains meaningless to the female characters. It is as if it comes from another planet altogether. Between the snippets of conversation, Bowen describes the haunting and elusive song of the nightingale:

Unseen rays of night pin-pointed the nightingale, in the concentrated and somehow burning blackness of its unknown tree. It sang into incredulity like the first nightingale in Eden. Note after note from its throat stripped everything else to silence: there was nothing but the absolute of its song. It sang from a planet, beyond experience, drawing out longings, sending them back again frozen, piercing, not again to be borne. (753)

The song is 'beyond experience' precisely because it is the war-experience, specifically the nomadic experience, that allows women to understand it. The nightingale's songs become 'frozen' in time, 'not again to be borne' in this uncertain post-war world, where the nomad might cease to exist at any moment. In *Elizabeth Bowen: The Later Fiction*, Lis Christensen argues that 'the movement of the story is the reverse of Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale", which is recalled at the very end in the younger woman's thoughts' (Christensen, 2001: 19). Christensen notes that in Keats' poem it is 'the bird that moves: past a meadow, over a stream, up the hill-side and into the next valley' while, in Bowen's story, the nightingale—or rather, its song—remains in the same place' (Christensen, 19). As the ruined buildings are stationary, the nightingale is captured in the 'concentrated and burning blackness' of the 'unknown' tree.

This is most apparent when we look at the character of Ursula, who appears at the end of the story. Ursula is a young widow who feels trapped in the house of her late husband. She fears that she has lost the ability to detect a secret, a knowledge that she might find on the streets of London. She longs for 'a hotel or apartment house where she was no one's business', desperate for a feeling of nomadism, of never staying for too long under one roof (756). She understands this house is the proper place for her as her late husband's widow, but instead of walking the streets she is instead 'walking in her sleep' (756). But as Ursula hears the nightingale's song she is filled with a 'profound happiness'; the free flight of the nightingale across the city is all she desires (757), although as quickly as she hears the song it comes to an end, 'no more' to be sang that night. Ursula is forlorn: 'Dejected lines of poetry, invocations, came flooding into her mind. *I cannot see what flowers are at my feet*. She looked down at the carpet, wondering if a secret were in its pattern. Naturally, it was too dark to see' (757). Ursula's access to the knowledge the nightingale's song offers is halted by her surroundings, her accepted place as the widow in the widow's house. She cannot become the *flâneuse*; the flowers at her feet are invisible to her. 'I Hear You Say So' confirms Bowen's fears that peace-time might eliminate her subversive female figure who lives and walks in the 'in-between' spaces of the city at war.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> It is important to note that Bowen denounced the idea of being a 'feminist' as late as 1961: 'I am not, and never shall be, a feminist' (Bowen, 'Woman's Place in the Affairs of Man': 19). Despite this, Bowen

In *Literature of the 1940s*, Gill Plain notes that the war ‘really [did] change everything’ in the literary tradition, reconfiguring the ‘limits of imaginative possibility’ and introducing ‘new confluences of influence and fresh discursive modes’ (Plain, 2013: 5). This essay argues that Bowen’s reconfiguration of the literary tradition allows for a new individual to emerge: the *flâneuse*. Bowen’s female walker emerges from the transformation of inside spaces to outside, private spaces to public. But while the *flâneur* strolls along arcades that remind him of the *intérieur*, Bowen’s fiction signals the destruction of inside space all together. With the destruction of the domestic space of the home and the acquisition of social and economic freedoms, Bowen’s female characters can finally roam the liminal spaces of the city unadulterated. Nomadically, they move through different dimensions. Bowen’s *flâneuse* thrives in the liminal space of the broken city, which often acts as a lens through which she can see new, heterotopic spaces. But, as we have seen, peace-time signals an end for the liberation of the female in the city. Like a ghost or a hallucination, the freedom of the *flâneuse* is temporary.

## Bibliography

- Benjamin, W. (1983) *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*. London: Verso.
- Bowen, E. (2008) ‘Introduction to The Observer Prize Stories’. In: Hepburn, A. (ed.) *People, Places, Things*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 318-320.
- (1980) ‘Mysterious Kôr’. In *The Collected Stories of Elizabeth Bowen*. London: Jonathan Cape, 728-740.
- (1980) ‘The Demon Lover’. In *The Collected Stories of Elizabeth Bowen*. London: Jonathan Cape, 661-666.
- (1980) ‘I Hear You Say So’. In *The Collected Stories of Elizabeth Bowen*. London: Jonathan Cape, 751-757.
- (1980) ‘The Happy Autumn Fields’. In *The Collected Stories of Elizabeth Bowen*. London: Jonathan Cape, 671-685.
- (2015) *The Heat of the Day*. London: Vintage.
- (1999) *The Mulberry Tree*. Lee, H. (ed.) London: Vintage
- (1962) *Seven Winters: Memories of a Dublin Childhood*. London: Doubleday.
- (1959) *Stories by Elizabeth Bowen*. New York: Knopf.
- (2008) ‘Woman’s Place in the Affairs of Man’. In: Hepburn, A. (ed.) *People, Places, Things*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 377-79.
- Braidotti, R. (2011) *Nomadic Subjects*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Christensen, L. (2001) *Elizabeth Bowen: The Later Fiction*. Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press.
- Drewery, C. (2011) *Modernist Short Fiction by Women: The Liminal in Katherine Mansfield, Dorothy Richardson, May Sinclair, and Virginia Woolf*. Burlington: Ashgate.
- Elkin, L. (2017) *Flâneuse*. London: Penguin Random House.
- Gilles, D. and Guattari, F. (1987) *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Massumi, B. (trans.) London: Continuum.

---

creates female figures whose movement subvert notions of the male city-walker. Though Bowen does not call herself a feminist, her *flâneuse* is ultimately a feminist figure.

