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The Elizabeth Bowen Review



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Editors

Nicola Darwood (University of Bedfordshire, UK)
nicola.darwood@beds.ac.uk

Nicholas Turner (University of Central Lancashire, UK)
drnicholasturner2013@gmail.com

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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 January 2020 for Volume 3 (to be published in September 2020). 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.

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This volume of the *Elizabeth Bowen Review* is dedicated to the memory of Evelina Garay-Collcutt, who very sadly passed away just a week before publication. Evelina's delight in and knowledge of Bowen was very apparent when she gave a paper at the conference in June; it is also evident in her essay in this volume.

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Nicola Darwood & Nick Turner ~ Introduction

We are delighted to publish Volume Two of the *Elizabeth Bowen Review*, a scholarly journal devoted to the work of one of the twentieth century's greatest writers. In this issue, and the issues that will follow every year, 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 and a third international conference at the University of Bedfordshire in 2017 and 2019, and to the parallel creation of the Elizabeth Bowen Society, which was officially launched at the conference in 2017. The aim of these ventures—conferences and the society—is to foster a community of 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, producing an exciting body of criticism and postgraduate dissertations focusing on themes such as trauma, displacement, memory and identity, reading Bowen in the context of Ireland and War, and modernist studies: students and scholars continue to discover the depths and timeliness of Bowen. 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.

The essays in this issue are a testament to Bowen's continuing power to excite and unsettle us in the best of ways, to be a writer whose possibilities for analysis are never exhausted. Eibhear Walshe's investigation into the use of place and setting in Bowen's art opens new perspectives on how her writing developed and changed over her life, and the importance of biographical experience in understanding her work. Walshe reveals how Bowen's representation of landscapes of loss trace her changing relationship with her aestheticized Irish and English landscapes and places, through a range of her texts, including *The Last September*, a number of her short stories from *The Demon Lover, and Other Stories* (a recurring focus in this volume of the *Elizabeth Bowen Review*) and *A Time in Rome*, a text which has received very little academic attention.

The second essay by Kezia Whiting argues that Elizabeth Bowen's free indirect style is essential to a radical reworking of political and subjective boundaries in *The Last September*. Whiting shows how the novel's Anglo-Irish historical context allows Bowen to interweave internality and externality, subjectivity and objectivity, in characteristically modernist style. Evelina Garay-Collecutt places the well-known short story 'Mysterious Kôr' next to the lesser known 'Gone Away', to argue that Bowen's art contains cities which present both dystopic and utopic features, showing

her concern for the future of the western concept of civilisation amid an age of political unrest, and her anxiety with regard to the disintegration, disappearance or reconstruction of emblematic cities.

Ana Ashraf also discusses Bowen's short fiction in *The Demon Lover and Other Stories* (1945). Ashraf shows how war is represented through the perspective of bewildered human experience in these stories, the ghostliness of the characters and places indicating the erosion of everyday reality and a search for alternative spaces, allowing us to understand how survival can be understood through the act of narration. The penultimate essay, by Carissa Foo, continues the theme of ghosts to interrogate how Bowen's women find themselves face-to-face with ghosts from the past in their homes, and how the haunted house breaks the archetype of feminine space and awakens women. Foo shows how the haunted house reflects the perversity of a phallogocentric world that women themselves are complicit in preserving, where there is a struggle with patriarchal ghosts, which is a manifestation of the struggles women face in the real world. Bowen's first novel, *The Hotel*, is the focus of the final essay in this volume, as Layla Ferrández Melero discusses the formation of Sydney's character. Ferrández Melero particularly considers the relationship between Mrs. Kerr and Sydney, as the young woman, just past adolescence, tries to negotiate a pathway in life which enables her to be true to herself, but who realises that to do so, might lead to societal disapproval.

The work of the scholars in this publication shows passion for Bowen's writing, and reveals how contemporary a writer Bowen can be in her understanding of the effect of place, movement, war and the home on her characters, and how linguistic style can mirror breaking boundaries; for Bowen, the world was disrupted, fragmented, yet fluid and exciting. 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. The issues explored in these essays will add to the body of knowledge about Elizabeth Bowen, her life and her work, and hope that they stimulate further research and potential contributions to the third volume of *The Elizabeth Bowen Review*.

Nick Turner and Nicola Darwood
September 2019

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## Eibhear Walshe ~ ‘Elsewhere’: Desired landscapes in the writings of Elizabeth Bowen

‘There can be no woman, in anything like Livia’s position, for whom elsewhere is not at times the desired land’ (*A Time in Rome*)

In this essay, I want to address the question of what form Bowen’s representation of landscape took in her fiction. A clue may be found in an article on Bergotte, Marcel Proust’s imaginary novelist, in which Bowen ponders the nature of this character’s unseen art. She speculates that his analytical approach to his characters was the affective ‘magic of the climate in which they floated, the concentratedness of the vision pin-pointing them’ (*The Art of Bergotte*: 95). These characteristics are also Bowen’s, as are those she attributes to him when she asserts:

He was a visual writer. Imagery rendered his cadenced prose, above all, sensuous and concrete. The art in his novels acted upon the reader as does a spectacle on an onlooker. There can have been nothing about the setting of a scene he did not know: everything came to have a magnified semblance of actuality (*ibid*, 95-96).

All of this illuminates Bowen’s representation of the Irish landscape in her fiction, for Bergotte, a writer who never existed, is Bowen’s own idealised self as writer as visual artist, remade and reinvented. The other deeply formative influence on Bowen’s relationship to, and representation of, landscape was her Anglo-Irish heritage and the history of colonial violence that was inherent in it. The political marginalisation of her class in Ireland during the crucial years of her formation as a writer acted as a stimulus and a tension, and shadowed her own imaginative development. As I will demonstrate, war and violence brought Bowen’s intense connection with the Irish landscape into sharp focus.

Towards the end of her life, Elizabeth Bowen reflected on the centrality of place and landscape within her fiction in an unfinished autobiographical essay, posthumously published in *Pictures and Conversations* (1975). Identifying herself as ‘a writer for whom places loom large’ and professing her belief that ‘what gives fiction verisimilitude is its topography’, Bowen went on to make the seemingly paradoxical claim that the terrain of her fiction ‘cannot be demarcated on any existing map; it is unspecific’ (*Pictures and Conversations*: 34-35). She described her fictional world as ‘[a]n inner landscape, assembled anything but at random’, the welded-together nature of which she attributed to ‘the changes and chances, the dislocations and [...] the contrasts which have made up so much of my life’ (*ibid*: 36-37). This late autobiographical disclosure offers a valuable key to what she herself called ‘Bowen topography’ (*ibid*: 36), and it is worth noting that Bowen was lamenting the lack of curiosity Bowen topography had excited in readers, critics, and interviewers alike. In this essay, I consider Bowen’s representation of landscapes of loss and trace her changing relationship with her aestheticized Irish and English landscapes and places.

For Bowen, Ireland was central to her fictive imaginations, yet it was often written about at a remove, from a position of exile or dislocation. Asked in a 1959 interview about the nature of her relationship to Ireland and belonging, Bowen described herself as ‘a naturally separate character’, adding: ‘I’m perfectly happy in any country, any place. I’m in a way rather unstuck – I mean un-located, and I don’t think that has ever troubled me.’ (‘Frankly Speaking: Interview, 1959’: 325). This distinctive quality of unbelonging or of being ‘unstuck’ shadows many of her protagonists, and it does trouble them. Roy Foster makes the observation that ‘[t]he permanence that Bowen sought, in writing about her Irish past, (while the world exploded in war around her,) required an exploration of memory – the only place, where, as Proust had taught her, permanence resides. A recognised landscape would take her there.’ (Foster, 2001: 152.)

The experience of exile is key to any reading of Bowen. Born in Dublin in 1899, Elizabeth Bowen was the only child of Henry and Florence Bowen, whose ancestors were Cromwellian settlers of Welsh origin, and whose eighteenth-century north Cork mansion, Bowen’s Court, she inherited in 1930. Bowen married early, published her first collection of short stories in 1923, and then lived between Bowen’s Court and her apartment in Regent’s Park in London until she returned to live in Ireland in 1959. This proved unsuccessful, and so Bowen ended her days in back in England, in Hythe, dying in 1973.

Raised for the first seven years of her life between Dublin and Bowen’s Court, displacement and disruption came to Bowen early. In 1906, after her father suffered a nervous breakdown, she and her mother were sent to live in England, to protect them from the consequences of Henry Bowen’s illness. For the next few years, mother and daughter lived a wandering life with friends and relations in and around Kent. Bound up in the close companionship of her mother, young Elizabeth felt the loss of her Irish family and connection; at the same time, the exiled child experienced the thrill of finding herself in a new, unfamiliar landscape. The small towns, villas and rural landscapes of the south-eastern corner of England were markedly different to the red-bricked classicism of Georgian Dublin or the fields that surrounded Bowen’s Court, where, she recalled in a 1940 essay, she had ‘grown up accustomed to seeing out of my windows nothing but grass, sky, tree’ (‘The Big House’: 25). In this same essay, she remarked on her belated awareness of how isolated and lonely life was in Bowen’s Court, and there is a similar belatedness about her recognition of the habits of solitariness and self-sufficiency that she formed during her years in Herbert Place, her Dublin home. In her childhood memoir, *Seven Winters* (1942), Bowen reflected on how her parents lived in ‘a world of their own’, and the impact this had on her own development:

Inside this world they each ruled their private kingdoms of thought, and inside it I, their first child, began to set up my own. My parents did not always communicate with each other, and I did not always communicate with them. They were both very independent of other people. I had been born, I see now, into a home at once unique and intensive, gently phenomenal. It may be because of this that my exterior memories of those winters in Dublin are so subjective, shifting, and concrete. I find myself writing now of visual rather than social memories. On the whole, it is things and places rather than people that detach themselves from the stuff of my dream. (*Seven Winters*: 9)

This affinity and fascination with the realm of phenomena and appearances, with ‘things and places’, became a key constituent of the ‘inner landscape’ Bowen forged in childhood and is one of the hallmarks of her fictional and autobiographical writings. It was an affinity she carried with her when she and her mother ‘were ordered to England’ so that her father’s illness could be ‘fought alone’ (ibid: 55). Already accustomed to seeing her world in spatial terms, and acutely attuned to distances and silences, the exiled child quickly found that ‘England affected me more in a scenic way than in any other’ (‘Pictures and Conversations: 24). Tellingly, Bowen’s recollections of her first impressions of this new country imbue its topography with a quasi-human vitality. The Kent coastline struck her as ‘dramatisable’, ‘the bald downs showed exciting great gashes of white chalk’, and her sense of the landscape ‘having been recently put together’ gave it a ‘precarious’ complexion (ibid: 24-25). Crucially, Bowen’s transplantation also had implications for her imaginative and artistic development. England as a ‘non-Ireland’ made her aware of its aesthetic possibilities. Alone with her beloved mother, the adult Bowen recalled the feeling of the two of them being ‘adventurers in this other country’ (ibid: 11). In this magical landscape of exile, her mother’s one concern was that her daughter would not inherit the Bowen propensity for mental illness. At the time, her father’s mental illness was understood in the light of a preponderance of first-cousin marriages in the Bowen family. Florence Bowen thus delayed teaching her daughter to read as it might over-stimulate her and lead to nervous exhaustion. Without books, Bowen’s childhood imagination and its attachment to ‘things and places’ intensified, and when she eventually discovered the excitement of reading, she likened the experience to entering another new landscape. Books, she wrote in a 1946 essay,

were power-testing athletics for my imagination – cross-country runs into strange country, sprints, long and high jumps. It was exhilarating to discover what one could feel: the discovery itself was an advance. [...] Also the expectation, the search, was geographic. I was and I am still on the lookout for places where something happened: the quivering needle swings in turn to a prospect of country, a town unwrapping itself from folds of landscape or seen across water, or a significant house. Such places are haunted – scenes of acute sensation for someone, vicariously me. (‘Out of a Book’: 51)

At this crucial moment of imaginative formation, then, the visual and the spatial predominated – it is significant that Bowen’s first venture as an artist was to train as a painter<sup>1</sup> – and her strong affinity for phenomenal reality was enriched by the discovery of imaginary worlds in which ‘real-life places [...] become more “real” through being also in books’ (‘Out of a Book: 52). Thus, the Kentish landscape of her early exile became her first testing-ground for her burgeoning imagination, and this landscape’s impact on her aesthetic sense was further deepened by the loss of her closest companion. By 1912, Henry Bowen had recovered from his mental breakdown but, tragically, Florence then became ill and died of cancer in Hythe, attended by her husband and daughter.

Towards the end of her own life, chronically unwell and living back in Hythe, Bowen began her memoir about her childhood (dis)location in this part of England. This

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<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to Michael Waldron for his insightful thinking on Bowen’s visuality in his excellent doctoral thesis, and to Heather Bryant Jordan for her wonderful work on Bowen.

work, left uncompleted at her death, opens with a precise topographical account of the land around Hythe and the particular quality of the Kentish landscape, her memories of which are weighed against her recollections of the landscapes of her childhood in Ireland. Here, Bowen retrospectively reconstructs her first experience of exile as vital to her developing awareness, recognising her propensity to regard landscape as both a signifier of imaginative states of being and a site of projection for displaced emotion, including the sublimated trauma of bereavement—of her mother’s death, she wrote: ‘I could not remember her, think of her, speak of her or suffer to hear her spoken of’ (*Pictures and Conversations*: 48). Looking back, she reflected: ‘[t]his was the beginning of a career of withstood emotion. Sensation, I have never fought shy of, or done anything to restrain’ (*ibid*: 9). In her fictional works, emotion is frequently evaded or sublimated and sensation often expressed or remade through landscape, physical phenomena becoming the means by which withstood emotion can be offset, housed, or reinterpreted. Sixty years after this first exile, Bowen speculated that experiencing this landscape as other, foreign, may have unconsciously awakened in her childhood self the first stirrings of the aesthetic sensibility that would become the foundation for her life’s work:

Possibly, it was England made me a novelist. At an early though conscious age, I was transplanted. I arrived, young, into a different mythology [...]. From now on there was to be (as for any immigrant) a cleft between my heredity and my environment – the former remaining, in my case, the more powerful. [...] It cannot be said that a child of seven was analytic; more, with a blend of characteristic guile and uncharacteristic patience I took note – which, though I had at that time no thought of my future art, is, after all, one of the main activities of the novelist. (*ibid*: 23-24)

Hythe and the marshy landscape around it had an emblematic significance within her imagination, with a crucial scene in her 1935 novel *The House in Paris* set there. In a foreword to the study *The Cinque Ports* by Ronald and Frank Jessup, published in 1952, she celebrates the bracing sense of endurance, a vitalised and enriching landscape: ‘the somnolent beauty of landlocked Romney; Sandwich’s steep-roofed streets lit by estuarial gleams; the changing light over Hythe, the Cinque ports and the whole belt of coastal county in which they stand, have an endemic temperament’ (*Foreword to The Cinque Ports*: 60-61)

In an interview in 1959 entitled ‘Frankly Speaking’, in answer to the question ‘How far has all that early life in Ireland affected your work, Bowen responded that it gave ‘a sort of terrain of imagination’, but went on to say that ‘it also gave me the thing about seeing England from the outside’ (*Frankly Speaking*, 327). As she suggests, Irish and English landscapes live in a perpetual state of parallel existence in her writings, one calling the other into being.

This sense of pathos in the Irish terrain is seen in *The Last September*, for the Kentish landscape of Bowen’s childhood exile appears as a vision of civility. Marda, an Anglo-Irish woman about to marry her English fiancé, is paying a visit to Danielstown. Within the narrative, Marda becomes the focus of romantic, even erotic interest from Lois and also from the married Hugo. Thus she acts as a catalyst for disruption, bringing with her the trivial upsets of lost luggage, and then, at a later point in the novel, more seriously, a near encounter with violence and possible death with the revolutionaries in the fields outside. During her visit, Marda and Lois

encounter an IRA man sleeping in a deserted mill, and the startled gunman holds them captive for a short period, afraid of their betraying him. When his gun goes off accidentally and wounds Marda's hand, the violence around them somehow becomes all too real. Later, Marda's imminent return to a Kentish landscape is seen by her as a return to safety, to civilisation and to a rejection of her troubled Anglo- Irish heritage:

Nothing would have induced Marda to confirm Leslie's opinion that her country was dangerous as well as demoralizing. [...] She expected, some forty-eight hours ahead, to be walking with him in a clipped and traditional garden, in Kentish light. Under these influences, she would be giving account of herself. Leslie's attention, his straight grey gaze, were to modify these wandering weeks, of her own incalculably, not a value could fail to be affected by him [...] At present the mill was behind her, tattered and irrelevantly startling, like a dream of two nights ago. (*The Last September*: 129)

In the end, Marda escapes to Kent, Lois also leaves for France, the house is burned out and the threat hanging over the Naylor's is finally enacted, despite their courage and their stubborn determination to sublimate their fears and their sense of anxiety. They cannot halt the inevitable march of history or the threat lurking in the landscape and, in the end, the hostile landscape, now an 'open and empty country', expresses its violent intent towards the frightened house:<sup>2</sup>

At Danielstown, halfway up the avenue, the thin iron gate twanged (missed its latch, remained swinging aghast) as the last unlit car slid out with the executioners bald from accomplished duty. The sound of the last car widened, gave itself to the open and empty country and was demolished. Then the first wave of a silence that was to be ultimate flowed back, confident, to the steps. Above the steps, the door stood open hospitably upon a furnace. (*The Last September*: 206)

Bowen wrote comparatively little about Ireland in the 1930s in her fictions, but this idea of a landscape of loss intensifies in Bowen's fictive writings during the Second World War, at a time when Bowen was reporting for the Ministry of Information about Irish neutrality, and attempting to justify Ireland's political stance.<sup>3</sup> Bowen lived between London and North Cork throughout the war, and the contrast between the two landscapes provided her with the most engaged of her Irish writings, a more complex vision of the relationship between Britain and Ireland at a time of misunderstanding and hostility. Landscape is key to Bowen's negotiation of wartime tension; as Heather Bryant Jordan writes '[s]he staked her claim to the realm of the geographic and creative, calling herself an 'intuitive writer' who is 'psychologically if not actually' a regionalist, one concerned with a place but not provincial' (Jordan, 1992: xvi).

As a result of living in London during the Blitz and being close to death and destruction, Bowen produced a remarkable series of short stories, published in her

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<sup>2</sup> See my essay, 'The Ghostly Fields of North Cork' on Bowen's two short stories, 'The Back Drawing Room' and the 'Happy Autumn Fields' in *The Irish Short Story: Traditions and Trends* edited by Elke D'hoker and Stephanie Eggermont, (Bern: Peter Lang, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> See Walshe, Eibhear. Editor *Elizabeth Bowen's Selected Irish Writings*. (Cork: Cork University Press, 2011) for Bowen's reports on Ireland during the Second World War.

1945 collection, *The Demon Lover*. In her introduction to the American edition, Bowen remembered London in the Blitz as a time when '[w]e all lived in a state of lucid abnormality' ('Postscript to *The Demon Lover*': 95). As I will suggest, many of these stories invest terrain, houses and landscape with a vivid sense of the divided nature of Bowen's wartime identity, energised by her heightened feeling of being alive in the face of imminent death. Bowen's multi-layered representations of the Irish landscape shifted as new conflicts and loyalties were called into being.

Many of the stories in her wartime collection explore this search for an ideal landscape. In 'Mysterious Kôr' a young woman, Pepita, wanders around wartime London late at night with her soldier boyfriend, Arthur, who is home on leave, unable to find a place of privacy to be together. Pepita's flatmate Callie is too naïve to realise that she should vacate their bedsit and allow them some time alone to make love, and so the lovers find themselves in Regent's Park at midnight. Here, surveillance is now conducted by nature itself: '[f]ull moonlight drenched the city and searched it; there was not a niche left to stand in. The effect was remorseless: London looked like the moon's capital' ('Mysterious Kôr': 173). The merciless scrutiny of the moonlight intensifies the oppressive lack of privacy, and so Pepita and Arthur make their way around Regent's Park, into a landscape made universal and anonymous by the intense moonlight. A moment of transformation and escape is found when Pepita remembers a book from her childhood, *She* by Rider Haggard, and now the image of the lost city in that beloved tale consoles her: '*Mysterious Kôr, thy walls forsaken stand, thy lonely towers beneath a lonely moon*' (ibid: 174). Now Pepita reconstructs London as Kôr, a place apart, remade by her imaginings. Pepita and Arthur share this hunger for escape, but she annoys him by proclaiming 'This war shows we've by no means come to the end [...] By the time we've come to the end, Kôr may be the one city left: the abiding city' (ibid: 176).

Pepita's memory of the original Rider Haggard book is vague, and so instead she remakes the city of Kôr as her own, refashioning it in light of her own imaginative need. She calls this imaginary city eternal, resisting the kinds of destruction that London is subject to during the Blitz; 'very strong; there is not a crack in it anywhere' (ibid: 175), and thus unconsciously excluding her lover. The couple return to Pepita's flat where the unworldly Callie is waiting, depriving them of any privacy and any chance to be together, and Arthur is left on the sofa, while the angry Pepita shares a bed with Callie, soon falling into a deep sleep. From her present day, unsatisfactory world, Pepita now re-encounters Kôr in her subconscious, finding a blissful dream which satisfies her desire for escape, a mythic landscape that is now hers alone, transcending the disappointment and the constraints of her time with Arthur:

She still lay, as she had lain, in an avid dream, of which Arthur had been the source, of which Arthur was not the end. With him, she looked this way, that way, down the wide, void pure streets, between statues, pillars and shadows, through arches and colonnades [...] He was the password, but not the answer; it was Kôr's finality that she turned. (ibid: 189).

Kôr becomes for her a solitary perfect landscape, in a city from a novel made by a remorseless tyrant. Bowen never allows her landscapes to be uncomplicated places of refuge.

In 'Summer Night', a story of wartime Ireland, longed-for landscapes underpin the story of a failed night of passion. The protagonist Emma is driving through the fields

of north Cork to meet her lover Robinson at his house, Bellevue, in a small town nearby. Emma is leaving her husband and daughters behind in their Anglo-Irish Big House, engaged on a covert bid for pleasure and escape in a romantic affair. As Emma drives away from her home and towards Robinson's house, Bellevue, the landscape reflects both her romantic aspirations and the warning of imminent disillusion by the intrusion of reality:

As the sun set its light slowly melted the landscape, till everything was made of fire and glass. Released from the glare of noon, the haycocks now seemed to float on the aftergrass; their freshness penetrated the air. In the not far distance hills with woods up their flanks lay in light like hills in another world – it would be a pleasure of heaven to stand up there, where no foot ever seemed to have trodden, on the spaces between the woods soft as powder dusted over with gold. Against those hills, the burning red rambler roses in cottage gardens along the roadside looked earthy – they were too near the eye. ('Summer Night: 582)

This romance is never quite fulfilled by the time Emma arrives at Robinson's house, where she encounters some unexpected visitors. This, partly, undermines the anticipated pleasure of their night together. Also, the glamour Emma was expecting from her secret night with Robinson is somehow quenched by her lover's solid, prosaic attitude towards her when she arrives at his house. "Here you are." "Yes, here I am." She added: "The night was lovely," speaking more sadly than she knew. Yes, here she was, being settled down to as calmly as he might settle down to a meal' (ibid: 603).

Instead, it is another character in the story who locates this longed-for sense of romance at Bellevue. It transpires that the house is the former gate lodge of a burnt-out Anglo-Irish house, and that one of the unexpected visitors at Bellevue is a local woman, Queenie. While Emma has the expectation of a love affair in the present, Queenie has a long-distant romantic past connected with this ruined Big House, and the memory of a lover who walked her there many years ago. Queenie's visit to Robinson's house has reawakened this memory of her first and only love affair, and so when she returns home to her modest lodgings that night, she finds a kind of exaltation in her dreaming of the landscape of the past, like Pepita: '[t]his was the night she knew she would find again. It had stayed living under a film of time. On just such a summer night, once only, she had walked with a lover in the demesne [...] they had felt the fresh aghast ruin totter above them, there was a moonless sky' (ibid: 607). To this past landscape, almost as if she were in the grounds of the executed Danielstown, Queenie dreams her way back to her one moment of pleasure, thus evading the constrictions of her impoverished life in two small rooms in the town square of a small provincial city. 'Queenie, in her bed facing the window, lay with her face turned sideways, smiling, one hand turned lightly against her cheek' (ibid: 608).

In a further story from this collection, another dreaming woman, caught in a dangerously crumbling house in wartime London, also imagines her way back to another Anglo-Irish landscape of loss and of sorrow. In doing so, Bowen finds a fruitful and engaging way of expressing her own divided imaginings. In many ways this story, 'The Happy Autumn Fields', is the most satisfying realisation of Bowen's wartime imaginings of the relationship between the Irish landscapes, seen through the lens of a beleaguered Blitz consciousness. Here, two landscapes come together in a dream sequence that may also be a ghost story, and possibly a murder.

'The Happy Autumn Fields' opens with a vision of an idealised nineteenth-century Anglo-Ireland, a landlord and his family walking the prosperous fields, the harvest saved, the family a numerous and handsome one. Abruptly, as the story progresses, this narrative of the past is fractured. The beautiful Anglo-Irish terrain is actually revealed as a hallucination of the protagonist, Mary, slumbering in a damaged house in war-torn London, conjuring up this vision out of her longing for escape. Mary imagines herself into the mind of Sarah, one of the many daughters of the landlord, possessively engrossed with her twin sister, Henrietta. The mood of these Irish autumn fields, as seen through Sarah's eyes, is elegiac: '[s]he recognised the colour of valediction, tasted sweet sadness, while from the cottage inside the screen of trees wood-smoke rose melting pungent and blue' ('The Happy Autumn Fields': 95). As the story progresses, it becomes clear that Sarah is somehow psychically intertwined with the identity, the mind and even the soul of her sister Henrietta and fears loss and separation will result from the intrusion of a young man, Eugene, a suitor of Henrietta. The vision of this golden autumnal landscape echoes that of *The Last September*, another house obliterated by the landscape:

The shorn uplands seemed to float on the distance, which extended dazzling to tiny blue glassy hills. There was no end to the afternoon, whose light went on ripening now they had scythed the corn [...] Only screens of trees intersected and knolls made islands in the vast fields. The mansion and the home farm had sunk forever below them in the expanse of woods, so that hardly a ripple showed where the girls dwelled' (ibid: 97)

The tension of the story partly comes from the fact that the modern-day protagonist, Mary, is in imminent danger of being killed if she remains in her bed in this bomb-damaged house. There is also a tension in the past narrative: the struggle between Sarah and Henrietta over the figure of Eugene, and Mary stubbornly remains in the dangerous house in order to dream her way back to this lost world and discover the fate of the two sisters and of the interloper, Eugene. Mary laments what she sees as the lost emotional depth of the past. 'So much flowed through people; so little flows through us. All we can do is imitate love or sorrow' (ibid: 112).

However, the Irish fields are no simple place of refuge in a time of war. Here, the threat of death hovers again. As with *The Last September*, danger is somewhere in those north Cork fields, now made manifest in the sinister presence of the rooks pecking at the autumn fields for stray wheat:

Behind them, rooks that had risen and circled, sun striking blue from their blue black wings, plane one by one to the earth and peck again. [...] In the inevitable silence rooks on the return from the fields could be heard streaming over the house; their sounds filled the sky and even the room, and it appeared so useless to ring the bell that Henrietta stayed quivering by Mamma's chair (ibid: 109).

