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The Elizabeth Bowen Review

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Editorial Board

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Editorial policy

All essays are subject to double blind peer review. We welcome submissions on all aspects of Elizabeth Bowen's life and work. Completed essays for Volume 6 (2024) (6,000 words including bibliography and footnotes) should be submitted by 31st October 2023. If you would like to discuss a possible submission, please contact the editors (details above).

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

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Nicola Darwood & Nick Turner ~ Introduction

It seems rather trite to say that it's astonishing how quickly the last eighteen months have passed since Volume Four 'hit the stands' in September 2021, but this certainly seems to be the case. The world changed significantly in March 2020 and we are still experiencing the long term effects of the pandemic now. We are fortunate indeed that, despite everything that has happened in those intervening months, scholars are still researching and writing about Elizabeth Bowen, her life and her work, and that there are others who are willing to review and comment on the results. The *Review* would not be possible without the contributions of the authors, our reviewers and our editorial and advisory boards, and we continue to be grateful for their time and support for this publication.

We have five essays in this volume, all of which demonstrate once more the vibrancy of Bowen scholarship. There are a number of common threads running through this volume that are endemic in much of Bowen's writing, such as identity, chance and inheritance. We open with Bronwyn Kato's exploration of *The Little Girls* ('Casting off the Mask: Elizabeth Bowen's *The Little Girls*'). Kato considers notions of identity, social constructs and constraints, and the need for some of Bowen's characters in her penultimate novel to mask their identity. In her discussion, Kato explores notions of repression and confinement, Bowen's use of humour, the importance of place, the uncanny in the novel, temporality, memory and inheritance, as Dinah, Sheila and Clare seek to establish an adult identity. While the emptiness of the disinterred coffer might suggest a lacunae in their own sense of being, Kato argues that the empty box also symbolises the opportunities for the women to recast their identities while recognising the importance of the past in the present.

As Kato notes, Bowen felt that she had managed to recast herself as a writer in *The Little Girls*, and this new approach to her work is even more apparent in her last published novel, *Eva Trout, or Changing Scenes*. In her essay 'Reading Irresponsibility in *Eva Trout*', Laura Lainväe focuses on the inability of the characters to read the signs — an inability that Lainväe identifies as a lack of responsible reading — as well as the possible consequences of irresponsible behaviour, the concatenation of events referred to by Constantine in the dying pages of the novel. Lainväe considers the unravelling of Eva's past, and its effect on her present, an unravelling which has much to do with both Eva's irresponsible actions and, in part, her emotional illiteracy. Bowen, however, makes the reader complicit in that illiteracy, leading us to misinterpret Eva's character, just as she misinterprets, misreads and misunderstands the language and motives of other characters in the novel.

Tara Werner turns our attention to locale, specifically the locale of the 'Big House', in her essay 'Letting the tradition lapse: Elizabeth Bowen's Embedded Big House Narratives'. She focuses particularly on *The House in Paris* and *The Heat of the Day* which are, in the main, located in European cities. Werner argues, however, that the 'Big House', despite its apparent marginalisation in these novels, should be considered to be at the centre of these two novels. Werner draws on Bowen's history of her own 'Big House', Bowen's Court, and her Anglo-Irish background, arguing that Bowen's incorporation of the 'Big House' allows her to explore the complexities of

her own inheritance. As with the other essays in this volume, Werner considers the importance of inheritance in the construction of identity, whether this is an inheritance which is accepted or one that is, ultimately, rejected.

In 'Lights! Camera! Action!: Elizabeth Bowen's Use of Cinematic Techniques', Diana Hirst considers Bowen's use of techniques found in the evolving cinema industry which continued to evolve over the course of her writing career. Hirst discusses cinematic openings of some of the novels, from the sweeping, panning shots in *The House in Paris*, the light and its effects in the first few pages of *The Little Girls*, to the contrasts of light and dark in Regent's Park in *The Heat of the Day*. The use of fragmentation used by Bowen as she sets scene can, Hirst argues, be identified in the montage of images experienced by the reader and Henrietta in the taxi ride from the Gare du Nord to Madame Fisher's house. Hirst's discussion culminates in her consideration of changing cinematic techniques in Bowen's final three novels.

