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# The Elizabeth Bowen Review



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## Editorial policy

All essays are subject to double blind peer review, and 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 31<sup>st</sup> January 2022 for Volume 4 (to be published in October 2021). 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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## Nicola Darwood & Nick Turner ~ Introduction

In the introduction to Volume Three of the *Elizabeth Bowen Review* we noted that ‘we had no idea when we hit the ‘publish’ button last September that so much would change over the course of the year’ and now, in October 2021, we find ourselves expressing the same sentiment. But once again, we also count ourselves very fortunate to belong to a growing group of people who are not just interested in the work of Elizabeth Bowen, but who also engage with this body of work. We have seen this throughout 2020 and 2021 through the activities of the Elizabeth Bowen Society, from those participating in the online book group which is slowly working its way through Bowen’s short stories, to all who enjoyed ‘An Evening at Bowen’s Court with David Hicks and Ian d’Alton’, at the end of September.

The balance of this volume of the *Review* is focused more on reviews of the excellent scholarship that has been published since the last volume, but we start with an essay by K. Narayana Chandran (University of Hyderabad), ‘The Familiar Compound Ghost of ‘The Demon Lover:’ A Correspondent Reading of Elizabeth Bowen and T. S. Eliot’, which draws on ‘The Demon Lover’ and *The Four Quartets*. The essay provides a fascinating insight into the ways in which a reader can make connections between two literary works, and discusses the ‘illusion of co-presence, of the familiar in or as the unfamiliar, either by some circumstantial likeness, or a resonance at once compelling and unignorable’, placing both texts within their cultural and historical contexts.

Bowen scholarship is thriving at the moment, and we have been fortunate to be able to review five new books in this volume of the *Elizabeth Bowen Review*. The first is Victoria Coulson’s *Elizabeth Bowen’s Psychoanalytic Fiction*, reviewed by Layla Ferrández Melero, and the second is *Reconsidering Elizabeth Bowen’s Shorter Fiction: Dead Reckoning* by Heather Levy, which has been reviewed by Aimée Gasston. The co-editors have also reviewed books this year: Nick Turner has reviewed Heather Ingman’s *Elizabeth Bowen* in the Key Irish Women’s Writers series and the new edition of short stories, *Elizabeth Bowen: Selected Stories*, edited by Tessa Hadley, and Nicola Darwood had the pleasure of reading and reviewing *The Shadowy Third: Love, Letters and Elizabeth Bowen* by Julia Parry and Eibhear Walshe’s *The Last Day at Bowen’s Court: A Novel*. Reviewing is always a privilege; we get to read some excellent scholarship and fiction. We always hope that our reviews will both lead to increased readership of those specific texts, and encourage others to develop their own research into Bowen, a writer whose life and works continues to fascinate so many. This year’s volume ends with an afterword by Eoin O’Callaghan, the Treasurer of the Elizabeth Bowen Society, as he reflects on a recent trip to Doneraile Court and the recent Bowen Society event, ‘An Evening at Bowen’s Court with David Hicks and Ian d’Alton’.

As always, we are very grateful for the support of our Editorial and Advisory Boards, and the vital work of our peer reviewers, without whom we could not offer a rigorous system of review to ensure that the *Elizabeth Bowen Review* continues to provide a platform for both early career and more established scholars. We reflected recently

on the five years that have elapsed since the Bowen conference in Warsaw, and we hope that we have created some strong foundations on which to build future Bowen scholarship.

Nick Turner and Nicola Darwood  
September 2021

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## Essay competition 2022

The editors of the *Elizabeth Bowen Review* invite undergraduate and postgraduate students to submit essays that focus on Bowen's life or work for the 2022 Essay Competition. Essays should be no more than 4,000 words in length (excluding reference list) and use the Harvard referencing system. The essay should be submitted by email to [bowen@beds.ac.uk](mailto:bowen@beds.ac.uk) by 11.59pm on 25<sup>th</sup> June 2022.

The submitted essays will be judged by a panel, and the winner will have the opportunity to work with the editors so that the essay can be published in either Volume Five or Volume Six of the *Review*. The winning essayist will be announced in Volume Five (to be published in October 2022).

For more information, please contact the editors, Dr Nick Turner and Dr Nicola Darwood, at [bowen@beds.ac.uk](mailto:bowen@beds.ac.uk)

# The Familiar Compound Ghost of ‘The Demon Lover:’ A Correspondent Reading of Elizabeth Bowen and T. S. Eliot ~ K. Narayana Chandran

*Correspondent*: 2. a.  
Answering to or agreeing with something else  
in the way of likeness of relation or analogy; analogous,  
or having an analogous relation to.  
*OED*<sup>1</sup>

While most readers believe that writers give them perfectly satisfying books, we rarely find writers and readers in agreement when it comes to enjoyment and affective pleasure. The intentions and objectives of writers figure much less when readers, each with their own history of reading and intellection, respond unpredictably to even the most tried and tested classics. They notice, for example, that certain stories and poems seem to be in dialogue when they read a new text, although no material evidence supports the text’s allegiance to ‘original’ sources or affiliations with cognisable traditions. This correspondence, however strikingly evident and convincing to readers, may not point towards direct borrowing from, or a response to, formal or figural sources. Roland Barthes attributed this strange but valid phenomenon to a reader’s ‘circular memory’.<sup>2</sup> Allusion sometimes creates an illusion of co-presence, of the familiar in or as the unfamiliar, either by some circumstantial likeness, or a resonance at once compelling and unignorable. Eerily, sometimes, readers suspect that their texts have begun to read *them* in the bargain. In multiple senses, therefore, I find this *ghost* of an allusion interesting in what I would call a *correspondent* reading. Elizabeth Bowen’s ‘The Demon Lover’ and a few passages from T. S. Eliot’s *Four Quartets*, especially ‘Little Gidding II,’ offer very persuasive samples of such echoes. In this *ghostly* correspondence, the traversal of ghosts is both literal and symbolic, given its common spatio-temporal setting in Bowen and Eliot.<sup>3</sup>

## Allusive Ghosts

When the literal and metaphoric coalesce in an allusive ghost, it is extraordinarily suggestive. It makes us wonder why we return to old texts: is it because we cannot forget them, or because we have, indeed, forgotten them? This text for now, like a ghost, battens on the lives of other texts from which it draws interpretive sustenance.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www-oed-com-uohyd.new.knimbus.com/view/Entry/41950?redirectedFrom=correspondent#eid>

<sup>2</sup> ‘Reading a text cited by Stendhal .... I find Proust in one minute detail. [. . .] I am [no] way a Proust ‘specialist’: Proust is what comes to me, not what I summon up; not an ‘authority’, simply a *circular memory*’ (Barthes 35-36).

<sup>3</sup> Passages from ‘The Demon Lover’ and ‘Postscript by the Author’ are cited with parenthetical page numbers. Passages from Eliot are cited from his *Collected Poems*. Line numbers appear in parentheses.

This is much like the many lives to which a ghost returns with avowed love or vengeance. Always in transit, and no more than liminal, a ghost is now here, now there. Its ambiguous exit or entry now prolongs 'life,' now confirms 'death.' Its being is predicated on an absence we rue or regret. The already known or long-imagined as one's own nurtures the ghost of allusion in marvellous ways. 'What is the ghost in *Hamlet*,' asks Lydia Curti rhetorically, 'if not [. . .] the evident and the hidden, the familiar and the unknown, the identity between mystery and truth, the enigma and the solution?' (159). Her point is that the *heimlich* and *unheimlich* are not the customary binaries they seem, but virtually the same thing, taking turns in alternating sensory subterfuges that seem endless.

While I find in 'The Demon Lover' and 'Little Gidding II' certain striking similarities in their confrontations with dead spirits, I suspect the traversal of an allusive ghost between them. At one level, this is hardly surprising, given that both Bowen and Eliot had direct experience of the London Blitz, the realist stage and the symbolic scene against which their fictional episodes respectively unfold. They walked virtually the same precincts of Kensington when they served as air-raid wardens in the London of the late 1940s and early 1941. The Drovers of 'The Demon Lover' settled in the 'arboreal part of Kensington' (Bowen 96), while Eliot seriously considered calling his *Quartets Kensington Quartets*. 'The title I have always had in mind for [the collection of four poems] was KENSINGTON QUARTETS,' he wrote John Hayward in 1942. 'I have had a fancy,' he recalls, 'to have Kensington in it' (Eliot quoted in Gardner 26). Besides being harried at once by wartime insecurities as well as their own indeterminate feelings of sin, guilt, compunction, and shame, they summon ghosts that share a certain uncanny resemblance. More precisely, Bowen and Eliot 'compound' their ghosts from their 'familiar' past lives, each driven by their respective memories and desires.