At the end of the story, Mary learns that a young man, unnamed but clearly Eugene, died alone and unexpectedly in the lonely, murderous fields one beautiful autumn evening:

Fitzgeorge refers, in a letter to Robert written in his old age, to some friend of their youth who was thrown from his horse and killed, riding back after a visit to their home. The young man, whose name doesn't appear, was alone; and the

evening, which was in autumn, was fine though late. Fitzgeorge wonders, and says he will always wonder, what made the horse shy in those empty fields. (ibid: 113)

It is implied that the rooks that haunt and shadow the landscape of this story may have deliberately startled his horse, somehow set to their task by Sarah. Sarah's determination to eliminate Eugene, the suitor that threatens the perfect affinity between herself and her sister, has now been fulfilled, the north Cork landscape acting on its habitual murderous intent and the tottering London house that Mary clung to now abandoned.

Three landscapes, London, Ireland and Kent, collide in Bowen's most celebrated wartime novel, *The Heat of the Day*, published in 1948, where, as Heather Bryant Jordan notices, 'Bowen depicts the psychological ramifications of the changed landscape of war' (Jordan, 1992: 153). Here, Stella, a middle-aged woman with a son away at war, begins a love affair with Robert, an affair that is echoed in the London landscape of war that enables their passion: '[t]hey had met one another, at first not very often, throughout that heady autumn of the first London air raids. Never had any season been more felt; one bought the poetic sense of it with the sense of death' (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day*: 90). Soon, their love is put to the test when Stella is told by a government agent, Harrison, that Robert is actually a spy, betraying secrets to the Germans. Instead of confronting Robert, Stella broods on this fact and continues to do so when she is unexpectedly sent to neutral Ireland to see Mount Morris, the Anglo-Irish Big House her son has inherited. The Irish landscape around Mount Morris is seen by Stella as an oasis of stability and a symbol of survival at a crucial stage of the war and at her crisis of belief in her lover Robert:

The river traced the boundary of the lands: at the Mount Morris side, it had a margin of water-meadow into which the demesne woods, dark at their base with laurels, ran down in a series of promontories. This valley cleavage into a distance seemed like an offering to the front window: in return the house devoted the whole muted fervour of its being to a long gaze. Elsewhere rising woods or swelling uplands closed Mount Morris in. (ibid: 162)

Here, in this loyal Irish landscape, Stella and the caretaker's daughter Hannah learn of the decisive victory in El Alamein in November 1942, the turning point of the war for Britain and the Allies. At this moment, Stella muses, watching the beautiful young Irish girl standing there outside Mount Morris, that '[w]hensoever in the future that Mount Morris mirage of utter victory came back to her, she was to see Hannah standing there in the sunshine, indifferent as a wand' (ibid: 257). An Irish Big House, and a young Irish servant girl, now stand as symbols of a moment of vindication for British resistance in a crucial moment of the Second World War.

However, in this idealised Anglo-Irish landscape, Stella imagines some of the drawbacks for the women who have lived in this house, the place where Cousin Nettie, the wife of the previous owner, went mad. The complex relationship between women and landscape is best exemplified by the following passage: '[a]fter all, was it not chiefly here in this room and under this illusion that Cousin Nettie Morris – and who now knew how many more before her? – had been pressed back, hour by hour, by the hours themselves, into cloudland?' (ibid: 166). Madness, a Bowen legacy, is here specifically gendered and the idealised landscape of 'Elsewhere' has also the

capacity to drive women mad, as well as liberate them into dreaming. Cloudland, the unravelling of sanity and reality, is dangerously close to a dreaming landscape, and Bowen anticipates her later vision of Livia's painted garden with its wealth of wild birds and its empty birdcage with a glimpse here in Danielstown of a dead bird representing despair. Madness comes to the women of Danielstown via the small moments of loss and pain and death:

'Everything spoke to them – the design in and out of which they drew their needles; the bird with its little claws drawn to its piteously smooth breast, dead, away in the woods the quickening strokes of the axes, then the fall of the tree; or the child upstairs crying out terrified in its sleep.' (ibid: 167)

Back in England, nourished and refreshed by her time in loyal Ireland (possibly Bowen's hit at British impatience with neutrality, something she defended in her wartime reports to the Ministry of Information), Stella confronts Robert, who confesses his betrayal. In their ensuing argument, Robert attacks Stella's beliefs about loyalty and patriotism as outmoded and redundant. Robert, a survivor of Dunkirk and a decorated hero, is an unlikely figure for treason and Stella struggles to understand his brutal, nihilistic cynicism. Bowen provides the explanation with her description of the house Robert grew up in in the Home Counties, a place that should have been a model for solid British identity and patriotism, but is really a nesting place for betrayal. Holme Dene, a prosperous villa in Kent inhabited by Robert's mother and sister, is seen as 'a man-eating home' (ibid: 256). Here, a Kentish landscape and house is, for once, set in opposition to the loyal house and landscape in Ireland, and Bowen underlines the house as a poisonous world of suppressed emotion and concealment:

Above stairs, Holme Dene was silent: without a creak it sustained the stresses of its architecture and the unsureness, manifestly indifferent to it, of its fate [...] These two upper floors were in fact, not hollow, being flock-packed with matter—repressions, doubts, fears, subterfuges and fibs [...] upstairs life, since the war, had up there condensed itself into very few rooms—swastika-arms of passage leading to nothing. (ibid: 256-258)

Evoking the image of passages like swastikas is deliberate on Bowen's part and, when she confronts him, Stella rebuts Robert's declaration. Robert tells her:

Country? – There are no more countries left; nothing but names. What country have you and me outside this room? Exhausted shadows, dragging themselves out again to fight [...] What is repulsing you is the idea of 'betrayal', I suppose, isn't it? In you the hangover from the word? Don't you understand that all that language is dead currency? (ibid: 267)

On the other hand, Stella, with brothers killed fighting for England during the First World War, has an uncomplicated and direct sense of duty to country and a belief in personal relations. She argues against Robert's nihilism and refutes his sense of despair with her own belief in the tangibility of words like country and loyalty. Here, Stella makes an explicit link with her own interior landscape of love and passion with Robert, the personal becoming political with her own interior world of love:

“Oh, but you cannot say there is not a country!” she cried aloud, starting up. She had trodden every inch of a country with him, not least perhaps when she was alone. Of that country, she did not know how much was place, how much was time (ibid: 274).

The novel ends with Robert falling from the roof of Stella’s house in an attempt to evade arrest, and her eventual liberation into another relationship. As Jordan argues,

‘In *The Heat of the Day*, Bowen depicts the psychological ramifications of the changed landscape [...] tackling in a more sustained, and sometimes more agonised, manner, the same questions she had addressed in her wartime short stories: the nature of betrayal, changing concepts of class, the role of Ireland and the Anglo-Irish, and the ramifications of espionage work. (Jordan, 1992: 153)

*The Heat of the Day* was a popular success, and with some of her money she earned, Bowen had, for the first time, bathrooms put into Bowen’s Court as part of her plan to live there permanently. However, after the Second World War, her relationship with Ireland underwent another shift. Her husband Alan Cameron retired, and so he and Bowen made the decision to leave London and make their home full-time at Bowen’s Court in 1950. But Alan Cameron’s health failed rapidly, and he died in 1952, leaving Bowen to struggle financially to maintain her Irish home, finding herself increasingly an outsider in Ireland, something which is reflected in her fictions. Her 1955 novel *A World of Love* was a return to the Irish Big House, here called Montefort, and again the house itself and the landscape reflect alienation or fear or loneliness: ‘[t]he unprecedented loneliness of the afternoon looked out, as through eyelets cut in a mask, from the archways of the forsaken dovecote’ (*A World of Love*: 48). However, something in the novel fails to connect with Bowen’s habitual command of narrative drama and structure, and somehow the Anglo-Ireland that Bowen portrays here is still obsessed with the past, unable to imagine a future. As if to underline this, in the closing scene of the novel, Jane travels to Shannon to meet the son of her friend Lady Latterly and, in an abrupt closing, ‘Their eyes met. They no sooner looked but they loved’ (ibid: 170). The implication of the closing of the novel is that Jane will leave Ireland, that Montefort will have no future and that the ghosts of the past will be swept away by this sudden moment of passion and a possible move to America.

It is worth noting that Bowen effectively stopped writing about Ireland with this novel and her interest in lost landscapes shifted elsewhere. This final alienation from Ireland and the Irish landscape makes Bowen’s later representation of a lost Italian landscape even more striking. Struggling with her decision to sell Bowen’s Court, in 1958 Bowen went to Rome to teach and to write her one travel book, published in 1960 as *A Time in Rome*. Throughout the book, Bowen views the Roman landscape in light of her own Anglo-Irish identity and here Rome is a place of disordered history and disintegrating cityscapes, with shifting unstable historical moments, not unlike London in the Blitz. All of these interests lead Bowen to the historical figure of Livia, the Emperor Augustus’s wife. Bowen was fascinated by this woman, the subject of much historical and literary misogyny, at the centre of political power in a new regime but lacking her own direct political agency.

In a chapter of *A Time in Rome* entitled 'The Smile', Livia is reconstructed by Bowen as an Anglo-Irish conqueror's wife, the chatelaine of an Irish house as if the Empress were running her household in a hostile Irish landscape in the years after the Cromwellian settlement. Like many Anglo-Irish women, Livia, the wife of a powerful man, finds herself under surveillance and thus hampered in terms of personal freedom: '[a]nyone interested in watching women deal with the situations in which they find themselves must have been interested in watching Livia. Observed she was' (*A Time in Rome*: 128). Bowen speculates on the strain that such a life of unrelenting public surveillance placed on Livia, as it did on Lady Naylor and many other Anglo-Irish chatelaines in her fictions:

Were there times when she put her hands to her head, moments when she would have given anything, everything to be elsewhere? There can be no woman, in anything like Livia's position, for whom elsewhere is not at times the desired land (ibid: 131).

This supposed yearning by the Empress Livia for a 'desired land', an 'elsewhere', a refuge from surveillance, is interpreted by Bowen in light of her own desire for aesthetic escape and a fixed identity. Thus a painted landscape becomes the locus for Livia's longed-for 'Elsewhere', at least as Bowen reads her. 'That there was more to Livia than the wearied *soignée* woman I feel sure. She had to keep going; one does so from some secret resource' (ibid: 132). At one point in the travel book Bowen describes a visit to a museum, the Palazzo Massimo in the centre of Rome, where Livia's painted garden can now be seen. This room-sized mural of a garden in spring was created because of Livia's orders for a basement room in her villa in Prima Porta, just outside Rome. It was then miraculously preserved in a landslide over the villa and survived for centuries, excavated in the nineteenth century and carefully transferred to a spacious room in the Palazzo Massimo Alle Terme. Recalling her visit, Bowen dwells in great detail on 'this blue-green eternity of Livia's' (ibid: 131), admiring the young trees, the flowers and the many birds represented in this artificial celebration of the natural. Here, observing Livia's garden, Bowen interprets it as a free, untrammelled interior landscape, painted at the command of a woman who is herself unable to wander at leisure in the woods around her villa. Thus she sees the artificial garden made in the privacy of Livia's well-guarded house as a solace and a refuge, when nature is reproduced safely for private enjoyment by this trapped woman. The painted garden is a retreat into an aestheticized landscape, produced by a woman's longing, where entrapment can be evaded and where the lost natural world is remade.

However, it is significant that Bowen fails to mention one significant feature of the mural in her musings. In the centre of Livia's painted garden, a birdcage stands on a low wall. In that birdcage, a sole tame bird can be seen, an imprisoned songbird, a poignant figure of loneliness, in a garden where a myriad of wild birds fly at liberty. It is a striking feature of the garden, a detail that no observer can miss, especially one as sharp as Bowen. A room painted for an entrapped woman has another form of imprisonment tellingly represented. Bowen's omission of the birdcage is significant, in that her reading of the painted garden as aesthetic escape and consolation thus parallels her own modernist vision in her fictions. However, the birdcage unsettles this metaphorical account of the role of the imagination for the woman writer and

artist.<sup>4</sup> Bowen's omission, I would suggest, comes from her desire to present the painted garden as an untroubled metaphor for the function of the aesthetic, an aesthetic that seeks to idealise and thus to transcend loss and the consequent fragility of selfhood. It is also an appropriated garden, as Bowen imagines Livia dismissing the painter with anger when the mural is complete, usurping the position of the artist, and appropriating the aesthetic role through the strength of her aesthetic longing for 'elsewhere': 'It is thought that women inspire by their beauty; more often they do so by their longings. The execution was his, but the wood hers [...]' (ibid: 132). Livia thus appropriates the function and the role of the painter by her longing to realise a landscape of 'Elsewhere.' The closing words of *A Time in Rome* underline this sense that Livia's painted landscape, her longed-for 'elsewhere', is a temporary and fleeting one: 'Here we have no abiding city' (ibid: 168).

Livia's painted garden draws from the conflicted and unsettled Bowen a significantly vivid expression of her lifelong preoccupation with an idealised, unattainable landscape at a crucial moment of change in her life. For Livia, as with Pepita in 'Mysterious Kôr' and Mary in 'Happy Autumn Fields', the dream landscape is the only realisable 'elsewhere' for women who are 'unstuck', out of kilter with a surrounding reality. For Bowen, her art, fiction, like the painted garden, is a place of reflected realism, a self-acknowledged attempt to find expression for elusive longings and vanished, desired worlds. Bowen's landscape of loss reflects a complex relationship with landscape, one that evolved and altered as her sense of her own craft changed and became more ambiguous and even contradictory.

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<sup>4</sup> See my essays, 'The Smile of Livia', *Classics Ireland*, Volume 16, 2009, 26-40 and 'No Abiding City: Elizabeth Bowen's Rome', *The Dublin Review*, Volume, 36 Autumn 2009, 13- 24.

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Kezia Whiting ~ Imprints of Style: *The Last September*

This essay argues that Elizabeth Bowen’s free indirect style is foundational to her radical reworking of political and subjective boundaries in *The Last September*. The novel’s Anglo-Irish historical context, and its preoccupation with property, boundaries, belonging, and hyphenation as a lived state give Bowen the perfect material to explore the implications of modernist free indirect style, and its interweaving and enmeshing of internality and externality, and of subjectivity and objectivity. Bowen’s free indirect style overruns distinctions between externalized and interiorized perspectives, defining each through their difference from the other even as this difference is suspended by their intermingling. The architecture of subjectivity in *The Last September* is constituted by Bowen’s free indirect style, which depicts the exteriority of the subject to itself.

In 'Rx for a Story Worth the Telling', Elizabeth Bowen suggests our desire for stories exists because 'we require to be transported, to transcend boundaries—not, I think, merely with a view to 'escape' but out of a necessity for enlargement. Positive rather than negative, this wish carries us to the portals of a world that is at once 'other' and our own, a terrain with potentials we barely sense in the everyday. A story deals in the not-yet-thought-of but always possible' (2008c: 325). The image of 'a world that is at once 'other' and our own' suggests not just a widening of our understanding and knowledge, but a constitutive nullification in the boundaries of ourselves. Bowen demonstrates this paradox of subjectivity—its persistent and yet suspended boundaries—through her unique free indirect style in *The Last September*, which explores the politics of personal as well as national terrains. The transcending of personal boundaries, figured positively in 'Rx for a Story Worth the Telling', troubles many of her essays, which deal with the problems of knowing and being oneself. In these essays, Bowen's position echoes her description of the younger generation returning from World War II, 'half revolutionaries, half nostalgics' (2008d: 390). Her unease regarding the dissolution of boundaries, especially personal boundaries, is clear in the title of her essay 'The Art of Respecting Boundaries', in which she laments the contemporary '[c]ampaign of ruthless intrusion upon the privacies of someone else's life' (2008a: 398). Yet it becomes clear that respect for boundaries is important for Bowen *in order* for them to be occasionally surpassed. Once again, storytelling informs this vision of inter-subjective relation, hinting at its relevance to her understanding of her own writing: '[w]e grow to know one another: gleam by gleam, intimation by intimation the truth blossoms; the story comes to be told' (2008a: 400). The story of another person, Bowen suggests, is not just revealed through a relation to another, but grows and blossoms through that intersubjective relation.

In her essays and novels, Bowen tends to describe subjectivity in terms of its boundaries, as these boundaries are not only pushed up against but also overrun. Each of these images doubles the subject, which becomes both enforcer and would-be fugitive. In a passage from 'A Way of Life' that echoes the image of gleams of awareness from 'The Art of Respecting Boundaries', Bowen recognizes how unconscious of ourselves we usually are, and our occasional flashes of awareness: "That", one thinks, with a sort of curious awe, 'was I. And the moment, like a flash of lightning over a dark landscape, has the effect of illuminating one's whole past [...] making the whole a pattern, giving the pattern meaning' (2008d: 386). Her examples of the shock of seeing oneself begin as external—an unexpected mirror, a friend telling you your traits, a recording of your voice—but move from 'one's exterior self' to the 'habits, desires, and ruling trends of the inner person [that] are the real mysteries; most mysterious in that—though they work within one, make one, in fact *are* one—one is seldom reminded that they exist' (386). But even in those flashes of illumination the one thinking is separated from whatever 'I' is, marveling at it, meaning that we can never really just be ourselves without also being beyond whatever 'ourselves' designates. Indeed, although in 'A Way of Life' Bowen maintains a distinction between 'one's exterior self' and 'inner person' (2008d: 386), these images of subjectivity suggest the composition of the subject by that exterior vision of oneself.

In *The Last September*, Bowen depicts the simultaneous dissolution and construction of subjectivity by its outside. The novel's stylistic complexity—its ellipses, strange metaphoric language, and inventive neologisms—emphasizes

interrelations between subjects and objects, exploring the ways in which objects either construct identities or sap a person of their agency. In particular, Bowen's free indirect style, which incorporates all of these stylistic features, is the foundation for the novel's challenge to conventional understandings of borders and boundaries—of both the subject and the community or nation. The Anglo-Irish families under scrutiny in *The Last September* embody the isolation and dividedness of their community. In the novel the gaps and traversals of the Big House parallel the simultaneous isolation and penetration of subjectivity so that the predicament of the Anglo-Irish Big House, its paradoxical isolationism and principle of hospitality, becomes the predicament of the subjects who inhabit it. And, as Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle remind us, the novel explicitly parallels political and subjective borders in the way both are produced through their own traversal: '*The Last September* presents the boundaries of the self above all in terms of a politics of private space and private property, a politics which is figured by the infringements of the borders of the Naylor's demesne by paramilitary soldiers' (1995: 16). The interdependent relationship between objectivity and subjectivity in Bowen's free indirect style, I will suggest, is the foundation for these other infringements.

While Bowen's engagement with modernist free indirect style and her use of it to maintain and suspend boundaries is not often discussed, critics do recognize the significance of the trope of borders in Bowen's writing. Jessica Gildersleeve comments on the 'slippage between inside and outside, the collapse of boundaries' (2014: 42) in both the psychic and domestic spaces of *The Last September*, arguing that 'the residents of Danielstown are forced to gulp in the 'fountain of darkness' to incorporate it, inescapably, into themselves, to be 'stained' with that very gap in their discourse, the threatening absent presence they refuse to name: the silenced Other that is the subaltern Irish culture' (41). This develops Bennett and Royle's claim that 'the boundaries of the self are turned inside out, so that what threatens, fear, the violent intrusion of the alien across the borders of the self, are understood to be within' (1995: 18). What I want to suggest is that Bowen harnesses the indeterminacy of free indirect style to depict the persistence of borders in the face of their dissolution, puncturing, and collapse. Discussing Bowen's 'aesthetics of unintimacy', Sian White similarly explores the ambiguous boundaries of narration in her work, finding that 'the precise boundaries between them [narrator and character interiority] are not always clear or easily identifiable' (2015: 96). While I agree that these boundaries are not clear, I will suggest that these shifting grounds indicate the annexing of external perspectives that make up the way we see ourselves, rather than a clearly identifiable external narrator. For White, and many other critics, Bowen's style is a difficult point of study precisely because it 'blurs the boundaries between the conventional and the experimental' (97). The fact that Susan Osborn needs to point out that Bowen's style is 'a queer, opaque style that realizes itself not solely as a style to be looked *through* but as a style to be looked *at* as well' (2009: 49) indicates the different reception of her work from other modernists, who are long recognized as experimenting with the relation between content and style in their texts. Indeed, even the most astute critics have implied that Bowen does not consciously produce her disconcerting style¹ or that she is 'not a 'Modernist' in the high Proustian or Joycean sense, because 'she does not set out radically to reinvent literary language or

¹ Neil Corcoran writes that 'her most arresting texts, and the most arresting moments in others, are those which most tellingly convey the impression of hesitantly following in their own footsteps, of knowing only by going where it is they have to go' (2009: xiii).

the form and purpose of the novel, but instead develops traditional form, pushing it even as she does so to its limits' (Bennett, 2009: 37). Both these claims, which one cannot help but see as influenced by her gender, suggest there is still much work to do to recuperate Bowen as a thoroughly modern and innovative stylist alongside the recognition of her relation to both the Irish and English literary tradition. In responding to Proust, Joyce, and Woolf's experimentation with narration, Bowen produces a distinctive version of free indirect style that challenges ideas of thinking, subjectivity, and the novel form.

Free indirect style always plays with the relation between objective and subjective, but in *The Last September* this technique is literalized in its interplay with actual objects. An early observer of the importance of objects in *The Last September*, Maud Ellmann claims that Bowen 'performs an 'intimate thing-y' resurrection in her prose' (2003: 59), a prioritization that gives agency to objects while 'everything in Bowen's prose conspires to efface the human subject' (67). If Bowen's prose conspires to efface the human subject, that is not to say it succeeds: the problem, in fact, seems to be the subject's stubborn persistence. But Bowen does demonstrate the capacity of free indirect style to articulate a psychoanalytic understanding of the subject, in which the boundaries between subject and object or between internality and externality are repeatedly traversed. These dynamics of modernist free indirect style enact Freud's description of early childhood mental states, in which the 'antithesis between subjective and objective does not exist from the first. It only comes into being from the fact that thinking possesses the capacity to bring before the mind once more something that has once been perceived' (2001: 237). Freud suggests that the process of memory (thinking, bringing before the mind) sparks the differentiation between subjective and objective, internal and external. This differentiation is thus inaugurated by its invalidation, since the act of 'bringing before the mind' internalizes objects. Bowen's free indirect style erases the antithesis of subjective and objective, while retaining traces of both. Her writing maintains what she calls 'the boundaries of the personal' (1998: 100) in the face of its complete saturation by what it supposedly excludes.

This dynamic of exclusion, whereby what both defines and dismantles the subject is ushered in through its supposed exclusion, follows the same logic as the advice Bowen gives writers in 'Exclusion': 'what may be most eloquent, sometimes, is the excluded word—or phrase, or paragraph, or it may be chapter' (1962: 216). Bowen emphasizes this technique in *The Last September*, which Neil Corcoran notes 'is a novel full of holes. Ellipses and lacunae characterize its dialogue, its detail, and its plotting, and several times it opens into irresolvable aporia' (2001: 39). The novel positions exclusion as the language of the Anglo-Irish, so that it is through Bowen's free indirect style—that combination of narration and character—that the silences of the characters, in 'not speaking about things', seep into the style itself. Bowen's 'language of exclusion' in *The Last September*, Matthew Brown argues, 'dramatise[s] the ways in which war disorients figurative language and, in so doing, subverts and transforms the apparently stable metaphors through which the Anglo-Irish sought to reconcile events occurring in September 1920' (2012: 4). Bowen's experiments with language are designed to critique and undermine the Anglo-Irish illusion of self-sufficiency, and demonstrate the self-negation inherent in what Thomas Davis notes as Bowen's 'equation of subjectivity with property ownership' (2013: 33). In much the same way as Bowen suggests exclusion should operate in fiction, Michel Foucault's analysis of the silences surrounding sexuality beginning in the eighteenth

century shows their functioning as a part of discourse, rather than as its opposite. He writes:

Silence itself—the things one declines to say, or is forbidden to name, the discretion that is required between different speakers—is less the absolute limit of discourse, the other side from which it is separated by a strict boundary, than an element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within over-all strategies (1978: 27).

In *The Last September* silences function alongside the things said in Bowen's free indirect style, to such an extent that the characters are perforated by ellipses. Silences function not just in conversation, but in thought itself, constituting the characters with a repeatedly sounded hollowness. The overall strategies of the silences surrounding sexuality and politics (to name just a few off-limit topics) in *The Last September* are to maintain the Anglo-Irish fantasy of self-containment, safety, and impermeability, yet Bowen's style of exclusion repeatedly depicts the permeability and permutability of the subject. As Gildersleeve argues, Bowen demonstrates 'the importance of the void or the darkness when accounting for identity' (2014: 40). Her characters are defined more by their gaps and spaces than their positive traits. Bowen's style insists on the outsideness of the self to itself, a heterogeneity which manifests as futility in these groups of characters, who are repeatedly shown to be failing the standard of self-determination of their nineteenth-century forbearers.

In her preface to the second American edition of the novel, Bowen describes the 'festivities' of Anglo-Irish life during 'the Troubled Times', and the 'state of affairs round Danielstown, outside happenings which impact on the story' (1987a: 125). In separating Danielstown, the Big House of the novel, from the 'outside', Bowen reinforces the Anglo-Irish characters' belief in their independence, while detailing the various ways in which the house (and its people) are traversed by these happenings. Although, as Ellmann argues, even the narrative 'cocoon itself, in the sense that most events occur offstage' (2003: 65), this cocoon is entirely permeated by what it tries to hold at arm's length. In fact, it is the tension between the British forces and the Irish rebels that structures the Anglo-Irish space and identity. The trope of barriers Bowen employs in her essay on the Big House to describe its survival after Irish independence is thus perhaps misleading, in that the Big House, as she demonstrates, is always already traversed, and as such, created, by its outside.

While they inform one another, the differing contexts of *The Last September* and the non-fiction essay 'The Big House', published eleven years apart, mean that each presents a distinct view of the Anglo-Irish and the Big House. Vera Kreilkamp figures this difference in terms of loyalty: where *Bowen's Court* (which Bowen was working on when she wrote 'The Big House') is 'a statement of loyalty to the past' (1998: 150), '*The Last September* is strikingly disloyal to the conservative tradition that is later elegized in *Bowen's Court*' (157). But, as Luke Thurston has argued of the various oppositions we might attempt to structure Bowen's writing around— 'between literary Ireland and the English novel [...] between modernism and conservatism, or even perhaps between patriarchal tradition and female writing'—her work 'always remains hybrid, irreducible to either term of the opposition (2013: 9), though I would resist the suggestion that modernism and conservatism are necessarily opposed. More recently, Kreilkamp indicates the intertwining of modernist and traditional

influences in Bowen's writing: '[t]he strikingly modernist sense of psychic incoherence and homelessness shaping Bowen's fiction stemmed no less from an Irish Ascendancy sensibility than from her receptivity to twentieth-century cultural innovation' (2009: 13). Bowen's writing attests to the traditional, nostalgic, and conservative ideologies that inform modernism, but also to their inseparability from its inventive, experimental, and radical modes.

Bowen's use of the trope of borders in both 'The Big House' and *The Last September* demonstrates the amalgamation of conservative and innovative feeling in her writing, and the way, as Kreilkamp suggests, much of her apparently modernist understanding of subjectivity stems from her Anglo-Irish background. Bowen frames the essay by emphasizing the apparent isolation of the Anglo-Irish Big Houses. She begins by acknowledging that the 'loneliness of my house, as of many others, is more an effect than a reality. But it is the effect that is interesting' (1987b: 25), and ends by gesturing towards efforts to integrate the Big House into Irish life: '[f]rom inside many big houses (and these will be the survivors) barriers are being impatiently attacked. But it must be seen that a barrier has two sides' (30). The Big House is still isolated from the world, Bowen suggests, but it is attempting to dismantle that barrier. The 'survivors' Bowen refers to here are the houses themselves, not the people within the house, so that the agency of the destruction of the barrier falls to the house and its surrounds, a strangely de-peopled image of integration that the passive voice of the final sentence emphasizes. But after describing the valiant efforts of the 'young people taking on these big houses' (30) both to maintain the houses and to dismantle its barriers, this final sentence sounds almost childish in its implied paternalistic accusation of the Irish people on the other side: 'a barrier has *two* sides' (30).