The last essay in this volume is Huw Jones' winning entry in the 2022 essay competition. In 'Remembering what never happened: the ghosts of imagined futures in *The Heat of the Day*', Jones takes us back to a consideration of the role that the past can have in informing the present, a haunting which can shape the future. He focuses on three characters in the novel: Roderick Rodney; Stella Rodney; and Louie Lewis. He argues that Roderick, though consumed by an imagined past, will have a bleak future and that Stella feels an element of nostalgia for her past life, but also for the lost possibilities of the future. In contrast, Louie has little to feel nostalgic about: her present is constructed through articles in the newspapers. It is, however, Jones concludes, Louie alone who has a more realistic chance of a settled future, one unimpeded by ghosts of the past.

We are very pleased to include reviews of a number of books and chapters: *The Wireless Past: Anglo-Irish Writers and the BBC, 1931-1968* by Emily C. Bloom; *Ireland's Gramophones: Material Culture, Memory, and Trauma in Irish Modernism* by Zan Cammack; *Public Opinion Polling in Mid-Century British Literature: The Psychographic Turn* by Megan Faragher; *Wastepaper Modernism: Twentieth-Century Fiction and the Ruins of Print* by Joseph Elkanah Rosenberg; *Irish Lesbian Writing Across Time: A New Framework for Rethinking Love Between Women* by Anna Charczun; and 'Houses in Paris, Houses in Cork: Elizabeth Bowen and the Modernist Inheritance' by Lauren Elkin in *Late Modernism and Expatriation*, edited by Lauren Arrington.

The Afterword has been written by Nuala O'Connor, the Irish novelist and poet, whose fifth novel, *NORA*, was published to great acclaim in 2021. O'Connor shares her personal connection with, and thoughts on, the often extraordinary writing of Elizabeth Bowen. It is, truly, a fitting conclusion to this volume, which we hope will be of interest and enjoyment to all who read it.

Nick Turner and Nicola Darwood
April 2023

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Essay competition 2022

We are delighted to announce that the winner of the 2022 essay competition is Huw Jones. Huw is currently studying for a PhD at Swansea University. His essay, published in this review, is a worthy winner of the competition. Congratulations again, Huw!

Essay competition 2023

The editors of the *Elizabeth Bowen Review* would now like to invite undergraduate and postgraduate students to submit essays that focus on Bowen's life or work for the 2023 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 by 11.59pm on 31st December 2023.

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 Six or Volume Seven of the *Review*. The winning essayist will be announced in Volume Six.

For more information, please contact the editors, Dr Nick Turner and Dr Nicola Darwood, at bowen@beds.ac.uk

News from the Elizabeth Bowen Society

The Elizabeth Bowen Society has continued to host a bi-monthly reading group. We're now discussing Bowen's novels in chronological order, and will be talking about *The Death of the Heart* at the May 2023 meeting. In September, we're going to return to *Encounters*, Bowen's first collection of stories, marking the 100th anniversary year of its publication.

In 2022, we started a tradition of birthday lectures. The first was given by Professor Allan Hepburn (McGill University), and his lecture, 'Writing Circles: Correspondence between Elizabeth Bowen and Eudora Welty', was a fascinating discussion of the correspondence between these two writers. Our 2023 birthday lecture, to be held on 7th June 2023, is in the planning stages, and more information will be available soon.

The Society is also planning a conference in the autumn. Once all the arrangements are in place, information about the conference will be available on the website: http://www.bowensociety.com/. The reading group and birthday lectures are held online. They are listed on Eventbrite and are free to attend (although tickets are often limited).