However, in tracing correspondences between 'The Demon Lover' and 'Little Gidding II,' I do not suggest their owing their significance to either text by precedence or evident recall. That is to say, neither Bowen nor Eliot is likely to have seen or recalled the other's work at the time of composition. Eliot's long and striking passages with which I align Bowen's were being composed and revised in and around the time 'The Demon Lover' appeared in *The Listener* in November 1941. 'Little Gidding' was published on 1 December 1942 (Gardner 155). Fear and anxiety, however, were in the air, much as their victims fancied that they were 'seeing' ghosts all through the days and nights of aerial bombardment. As Martin Francis observes, even those who professedly rely on factual reports and count on material evidence admit to 'absences, disavowals, repressions [that] abound in the historiography' of the World Wars. They agree that 'it is hard not to feel the troubling presence of shadowy apparitions on the margins ...' (Francis 349). Although Julia Kristeva's initial definition of intertextuality as 'an intersection of textual surfaces' or 'a dialogue among several writings' applies here, given that it is possible for any reader to see any text as, according to her, 'the absorption and transformation of another' (Kristeva 1980, 65-66), I am wary of calling my reading plainly intertextual. I would rather suggest that my reading of Bowen with Eliot's passages in mind certainly answers to the interpretive call of an *intertextual unconscious*. If anything, more than mere 'absorption and transformation,' I find my approach much closer to Kristeva's later formulation of intertextuality that 'invites the reader to interpret a text as a crossing of texts' (Kristeva 2010, 10). But even so, do the Bowen-Eliot texts *cross* verifiably against any factual documentary evidence? I would call them 'ghost

references ... that aren't concretely there, yet that seem to haunt the work we are reading' (246), in Peter J. Rabinowitz's more persuasive elaboration. I am more convinced by his comments on the trouble such intertextual ghosts give readers, not least because 'We're never sure of whether or not they're actually there ... [a]nd beyond that, we're never sure of their interpretive consequences' (247). The more elusive such ghosts are, the more fascinating they become in the ghost-ridden texts of Bowen and Eliot.

### **In the Shadow of War**

Scholars have already heard echoes of Eliot in Bowen when discussing her wartime fiction, but they do not appear to be interested in establishing influence or possible precedence, although they are keen not to miss the kind of correspondent responses the two World Wars evoked in the writers, especially those involving memories of the dead and the arrival of visitants. For example, Neil Corcoran remarks that *A World of Love* is a novel 'which comes closest [...] to the explicit supernaturalism of [Bowen's] short stories' (127). The illustrative passage he cites is one where Jane is attending a dinner party at Lady Latterly's castle:

I quote here only part of a lengthy passage which appears to allude to T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*, that other work containing spectres and commemorating the dead of history's wars: Guy's voice, which Jane cannot quite hear, is 'just not here or there, just not now or then but at the same time everywhere and always'. 'Burnt Norton', the first of the *Quartets*, includes the line 'Quick, now, here, now, always', and the final poem of the sequence, 'Little Gidding', moves towards its climax with an evocation of 'England and nowhere. Never and always.' (131)

Corcoran suggests that the point of Bowen's title and the gist of her epigraph from Thomas Traherne together reinforce the logic of Guy's spectral and spectatorial 'return.' 'Undoubtedly,' adds Corcoran,

part of Bowen's meaning here is equivalent to Eliot's summative statement of the relationship between the living and the dead in the fifth section of 'Little Gidding':

We die with the dying:  
See, they depart, and we go with them.  
We are born with the dead:  
See, they return and bring us with them. (131)

Joseph E. Rosenberg's 'Paper Bombs: The Blitz and the Aesthetics of Salvage' comes very close to hearing echoes of *Four Quartets* and *The Waste Land* while citing ghosts seen and heard among some fiction and non-fiction of the period. He devotes little more than three pages to the ghosts that haunt Bowen's short fiction, especially the one in 'The Demon Lover' (471- 472, 474). Citing Bowen's 'Postscript' to a collection of ghost stories,<sup>4</sup> Rosenberg shrewdly notes that her ghosts are no mere

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<sup>4</sup> I cite from Bowen's 'Postscript' that appears on pages 216- 224 of *The Demon Lover and Other Stories* (1945). Her 'Postscript' is dated 1944 in this Jonathan Cape, London edition. This text appears

avengers but agents that ‘simply leak out of injured landscapes...’. He calls them ‘papery ghosts of the Blitz [who] are themselves charred and ashy scenes of violence, unnerving left-over remainders that [...] demand recognition’ (474). London, the ghost city of incendiary mayhem, is recalled when Rosenberg quotes Eliot’s ‘Men and bits of paper, whirled by the cold wind’ of ‘Burnt Norton.’

Writing on the London Tube shelters during the 1940s, David Ashford shows how the great talent of British official culture was to sweep the ugliness of the Blitz under the rug of its People’s War. Focusing particularly on the plight of poor children, his essay presents pictures, diary-entries, news-reports, and passages from such writers as Henry Reed, Graham Greene, T. S. Eliot and Elizabeth Bowen. It was no coincidence that writers of the period empathised with the innocent destitute, recalling their own happy childhood. One example of such empathetic memory that Ashford records is Eliot’s. In a passage, again from ‘Little Gidding,’ we are treated to ‘The voice of the hidden waterfall / And the children in the apple-tree/ Not known, because not looked for/ Heard, half-heard, in the stillness/ Between two waves of the sea’ (ll. 247-253). Ashford adds that ‘The ambivalent feelings toward childhood expressed in Greene’s [*The Ministry of Fear*], Reed’s [*The Novel Since 1939*], the *Four Quartets*, and the photographs and pictures that seemed torn between fear and hope, are touched upon by Elizabeth Bowen in the ‘Postscript’ to her remarkable wartime collection *The Demon Lover and Other Stories*’ (307).

### **Spectral Correspondences**

If few readers of Bowen’s fiction and Eliot’s poem have made anything of the coincidence of these ghostly emanations, it is reasonable to ask why. They are right *not* to press the correspondence beyond their own associative memory, but as the Poet of ‘Little Gidding II’ puts it, ‘The wonder that I feel is easy, / Yet ease is cause of wonder’ (ll.110-111). Before ignoring what might possibly be a minor correspondence, Kathleen Drover’s annoyance and anticipation as she arrives at her London flat is very much her compulsion ‘to put off/ Sense and notion’ (ll. 44- 45), which is what the Poet urges the visitors to do when they are within the hallowed precincts of Little Gidding. Perhaps, in a manner of speaking, that might be the case. She notices for instance that ‘in her once familiar street [...] an unfamiliar queerness had silted up’ (91). This peculiar observation of Kathleen has its corresponding parallel in the Poet describing the compound ghost as one ‘Whom [he] had known, forgotten, half recalled,’ and was once ‘familiar,’ (ll. 95, 97). The play on intimacy and alienation, familiarity and strangeness, recurs throughout both narratives.<sup>5</sup>

Until she reads the letter, Kathleen is intrigued by the alternating impingement of the familiar and the unfamiliar, ‘her once familiar street’ suddenly acquiring ‘an unfamiliar queerness’ (91) for her. This is the case with practically all the things she notices as she advances: the door standing ajar, the shuttered big window, and the cracks and scars left on the building walls by ‘the last bombing’ (92). What she is at a loss to understand and make peace with are the unresolved interplay between the forms and figures that *return*. They include her return to her shut-up house, as well as the mostly unforeseen and ominous returns such as her fiancé’s letter. Eliot’s *Four*

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as preface to the American edition of the same collection called *Ivy Gripp'd the Steps and Other Stories* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1946).

<sup>5</sup> ‘Poet’ is meant to distinguish the speaking voice of the *Four Quartets*, especially of ‘Little Gidding’ where we see the Poet persona differently from Eliot, the poet.

*Quartets*, especially ‘Little Gidding,’ is an extended engagement with many such ‘returns’ under the shadow of war, and with how best one might negotiate all such turns and returns in public history and private memory. As though anticipating Kathleen’s uncanny experience in her flat, we have the Poet’s voice in ‘Little Gidding I’ setting the scene for a momentous ghostly interlude:

And what you thought you came for  
Is only a shell, a husk of meaning  
From which the purpose breaks only when it is fulfilled  
If at all. Either you had no purpose  
Or the purpose is beyond the end you figured  
And is altered in fulfilment.

(ll. 31- 36)

Read with ‘The Demon Lover’ in mind, nearly every phrase here now seems to comment retrospectively on Kathleen’s trip to London in order ‘to look for several things she wanted to take away’ (91). What she thought she came for, her intention to collect what she wanted from her bedroom chest, turns out to ironically have no ‘purpose’ when it is fulfilled, but what in fact was tragically in store for her turns out to be, to adapt the Poet’s words, ‘no purpose/ Or the purpose [far] beyond the end [she had] figured/ And is altered in fulfilment’ (ll. 34- 36). If Eliot’s repeated puns on *end* in the *Four Quartets* are a commonplace of commentaries, it is useful here to consider Kathleen’s *ends* in the story – by turns, her avowed purpose in making the visit to London; the disastrous finale to her visit; what was earlier figured as routine and uneventful, and what was transfigured portentously as the end of her visit, for example. Scattered throughout Bowen’s story are details that correspond with the Poet’s musings on arrivals and departures, turning around to face the other way, a detour perhaps, where a chance meeting with a ghost from the past is mysteriously in store:

If you came this way,  
Taking any route, starting from anywhere,  
At any time or at any season,  
It would always be the same: you would have to put off  
Sense and notion.  
[. . .]