Bowen reveals her nostalgia for her version of the Big House in describing its aestheticization of hospitality. The most ornate parts of the house, she writes, are the ones that 'contributed to society, that raised life above the exigencies of mere living to the plane of art, or at least style. There was a true bigness, a sort of impersonality, in the manner in which the houses were conceived' (27). As Kreilkamp notes, Bowen's attachment to the Big House seems in large part due to its aesthetics: 'Bowen's undermining of her own caste is characteristically more ambivalent than that of many predecessors and successors, more insistent on registering loss, less willing to renounce a mortality identified with aesthetic forms and Anglo-Irish cultural style' (2009: 14). 'Style' for those in the Big House is not just 'keeping up appearances', but entails turning life into art, or, in a phrasing that seems to echo T. S. Eliot's 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', 'the subjugation of the personal to the impersonal' (Bowen, 1987b: 29). Ironically, it is the impersonality of the house that allows it to welcome anyone, so long as they comply with its subjugatory effects—yet in *The Last September* Bowen emphasizes the spuriousness of offering hospitality on the condition of impersonality.² The style the Big House asserts twins hospitality and sepulchering, and in *The Last September* Bowen fully explores the deadening effect of turning life into art, equating art and writing with death. Bowen prides the Big House on always being open to the outside, telling her reader: 'Symbolically (though also matter-of-factly) the doors of the big houses stand open all day; it is only regretfully that they are barred up at night. The stranger is welcome, just as much

² For a fuller exploration of the ethics of hospitality in *The Last September* and its relation to Derrida's conceptualization of the impossibility of the task, see Matthew Brown.

friend—the stranger, in fact, *is* the friend if he does not show himself otherwise. But who ever walks in? Is it suspicion, hostility, irony that keeps so much of Ireland away from the big house door?’ (1987b: 29). But this appearance of hospitality is, as the description reveals in spite of itself, for those outside the Anglo-Irish community, suspicious and just as forbidding as a locked gate. In the novel, Bowen more self-consciously recognizes the limitations imposed by the apparent openness of the Big House.

The emphasis on isolation and hospitality throughout the essay puts the Big House constantly in relation to its outside while holding them separate. The question Bowen does not quite ask, but which her argument pushes us toward, is just what the Big House will be as a ‘survivor’ without its definition in antagonistic relation to Catholic Ireland. If the barrier is attacked, then what identity is left for the Big House? It is this movement of antagonistic relation that *The Last September* explores, demonstrating its unfolding between nationalities, people and their ancestors, and people and places. Bowen’s free indirect style produces and perpetuates this suspension of relation in the novel, holding things constantly in a process of dissolution as their defining relations are sundered. The youngest members of Danielstown, Lois and Laurence, being ‘queerly linked by antagonism’ (1998: 118), separate and opposed as well as converging, is emblematic of the problem of antagonistic relation that is both formal and empirical in the novel. The phrase suggests that they are queerly linked through their antagonistic attitude toward one another, but also queerly linked through their shared antagonism to the rest of the scene. Just like the sentence itself, this queer link through antagonism produces possibilities of meaning without certainty and ensures the mobile quality of Bowen’s language.

Given the agency of objects in the novel, it is not surprising that the house and its inhabitants are similarly traversed, queerly linked through antagonism. The characters are repeatedly shown to be more passive than the objects and space that wield much influence over them. As Ellmann demonstrates, ‘In *Bowen’s Court*, Bowen insists that character is shaped by architecture; but in *The Last September*, architecture takes the place of character, usurping personality from the protagonists’ (2003: 66). Hugo and Francie Montmorency’s first dinner at Danielstown is framed by descriptions of the portraits of the family’s ancestors lining the walls above the diners, with the juxtaposition emphasizing the lifelessness of the living characters. The dinner scene enacts the stultification the characters feel in response to the transformation of the personal to the impersonal Bowen describes in ‘The Big House.’ The ancestors’ gaze pervades the room, with the characters always aware of it. The portraits ‘cancelled time, negated personality and made of the lower cheerfulness, dining and talking, the faintest exterior friction’ (Bowen, 1998: 24). The strangeness of paintings making people into ‘exterior friction’ situates the objects with the interiority and depth the people themselves lack. The portraits extract agency for themselves, morphing themselves into active subjects and the people into objects. Bowen indicates the passivity of the protagonists in relation to the spectres, with her free indirect style suggesting the amorphous boundaries between the dead and the living as well as between subjects and objects. The phrase ‘exterior friction’ transfers the two-dimensionality of the portraits to the people, who seem ‘unconvincingly painted’ in comparison, but it also hints at the importance of the surface and the superficial to the novel, asking us to pay attention to the ‘faintest exterior friction’ on the surface of the text, and reworking an understanding of

character based on depth to one focused on surfaces and edges. Bowen's exercises in textual friction play out in passages that are about surfaces—mirrors, aesthetic objects, or pages. Here, in flattening the people into two dimensions, Bowen anticipates Lois's analogy between herself and the paper of her sketch book—a passage, as I later discuss, which similarly literalizes Bowen's suggestion in 'The Big House' that the personal be subjugated to the impersonality of an aesthetic object.

The first sentence to describe the portraits begins by positioning them in relation to the characters, but soon digresses into describing the paintings themselves, and the living characters never regain their primacy: '[u]nder that constant interchange from the high-up faces staring across—now fading each to a wedge of fawn-colour, and each looking out from a square of darkness tunneled into the wall—Sir Richard and Lady Naylor, their nephew, niece and old friends had a thin, over-bright look' (24). The sentence enacts the destabilization of subjectivity it describes, with the characters quickly taking a back seat to the portraits. Where the characters are 'so enisled and distant', the portraits are in 'constant interchange', their gaze somehow both in communication with each other, 'staring across', while also passing judgment on those 'under' them. But there is the faintest friction on the surface of the conversation among the characters, controlled expertly by Lois's aunt, Myra (Lady Naylor), who speaks of the way things are in order to not say anything at all about 'things' (24). Laurence's vague response to Hugo's equally indirect question ('what do you think of things?') is already too much for Myra, even though its very grammar is evasive, avoiding the object altogether: '[s]eem to be closing in [...] rolling up rather' (25). The move from 'closing in' to 'rolling up' effaces the position of the Anglo-Irish: where 'closing in' positions them as being surrounded and even under siege, 'rolling up' instead describes their inevitable dwindling, which is self-induced but which they are also somehow unable to resist. While Laurence is being silenced, Lois says more about 'things' by suggesting they search for the guns supposedly buried on their property by the IRA. She finishes by claiming: 'surely we ought to know' (25), which is precisely the kind of situational awareness Myra and her husband Richard avoid. As Richard retorts 'why would we want to know?' (25), Myra reassures her guests: '[f]rom all the talk, you might think almost anything was going to happen, but we never listen. I have made it a rule not to talk, either' (26). References to 'things over here', then, can only be made obliquely, but the absence of discussion makes the presence of the political situation more strongly felt. Myra's rules make 'all the talk' much louder: as Bowen knows of her craft, 'From the unsaid, or from what does not remain in writing, comes a great part of the potency of the novel' (1962b: 220). While in 'The Art of Respecting Boundaries' Bowen herself takes up Myra's position, claiming that 'relationships most worth having are built up on a basis of things unsaid' (2008a: 398), this is also a position that she subjects to extensive criticism in *The Last September*. The enforcing of silence does retain some value in the novel, however, in terms of its relation to Bowen's allusive, mobile, and purposefully indefinite language. While Myra disregards the power she gives to topics simply by proscribing them, Bowen is fully aware that, as Foucault shows, silences function as a part of discourse, and are able to convey ideas more clearly than apparently precise language.

Conversation between the British troops and the Anglo-Irish at the Danielstown tennis party demonstrates the power of the unsaid, with the British employing a

similar, though not as adept, penchant for evasiveness to the Anglo-Irish.³ Chapter 6 opens with the English Betty Vermont offering raspberries to David Armstrong, one of the subaltern officers, who is sitting beside her, and continues to detail a fractious conversation between her and the Anglo-Irish Mrs Carey. Myra earlier accuses her and Mrs Trent, who soon arrives and is also Anglo-Irish, of talking too much about things: 'if you want rumours, we must send you over to Castle Trent. And I'm afraid also the Careys are incorrigible' (Bowen, 1998: 26). While Mrs Carey and Mrs Trent do not live up to Myra's injunctions against listening and talking, when they talk to Mrs Vermont they do follow its rules by downplaying the terror of having property seized as well as their unwitting complicity in the action against them. David does not take any part in the following conversation, but at the end of it, after Mrs Vermont claims the role of the English is to protect the Anglo-Irish, the narration returns to his perspective:

Her husband [Mr Trent] was M.F.H. and really, thought Mrs Vermont, they did not seem to worry about anything but wire. Mrs Vermont turned for support to David; his ears were scarlet, he rapidly stirred his tea.

Five days ago, an R.I.C. barracks at Ballydrum had been attacked and burnt out after a long defence. Two of the defenders were burnt inside, the others shot coming out. The wires were cut, the roads blocked; there had been no one to send for help, so there was no help for them. It was this they had all been discussing, at tea, between tennis: 'the horrible thing'. (47)

The only description of the conversation 'at tea' is the exchange between Mrs Vermont and Mrs Carey, so the directness of this second paragraph is shocking. Although David's ears blush as Mrs Vermont turns to him, already pointing to his investment in what follows, the bluntness of the first two and a half sentences of the second paragraph creates the impression of objectivity. The slight inflection in the repetition and reversal of 'for help' to 'help for' begins to reveal the focalization, which is consolidated as the paragraph continues. While David might have had more direct conversations with others about these events, the revelation that this is what 'they had *all* been discussing' prompts us to reread the conversation between Mrs Carey and Mrs Vermont to look for the ways that their discussion was also about this event. David's blush indicates that the women's conversation indeed touches to the quick, 'the horrible thing' written as clearly in it for him as it is for us in the paragraph beginning with 'Five days ago'. David realizes 'It was not apparent how the subject rasped on their [his and the other officers] sensibilities' (47), his reddening ears the manifestation of this 'rasping', or 'exterior friction' that has been disturbing him throughout their conversation, and linking the paragraph back to the chapter's beginning with the raspberries, the signifier of the hospitality of the Anglo-Irish whose welcome is governed by a desire and ability to avoid rasping. Bowen depicts the impossibility of entirely subjugating the personal, and the rasp of Anglo-Irish hospitality against it. This rasp is also precisely how the subject is produced through Bowen's free indirect style, as the objective rasps the subjective into textual existence.

³ As Brown observes, 'it is clear that the Ascendancy demonstrate a skill in euphemism superior to the British and wish to maintain a balance between the two parties across the 'hyphen' of Anglo-Irish society' (2012: 17).

The novel's preoccupation with transferring subjective traits onto objects extends to the narration, which often appears objective before revealing itself as having been subjective all along. For Bowen, the relation between subjects and objects is not unilateral, but mutually constitutive. This reciprocity also means that subjectivity is produced as an effect of style, and not something simply referred to by the text. For example, the description of Laurence stepping on a snail appears to be an objective summary of Lois's day: 'She meant to go out to meet Gerald, bright and matter of fact, but this miscarried: when he came, in the evening, she was halfway down from the garden, fighting with Laurence over a snail. He had walked on the snail on purpose' (188). While it is clear that the passage is focused on Lois, it seems fairly objective in its descriptions of her actions and desires, so it is only when the focalization shifts to Laurence that we realize Lois's error in ascribing deliberation to Laurence's action: 'As a matter of fact, he was sorry about the snail; he had thought it was just a shell, but he wasn't going to say so' (188). Even the speech tags, we realize, are imbued with Lois's perspective, as Laurence's being 'pleased' is at most only bravura: "It's scrunched . . . I dare say", said Laurence, pleased. "I am pathological." (188). The narration is simultaneously undermined and solidified. We can no longer take at face value other statements that appear objective, including the description of Laurence's dismay, but it is precisely the apparent objectivity of this description of his dismay that allows us to recognize the subjectivity of the first description of the event. Bowen's free indirect style slides from Lois to Laurence, showing us where Lois was in the text only by repositioning us with Laurence, defining each through their relation to the other. The subtle movement of the narration from Lois to Laurence emphasizes what Lois calls the 'un-sympathy' between them. For Lois, their relationship is essential because of the space Laurence provides. Coming home from the barracks party after becoming engaged to Gerald, Lois is 'in tremendous need of [Laurence's] un-sympathy' (160). Like their being 'queerly linked by antagonism', the term un-sympathy calls forth the space necessary for relation to take place. Their un-sympathy is not simply a lack of understanding, but a space in which sympathy could have taken place. It does not, and is abortive in that sense, so that it both marks and nullifies that possibility.

'Un-sympathy' falls into a series of terms that name only through negation. Among others, there is the 'unintimacy' of Hugo and Lois's thoughts as they drive home (63), the 'unwisdom' of Marda's advice to Lois (100), and the 'ironic uncuriosity' Laurence feels gazing upon him from the mountains behind Danielstown (119).⁴ Bowen's apophatic technique implies that naming something more directly is in fact less accurate, since it does not allow for the same range of meaning as naming something through what it is not. Of 'unintimacy' and its surrounding sentence, White suggests that the 'subtly shifting focalizations and verb tenses [...], in their attempts to be precise, obscure rather than elucidate the plot-relevant content of the sentence, leaving the meaning ambiguous' (2015: 79). But it is through keeping the meaning

⁴ There are more: 'Laura's un-repose had been irradiation, a quiver of personality. She was indefinite definitely, like a tree shining, shaking away outlines; a bay, a poplar in wind and sunshine' (63, my emphasis); '[The house] seemed to huddle its trees close in fright and amazement at the wide light lovely unloving country, the unwilling bosom whereon it was set' (66, my emphasis); 'unrelated' (40, 62, 83); an unemotional kindness withering to assertion selfish or racial (93, my emphasis); 'Lois looked quickly away. She thought how the very suggestion of death brought this awful unprivacy' (127, my emphasis); 'He seemed at once close and remote, known and un-personal; she understood why, up to now, she had searched for him vainly in what he said. He had nothing to do with expression' (153, my emphasis).

ambiguous that I argue Bowen's descriptions are precise, demonstrating an inability to settle for language that, as she writes elsewhere, has been 'allowed to set or harden' (1962a: 212). All these terms beginning with the prefix 'un' open up a space of meaning in which the relation between a word and its signified is stretched though not broken. As Laurence's 'un-sympathy' makes clear, Bowen's use of the prefix 'un' does not necessarily denote negation—Laurence is at least capable of 'stretch[ing] for a moment to an effort of comprehension' (1998: 161), and 'unintimacy' gestures toward the intimacy Lois felt toward Hugo in her memory of him before his arrival disrupts it.

Each of these terms informs the novel's complex understanding of relations between people, which are also rendered through its free indirect style, further complicating the expectation that free indirect style give access to individual, and not mingled, minds. The passage describing Marda's advice shifts focalization from Marda to a more universalizing perspective offering its own advice, but which still lacks 'the sublimer banality' that would make it acceptable to others (100). Because of this similarity, there is a trace of Marda in the shift into external narration: 'The advice, fruit of her own relations to experience, unwisdom, lacking the sublimer banality, was—as she suspected while still speaking—to her young friend meaningless and without value. The infinite variance of that relation breaks the span of comprehension between being and being and makes an attempt at sympathy the merest fumbling for outlet along the boundaries of the personal' (100). While the 'span of comprehension between being and being' is broken simply because every relation between people is different, the relation itself nonetheless remains. Because 'that relation' does not point to a relation in the previous sentence it hangs unclearly until 'between being and being' later in the sentence partially resolves the difficulty. The convolution of phrases makes the words themselves linger, so that precisely what they describe remains vague, maintaining the indistinct impression created by Lois's inattention and self-absorption. The present tense of the second sentence indicates a break from the previous one, suggesting that the focalization on Marda from the first is not continued in the second. Yet while its tone is omniscient, its apparent detachment echoes the very advice Marda has just been trying to give Lois: 'be interested in what happens to you for its own sake; don't expect to be touched or changed—or to be in anything that you do. One just watches' (100). In giving this advice, she voices and inverts the position of the narration, claiming its externality as her own, even as she cannot extend it back outwards for Lois to take up. Bowen's narration thus both enforces and elides the 'merest fumbling for outlet along the boundaries of the personal', combining and holding in relation Lois, Marda, and an externalized perspective. Bowen maintains a distinction between outside and inside in describing the failure of sympathy to move beyond the personal, yet her free indirect style already traverses these boundaries.

In the combination of identification and attraction played out in Lois's relationship to Marda, the gaze facilitates the traversal of the boundaries of the personal. Bowen demonstrates these dynamics of relation in the textual metaphor she uses when Marda looks at Lois's drawings: 'with a jump of the heart she heard every page turn over. She received the print of each look as though her sensibility were the paper' (98). Marda's presence affects her to the point of the cross-over between textuality and gaze in Marda's gaze imprinting Lois. Lois's sensibility being 'the paper' makes her at once into the paper of her own sketchbook, but also the book containing the text Marda transmits through her look, making this gaze something that can be

decoded and translated into text. It might make more grammatical sense for the final phrase to be: ‘as though her sensibility were the paper’s’, not ‘were the paper’. ‘Were the paper’, however, suggests a more radical passivity in which Lois’s emotional response is literally the paper on which Marda’s gaze writes itself, mirroring the look, while also suggesting the second meaning of the word ‘sensibility’. Lois’s palpable response confuses the gaze with the fingertips turning the pages, and the pages with Lois herself. Lois’s fear of revealing herself in writing, her fear that ‘[e]ven things like—like elephants get so personal’ (98), lays the groundwork for the metaphor encoding her in the page. The passivity of ‘receiving the print’ is thus complicated by the self-reflexivity of the passage that acknowledges that Lois is the paper we are touching.

During this encounter Lois tells Marda: “I like to be in a pattern.” She traced a pink frond with her finger. “I like to be related; to have to be what I am. Just to *be* is so intransitive, so lonely” (98). Bowen again emphasizes Lois’s textuality by making the first word Lois thinks of to describe her isolation a grammatical term, intransitive (a noun not taking a direct object), which is only retrospectively replaced by the feeling ‘lonely’. The description also calls attention to the prominence of objects in Bowen’s descriptions of Anglo-Irish life, objects which make manifest Lois’s and Bowen’s grammatical abstractions. Without objects, and their relations to ancestors and the roles they produce for the characters, life indeed would be lonely. Yet, as I have suggested, objects and subjects are not clearly demarcated in the novel, a fluidity first signaled by the novel’s Proustian epigraph. Proust describes the two-fold nature of impression, especially in response to art, in the section of *Time Regained* from which Bowen quotes: ‘every impression is double and the one half which is sheathed in the object is prolonged in ourselves by another half which we alone can know’ (Proust, 2003: 292). Proust is critical of our tendency to neglect the subjective half of impression, and expresses his dismay that ‘the effort to perceive the little groove which a musical phrase or the view of a church has hollowed in ourselves’ is seen as ‘too arduous’ (293). This subjective half of impression is not straightforward for us to understand simply because it is ‘within’ us: it is an effect of the object, which creates within us a space of otherness that is no longer ‘unfathomable because it is exterior to ourselves’ as the object itself is, but which is still unknown and arduous to attempt to discover (293). Proust’s metaphor enacts the very blurring of subject and object it describes when he positions the viewer as an object—the record on which a ‘little groove’ is etched by music.⁵ The word ‘impression’ emphasizes the effect the object has on us, pressing into us, marking us with its shape—it is this Proustian idea that Bowen elaborates in the description of Lois ‘receiving the print’ of Marda’s gaze.

The blurred boundary between subject and object is most evident in the relation the characters have to the house itself, which is as active as Lois in their interpenetration: ‘she and those home surroundings still further penetrated each other mutually in the discovery of a lack’ (Bowen, 1998: 166). But this penetration between people and objects suggests both that there are no borders between them, and also that we need these borders in order for the relation to take place. This contradiction follows Jean-Luc Nancy’s logic in describing the significance of borders for meaning-making and sense: ‘[i]s it not necessary that there should be nonaccess,

⁵ Bowen draws her epigraph from this paragraph: ‘And how many stop at that point [of thoroughly examining the external object], get nothing from their impression, and ageing useless and unsatisfied, remain sterile celibates of art! To them come the same discontents as to virgins and idlers whom the fecundity of labor would cure’ (Proust, 2003: 293. Italics are Bowen’s epigraph).

impenetrability, in order for there to be also access, penetration? That there should be, therefore, nonsense or, rather, beyond-sense in order for there to be sense?' (1997: 60). Rather than describing non-access and access as mutually exclusive, Nancy articulates their mutual dependence. This logic is apparent not only in Bowen's tactile descriptions, but also in the text itself, which explores this same tactility in the relation between words and phrases, with punctuation marks joining and separating them. Her dashes and ellipses are the most apparent place this happens, but Bowen's colons produce a stronger link and stronger disconnection between terms through their lack of explanation. The colons make phrases touch while keeping them separate, forever suspended in relation, without ossifying that relation, and thus suggest the immediacy of the perceptions they articulate. Bowen blends thought and feeling seamlessly, but also draws attention to those seams, and the staging of that immediacy.

Bowen's stylistic experimentation is perhaps most evident in the uncanny scene of Lois's near-encounter with an Irish rebel in the Danielstown demesne. The narration stylistically reproduces the tension between exteriority and interiority, and separation and touching, that the scene describes, especially in the two sentences that each contain two colons. The first of these sentences describes Lois's fear and her surroundings, with the affect leaching in to the environment so that it is difficult to separate the descriptions of each:

High up a bird shrieked and stumbled down through the dark, tearing the leaves. Silence healed, but kept a scar of horror. The shuttered-in drawing-room, the family sealed in lamplight, secure and bright like flowers in a paperweight—were desirable, worth much of this to regain. Fear curled back from the carpet border ... Now, on the path: grey patches worse than the dark: they slipped up her dress knee-high. (Bowen, 1998: 33)

The connections between these phrases are not spelled out. The colon, usually used to explain the previous phrase, introduces more ambiguous phrases that make it impossible to decide what is happening. The comfort of being with familiar others is subsumed into the description of the safety of the house, impenetrable to the darkness and fear surrounding Lois. As her fear escalates, the others progress from the negative 'shuttered-in', to 'sealed', to 'secure and bright', but Lois must have the darkness to 'regain' the light, which only exists in contrast to the darkness surrounding it (another antagonistic relation). The 'grey patches' on the path appear suddenly, without clear external referent, abruptly slipping up her dress. The ellipses separating 'Fear curled back from the carpet border' and 'Now' implies that these grey patches are the embodiment of that fear, now on the path, though Lois also seems to be reacting to shapes produced in the play between light and dark that appear like ghosts, and to the approaching 'displaced darkness' of the trench-coat. The second colon in the series seems gratuitous, and retrospectively highlights the superfluity of the first. The colons create a sense of immediacy, suggesting the fragmentation of Lois's perceptions in this moment of fear and approaching otherness as her thoughts and affect pile on top of one another. The man in the trench-coat is dehumanized throughout the passage; it is only 'a resolute profile, powerful as a thought' that 'passed within reach of her hand', not a man (34). The simile of thought as powerful dismantles itself, also suggesting the profile's nebulosity and basis in Lois's subjectivity, an insidiousness already posited when she 'thought what she dreaded was coming, was there within her' (33). Yet, after he

passes by Lois, the text incorporates an understanding of him as living: '[i]n gratitude for its fleshliness, she felt prompted to make some contact: not to be known seemed like a doom: extinction' (34). The first colon in this sentence marks the point of contact between the two phrases, even though contact is not actually made between Lois and the trench-coat, while the second colon highlights Lois's sense of her own insubstantiality in response to that fleshliness, and marks her trace in the text even as she is threatened with erasure.

The extinction that threatens Lois is thematized throughout the passage in relation to her dead mother, Laura, whose 'ever-living' presence structures many relationships in the novel (80), and who, more than any other character, embodies the novel's challenge to borders: '[s]he was indefinite definitely, like a tree shining, shaking away outlines' (63). Shaking away outlines between the living and the dead, the mother and the daughter, the laurel and the woman, the house and the ghost, Laura's indefiniteness threatens to encompass Lois. The passage opens with a tactile, zoomorphic description of the laurels which 'breathed coldly and close: on her bare arms the tips of leaves were timid and dank, like tongues of dead animals' (33). The laurels are first given life through the word 'breathed', which is then taken away as they metamorphose into 'dead animals' in the movement from the metaphor that begins the sentence to the simile that ends it. The combination of life and death in the description of the laurels emphasizes the connection that the name already implies to Laura, and the sentence after the 'dead animals' simile makes the association explicit: 'Her fear of the shrubberies tugged at its chain, fear behind reason, fear before her birth; fear like the earliest germ of her life that had stirred in Laura. She went forward eagerly, daring a snap of the chain' (33). The 'snap of the chain' figures both Lois's relationship to Laura (and her attempts to break free), and her relation to her fear. Fear is metaphorically described as a restrained animal, and the progressing descriptions that enwomb the fear equate it with Lois herself, so that a 'snap of the chain' would then be both the unleashing of her fear, but also a dissociation between herself and the fear—which is her—or, herself *and* Laura. This complicated metaphor that both claims and releases the fear demonstrates the otherness at the core of the subject. Bowen's free indirect style is incredibly fluid, literalizing metaphors as they progress or metaphorizing actual things. Bowen depicts the uncanniness of the subject to itself, its untimeliness and detachment from what is apparently its own affect, particularly by emphasizing the machinations of the text. Free indirect style allows Bowen to hold the subject in the process of dissolution, without entirely losing its contours.

The unexpected position of birth and the womb connecting the living and the dead in these metaphors falls into a pattern of birth-related imagery throughout the novel—part of its poetics of touching and penetration more broadly—including the morning giving birth to a disappointment (108), Lois's miscarried plan to meet Gerald (188), and the cataclysmic 'extra day' the novel ends on that 'had come to abortive birth that these things might happen' (206). The shocking oxymoron of an 'abortive birth' emphasizes the atemporality of this final day of negation. Each of these examples is a failed birth, emphasizing the sterility of the Anglo-Irish, and the impossibility of bringing forth anything new in this environment. In her imagery of failed birth Bowen suggests that in spite of their evanescing, the boundaries of the subject and of the Anglo-Irish domain persist and isolate the old order from the new.

The title of *The Last September* emphasizes its autumnal setting and mood, a point Bowen returns to in the poetics of collapse of her final pages: ‘The two did not, however, again see Danielstown at such a moment, such a particular happy point of decline in the short curve of the day, the long curve of the season. Here there were no more autumns, except for the trees’ (205). Danielstown is indeed shown off best at the close of the day at the close of the season, at its peak of loveliness just before its destruction, because its potential for disintegration has always been its foundation. Bowen’s anticipatory grammar in this antepenultimate paragraph allows her to conjure the destruction of the Big House while maintaining it as a future event, staving off its destruction by displaying its inevitability. While her last two paragraphs do give way to the destruction in their shift to the past tense to describe the occurrence, Bowen nonetheless emphasizes the unnaturalness and atemporality of this ‘extra day’, allowing the ghost of the Big House to remain, ‘the too clear form of the ruin’ (205) to puncture the empty landscape.