- Ellmann, M. (2004) *Elizabeth Bowen: The Shadow Across the Page*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Feigel, L. (2013) *The Love-charm of Bombs: Restless Lives in the Second World War*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Foucault, M. (1986) 'Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias'. *Diacritics*. 16, 22-27.
- Massumi, B. (1987) 'Translator's Foreword: Pleasures of Philosophy'. In: *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Massumi, B. (trans.) London: Continuum, ix-xi.
- O'Connor, F. (1963) *The Lonely Voice: A Study of the Short Story*. London: Macmillan.
- Parsons, D. (2000) *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Plain, G. (2013) *Literature of the 1940s: War, Post-war and 'Peace'*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Thurston, L. (2012) *Literary Ghosts from the Victorians to Modernism: The Haunting Interval*. New York: Routledge.
- Towheed, S. (2009) 'Territory, space, modernity: Elizabeth Bowen's The Demon Lover and Other Stories and wartime London'. In: Osborn, S. (ed.) *Elizabeth Bowen: New Critical Perspectives*. Cork: Cork University Press, 111-131.
- Walkowitz, J. R. (1992) *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Wolff, J. (1990) 'The Invisible Flâneuse: Women and the Literature of Modernity'. In: *Feminine Sentences: Essays on Women and Culture*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 34-49.
- Woolf, V. (1989) Olivier Bell, A. and McNeillie, A. (ed.) *The Diary of Virginia Woolf. Volume 5*. London: Hogarth Press.

~~~~~

Diana Hirst ~ Shaking the cracked kaleidoscope: Elizabeth Bowen's use of Futurism and Collage in *To the North*

In a wide-ranging conversation recorded for the BBC in 1950, the writers Jocelyn Brooke and Elizabeth Bowen discuss the importance of quality of light in their work, and how Bowen had originally wanted to be a painter (Hepburn, 2010, pp.274-286). Several critics, as well as Brooke, identify a visual quality in Bowen's writing, and she herself affirms this on several occasions. In an autobiographical note from 1948 she writes:

It seems to me that often when I write I am trying to make words do the work of line and colour. I have the painter's sensitivity to light. Much (and perhaps the best) of my writing is verbal painting. (Bowen, 1948)

As a child Bowen attended painting classes held in Dublin by Elizabeth Yeats: a fellow pupil was Mainie Jellett who would go on to become one of Ireland's most notable and influential modernist painters.^{1,2} In her eulogy for Jellett, Bowen looks back over their lifelong friendship and describes their childish excitement at bringing crocuses to life on white paper, saying how if they shared 'the same burning wish, it was in those days an inarticulate one.' Her wish, she says, 'has taken [her] down the path of another art' (Bowen, quoted in Hepburn, 2008: 115). Perhaps the paths that she and Mainie Jellett took were not so divergent. As is well-documented, Bowen's own original intention was to become a visual artist, an idea quickly abandoned because she felt she was not talented enough. But the lessons Bowen learnt at that early age must have remained with her, for she uses her innate skills as a visual artist and draughtsman in her writing, adapting the techniques of various genres to form the basis of an individual aesthetic. Whether this is a conscious decision or an intuitive one is difficult to say, for Bowen herself rarely sets out an explanation for this aesthetic, but in this essay I attempt to detect her intentions using various statements she makes in her non-fiction, and examining how she uses some of the techniques in her fourth novel, *To the North* (1932a).

An important but less well-known fact, which she mentions in her biographical note on the back cover of the 1945 Penguin edition of *To the North*, is that, '[h]ad she not been a writer, she would have liked to be an architect', and the attention to design and structure required from an architect is evident in her work (1932b). As John Hildebidle comments, '[Bowen's] novels are never shapeless. In fact they are full of architectural arrangements, of patterns of defining parallels and echoes, of "pairings" at the metaphorical level which are much more persistent than the romantic or marital pairings which make up the plot.' He goes on, 'Bowen's plots almost invariably betray a predilection for mathematical patterns, for proliferations of twos and threes, of symmetries in uneasy proximity to asymmetries' (1989: 121, 122). Maud Ellmann also comments on her geometry, particularly where relationships are concerned (2003: 71). Bowen herself seems to prefer the term 'pattern'. In an interview with *The Bell* she is emphatic: 'The idea for a book usually comes to me in the shape of an abstract pattern' ('The Bellman', 1941: 423). That pattern is brought to life by language which she says 'is the writer's medium, used by him as the painter uses form, line and colour' (1962: 210). So far as form is concerned, most noticeably she orders her words in an unusual way. She puts forward the idea 'that style is not just a matter of sentence formation, of pleasing sounds or effective words, but that it really arises in the first place from the whole sight, view, and conception of [sic] which the author has of his subject and of his scenes' (Bowen, quoted in Hepburn, 2017: 22). One technique Bowen uses to achieve her style involves bending the accepted rules of syntax. In an interview with Walter Allen, she gives an example from her 1955 novel *A World of Love*, 'Pyramidal the flowers were on the piano', explaining that the words are ordered 'in the way they would have struck the

¹ Elizabeth Yeats (1868-1940), the sister of W.B. Yeats, trained and worked as an art teacher in London before returning to Dublin in 1900. Her *Elementary Brushwork Studies* was published in London in 1900.

² The abstract artist and figure painter Mainie Jellett (1897-1944) was born in Dublin. She studied drawing and fine art painting at the National College of Art in Dublin and under Walter Sickert at the Westminster Art School in London. Starting out as a follower of Impressionism she began – as a result of her association with the Parisian abstract painter and teacher Albert Gleizes – to develop a greater interest in modern abstract art like Cubism. Along with Evie Hone and Mary Swanzy, Jellett was one of the earliest abstract painters in the history of Irish art.

beholding eye' (1955: 117; Bowen, quoted in Hepburn, 2017: 28). Bowen's explanation for her alteration of syntax has similarities with the first clause of the Italian Futurist Marinetti's *Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature*: 'One must destroy syntax and scatter one's nouns at random, just as they are born' (Marinetti, 1912). In Bowen, the 'beholding eye' will observe nouns in the order in which they are born, in other words in the order in which the objects they represent are perceived.

This approach, using the sequence of visual perception rather than the conventional ordering of words, is one example of Bowen's 'willingness to revise older forms of fiction and to experiment with techniques influenced by painting, cinema, and radio' described by Keri Walsh in her essay on Bowen as a Surrealist (2007: 128). Though Walsh deals with Surrealism mainly in the short stories, in her ten novels Bowen draws not only on Surrealism, but on other genres including Impressionism, Cubism and Futurism, blending their attributes to form a genre peculiar to her.

Light, and its partner shadow, are recurrent leitmotifs in Bowen's writing. She uses them mainly when painting natural and built environments, often achieving a sharp focus through mirroring, reflection or refraction. Thus she begins her experiments with landscape paintings in an Impressionist style in her earliest novel, *The Hotel* (1927). Maud Ellmann notes '*The Hotel* is punctuated by tableaux, in which the scene of action is suddenly immobilised into a picture' (Ellmann, 2003: 79). These pictures are straightforward descriptions, and are in a style she will continue to use in *The Last September* (1929). In her third novel, *Friends and Relations*, however, she begins to go further than simple verbal description, showing early signs of the aesthetic whereby she adapts the techniques of the visual artist. One notable example is Lewis's meditation on the apparent elopement of Janet and Edward, which dazzles the reader with its constantly changing perspective, something Bowen achieves through the multiple use of the pronoun 'you', giving a Cubist or Futurist effect (1931: 147). These perspectives may be likened to the force lines described in the notice of 'The Exhibitors to the Public' in the catalogue of the Exhibition of Italian Futurist Painters at London's Sackville Gallery in 1912.