And what the dead had no speech for, when living,  
They can tell you, being dead: the communication  
Of the dead is tongued with fire beyond the language of the living.  
Here, [. . .]  
Is England and nowhere. Never and always.

(ll. 41- 45, 51- 55)

The end is where we start from.  
[. . .]  
And any action  
Is a step to the block [. . .]  
We die with the dying:  
See, they depart, and we go with them.

We are born with the dead:  
See, they return, and bring us with them.

(ll. 218, 227- 231)

Such passages in the *Four Quartets* eerily assume an auditor-focus, an accompanying presence, and often presage a meeting between the living and the dead. Eliot imbues such passages with certain ghostly demarcations, long-repressed memories and visitations under the shadow of some war that appears to have just ceased. Nothing specific is ever said about who died, about how or why we die with the dying. Bowen's 'Postscript' to *The Demon Lover and Other Stories* (London, 1945), however, broadly contextualises the collection as 'all war-time, none of them, war stories' (217), a crucial distinction that underscores the uncertainties of civic life during air raids and Bowen's social obligation as a writer to heed alternative narratives, while seeing ghosts of her former abnormal self in otherwise 'normal' denizens of her city. 'Arguably,' she adds, 'writers are always slightly abnormal people: certainly, in so-called 'normal' times my sense of the abnormal has been very acute. In war, this feeling of slight differentiation was suspended' ('Postscript,' 217). In a short passage that paradoxically collapses what we ordinarily see to be distinctly separate, she credits war with a great unifying force. War, according to Bowen, annuls all those divisions and distances between selves:

In war, this feeling of slight differentiation [of the normal/abnormal] was suspended. I felt one with, and just like, everyone else. Sometimes I hardly knew where I stopped and somebody else began. The violent destruction of solid things, the explosion of the illusion that prestige, power and permanence attach to bulk and weight, left all of us, equally, heady and disembodied. Walls went down; and we felt, if not knew, each other. We all lived in a state of lucid abnormality. ('Postscript,' 217-8)

It is much the same war psychosis, which Bowen prefers to call 'a state of lucid abnormality' (218), that looms in Eliot's 'Burnt Norton', where one meets 'the strained time-ridden faces/ Distracted from distraction by distraction' (ll. 103- 104) like the protagonist of 'The Demon Lover.' At 'intersections' in the *Four Quartets*, again, we see strangers meet and part, their *faces* signalling distractions of another range and order. The Poet's celebrated meeting with his 'familiar compound ghost' takes place at an intersection: conceptually, between the living and the dead; temporally, between day and night; spatially, where three districts meet and where the Old Poet's path crosses the Young Poet's.<sup>6</sup> On its part, 'The Demon Lover' begins with indeterminate, late, twilight scenes and states of time, place, and action: 'Towards the end of her day in London,' the opening phrase of Bowen's story; 'late August;' 'her once familiar street ... [now] an unfamiliar queerness;' now 'the prosaic woman' versus 'her long habit of life' then, etc. (all on 91). The very climax of this story, Kathleen's reading of the mysterious letter, marks a structural and temporal intersection of analeptic and proleptic narratives, between the young Kathleen's

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<sup>6</sup> cf. also Eliot's lines such as 'In concord at this intersection time / Of meeting nowhere, no before and after ...' (ll. 107-108, 'Little Gidding II'); 'Here, the intersection of the timeless moment / Is England and nowhere. Never and always. (ll. 54- 55, 'Little Gidding I'); 'But to apprehend /The point of intersection of the timeless/ With time, is an occupation for the saint. (ll. 204-206, 'Dry Salvages V').

meeting her soldier-lover in the garden, and the last taxi ride, presumably with his ghost. Both these episodes, again, are marked by faint if indistinct recognitions of the lover's face, like Eliot's compound ghost whose 'sudden *look*' (emphasis added) makes it 'Both intimate and unidentifiable' (ll. 94, 98). Correspondingly, if young Kathleen 'had not ever completely seen [her soldier-lover's] face' (94), or 'she [had] imagined spectral glitters in the place of his eyes' (94), Mrs Drover, twenty-five years later, could hardly see him either. '[H]er face [...] almost into the glass' only 'remained for an eternity eye to eye' with her driver but with scarce recognition of his face (99).

When Bowen mourns 'The violent destruction of solid things, the explosion of the illusion [of] bulk and weight' (218), the Poet of 'Little Gidding II' similarly mourns the collapse of what mankind had raised together:

Dust in the air suspended  
Marks the place where a story ended.  
Dust inbreathed was a house –  
The wall, the wainscot and the mouse  
The death of hope and despair . . .

(ll. 58- 62)

The Poet cannot but continue with short elegies on 'the death of air,' 'the death of earth,' and 'the death of water and fire' in close succession.

It is striking, again, that the close spectral encounters in Bowen and Eliot are framed by uncertainties and instabilities that beset characters who feel betrayed by others, especially those in whom they once had faith. For Bowen, it is the betrayal of romantic love; for Eliot, the sense of betrayal that comes with the burden of a poet's past: his love of, and investment in, poetic traditions and ancestry. Both seem to ask themselves, like the Poet's anguished cry in 'Little Gidding IV' that answers itself, 'Who then devised the torment? Love' (l. 209).

Unless caught in our repeated reading, we are apt to miss a peculiar ambivalence felt by the ghosts in Eliot and Bowen. This ambivalence would seem to infect both writers, an ambivalence at once self-directed and other-directed, a detail they exploit to a fault in their correspondent texts. When directed towards its own self, the ghost torments and riddles its unenviable apparitional status, feeling hurt and jealous, and perhaps a little guilty that it has left some unfinished earthly business, or an obsessive desire unfulfilled; when directed at its targets, it causes much the same torment in them while it cannily reads their riddling mind as if it were in print. The mysteriously intrusive letter K sends Kathleen bespeaks literally, as the Poet puts it, 'what the dead had no speech for, when living, / They can tell you, being dead: the communication / Of the dead is tongued with fire beyond the language of the living' (ll. 51- 53):

Dear Kathleen: You will not have forgotten that today is our anniversary, and the day we said. The years have gone by at once slowly and fast. In 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 . . . K. (94)

It might also help here to recall a line from the 'Little Gidding' Poet here: '... yet the words sufficed/ To compel the recognition they preceded' (ll. 103- 104). A revenant had better be acknowledged, for the knowledge it brings has to do with something hard to forget or make peace with, or that which indeed has already been forgotten, or made peace with. This perhaps is more in the spirit of the Poet in 'Little Gidding II' telling himself that the ghost's 'words sufficed / To compel the recognition they preceded' (ll. 103-104).

### Facing Up to Ghosts

As we have seen, *recognitions*, both personal and textual, are key to the correspondent reading of texts. The opening lines of Eliot's passage featuring the 'familiar compound ghost' are quite revealing in this respect. The phrases in bold below refer to *face* and *facing*, details crucial to Bowen's ghostly encounter as well:

In the uncertain hour before the morning  
Near the ending of interminable night  
At the recurrent end of the unending  
After the dark dove with the flickering tongue  
Had passed below the horizon of his homing  
While the dead leaves still rattled on like tin  
Over the asphalt where no other sound was  
Between three districts whence the smoke arose  
I met one walking, loitering and hurried  
As if blown towards me like the metal leaves  
Before the urban dawn wind unresisting.  
And as I fixed upon **the down-turned face**  
That pointed scrutiny with which we challenge  
The first-met stranger in the waning dusk  
I caught **the sudden look** of some dead master  
Whom I had **known, forgotten, half recalled**  
**Both one and many; in the brown baked features**  
**The eyes of a familiar compound ghost**  
Both intimate and unidentifiable,  
So I assumed a double part, and cried  
And heard another's voice cry: 'What! Are *you* here?  
Although we were not. I was still the same,  
Knowing myself yet being someone other –  
And **he a face still forming**; yet the words sufficed  
To compel the recognition they preceded.  
And so, compliant to the common wind,  
Too strange to each other for misunderstanding,  
In concord at this intersection time  
Of meeting nowhere, no before and after,  
We trod the pavement in a dead patrol.