Bowen’s free indirect style enacts the border logic she depicts in the physical borders of Danielstown, a logic whereby one side of the border is defined and punctured by its relation to the other. *The Last September* traces the remains of the boundaries of the subject and the community, and their persistent, ghostly effects despite their dissolution. In holding subject and object, and interior and exterior, in perpetual collapse, free indirect style is like the hyphen of the Anglo-Irish, simultaneously linking and separating, holding the two terms in suspension as they collapse into one another. *The Last September* ends by marking its own obliteration and vestiges—all but two of the characters have left or died, September is over, and the Big House burns. Bowen’s flirtation with disintegration is inaugurated by her free indirect style, where objects and subjects collide, collapse, and coalesce.

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## Evelina Garay-Collcutt ~ Utopic and Dystopic Connections in Elizabeth Bowen's Short Stories 'Mysterious Kôr' and 'Gone Away'

Elizabeth Bowen enjoyed considerable success during her lifetime as a writer of novels and short stories, generating a literary output that has become increasingly valued in the twenty-first century. In this article I propose to analyse two of her short stories that were written in the 1940s and represent very different ways of understanding the tumultuous historical epoch in which Bowen lived. While 'Mysterious Kôr' is considered to be one of her most successful pieces of writing, 'Gone Away' has received very little attention, perhaps due to the fact that this dystopic tale constitutes an unusual departure from the writer's prevalent style. It is my aim in this essay to carry out a close analysis of both these stories, paying particular attention to the author's use of utopic and dystopic features in order to trace a common thread that connects them. I will first focus on considerations relative to Bowen's effectivity as a short story writer, an effectivity especially notable in the use of setting and mood in her fiction, before giving a brief historical description of utopic and dystopic literature and how it may be related to the writer's own productivity. In the main body of this essay I will first consider both stories separately, with the aim of examining the real or imaginary cities and societies described. In order to do so, I will investigate the three cities represented, which include a rather disheartening image of war-torn London, the representation of the imaginary ancient city of Kôr and that of an ultramodern city, Brighterville, these being cities which present either dystopic characteristics, such as those resulting from war or from severely controlling state systems, or purely utopic features based on perfectly planned societies and urban locations. I will then continue by discussing some of the more thought-provoking issues generated by these stories, such as the writer's concern for the future of the Western concept of civilisation amid an age of political unrest, and her anxiety with regard to the disintegration, disappearance or reconstruction of emblematic cities.

As a short story writer Elizabeth Bowen has not received the attention this fiction warrants. Her novels have been studied in depth by scholars, in particular *The Last September* (1929), owing to its subject matter dealing with the Irish Independence Movement after the Easter uprising of 1916; *The Death of the Heart* (1938) for the writer's understanding of adolescent behaviour; and, most notably, *The Heat of the Day* (1949) for its atmospheric representation of wartime London. However, as Bowen's reputation as a novelist became more established so did she strive to perfect her art in the short story form. Bowen started writing short stories very early in her life, almost before she contemplated becoming a novelist; she claimed her early influences to have been Katherine Mansfield, D.H. Lawrence and James Joyce (Hepburn, 2008: 5). Her first volume, *Encounters*, appeared in 1923, the title evoking the immediacy of Mansfield and in the name chosen reminiscent of Joyce's story 'An Encounter' from *Dubliners* (1914). After this volume, she wrote stories for

various collections that were published at close intervals during the 1930s and the beginning of the 1940s. Nevertheless, it is by means of her wartime collection *The Demon Lover and Other Stories* (1945) that Bowen acquired a reputation as a short story writer that could rival that of her own mentors. The stories are all superb illustrations of a wartime period, with settings that include the city of London as well as the badly damaged coastal areas around Kent, a part of England which Bowen knew well in her younger years. Pieces such as 'Ivy Gripp'd the Steps' and 'The Happy Autumn Fields' are full of dramatic intensity, stories that are presented as having several layers of interwoven past and present realities, thus creating a timeline that moves through different periods of both pre-war and wartime experiences. However, after the war, Bowen's production of short stories fell considerably, as she increasingly concentrated her efforts on the writing of articles and essays for which she was in constant demand and which, at that time, constituted a more secure income. Bowen was to publish only one more collection of short stories, *A Day in the Dark and Other Stories* (1965), which contains only a few previously unpublished stories. Nevertheless, looking at her short story output over the decades, we find that her contribution to this literary form has indeed been generous. After her death, her short story collections were compiled in a large volume, *The Collected Stories* (1981), which consists of seventy-nine stories in all and shows the evolution of the writer from the early 1920s to the 1960s, also being illustrative of the changes that took place in a century full of historical and social developments. More recently, Allan Hepburn has brought to light a series of previously uncollected or unpublished tales by Bowen, many of them stories that had appeared in magazines or journals but that had never made their way to the marketed published collections. These twenty-eight extra stories included in *The Bazaar and Other Stories* (2008) are further proof of Bowen's prolificacy, while also evidencing her constant dedication and interest in the form.

As Elizabeth Bowen herself confessed in one of the 'Prefaces' to her collections, short story writing constituted a liberating art form as it permitted her to express herself in ways that were different to those used when writing a novel (1986: 128). In this respect, the writing of short fiction constituted an outlet to some of her artistic aims, although, at the beginning of her career, she was not sure whether these pieces would attract critical attention. In the 1949 'Preface' to a republishing of her first story collection of *Encounters*, Bowen confessed her initial doubts as to the status of the short story in the 1920s: 'The short story's position was anomalous. It had not, I think I am right in saying, been recognised as 'a form'. There had been, so far, little constructive-critical interest in the short story's inherent powers and problems' (1986: 119). As time would show, the short story became one of the leading artistic forms of the twentieth century, and for Elizabeth Bowen this development would allow her to explore a literary form which she claimed to be closer to poetry and to pure artistic creation. To this purpose, in a 1959 'Preface' to another collection of her stories she remarked: 'The short story is at an advantage over the novel, and can claim a nearer kinship to poetry, because it must be more concentrated, can be more visionary and is not weighed down (as the novel is bound to be) by facts, explanation, or analysis' (1986: 128). Bowen's reference to 'the visionary' quality of the short story is highly revealing, as it is the imaginary realms created by the author that this essay

will focus on. Another of Bowen's main interests when writing a short story revolved around issues of space, or place in its more concrete manifestation. For the writer, the *loci* or place where the events take place was of uppermost importance, often overriding considerations of plot or character. In this respect she confided that 'on the whole, places more often than faces have sparked off the stories. To be honest the scenes have been with me before the characters – it could have seemed to me, even, as though the former had summoned up the latter' (1986:129). Therefore, as can be seen, both her awareness as of the importance of place as the initial creative starting point of a story, and her interest in the visionary dimension of writing, were satisfied by the short story form, which emerged as a perfect receptacle for her to exercise her creative powers to the full.

In Bowen's writing of the two stories in question a third element comes into play: the weight of history. During the twentieth century European history was marked by the two devastating wars that took place in the first half of the century, and by the consequences that these two major conflicts would have for the world in the years to come. Personally, as well as artistically, Bowen was fully aware of the momentous events of her times, and this is reflected in her writing and in the way she organised her life during the war. As has been recorded by her biographer Victoria Glendinning, Bowen was a warden for her district of Marylebone in West London where she worked tirelessly, often on night duty. During this time she did not leave the city, except for brief periods when she was bombed out of her home in Regency Terrace, or on fleeting visits to Ireland. Therefore, she was in a good position to observe the effects of war on the city and its citizens and to write with great insight when describing the Blitz in London. However, as Bowen herself commented in the 1945 'Preface' to *The Demon Lover and Other Stories*, her stories did not deal with the bombing itself or the injured or dead, but instead described the actual atmosphere breathed in the wartime city (1986: 95). Revolving again around the idea of place as central in her short fiction, Bowen believed that her stories were 'studies of climate, war-climate, and the strange growths it raised. I see war (or should I say feel war?) more as a territory' (1986: 95). In relation to this unprecedented situation that involved all citizens alike, she further confessed that, in order for people to be able to mentally withstand the onslaught, they often resorted to mental creations that included imaginary or even hallucinatory parallel worlds. In her opinion, these hallucinations were not dangerous for mental stability, for they helped the traumatised individual to gain some modicum of sanity in the midst of the reigning chaos. Bowen explains their purport in this same 'Preface':

The hallucinations in the stories are not a peril; nor are the stories studies of mental peril. The hallucinations are an unconscious, instinctive, saving resort on the part of the characters: Life, mechanised by the controls of wartime, and emotionally torn and impoverished by changes, had to complete itself in some way. (1986: 96)

The hallucinations or 'deep intense dreams' (96) that Bowen's characters have in the stories have a healing or comforting effect, an effect that also proved to be beneficial for the reader of these stories. Indeed, a new writing specific to the circumstances of wartime was looked on as being a prime necessity because, as Maud Ellmann

explains, ‘the literature of such a cataclysm could no longer rely on the old certainties of time and place, nor on the continuity of consciousness’ (2003: 172). This breaking with the past and ‘the continuity of consciousness’ often resulted in the creation of imaginary realms, which Bowen described as ‘worlds-within-worlds of hallucination’ (1986: 97). These flights of imagination were meant to act in a positive way for citizens faced with the traumatic reality of war. However, once the war ended the literature of the times changed to include more negative depictions of society, created with the aim of warning people of the dire consequences of war or of the dangers inherent in falling under the rule of authoritarian states. The literature of wartime, therefore, as well as that of the years after the war, characteristically featured imaginary realms of a positive or negative intensity, realms which could also be considered as pertaining to the worlds of utopic and dystopic writing.

The study of utopic and dystopic fiction has been part of our literature for many centuries. In the realm of the utopia we are well aware of Plato’s *Republic* or Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516), emblematic works in which the introduction of a well-organised *alter* world was supposed to act as an incentive for the improvement of society.<sup>1</sup> After More’s influential treatise, other works were also written that had as their main theme the search for a better society within the realm of the imaginary; Francis Bacon’s *New Atlantis* (1627), which looked to scientific progress as the solution to current problems, could be taken as an example. As Keith Booker has explained: ‘Imaginative literature is one of the most important means by which any culture can investigate new ways of defining itself and of exploring alternatives to the social and political status quo’ (1994a: 3). In the nineteenth century, socialist ideals brought about the creation of idealised worlds such as the one proposed by William Morris in his novel *News from Nowhere* (1890), in which an agrarian society functions by means of a system of common ownership. In the twentieth century, however, these theories resulted in a literature of the reverse trend. As Robert C. Elliott remarked: ‘[u]topian dreams of ‘old reformers’ have been realized, only to turn out into nightmares’ (1970: 5). In this case, these novels that relate the dangers inherent in living automatized existences in severely state controlled societies have often been named ‘dystopias’ (a bad place) or ‘anti-utopias’ (not good place) or even ‘cacotopias’ (wicked place). As Booker more fully explains:

Dystopian literature generally also constitutes a critique of existing social conditions or political systems, either through the critical examination of the utopian premises upon which those conditions and systems are based or through the imaginative extension of those conditions and systems into different contexts that more clearly reveal their flaws and contradictions’ (1994a: 3).

Following this line of thought, writers of the twentieth century produced novels such as E. M. Forster’s *The Machine Stops* (1909), Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1932) or George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), novels dealing with

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<sup>1</sup> These places were called utopias, the correct meaning of the word being a ‘non-place’, whereas a ‘good place’, which would be more adequate, would be termed a eutopia. Curiously, both words are pronounced identically in English (homophonous) so the confusion between a utopia and a eutopia can be viewed as being even greater, the term of utopia having become the most prevalent over the centuries.

apocalyptic situations in some cases originating from utopic settings that soon developed into dystopias. It is also worth taking into account that, although the literature of past centuries produced novels that are easily recognised as being either utopias or dystopias, in many cases both ideologies may coexist in the same work.<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Bowen's writing also presents contrasting realms in stories such as 'Mysterious Kôr' and 'Gone Away', realms that may be explored from a utopic or dystopic standpoint and that evidence, as with the other writers mentioned above, Bowen's direct involvement with the period of history she was due to represent.

The first story to be analysed in this essay is the much celebrated 'Mysterious Kôr', included in the *Demon Lover and Other Stories* of 1945. This story was written towards the end of the war, in 1944, and first appeared in *The Penguin New Writing* no. 20, a monthly literary book edited by John Lehmann, the brother of novelist Rosamond Lehmann. 'Mysterious Kôr' has drawn the attention of readers over the years not only for the presentation of the imaginary realm of Kôr but also, and more poignantly, for its description of bombed-damaged London, a seemingly lifeless city that is the direct opposite of the burgeoning, busy metropolis it had been before the war.

The story opens with a visually striking image of London, described as a deserted city, 'drenched' (1981: 728) in moonlight, which contrasts with the blackout it is subjected to. In effect, the image of the moon over London had been Bowen's initial inspiration for the writing of the story. As she recalled, she was 'spellbound' by the 'scene in question', that of 'weird moonlight over bombed-pitted London' ('Preface' to *Stories by Elizabeth Bowen* 1986: 129). The metropolis is further described as 'shallow, cratered and extinct' (728), showing obvious signs of the severe bombing that had given it an air of doom and finality. It is compared to the 'moon's capital' (728), already powerfully suggesting a remorseless progress towards extinction. Another characteristic that points towards this seemingly inevitable outcome is the pervading silence of the scene, and the comparative absence of people and of all normal activity. The couple that are the protagonists of this story, Pepita and her soldier boyfriend, Arthur, stand aimlessly overlooking the park's 'gateless gates' (1981: 728) without knowing which way to turn. It is then that Pepita recites the poem *She* by Andrew Lang, based on Rider Haggard's novel, and introduces the literary city of Kôr.<sup>3</sup> For Heather Bryant Jordan and Gill Plain, Kôr represents 'the eternal city' (Bryant Jordan, 1992: 139) where the characters create an 'illusion of safety' (139), or even a 'fantasy of escape' (Plain, 1996: 181), also defined by Plain as 'an opening-out of imaginative space' (181). Indeed, what makes Kôr so captivating for the characters is that, whereas the description of London is characterised by

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<sup>2</sup> In Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), an initial nightmarish situation evolves into a rewarding one in which labour and effort are recognised. Also in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), the main character travels to both utopic and dystopic realms.

<sup>3</sup> Created by nineteenth century writer Henry Rider Haggard, the novel *She* (1887) is an adventure story in which an English explorer discovers in Africa the abandoned city of Kôr and there meets a powerful and beautiful queen who falls in love with him. Rider Haggard is also the author of other extremely popular adventure stories such as *King Solomon's Mines* (1885) and was widely read in his time and during the first half of the twentieth century. Elizabeth Bowen was obviously fascinated as a girl by the possibility of discovering remote civilizations and the germ of this fascination later flowed into her fiction as we can see in this story.

extinction and death, the silence and emptiness of Kôr point towards rebirth and future life. Pepita puts the whole thing into a nutshell when she says:

This war shows we've by no means come to the end. If you can blow whole places out of existence, you can blow whole places into it. I don't see why not. They say we can't say what's come out since the bombing started. By the time we've come to the end, Kôr may be the one city left: the abiding city. (1981: 730)

Pepita makes it clear that, according to her, the imaginary city of Kôr could in this way effectively supplant the ruined remains of London. As Gill Plain has remarked, 'the logic of destruction is inverted and thought alone has the power not only to rebuild what war has destroyed, but to create whole cities anew' (Plain 1996: 181). By means of this comment, Plain makes us reflect on the powerful inner world of the mind during wartime. So much so, that, in the story, Pepita's Kôr seemingly goes beyond the realm of the imaginary or hallucinatory in order to become a real place. As the story progresses we become increasingly aware of this undercurrent of interdependence between London and Kôr. Kôr is initially as empty and lonely as London, and as the characters quote from Andrew Lang's poem, it is described as a city of 'lonely towers beneath a lonely moon', towers which are 'as high as cliffs and as white as bones, with no history' (1981: 729), a city that is 'strong' with 'not a crack in it anywhere for a weed to grow in; the corners of stones and the monuments might have been cut yesterday, and the stairs and arches are built to support themselves' (729) implying that Kôr is not like London whose 'brittle' buildings (728) sink under the pressure of history. As Shafquat Towheed explains, 'Mysterious Kôr' succeeds in 'presenting an unhistoricized, even prehistoric utopia fleetingly projected before a historicized, territorialized dystopia' (2009: 129). Here Towheed not only makes a direct reference to Kôr as being a utopia and London a dystopia, but also introduces the subjects of history and territorialisation. Indeed, Bowen herself refers in the story to Kôr's absence of history as one of its main assets (729), implying that for London the weight of history may have been too much to bear in the long term. Furthermore, as Towheed conveys, London being easily placed on the map has made it all the more vulnerable, whereas Kôr not being on any map, except the imaginary one, makes it ironically safer and more desirable. Neil Corcoran further confirms the desirability of Kôr in the face of the pressure of history when he reiterates: 'Pepita's reinvention of the sonnet's dead city of Kôr as the scene of oneiric togetherness with her lover does indeed figure an imaginative possibility in fact denied by the almost unbearable constraints of her present history' (2004:166).

Kôr also represents the characters' hope for a new start in a place that, in contrast to London, is timeless and indestructible and that may also encourage a future successful configuration of society. Fátima Vieira explains what is involved in a utopic creation: 'Utopists depart from the observation of the society they live in, note down the aspects that need to be changed and imagine a place where those problems have been solved' (2010: 8). This is what Pepita attempts to do with her creation of Kôr, creating a place in which the problematic issues of her time have been overcome. Indeed, as Laura Lojo-Rodríguez argues, the story presents Pepita's own version of an imagined realm that bears practically no relation to the one initially created by the expansionist mind of Rider Haggard. More precisely, we should see

Pepita's interpretation of Kôr as a product of her own personal disenchantment with a world at war and with her view of London. As the story progresses, Pepita and Arthur delve deeper into their longings, and their desire for London to become Kôr becomes patently obvious. Indeed, they both become trapped by their imagination and so absorbed with the idea of Kôr that even Arthur enters Pepita's frame of mind. Arthur wonders: 'What you mean we're there now, that here's there and that now's then?' (1981: 730). They both seem to enter a symbiotic process which is inherent to their utopic vision and so involve the reader, who no longer sees the damaged and forlorn city of London, but accompanies Arthur and Pepita, 'down the wide, void, pure streets, between statues pillars and shadows, through archways and colonnades' (739). As Vieira reminds us, 'utopia is in fact a game, and implies the celebration of a kind of pact between the utopist and the reader' (2010: 8).

Whereas in some cases a utopia is described as an 'expression of longing and fulfilment' (Levitas, 2013: 5), or, more concretely, 'an imagined perfect society or wishfully constructed place which does not and cannot exist' (3), for other critics that base their criticism on Bowen's story, the creation of Kôr has a quite different significance. Sara Wasson, for example, describes Kôr as a 'lifeless city' (2010: 123), a 'necropolis' (123) or a 'static, ancient city that represents the decay of an imperial dream' (123), investing Kôr with characteristics that are far from utopic. For Wasson 'Pepita's fantasy of a time-frozen city unmasks three fracture points in national narrative: the defeat of imperial adventure, the inevitability of the British Empire's extinction and the emotional agony – rather than the majesty – of war' (124). The different assessments of 'Mysterious Kôr' that I have delineated over the last few pages show the complexity of the story and the versatility of Bowen's suggestive power in the introduction of a utopic realm. In effect, it is precisely by means of opposing and contrasting both urban scenarios, London and Kôr, that Bowen achieves her full effect. Indeed, the almost dystopic situation of London after four years of war becomes more apparent by means of the inevitable mental association that the reader makes between the two realms represented, which serves to potentiate the image of London's 'remorseless' disintegration. Viewing the metropolis in this way, and, as the story powerfully suggests on the verge of 'extinction', brings home to the reader the damaging effect of war and how far the city had come from the initial wartime slogan of 'London can take it!'<sup>4</sup>, an attitude that in 1944 had been replaced by a feeling that London could take it no longer.

'Mysterious Kôr' was written in a difficult year in which the citizens' exhaustion and urgent need of mental reprieve was very noticeable. The much desired news of victory would in fact arrive one year later, in 1945, with celebrations all over Britain for the memorable VE day. Churchill was the hero of the moment and England warmly applauded his mandate throughout the war. However, the political situation was about to change dramatically. Just two months after VE Day, England held elections and the results were a surprise to many as Clement Attlee's Labour Party won by a vast majority. Public opinion showed that the country feared a return to the

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<sup>4</sup> 'London Can Take it!' was originally an short film issued in 1940 by the Ministry of Information and which highlighted Londoners' resilience and bravery in the first months of the Blitz. The aim of this film was to sway the public opinion of the US in favour of Britain and the allied forces and justify their fight against Hitler.

unemployment of the 1930s, and therefore believed that the socialists' plans for rebuilding the country were preferable. For many, however, the defeat of Churchill came as a great shock, and especially so for Elizabeth Bowen who had been his staunch defender for years. Bowen had repeatedly stated that, '[w]hen Mr. Churchill goes, I go' (Glendinning, 1977: 166), and her personal state of disillusionment may well have prompted her to write the chilling dystopic story 'Gone Away', coupled with her fear that Communist rule of Russia could spread to the rest of Europe. Indeed, Churchill also voiced this concern, publicly warning of the 'iron curtain' of Soviet influence in Europe.

'Gone Away' was first published by the BBC magazine *The Listener* in 1946. As mentioned earlier, the story has not received much attention. Phyllis Lassner, in her monograph on Bowen's short stories, mentions that it is an 'apocalyptic tale' (1991: 95), later referring to the story as a 'dystopic fable' (96) without making a clear evaluation of it. In his Introduction to *The Collected Stories of Elizabeth Bowen* (1981), the writer and friend of Bowen, Angus Wilson, suggests that the story may represent 'a failure' in the collection (1981: 11), adding that 'Gone Away', I think, suggests that life as lived was enough for her, and speculation about the future of her society had no place in her scheme of things' (11), an opinion which is at least debatable and which I hope to counteract.

The story opens with a seemingly uneventful meeting between two elderly men, a vicar and his friend, who get together to enjoy afternoon tea and cakes at the vicarage. However, the cosy atmosphere created is soon placed in doubt by the rather strange comments both men make, which alert the reader to the fact that things are not what they seem. 'What year is it?' (1981: 758) and 'What are a few decades?' (758) come to spoil the idyllic picture that has just been painted. Soon we find out that the vicar is in fact 'under contract' (758) not to change, and that 'preserving' him (759) is a costly business. The vicar is in fact the main attraction of a Reserve, a place set up by the Board of Arts of a futuristic city named Brighterville in order to maintain a remembrance of the past. The Reserve has an unsettling effect on the reader in that it is presented as falsely authentic, complete with a church and set in an 'almost hallucinatory old-worldness' (759). However, this 'picture postcard' (759) is in fact more like a film 'set-up, the greater part of the buildings being façades only supported by struts behind' (759). Outside the Reserve, which is cut off by a high wire fencing, we encounter the city itself, which is the complete antithesis of what the Reserve aims to represent. Brighterville is a city full of skyscrapers, 'polished perspectives of glass, of dizzying architecture soaring rigid into the mauve blue sky' (759), a place that effectively transposes us to the realm of the ultramodern city. After their tea the men set out for a walk around the area, an experience that proves to be unnerving for both. The modernity of the surroundings is not the main reason for this unease, however. What they encounter (or do not for that matter) is a total absence of human activity, deserted streets and an overwhelming silence which is reported to be 'at once closed and dead' (759). Little by little the vicar discloses the reasons for the sudden emptiness of the city. As we read, we discover that Brighterville, in fact the product of centuries of severely controlling governments, is represented by citizens that, although amply provided for in equal measure, have lost all volition to act out of their own initiative. As one of them complains meekly, 'we've

got no prohibitions, no inhibitions, no anything!’ (760). The result is a way of life marked by a set routine and a stunting boredom, so much so that the controlling state has to install megaphones or amplifiers in the street with items of news and music, these being ‘introduced to fill any awkward silence when it was found that the Brightervillians had ceased to talk, being able to think of nothing further to say’ (763). When one day these amplifiers cease to operate, ‘the uncanny silence’ (764) that follows turns out to be so unendurable that ‘not a soul could bear it a minute longer’ (764), all the citizens fleeing from Brighterville in a stampede. As the vicar reflects, the silence ‘was not merely null, it was shocking’ (765), there was a ‘voicelessness everywhere’ (762) that could not be borne. As Phyllis Lassner also points out, the story can be understood as representing ‘the sudden silence of their utopia’ (1991: 95), as if the citizens’ dreamlife of simulated (and imposed) perfection had been effectively ‘silenced’ once and for all, both physically, by means of the total absence of human activity, and metaphorically, by means of the dismantling of a seemingly perfectly planned community.

Indeed, in the description of the city we are told: ‘[a]ll round, Brighterville stretched, soared, stood, with the tame blamelessness of a realized ideal’ (1981: 761). In these words we see the author’s need to stress the fragility inherent in an idealised vision of a model society. Therefore, what is initially planned as a utopia in which all citizens are meant to be equally happy and contented develops into the dystopic scenario of the story. As Booker explains, ‘dystopia is a general term encompassing any imaginative view of a society that is orientated towards nature highlighting in a critical way negative or problematic features of that society’s vision of the ideal’ (1994b: 22). So, attending to Booker’s explanation, we could affirm that Bowen’s initial utopia does not take long to reveal the problems inherent in its creation and the impossibility of its continuance. Michael D. Gordin takes us one step further and perhaps closer to what Bowen herself contemplated in his assertion that ‘Dystopia places us in a dark and depressing reality, conjuring up a terrifying future if we do not recognize and treat its symptoms in the here and now’ (2010: 2). This profoundly negative vision of the future was shared by other writers of the day, most notably George Orwell, who published his *Nineteen Eighty-Four* just three years later in 1949. In spite of obvious differences in style and purpose (I do not propose here to compare Orwell’s ambitious and disturbing novel with Bowen’s effective but gentler short story), we are able to trace a common climate of preoccupation and fear with regard to the means of control that could be exercised by totalitarian or authoritarian states. Dystopic novels and short stories such as these clearly seek to raise the reader’s awareness and, as critic Gregory Claeys summarises accurately, these accounts are invariably based on:

The quasi-omnipotence of a monolithic, totalitarian state demanding and normally exacting complete obedience from its citizens, challenged occasionally but usually ineffectively by vestigial individualism or systemic flaws, and relying upon scientific and technological advances to ensure social control. (2010: 109)

In effect, these dystopic literary works are created with the aim of exercising a close examination of the methods, both scientific and in this case also technological, used

to enforce this 'social control' and so, by this means, generate an awareness of their potential shortcomings.

As we have seen, 'Mysterious Kôr' and 'Gone Away', appear, at first impression, to be totally dissimilar. However, on a closer reading there are various points in common that may be found. The realms of utopia and dystopia can in fact sometimes have affinities and a closer connection than may initially be supposed. Indeed, Claeys reminds us that: '[b]oth utopia and dystopia conceive of ideal harmonious groups which privilege close connections between individuals and the unity and interdependence they exhibit. A key question here is how inclusive or exclusive this exchange of benefits is' (2017: 7-8). In this case, both Kôr and initially Brighterville are supposed to represent this ideal of harmonious co-habitation, although the idealised 'dreamscape' receives a totally different treatment, depending on the story. Also, the altered historical moment at the time of writing each story must have been a determining factor that influenced Bowen's mood and disposition. 'Mysterious Kôr', as we know, was penned at the end of an exhausting war, in which Bowen as a warden in London had her full share of work and toil, Kôr representing a desire to escape witnessing the potential destruction of the much-loved city. 'Gone Away', on the other hand, was written as a reaction to the unforeseen happenings which took place just after the war, Churchill's unexpected defeat, the fear of a new war and of the spread of the most severe type of Communism in Europe.