[The spectator] shall not be present at, but participate in the action [which is] translated upon the canvas in sheaves of lines corresponding with all the conflicting forces, following the general law of violence of the picture.

These *force-lines* must encircle and involve the spectator so that he will in a manner be forced to struggle himself with the persons in the picture.
(Boccioni et al., 1912: 14)

While Bowen herself would have been too young to have attended that exhibition, and by the 1930s was no longer a practising artist, with her interest in the visual arts and through her friendship with Jellett she would certainly have been aware of these movements and would surely have been influenced by them. In a later paper, Walsh explores Futurism in both *To the North* and Bowen's subsequent novel *The House in Paris* (1935). She finds that despite borrowing innovative techniques from Futurist visual culture, Bowen rejects the fascist elements with which Futurism would come to be associated, instancing in particular the Mosley and Mitford circles (2017: 21). Céline Magot also identifies Futurist elements in the opening scene of *To the North*, but goes on to say that 'Elizabeth Bowen's relation to futurism is but a distant one:

even if she makes the rhythm of her prose “jerk or jar”, she does not aim at a stylistic or narrative experimental revolution as the Futurists did’ (2013: 131). While I agree with Magot that Bowen is adapting Futurism, I would argue that Bowen does indeed aim at a stylistic or narrative experimental revolution. Bowen explains this to Brooke in their 1950 conversation after Brooke describes reservations he has about her recently published novel *The Heat of the Day*, and how he feels that it does not ‘quite hang together’ (Bowen, 1949; Brooke, quoted in Hepburn, 2010: 283). Bowen responds, saying that ‘I want to try and explain something to myself.’ She goes on:

I wanted to show people in extremity, working on one another’s characters and fates all the more violently because they worked by chance. I wanted the convulsive shaking of a kaleidoscope, a kaleidoscope also in which the inside reflector was cracked. (quoted in Hepburn, 2010: 283)

The kaleidoscope is an optical instrument in which reflecting surfaces or mirrors are placed within an outer tube. Small coloured objects are contained within a small compartment, creating a series of symmetrical reflections, alternately mirrored: when the kaleidoscope is shaken or twisted, these reflections change, giving an endless variety of patterns. Light shining into the kaleidoscope is an essential: without it there would be no effect. A cracked reflector would multiply the reflections further, giving the distorted perspectives similar to those created by the Futurists.

The effect which Bowen has described to Brooke is one she was seeking to achieve nearly twenty years earlier in *To the North*, the novel in which her aesthetic begins to blossom. Writing at the beginning of the nineteen-thirties, a time when, faced with the economic crises of the 1920s and the rise of political extremism, hope that World War I had been the war to end all war was evaporating, Bowen reflects the atmosphere of economic, political and social unease by her adaptation of two visual art genres that are concerned with fragmentation, fragments and movement: Futurism and Collage.

The spokesman for the Italian Futurists was not a painter but a journalist, F.T. Marinetti, who founded the movement in Milan in 1908/1909, publishing the first of several Futurist Manifestoes, *The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism*, in the French newspaper *Le Figaro* in February 1909. These are two of the clauses:

We intend to sing the love of danger, the habit of energy and fearlessness.

We affirm that the world’s magnificence has been enriched by a new beauty: the beauty of speed. (Marinetti, quoted in Rainey, Poggi and Wittman, 2009: 51)

In their work, Futurist artists sought to express dynamism and movement, either by combining on one canvas images that might be experienced over a period of time, or by repeating images to give an effect of movement. As Frank Rutter explains in his 1926 *Evolution of Modern Art*, ‘the first Cubists specialized in the third dimension; the Futurists went one better and specialized in the fourth. . . . Generally speaking, the Futurists were particularly successful in the rendering of movement [which] they secured by their adroit use of diagonals and slanting lines’ (1926: 108, 110).

To the North is full of Futurist aspects: the embracing of danger, violent movement, speed and their almost inevitable result, fragmentation. Not for nothing does Cecilia start her train journey in Milan, the birthplace of Futurism. As Magot points out: ‘The opening sentence of the novel depicts the setting, Milan train station, as a concentration of conflicting movements: “Towards the end of April a breath from the north blew cold down Milan platforms to meet the returning traveller” [Magot’s emphasis] (2013: 131). The paragraph continues in this vein: ‘as the glass brass-barred doors of the restaurant flashed and swung, that bright circular park outside with its rushing girdle of trams was the last of Italy’ [my emphasis] (Bowen, 1932a: 5). Once Cecilia boards the train, what follows is an extraordinarily violent journey: the train begins by clanking, it lurches, flings itself sideways; it flees, it shrieks, dashes light on rocks, lashes its passengers. At one point Bowen moves to the present tense to make movement more violent: ‘the train at this point rocks with particular fury.’ This violent movement causes Markie to collide with Cecilia in the dining-car: looking for somewhere to sit, when the train lurches [he shoots] into the place opposite Cecilia’ (1932a: 5-7).

While Cecilia is undergoing this journey, back in England her sister-in-law Emmeline tries to imagine it in the succession of images in the following short Futurist passage, though nothing is as violent as what Cecilia is experiencing.

The map of Europe was never far from [Emmeline’s] mind, crowds rushing from platform to platform under the great lit arches, Cecilia’s face sleeping against cushions as the Anglo-Italian express tore into France from Switzerland on the return journey. (1932a: 26)

Emmeline’s visualisation comes after she has been at a party where she has met Julian. One might think that the geometry of these young people would be set as the two couples: Cecilia and Markie, Emmeline and Julian. But as Hugh Haughton writes in his introduction to the 1999 Vintage edition, ‘The novel is as intricately unified as a string quartet. It opens with a kind of red herring’ (1932a: xi). That geometry is soon disturbed as we discover that Julian is already in a desultory relationship with Cecilia, and while Cecilia and Markie do meet socially after their return, it is Emmeline and Markie who will become a couple.

Markie and Emmeline make an unlikely couple. Markie is frequently, often unaccountably, angry and acts or speaks violently: sometimes he handles Emmeline roughly. With his heavy shoulders and thick neck he resembles a rugby forward. He is associated with earth and dark colours: he lives in a ‘very high dark-red [house] in Lower Sloane Street’ (1932a: 66). Emmeline, on the other hand, lives in St John’s Wood where houses are ‘white and buff-coloured’ (1932a: 13). Her colours are silver, white, yellow and green.³ She is associated with cold (she has a ‘glacial manner’) and with ice (she drinks ‘iced tea’) (1932a: 16, 21). Emmeline has short sight, which is not only physical but moral and emotional, and there are frequent references to blurred vision or blindness. Wondering how late it is at the party where she meets Julian, she gazes at him ‘wishing he were a clock.’ Bowen comments on this, ordering words in the sequence of the beholding eye: ‘Watching slip past her a blurred repetitive pattern she took to be life, she adored fact’ (1932a: 25).

³ Bowen carefully distinguishes Emmeline from Cecilia, whose main colours are black, pink and gold.