(ll. 80- 109)

The carefully worked effects of this highly dramatic episode in the whole of *Four Quartets* are achieved by *facial* recognitions, so crucial in accosting strangers. Eliot draws upon recollections, an effort compounded and challenging for the speaker by their temporal distance and the spatial dimness of the twilight. The hour is *uncertain*, the end *recurring* and *unending* in multiple senses for both episodes in Eliot and Bowen. While nearly every turn in ‘The Demon Lover’ again hinges on unexpected and abrupt returns in dimly-lit locations, temporal dislocations seem to make the familiar both suspiciously unfamiliar and perplexingly recognisable at once. The *face*, in short, is both intimate and horrifying, even where the narrative consciousness makes no direct reference to it. One example is Kathleen’s ‘reluctance to look again at the letter’, which gives her the uneasy feeling of being ‘intruded upon,’ of being pried on by someone whose face she cannot quite imagine, let alone see (95). Kathleen’s reading of the letter is closely followed by a panic that she feels is showing on her face: ‘She felt so much the change in her own face that she went to the mirror, [...] and looked at once urgently and stealthily in’ (95). This mirror image is ‘Both intimate and unidentifiable’ (l. 98) to Kathleen, who ‘assume[s] a double part’ (l. 99) as the Poet does *vis-à-vis* the compound ghost that patrols the bombarded London streets. Kathleen is now ‘confronted by a woman of forty-four ...’ (93), and before long is ‘Turning from her own face as precipitately as she had gone to meet it’ (94); she might conceivably have uttered much the same words as the Poet of ‘Little Gidding II.’ ‘And heard another’s voice cry: ‘What! Are *you* here?’ (l. 103).

The *face* returns yet again a few moments later when Kathleen forces herself to call to mind anything at all of her old fiancé. ‘She remembered,’ we are told, ‘but with one white burning blank as where acid has dropped on a photograph: *under no conditions* could she remember his face’ (Bowen’s italics, 98). In self-assuring finality, as it were, the indistinct face matters nothing to Kathleen if she breaks the promise of a reunion, if there had been one, even if she had ‘plighted a more sinister troth’ (95): ‘So, wherever he may be waiting, I shall not know him. You have no time to run from a face you do not expect’ (98). This last reflection applies just as equally to the Poet of the *Four Quartets*. The perfect anonymity of this ghost, compounded of many masters and contemporaries of Eliot, has opened up for readers wide interpretive and speculative avenues.<sup>7</sup> With this ghost of ‘some dead master’ whose ‘down-turned face’ was ‘still forming,’ ‘Both one and many,’ ‘both intimate and unidentifiable,’ ‘too strange to each other for misunderstanding’ (ll. 94, 91, 98, 106), Bowen’s ‘You have no time to run from a face, you do not expect’ bespeaks a predestined inevitability and benign circumstance that Eliot exploits at length in the famous infernal interlude of ‘Little Gidding II.’ And having come this far, another correspondent detail becomes even more important. While Eliot’s ‘dead master’ ‘left [his] body on a distant shore’ (l. 127), Bowen’s fiancé ‘was reported missing, presumably killed’ (95). What indeed, then, might better suit Bowen’s wraith than Eliot’s description of his master as ‘the spirit unappeased and peregrine’ (l. 123)?

Until the very end, Bowen’s account of the ghostly episode cannot help obsessing about *face* – the literal and metaphoric compounded in such descriptions as the

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<sup>7</sup> The ‘familiar compound ghost’ is perhaps the most widely and contentiously annotated single phrase in commentaries on the *Four Quartets*. Eliot’s ‘original inspiration for [the whole section of ‘Little Gidding II’],’ as Gardner observes, ‘had been Canto XV of the *Inferno* ...’ (186), although critics have time and again alerted us to passages (among numerous others) from Shakespeare, Yeats, Coleridge, Shelley, Whitman, Poe, and Baudelaire.

following: ‘The taxi *faced* the main road;’ ‘the jolt [caused by the brake] flung Mrs. Drover forward till her *face* was almost into the glass;’ the ‘driver and the passenger ... remained for an eternity *eye to eye*’ (emphasis added, 99). As Luke Thurston observes, the face acts figuratively in Bowen’s fiction ‘to disclose something of the strange relation, the ambiguous bond, of self and the other’ (19); but beyond that, in ‘The Demon Lover’, compounded like Eliot’s ghost, the face provokes confrontation and commitment in unambiguous terms. Bowen’s ‘Postscript’ indeed reflects on such supple confusions of being and becoming, of tenses and terms, when she says, ‘The past [...] discharges its load of feeling into the anaesthetised and bewildered present. And the ghost [...] questionable [...] in [...] ‘The Demon Lover’ – what part [does it] play? ... [T]he ruthless young soldier lover unheard of since 1916: hostile or not, [the ghosts] rally, they fill the vacuum for the uncertain ‘I’ (221). It is precisely this role that Eliot’s poem assigns his compound ghost. Narrowly conceived and focalised through one ancestor or master, Eliot fashions a ghost that still gives us a formal slip. It gives us no face as it tantalises us, unsettling all determinations of being and any comforts of belonging that existed in a world before the Second World War.

### **Making Sense of an Ending ...**

I began by suggesting that allusion sometimes creates an illusion of the co-presence of the familiar in or as the unfamiliar, and perhaps even of a lie masquerading as the truth. ‘Truths are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions...’ (84), as Nietzsche reminds us in ‘On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense,’ a condition that readers of ‘The Demon Lover’ get used to by degrees. The fuzzy borders of sight and memory, across which the old lover seems to appear for Mrs. Drover, rework much the same illusions of Eliot’s Poet ‘assum[ing] a double part,’ and ‘Knowing myself yet being someone other –’ (ll. 99, 102). No wonder, in one of her most moving afterthoughts, Bowen’s ‘Postscript’ admits to her modest gains as a storyteller. ‘I have isolated,’ she says, ‘spot-lighting faces or cutting out gestures that are not even the faces or gestures of great sufferers. This is how I am, how I feel ... and only as I am and feel can I write’ (222- 223). Frightening or pathetic, Bowen’s ghost in ‘The Demon Lover’ gains greater credibility and narrative logic when we read passages like the following, spoken by Eliot’s compound ghost, who discloses to the Poet ‘the gifts reserved for age,’ the last of which is worth recalling in full:

And last, the rending pain of re-enactment  
 Of all that you have done, and been; the shame  
 Of motives late revealed, and the awareness  
 Of things ill done and done to others’ harm  
 Which once you took for exercise of virtue.

...

From wrong to wrong the exasperated spirit  
 Proceeds, . . . .

In the disfigured street

He left me . . . .

(ll. 140-144, 146-147, 150)

If one were to read K’s letter to Kathleen all over again now, one would possibly hear echoes of such sentiments, however faint or indistinct; or see in it at least a touchingly earnest bid for reconciliation and forgiveness. We might be persuaded by Eliot to be a little more charitable to an unknown warrior who now longs for home

and love. From such a distance, and commanding such elevated thought as the compound ghost's, it is unlikely that Kathleen would now think herself 'plight[ing] a more sinister troth' (95), as she had at some point earlier.

There is perhaps another lesson to be learnt in thinking about the compounded ghosts in Bowen and Eliot without insisting on their further links as contemporaries. While readers *figure*, rather than figure out, spectral shades in fiction (because the ghosts are, and are not, simultaneously there), they are entertained at the same time by a strong suspicion of one text prefiguring the other, making for an interplay between them. Since both experiences are founded on an 'absent presence', readers as well as the characters they read in texts seem to walk a thin line between assertion and denial. If it is a demon lover's return that informs the magic of Bowen's story, it is precisely that absent presence in Eliot's poetry in the precincts of Bowen's narrative facility that intrigues us, as it has in my correspondent reading.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Work on this, and related subjects, has benefited from the academic privileges granted to me by the Institution of Eminence Chair in Literary and Cultural Theory of the Department of English, the University of Hyderabad, India. KNC.

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## REVIEWS

### Victoria Coulson, *Elizabeth Bowen's Psychoanalytic Fiction* (Edinburgh University Press, 2020)

Elizabeth Bowen's fiction is keeping its hold on the public's interest and has been, for some years now, securing a foothold on the syllabuses of both English and non-English-speaking universities. Since the 1990s, scholars have approached her work from different angles and contemporary theoretical frameworks, such as poststructuralism or gender studies, providing a compelling body of ground-breaking critical works. This is the case with Victoria Coulson's *Elizabeth Bowen's Psychoanalytic Fiction*, a thought-provoking and original reading of some of Bowen's best-known novels and short stories. Coulson's work is part of the Midcentury Modern Writers series, edited by Maud Ellmann, and aimed at bringing undervalued women writers' modernist works into the spotlight.

The book is divided into three main sections—development, sexuality, reproduction—that evoke, at once, core elements of Freud's psychosexual development theory. The main premise is the mandate of symbolic law in which the mother/child dyad, closely connected by the nourishing and protective function of the mother, is broken by the crucial experience of separation, a sort of symbolic first death, either in the form of weaning or any limitation of the access of the child to the mother, the object of desire. The father figure is then responsible for the reconfiguration of the dyad into a triangulation in which he outlaws the intimacy between mother and child, so that he can have access to the object of desire. The separation, rendered in Coulson's analysis as the maternal No, allows the mother to have a life of her own and, therefore, seek her own desire and satisfaction, something that the author examines in the second part of the book.