However, taking a look at the three cities featured in the stories, London, Kôr and Brighterville, we find that they have, perhaps surprisingly, certain physical aspects in common. On the surface, all three cities are described as being 'ghost towns' or 'dead cities', places that are devoid of habitation, presenting a veritable maze of deserted avenues and empty streets. In this respect, the aesthetic impression presented by both Kôr and Brighterville is another point to be noted. Indeed, in some instances the futuristic city of Brighterville is described in a way that reminds us of the long-lost civilisation Kôr, exposing a 'long unbroken impression of squares and streets, of soap-clean arcades and polished perspectives of glass' (1981:759) (with glass instead of marble). The silence that permeates all three cities is another common feature, but this does have different connotations in each case. Whereas in London it represents 'extinction', in Kôr the silence is reassuring, restful and comforting. Again, in Brighterville, this same silence is 'shocking' and 'uncanny' and full of frightening implications. An aspect also worth taking into account is the fact that whereas Kôr is a city product of individual imagination, Brighterville is presented as being the work of the state and in this case of collective thought. This point brings to our attention to Bowen's seeming preference for the creative power of the individual over and above that of a collective force that may have the power to wipe out entire civilisations. In my estimation, however, what lies at the core of Bowen's motives for writing these stories is her deep concern about the apparently remorseless destruction of the metropolis, and her fear with regard to the possible end of a concept of civilisation that she had defended throughout the war by means of her writing. Consequently, the attention paid to Kôr and Brighterville may be seen almost as a creative pretext that served the purpose of highlighting issues that were of real importance to her. Indeed, by means of writing such disturbing stories, Bowen was also voicing her anxiety regarding the fate of cities all over England, and for this purpose was

obviously only too pleased to be able to use the literary devices that were within her creative grasp.

At this point it would seem clear that Bowen's central preoccupations as a writer rested upon her own personal misgivings with regard to the way in which the world was developing. During these difficult years, inevitable questions were raised by Europeans and Americans alike, worried about the future of their countries, fearful with regard to the possibility of Soviet ideals extending in Europe, or the possibility of a Third World War erupting – which also presupposed the threat of nuclear bombs that could wipe out entire cities, as had already happened in the case of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. These were the issues of the day, and in her writing Bowen featured some of these anxieties in stories such as 'Mysterious Kôr' and 'Gone Away', stories which focus on imaginative communities and their positive and negative attributes. Indeed, faced with the destructiveness of war on the one hand and the deformation of political ideals on the other, the writer turned from the creation of an imaginative realm, in which the idea of rebirth and a fresh start would hopefully act upon the weary psyche of civilians, to another type of literary creation, in which dire warnings were expressed with regard to the adverse effect of principles and ideals applied erroneously. Departing from this premise, and although we understand Kôr to be utopic in its imaginative desirability and Brighterville dystopic in its terrifying implications, the real crux of the question lies in the author's need to demonstrate that both creations could indeed be seen as plausible imaginative alternatives to London. Considering also that these alternatives were created within such a short margin of time, we are faced with a question: could the artistic impulse behind the writing of 'Mysterious Kôr', envisaged by Bowen as a utopic illusion revealing her state of mind at the time, have evolved by the tenor of events taking place in the world in the mid-1940s into a completely different kind of creative motivation, represented here by the writing of the dystopic story of 'Gone Away'? It would certainly seem that the historic situation, and Bowen's reaction to it, had destroyed her desire to create a place that merely symbolised peace and goodwill, instead impelling her to warn people against its possible future deformation. In two stories so closely linked by time, we could be facing the possibility that London, Kôr and Brighterville might in fact be represented in the subconscious realm of Bowen's creative mind as being the much feared progressive consequence of each other, a consequence that, when considering the world today as we approach 2020, still has some bearing on our increasingly mechanised and dehumanised societies.

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Ana Ashraf ~ The Spectral, the Uncertain 'I' and the Spectacle in Elizabeth Bowen's *The Demon Lover*

The short fiction collection *The Demon Lover and Other Stories* (1945) portrays the lives of English men and women during the London Blitz. All of these stories were written during the wartime and were published in different magazines at the time. Though written separately, the stories share much in common, creating what Bowen called an 'organic whole' (1945: 217). What binds them together is the wartime and Bowen's treatment of subjective human experiences, time, space and narration. In all of these stories, war is not represented through war-action as such, but through the perspective of bewildered human experiences. The ghostliness of the characters and places within the stories thus speaks simultaneously of the erosion of everyday reality and the urge to search for alternative spaces. Bowen's collection remains relevant to understand how the characters persevered through times of perpetual war and how, through narration, the act of their survival can be understood.

Some of these stories have been analysed from various perspectives. Both men and women are presented through the imagery of ghosts, thus, the soldier ghost' from the Great War haunts 'people with the progressive intensifying of World War II' (Calder, 1994: 91) and 'the female ghost' registers an implicit criticism on the patriarchal and oppressive society (Lassner, 1991). The entourage of characters return to a familiar place or person or return as ghosts which makes this collection a book of 'many unhappy returns' (Corcoran, 2004: 147). Time, here, attains the same ghostly characteristics as the characters of the story. Thus in 'Sunday Afternoon' and 'The Happy Autumn Fields' time represents a 'metafictional account of the dispossessed Anglo-Irish identity', (O'Connor, 2011: 5). The form of short stories proved suitable to register the chaotic times of the London Blitz. Writing about her wartime collection in the afterword, Bowen says, 'this discontinuous writing, nominally 'inventive', is the only diary I have kept' (1945: 223). In many ways, the intense and discontinuous everyday experiences came to be represented best through the somewhat intense and discontinuous form of the short stories. Not surprisingly then, *The Demon Lover* along with wartime short fiction of other authors, 'formed a kind of war diary', as a means to cope with the desire to witness authentically the history she was participating in (Feigel, 2015: 1289). Rather than merely record, this 'diary' purports to restore 'the communicative touch of personal life' and rescue the 'I' that loses its material and immaterial boundaries in wartime' (Davis, 2016: 115). Ultimately, 'each of the stories in *The Demon Lover* challenges the "safety curtains"' which 'separate regions of the mind, of personal relations, of time, and of space' (Teekel, 2018: 154-5).

By means of the imagery of the spectral and the uncertainty surrounding the characters, the stories present the unique experiences of the witnesses of war and the challenges faced by them in communicating these experiences to others. This article, therefore, aims to demonstrate how *The Demon Lover and Other Stories* forms a collective testimony of the wartime English society from spring 1941 until autumn 1944. By focusing on five stories—'In the Square', 'Sunday Afternoon', 'The Demon Lover', 'The Inherited Clock', and 'The Mysterious Kôr'—I will bring the concept of testimony and the predicament of witness, as they are discussed by Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub (1992), Ana Douglass and Thomas Vogler (2003), Maria Delaperrière (2014) and others, in dialogue with Bowen's wartime fiction. In doing so, I demonstrate how the fictional accounts of wartime London in *The Demon Lover* provide a way to understand the performative function of testimony, and how witnessing is shaped by the inter-connection of gender, war and literature in popular and literary memory. I focus on (i) the epistemological gap between the witness and the listener in the act of telling, (ii) the uncertain subjectivities of the 'I' witnesses of war, as it is informed and shaped by the 'spectral', and (iii) the way storytelling constitutes an imaginative survival.

The Absent Presence of the Wartime and the Spectral

The spectral and the supernatural permeate both the characters and the environment in *The Demon Lover*. Even time adapts a ghostly character; the first story 'In the

Square' begins with a 'ghost of the glare of midday' (9)¹ and the last story 'The Mysterious Kôr' ends with an equally 'ghostly unbroken reflection' of the searching eye of the full-moon (196). Apart from the clear continuity of ghost imagery and the inference of the supernatural, what can be drawn from such a writing as *The Demon Lover*? Looking at the meaning of the word 'spectral' helps to announce a plausible answer. Although the 'spectral' is generally used to describe an apparition or something ghostlike, it also implies a frightening, unpleasant and dangerous occurrence. The term spectre, therefore, refers to a subject, be it a person who could be ghostlike or an apparition, an event which is surmised to arouse fear. In *The Demon Lover*, both a ghostlike figure and a fearful event converge to create a spectacle of testimony.

'In the Square' is written during 'a hot, raid-less patch of 1941 summer, just after Germany had invaded Russia' (1945: 218). The story centres around Magdela, a hostess from the pre-war social milieu, 'the replica of so many others that you could not count' (11). During the wartime, however, Magdela is at a loss. Her very identity as a hostess seems to liquidate under the hot glance of the midday sun. 'Her failure to get to the door' upon Rupert's arrival, shows the lurking of the old habits of class and social decorum (11). The noise of other people in the house symbolizes the decline of past values of living. The 'living' room, which was used to entertain people in the past, transforms into a 'dead room' due to its lack of watery gloss on the parquet and the appearance of 'a film of dust on the bulb' (11). Indeed, this apartment, along with 'the coastal house in 'Ivy Gripped the Steps', the villa in 'Sunday Afternoon', and Mrs. Drover's foreboding, bombed house in 'The Demon Lover' are all what Bowen called 'indestructible landmarks in a destructible world', but they are also relics of lost forms of life' (Davis, 2016: 97). The hostess' failure to maintain the pre-war ease and sociability further emphasizes the decay of pre-war values. When Rupert asks if she knows what has been happening lately, she responds, "Oh yes; oh yes, I'm sure I do. What can I tell you that would be interesting? I'm sorry", she said *suddenly, shutting her eyes*, "but so much has happened." *Opening her eyes* to look at him, she added: "So much more than you know." [emphasis added] (14). This passage represents the ambiguity of witnessing and testifying. Closing her eyes allows Magdela to look inwardly and to see clearly what has happened: how the war has affected her life, and how even her own house is occupied by her husband's mistress. Even though she is alive, her past self – the self which could entertain people, talk endlessly, and create memorable events – is reduced to a spectre. Upon opening her eyes, however, Magdela discovers the impossibility of communicating all this. Her experiences of the war create a breach between her and Rupert. Even if she wishes to communicate, she can only hint at what he does not know. In other words, there is a gap between the witness and the listener (cf. Laub). What remains essentially incommunicable between Magdela and Rupert is conveyed through non-verbal devices in the story. Magdela's body language, the change in her behaviour, the warning 'look' in her face, and the discomfort of non-belonging in her own house all represent the testimonial

¹ All references to the stories are from the 1945 edition of *The Demon Lover and Other Stories* published by Jonathan Cape.

beyond the means of language captured within the story. Her incoherence of speech and body language speak of the otherwise unspeakable damage done by the war.

In 'Sunday Afternoon', a similar spectacle of the spectre is represented through the perspective of a forty-three-year-old man. Henry, a Londoner who visits his friends in Dublin in the neutral Ireland. Although eager to hear about the war, they are not ready to take anything too terrible nor do they perceive how Henry himself could be a 'dreadful' relic of war. Mrs. Vessey asks Henry, '[w]hat are your experiences? – Please tell us. But nothing dreadful: we are already feeling a little sad' (20). Here again, one finds the epistemological gap between the witness and the listener through Mrs. Vessey's curiosity to know and desire to protect herself from any damaging knowledge. Looking at his friends' zeal to know about a somewhat distant war, Henry perceives them wrapped in 'an air of fastidious, stylized melancholy, an air of being secluded behind glass' (20-1). The friends are embalmed in this 'stylized melancholy', this peculiar Sunday afternoon. Even before his arrival, they 'discover that we all have friends who have died' (21). This is a peculiar sentence. Although in the given situation one might infer that each one of them had a friend or an acquaintance who died because of the London bombing, the way the story unfolds shows that the sentence contains a clairvoyant ring to it; that they still have friends who apparently died because of war. What they do not realize and what is represented in the story, is the tension that Henry faces between his war-experiences and their representation.

Having lost all his possessions during the Blitz, Henry has barely survived through the war. In this small encounter with his friends untouched by such devastation, Henry is not simply laden with the knowledge of the past, but, more significantly, with the impossibility of expressing that knowledge within the present moment. In this way, Henry has not merely witnessed the material disintegration from the war, but also the emotional and social disintegration caused by the lack of communication. In this respect, Henry's suffering is a continual one. He is neither fully alive nor fully dead. He speaks from the no-man's land of life and death where dying becomes the persistent condition of being. In her discussion of witness and testimony in literature, Delaperrière elaborates on this ambiguous nature of continual 'dying' as follows,

Not incidentally, the Greek word *martyros* still today means both a witness and a martyr. The very act of giving testimony can be perceived as an act of violence against oneself, not only due to the dramatic struggle with the memory but because of inevitable antinomy between one's knowledge and the means of rendering it. (2014: 44-45)

It is in this act of violence against his own desire to remain, to exist, that Henry prefers to remain silent, and in embodying this violent eruption within himself, he is as frightening to his listeners as the bombing is in London. The gap between him and his listeners intensifies his suffering of *telling*. Despite knowing Henry from childhood, they now perceive him, not as a 'living dead' of the war, but as a 'distraction'. 'To us these days, you are quite a figure. In fact, from all we have heard of London, it is something that you should be *alive*' [emphasis added] (21). All anticipate the story, or the act of telling which Henry procrastinates. By the time he is

forced to say whether the bombing is as *frightening* as the way media projects it, he responds: 'one's feelings seem to have no language for anything so preposterous' (22). Rather than understanding Henry's ambiguous feelings, Maria retorts: '[a]bout what is important, it seems that no one can *tell* one anything. There is really nothing, till one knows it oneself' [emphasis added] (22-3). Because of this understanding, Maria decides to go to London to experience war by herself. It is not until the middle of the story, and that also through another character, Lady Ottery, that the reader gets to know that Henry lost all his possessions in the bombing. Contrary to everyone's expectations, Henry is too calm about the whole event. He is 'glad to remain. To exist' and that too 'on any level' (25). It is clearly ironic that, while everyone wants him to speak during his short visit, the moment Henry speaks of his ultimate knowledge, i.e., that he could live without possessions and merely 'exist', nothing much is inquired from him. In fact, Maria makes him realize, '[t]hey sent you off ten minutes before your time. They are frightened someone would miss the bus and come back; then everything would have to begin again' (27-8).

As a witness to personal suffering, Henry's presence is a painful reminder of the suffering of war. His knowledge acquired through suffering, which he could only think of, but not articulate to anyone, makes him ponder that 'with nothing left but our brute courage, we shall be nothing but brutes' (29). Henry's understanding of the brutes befits both the older and the younger generation: the older generation's apathy and the younger generation's desire to gain first-hand knowledge of war both signal a world where the past is quickly made irrelevant and where individual experiences remain incommunicable thus frightening. The story comes to an almost supernatural ending when Henry says goodbye to Maria and calls her 'Miranda', despite Maria's name being uttered recurrently by everyone around Henry. Her attempt to correct him goes unnoticed, and he says, 'Miranda. This is the end of *you*' (29). This plot can be interpreted in two ways. Considering that Henry is forty-three at this moment, one might assume that his referral to a hypothetical Miranda is a recurrence of the farewell to his beloved during the Great War. Standing on the threshold of another world war, he could enact another painful farewell; this time, however, not to the person as such, but to the memory, the legacy or the commemoration of that lost generation.

Another interpretation is facilitated by understanding the intertextual referentiality. The name 'Miranda', as O'Connor has demonstrated, is reminiscent of the only female voice in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (2011: 13). Although I agree with O'Connor's interpretation of the link between Shakespeare's and Bowen's Miranda, I want to add another aspect to this interpretation. O'Connor discusses the implication of the name Miranda in *The Tempest* as the manifestation of how Ireland becomes an 'enchanted Island' by being neutral during the war. Thus, leaving Ireland for a war-torn London implies a 'loss of identity' for Henry (2011: 13). To this argument, I add that the intertextuality also implies Miranda's wilful 'othering' of Caliban as a brute. As the sole female sovereign of the Island, she parallels the colonial and imperialist way of writing about the cultural 'other'. Miranda addresses Caliban and calls him '[a] thing most brutish', (Act I. Scene II: 360). In 'Sunday Afternoon', the British imperial superiority is clearly subverted. The 'brute' in this narrative is not a racial, ethnic, and cultural 'other', rather, it is one of the survivors of the lost-

generations, the Anglo-European white male who, after a process of dispossession, makes a final plea to his listener: Maria and the reader by extension. Henry makes a plea for the past (Miranda) and for the future (the young Maria). Moreover, his friends' apathy and Maria's ambitions represent the brute force which is not outside 'us', but has always already been part of our identity. The Miranda whom he addresses is perhaps nothing but a figment of his own imagination. The woman who actually listens to him is incapable of empathy. Just as Miranda is nothing but a spectre of Henry's imagination, Henry is reduced within the story to a spectre whom everyone wants to forget before his suffering can affect their Sunday afternoon. Is there, then, a complete deadlock between the witness and the listener?

'The Demon Lover' is probably one of the most celebrated stories of this collection. This story exhibits the consequences of the deadlock between two individuals. Mrs. Drover returns to her home in London to take back some of her possessions. Upon arrival, she perceives that 'no human eye watched Mrs. Drover's return' and 'dead air came out to meet her as she went in' (91). The words 'no human eye' and 'dead air' contains the same register of the spectral as in other stories. The woman is overwhelmed by 'everything that she saw, by traces of her long former [pre-war] habit of life' (91). To add to this feeling of estrangement, she finds a letter addressed to her in her maiden name by a soldier from the Great War who claims, '[i]n view of the fact that nothing has changed, I shall rely upon you to keep your promise. I was sorry to see you leave London, but was satisfied that you would be back in time. You may expect me, therefore, at the hour arranged. Until then ...' (93). This is one of the most surreal and supernatural elements in the story. Used to her current lifestyle, Mrs. Drover is surprised to be reminded of a somewhat obliterated past. The narrator states:

The young girl talking to the soldier in the garden had not ever completely seen his face. [...] from not seeing him at this intense moment, as though she has never seen him at all – she verified his presence for these few moments longer by putting out a hand, which he each time pressed, without very much kindness, and painfully, on to one of the breast buttons of his uniform. [...] Being not kissed, being drawn away from and looked at intimidated Kathleen [first name of Mrs. Drover] till she imagined spectral glitters in the place of his eyes. (94)

The 'spectral glitters' in place of his eyes confirm the ghostlike existence of the soldier. This implies that the overpowering presence of war dilutes his identity. Despite the failure of verbal communication, both Mrs. Drover and her lover exhibit a similar behaviour: just as the woman returns to an unused house to claim her possessions, so the man returns from the dead to claim her back as Mrs. Drover remarks, '[h]e was set on me, that was what it was. Not love' (98). The word-play of Drover and driver confirm this similarity. Both the man and the woman try to drive their own will regardless of the 'other', hence the failure of dialogue and the gap between a witness of the past war and the current listener during the Second World War. The soldier, who went missing during the action of 1916, returns and appears on the driving seat of a taxi chosen at random by Mrs. Drover. 'Through the aperture driver and passenger, not six inches between them, remained for an eternity eye to eye. Mrs. Drover's mouth hung open for some seconds before she could issue her first

scream' (99). The past is encountered through an unwilling submission on the part of the woman and a forceful but futile drive into the hinterland by the man. Clearly, the soldier will not retrieve his lost youth or past, and Mrs. Drover can no longer resume her unmarried life as Kathleen. The encounter between the two, therefore, is a dramatization of two things: the persistence of 'brute' force and the continuity of wars, on the one hand, and a failure of verbal understanding (empathy) on the other hand. In this context, the spectral is not a superficial tool. Instead, it is a language through which the incommunicability of suffering is registered and made visible to the reader. This 'incommunicability' is projected by their gendered roles (the housewife and the soldier). Gender, therefore, becomes one experiential zone through which the breach between individuals is heightened and maintained. Clearly then, Bowen's use of the spectral represents both the necessity of witnessing and the probable failure of its representation. The uncertain identities of different witnesses in these stories reflect further how the spectral and the testimonial is correlated.

The Uncertain 'I': The Condition of the Witness

Bowen elaborates as to how the spectral informs the identities of her characters as follows, '[g]hosts are the certainties [...] The bodiless foolish wanton, the puritan other presence, the tipsy cook with her religion of England fare, the ruthless young soldier lover unheard of since 1916: hostile or not, they rally, they fill the vacuum for the uncertain 'I' (221). If ghosts have come to testify in place of the uncertain characters, how do we understand the predicament of the witness? The uncertain 'I' is the kaleidoscopic fragmentation of a collective 'we': the victims, the survivors and the perpetrators of war. Clearly, this 'I' witness is overwhelmed with the continuity of violence and its implication in the everyday. War, the ghost of the First and the looming shadow of the Second, defines the vulnerabilities of the characters such as Mrs. Drover, Henry and Maria, Magdela and Rupert. As Bowen puts it, 'but everyone was pathetic – more than they knew. Owing, though to the thunder of those inordinate years, we were shaken out of the grip of our own pathos' (222).

By means of the spectral in the ordinary realm, Bowen emphasizes the collective need for 'pathos'. To ask for empathy is to claim a certain form of survival; in the afterword of the collection, Bowen writes, '[p]ersonal life here, too, put up its own resistance to the annihilation that was threatening it – war. To survive, not only physically but also spiritually, was essential' (220). The continuity of the quotidian makes survival at the physical level possible, and the continuation of the rich tradition of story-telling enables the act of remembering and testifying.

Both in 'The Inherited Clock' and 'Mysterious Kôr', the uncertain 'I' creates survival at the level of plot and narration. In 'The Inherited Clock' 'a girl [Clara] is led to find the key to her own neurosis inside a timepiece. The past, in all these cases, discharges its load of feeling into the anaesthetized and bewildered present. It is the 'I' that is sought – and retrieved at the cost of no little pain' (221). Unlike Henry, Clara is a young woman at the start of World War II. While she works in London, her only ambition is to receive the will of her aunt Rosanna. Through this will, she anticipates to live according to her own taste. Along with the money comes an old clock which, if one believes Clara's other aunt, Addie, never stopped ticking 'for more than a hundred years' (32). Upon receiving the clock, Clara asks herself a strange question,

‘[w]as it impossible that the past should be able to injure the future irreparably?’ (44). In Clara’s case, the future has been damaged through the past controlled by her aunt’s inheritance will. Through her aunts Addie and Rosanna, her cousin Paul and her childhood play mate, the reader gets to know about certain events which Clara no longer remembers. In the narrative, her uncertain memory is also exhibited when, in order to avoid the clock, she goes out for a walk and forgets the way to return home. Upon finding herself in unidentifiable surroundings, she thinks, ‘unless she had lost her memory, she had lost her way’ (45).

Throughout the story, Clara ignores to see the clock. However, when Paul insists, she finally faces the clock and remembers. Through this hypnotic encounter, she sees the reality of her childhood and her aunt’s inheritance. She realizes that her aunt Rosanna, the old spinster from the First World War, cultivated a desire for money in Clara and her cousin Paul. In this way, Rosanna sustains the legacy which she herself was a receiver and victim of, not of material possessions, but of waiting. Apparently, like her aunt, Clara ends up sharing the legacy physically, by being the recipient of the clock after Rosanna’s death, but also mentally, because a long waiting-period has made her life sour. Yet, once Clara realizes how her past, present and future were programmed by the destructive will of her aunt, she breaks the hypnotism of the spectral clock. When Paul asks her if she minds to keep the clock at her place for a few days, she responds: ‘It is not very useful at present to tell the time by, but apart from that I should never know it was there’ (58). As Paul finally makes her confront her past, the clock loses its ghostliness – thus, Clara overcomes the spectral legacy of her aunt. She retrieves her ‘self’ from the will of her aunt and claims, ‘I shall sit with my memories. I expect to spend some time getting to know them’ (58). Moving away from the passive and static legacy of waiting to an active survival through remembering, Clara becomes a bright and clear survivor, as her very own name suggests.

The final story in this collection, ‘The Mysterious Kôr’, presents this active survival through two agents: the full moon and the main protagonist, Pepita. The eye of the moon, as the only panopticon in the sky, searches the city of London, as if it searches for an alternative reality. Through the searching moonlight, the city is transformed into a ‘shallow, cratered, extinct’ space. The late evening silence and the moonlight create ‘a ghostly unbroken reflection’. Rather than the Germans ‘something more immaterial seemed to threaten, and to be keeping people at home’ (196). The emergence of Pepita and Arthur from the Underground in this penetrating moonlight creates a theatrical spectacle. Arthur is on leave and Pepita is preoccupied thinking of the mysterious city, Kôr. The glitter in Arthur’s eyes and the witnessing of this glitter by Pepita is reminiscent of the First World War soldier in ‘The Demon Lover’. As the narrator tells, ‘his look up the height of a building made his head drop back, and she saw his eyeballs glitter’ (198). When Pepita recites from ‘She’, a poem by Andrew Lang in which he recalls the mysterious city of the Kôr, Arthur warns, ‘[b]ut something must once have happened: why had it been forsaken’ (198). When he remarks that Pepita’s fascination with this city is because of the book, she responds: ‘Oh, I didn’t get much from that; I just got the name.’ Arthur remarks, the poem begins with ‘Not’ – ‘Not in the waste beyond the swamps and sand’ [. . .] implying thus that even the ‘poem says there’s no such place’. To this, Pepita defiantly adds,

'[w]hat it tries to say doesn't matter: I see what it makes me see'. Anyhow, that was written some time ago, at that time when they thought they had got everything taped, because the whole world had been explored, even the middle of Africa' (199).

Through these two characters, and particularly through Pepita's remark, Bowen creates a subtle critique of the colonial and imperial representation of the world. This remark is also overlaid with a similar cynicism and sarcasm that is shown by Henry in 'Sunday Afternoon'. Clearly, the logos of understanding the cultural and topographical other as exotic, evident in the references to Andrew Lang's poem, is subverted here. Pepita is resistant to what already has been said about Kôr. The estrangement of Kôr is applied to the war-torn London; what is more gripping beyond this critique, is the fact that through Pepita's over-indulgence in this fantasized and absent place, the strangeness of the familiar place of London is superimposed. This romantic fantasy comes to a sudden jolt when the narrator states, '[t]hey were, that was to say, in London without any hope of any place of their own' (201). The mundane reality of wartime, the awkward sharing of a small flat with Callie, Pepita's flatmate, and the bodily discomfort, all echo the limited materiality which became the norm in these unusual times. Wandering aimlessly through the city, Pepita and Arthur come to the small flat. This night does not provide the opportunities sought by the young lovers, but rather intensifies their existence as fragmented and separate beings. Callie, in Arthur's masculine presence, is too conscious to fall asleep and Arthur wakes up from his nightmares with an urge to smoke. Pepita sleeps deeply, for it is only in her dreams that she can reconstruct her vision of Kôr.

Another interpretation is made possible through the character of Callie – the name in Greek literally signifies the beautiful one. Not having the experience of love relation so far, Callie awaits the arrival of the two lovers with much excitement. Yet it is her very presence which creates a separation between the two lovers. Unlike Pepita, who does not stop talking about her own excitement over a hypothetical city, Callie hears the disturbed sounds of the soldier on leave, and wonders what gives him nightmares. Arthur responds: 'How are any of us to know how things could have been? They forget war's not just only war; it's years out of people's lives that they've never had before and won't have again' (212). Dreams here translate the incommunicable gap between Pepita and Arthur's experiences; where Arthur has nightmares from his battlefield experience, Pepita has developed a deep slumber by yearning for an unrealizable space. In both cases, however, the result is a sense of disconnection with the immediate surroundings and an adherence to an imagined or feared space.

The power of imagination to 'blow' whole places into reality is what the story, as a narrative configuration, successfully does (199). In other words, the spectre of Kôr gains a novel meaning for the present-reality of dislocation and non-belonging in Pepita and Arthur. What remains unattainable in the lives of people narrated in the stories, is achieved by creating a spectacle of storytelling for the future reader. Through this spectacle, the literature of war and conflict leads to a discursive practice in which peace becomes imaginable.