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Casting off the Mask: Elizabeth Bowen's *The Little Girls* ~ Bronwyn Kato

The Little Girls (1963),[1] Elizabeth Bowen's penultimate novel, centres on the reunion, after nearly fifty years apart, of three women in their early sixties. While creating a time capsule, Dinah ('Dicey') is reminded of the coffer containing significant items which the three friends secretly buried when they were eleven years old, on the eve of the First World War. This memory inspires Dinah to instigate a meeting with Clare ('Mumbo') and Sheila ('Sheikie'), with the purpose of exhuming the coffer. The narrative is divided into three sections, with the second part drawing back to the summer of 1914 and the burial of the original time capsule. Part III returns to the present, and the exhumation of the coffer, which is found to be empty. The shock and disappointment of this discovery leads to Dinah having a breakdown representing, as Nicola Darwood describes it, the literal and symbolical 'construction/destruction of identity' (2009: 11).

Some critics have been dismissive of the novel, viewing it as a disappointing departure from the elegance and nuance of the works that preceded it, and describing it variously as 'busy and banal' (Corcoran, 2004, 8), 'dubious and illusive' and beset with 'uneasy ventures into symbolism and contrived literary allusions' (Lee, 1981, 204). Yet, as Bennett and Royle (1995, 123) note, it is 'precisely the kinds of assumptions which lie behind Lee's negative appraisal' that *The Little Girls* challenges, considering that '[t]he accuracy of such descriptions depends upon an entire conceptual edifice of critical, aesthetic and ideological presuppositions which *The Little Girls* itself places in abeyance'. In response to Lee's remark regarding the 'uneasy venture into symbolism', I would argue that the latter is employed on the one hand with irony and humour, while on the other with the intention of exposing both the ubiquity of symbology in literature and culture,[2] and the way in which symbols paradoxically represent and obscure deeper truths. As Bowen notes in 'Pictures and Conversations', 'On the subject of my symbology, if any, or a psychology (whether my own or my characters'), I have occasionally been run ragged' (1975, 281–282). This observation points to a mask imposed by critics and readers on Bowen's work in the form of fixed interpretations through which her writing is evaluated and understood, a stricture which, in this novel, Bowen consciously casts aside.

That *The Little Girls* is a deliberate departure from the novels preceding it is evidenced in an essay written in 1950 entitled 'Disloyalties'. Bowen defines what she regards as the true 'loyalty' or responsibility of the writer; that is, to be faithful not to a fixed style or ideology but rather to the 'endlessness of human variation and dissonance' and the reality that 'ideas, creeds, persons' are 'not fixed but shifting' (61). The task of the writer, she says, is to avoid the 'death symptom which is repetition' and to 'make the break', 'strike out' and 'pursue his course into darker country' (ibid).[3] In the essay's conclusion, Bowen proposes that the 'ultimate loyalty'

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[1] Page numbers only will be given in parenthetical references to quotations from *The Little Girls*.
[2] As Dinah remarks about a butter knife from Clare's gift shop: 'And you need not worry if it is a symbol, as practically everything is, as we now know' (171).
[3] Criticisms aside, Corcoran cites the same essay to offer this 'axiomatic belief in alternative, and further, destination' as 'one explanation for the marked [...] change in her entire style of writing [...] in

of the writer is 'the pursuit, the search, the range of the exploration, the hope of the 'extra dimension', wherein lies truth' (62). This essay, too, aims to look behind the masks and constructs of identity, beyond the bounds of ego and the limits of temporality to locate the 'extra dimension[s]' of emptiness or nonentity and the 'eternal "now"' which Bowen seeks to retrieve and convey ('Subject and Time', 102).