Emmeline is also ethereal: she is associated with the moon and is referred to as 'angel' or 'not quite angelic' (1932a: 15). Not surprisingly, she is comfortable with flight, and when she needs to go to Paris on business connected with her travel agency, she and Markie fly from Croydon. As she waits for Markie ' [a] huge blue June day filled the aerodrome and reflected itself in the hall: she heard a great hum from the waiting plane hungry for flight. Such an exalting idea of speed possessed Emmeline that she could hardly sit still' (1932a: 135). Once they take off, the difference between Markie and Emmeline is emphasised: 'For Markie the earth was good enough, he could have asked no better; he observed, however, from Emmeline's face of delight that something had happened: earth had slipped from their wheels that, spinning, rushed up the air' (1932a: 135). But to Emmeline 'some quite new plan of life, forgotten between flight and flight, seemed once more to reveal itself' (1932a: 136). Emmeline has been experiencing the 'shifting perspectives of flight' described in the first clause of a later Futurist Manifesto, the 1929 Manifesto of Aeropainting.

The shifting perspectives of flight constitute an absolutely new reality which has nothing in common with reality as traditionally constituted by a terrestrial perspective. (Rainey, Poggi and Wittman, 2009: 283)

Markie, on the other hand, clings to his terrestrial perspective, and Bowen continues to emphasise the difference in perspective between the two of them as they constantly move around Paris. Yet in the midst of this Futurist motion, Bowen surprises us with a passage which echoes not the Futurists, but the Vorticists, in which Emmeline longs for stillness in what should be the calm of the Park at St Cloud:

[Emmeline] longed to stand still always. She longed suddenly to be fixed, to enjoy an apparent stillness, to watch even an hour complete round one object its little changes of light, to see out the little and greater cycles of day and season in one place, beloved, familiar, to watch shadows move round one garden. (1932a: 144)

Wyndham Lewis, the founder of Vorticism, explains: 'You think at once of a whirlpool. At the heart of the whirlpool is a great silent place where all the energy is concentrated; and there at the point of concentration is the Vorticist.' (Goldring, 1943: 65)⁴ An alternative interpretation to this paragraph may be found in Bennett and Royle, who equate Emmeline's desire for still life with the desire for death (1995: 27). It is perhaps no coincidence that the French for 'still life' is *nature morte*, and that Wyndham Lewis regarded Cubism as having a passive approach to its subject, often taking what he termed the *nature-morte* approach (Wyndham Lewis, 1915).⁵

⁴ Vorticism reacted to and in some ways converged with the Italian Futurist movement, led by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti. While Vorticists shared the Futurists' fascination with dynamism and industry, they rejected the Futurists' celebration of industrial advancement. Vorticism, aiming to capture movement within the image, "proud of its polished sides," sought the stillness at movement's centre, whereas Futurism sought movement itself. <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/69478/long-live-the-vortex-and-our-vortex>

⁵ The French term '*nature morte*' translates literally as 'dead nature'.

But Emmeline's wish for stillness will not be granted: another violent journey will take place later that evening. This is the first time Emmeline has doubts about her relationship with Markie: 'Her new soaring confidence faltered, she dropped nearer the earth' (1932a: 148). By dropping nearer the earth, she is beginning to lose her ethereal individuality, and is at risk of being taken over by Markie. When the taxi bumps, spins, and draws up at the restaurant 'with a jerk that wrenched at its vitals', Emmeline is resigned: laughing as she sees Paris spin round, she blinks at the crash of light and remarks: 'Oh well, if one's killed one's killed' (1932a: 149). Still later that evening they visit Sacré Coeur. The discord between them has now become clear: it has been Emmeline's idea to come here rather than visit the 'indoor intimate Paris' preferred by Markie (1932a: 149). The colour of the building is one associated with her – white – and Bowen's adjectives about the scene are cold. The moonlight is 'glacial, sinister', the breath of Paris is 'chilled', one is 'served cold up to the moon' (1932a: 149-150). This is Emmeline's territory, cold and moonlit: she declares she is happy and wishes it could last forever. But as she looks uncertainly at Markie in the moonlight, her short sight means that she cannot see what he is doing or thinking, and she becomes disorientated. She is beginning to lose her perspective, both physically and emotionally.

Emmeline's uncertainty about Markie increases in the weeks after their return from Paris, but initially she remains outwardly serene, until her discovery of Markie's infidelity with Daisy brings about withdrawal and a lack of focus. Her disintegration is noticed both by Lady Waters, who warns Cecilia that Emmeline is not herself, and by Julian, who tells Emmeline she has been doing too much (1932a: 187, 190). However, even on the final, fatal, car journey she starts by 'slipping ahead through the traffic at *even* speed' [my emphasis], and talks 'calmly', until she gives way to her 'furious driving' (1932a: 237, 238, 243). When she sees the sign 'TO THE NORTH' it appears like 'a long black immovably flying arrow': something, subject to two conflicting forces, is straining to be loosed. This gives rise to the paragraph beginning 'An immense idea of departure', which has the energy and dynamism of the first Futurist Manifesto.

An immense idea of departure – expresses getting steam up and crashing from termini, liners clearing the docks, the shadows of planes rising, caravans winding out into the first dip of the desert – possessed her spirit, now launched like the long arrow. The traveller solitary with his uncertainties . . . is sustained and more than himself on a great impetus; the faint pain of parting sets free the heart. Blind with new light she was like somebody suddenly not blind, or, after a miracle, somebody moving perplexed by the absence of pain. Like earth shrinking and sinking, irrelevant, under the rising wings of a plane, love with its unseen plan . . . dropped to a depth below Emmeline, who now looked down unmoved at the shadowy map of her pain. (Bowen, 1932a: 244)

We will sing of great crowds excited by work, by pleasure, and by riot; . . . we will sing of the vibrant nightly fervor of arsenals and shipyards blazing with violent electric moons; the gluttonous railway stations devouring smoking serpents; . . . adventurous steamers that sniff the horizon; deep-chested locomotives whose wheels paw the tracks like the hooves of enormous steel horses bridled by tubing; and the sleek flight of planes whose propellers chatter in the wind like banners and seem to cheer like an enthusiastic crowd. (Marinetti, quoted in Caws, 2000: 187)

In Bowen's passage are echoes of some of the images in Marinetti's manifesto: the vastness and complexity of the overall image, and the movement within it of different forms of transport, by land, sea and air. There is a difference in that Marinetti's 1909 text uses more adjectives, giving it a density and weight; Bowen uses hardly any adjectives, which gives her text a freedom and movement. They differ too in their subjects: Marinetti's vision is experienced by the many and the images incorporate the many ('great crowds', 'enthusiastic crowd'), while in Bowen's no one other than Emmeline is evident: the experience is hers alone.

Then comes the inevitable crash, unknown to those who remain in London. Julian has drawn the curtains over the strip of cold night that is disturbing Cecilia. All that remains for Cecilia is the cold and fragmentation which have dominated this novel: she goes into the chilly hall, and stands under the light with its hanging crystals as she waits, fruitlessly, for Emmeline to return (1932a: 245-246).