Bowen is identified as 'a rigorous conservative thinker with a profound belief in symbolic law' (10), and as having 'a significant degree of creative and conceptual intentionality' (11). In her study, Coulson explores Bowen's recognition, through her characters, of the different relations to socio-symbolic powers that emerged throughout her long career as a result of the socio-political context and its enduring

consequences. Bowen's psychoanalytic notions derive, as one would expect, from her childhood experiences, her relationship with her parents, and her family history. Coulson draws on Bowen's account of her family lineage in *Bowen's Court* (1942) to delineate the Anglo-Irish patriarchal social organisation which she extrapolates in terms of geopolitics, as war is considered to be dyadic: for example, her acute analysis of *The Last September* (1929) characterises the Irish War of Independence as a conflict concerning the father-like proprietorship of the Irish motherland by the English Empire—and therefore, the Ascendancy—and the Irish Republicans. The origin of Bowen's own weaning process is depicted through the pair of paintings that hung from the walls of her nursery, described in *Seven Winters* (1943), her mother's weak maternal No, her father's paternal failure to restore the symbolic law, and the eventual and irreversible separation from her mother after her death.

Similarly to Julia Kristeva, who reads Jacopo Bellini, Andrea Mantegna, or Leonardo da Vinci through their pictorial language in their portrayals of the Madonna with child, Coulson delves into Bowen's conceptualisation of motherhood and projects different Madonnas: Florence Bowen as a Madonna del Parto, Lilia as the Madonna of Montefort in *A World of Love* (1954), Mrs Kerr's association with beauty and death making her the Madonna in *The Hotel* (1927), and Naomi with her maternal quality for her fiancée Max becoming yet another Madonna in *The House in Paris* (1935). This type of motherly trait is the basis of most relationships between the characters, whether dyads or triangulations. The maternal object, longed for and repelled, is represented by women characters, flowers (most recognisably carnations, whose circular shape and 'crimson veining' (30) allude to bosoms, and which are interpreted as symbols of the dyadic activity of breastfeeding), items of food that convey the characters' desire for lactating breasts (and which Coulson analyses in-depth in Sydney and Mrs Kerr's visit to the patisserie in *The Hotel*), countries, or the Big House. The nurturing and/or nourishing function, whether it is physiological or ideological, is associated with the feminine and the mother, always in symbolic terms because, according to Coulson, 'the object of any Bowen character's heart's desire is Mother' (109). The images of animals as conduits of unconscious symbols also appear repeatedly: dogs and monkeys channel the child's resistance to separation (63), and cats do the same for the mother (94).

Coulson also explores Bowen's rather fluid conception of gender, femininity, and masculinity, and brings forth the trio sibling theory, a complex that produces a dysfunction in reproductive capability, rendering the continuation of the family legacy, or the survival of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy, an impossible task. The trio is modelled on Bowen's unborn siblings: the boy her parents expected when, instead, she was born, and a miscarriage a few years after Bowen's birth. Coulson analyses the inhibited triangulated adult sexuality in *The Heat of the Day* (1948) and Bowen's later works, *A World of Love* and *Eva Trout* (1968), and demonstrates how male and female characters can assume a sexual role, maternal or paternal, feminine or masculine, independently of their biological or assigned sex. This way, the author breaks gender stereotypes, but she nevertheless maintains a heteronormative structure of the family or triangulations while reinforcing the notion of binarism. Her consideration of the incestuous desire between Stella and her son Roderick in *The Heat of the Day*, when they are sitting on the same sofa, is compared to that between Mrs Kerr and her son Ronald in *The Hotel*, because they spend some time together in the same room. One wonders why the scene in which Louie and Connie share a bed, a passage imbued with sensuality and sexual symbols like that of the fish, is excluded

from such a thorough analysis, especially since the excerpt involves two women whose relationship might also be interpreted in psychoanalytical terms as forming a mother/child dyad.

As the author posits, Bowen is a 'de facto 'theorist' of psychic' (11) with a deep sense of the aesthetic. Her understanding of psychoanalytic readings of the time and her idea of psychosexual development is accurately captured in this alluring interpretation of her most iconic works. Coulson's insight into the varied ways in which Bowen communicates her thoughts about geopolitics, sexual desire, and family constellations in her fiction is a valuable and enriching contribution to Bowen scholarship.

Layla Ferrández Melero

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### *Reconsidering Elizabeth Bowen's Shorter Fiction: Dead Reckoning* by Heather Levy (Lanham, Boulder, New York, London: Lexington Books, 2021)

As Heather Levy notes in her introduction, books dedicating themselves to Bowen's short fiction are scarce, and anything which expands this slim class of literature is clearly to be welcomed. Yet one of the things that this new volume shows is how difficult it is to write about Bowen's short fiction in a systematic way: her stories resist ordering. In Bowen's words, short fiction's elasticity allowed for the depiction of 'what is crazy about humanity' (Preface to 'Stories by Elizabeth Bowen', 1959, 130). *Dead Reckoning* intends to 'reconsider [...] Bowen's ethical legacy and her strategy of curating violence against the self and others' (1). Yet strategy is seemingly precisely what is absent from her stories. Bowen described herself as a 'visual writer, with no taste for analysis', the very reason why – in her view – short fiction as a genre 'suited [her] better' ('Pictures and Conversations, 1975, 296). An overtly diagnostic approach, and one which posits Bowen's stories as the outcome of carefully measured formulation, therefore requires justification.

The three main chapters are organised thematically, focusing on suicide, murder and 'inconclusive mayhem' respectively. Levy's exegesis largely consists of plot descriptions interpellated with historical explication, and quotations from Freud and more recent research on crime, violence and psychology. Often the text is treated as concretely factual, which results in forensic literary sleuthing which can, on occasion, perplex. For example, in a discussion of 'Recent Photograph' (1926), the following hypothesis is drawn: 'Perhaps Mr. Brindley shared Bertram Lukin's fascination for American objects.' The next sentence diverges: 'It is likely that he used a razor made in England to kill his wife [...]' (23). There is then an assertion that the character may have been inspired in his selection of murder weapon by Birmingham street gangs,

then the statement that ‘Razors were certainly not scarce. Sheffield was relatively close to London’s northern suburbs, and it offered a dazzling selection of razors made in England’ (24). Then, dizzyingly, ‘By the 1940s, Sheffield was an internationally renowned manufacturing city, and this made it a prime target for Nazi air raids. Many British civilians were angry that lives were jeopardized or destroyed to save the factories. David Morton explains how capitalism uses raw materials to manufacture objects. Bowen’s shorter fiction demonstrates the devastating range of objects’ (24).

This kaleidoscopic commentary can make for a slightly exhausting reading experience. With these strings of details, some quite oddly presented, we have strayed quite far from the murder, its geography and even its historical provenance; rather than decoding the gentle surrealism of the story, which deals with themes of reportage and disclosure, it feels as if a chaotic layer has been added. Elsewhere, a generalised clinical approach is opted for: an analysis of ‘Ghost Story’ concludes, after remarking upon the protuberant eyes of family oil portraits, ‘Bulging eyes are a sign of hyperthyroidism which can also shorten life expectancy. Verena nervously remarks upon how the family loved to eat; nevertheless, the pair dutifully work their way through the multicourse dinner arranged by Meta. Gluttony may have harmed the mental health of the family over the generations. Laura Fiori (2014) reveals that ongoing studies from 1979 reveal that cholesterol levels can influence violent and suicidal tendencies’ (42). Mrs Drover of ‘The Demon Lover’ is similarly diagnosed: ‘It is likely that she has experienced a minor stroke or transient ischemic attack’ (114). It isn’t clear what this type of approach is intended to achieve, whereby fiction is treated as fact and explicated: that this weird fiction is actually intrinsically realist? Or perhaps, given the fact that much of the psychological research drawn upon significantly post-dates the fiction, that Bowen’s short fiction behaves as she described it in the essay ‘The Short Story in England’ (collected in *People, Places, Things*) as a ‘magic mirror, reflecting what was to come’ (313)? Elsewhere allusions are assuredly determined. The statement ‘One could precipitate nothing’ in ‘The Cat Jumps’ is authoritatively interpreted as a reference to ‘the struggle for suffrage in Britain and Ireland’, despite the fact that Bowen was quite clear that she did not identify as a feminist. Such definitive pronouncements are uncomfortable in the light (or murk) of the equivocal undecidability of Bowen’s prose. Sometimes, as in the case of the discussion of ‘The Happy Autumn Fields’ – ‘Henrietta either subtly sabotaged the saddle or enlisted supernatural forces to spook the horse’ (73) – the kind of diagnosis that is actually the product of engaged, creative reading brought in to fill the gaps left by Bowen can feel more like an exercise in rationalising the irrational. This is the trap Bowen’s stories leave for us.