Behind the 'social mask': constructs and constraints of identity

In 'Disloyalties', Bowen writes that the 'novelist's subject is not society, not the individual as a social unit, but the individual as he himself is, behind the social mask' (60). As she states in her notes for a public reading, *The Little Girls* 'is a story about identity' (HRHRC 7.4, n.d.), both the formation and the dissolution thereof. The three protagonists are employed first to illustrate various constructs of identity from gender and sexuality to age, personality, possessions and heritage, and then to reveal how each operates as a mask that conceals, obscures, constrains or represses the individual and the deeper truths Bowen wishes to uncover.

In Dinah, Sheila and Clare we see how each woman is to varying extents confined by aspects of her identity, including the limitations imposed by certain conventions or social constructs, and that which has been buried as opposed to integrated and which continues to operate on a subconscious level. As Jessica Gildersleeve notes in *Elizabeth Bowen and the Writing of Trauma: The Ethics of Survival*, 'Each woman's identity is as much tied to the […] coffer as its form and presence is a result of their identities', and the novel is 'concerned with the representation of repression' (2014, 148–9). Victoria Coulter shares this 'sense of the significance of mechanisms of repression' (2020, 158–9) and cites Maud Ellmann's theory of 'incubing', whereby the unacknowledged or resisted material, such as traumatic experience, is 'entombed alive within the ego' (159). Thus the three writers would seem to agree that the box is symbolic of both the women's repressed experiences and the imprisoning effects of the ego.[4]

A core aspect of identity which Bowen explores concerns gender and sexual orientation. In Clare, we see a woman relatively less confined or defined by prevailing societal conventions and expectations, as evidenced in her masculine presentation[5] and sexual identity. As Jane Rule comments in *Lesbian Images*, Clare is 'the only overt lesbian among all the characters Elizabeth Bowen created' (1975, 118), and critic Judith Woolf posits that, 'the novel is in fact a deferred and troubled love story' (2017, 13) between Clare and Dinah, whose feelings are contrastingly less conscious than Clare's, and emerge only after the exhumation and consequent crisis of identity (2017, 13). At the end of Part II, there is a scene on a beach where, following a disagreement, Dinah, 'alone in the middle of the empty sands' wails as Clare disappears behind the sea wall (151). Dinah later refers to this parting as the 'days before love' and the 'days after' (60). Following their reunion as adults, Dinah's

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the final two novels'. He adds: '[S]he says of the writer's ethical responsibilities that 'His ideal is, to be […] for ever mobile' […] We may read this 'ideal' as an aesthetic as well as an ethical demand: her books are … very keenly pledged to the adventure of the journey itself' (6–7).

[4] As Bowen writes to Ritchie, this 'really is the Subject of the book', 'the 3 of them ARE little girls […] encaged, rather terrible little girls battering about inside grown-up (indeed, almost old) women.' (*Love's Civil War*, 398) Future parenthetical references to this text will read *LCW*.

[5] In her biography of Bowen, Patricia Laurence remarks on Bowen's gender and sexual fluidity, writing that she 'never accepted a label for herself – whether "lesbian, feminist, heterosexual, or invert"' (2019, 161).

son points to her mother's feeling for Clare, saying that she '[s]imply ceased to care for anything since […] [t]hat time you three had […]. You more, though. […] You mean more than you know' (257). When Dinah asks Clare outright if she is a lesbian, the latter refrains from answering directly, countering, 'All your life […] you have run for cover' (229), here echoing an earlier remark: 'I thought you were going to hang that mask?' (217). Clare then asks whether Dinah would have her live, like her companion and maybe-lover Frank, next door to her, quoting *Twelfth Night* (another allusion to gender identity): 'Make *me* a willow cabin at your gate?' (225), to which initially Dinah objects, though later, once they are alone, she admits, 'I wanted you. I wanted you to be there – here, I mean' (229). Dinah talks of the wounded pride both girls felt after their childish disagreement: 'Never should we have called each other to account: that was the catastrophe (278). Yet ultimately they had left it to 'chance, not choice' (277), and the book ends with the suggestion 'that these two will now deal with the relationship the one has longed for, the other longed for but dreaded' (Rule: 121): 'Not Mumbo. Clare. Clare, where have you been?' (277)