The Spectacle in the Testimonial

The recurrence of a witness' experience as a 'traumatic recall', the fear of the failure to communicate to the other, and the urge to arouse and claim empathy from the listeners, all constitute the witness as an absent-presence (Caruth, 1995: 153). The experience of the witness becomes, what Douglas and Vogler describe as an 'absent signified', i.e., 'an object that can by definition only be constructed retroactively' (2003, 5). In the face of modern warfare, the reconstruction of this 'absent signified' becomes all the more challenged. An apt example here is Walter Benjamin's description of the returned soldiers in 'The Storyteller'. Benjamin writes 'with the World War a process began to become apparent which has not halted since then. Was it not noticeable at the end of the war that men returned from battlefield grown silent—not richer but poorer in communicable experience?' (362). Bowen takes up the task of making this poorer experience available to her reader through her wartime stories. Riveted around the myriad experiences of war, these stories clearly frighten us – the eerie ghostly presence of an absence, the recurrent incommunicable gaps between different characters, witnesses and listeners, and the looming legacy of the past onto the present, all shape up what Bowen calls 'resistance fantasies' (1945, 221). The word 'resistance' resonates across the different spectrums of her writing whereby an artist, particularly post the Great War, 'took up the attitude of the critical exile, the psychologically displaced person' (Lee, 1999: 54). The *raison d'être* for writing a book is 'nothing but a return to images that will allow nothing to take their place; the aesthetic is nothing but an attempt to disguise and glorify the enforced return' (ibid: 53). In her essay, 'The Bend Back', Bowen elaborates further on the role of literature as follows, 'by art we are made to seem to remember that which we have not actually known [...] It is a case, here, not of the personal past, which may be evoked, but of the historic past, which must be created – i.e., re-created in terms of art' (ibid: 56-7).

Bowen's claim that art must 'eliminate', 'edit' and even falsify resonates with what Felman claims about the ultimate purpose of testimony. According to Felman, the significance of a testimony resides not merely in its factual accuracy, but rather in 'a performative engagement with consciousness and history' (114). Similarly, Delaperrière has argued that literature, as testimony, entails both the 'informative as well as performative function' (2014: 43). Hence, we can say that the spectacle of testimony is a self-conscious 'telling' of the events of the past. *The Demon Lover*, as a collage of wartime experiential fragments of different individuals, both men and women from older and younger generations, reflects upon this self-conscious telling on the part of the author. Bowen represents the urgency to witness and testify as is evident in the themes of the spectral and the war-torn and uncertain identities of her characters, on the one hand, and the epistemological gaps between the witnesses and the listeners of these events, on the other. In doing so, her stories present a spectacle of testimony through art whereby both the predicament of the witness and the essential ambiguity of testifying is represented through narration.

Conclusion

The recurrent theme of the spectral and the uncertain characters shape together the spectacle of testimony in Bowen's wartime fiction. The convergence of the spectral

with the uncertain witness transcends the limits of the spatio-temporal reality, and the past of the Great War overshadows the future of the young and somewhat rebellious women like Maria, Clara and Pepita. Collectively, their gender speaks of the other reality of war – one which is outside the battlefield but is as disrupted by it as Arthur’s nightmares, Henry’s ghostly survival and Paul’s materialistic drive for possession. The present reality is incomprehensible for the older generation, represented through the characters of Magdela, Henry and, Rosanna. Yet, there are moments when these apparently unbridgeable binaries of time meet either through fragmented conversation in the living room of a hostess from the bygone times, or through an unsuccessful conversation between friends, or even through the spectre of a clock,.

These stories also foreground the act of telling and listening and the possible failure of such communication between the witness and her listener. By presenting the gap of the knowing and unknowing through the various modulation of the spectral and the supernatural with that of the uncertain witness and the wartime reality, these stories emphasize the lack of empathy from which most of the characters suffer and react to. By presenting these individual responses to war, Bowen forms a literary response to what Paul Celan calls the incommunicability of the suffering of a witness in his poem ‘Ashglory’:

No one
bears witness for the
witness. (2014: 62)

Literature, as a counterforce to violence, is not merely resilient to wars as such, but it also incorporates and performs a dialogism of peace. By addressing, warning and informing the future reader of the position of the witness, *The Demon Lover and Other Stories* creates an inclusionary space where the isolated witness of an event and the reader forge a meta-chronic and empathetic bondage.

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## Carissa Foo ~ Patriarchal Hauntings and Feminist Exorcisms in Elizabeth Bowen's Short Stories

The home is the preserve of domestic life and feminine nurturance. It is the most feminine of spaces, built on 'deep-seated and seemingly 'natural' association' of women as 'defenders of the private sphere' (Domosh and Seager, 2001: 2). As daughters and wives, Bowen's women find themselves in the home, face-to-face with ghosts from the past, defenceless against the material substantiation of the feminine and domestic ideals to which they subscribe. The perverse of the home—the haunted house—breaks the archetype of feminine space and awakens the pious woman from her blind faith. Faith, here, is the ingrained belief or naturalised idea of certain femininities that reinforces the power of the dominant and enables the continued marginalisation of the women: Kathleen Drover, in 'The Demon Lover' (1945), believes she failed her unreturning soldier-lover when she moved on; Ethel Trevor, in 'Hand in Glove' (1952), believes that she would fail in her feminine duties if she did not have Lord Fred within her grasp. Beliefs of such force have the strength of ideology, and the women's deviance produces existential angst that is enfolded in the spectres that haunt the home.

The women are tormented not only by their persecutors but also by an internalised, patrimonial sense of duty and honour. Phyllis Lassner, in *Elizabeth Bowen: A Study of the Short Fiction*, affirms that the women are '[held] responsible' for 'men's failed dreams' and 'betrayed expectations' (1991: 57). The haunted house reflects the perversity of a phallogentric world that women themselves are complicit in preserving. Disciplined by 'the law of the father', Donna Haraway muses, '[w]ho wouldn't grow up warped' (1997: 54)? Living in a 'garrison town' that 'plumed itself upon its romantic record', Ethel Trevor sees marriage as a prize to be fought for (Bowen, 1965: 207). Her perception of the world is formed by what she believes the world to be. In order to see through wrong beliefs, Haraway states that emphasis must be placed on 'limited location': it is not 'transcendence' but 'situated knowledge' of where we are that 'allows us to become answerable for what we learn how to see' (1997: 59). We find in the haunted house a struggle with patriarchal ghosts, a manifestation of the struggles women face in the real world, struggles between the gendered perceptions and expectations within ourselves and the influences at work in our societies.

The haunted house is uncanny: 'something which is old-established in the mind and which becomes alienated from it only through the process of repression' (Freud, 1919: 241). Evoking feelings of homeliness and homelessness, it is a space of ambivalence: the women are domesticated and dispossessed in its premise. Sinéad Mooney describes the haunted domestic house in Bowen's stories as 'an uncanny space inhabited by unhappy women' who are plagued by 'spectres of female alienation and entrapment' (2009: 91). The place they call home is not only protective but also aggressive, and the values in which they believe are not natural but negative. As the home is unhinged, the women feel displaced. The ghostly house precipitates an existential crisis, shaking foundational beliefs that determine what it means to be a woman. Herein is the violent but needful exorcism: the women are scared to death (in the case of Ethel Trevor) and deracinated from conventions in order to cast out the demon of patriarchy. This essay argues that the haunted house in Bowen's short stories is a spectral and spatial dramatisation of female precarity, revealing the pernicious effects of inherited values and imitated practices that domesticate and disempower women, such that their only freedom from beliefs that have been embodied and emplaced is annihilation.

### **The Haunted House: The Domestic Ideal and Failed Home**

Often linked to the Gothic, the haunted house is associated with 'curse narratives', which, Robert Mighall explains, 'bind the lives of the present generation to the misguided customs of the past' (1999: 80).<sup>1</sup> Usually a castle or country manor, it commands an 'imposing' presence, echoing the strong patrimonial ties between fathers and heirs (Williams, 1995: 39). Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Ontario* (1764) sealed the gothic tradition of ancestral homes and inter-generational strife. Decades later, Ann Radcliffe's *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne* (1789) and Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1817) focus on stories of women caught in the crossfires

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<sup>1</sup>The haunted house appears in a myriad of genres from invasion narrative to detective fiction. The old family home in Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone* (1868) and Arthur Conan Doyle's 'The Adventures of the Speckled Band' (1892) is surrounded by an aura of otherness that thickens the mystery. In the twentieth century, the haunted house hosted more than ghosts and spirits. Notably, in the fantasy tales of H. P. Lovecraft, the house bridges science and the supernatural, functioning as a portal to alien worlds and mythic cosmos.

of familial and social unrest. Female precarity continues in the fiction of the Brontë sisters where women are trapped in *Wuthering Heights*, *Wildfell Hall*, and *Thornfield Hall*.<sup>2</sup> In their ground-breaking study of the Victorian imaginations of women, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar avow that ‘almost all nineteenth-century women were in some sense imprisoned in men’s houses’:

From Ann Radcliffe’s melodramatic dungeons to Jane Austen’s mirrored parlors, from Charlotte Brontë’s haunted garrets to Emily Brontë’s coffin-shaped beds, imagery of enclosure reflects the woman writer’s own discomfort, her sense of powerlessness, her fear that she inhabits alien and incomprehensible places. (1979: 83-84)

The manifold imprisonment reflects women’s precarious existence, perhaps best illustrated in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ (1890). The house, with ‘undulating wallpaper’, haunts its schizophrenic female inhabitant who is the investigatory writer, the madwoman, the ill wife, the unloving mother (Gilman, 2009: 11).

The sense of imprisonment associated with the home emerged with the cult of domesticity which proliferated in the 1800s and was also coined the cult of True Womanhood. Barbara Welter explains how conflation of the feminine ideal and domestic space made women ‘the hostage in the home’:

The attributes of True Womanhood, by which a woman judged herself and was judged by her husband, her neighbors and society could be divided into four cardinal virtues-piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity. Put them all together and they spelled mother, daughter, sister, wife-woman. (1996: 151-152)

To be a true woman was to stay at home. Women were expected to ‘dispense comfort and cheer’, ‘keep busy at morally uplifting tasks’, and pick up ‘forms of artsy-craftsy activity’ like needlework and flower arrangement (163-165). These tasks ensured the moral and aesthetic upkeep of the home. As the home came to represent virtue and taste, economic progress and growing affluence led to an increase in the number of bourgeois houses. This socio-architectural phenomenon affected the narrative of the haunted house.

Significantly, the bourgeois domestic home is the *idée fixe* in nineteenth-century women’s ghost fiction. Neither a castle nor an abbey, the house in West London in Rhoda Broughton’s ‘The Truth, the Whole Truth, and Nothing but the Truth’ (1868) and the cosy cottage in Edith Nesbit’s *Man-Size in Marble* (1893) are more homely to the Victorian reader. The move of the haunted house from noble estates to middle-class homes has implications. Crucially, it is not bound with patrimony but femininity.<sup>3</sup> The middle-class home is a ‘highly feminized phenomenon’ in which

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<sup>2</sup> Judith Butler offers a definition of precarity as ‘that politically induced condition of maximized vulnerability and exposure for populations exposed to arbitrary state violence and to other forms of aggression that are not enacted by states and against which states do not offer adequate protection’ (2009: ii). The women in haunted house fictions may not be victims of explicit state violence, but they do live in precarity without protection and with added exposure to ghosts that are extensions of social oppression and gender norms.

<sup>3</sup> See Sharon Marcus’s *Apartment Stories* (1999) for a detailed account of the domestication of the castle, that is, ‘the Englishman’s home’.

women ‘worked for love’ (Sparke, 1995: 19; Domosh and Seager, 2001: 5). Sharon Marcus expounds on the relation between domesticity and femininity:<sup>4</sup>

Domestic ideology dictated that women were to be self-sacrificing and virtuous, men enterprising, protective of their families, and susceptible to women’s softening influences. Women were to guarantee the neatness, order, and comfort of the home by managing household finances and supervising servants; men were to earn the money with which women created the domestic comfort that would restore their husbands at the end of each working day. (1999: 90)

Women are supposed to be the paragon of morality and virtue, whose ‘softening influences’ create a home that does not ‘threaten or create dis-ease of any kind’ (Sparke, 1995: 26). The home is a material projection and spatial embodiment of feminine qualities and ‘moral attributes’ (Marcus, 1999: 90).

Conversely, the home becomes haunted when its mistress is haunted by her conscience. Bowen herself was convinced that ‘persons are as hauntable as places’ (1962: 103), and that, as Mooney reiterates, ‘instances of the *unheimlich*’ are ‘personifications of both personal and the larger cultural or historical traumas’ (2009: 78).<sup>5</sup> In ‘The Demon Lover’, Kathleen, by marrying William Drover, has broken her promise to her soldier-lover. To his command, ‘You need do nothing but wait’ (Bowen, 1945a: 84), she does not submit. As a consequence, she lives in fear that her movements as Mrs Drover—the very identity that epitomises her betrayal—are ‘watched’ (84). She is haunted by the decisions of her past, even before the appearance of the threatening letter. As she walks into the house, Kathleen sees the past mingling with the present:

the yellow smoke-stain up the white marble mantelpiece, the ring left by a vase on the top of the escritoire; the bruise in the wallpaper where, on the door being thrown open widely, the china handle had always hit the wall. The piano, having gone away to be stored, had left what looked like claw-marks on its part of the parquet. (80)

In this example, the fallen state of the objects points to the passing of time rather than the objects themselves. In a complimentary reading of ‘The Demon Lover’, Thomas Davis regards the house and the missing fiancé’s letter as symbols of ‘the afterlife of the past in the present’ (2013: 34). Similarly, Neil Corcoran highlights that the inter-war story’s fixation on historical past is a means to assuage ‘the fear of civilizational decline and extinction’ (Corcoran, 1994: 35). Yet, the past does not comfort the women, as it exacerbates anxiety. For Kathleen Drover, the fallen state of familiar objects is a reminder of her ‘unideal’ self.<sup>6</sup> She who wanted to be ‘good’,

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<sup>4</sup> The domestic ideal is overtly tied to the nineteenth century but its legacy continues in the twentieth century, manifested in the works of modernist women writers like Woolf in *Mrs Dalloway* where, for example, Clarissa finds comfort in the attic-room after her walk in London; also, consider Jean Rhys and Dorothy Richardson’s fictions, where their female protagonists move between hotels and boarding houses, contesting notions of homeliness and the boundaries of the domestic realm.

<sup>5</sup> Even though Mooney is more concerned with ‘the spectres of modernity’ and how the supernatural is Bowen’s ‘fictional enquiry’, she focuses on the politics of gender and the issue of women’s domestication, which take the form of the spectral trope in Bowen’s short stories (2009: 79).

<sup>6</sup> In *Housewife*, British sociologist Ann Oakley writes, ‘the ideal self is ... that self which aspires to be a good wife, a good mother, and an efficient homemaker’ (1974: 9).

waiting indefinitely for her soldier-lover, now suffers from the guilt of being unfaithful to her promise to him.

In *Danse Macabre*, Stephen King writes that haunted house fiction begins with the 'prosaic fallout of the place' (1981: 152).<sup>7</sup> The furniture and the state of the house begin to fall apart, as its owner is unmoored. Bowen's personal reflection throws light on this:

It is impossible to believe that the people discovered in rooms sitting stiffly about as dolls in dolls-house attitudes are not to be sold with the house, and to remember that it is not necessary to ask oneself whether one likes them. I had no idea so many houses could be macabre and horrifying. (1986: 211)

The house is as eerie as its inhabitants, and vice versa. The doll-like inhabitants and the macabre houses are intimately related. This relation between the state of the house and state of its homemaker is further fleshed out in 'The Demon Lover'. The house is broken-down: the diction ('bruise', 'hit', 'claw-marks', 'thrown') suggests violence, which is reiterated when Kathleen felt 'intruded' when she looked at the letter (Bowen, 1945a: 81). The house, haunted and afflicted, is reflective of the homemaker's state: Kathleen is plagued by the 'unnatural promise' (84)—which is symbolic of the impossible expectations placed on women—and suffers for her inability to keep it. The haunting is not merely of the past but of patriarchal oppression as well.

Unable to provide comfort and protection, the haunted house is the antithesis of the domestic ideal, also exposing the impossibility of its fulfilment. Rather than propagating the myth of the feminine home, domestic space in Bowen's short stories is alternatively mythologised, that is to say demonised. The women are haunted by their failings—Kathleen is unfaithful to her promise to her soldier-lover and Ethel is unable to attract Lord Fred—materialised in spectral figures like the demon lover and gloves that shake the foundations of reality and beliefs. If the home domesticised is a prison that keeps its homemaker in, then the home demonised may be the way to keep her out. The haunted house is the material fabric of patriarchal imprisonment and bodily extension of the subject's consciousness of feminine obligations, designed to scare, and so keep in the woman whose life has been shaped by ingrained beliefs in the domestic ideal and cult of True Womanhood.

### **Patriarchal Hauntings: Unnatural Beliefs and Supernatural Consequences**

'Belief is a rule for action', wrote the American pragmatist Charles Sanders Pierce (1878: 129). It is a meeting place for monistic principals of the dominant and the material application of rules. More recently, Sara Ahmed suggests that belief is 'inheritance... what we receive from others, as our 'point of arrival' into the familial and social order' (2006: 125). It links us to those who came before and with those

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<sup>7</sup> King cites the example of the Lutz family in *The Amityville Horror* whose financial troubles are reflected in the state of the house that 'seems to literally tear itself apart': 'Windows crash in, black goop dribbling out of the walls, the cellar stairs cave in... and I found myself wondering not if the Lutz clan would get out alive but if they had adequate homeowner's insurance' (1981: 152).

who share the same lineage, fits us into social groups and distance us from non-believers. Ahmed digs deeper into the implications of inheritance:

Indeed, the word inheritance includes two meanings: to receive and to possess. In a way, we convert what we receive into possessions, a conversion that often 'hides' the conditions of having received, as if the possession is too simply 'already there'. (2006: 126)

Belief is 'already there', orientating us and reproducing the orientations of our predecessors. This conversion is insidious and imposing: 'reception is not about choice' (Ahmed 2006: 125).<sup>8</sup> The woman receives and believes, and is incapable of doubt: 'No such confrontation makes sense', as Donald Davidson explains, 'for of course we can't get outside our skins to find out what is causing the internal happening of which we are aware' (2001: 144). That is to say, belief is existential to one's being. This section will demonstrate how the women's haunted experiences are experiences of embodied and spatialised beliefs that are products of their histories.

In Bowen's stories, haunted experiences may be read as experiences of embodied and spatialised beliefs. Believing that she must fulfill her duties as a fiancée, sister, daughter, wife, and mother, Kathleen Drover's personal experience is shaped by the social. In the aftermath of her soldier-lover's departure, she is in 'complete suspension of *her* existence' (Bowen, 1945a: 86). This has extended into the months after he went missing, and for a long while she has been 'dislocate[ed] from everything' (84). When she married William Drover, her 'movements as Mrs. Drover were circumscribed' (84). Her existence is defined and limited by forces outside herself. Young Kathleen committed her life to an 'unnatural promise' because a man was set on her; she 'put herself out' to suitors because she 'share[d] her family's anxiousness' (84). In a world where patrimonial beliefs are imposed by the men and women in her life, Kathleen does not exist for herself. Lassner adds that she is 'driven by a male fantasy of her total devotion', around which she builds her life (1991: 65). The gaze internalised dictates her identity; what is particular about the portrayal of Kathleen is how she has been socialised into accepting patrimonial beliefs to a point where the demands of society become the demands of the self. In her we see the tension between existential angst and societal pressure. Beliefs of society are naturalised by the individual as those of the self.

Even when the enforcers (the soldier-lover and her mother) of social conventions are absent, Kathleen is still terrorised by the spectre of patriarchy. This manifests itself when young Kathleen dares not speak in the presence of her fiancé, and again when she is unwilling to leave the haunted house 'without the objects she had come to fetch' because she is 'a woman whose utter dependability was the keystone of her family life' (Bowen, 1945a: 85). Further, although the soldier-lover is presumed to be dead and she has married William Drover, Kathleen is unhappy and plagued by illness, paranoid that she is being watched, as though resignedly anticipating the return of her bygone fiancé and his judgment. In *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir diagnoses such behaviour as a general pathological dependence on the dominant, whereby women are often 'weighed' by 'a tradition of timidity and of submissiveness' (1974: 140). Kathleen's submission to the absent lover and feeling of being watched

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<sup>8</sup> Ahmed's discussion of inheritance and reception centres on the passing down of histories, of 'normative whiteness', and of 'compulsory heterosexuality' (127).

not only reveal servility, but also the difficulty of tearing oneself away from *a priori* truths, both of which result in a reflex-like obedience. The expectation that she waits for her soldier-lover mutates into something instinctive over time, and the boundary between external and internal pressures is unclear.

The conjunction between social and personal, societal pressure and existential angst, is seen in the detail of the signature, K., which also happens to be Kathleen's initial. To Lassner, this is evidence of intermingling consciousnesses to a point where 'Kathleen is haunted by becoming his reflection' (1991: 66-67). On this, Corcoran agrees that the signature symbolises the 'disruption of legitimate privacies' (1994: 159). Kathleen's identity is tied to those around her, 'a life lived under control, in check, unspontaneously, subserviently; and lived for others, not herself' (160). Both Lassner and Corcoran identify the succession of consciousness as the primary consequence of oppression. To draw on the idea of invisible disciplinary power, we can say that Kathleen has internalised the 'faceless gaze' (Foucault, 1977: 214), which is an apparatus of the soldier-lover's control over her, reinforcing deep-seated gendered power relations. It is useful to consider how this internalisation may contribute to Mooney's idea of the mind as 'a potentially supernatural site', whereby her thoughts are invaded by 'recurrence' of the patriarchal ghost that is her dead fiancé, whether in the form of the letter or the feeling of being watched (2009:85). His power and her subservience are conclusively established in the letter: 'I shall rely upon you to keep your promise' (Bowen, 1945a: 82). The demon lover is confident that Kathleen will fulfil her promise, and therefore requires no reply. This is Kathleen's faithfulness, not so much to the one she loves but to the hegemonic ideals and expectations that have shaped her beliefs.

The consequence of internalised beliefs on women's lives is detailed in 'Hand in Glove'. Embodying traits of military history and romance, the Trevor sisters are described as 'tall and handsome' with 'good bust and shoulders' (Bowen, 1965: 208). Though strong as soldiers and attractive as lovers, the blend of features makes them 'handsome girl[s]' which is the 'vocation' for women as 'many of the best marriages had been made by such' (208). The sisters are part of 'a marriage market', as Lassner notes, 'obsessively driven by the dictum to marry at all costs' (1991: 69). They are trained to focus on the goal—that being, '[w]hom, and still more when did they mean to marry'? (Bowen, 1965: 208). Their vision for themselves as wives is a vision inherited, disciplined and regimented. Like Kathleen, who subconsciously waits for the lover whose supernatural return has dire consequences for her, Ethel's obsession with marrying and desperation to attract Lord Fred figuratively manifest themselves in her fixation on the pair of gloves that will later take her life. As Heather Bryant Jordan notes, these spectral presences are 'demons created by her own mind' (1992: 133).<sup>9</sup> The haunting is a site where the women are confronted with their own 'demons' and forced to react or be consumed (as both Kathleen and Ethel have been). 'Hand in Glove' and 'The Demon Lover' dramatise the detrimental consequences women face when believing in the reigning ideology and its values.

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<sup>9</sup> Even though Jordan refers to the horrors of war in her book *How Will the Heart Endure*, she writes about the blurred lines between reality and fantasy that elucidate how physical experience can be a product of long-term mental conditioning and the practice of beliefs.

## Feminist Exorcisms: Desolation and Echoing Screams

If haunting is a projection of warped beliefs, then haunted house fiction can be read as narratives questioning women's faith in domesticity. Ironically, it is the belief in the house as a home that enables the woman to see the uncanny house as haunting and macabre. The more she dwells in haunted space, the more discomfort and anxiety brew as a result of the discrepancies between the house as a home and the house as haunted. As the haunted house destabilises the woman's sense of self, it reveals the constructedness of her vantage point and false comfort of her identity as homemaker. Once conscious of this, the haunted house is not that bad for her: Haraway believes that 'vision is better from below the brilliant space platforms of the powerful' (1997: 59). The experience of the haunted house, as this essay argues, is central to understanding how women may exorcise their patriarchal ghosts. Having established the relation between belief and experience, this final section focuses on how the haunted house is a site of feminist awakening, scaring and displacing the woman from domestic comfort, so that she may re-envision possibilities of habitation outside the home.

A motif both of refuge and imprisonment, the haunted house is Bowen's way of confronting the relation between women and place: 'it allows for an exploration of the blurred boundaries between social convention and the 'other world' that lies behind private frustrations and cruelties of marriage' (Mooney, 2009: 93). Hermione Lee asserts that 'places are used repeatedly to expose a deficiency in the people who inhabit them' (1981: 132). The house, at once domesticating and dispossessing, is used to expose the problems of those who believe in and are influenced by the hegemonic ideology that dresses up the feminine and private sphere as ideal. Given its 'close association with family and stability', Rebecca Janicker avows that the home is 'especially good at provoking tension and anxiety in most people—both about the relationship of individual to family and of family to larger social and historical role' (2015: 19). The haunted house narrative thus compels a re-examination of women's roles *vis-à-vis* the domestic abode.

Despite her disavowal of feminist politics—as late as 1961, Bowen had written: 'I am not, and shall never be, a feminist' (2008: 378)—Bowen's haunted house fiction can be read as an examination of women's intimate and parasitical relations with domestic ideology and the home. Feminist scholars such as Hermione Lee, Maud Ellman and Harriet Scott Chessman have been instrumental in the renewed interest in Bowen's *oeuvre*, each arguing for her relevance and importance to the women's movement of her time. Whilst 'Hand in Glove' and 'The Demon Lover' do not overtly rally for feminist empowerment, and the female characters are devastated by the society and system to which they belong, the stories cast doubt on the women's world by placing them in an alternative spectral realm, exposing the myths and beliefs that engineer feminine experiences, and gesturing towards the eventual casting out of patriarchal ghosts.

Part of how Bowen creates the haunting atmosphere has to do with her employment of strange objects that upsets and breaks down the women's sense of reality. The leather gloves and the mysterious letter are objects that, according to Jacqueline Rose, in her illuminating essay 'Bizarre Objects', question 'our relationship to the perceivable world, our confidence that there is a world which, simply by looking at it, is there to be seen' (2000: 78). The leather glove appears in the narrative initially as

symbol of a type of femininity associated with marriage and the inherited beliefs about it. In her book, *Tactile Poetics*, Sarah Jackson makes a compelling case for reading the gloves as propagation of the marriage ideal: not only are they a means to possess Lord Fred, they also ‘represent the remains of Mrs Varley de Grey’s marriage’ (2005: 142). Ethel’s insistence on the gloves—‘Success was imperative – she *must* have gloves’ (Bowen, 1965: 215)—reveals her unwavering belief that possessing Lord Fred is intrinsic to her female identity and desire to be married, like her aunt. The gloves are ‘bizarre objects’ that confront and disrupt foundational beliefs. Therefore, when the omniscient narrator tells us that ‘the gloves would have been too small for her’ (216), they suggest the problematic alignment of one’s identity with pre-existing female archetypes.