If Futurism concerns the fragmentation of images to create perspective and dimension, Collage might be said to be the reverse, being concerned with the creation of an image from disparate fragments.⁶ It was with the work of Picasso and Braque that this genre gained popularity among artists of the modernist era. Collage is one genre which Bowen definitely adapts, and this seems to have begun with her reading of French novels in her twenties. In an unpublished article from 1944, 'The Idea of France', she writes: 'I pieced word-pieces together, inside my own mind, into what must have formed a more fantastic collage than any Surrealist has yet achieved' (Bowen quoted in Hepburn, 2008: 64). In practice her collage takes three very different forms, but on each occasion she will draw her fragments from a resource which she calls her 'compost of forgotten books.'

All through creative writing there must run a sense of dishonesty and debt. In fact, is there such a thing, any more, as creative writing? The imagination, which may appear to bear such individual fruit, is rooted in a compost of forgotten books. (Bowen, 1950: 268)

Firstly, she uses what might more commonly be termed 'intertextuality', by reference to an author or through inclusion of another author's text. Secondly, she will hide or bury a reference within her text, rather as the top layer of a palimpsest conceals something written earlier so that the reader has to strip off a level to get to the nub of what she is intending to communicate. Thirdly, she may require the reader to look outside the frame, by using a technique similar to one used by the Futurists. In 'The Exhibitors to the Public', the signatories declare:

You must render the invisible which stirs and lives beyond intervening obstacles, what we have on the right, on the left, and behind us, and not

⁶ The Poetry Foundation defines 'Collage' thus: 'From the French *coller*, meaning to paste or glue. In visual arts, a technique that involves juxtaposing photographs, cuttings, newspapers, or other media on a surface. Widely seen as a hallmark of Modernist art, collage was first developed in the early 20th century by Pablo Picasso and other Cubists. . . . Collage in language-based work can now mean any composition that includes words, phrases, or sections of outside source material in juxtaposition. An early example is T.S. Eliot's 'The Waste Land', which includes newspaper clippings, music lyrics, nursery rhymes, and overheard speech. Ezra Pound's *Cantos* also use the technique extensively.' <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/resources/learning/glossary-terms/detail/collage>

merely the small square of life artificially compressed, as it were, by the wings of a stage. (Boccioni et al., 1912: 12)

In a similar way to the Futurists, Bowen is encouraging her reader to perceive the world in different ways, and she sets out to demonstrate this particularly through her use of perspective and the way in which she throws light on seemingly unimportant aspects. In *To the North* she requires her reader to look not only at the whole text, but to explore details which may seem irrelevant: the images which are revealed will add to the reader's appreciation of her story, as is the case in the episode that takes place after Markie and Emmeline return from Paris, when Emmeline arranges an illicit weekend away in a Wiltshire cottage. Here Markie 'takes down a yellow volume', opens it at random and reads aloud a long passage in French, which he dismisses as '– Rot' (1932a: 203). He has stumbled upon the opening passage of the chapter 'De la jalousie' from Stendhal's *De l'Amour* (Stendhal, 1822: 111-115). There is no obvious reason for Bowen collaging this piece, apart perhaps from heralding the jealousy which Emmeline will begin to feel about Markie's relationship with Daisy when she discovers it. But by using the Futurist technique of looking outside the frame, we find that in an earlier chapter of his treatise Stendhal introduces his notion of crystallization, central to his ideas on love: '[w]henever all is not well between you and your beloved, you crystallize out an *imaginary solution*. Only through imagination can you be sure that your beloved is perfect in any given way.' (Stendhal, 1822: 51).

This was inspired by a visit to an abandoned salt-works near Salzburg where he was fascinated to observe the transformation of a bare bough into a 'galaxy of scintillating diamonds' after it had been left there for a period.

At the salt mines of Salzburg, they throw a leafless wintry bough into one of the abandoned workings. Two or three months later they haul it out covered with a shining deposit of crystals. The smallest twig . . . is studded with a galaxy of scintillating diamonds. . . . What I have called crystallization is a mental process which draws from everything that happens new proofs of the perfection of the loved one. (Stendhal, 1822: 45)

What Stendhal is saying, I would argue, is that when one is in love its glitter is such that one is blinded to the imperfections of the loved one. Bowen is using this to underline what is happening to Emmeline, who is unable to see beyond the glittering crystals that embody her love for Markie. But Bowen has distorted Stendhal: in *To the North* the glitter of love which has blinded Emmeline to Markie's imperfections emanates from ice crystals, not salt crystals.⁷

⁷ The art critic Frank Rutter gives this anecdote about the genesis of Cubism. 'A new word, a new formulation inspired artists in a way that is probably unique in the history of art. This is certainly what happened with the word "crystallization." Its discovery was due to the accidental attendance by a member of one of the advanced groups at a lecture on mineralogy at the Sorbonne. The crystal, this artist there discovered, was the primitive form of all things, and therefore the greatest art must show "crystallization," which, in pictorial terms, means very sharp edges to the planes and very much accentuated angles of the volumes of the compositions. (1935-1936: 259)

Another work essential to our understanding of *To the North* is collaged in a different way. This time, rather than 'stick on' a whole section of text, Bowen collages throughout the novel fragments from *The Snow Queen* by Hans Christian Andersen (Andersen, 1844: 260-340). This story contains several of Bowen's *leitmotifs*: the mirror, the splinters or crystals of ice or glass, the creation of something from broken or disparate pieces, and above all the coldness which envelopes Emmeline and permeates *To the North*. In Andersen's tale, when the Evil One creates a mirror, his gnomes fly with it to Heaven to make fun of the angels, but lose hold of it. It plunges to earth, smashing into pieces. Each tiny piece has the same power as the original, so that if it gets into a person's eye, their moral vision becomes distorted, and if a splinter gets into a man's heart, the heart immediately becomes a lump of ice. The young boy Kay is stabbed in the heart and in the eye by splinters of glass from the enchanted mirror. The splinter in Kay's heart turns to ice, and as a result Kay's nature changes and he distances himself from his close friend, the little girl Gerda. One day while he is sledging, the Snow Queen, who is 'fair and fine, but of ice – dazzling, sparkling ice', abducts him (Andersen, 1844: 270). She takes him through a snowstorm to her palace where 'high above them shone the moon, large and bright', and where 'Kay gazed at it throughout the long, long, winter night' (Andersen: 274). He has told the Snow Queen how he is 'good at mental arithmetic, including fractions', and he is given the task of forming the word 'Eternity' from sharp, flat blocks of ice: if he can solve this puzzle, he will be his own master. But he is unable to focus correctly because of the splinter of glass which still remains frozen within his eye.

Gerda sets out to find him, wearing red shoes, and getting colder and colder as she nears the Snow Queen's palace. When she eventually reaches it and discovers Kay, it is her hot tears that melt the ice, releasing the mirror splinters in his eye and heart, and causing the sharp, flat blocks of ice to dance with joy and lie down in exactly the letters the Snow Queen had asked for: they form the solution to the puzzle.