Levy’s overarching thesis is that while Bowen’s short fiction ‘initially appears to be a quixotic celebration of moral transgression, crime without meaningful punishment, and suicide without mourners, it is actually a prescient and compassionate appraisal of perpetrator pain’ (1). Given this focus it is perhaps surprising to see Jessica Gildersleeve’s *Elizabeth Bowen and the writing of trauma: the ethics of survival* referenced only in passing. As Gildersleeve’s positive take on the short fiction is quite different from Levy’s—where ‘[e]ach story refuses or overcomes annihilation, consistently privileging life over death, the safety of the psyche over the danger posed to the body’ (109)—this would have proved a fruitful engagement. The question of ethics is a compelling one, but it is one that could have been interrogated further. One provocative chapter heading, ‘Ameliorative Suicide’, poses its own

ethical question: can there be such a thing? We ask ourselves whether Bowen's interest in the sensational is sensible, interrogative, or prurient. If, as Levy shrewdly observes, 'The motives and minds of killers receive so much attention in Bowen's shorter fiction that their victims fade out of focus' (78) – what are the ethical implications of this? What are the ramifications of venerating Bowen as a writer who dedicates time to 'perpetrator trauma' but finds victims' perspectives uninteresting? If Bowen's stories 'prove that she [...] believed all human consciousness has an equal value' (128), surely this view is modified in some way by a privileging of the perpetrator's perspective. Further questions arise, such as how ethics can function within a context of surrealism or the non-explanatory. Also, in literary worlds which challenge the notion of individuality, how does responsibility function in the world without a self? Bowen's biography is relevant in such a context: her willingness to engage in infidelity which was not necessarily fully transparent or consensual, her agreement to 'spy' on Ireland for a British government, her Catholicism, her involvement with the Royal Commission on Capital Punishment, are all factors which evidence a writer operating within shifting and ambiguous ethical matrices.

*Dead Reckoning* does not quite engage with questions such as these, and while Levy's book is rich in plot description, cultural history and reference, sometimes this means her voice becomes a little lost. The pace can be frenetic, occasionally struggling with contradictions and non-sequiturs: for example, on page 9, we are told, 'Perhaps because the short story represented freedom from convention, [Bowen] did not write a manual for it', which is quickly followed by a reference to her preface to the *Faber Book of Modern Short Stories* that Levy describes as 'overtly instructional'. There are some typographical errors too, and Bowen is not always quoted as carefully as she should be. For a book which at times has the feel of a miscellany, scholars might feel frustrated that while previously unpublished story drafts and portions from the Harry Ransom Center are discussed in the final chapter, they are not reproduced. If this book does not quite coalesce as a meaningful whole, perhaps appropriately concerned as it is with her wildest stories and fragments, it does start a productive and inherently valuable conversation about these bizarre and phantasmagoric stories whose magnetism works in two directions, drawing us in and warding us off.

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(Re)constructing the life and loves of Elizabeth Bowen: *The Shadowy Third: Love, Letters and Elizabeth Bowen* by Julia Parry (Duckworth, 2021) and *The Last Day at Bowen's Court: A Novel* by Eibhear Walshe (Bantry: Somerville Press, 2020).

At the beginning of 2020, the Elizabeth Bowen Society started to put together plans for a Bowen Symposium to be held in London at Birkbeck, University of London, on 29<sup>th</sup> February, a leap day and a day on which, traditionally, a woman can propose marriage to a man. There are various traditions about this day, which occurs just once every four years, one of which is that should he refuse the proposal, the man has to pay a financial penalty or, in certain European countries, buy the woman twelve pairs of gloves. In a flight of fancy, I wondered what would have happened had Elizabeth Bowen had the opportunities afforded by a leap day, and proposed to either (or both) Humphry House or Charles Ritchie (obviously leaving aside the fact that, at the time, she was married to Alan Cameron). Had she done so though, and had the proposal(s) been accepted, we would not have been in a position to have read the (re)constructions of her relationships with these two men written respectively by Julia Parry (*The Shadowy Third: Love, Letters and Elizabeth Bowen*) and Eibhear Walshe (*The Last Day at Bowen's Court*).

Nick Turner and I were delighted that Julia Parry accepted the invitation to talk at the Symposium about her forthcoming book. Layla Ferrández Melero's excellent report of the event was published in Volume Three of *The Elizabeth Bowen Review* (2020). But no written account of the event, however excellent, could completely capture the sheer delight of the talk, the excitement of hearing about this wonderful archive of correspondence between Humphry House and Elizabeth Bowen, the pleasure of seeing unpublished photographs, or the enjoyment of hearing the ways in which Julia Parry's journey of discovery was interwoven into the story of the affair between House and Bowen.

Already an admirer of Bowen's work (despite admitting that she hadn't read any of Bowen's work while she was an undergraduate), the re-discovery of Bowen's letters to House, and House's letters to Bowen, was an extraordinary moment in Parry's life. The story of the affair and the relationship between House and his wife (Parry's grandfather and grandmother) draws on her extensive knowledge of Bowen's fiction; it juxtaposes Parry's own physical journey with the places where Bowen and House lived and loved, and with her reconstruction of the love affair. It is a story that is told with wit and a certain amount of bathos, and will appeal to all those who have an interest in Bowen's life and fiction. Parry's enjoyment of her own engagement with the letters is clear to see; she tells the reader that she found herself 'bewitched' by the persona of Elizabeth Bowen (19), a sentiment that was also felt by House, who Parry describes as being 'dazzled by her status and stature as well as by her other qualities' (53).

However, Parry is unsparing when it comes to her portrayal of House, detailing, for example, his move to Calcutta for a job as Professor of English at the Presidency College in February 1936. This involved signing a contract for three and a half years and leaving behind his pregnant wife and young daughter, and it was a job which

‘allowed him to slip the knot of marital and parental responsibility’ (176). The letters from House to Bowen are sometimes wrought with emotion and, with hindsight, seem particularly cruel. For example, in a letter written on 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1934, House berates Bowen for her accusation that he lacks ‘simplicity’ for not telling her that Madeline (now his wife) was expecting a second child. At the same time, he accuses Bowen of a lack of directness: ‘Why, Elizabeth, did you not tell me when we first slept together that you were a virgin?’ He continues:

I do not want to give a childish *tu quoque*:<sup>1</sup> but I want you to see that in urging ‘simplicity’ upon me as a criterion of letters and our whole relationship you are urging something which I cannot say I have found wholly in you. (132)

But Bowen could be equally acerbic, particularly when writing about Madeline; after visiting the Houses at ‘The Steps’, their home near Ashdown Forest, in August 1938, Bowen wrote to her friend William Plomer about the couple. She refers to House as ‘so nice’ with a ‘tendency to over-intellectualise things’ in his writing, ‘a form of indigestion (like acidity) I suppose’, as a man with ‘a rather inadequate stomach’ and to Madeline as looking ‘pop-eyed with anxiety the whole time, poor little creature: I always feel at once sorry for and depressed by her’ (236). Bowen’s comments about House are understandable, but those about Madeline seem both vicious and patronising. This visit is followed in the book by a trip by House and Madeline to Bowen’s Court, a visit captured in photographs that starkly depict the awkwardness of the occasion, which is clear on the faces of Elizabeth, Madeline and Noreen Colley (Bowen’s cousin), but which is not apparently shared by House, who hovers over the three women in a proprietorial manner.

Parry’s writing owes much to her study of Bowen’s fiction and non-fiction: ‘My sense of an uncanny correspondence with Elizabeth takes many forms’ she writes, ‘But there is also a sense of being a pupil under her tutelage, inevitably influenced and inspired by her as a writer’ (243). One way in which the ‘uncanny correspondence’ can be seen is in Parry’s ability to describe place. In ‘Pictures and Conversations’, an essay published in 1972, Bowen wrote about the importance of ‘showing scene in fluidity, in (apparent) motion’, continuing that

‘the beholder must be in motion himself, on foot or on or in a conveyance of whatever kind, of whatever speed. The greater the speed, the more liquefying the process. [...] He does not merely — as he would were he at a standstill — see scene, he watches it compulsively like a non-stop narrative’ (‘Pictures and Conversations’ 40).

Julia Parry’s fascination and engagement with Bowen’s writing, her sense of *locale* and the notion of being in transit, is very evident in this book. It is not an overt condemnation of the behaviour of Bowen and House, although neither are depicted in a particularly positive light; it is rather an exploration of the complicated personalities involved: Bowen, House and Madeline. Indeed, Parry’s own journey to Kolkata in the footsteps of her grandfather, visiting the places where he lived and worked and hearing about the high renown in which he was held, found her ‘being forced, gently, kindly, into a reappraisal’ of him (226), as she considered and wrote about the relationships between the three people. She concludes her story of these

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<sup>1</sup> *Tu quoque* – ‘you too’: discrediting the opponent by accusing them of inconsistent behaviour.

lives by reflecting on her own pilgrimage, her own sense of being in transit: ‘On these exhilarating travels – carried by boat, bike, tuk-tuk, and train – I have been accompanied both by my grandparents and by an extraordinary writer obsessed with journeys; the heightened sensibility they bestow, the spells they cast, their dramatic, transformative potential’ (335). Julia Parry writes about the debt that she owes to her family and to Elizabeth Bowen, about the importance of the archive to literary scholarship, and of her feelings of responsibility, a debt that she has fully repaid in this book. This is more than an edited collection of the correspondence between Bowen and House: it is a memoir of a family, woven around those letters but also around memories and personal reflections. In writing about these three people, Parry has helped transform my understanding of the complexity of that relationship and, even more, of the complexity and the contradictions inherent in Elizabeth Bowen.