In Bowen’s stories, ghostly objects are not figments of the imagination or evidence of a psychotic break. Rather, they are products of ‘another way of seeing things’ (Rose, 2000: 83). Consider how Kathleen begins to see her relationship with the soldier-lover in a new way upon receiving his letter, realising that ‘she had never seen him at all’ or, for that matter, even known him (Bowen, 1945a: 83). The haunting catalyses a moment of reckoning, a re-vision that is ‘disintegrative of all knowing’ (Rose, 2000: 78). With regard to this, Grégory Delaplace describes how spectrality challenges foundational truths:

Ghosts, as sensations that challenge abruptly the implicit certainty that ‘the world is what we see’, give us in a flash the uncanny suspicion that what we perceive might actually *not* be the entire world. Ghosts give us an uncertain glimpse of a dimension that usually remains invisible to us but that might nevertheless be part of the world. (2014: 65)

Spectral presence casts suspicion on one’s knowledge of the world and gives hope that there are possibilities of existence beyond the visible and given.

The haunted house forces re-vision of the domestic architecture and archetype. In ‘The Demon Lover’, Kathleen finds strange clarity and comfort in the haunted house. In Kensington, the feeling of unhomeliness causes her to think of ‘flight’ (Bowen, 1945a: 86). This is contrasted with her inability to speak and move in the garden where she was confronted by the soldier-lover—a symbolic stillness that prevents her from attending to her own fear and anxiety. In the haunted house, however, she reflects astutely on the relationship with her fiancé: ‘He was set on me, that was what it was – not love. Not love, not meaning a person well’ (86). She recognises the power dynamics of their relationship, that he had regarded her as an object to be possessed. Here, the haunted house turns crisis into clarity. Kathleen might be trapped in the house, frightened and helpless; but it is also in the haunted house where she is somewhat enlightened, a revelation that is limited by the fatality of her situation: she cannot ‘run from a face [she does] not expect’ (1945a: 86). Her new perspective may seem limiting; but a limited point of view comes from a unique vantage point.

The paradoxical idea of limitations as potentially enlivening may be traced back to the Jewish philosopher Edith Stein, who was one of the few female members of the Göttingen Circle, writing contemporaneously with Martin Heidegger and her tutor Edmund Husserl. Stein saw woman as ‘finite’, someone who must ‘seek to know within the form and limits’ of her existence (1996: 73). One has to turn to her limitations in the world to understand herself even if ‘life itself has made existence

problematic' (45). Limitations are useful to the extent that they are recognised for a better understanding of one's situatedness in the world. Haraway puts it like this: 'partial perspective promises objective vision' (1997: 59). That Kathleen is able to apprehend the inescapability of oppression reveals her awareness of the limits of her circumstances. This attests to growth, to her awakened maturity as a result of the haunting, which eventually leads to de(con)struction of the self.

Edward Casey, in *Getting Back into Place*, states that place is 'at once the limit and the condition of all that exists' (1993: 15). Given that the home is the 'condition' of her being, the only way for the woman to break out of its limiting walls is an absolute destruction of the self. The constructiveness of such an extreme destabilising force is evident in another Bowen story, 'Pink May' (1945), where the unnamed female protagonist descends into a madness almost reminiscent of Gilman's narrator. She cries out, 'Let to oneself, one doesn't just ruin one's life!' (1945b: 160). In this instance, self-destruction is not masochistic; it is a necessary annihilation of a self that is not her own. In her essay, 'Professions for Women' (1942), Virginia Woolf wrote on the need to destroy:

I turned upon her and caught her by the throat. I did my best to kill her. My excuse, if I were to be had up in a court of law, would be that I acted in self-defence. Had I not killed her she would have killed me. (238)

'Her' refers to the Victorian ideal feminine archetype, the Angel in the House. Women must kill the self that is mirrored upon the Angel in the House whose 'shadow' and 'radiance' are omnipresent (238). As discussed earlier, Kathleen and Ethel are entrenched in dangerous beliefs—this firm rootedness makes it almost impossible for women to imagine other possibilities of feminine experience—thereby requiring extreme actions to end their habitual thinking and beliefs, including strangulation. Just as the Angel of the House is caught by the throat, Ethel, too, chokes to death. The violent ends of the female characters are testimonies of not only the extent of systemic patriarchal indoctrination, but also the unnaturalness and debilitating effects of feminine and domestic myths.

To be trapped within the haunted house forces one to confront beliefs and the engineering of beliefs that undergird the haunting. The sudden and spectral encounter provokes an aggressive but exorcistic awakening that expels past demons and beliefs, so that the women may be emptied of inherited beliefs and ready for new epistemic possibilities. Indeed, only the 'hollowness of the house' can cancel 'years of voices, habits and steps' (Bowen, 1945a: 85). Interestingly, the only remains of the women are their screams. Ethel's call for help, though unheard, is conveyed in her sister's 'shrieks' (Bowen, 1965: 217); Kathleen's screams go unheard as she disappears into the hinterland. The women are bonded by their 'inarticulate' screams which, according to Harriet Scott Chessman, is characteristic of Bowen who 'often hints at the larger silence all women share within culture' (1983: 71). In context of the stories, silence seems to be a result of systemic oppression, be it external or interiorised. The final image of Kathleen, 'Mrs. Drover's mouth hung open for some seconds before she could issue her first scream' (1945a: 87), is chilling but resounding, echoed in the shrieks of the only witness to Ethel Trevor's death.

Bowen's haunted houses dramatise the homemakers' limited perspectives and fateful situations. As Haraway tells us, gender is 'extreme localization' (1997: 63). The

women's demises are tragic; the lack of some form of transcendence is frustrating. Still, if we take emphasis away from the traumatic endings and focus instead on the recognition of beliefs, then the texts lend themselves to a potentially positive reading. To quote Bowen: 'Nothing can happen nowhere' (1986: 39). Put differently, as long as there is 'localization', be it the delimiting of boundaries or defining the problem of internalised misogyny, there is potential for transformation, a change in mind and possibility of action. There are no big moments of liberation, epiphanies, or gasping revelations in Bowen's ghost stories. If there are, they come too late. Still, what we do find in these stories is Bowen's unyielding commitment to presenting the world as it has been given to the women, as they themselves commit to it. This is a dogged and deadly commitment. In the preface to her 1959 short story collection, Bowen wrote that the short story 'allows for what is crazy about humanity', including 'obstinacies' and 'inordinate heroisms' (quoted in Austin, 1971: 94). The women may be obstinate, but they are also heroic. There might be a silver lining here: we may be haunted and awakened by these stories, self-exorcising the demons from our past and tradition, in similar ways to how the women have been haunted by patriarchal ghosts. Kathleen Drover may be trapped in a taxi driving to nowhere, but her heard scream reverberates. Ethel Trevor is dead, but her misfortune is still the talk of the town. The haunting continues after the haunted is gone.

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Layla Ferrández Melero ~ 'There Was Certainly Something in the Girl:' Sydney as a Sapphist Character in Elizabeth Bowen's *The Hotel*

The name of Elizabeth Bowen is often associated with certain literary traits and tropes. One can expect to find studies of her Anglo-Irishness and the value of national identity; of her deviation from the 'dominant (male) literary movements' (Hoogland, 1994: 106) that resulted in a non-Modernist style;¹ of the mannerisms and idiosyncrasies in her writing; of her use of the Gothic; or of her portrayal of wartime and post-war London. But we are less likely to find her name among studies on lesbian writing due to the inherent lesbophobia that has pervaded literary criticism, even feminist literary criticism, throughout the twentieth century.² Most scholars have approached the author's work from a traditional standpoint and, thus, have overlooked the underlying radicalism and sexual transgression which can be argued to be present throughout her fiction (Hoogland, 1994: 28). The relationships between Bowen's women protagonists have been analysed as an analogy of her own relationship with her mother, which brings to mind Freud's Oedipal complex and the concept of mother substitution.³ However, these readings assume a heterocentric conception of identity that misses the marginality and unconventionality that pervade her work. The ambiguity Bowen uses to talk about her women characters' sense of self, innermost feelings, and their wish to escape, should lead to a (re)interpretation of her work focusing on same-sex eroticism and desire, whether as part of the main plot or as a part of subplots. According to Jane Rule, Bowen presents lesbianism 'as an emotional need rather than a physical attraction' (1975: 115), and Renée Hoogland reflects that, even though lesbian sexuality is largely relegated to a secondary role, Bowen's use of displacement of identity and her 'critique of the intertwining systems of phallogocentrism and compulsory heterosexuality [...] invite a lesbian feminist reading' of her work (1994: 108). For her part, Patricia Juliana Smith posits that the use of lesbian plotlines in Bowen's work is

¹ Hoogland places her 'in the position of literary exile: off mainstream modernism, off Bloomsbury, off the Anglo-Irish tradition even' (1994: 301).

² For a discussion on the matter, see Renée Hoogland (1994) and Patricia Juliana Smith (1997).

³ The sexual confusion of her young protagonists has been traditionally associated with Bowen's trauma at losing her mother at the age of thirteen.

a manifestation of what she terms 'lesbian panic',⁴ that is, a literary device that authors employ as a way of masking a repressed lesbian desire. The 'lesbian panic' scenes become self-evident when the characters are overcome by 'the fear of the loss of identity and value as object of exchange, often combined with the fear of responsibility for one's own sexuality' (1997: 6). Such informed studies draw attention to a fundamental aspect of Bowen's work that has been neglected and provides yet another voice in the diverse LGBT community. To date, not much attention has been paid to Bowen's novels as lesbian texts;⁵ therefore, the analyses of identity formation of her women characters fail to elucidate the underlying sexual confusion that afflicts them. This essay does not argue that the same-sex encounters or longings, and the heterosexual relationships depicted in her novels, took place in the exact same way in Bowen's personal life, and they are not the focus of this analysis. As Zimmerman states, even though literary interpretation is 'supported by historical and biographical evidence [...] If a text lends itself to a lesbian reading, then no amount of biographical 'proof' ought to be necessary to establish it as a lesbian text' (1990: 185). That Bowen had relationships with women – which nonetheless probably influenced the portrayal of her characters' non-normativeness – is less relevant than the fact that her 'state of open susceptibility' (Bowen, 1962: 61) led her to write about lesbian desire and sexual ambivalence. Shari Benstock reflects on the tricky disguise many women writers adopted in their writing to avoid censorship, and states that '[t]o write as a lesbian was to make a commitment to lesbianism as an artist and as a political being. In order to make this commitment, one needed to be assured of one's sexual orientation and secure in one's poetic method' (1987: 334). Bowen did not use Sapphism openly – or rather explicitly – but explored same-sex desire on several levels and, moderate as she was, did not use it as a political stance to reject the constraints of the patriarchal system. Her characters question the dominant ideology, the imposition of a compulsory heterosexuality, and refuse to be reduced to mere objects of desire; moreover, they become the subjects and regain the agency that a restrictive society keeps dormant.

⁴ Smith defines 'lesbian panic' as 'the disruptive action or reaction that occurs when a character – or, conceivably, an author – is either unable or unwilling to confront or reveal her own lesbianism or lesbian desire' (1997: 2).

⁵ In *Lesbian Images* (1975), Jane Rule dedicates one of the chapters to Bowen and proposes a connection between her life and the exploration of lesbian desire in her works, remarking that, after her husband's death, Bowen 'returned to a concern for relationships between women' (115). In *Lesbian Panic: Homoeroticism in Modern British Women's Fiction* (1997), Patricia Juliana Smith offers a detailed, historically-based explanation for the lessening of lesbian plots and subplots in Bowen's work from the 1930s to the 1950s following the obscenity trial of Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* in 1928, which imbued the literary world with an aura of suspicion, mistrust, and disapproval. As she informs, Bowen's return to the subject matter in the last years of her career was possible due to the 'permissive social attitudes of this decade' (102). For her part, in *Elizabeth Bowen: A Reputation in Writing* (1994), Renée C. Hoogland offers a detailed post-structuralist commentary on Bowen's work and links 'the stylistic aspects of her work to a radically subversive desire' (301). Patricia Coughlan dedicates a chapter to desire in Bowen's work and the sexual ambivalence of her characters (in *Sex, Nation, and Dissent in Irish Writing*, 1997). Neil Corcoran considers briefly the sexuality of the protagonist of *The Last September*, Lois, and her attraction to Marda (*Elizabeth Bowen: The Enforced Return*, 2008), but does not go deeply into the matter. In *Elizabeth Bowen: The Shadow Across the Page* (2003), Maud Ellman carries out a thorough study of the ambivalent identities of Bowen's characters, and considers that, 'in spite of innuendos of lesbian desire, outing the heroine is not the point, for Bowen is more concerned with number than with gender' (2003, 70). Bowen is included in Jeanette Foster's exhaustive research on writers who explored relationships between women (*Sex Variant Women in Literature*, 1975).

Her first novel, *The Hotel* (1927), although heavily influenced by a number of works (E. M. Forster's *A Room with a View*, Virginia Woolf's *The Voyage Out*, or Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady*), contains the very essence of Bowen's narrative methods. This is the novel where her first heroine appears, and from which her subsequent protagonists seem to emanate, as all of them share the same feeling of being uprooted and have an unstable sense of self. As Patricia Coughlan (1997) accurately points out, Bowen had already started exploring different manifestations of women's sense of themselves in her two previous short story books, *Encounters* (1923) and *Ann Lee's* (1926), by means of portraying women characters who long for an independent life away from the social role that subjugates them.⁶ However, whereas the short story 'revolves around one crisis only' (Bowen, 1962: 178) and, therefore, the characters involved in that crisis exist around that happening, in the novel the succession of crises allows the characters to develop their inner landscapes, from different points of view depending on the moment or event. In Bowen's own words, the short story cannot be used 'for the analysis or development of character. The full, full-length portrait is fitter work for the novelist' (1962: 179).

The major theme and the central point of the plot of *The Hotel* is the coming of age and self-discovery of Sydney Warren, a young, educated woman who goes abroad to take a break from her studies, and becomes infatuated with an older woman, Mrs Kerr.⁸ Eventually, Sydney gets engaged, but breaks the commitment off once she realises there is no point in living against her own grain to please social expectations. This article, therefore, analyses the identity formation of Sydney and her development as a sapphist character, based on Bowen's own conception of the writing process.

In her essay 'The Roving Eye' (1962), Bowen ponders the creative process of writing and its inherent decision-making. She argues that 'writers do not find subjects: subjects find them. There is not so much a search as a state of open susceptibility' (1962: 61). That is, the relationship between author and subject matter transcends thought and reason and becomes an obsession. There is no premeditation, but a compelling subconscious motivation rooted in 'background, origin, circumstance, the events of life' (1962: 62). This determines a predisposition that is noticeable in Bowen's work in her depiction of women characters with (sexual) identity confusion, a sense of detachment, and who are unconventional members of a certain social order. This goes hand-in-hand with her contemplation of her characters, who are not 'created' but 'pre-exist. They are *found*. They reveal themselves slowly to the novelist's perception' and she adds that '[t]he ideal way of presenting character is to invite perception' (1987: 37). But perception is subjective and, thus, it is prone to being unconsciously affected by one's own experience of the world and inner self. To

⁶ For example, in 'The Return,' Lydia, the housemaid, wishes to free herself from the life relegated to women in her profession; in 'Coming Home,' the mother is depicted as absent and remote without any implication that she is a bad mother, just having a life of her own; in 'Joining Charles,' we find an unhappy married woman who struggles between what she wants as a woman and what she has to do as a wife; in 'All Saints,' Mrs Barrows talks cryptically about her unreligious and very unconventional friends, and her depressive state of mind after a dear friend and she had parted; in 'Mrs Windermere' and 'The Jungle,' Bowen presents sensuality and complicity between women by means of looks, gestures, and touch.

⁷ Page numbers for *The Hotel* will be given in parenthetical references.

⁸ The relationship between Sydney and Mrs Kerr is considered ground-breaking in Bowen's work, for it 'set the pattern for many of her ensuing fictions – the passionate involvement of a young girl with an older woman' (Hoogland, 1994: 302).

see Bowen's characters is to let oneself be directed by the character itself and not by the author's intention. In *The Hotel*, for instance, the most common interpretation of Sydney's desire stems from a compulsion to read Bowen's childhood trauma in the protagonist, as though that were the only possible way for Bowen to present such an ambivalent character. There seems to be no space for Sydney to have feelings, other than those related to filial love, even though the reader lacks information about Sydney's family background: '[t]he association of a mother-figure with the sense of a permanent place in which to grow prefigures Bowen's later fiction while recalling her experience of transience with her mother and the loss of her' (Lassner, 1990: 12-13). This commonly accepted view of the bonds between young and older women contrasts with Bowen's rejection of autobiography in her work and misjudges the characters' desirability. One could argue that to establish such a pattern in the relationships between women in her work is to deprive her characters of their appeal.

According to Bowen, '[t]he character must do to the reader what he has done to the novelist – magnetize towards himself perceptions, sense-impressions, desires' (1987: 39). In *The Hotel*, Bowen confers this magnetism on Sydney and Mrs Kerr on different levels and distinguishes two types of character: the *seeing* class and the *seen* class (1987). Whereas Sydney belongs to the former and is central to the plot, with not only her point of view provided but also Sydney herself – her identity, her sense of self, her desire – as a subject matter, Mrs Kerr belongs to the latter, to the class of characters that 'gain importance and magnetism by being only seen: this makes them more romantic, fatal-seeming, sinister' (1987: 43). Mrs Kerr's role as a subject to be seen is determined by Sydney, whose standpoint – and idealisation of Mrs Kerr – is palpable throughout the novel.

Bowen exhibits a strong resistance to predefined conceptions of the individual, and identity is presented as something liminal, deconstructed, and in permanent development. In her work, the women characters face the repercussions of divergence, no matter what their family status is: single, widowed, mothers, and, as a counterpart, those who do not have children, all respond to society by rebelling against the norm. Bowen always posited the idea that the answers to everything are in the past. As she reflects in the introduction to *Seven Winters and Afterthoughts*, '[t]hrough most fiction is to be traced the thread of the author's own experiences, no doubt. But the early years of childhood contain most others: as we now know they are in part the cause of, in part the key to, what is to follow. No years, subsequently, are so acute' (1962: vii). The happenings she relates in *Seven Winters* are defined as 'the external world as I first saw it' (1962: vii) and by means of these sort of non-fiction 'short stories' – or 'disjuncted snapshots' (Bowen, 1987: 99) – of her own life, she gives the reader access to her unconsciousness. She presents the workings of the mind of a child, which serve as the basis for her future as an adolescent, a time of life in which one comes to face an interior world for the first time.

The adolescent is of great importance throughout Bowen's novels. She returns again and again to the figure of the young woman to explore the turning point in life when childhood comes to an end and gives way to a process that will culminate in full development and maturity. Hoogland remarks that, from the nineteenth century onwards, adolescence has been perceived as 'the most critical stage in identity formation' (1994: 42). As an in-between stage, 'adolescence represents a period of intense anxiety, sexual confusion, and an often-daunting sense of nonexistence' (1994: 43) which is a very accurate definition of Bowen's young adults, whose

detachment – from life, from people, from themselves – is not only present in the narrative but felt deeply by the reader. Julia Kristeva provides a psychoanalytical insight and considers ‘the term ‘adolescent’ less an age category than an open psychic structure’ (2012: 8). According to her, this mythic figure maintains ‘a renewable identity through interaction with another,’ and the adolescent structure ‘opens itself to the repressed at the same time that it initiates a psychic reorganization of the individual’ (2012: 8). This reading offers an ambivalent understanding of identity, and the psychic structure reveals the characters’ fluctuating sense of self, as well as the author’s; that is, the writer uses the adolescent to ‘filter personal fantasies,’ which can be projected onto writing as ‘a genuine inscription of unconscious contents’ (2012: 9). Bowen’s adolescents, especially in her first two novels, *The Hotel* and *The Last September* (1929), find themselves in the middle of a journey of self-discovery: they feel trapped in their own bodies and minds and restrained by the duality – the need to become a man or a woman – imposed by social conventions. The body and mind as cage is wonderfully conceived by Luce Irigaray in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, where she suggests a ‘change in our perception and conception of space-time, the inhabiting of places, and of containers, or envelopes of identity’ (2004: 9). These envelopes of identity are limited and limiting spaces, and the image of a container brings to mind Bowen’s appreciation of the writings of the previous generation: she defined Austen’s works as ‘life with the lid on’ (Bowen, 1947: 25) as though keeping the reader at the threshold. While she praises Austen for her ability to make ‘life with the lid on’ interesting enough as a flawless writer, Bowen herself tears off these envelopes of identity, showing what happens when you take the lid off with magnificent results.

The use of adolescents or young women in Bowen’s fiction is necessary in order to pinpoint, on the one hand, the perplexity felt by women at their realization of how patriarchy, from a power position, commands their lives; and, on the other, their rebellion against subordination. An adolescent is expected to assume a heterosexual gender identity (Hoogland, 2004: 43) as the norm stipulates, and anything outside the convention is ostracised. De Lauretis’s conception of gender is pertinent as, in her debut, Bowen presents a protagonist who understands how the ‘sex-gender system’ manipulates the acquisition of a prescribed identity.⁹ Sydney’s struggle is determined by the understanding that, in order to have a place in society, she has to comply with the dominant discourse and embody a *gendered* – constructed – identity. For this purpose, Bowen displays the ebb and flow of the process of identity creation – both the construction and the deconstruction of a given gender – and the trouble it creates for the women characters. They are learning about themselves and about the mechanisms of society; they are shaping their personalities, but they lack a language to express how they feel: without language, they cannot build their true sense of self and, therefore, they are forced to remain silent. As Smith notes, ‘lesbianism frequently lacks a name, much less an acknowledged or acceptable identity’ (1997: 6), which accounts for the inability of the characters – and the author – to talk about it. Nevertheless, this speechlessness or stillness of words is not meant to go unnoticed, as Bennett and Royle suggest in their analysis of silence in *The Heat of the Day*: ‘silence is never at rest, least of all if we are being invited to think about it

⁹ To obtain a position in the social order, one has to submit to the given ‘sex-gender system’ – and, therefore, assume the ‘meaning effects’ ascribed to the conceptions of male and female – that ‘assigns meaning (identity, value, prestige, location in kinship, status in the social hierarchy, etc.) to individuals within the society’ (De Lauretis, 1987: 5).

as enormously meaningful' (1995: 85), which is inextricably linked with 'the unspoken and unspeakable' (1995: 95).

It is not surprising that lettered people like Bowen, regardless of their sexual preference, pondered on homosexuality at the time, when writings and studies about same-sex desire proliferated.¹⁰ According to Freud, '[h]omosexual enthusiasms, exaggeratedly strong friendships tinged with sensuality, are common enough in both sexes during the first years after puberty' (1990: 263). He believed that homosexuality in adolescence was a necessary, or at least inevitable, stage of development needed to reach psychosexual normalcy, meaning heterosexuality (Hoogland, 1994: 44). The bisexual functions of human beings that he defended, understood as the combination of male and female characteristics in a person, also led subjects to the realization of their eventual heterosexuality. In his study 'The psychogenesis of a case of female homosexuality', he acknowledges that it is a case of 'congenital homosexuality' (1990: 264), although he also concludes that the same-sex desire in his patient is triggered by a revival of the Oedipal complex, and admits the social component of homophobia and its rejection: '[i]f [the patient] comes to be treated at all, it is mostly through the pressure of external motives, such as the social disadvantages and dangers attaching to his choice of object' (1990: 246). In her essay about lesbianism and neurosis, Black shows that the assumptions made by sexologists such as Bergler, who thought that 'happiness and lesbians were mutually exclusive' and lesbians 'unconsciously want to be disappointed' (quoted in Black, 1994: 203), led women to believe they were 'trapped in roles that confused love and pain' (ibid). Whether or not Bowen was aware of this theory can only be presumed, but the idea is present in *The Hotel*. According to Mrs Kerr, Sydney is 'so out to suffer' (69), and Milton attributes her 'queer appetite for pain' (156) to analogous comments (from the closest people to Sydney at the Hotel) that point to some sort of shared knowledge. These insights parallel Sydney's apprehension: 'I am not [happy], in any way, and I don't want to be' (79-80).

The work of German psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing¹¹ is especially relevant for an analysis of *The Hotel* since Tessa, Sydney's cousin, refers to a doctor at Baden (where Krafft-Ebing was born) in the context of a conversation with the 'habitués of the drawing-room' (54), also called the 'matronhood' of the Hotel (53), about Sydney's affections towards Mrs Kerr. This group of women, middle-aged and elderly ladies, married and widowed, whose reunions are rather exclusive, represents the Victorian values that the younger generation tries to distance itself from. In their conversation, they define 'other cases' of similar relationships between women as 'very violent friendships' and persuade Tessa to discourage Sydney 'from a friendship

¹⁰ Allida M. Black (1994) provides a useful insight into the different theories held by sexologists, psychoanalysts, and physicians such as George Beard, Sigmund Freud, Edward Carpenter, and Havelock Ellis, among others, which had a great impact on lesbians during the twentieth century.

¹¹ Bowen refers to the work of 'Krafft-Ebing, Freud, Forel, Weiniger [sic] and the heterosexual volume of Havelock Ellis' (1982: 366) in the short story 'The Cat Jumps,' published in 1934. The story satirises the crisis among a party of friends who are staying in the house where Rose Hills was killed by her husband. Krafft-Ebing's work is mentioned in relation to his idea of sadomasochism and its association with violence, murder being one of its manifestations. By pinpointing the 'heterosexual volume' of Ellis, the author distances the psychoanalytical background of her story from homosexuality, even though Muriel's rejection of men is reminiscent of Freud's premise about homosexuality in women being a result of hatred of men.

with an older woman' (60). Their talk gets more and more personal until they touch on a taboo subject:

'One wonders, indeed, why some types of women ever come out here.'
'Mrs Kerr? Oh, do you think –?'
'Mmm-mmm.'
'But she may believe in the sun,' said Tessa; 'many people believe in the sun. Of course it's always been known of, but quite recently a doctor at Baden –'
(61).

As Bowen remarks in her 'Notes on Writing,' what characters '*intend* to say should be more evident, more striking (because of its greater inner importance to the plot) than what they arrive at *saying*' (1987: 42), which suggests that silences, ellipses, even interruptions, provide the reader with information as significant and pertinent as words. This 'doctor at Baden', Krafft-Ebing, wrote *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886), one of the first texts about sexual pathologies that, by the beginning of the twentieth century, had become quite well-known through the work of Havelock Ellis in Britain (Bauer, 2003: 24), in which Krafft-Ebing acknowledges 'numerous sexual behaviours and sexual practices [...] to be 'natural variations' of the same phenomenon' (ibid). That is, he made popular the idea that homosexuality was not a vice, as it was thought to be at the time, but something innate and, therefore, natural. Nevertheless, the fact that these sexologists and psychologists claimed that homosexuality was congenital did not lead to wider acceptance.¹² This is exactly what the secrecy and abashment in the conversation in the drawing-room imply: the women know same-sex relationships exist, but they do not approve of them. The fact that Tessa, a supporting character described as a childless wife (perpetrating her purpose in life and position in society as a bearer), knows about the work of Krafft-Ebing is unlikely and evinces Bowen's 'lesbian panic' by dodging the question and relegating the matter to secondary characters' subplots.