However, Bowen frequently distorts her collage. In *To the North* she takes fragments from Andersen's work and dislocates them, distorting the Andersen tale which lies beneath her text like a palimpsest. Thus, rather than the male protagonist Markie, it is Emmeline who is associated with ice. It is Emmeline, not Markie, who has defective eyesight and who has the 'splinter of ice in the heart [which] is bombed out rather than thawed out' (1932a: 47). Gerda, whom Cecilia describes as 'a bad illustration to Hans Andersen', is just that: in the novel her shoes are not red, they are green.⁸ (1935: 95, 53). It is Emmeline, not Gerda, who wears red slippers as she vacillates over giving a letter to Markie, in this passage full of images of coldness drawn from the Andersen story:

Emmeline's heart smote her. . . . – this idea of pleasure as isolated, arctic, regarding its own heart only, became desolating to Emmeline as a garden whose flowers were ice. Those north lights colouring the cold flowers became her enemies; her heart warming or weakening she felt at war with herself inside this cold zone of solitude. She desired lowness and fallibility, longing to break the mirror and touch the earth. (1932a: 106)

⁸ Anderson published *The Red Shoes* a few months after *The Snow Queen*, but I am unable to find anything which Bowen has collaged from this story.

Again, Bowen has distorted Andersen. Although Emmeline no longer wants to soar near the angels, she still wants to break the mirror, just as the Evil One's gnomes did when they dropped it. When Emmeline discovers that Markie has deceived her, Bowen writes: 'Broken up like a puzzle, the glittering summer lay scattered over her mind, cut into shapes of pain that had no other character (1932a: 225).

The forces that have been building up all summer are beginning to resolve. North is where the pieces of the puzzle are to be found. Wearing her white fur coat, silver slippers and silver dress with crystals around her neck, Emmeline becomes the Snow Queen: by abducting Markie (as the Snow Queen had abducted Kay) and driving him, not to King's Cross, but 'To the North' she is hoping to find the solution as Kay and Gerda did in Andersen's tale. Markie and Emmeline's journey begins with the 'cold pole's first magnetism [beginning] to tighten on them', and Bowen's prose continues to be full of cold and ice as they drive along roads where lights replace the snowflakes of the Andersen tale (1932a: 238). 'Shop windows [reflect] lamplight. . . . Lit parapets . . . fretted the darker sky; swept by long spokes of light the wide street was watery. . . . Among street lights crossing like spears . . .' (1932a: 237). Yet again, Bowen has distorted Andersen: Emmeline as Snow Queen has no palace where Emmeline as Kay can find the solution to the puzzle. 'Markie [watches] the next lights dawn like doom, make a harsh aurora . . . and . . . flood the Great North Road' (1932a: 245). But Emmeline's little car is 'magnetized up the heart of the fan of [that] approaching brightness', and as they are sucked into the vortex Emmeline sees 'what was past averting' (1932a: 245). It is implicit that her search for a still life, which began in Paris, will end in death, as *nature morte*.

As Walsh writes, 'Seldom considered in the context of a modernist avant-garde, Bowen's work has been read . . . within the history of the novel of manners, with Jane Austen and Henry James as precursors' (2007: 127). Walsh highlights the development of Bowen criticism, citing Corcoran and Ellmann as identifying her with the modernist tradition, and argues that while her approach might align her with Virginia Woolf, Gertrude Stein and Djuna Barnes, 'even those critics attending to her modernist style and technique figure such experiments as idiosyncrasies' (2007: 128).

Bowen's approach does indeed bear superficial similarities to those of other modernist writers in her use of fragmentation. I would argue that, though they may be idiosyncratic, her experiments are successful and that she achieves an aesthetic that is peculiar to her. Specifically, in *To the North*, she adapts Futurism and Collage by her use of crystals not only to blind, by their glitter, the already myopic Emmeline, but to suggest the sharp angles and lines of dynamic images, particularly in the speed and violence of the journeys. More generally, this aesthetic is itself kaleidoscopic in the way it reflects fragments of the work of other writers and visual artists. Facets of their work shine from Bowen's pages in the same way that light catches on the facets of crystals. Her individual technique, involving distortion and requiring the reader to search outside the frame, often reworks these facets to the point where the original is either unrecognisable or concealed. This technique may be a contributory factor to her reputation as an eccentric or difficult author, but it has been carefully devised using her skills in perspective and the use of light. Her strength lies in her ability to avoid pastiche and to maintain the integrity of her own work, resulting in a narrative that is both complex and fascinating.

Bibliography

- Andersen, H.C., (1844). 'The Snow Queen' in *Fairy Stories*. Illustrated by Margaret W. Tarrant. U.d. London and Melbourne: Ward, Lock & Co., Limited, 240-360.
- 'Bellman, The' [Larry Morrow], 1942. 'Meet Elizabeth Bowen', *The Bell*, 4(6), 420-426.
- Bennett, A. and N. Royle. 1995. *Elizabeth Bowen and the Dissolution of the Novel*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Boccioni, U., Carrà, C.D., Russolo, L., Balla, G., Severini, G., 1912. 'The Exhibitors to the Public', *Exhibition of Works by the Italian Futurist Painters*. London, Sackville Gallery.
- Bowen, E., (1927: 1987). *The Hotel*. London: Penguin.
- (1929: 1998). *The Last September*. London: Vintage.
- (1931: 2012). *Friends and Relations*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- (1932a: 1999). *To the North*. London: Vintage.
- (1932b: 1945). *To the North*. London: Penguin.
- (1948). Autobiographical note for Curtis Brown, 15/10/48, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas, Austin, box 1, folder 5, 2.
- (1949: 1950). *The Heat of the Day*. Oxford: The Reprint Society.
- (1950). 'Out of a Book' in *Collected Impressions*. London: Longmans, 264-269.
- (1955: 1983). *A World of Love*. London: Penguin.
- (1962). 'Advice' in *Afterthought: Pieces about Writing*. London: Longmans.
- Breton, A., (1953). 'On Surrealism in Its Living Works', *Manifestoes of Surrealism*. Translated from French by Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane, (1972). University of Michigan Press: Ann Arbor Paperbacks.
- Caws, M.A., (2000). *Manifesto: A Century of Isms*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Corcoran, N., (2004). *Elizabeth Bowen: The Enforced Return*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Eliot, T.S., (1922: 1999). 'The Waste Land' in *The Waste Land and other poems*. London: Faber.
- Ellmann, M., (2003). *Elizabeth Bowen: The Shadow across the Page*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Goldring, D., (1943). *South Lodge*. London: Constable.
- Hepburn, A. ed., (2008). *People, Places, Things: Essays by Elizabeth Bowen*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Hepburn, A. ed., (2010). *Listening In: Broadcasts, Speeches, and Interviews by Elizabeth Bowen*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Hepburn, A. ed., (2017). *The Weight of a World of Feeling: Reviews and Essays by Elizabeth Bowen*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Hildebidle, J. (1989). *Five Irish Writers: the Errand of Keeping Alive*, Harvard University Press.
- Magot, C., (2013). 'Prosthetic goddesses: ambiguous identities in the age of Speed', *Textual Practice*, 27:1, 127-142, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0950236X.2013.752222>
- Marinetti, F.T., (1909). *The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism*. (*Manifeste du Futurisme*), Paris: *Le Figaro*.

- Marinetti, F.T., (1912). *Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature*. (*Manifeste Technique de la literature futuriste*). Milan. Direction du mouvement futuriste.
- Rainey, L.S., Poggi, C., Wittman, L., (2009). *Futurism: An Anthology*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Rutter, F., (1935-1936). *Modern Masterpieces*. London: Newnes.
- Stendhal (Henri Beyle), (1822). *De l'Amour*. Translated from French by G. and S. Sale, (1984). London: Penguin.
- Walsh, K., (2007). 'Elizabeth Bowen, Surrealist', *Eire-Ireland*, Number 42. Fall/Winter 2007, 126-147.
- Walsh, K., (2017). 'Elizabeth Bowen and the Futurist Imagination', *Journal of Modern Literature*, Volume 41, Number 1, Fall 2017, pp.19-39.
- Wyndham Lewis, P. (1915). 'A Review of Contemporary Art', *BLAST 2*. London: John Lane.