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Over the summer I was very fortunate: first I read Julia Parry’s book and then (in order to preserve some sense of chronological development) I read Eibhear Walshe’s latest novel, *The Last Day at Bowen’s Court*. In this novel, Walshe evokes the heightened emotions felt by many during the Second World War and its aftermath, and the growing love, with its many pitfalls, between the two main protagonists, Elizabeth and Charles, from the very early days of their relationship through to the heartbreak felt by Charles following Elizabeth’s death. His retelling of the love affair between Bowen and the Canadian diplomat Charles Ritchie draws on letters, diaries and Bowen’s fiction, producing a tightly woven novel which focuses on a love affair that started during the War, following a chance meeting at the christening of John Buchan’s grandchild, continued through the height of the Blitz and post-war period, and ended with Bowen’s death in 1973.

The novel opens with a heartfelt cry from Charles as he recalls his dream, some years after the death of his lover: ‘Elizabeth!’. All I want to do’, he says, ‘is dream of you again while I lie here and wait for the dawn. My dream. It’s very simple. The roses in Regent’s Park, a summer’s day, you lying on the grass, elegant, smoking gracefully, telling me about your latest book. My dream of you. Of us.’ (9). In the succeeding chapters we learn of the beginnings of their affair, from the moment they met at the christening through the heady months of spring and summer 1941. In his diary entry for 10<sup>th</sup> February 1941, Ritchie notes: ‘Met Elizabeth Bowen, well-dressed, intelligent handsome face, watchful eyes. I had expected someone more Irish, more silent and brooding and at the same time more irresponsible. I was slightly surprised by her being so much ‘on the spot’.’ (1974: 88) It was a chance meeting that was to spark a love affair that lasted twenty-eight years.

Following the christening, the relationship between Elizabeth and Charles grows. As they walk through Regent’s Park one evening after dinner, Elizabeth is reminded of Andrew Lang’s poem based on Rider Haggard’s story *She*, a novel which had so entranced Bowen as a child (for a time in her childhood, Bowen says ‘I read *She*, lived *She* for a year and a half ... [1962: 113]). The discussion between Elizabeth and Charles forms the basis for a short story, later completed by Elizabeth (and a story

that incenses Sylvia, as she recognises herself as the character Callie). The scene is taken from 'Mysterious Kôr' (one of Bowen's most anthologised short stories, published initially in *The Demon Lover and Other Stories* in 1945), in which Bowen captures the emotions of those living in London during the Blitz. As Neil Corcoran notes, the story is 'poised with ironic delicacy between farce and pathos' (2004: 156), and this is a balance played with by Walshe when the lovers go back to Charles's flat where his cousin (and later wife) Sylvia is staying.

The love affair between Charles and Elizabeth continues through a trip to Hythe, where Elizabeth goes to visit her mother's grave, and a summer at Bowen's Court, which includes a short stay in 'The Shelbourne' in Dublin in 1942. But something goes awry with their relationship. In his diary entry for 12<sup>th</sup> November 1942, Ritchie notes, 'E came to see me for a few minutes. I was rather at a loss with her. Where will it end?' (2008: 35). It ends with Charles's decision to marry his cousin, Sylvia. Bereft by this news, and then later by his marriage, Elizabeth crumbles and finds that she's no longer able to write, despite pressing deadlines. As she struggles through her grief, she and Alan move back to Bowen's Court and Alan's health deteriorates as he falls into a 'rapid slide into old age' (104): 'Overnight, the capable man who managed the dismantling of their London life with such speed, is dwindling into a bewildered invalid, looking to her with increasing irritation, wondering where his life has gone' (ibid). Elizabeth's desire to write is stimulated by the sight of swans flying overhead, 'thrilling her with their strength and their nearness' (125), and she rushes back to the house to write to Charles and to continue writing the novel which will become *The Heat of the Day*, focusing particularly on the scenes in which Stella confronts Robert, and his subsequent death. Those very swans appear in the final scene of *The Heat of the Day* as Louie holds her new son up, 'hoping that he might see, and perhaps remember' (1948: 372), providing a sense of hope for them both in an apparently senseless world, a vision perhaps shared by Elizabeth as she tries to make sense of her relationship with Charles.

The novel ends with Charles reminiscing about the many times over the years that he and Elizabeth met: the snatched hours in Rome, London or Paris; the time when he 'could play at being master' of Bowen's Court, following Alan's death (184); his feelings of despair when Elizabeth sells Bowen's Court—'a cruel end' (185)—and his final realisation that he loved Elizabeth as much, if not more, than she loved him—'I stand up and summon you. The living apparition I long for. Elizabeth, if you ever thought that you loved me the best, now you have your revenge' (190).

Walshe's integration of scenes from the short stories in *The Demon Lover and Other Stories* (published in 1945) and *The Heat of the Day* (published in 1948), together with 'nods' to her other fiction and non-fiction writing, adds to the sense that we are hearing Bowen's joyful voice as the love affair unfolds, her distress when the relationship faltered and then her desire to grasp happiness following Alan Cameron's death, even though Ritchie had, by then, married Sylvia. While it isn't necessary to be familiar with Bowen's fiction, Ritchie's diaries,<sup>2</sup> or Bowen's letters to

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<sup>2</sup> These were published in three volumes: *The Siren Years: A Canadian Diplomat Abroad 1937-1945* (London: Macmillan London Limited, 1974); *Diplomatic Passport: More Undiplomatic Diaries 1946-1962* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd, 1981); and *Storm Signals: More Undiplomatic Diaries 1962-1971* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd, 1983).

Ritchie<sup>3</sup> in order to enjoy the novel, an extra layer of pleasure is probably added if the reader has some knowledge of Bowen's language and her ability to describe place and emotion. It is, as Walshe notes, 'a fictional version of the interconnected lives of Elizabeth Bowen, Charles Ritchie, and of Bowen's husband, Alan Cameron and Ritchie's wife Sylvia Ritchie' (6), but by rooting it in the events that took place over the many years of their relationship, Walshe provides a real sense of verisimilitude. Walshe is, of course, a well-regarded Bowen scholar and this novel benefits from that scholarship. But, while we know that many of the conversations and events probably didn't take place, we are left with the impression that we could be eavesdropping on an extraordinary romance between two extraordinary people, a story that is told with a style that Bowen would have recognised and would probably have much appreciated.

Nicola Darwood

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<sup>3</sup> Some of these letters can be found in *Love's Civil War: Elizabeth Bowen & Charles Ritchie: Letters and diaries from the love affair of a lifetime*, edited by Victoria Glendinning with Judith Robertson (London: Simon & Schuster UK Ltd, 2008).

## Exactness from Obscurity – Bowen and her criticism: Heather Ingman, *Elizabeth Bowen (Key Irish Women Writers)* (Edward Everett Root, 2021) and *Elizabeth Bowen: Selected Stories*, Vintage (Penguin Random House, 2021)

One of the great things about the world of Elizabeth Bowen, her fiction and the criticism that surrounds it, is the apparent bottomlessness of the discussion. As is the case with the greatest writers, everything will never be said, and a new way of reading, a new apparently marginal observation in a text, suddenly becomes crucial. Bowen was, I feel, ahead of her time in her registering of trauma, dislocation and fractured identity, areas which are now very much of topical interest.

The complexity of Bowen's work, both in its style and content, invites complex discussion; some critics have added to this with similarly complex scholarship which does open up fascinating questions but lacks clarity and obfuscates. This is not the case with the work of Heather Ingman, whose *Elizabeth Bowen*, part of Edward Everett Root's Key Irish Women Writers Series, is an exceptionally lucid, intelligent introduction to the writer's work which manages the difficult feat of being pitched at both newcomers to Bowen and scholars, and embraces a wide range of critical material while never losing sight of its explanatory drive.

Given the parent series, the overarching theme is the Irishness of Bowen's work, but also an intention to highlight 'moments when cataclysms occur' in a body of fiction made up of extraordinary juxtapositions (11). Ingman, though, is open to the multiplicity of readings of individual works and places them usefully within wider contexts: *The Hotel* is seen as a 'comedy of manners tinged with modernist awareness' (18), *The Last September* is linked to Beckett and Irish Protestant Gothic and Gothic more generally, and *The House in Paris* allied with fascism as a kind of new global political primitivism. Ingman gives prominence to the short stories and non-fiction, too, widening our understanding of their importance and the links between them and her novels; she is catholic and her acknowledgement of literary influences.

This book is a highly useful one for readers and scholars of Bowen's work at whatever level; it fills an important gap, while reminding us that her 'inconclusive plots and stated preference for creating silences and mystery around her characters make resistance to final explanation an appropriate end note' (153). It is faultlessly edited, error free, clear and readable, and should be a marker and model for all Bowen criticism that follows.