In 1961 Bowen writes of 'a further addition to the identity', that of age ('The Beauty of Being Your Age': 356), a subject with which she was increasingly preoccupied in later years. Dinah, whom 'Time' has 'so far failed to give […] coating' (164) transcends the usual definitions and societal limitations around age and ageing, embodying the youthfulness to which many of Bowen's acquaintances referred when describing the author,[6] and reflecting her sentiments that 'one thing Time does is, make anyone *capable* capable of still more' (165). For Bowen, the definition of youthfulness was 'an ability to be charmed by the world around, to respond to things as they come. That, we need not lose (356)'. A lack of engagement and interest in the present, she felt, showed in the 'emptying faces, unexpectant eyes' and '[a]utomatic talk, unconvincing laughter' of 'the man or woman with no incentive, no joys, no interests' ('Mental Annuity', 346), as demonstrated by Sheila, the one of the three women whom Time *had* touched, leaving her 'far more barnacled over' (186): '[She] regarded herself in the lid mirror, without comment or, it seemed, curiosity. […] The flesh of her face had hardened, perhaps through the effort involved in resisting change' (30).

This theme of agelessness as typified by curiosity, presence and flexibility is central to Bowen's intentions and desire to retrieve and express the unmitigated, unfiltered perception of the child, or as she puts it to Jocelyn Brooke, 'some particular faculty that childhood had' (295). In 'The Cult of Nostalgia', she describes how children are naturally:

> aware of the delightful and forceful mystery locked up in the existence of outside things. […] That heaven lying around us in our infancy: was it perhaps in fact, or at least in part, the heaven of impersonal curiosity? If so, it is a heaven we do indeed do well to try and regain. The original magic – perhaps, even, the original truth? (99)

[6] In 1958 Charles Ritchie records a friend commenting, 'She is the YOUNGEST person' (*LCW*, 312), and considers whether Bowen's youthfulness stems from 'this power of enjoyment, this immediate responsiveness' and if 'her art' is 'the secret of her strength' (ibid). In a letter written in 1964, Bowen describes a holiday with a friend in Jordan, comparing herself and her companion to the women in her book: 'She and I *are* both very childish characters. […] [O]ur vocabulary and our recreations and our mental level seem to be about the same (as those of the Little G.'s, I mean)' (*LCW*, 420).

This childlike embrace of the immediate is viewed by Bowen as a 'pure beholding' of and response to the present ('Subject and Time', 1954, 149), a response undiluted by preconception, analysis, or the blur of 'too many associations' ('The Cult of Nostalgia', 1951, 99).

In 1962 Bowen wrote to Ritchie:

> What I like about [*The Little Girls*] is that I do think it is overtly and unguardedly silly. I realize that why I have from time to time tied myself up into knots over my writing, is, because of efforts to conceal how silly I am, and what a predilection for silliness I have. Now I am casting off the mask. (*LCW*, 382)

A profound truth underlies the seemingly self-deprecatory word 'silliness'. In 'Pictures and Conversations' Bowen remarks on the 'magnificent, self-exonerating silliness' she detects in her 'betters, the giants of my profession' (278). This is a silliness which reaches past the limits and boundaries of literary and social convention or egoic constraints to embrace the absurdities and contradictions, the inexplicable and inexpressible aspects of reality, encompassing the transcendent and banal, the profound and meaningless. This is the paradox towards which Bowen repeatedly points in *The Little Girls*: the concomitant profundity and inconsequence of fiction with its associated symbology and inherent transience; and the effort whereby fiction strives to convey the present-moment reality it simultaneously occludes.

The following childhood scene highlights Bowen's keen sense of the ridiculous which, beyond providing humour, is frequently a source of revelation, as demonstrated by her implicit commentary on individuality – how despite our emphasis on difference and efforts to be unique, beneath our masks we are 'all the same'.