~~~~~

## Paul Binding ~ Afterword

I met Elizabeth Bowen one Sunday morning in spring 1963, at the North Oxford house of her old friend, Lord David Cecil. David Cecil was Goldsmiths' Professor of English at my college, New College, where I was a close friend (as I still am) of his second son, Hugh. Hugh would invite friends round to meet his parents for pre-lunch drinks on Sunday mornings, and these, like their hosts, were lively, talkative, informal affairs – no touch of 'occasion' about them whatever, which was why I found them so enjoyable. David, who took great interest in all his sons' and daughter's friends, more as if he were an older contemporary of theirs than the holder of a distinguished academic chair, knew I was interested in both novels and the writing of them. At one point that morning he made his way through his crowded Linton Road drawing-room and said: 'Paul, would you like to meet Elizabeth Bowen?'

She was, I later found out, living at Headington (East Oxford) at the time, and must have been a frequent visitor to Linton Road. I was a great admirer of her short stories about the War, collected in *The Demon Lover* (1945), and of her then perhaps most famous and esteemed novel *The Death of the Heart* (1938). As for my own novel-writing (I had written my first one a few years earlier, just before taking my A Levels) I have happily succeeded in blotting out any recollections of any of it.

Elizabeth Bowen, though tall, was less so than myself, and possibly because of the chatty hugger-mugger of the room she arrived at my side with no ado whatsoever. She wore her hair in a classical Greek fashion, looked perhaps a little older than her early sixties, placed herself very close to me, and started speaking in consecutive sentences virtually straightaway. She had a memorable voice, a little nasal, and punctuated by a slight stammer which also partook of a thoughtful, mildly unnerving pause in which she seemed to be searching for the right words. I can't remember

what I myself said first, but I remember very clearly what *she* said – or at any rate its purport. The beginning, the *before writing* stage of a novel, was of supreme importance to her. She often could recollect it above the events and people of the actual book itself. Before writing what came to be called *The House in Paris* (1935) she was haunted by the image of two children whose very existence was unknown to each other, undergoing an arranged meeting in a room in Paris early one morning. She could see the room so clearly. The questions would not leave her: Who were they? Why were they in Paris? By whose design? What were the familial and emotional circumstances behind the pair? Only after puzzling these mysteries out could she begin writing the book. Readers will know that that the answers to these queries are immensely complex, and will involve travel to and experience of several milieus and places, including a hypnotically rendered Cork (which, to my loss, I had not then visited). Place was important to her conception of novels? I diffidently ventured. Intensely. *The Last September* (1929) originated in her passion for her own house Bowen's Court and its fellows in County Cork. "Danielstown's looking lovely, lovely!" enthuses a visitor, right at the novel's start. At the time of *The Troubles*, Elizabeth Bowen lived in continual fear that this loved house of hers would be burned, blown up. On the final page of her novel Danielstown itself suffers this fate, at the hands of 'executioners bland from accomplished duty'. In reality, Elizabeth Bowen told me, this never happened to Bowen's Court; instead, many years later, she found herself unable to maintain it, and subsequently it was pulled down by developers. "That gave me a nervous breakdown!" she said, in a disconcertingly objective voice. It was the first time that anyone had ever told me such a thing (I was only twenty, and despite their later reputation, the earlier Sixties was still quite a circumspect, socially inhibited period.) Perhaps because of the impact of this confession, its intimation of real experienced distress, the dark realisation of the speaker's worst imaginings, I can recollect no fragment of conversation beyond this point. Anyway, the Cecils' drawing-room was very full, and there must have been many there she knew and now wanted to talk to.

I did see her again, however, and that year – in mid-summer. My girl-friend asked me to accompany her to a rather grand ball at a country house out on Otmoor, to the north-east of Oxford. It was a warm summer night; the party didn't begin till after midnight and continued till about five am. Quite a lot of dancing was enjoyed in a large garden abundant with roses. It was the Year of the Beatles, and house and parkland seemed filled with the sound of twanging guitars. Suddenly a figure appeared at my side – I recognised her by her Grecian hair. 'Aren't you having a lovely party!!' she exclaimed warmly. And all at once that was how it then seemed. Parties are, in truth, *never* lovely for me, and they have played scarcely any part in my life since that one of 1963, not least out of choice! But Elizabeth Bowen records them very magically – above all in *To the North* (1932), where Emmeline, in my view of all her central characters the most likeable and sympathetic (the two are not synonymous!), goes 'to a good many parties'. That novel was dedicated to David Cecil (the D C on its dedication page), and not inappropriately I, later on that night, saw the two of them dancing together, as if in doing so they were bringing back parties of the Thirties into their souls.

Between these meetings and her death ten years later (1973), Elizabeth Bowen published two novels, *The Little Girls* (1964) and *Eva Trout* (1969). While I am sure I found things to praise and enjoy in them at the time, it is not till recently – late in my life – that I have felt not merely admiration but veneration for them; they seem to me

two of the most intensely felt, intricately worked, and particularly imagined works of fiction in English of the entire twentieth century. The eponymous little girls come from middle-class backgrounds (of differing, sensitively noted degrees) and have no special gifts, no special connections or relationships to make them superficially arresting to readers. Yet arresting they are, because, like their creator, all three women – and those who know them – are distinguished by what Dr Johnson called ‘the hunger of the imagination’. Even more so is Eva Trout herself. Unusual in wealth, unusual in height and looks, she nevertheless represents the stubborn, unbiddable, often anti-social self within all of us. The poetic apprehension of place and circumstance – which made her stories of bombed London so definitive (‘Mysterious Kor’, ‘Those Happy Autumn Fields’) – appears in even more heightened and psychically potent form in this last novel by this great novelist. Not only Eva herself but Henry, the man who will marry her, and the bewildered child Jeremy, are rendered with an understanding of the sheer mystery of others’ beings which I think unsurpassed by any novelist from the British Isles since the First World War. I am therefore proud to have the memories that I do have of their creator.