A similar note is found in Tessa Hadley's introduction to Vintage's new edition of selected stories by Bowen. Hadley, a critically admired and successful British novelist, writes nuanced, subtle analyses of domestic and family life; their sensibility, their registering of emotional temperature, show why Bowen was a writer who has fascinated her so much. She proves herself an acute, insightful critic here, and her introduction to the stories is a major attraction of this edition. 'Trust begins in the

aesthetic', writes Hadley, 'not in the argument, or in what's said or shown. Something feels right, smells right, in the colour and flavour of the work.' (x). Hadley's 'something' is precisely the point: the ambiguity Bowen embraces, and the impossibility of pinning down greatness. I agree with Hadley that Bowen is a rarity in that she is 'equally good at novels and short stories' (xi); in whatever form, Bowen exerts a 'forceful authority' alongside 'romantic excess' (xi) in her writing. The former is something I have not seen much discussed, and it marks out another difference between her work and much other Modernist writing. Hadley goes on to note, interestingly, that 'what feels masculine in her authority ... enables in effect an upending of hierarchy, opens up a wild female space of the absurd, the inadmissible' (xv).

The selection, including as it does a generous but necessarily restricted twenty-one stories out of Bowen's *oeuvre*, is bound to elicit some questioning as to what has and has not been included, but the acknowledged classics are here: 'Mysterious Kôr', 'Ivy Gripped the Steps', 'Summer Night' and 'The Demon Lover', the only notable omission perhaps being 'The Happy Autumn Fields'. The collection ranges across all Bowen's short story collections, Irish and English settings; for the beginner, it's the perfect introduction to her work; for those already acquainted, a chance to see how Bowen's style developed rapidly and confidently between the publications. Hadley's conclusion is that Bowen is 'better than Woolf ... more confidently passionate ... she's funnier, the flow of her words is more elegantly sure and more original' (xviii). Bowen, today, could have no greater praise.

Nick Turner

## Afterword ~ Eoin O'Callaghan

Like many people, having spent 2020 unable to travel very far at all, 2021 brought some welcome relief. As travel became easier I took the chance to spend some long overdue time in Ireland. I'm Irish, but have been based in London for nearly 20 years, and it was great to get the opportunity to explore Ireland in a way I don't normally have the time to do. While I have visited both the site of Bowen's Court and Doneraile Court estate before, both were on my itinerary again this time. Doneraile Court, because I had heard much about, but not seen the Elizabeth Bowen exhibition there, and Farahy and Bowen's Court, because, well, when in the area I can never resist stopping and savouring the atmosphere there.

At the time of these visits the Bowen Society was in the process of organising our virtual event, 'An Evening at Bowen's Court' so for me, these visits took on added meaning. In this piece, I'd like to reflect on the event, but also on Bowen's continuing presence in North County Cork, at both the site of Bowen's Court and Doneraile Court.

'An Evening at Bowen's Court' took place on 30<sup>th</sup> September and featured talks on Bowen's Court itself and Bowen's book of the same name. It proved to be the most well attended event the Bowen Society has put on to date. It seems that the Big House, Bowen and Bowen's Court continue to capture the public imagination, perhaps more so as the decades go by. It struck me listening to David Hick's brilliantly illustrated talk that the more you see, the more you realise what has been lost: seeing the aerial photos, one wants to gaze on the house from afar; seeing the floor plans one wants to be in the rooms; seeing an image of the stairs, the entrance hall, the library, the front steps, or any one of these spaces populated by Bowen and her friends, one is repeatedly shocked by what has been lost.

In planning this event, we wanted the focus to be two-fold. Firstly, the focus had to be on the house itself which was so important to Bowen. Secondly, as a literary society devoted to promoting Bowen's work we wanted Bowen's writing to share the limelight. This was not a difficult task, given that in the early 1940s Bowen wrote a long and detailed account of her family's history in Ireland and at Bowen's Court (*Bowen's Court*, published in 1942). Ian d'Alton spoke about how Bowen's Court has become almost mythological as a result of Bowen's account of the creation of her tribe, their way of living, their ambition, and of course ultimately, their decline. Ian accurately concluded his talk by saying: 'In writing it, she created a new, a higher reality, and there it still is.'

When visiting Bowen's Court now it's difficult to get any real sense of what was once there. Bowen's grave in the quiet cemetery on the edge of the estate will always be a place of pilgrimage. But what remains of the wider estate? The upper and lower gates are intact. The drives are there, their curving arcs discernible. The Ballyhoura Mountains still loom large on the horizon and of course you can always rely on having a big sky. The walled garden lies where it always was, its high walls intact, the land turned over to farming. Depending on the time of year, you may find the fields full of fresh green growth, ready for harvest, recently cut or freshly ploughed. While the woods that ringed the demesne no longer exist you can still discern a sense of the parkland it once was from some scattered trees across the fields to the west of where the house once stood. At the site of the house itself nothing remains except a few

mounds of stone and earth, now covered with dense vegetation. Farm machinery lies scattered here and there, reminding you that people do still inhabit this space. Otherwise, there's nothing to remind you of the family life which endured here for nearly two hundred years. On my most recent visit I did notice two wicket gates, one into the walled garden, another from the field into the churchyard (both completely overgrown) which were the only sights to evoke any sense of Bowen's lived life there. I could imagine her walking through one of those gates. While Bowen's Court will always cast a spell, it's difficult for someone, especially someone not very familiar with Bowen and her work, to get a sense of her or the house from the landscape which remains.

Luckily 10km to the west a very similar house survives and is making considerable efforts to showcase Bowen, her work and her connections with the area. Doneraile Court predates Bowen's Court, but was remodelled in 1730 by Isaac Rothery, the architect of Bowen's Court. Managed by the Office of Public Works since 1994, it has been undergoing a long and thorough restoration and the interior reopened to the public for the first time in a generation in 2019. In appearance it is very similar (seven-bays, three-storey over basement) to Bowen's Court. This summer, for the first time, I took a tour of the house. Waiting to enter at the front steps, I was immediately struck that the limestone porch was surmounted by a curvilinear pediment of almost exactly the same shape as the fireplace from the entrance hall at Bowen's Court.

Currently, a room downstairs is devoted to Bowen memorabilia. These include Bowen's address book, correspondence with her solicitors regarding the sale of Bowen's Court, her CBE, as well as some artefacts from Bowen's Court. The room is hung with several Bowen family portraits but the *piece de resistance* is Patrick Hennessy's 1957 portrait of Bowen on the stairs at Bowen's Court, on loan from the Crawford Gallery in Cork.

The corridor outside contains a large display of photos. These show various aspects of life at Bowen's Court. Many are of the literary set that congregated there, others are simply of the house and its interiors, and some are of Bowen herself. All are fascinating. There is also a facsimile copy of a personal photo album once owned by Bowen which can be perused. Personally annotated by her, it contains many beautiful and personal photographs.

Doneraile Court is also being used as a venue for community events, fulfilling Bowen's own social vision for these buildings as articulated in her 1940 article, *The Big House*. As a result of one such event, on the day of my visit, Bowen's Olympia Splendid 33 typewriter had been taken off display. At the end of the tour (and after a special request) I was given permission to see the typewriter in a storage room upstairs. One can very easily imagine Bowen, working hard on an article or later novel on this machine.

It was wonderful to see the guides take visitors through the Bowen exhibits and also to see the enthusiasm which they have for Bowen's work. Visitors are definitely getting exposure to Bowen's life and work here. The house is also facilitating an ongoing dialogue between visitors and the heritage (literary and otherwise) of the North Cork area. One of the guides relayed to me, how they had a visitor who worked as butler to Mary, Lady Doneraile, the last St Leger resident of Doneraile Court.

Elizabeth Bowen was a friend of Lady Doneraile's and the butler recounted that when she visited, everything had to be properly prepared, including him having to dress more formally than he normally had to.

As Doneraile Court is further restored, the plan is for the Bowen exhibition to become a permanent feature there. Two rooms on the first floor will be permanently devoted to Bowen. In 2022 the OPW will be opening to the public the Gardens at Anne's Grove, also very familiar to Bowen and situated even closer to Bowen's Court than Doneraile.

So while to all intents and purposes Bowen's Court is no more, apart that is from in her remarkable writing, it's both amazing and heart-warming to see Bowen's memory and legacy being kept very much alive in the Big Houses and sheltered demesnes of North County Cork.

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## Contributors

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**Eoin O'Callaghan** is a Chartered Accountant with 20 years experience in the Energy and Shipping industry. He undertook his undergraduate studies in Food Business at University College Cork where he had exposure to the writing of Elizabeth Bowen, sparking an enduring interest in her life and work. Since 2019 he has been Treasurer of the Elizabeth Bowen Society.

**Dr Nick Turner** is an Associate Lecturer with the Open University and a Lecturer at Kirklees College. His monograph is *Post-War British Women Novelists and the Canon* (Bloomsbury, 2010). He has published research 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, organising a centenary conference in 2013 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 a manager of the popular Facebook group *Undervalued British Women Novelists 1930-1960*, and was co-editor of the online journal *Writers in Conversation*. Recent publications include the edited collection *Interwar Women's Comic Fiction: "Have Women a Sense of Humour?"*, Cambridge Scholars Press (2020), with Nicola Darwood, and essays on Barbara Comyns and Mary Fitt. He is a co-founder and co-chair of the Elizabeth Bowen Society and is co-editor of *The Elizabeth Bowen Review*. He lives in Yorkshire, UK.

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