> 'I wanted some ants' eggs. But, Mr. Fagg—' 'Then what's your trouble? I have them.' 'One of my goldfish died.' 'Well, we're all but mortal.' 'But another's begun to come out in blotches: are you sure your ants' eggs are quite all right?' 'Those fish of yours, were they ever healthy?' 'Beautifully healthy, always. They came,' said Hermione, colouring with social consciousness, 'from Harrods.' 'Thought I never supplied them! Well, if they continue to play you up, miss, I should tip the whole lot out and begin anew.' 'But I'm very, very fond of them, Mr. Fagg,' expostulated the almost mother.
> 'Take it from me,' he said, 'all fish are the same.' (106)

Scenes like the above clearly convey the author's enjoyment of the present moment, the faculty of childhood which Bowen is now embracing rather than tying herself 'up into knots'. Instead, Bowen affirms the 'enormous element of pleasure' involved in the contemplation and performance of writing, as she describes in conversation with Jocelyn Brooke:

> I am convinced that writers, or painters, like composers, really do intensely enjoy themselves [...] And if they don't do anything else they communicate by what they paint, or write, or compose, at least some degree of what has been their own enjoyment. I think art [i]s sociability. I think it all links up with the enormous human fact that it's for pleasure. They enjoy themselves more than they know, and more than perhaps they probably dare admit. (285–286)

In several letters to Ritchie, Bowen confesses that she is 'having a whale of a time', 'rushing along with [her] novel in an obsessive manner' (*LCW*, 382) and 'fanatically unwilling to be separated from it' (398):

> I feel I am going on in the most ridiculous way about this book [...] I mean, I have been writing for 40 years: anybody would think I'd never written a book before, from the fuss I'm making about never being able to be apart for an hour, if possible, from the dear thing. But it has a sort of hallucinatory excitement about it. (392)

This pursuit of pleasure, of fully experiencing the sensation of now, fueled and infused Bowen's writing, producing a state which is transferred to readers via scenes like the above, and vivid, poetic descriptions such as the following passage featuring Dinah's garden (gardens being a recurring motif in Bowen's work):

> Roses were on enough into their second blooming to be squandering petals over cushions of pansies. [...] And everywhere along the serpentine walk where anything else grew not, dahlias grew: some dwarf, some giant, some corollas like blazons, some close-fluted, some velvet, some porcelain or satin, some darkening, some burning like flame or biting like acid into the faint dusk now being given off by the evening earth. (12)

Particularly evocative are her haunting depictions of place – a primary source of pleasure for Bowen and, in her opinion, of undervalued significance in her novels. As she writes in 'Pictures and Conversations', 'Am I not manifestly a writer for whom places loom large?' (282). In *The Little Girls*, we see Bowen return to a site of particular significance to her, the place where as a young girl she lost her mother and became a writer: Hythe, Kent. Bowen describes how her initial arrival in England was like entering another world. With its 'exoticism' (280), and 'phantasmagoric variety' (279) of villas, the contrast of this 'paradise of white balconies, ornate porches [...] bow windows protuberant as balloons, dream-childish attic bedrooms with tentlike ceilings' to the 'box-square Georgian houses' and 'repetitive eighteenth-century interiors' of Ireland fired her imagination (279). While exploring these empty villas with her mother, 'on chance', their steps echoing on the stripped floors of shadowed deserted rooms, 'another dream-future sprang into being' (279). Not surprisingly, Bowen felt it was England's otherness that 'made me a novelist' (276), and led her subsequently to thrive on the unfamiliar, the 'changes and chances, the dislocations and [...] the contrasts' that made up her life. (283)