## Contributors

**Dr Ian d'Alton** is a Visiting Research Fellow in the Centre for Contemporary Irish History, Trinity College, Dublin. He was an editorial advisor and contributor to the Royal Irish Academy/Cambridge University Press's *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (2009), writing, *inter alia*, the entries on Elizabeth Bowen, Molly Keane and Iris Murdoch. In 2011-12, he was an honorary Senior Research Fellow in the University of Liverpool and, in 2014 in Cambridge, a Visiting Fellow at Sidney Sussex College, and a Senior Research Associate, Peterhouse. His latest publications include: 'Bowen's Court as "an aesthetic of living": a lost mansion's significance in the imagining of the Irish gentry' in J. Raven (ed.), *Lost mansions: essays on the destruction of the country house* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); ' "Lay spring flowers on our boy's grave": Norman Leslie's short war', in T. Dooley and C. Ridgway (eds), *The country house and the Great War: family stories* (Four Courts Press, Dublin, 2016), and 'Religion as identity: the Church of Ireland's Patrician celebrations, 1932' in J. Hill and M. Lyons (eds.) *Representing Irish religious histories: historiography, ideology, and practice* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017). He is currently co-editing a book of essays on the Protestant accommodation with independent Ireland, 1922-1960 (Cork University Press).

**Paul Binding** is the author of novels (four published, a fifth scheduled for 2019), poems, a prize-winning memoir, and works of literary and cultural criticism. His most recent books are *Hans Christian Andersen: European Witness* (Yale, 2014) which won the Hans Christian Andersen Prize in Denmark in 2015, and his translation of Andersen's novella *The Ice Virgin* (Angel Books UK, 2016, Overlook US 2017). He has been for many years a reviewer, especially for the *Times Literary Supplement*. He has served on literary juries and committees in Britain, Norway and the Netherlands. He lives in South Shropshire, and is much concerned with animals and their well-being.

**Dr Nicola Darwood** is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Bedfordshire, UK. Her research interests include: early twentieth century women writers, specifically the work of Elizabeth Bowen (the subject of her PhD) and Stella Benson; children's fiction; Anglo-Irish literature and the Gothic. She has published work on Elizabeth Bowen (her monograph *The Loss of Innocence: the fiction of Elizabeth Bowen* was published in 2012) and has presented her work on Bowen, Benson and children's fiction at a number of international conferences. She is a co-founder of the newly formed Elizabeth Bowen Society and is co-editor of *The Elizabeth Bowen Review*.

Email: [nicola.darwood@beds.ac.uk](mailto:nicola.darwood@beds.ac.uk)

**Charlotte Hallahan** is a PhD candidate at the University of East Anglia. Her thesis examines the archival urge in women's writing of the Second World War, and focuses particularly on how writers used psychoanalytic concepts to think about the bombed landscapes of the Blitz.

Email: [c.hallahan@uea.ac.uk](mailto:c.hallahan@uea.ac.uk)

**Diana Hirst:** After retiring from a career as an arts administrator working initially for BBC World Service and then for a number of classical music organisations and artists, Diana Hirst studied for the Advanced Diploma in English Literature at the Institute of Continuing Education, University of Cambridge, supervised by Dr Trudi Tate, where her topic was verbal painting in the novels of Elizabeth Bowen. She is now continuing this research at Canterbury Christ Church University, under the supervision of Dr Andrew Palmer and Dr Stefania Ciocia. She has presented papers on Bowen at Canterbury Christ Church University, the Universities of Bedfordshire and Kent, and at the International Conference on Elizabeth Bowen held in Warsaw in 2016. For *Women: A Cultural Review* she has reviewed biographies of Elizabeth von Arnim, a retrospective exhibition of the works of Winifred Knights and a collection of reviews and essays by Elizabeth Bowen.

Email: [d.hirst417@canterbury.ac.uk](mailto:d.hirst417@canterbury.ac.uk)

**Imola Nagy-Seres** is a PhD candidate at the University of Exeter. She is currently completing her thesis on sympathy in the works of D.H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf and Elizabeth Bowen. Her fields of research and teaching include modernism, contemporary literature, phenomenology, and the history and theory of the novel. She regularly reviews articles for the postgraduate journal *Exclamation* published at the University of Exeter. Her article 'Malleable Sculptures in Virginia Woolf's *Jacob's Room* and Early Travel Diaries' is forthcoming in the *Journal of Modern Literature*.

Email: [in225@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:in225@exeter.ac.uk)

**Dr Heather Ingman** is Visiting Research Fellow in the Centre for Gender and Women's Studies, Trinity College, the University of Dublin. Her publications include *Irish Women's Fiction from Edgeworth to Enright* (2013), *A History of the Irish Short Story* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), and *Twentieth-Century Fiction by Irish Women: Nation and Gender* (Ashgate 2007). She is co-editor, with Clíona Ó Gallchoir, of *A History of Modern Irish Women's Literature* to be published by Cambridge University Press, Autumn 2018. She is currently working on a study of ageing in Irish writing for Palgrave.

Email: [ingmanh@tcd.ie](mailto:ingmanh@tcd.ie)

**Dr Nick Turner** is an Associate Lecturer at Salford University. His monograph is *Post-War British Women Novelists and the Canon* (Bloomsbury, 2010). He is an international expert on the work of Barbara Pym and Elizabeth von Arnim. His work on Pym includes editing a special issue of *Women: A Cultural Review* on the writer, and organising a centenary conference and addressing the Barbara Pym Society at Harvard University. His article on von Arnim, 'The Pastor's Wife: A Re-assessment' was published in *Women: A Cultural Review* in 2016. He is the manager of the vastly popular Facebook group *Undervalued British Women Novelists 1930-1960*, and the co-editor of the online journal *Writers in Conversation*. Forthcoming projects include a special journal issue on women, intermodernism and comedy, and a monograph assessing the literary reputations of interwar novelists such as Ivy Compton-Burnett and E.M. Delafield. He is a co-founder of the newly formed Elizabeth Bowen Society and is co-editor of *The Elizabeth Bowen Review*. He lives in Yorkshire, UK.

**Dr Lorna Wilkinson** has a PhD in English from the University of Exeter. Her thesis explored “trickster” figures in the works of Elizabeth Bowen, Elizabeth Taylor, Iris Murdoch, and Muriel Spark, arguing that many mid-century writers created allusive, liminal figures in their fiction to act as vessels for artistic anxieties. More broadly, Lorna is interested in challenging the preoccupation with “realism” that has become prevalent in criticism of mid-century literature.

## Acknowledgements

The editors drew on *The Iris Murdoch Review* as a model of good practice, and they are grateful to Anne Rowe (Emeritus Associate Professor, Kingston University) for her timely advice.

Cover photo © Nicola Darwood