These psychoanalytical theories might have influenced Bowen's perception of sexuality more widely as something unstable and uncertain. She defies the institution of patriarchy in various ways through unconventional women characters, and confronts the social constructs of femininity and masculinity by bestowing physical and nonphysical features on her characters, regardless of their gender. To epitomise her hesitation as to the social definitions of gender, in *The House in Paris* (1935) the protagonist wonders: '[s]he and I belong to the same sex, even, because there are only two sexes: there should be more. Meeting people unlike oneself does not enlarge one's outlook; it only confirms one's idea that one is unique' (Bowen, 1998a: 90). The quotation illustrates Bowen's detachment from the norm and reveals the essence of her characters' unsuitability in society. This is a plain rejection of the mechanisms of society and a challenge to binary discourse. If lack of words (discourse) hinders construction of a meaningful identity, the solution is to accept the available discourse, that is, the sex-gender system, and give in, or become a pariah. The concept of uniqueness, as it is used by Bowen, reinforces the ambivalence of her characters' identity and, unconsciously, her own. Her characters struggle as they

¹² While the biological stance exempted lesbians from culpability, as they could not help it, the fact that it was inborn did not legitimate their relationships and they 'defended only those lesbians who refused to act out their emotional and sexual desires' (Black, 1994: 204). This led to feelings of self-hatred and to an internalised homophobia that was thought to be 'the cause rather than the result of social disapproval' (Black, 1994: 212).

realise they do not fulfil the requirements of society and, vice versa, that society does not suit them, and waver about embodying an identity or creating one of their own, which might attract social disapproval. Bowen considered that her relation to society as a writer did not exist, since writers are 'solitary and farouche people' who 'don't have relationships: they are quite unrelatable' (1987: 223). She admitted feeling uncomfortable when asked about the nature of her relation to society as she did not contemplate its existence: '[m]y writing, I am prepared to think, may be a substitute for something I have been born without – a so-called normal relation to society. My books *are* my relation to society' (1987: 223). Bowen's dismissal of the prevailing dualism echoes what Simone de Beauvoir would develop in *The Second Sex*, and what Judith Butler applied to gender and its performativity. In *The Last September*, Bowen posits the idea that her characters 'have to play at being a woman' (Bowen, 1998b: 50), which anticipates de Beauvoir's and Butler's ideas about the sociocultural construction of gender. This is an almost contemporary vision of the fluidity of gender and a challenge to the established dichotomies of man/woman, male/female, masculinity/femininity, and heterosexual/homosexual.

In Bowen's narrative, performativity becomes a meaningful resource that can be considered one of the hallmarks of her writing. The theatrical quality of her characters at the Hotel is condensed in one of Sydney's realizations of gender roles when picturing a hotel stripped of its façade: '[i]magine [...] all the people surprised doing appropriate things in appropriate attitudes as though they had been put there to represent something and had never moved in their lives' (79). The immobility in this image of a hotel and the people in it, resembling actors waiting for the curtain to rise, is related to Sydney's defiance of the status quo. Her bewilderment about her self rests upon her understanding of the sex-gender system because she does not recognise her place in the social strata. The use of the past perfect tense in the following quotation is, in itself, a statement about Sydney's changing perception of patriarchal hierarchy:

Like the cook-doll that I always had propped up against the kitchen stove and the father-doll propped against the library book-shelves and the sitting-up doll in the bath that was really a china ornament and had no other attitude, and the limp dolls that wouldn't do anything so had to be kept in the spare-room beds, which I always think was an unconscious reflection on the ideal habits for visitors (79).

If the cook-doll, the father-doll, and the sitting-up doll are a child's representation of her normative family, Sydney has identified, until that moment, with the sitting-up doll that 'had no other attitude' but to remain still; and the visitors, as hotel guests, are identified with limp dolls that 'wouldn't do anything' either. The concept of immobility that Bennett and Royle discuss as a narrative oxymoron (the importance of abeyance for the linear mobility of the story) in their analysis of *The Hotel* is inherently intertwined with the women characters' sense of being and, in particular, with the protagonist's identity derangement in the novel. The 'interior quietness' they ascribe to Sydney, which contrasts with the 'interior mobilities of thought' they ascribe to the novel (1995: 6), exists because of her (sexual) disorientation.¹³

¹³ The episodes of stillness, depersonalization, or catatonic state are experienced by women characters in the novel, which creates a pattern and reinforces the connection between abeyance (thought) and diversion (identity): Sydney experiences moments of disembodiment and questions gender roles when

The parallelism of dolls and people is especially relevant because Bowen uses the motif of the doll's house in other novels as well. The dwellers, inanimate, at a standstill, are (dis)located by another actor who compels them to carry out a given performance. Sometimes this force is tangible, and it takes the form of a matron (e.g., Mrs Kerr in *The Hotel*, Lady Summers in *To the North*, or Madame Fisher in *The House in Paris*); for others, it is an abstract influence exerted by social conventions. The Hotel is 'a place where there was nothing to look at and no one to visit and nowhere to go' (71), isolated and isolating; and yet, in a very 'Austenian' style, Bowen turns the trivial into something interesting, so that the Hotel, that 'little world of suspended activity' (165), becomes the perfect setting for the action.

The structure of the novel follows a balanced two halves format, and Bowen adheres to her conception of how action should be developed: '[i]n the first half of a novel, the unpredictability should be the more striking. In the second half, the inevitability should be the more striking' (1987: 38). This sheds some light on the progress of Sydney and Mrs Kerr's relationship. At the beginning, it is surprising to find a young woman feeling self-aware around a middle-aged widow. Sydney's infatuation becomes more and more noticeable until it reaches a point of no return at the end of the first half. In the second part, the inevitable takes place and Sydney's world falls apart after Mrs Kerr's rejection: this prompts Sydney's engagement and the final moment of truth (provoked by a car accident) that enlightens Sydney and drives her to break off the commitment and leave the Hotel on her own. Bowen conceives two 'romantic friendships': an optimistic portrait of two middle-aged women, Miss Pym and Miss Fitzgerald, and the obsessive attraction of Sydney towards Mrs Kerr. These women epitomise the modern rebellion that predicted a future outside marriage, even though it meant social rejection and isolation.

The novel opens with a quarrel between Miss Pym and Miss Fitzgerald that Bowen presents as one between lovers. The references to the vicissitudes of their relationship make the romantic involvement between the two women clear. The quarrel, which had ended 'with such bitterness of finality' (7), is described as the result of an 'isolating doubt' that left them both with a feeling 'worse than a sense of destruction: they had felt the whole force of a doubt in that moment: had there never been *anything* there?' (10). Right after the quarrel, in an attempt to make Miss Fitzgerald jealous, Miss Pym accompanies Mrs Kerr to the courts, and wonders 'whether their two names [...] might not, henceforward, begin to be coupled' (9).¹⁴ In this situation, Miss Pym feels the need to tell Mrs Kerr everything about the quarrel but lacks the words to address the matter. Throughout the novel, Miss Pym and Miss Fitzgerald appear 'ravaged by emotion' (25), affected by their quarrel, that Moment (Bowen's upper case), that flare. They are presented as 'half of a duality' (118) and the presence of one seems inevitably linked to the other. The final scene of the book resembles the beginning: both women walking away from the Hotel, this time together, 'shoulder to shoulder they sat and looked down on it. Hand in hand,

immersed in her unconsciousness; Miss Fitzgerald falls into a state of shock after the opening quarrel with Miss Pym and hardly articulates a word; Mrs Kerr usually stares at Sydney (and elsewhere) absorbed as 'from some profound reverie' (69); Mrs Lee-Mittison fantasises, 'in her little oasis of solitude' (42), about a *villino* away from her husband.

¹⁴ According to Ellman, Bowen conceives couples in threes (or more) 'to create a circuit of desire' (2003: 72). In this sense, Miss Pym would wish to be seen with Mrs Kerr to awake Miss Fitzgerald's lost passion after the quarrel.

reunited, in perfect security' and remembering that first day 'when we – so nearly lost one another' (199).

Sydney is sent abroad with her cousin Tessa because, after passing some examinations, her family think that Sydney 'was on the verge of a breakdown' (20). However, the breakdown seems to be an excuse, since the trip 'had appeared an inspired solution for the Sydney problem' (20). This problem is related to the cause of her reputation at the hotel: her queerness. The solution is to get her to 'a pleasant social round' where she could 'get engaged' (20), and a 'forty, married, motherly' woman with no children was 'the ideal companion for anybody inclined to be neurotic' (21). The reference to neurosis reinforces the emotional unpredictability and undetermined sexual identity of Sydney, and mirrors the connection between homosexuality and female neurosis that prevailed at the turn of the century.¹⁵ Sydney does not contemplate any prospect of engagement, as she spends most of her time with Mrs Kerr and does not care for the social life of the hotel. She questions herself and the world around her, in search of answers, and her doubts feel like a burden that makes her aware of her own strangeness. She is scrutinised by her family, by the guests at the Hotel, by her suitor, and by herself – '[s]he frowned at her own reflection: Was this what all these people really saw when they looked at her? [...] did *they* also think as they looked at oneself?' (21). Her introspections alter her sense of self and sometimes she 'let herself fall back on an outside consciousness' in order to contemplate the scene from a distance as 'if she were someone else' (131). These disembodiments allow Sydney to experience the alternative reality she longs for, to watch the life she cannot have without being watched, to feel safe 'in her own society' (48), which only exists in her imagination, and to acquire a sense of belonging. Her solitude and voluntary isolation trigger episodes of derealisation, and she becomes so absorbed in her unconsciousness that, in order to come back, she needs to make sure she is still there: 'she stared at her hands, at her body, at the hills round her' (180).

Bowen uses Sydney's 'most ordinary, popular of her aspects' (17), her ability to play tennis, as a device to show Sydney's sensitivity to Mrs Kerr. Bowen evinces Sydney's uneasiness around her through the way that Mrs Kerr's presence, or rather her attention, distresses and stupefies Sydney – 'a fine player subject to this deplorable kind of paralysis' (15). Sydney's feelings about and dependence on Mrs Kerr disrupt her sense of being and make her question her own existence:

If she did not exist for Mrs Kerr as a tennis player [...] had she reason to feel she existed at all? It became no longer a question of – What did Mrs Kerr think of her? –but rather – Did Mrs Kerr ever think of her? The possibility of not being kept in mind seemed to Sydney at that moment a kind of extinction (17).

This existentialist approach represents the vehemence of first love, the irrationality that accompanies the intensity of youthful emotions. In contrast to this open display of feelings, Bowen uses more temperate and gentle language when presenting Mrs Kerr's fondness: after finding Sydney in the tennis court, '[h]er eyes rested in passivity, as after a homecoming' (12). Whereas Bowen allows Sydney to express most of her feelings by means of dialogue and, apparently, her own thoughts as told

¹⁵ See Black (1994).

by the narrator, the author seems more reticent about allowing Mrs Kerr the same display of emotions, which reinforces her quality of being a *seen* character.

As a resource to provide Sydney's point of view as a *seeing* character, the senses are addressed in a conspicuous manner, and gazes and touch are charged with meaning and desire. Sydney finds the safest way to approach Mrs Kerr and takes pleasure in watching longingly: 'from where they sat, without being too much observed, Sydney was able to watch' Mrs Kerr's table (21). She waits for Mrs Kerr's entrance in the dining room and fixes her eyes on the doorway which, without Mrs Kerr, 'still framed emptiness' (24). Bowen conveys the importance of the minimal physical contact her protagonists have with one another, and often describes the slightest touch which, otherwise, would go unnoticed. The demonstrations of affection always take place when both women find themselves away from the public eye and remain at a 'moral' level; that is, they never exceed the limits of what is socially acceptable between women of the time. The scene of the kiss, in which Mrs Kerr 'with an unprecedented movement held up [Sydney's] face to be kissed' (67), has special significance because it can be compared to the kiss between Milton and Sydney at the moment of their engagement: on the one hand, whereas Mrs Kerr is the agent of the action ('held up [Sydney's] face'), it is Sydney's desire that commands the action ('to be kissed'); on the other hand, Milton, after being told by Sydney that she does not love him but will marry him, is granted the right to kiss her, as a lover, when he asks for permission with his imploring eyes (141).

Everybody at the Hotel is aware of the special friendship between Sydney and Mrs Kerr. They also see the women as unconventional: 'the conventions don't seem to fit you', Sydney tells Mrs Kerr (72); and Mrs Kerr responds: 'I've never professed that anything could transcend the conventions; you have' (132). Their unusual conduct startles the other guests who, lacking the words to refer to their relationship, cannot define their impressions either: whereas Tessa 'had always known that there was something *in* Mrs Kerr' (176), other guests feel the same way towards Sydney: 'There was a certain dark aloofness [...] she was curiously dammed up; there was certainly something *in* the girl' (16). However, when their lives seem to meet the requirements of society (Mrs Kerr's son's visit and Sydney's engagement), all of a sudden, they are more accepted and well regarded.

The appearance of Ronald prompts a 'jealous rivalry' (Smith, 1997: 76) on Sydney's part and makes her feel substituted, as Mrs Kerr's attention, driven by guilt, is drawn to her neglected son. His presence perturbs the protagonist, whose world is falling apart, and pushes her to the only person who can assure her a better position in the social order. According to Smith, Sydney's decision to marry Milton is 'a form of lesbian panic' (1997: 76) derived from the scene in which Mrs Kerr suggests a possible marriage between Sydney and Ronald in a 'design for a homoerotic family grouping' (1997: 77), giving way to a love triangle. For her part, Ellman observes a quadrangle instead for, as a consequence of Ronald's arrival, 'Sydney has to go hunting for a fourth to avenge herself against the second for favouring the third' (Ellman, 2003: 70). However, Sydney keeps questioning the compulsory heterosexuality and the institution of marriage: '[i]t seemed odder than ever to Sydney, eyeing these couples, that men and women should be expected to pair off for life' (22). She wonders whether she, as a woman, will experience what people expect of her. At some point, she sees Veronica and Victor kissing and the situation makes her aware of her total detachment from society:

Then she wondered by what roads now unknown to her she might arrive at this: to be seen swinging back against a man's shoulder in that abandon of Veronica's. She wondered whether at such a moment she would be cut off from herself, as by her other emotions (49).

The lovers' kiss makes Sydney reflect on expectations and she expresses her doubts to Mrs Kerr in a small demonstration of her feelings: 'you and I are supposed to assume, or to seem everywhere to assume, that that man down in the garden could be more to either of us than the other' (69). Milton's proposal makes Sydney look back on her life and realise that

living as she had lived she had been investing the future with more and more of herself. The present, always slipping away, was ghostly, every moment spent itself in apprehension of the next, and these apprehensions, these faded expectancies cumbered her memory, crowded out her achievements and promised to make the past barren enough should she have to turn back to it (99).

Once Milton has expressed his feelings, Sydney, for the first time, feels desired and broods over 'a life shared with someone for whom it would have this overtone of significance. And to be wanted!' (100).

There are two key moments in the novel that set Sydney in motion: Mrs Kerr's rejection, and the car accident. Bowen tends to provide the most personal information about her characters by means of dialogue, action, and reactions, as opposed to descriptions of feelings by the omniscient narrator, so that the reader draws conclusions. The dialogues in *The Hotel* are particularly valuable in terms of delimiting the characters' intentions for, as the author remarked, 'Dialogue is the ideal means of showing what is between the characters. It crystallizes relationships' (Bowen, 1987: 41). Mrs Kerr's rejection comes unannounced: one morning, she just decides to tell Sydney how guilty she feels for taking too much from her without a thought about what Sydney would expect to have back:

'[...] You see, I'm fond of you, but –'

'But?'

'Well, simply but! I mean, there is nothing else there [...] I think moderation is everything – but perhaps I am cold...' (133-134).

After this unprecedented disclosure, Mrs Kerr 'laid a hand on Sydney's sleeve in her anxiety to be directed' (134), but Sydney is paralysed by the shock and 'could not command the few words, the few movements which should take her away from Mrs Kerr, or imagine where, having escaped, she would find a mood, room, place, even country, to offer her sanctuary' (135). Sydney feels the unreality of the moment: '[s]he could see her life very plainly, but there seemed no way into it [...] She thought, 'So there is really nothing to go back to'' (135). This scene erases any sense of belonging she may have had and makes her run to Milton to accept his proposal. He defines their future marriage as 'a way out for us both – can't you see it so? – a way out of ourselves' (172) and Sydney's detachment from her self and her emotions reaches a turning point when, at the moment of the car accident, she realises that she has no command over her life – which Bennett and Royle denominate as a 'somnambulistic existence' (1995: 5) – and that it is time to take control of it:

She stood between Tessa and Mrs Kerr as inanimate and objective as a young girl in a story told by a man, incapable of a thought or a feeling that was not attributed to her, with no personality of her own outside their three projections upon her: Milton's fiancée, Tessa's young cousin, Mrs Kerr's protégée, lately her friend (178).

The car accident provokes 'the shock of being alive' (181) in her that sets a precedent to break off her engagement and causes a revealing dream in which she '[climbed] up the endless road again, corner by corner, to an empty house at the top' (184). If the accident brings her back to life, the dream brings her back from denial and to her truest self, even though that means solitude. As a metaphor for Sydney's maturity, Bowen uses the image of the river that runs by the Hotel, which 'had once been expansive and impetuous [...] was young no longer; it had made an end of its variations and detours and had worn away for itself a very deep channel down which it flowed swiftly, and with a sinister effect of purpose; steel-smooth, impenetrable' (158).

At the end of the novel, Bowen takes the reader into Mrs Kerr's room to witness the farewell before Sydney leaves the Hotel. Mrs Kerr and Ronald are having a conversation about loneliness, and she concedes that no one has ever loved her, to which Ronald, pointing out that Sydney does, replies that she is not fair to herself. When Sydney enters the scene, having regained her agency, Mrs Kerr notes that Sydney looks older: 'you certainly have developed. I suppose there is nothing like buying experience that somebody else pays for' (191). Even though this person Mrs Kerr refers to is likely to be Milton, by the end of the scene it is unclear whether or not Mrs Kerr might have been referring to herself. Sydney then speaks some affectionate words to her, but Mrs Kerr's reaction is to remind her that Roland is listening. Their farewell resembles the scene in which Mrs Kerr is introduced in the first chapter: In the same apathetic tone of voice, she calls Sydney, but this time Sydney is not coming back: "'Well, *Sydney* – what have I done?" Sydney did pause on the threshold and look back uncertainly, Mrs Kerr held out a hand; then she turned again and went out' (192), leaving behind the voice of Mrs Kerr repeating her name. The ellipses in the dialogue of the whole scene seem to be what Bowen defined as the 'rejected alternatives [that give] action interest' (1987: 38). According to her, either 'calculation, or involuntary self-revelation' (1987: 42) must be present in a character's words, which '*should*, ideally, so be effective as to make analysis or explanation of the relationships between the characters unnecessary' (1987: 41).

Bowen's treatment of adolescence as a site of rebellion allows her to take advantage of a young adult character's potential to portray the author's own rejection of the norm through a person who is coming to terms with the world and, as such, dares to express her emotions without thinking too much about other people's opinions. Sydney's concern about social acceptance makes her hesitate and swing between living according to social expectations and leading a fulfilled life. At the end, her (dis)satisfaction and inner conflicts prove to be necessary for her development as character who accepts her lesbianism and learns that the real regret is living against oneself because 'it's no use trying not to offend people' (80). Bowen reflects on a reality which nonetheless is a product of her imagination, and she masterfully exposes 'The overlapping and haunting of life by fiction' (Bowen, 1987: 48). By choosing these figures of sexual ambiguity, Bowen is, in Kristeva's appreciation of the adolescent novelist, 'interrogating [her]self on the role of the imaginary' (2012: 8).

Her magnetic *dramatis personae* try to construct and deconstruct their identity through various performances. Bowen, just like her characters who cease to inhabit their bodies and become spectators of their own lives, detaches herself from reality and invites the reader to engage in the 'layers of synthetic experience' (Bowen, 1987: 48) that live in her unconsciousness. Finally, Bowen's conception of her next book as the medium to further develop her obsessions is more than pertinent: 'What has been meant, but not yet properly said, still remains to be said' (Bowen, 2010: 85).

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## Nicola Darwood and Nick Turner ~ Conference Report

### **Elizabeth Bowen: Blurring Boundaries, 8<sup>th</sup> June 2019, University of Bedfordshire**

Following on from the success of the 2017 Elizabeth Bowen conference at the University of Bedfordshire, we decided that there was sufficient interest in Elizabeth Bowen to organise a second conference. The weekend started on the Friday evening when a number of speakers, panel chairs and friends met for an informal meal, an event which really helped to break the ice for the conference the following day.

Patricia Laurence (The City University of New York) started off the day with her paper "The Difficulty of Saying 'I': Elizabeth Bowen's Fluid Selves", as she explored Bowen's notions of autobiography and biography. The second paper in this panel was given by Diana Hirst (Canterbury Christ Church University), who explored the connections between art and Bowen's fiction in her paper, "I do write, I think, from the eye": verbal painting in Elizabeth Bowen's *Friends and Relations* (1931). In the final paper of this panel, Nuwayyi Mutlack Alsubaie (University of Sussex) discussed the blurring of boundaries in syntax and between the living and the dead in *The Heat of the Day*, in her paper 'Embrasire: Inside/Outside *The Heat of the Day*'.

After a short coffee break, Layla Ferrández Melero (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid) started the second panel with her paper, 'Life as a Perpetual Conflict in Elizabeth Bowen's *The Hotel* and Virginia Woolf's *The Voyage Out*'. Discussing a common theme in both novels—the coming of age and the accompanying self-discovery—Layla also considered the role of these novels within the context of Woolf and Bowen's continuing careers. In the fifth paper of the day Maria Rodina (Moscow

State Lomonosov University/National Research University Higher School of Economics) explored the role of Bowen during the Second World War in her paper, 'An Artist and a Spy: Elizabeth Bowen's Appraisal of Irish Neutrality', and compared non-fictional and fictional representations of wartime Ireland by Elizabeth Bowen, while also considering notions of espionage and neutrality.

Allan Hepburn (McGill University) then introduced the keynote speakers, Andrew Bennett (University of Bristol) and Nicholas Royle (University of Sussex). The simplicity of the title of the address, 'Demon Writing', belied the complexity of both their delivery (a double-handed *tour de force*) and their material. Focusing particularly on *The Demon Lover, and Other Stories*, they explored the hallucinatory nature of Bowen's writing and also reflected on the developments in Bowen criticism since the publication of their analysis of Bowen in *Elizabeth Bowen and the Dissolution of the Novel* published 25 years ago.

Their talk became the focus of much of the discussion over lunch as we also eagerly awaited a short piece entitled 'My name is Alan Cameron'. Adopting the persona of Cameron, Ian d'Alton (Trinity College, Dublin) explored facets of Bowen's character from Cameron's perspective in a piece that was, in equal measure, thought provoking and very enjoyable.

The first paper in the penultimate panel, 'Fraught "Jingles" as burgeoning female modernist stylistics' was given by Rebecca Thomas (University of Bedfordshire). This paper considered three short stories: 'The Apple Tree'; 'Careless Talk' and 'The Cat Jumps' as Rebecca discussed Bowen's syntactical experimentation. Connor Larsen (Emory, Atlanta) gave the second paper, 'Innocence and Experience in Elizabeth Bowen's *The House in Paris*', which focused on the two children in the novel, Henrietta and Leopold, asking how the experience and knowledge gained by the children might have implications for the future. The final paper in this panel was given by independent scholar Evelina Garay-Collcutt. Turning our attention to Bowen's use of the gothic and the supernatural tale in her paper, 'Crossing the liminal boundaries of the ghost story in Elizabeth Bowen's 'The Back Drawing Room' and 'Foothold'', she considered the blurred boundaries between the real and the imagined.

Each and every panel was a joy to listen to, broadening our understanding of Bowen and often opening up new avenues to consider. This was equally true of the final panel which commenced with a paper by Sofia Pelendridis-Roberts (King's College, London): "'The essence of a poetic myth is that no statement of it can be final": image, poetics and the 'roving eye' in Elizabeth Bowen's *The Heat of the Day*'. Unfortunately Sofia wasn't able to be at the conference, and so Nicola Darwood read the paper and hopes she did it justice. Sofia's paper was particularly focused on the ways in which, through drawing her 'inter-art experimentation', Bowen also experimented with forms of writing. Olena Lytovka from the London Centre for Interdisciplinary Research gave the second paper in this panel, 'Resisting Domesticization: The Uncanny House in Elizabeth Bowen's Fiction'. Discussing issues of domestic ideology, Olena considered how many of Bowen's characters often find the domestic setting to be oppressive and the cause of much loneliness. Allan Hepburn (McGill University) gave the final paper of the day, 'Bowen's Aesthetics of Indirection: obliquity in *The Death of the Heart*', finishing the conference on a very high note. Focusing particularly on notions of obliquity and 'askanceness' in *The*

*Heat of the Day*, Allan concluded that obliquity is the only possible way in which characters can form any sort of connection in a novel where lack of attachment is often the easier route to follow.

Discussions about obliquity, art, syntactical experimentation, biography and autobiography, hauntings (both real and imagined) and notions of blurred boundaries which, as we found during the day, are evident in much of Bowen's fiction, carried on late into the evening. It was a day of new ideas and new friendships, and it was an absolute pleasure to meet both established and new scholars of Bowen's work. We have to say a huge thank you to the University of Bedfordshire and the Research Institute of Media, Art and Performance for their support, and particularly to everyone who worked behind the scenes, who gave papers, who chaired sessions and who provided so much scholarly discussion and, above all, such enjoyment. We look forward to another Bowen conference soon.

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Contributors

Ana Ashraf is a PhD fellow in the department of English Literature at KU Leuven, Belgium. The topic of her research is *Testimonies of War in the Works of Modern and Contemporary British and Pakistani Women Writers*. Her research interest lies in 19th and 20th Century English Literature and Literature of War and Conflict.

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), has presented her work on Bowen, Benson and children's fiction at a number of international conferences and has a number of forthcoming essays on Bowen and Benson. With Nick Turner, she is co-chair of the newly formed Elizabeth Bowen Society and is co-editor of *The Elizabeth Bowen Review*.

Layla Ferrández Melero was born in Zaragoza, Spain, in 1989, where she graduated with a degree in English Philology from Universidad de Zaragoza in 2012. Thereupon, she obtained her Master's degree in English Linguistics in 2013 at Universidad Complutense de Madrid. Currently, she is a Ph.D. candidate at Universidad Autónoma de Madrid and is writing a thesis on Elizabeth Bowen. Her research focuses on identity formation and the relation between Bowen's women characters and the places they inhabit.

Dr Carissa Foo is a lecturer of Humanities (Literature and Writing) at Yale-NUS College, Singapore. She received her Ph.D. from Durham University where she worked on women's experiences of places in modernist writing. Her field of research is twentieth-century women's writing and its dialogues with perception theory, gender and queer studies.

Dr Evelina Garay-Collcutt, who very sadly passed away just before this volume was published, was an independent scholar (University of Alicante, Spain) who held a PhD in English Literature. Her thesis, entitled *Women Writers on a Wartime Liminal Voyage: A Critical Study of the Changing Face of Blitzed London through the Eyes of Five Novelists*, includes individual studies on the writers Marguerite Steen, Phyllis Bottome, Bryher, Lettice Cooper and Elizabeth Bowen. Prior to this study she wrote another piece of academic work focusing on Bowen's wartime literary output; *On not By-Passing Locality: Space and Place in Elizabeth Bowen's Wartime Short Fiction*. She also carried out research on urban studies and female wartime *flânerie* as well as on utopic and dystopic twentieth century literature.

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 Eibhear Walshe is the Director of Creative Writing and a senior lecturer in the School of Modern English at University College Cork. His biography *Kate O'Brien :A Writing Life* was published by Irish Academic Press in 2006 and he edited *Elizabeth Bowen: Visions and Revisions* for Irish Academic Press in 2008, *Elizabeth Bowen Remembered* (Four Courts Press: 1999) and *The Plays of Teresa Deevy* (Mellen Press: 2003.) *Oscar's Shadow: Wilde, Homosexuality and Ireland* was published by Cork University Press in 2012 and *A Different Story: the Writings of Colm Toibin* was published by Irish Academic Press in 2013.

Kezia Whiting is a PhD candidate at the University at Buffalo. Her dissertation, *Modernist Intimacy*, examines the relation between free indirect style and subjectivity in modernist literature. She has published essays on J. M. Coetzee (forthcoming in *TSSL*) and David Malouf.

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