Also of significance with regard to Kent is the region's past. As a young girl 'inebriated' by 'History' (278), Bowen discovered that '*here* was where it belonged: Kent-England had a proprietary hold on it' (278). In the second part of *The Little Girls*, an aunt visiting the school asks the young Dinah if this was where the Romans landed. Her curiosity piqued, Dinah wonders whether the Romans might have left anything behind to be found 'if anyone hunted'. Unsatisfied with the aunt's response that there are 'fine Roman things in museums', Dinah replies, 'but all those things have been found'. The aunt responds that 'the Romans, I'm sorry to say, have been

long gone, and as time goes on things bury themselves', to which Dinah retorts portentously, 'Oh. Doesn't anyone bury them?' (100)[7]

Beyond the bounds of ego: emptiness and nonentity

> It was there.
> It was empty.
> It had been found. (178)

What is discovered in the box (nothing) can be read on multiple levels, from the personal, or biographical, to the psychological and existential. To begin with the latter, the empty box, as the former repository of identity-forming memories, may be seen to represent the ego, a defining though ultimately immaterial entity. In 'The Bend Back' (1950), Bowen writes:

> In an age where change works so fast, where each change spells so much obliteration, and when differentiation between person and person becomes less, each one of us clings to personal memory as a life-line. One might say, one invests one's identity *in* one's memory. To re-live any moment, acutely, is to be made certain that one not only was but is. (56)

Thus it follows that Dinah, whose identity has been shaped by her memories (represented physically by the items buried in the box), should suffer what might be termed an ego break on finding it to be empty. Having lost her 'life-line', Dinah is faced with a terrifying sensation of groundlessness, or nonentity, with its accompanying primal threat of annihilation:[8]

> [S]he was in terrible distress, crying, 'It's all gone, was it ever there? No, never there. Nothing. No, no, no.' […] And so on. Terrible to hear her. So something *had* knocked the bottom out of that, eh? So, where is she now? That is, what has she – now? (258)

Stripped of all that had previously defined her, Dinah is left to grapple with what it means to have 'nothing' and, more significantly, to 'be' nothing. This state of nonentity has resonance for both Dinah's future and the unknown, 'darker country' which Bowen advocates pursuing in her essay 'Disloyalties' (61). In common with writers such as Virginia Woolf, Bowen sees the search for the "extra dimension', wherein lies truth' as necessitating a separation from the ego. As she asserts in a lecture given at Wellesley: 'If one is a writer one must regard oneself impersonally as an instrument' (Sarton, 1975, 204). In 'Pain and Pen', Italian author Elena Ferrante discusses the limitations of the ego or the 'singular I' and references the following entry from Virginia Woolf's diary: 'one must become externalised […] not having to draw upon the scattered parts of one's character, living in the brain […] when I write

[7] This incident recalls Bowen's 'excavating for secret passages' ('Pictures and Conversations': 293) at Harpenden School, whose garden she says was the model for the garden in *The Little Girls'* St Agatha's, where the coffer was buried (295).

[8] Annihilation was a concept which Bowen frequently considered, having lived through a civil and two world wars, and *The Little Girls* was written during the Cold War, with its ever-present threat of mass extermination. Going further back, in conversation with Jocelyn Brooke Bowen recalls a childhood conversation in 1910 during which a friend informed her that Halley's Comet would soon impact and demolish the earth. Bowen describes the clearly traumatising memory as an 'excoriating nervous experience' (284).

I'm merely a sensibility' (2022, 12). This is not a state which can be reached by will. Rather, as Ferrante describes, it requires writing and waiting patiently for the 'brain to get distracted' (14), at which point she says she may begin to write 'with all the truth I'm capable of, destabilizing, deforming, to make space for myself with my whole body. For me true writing is that: not an elegant, studied gesture but a convulsive act (15).[9] Freed from the bounds of ego, the writer has a clearer view and, in Bowen's estimation, a more 'equable attitude to the unknown' or what '[t]he pious' call 'God's grace' ('The Bend Back', 55) – perhaps comparable to Keats' theory of Negative Capability: 'when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason […] a life of sensations rather than of thoughts' (Keats, 1899).

A related facet of the unknown which Bowen explores in *The Little Girls* is chance, or fate. As she emphasises in her notes for a public reading, the novel is 'about the *involuntary* element in behaviour: 'chance, not choice' (Bowen, HRHRC 7.4), which is to say mystery or fate over will or volition. When addressing her and Dinah's fifty-year separation and eventual reunion, Clare concludes that they were:

> [e]ntrusted to one another by chance, not choice. Chance, and its agents time and place. Chance is better than choice; it is more lordly. In its carelessness it is more lordly. Chance is God, choice is man. You – she thought, looking at the bed – chanced not chose to want us again. (277)

As Dinah stands on the edge of the unknown, fully in the present, she finds herself in a place which, though unnerving, affords her a new perspective and the opportunity to recognise that neither the contents of the box nor her memory define her. Thus she is free to know herself anew. Dinah realises too that the items she was collecting for the new time capsule could not have defined their owners. She now has renewed empathy for the 'fear of nonentity' and its concomitant desire for 'shape', which leads people to seek external difference. In 'Pictures and Conversations', Bowen writes that

> a main trait of human nature is his amorphousness, the amorphousness of the drifting and flopping jellyfish in a cloudy tide, and secret fears (such as fear of nonentity) […] prey upon individuals made aware of this. There results an obsessive wish to acquire outline, to be unmistakably demarcated, to *take shape*. (295)

Dinah echoes this sentiment when she says, 'I suppose the fact is, people are much the same, if one goes down deep. All the variety seems to be on the surface' (3). Nevertheless, it is only human to wish to 'be thought of as personalities' and not 'merely as a race […] stuck together in one lump (8), and it had been Dinah's aim, through her time capsule, to leave behind items that would provide a better impression to future generations than the 'daggers […] and dinged-in skulls that give such a fractious, bad-tempered picture of the vanished races' (9).

Linked to this desire for 'shape' and definition in the present is the concept of posterity – the quest to fix and preserve this shape in the future through memories, written records and especially possessions. *The Little Girls* abounds with objects,

[9] This echoes a line from 'Disloyalties' where Bowen talks of the writer's need to 'disengage […] convulsively, from a faith or theory' in loyalty to the pursuit of truth (62).

from the artefacts collected for the time capsule to the bric-a-brac in Clare's shop Mopsie Pye and the 'assortments of fancy tea spoons, tied up into bunches with rotting ribbons, tangled corals, dishonoured medals decanters with dust in their cut glass, cruets for ogres' (111) in 'Curios' second-hand store. It is this ephemera which we believe defines and expresses us, and about which, as Dinah observes, we 'have obsessions [...] keep on wearing or using, or fuss when [we] lose, or can't go to sleep without' (9).

An additional aspect of posterity explored in the book is that of physical inheritance, for instance Frank's resemblance to his grandmother: 'More, there's something of her in me, I've sometimes thought [...] In some way or another, a likeness. Though, mind you, I never set eyes on her: she died young.' To which Dinah responds, 'At least you haven't done that' (5). As Clare remarks, 'We are posterity – now' (69), and what Bowen seems to be alluding to here is that posterity goes beyond the physical and lies instead in 'the uncanny mobilities of temporality and being' (Bennett and Royle, 124). When, near the end of the book, Dinah is visited in spirit by a friend from the past, she notes his appearance without surprise: 'One is where one would be. May we not, therefore, frequent each other, without the body, not only in dreams?' (277)

It stands to reason that this sense of the uncanny mobilities of being is intensified later in life, following the accumulated losses of people and possessions. To return to the personal or biographical as it relates to the theme of emptiness and nonentity, Bowen began writing *The Little Girls* a few years after the death of her husband in 1952 and continued to work on it during and after the sale in 1959 of her family home Bowen's Court, where she had dreamed of one day living with her lover Charles Ritchie. In *The Shadowy Third* (2021) Julia Parry describes how 'the box-shaped house, full of memories and history, passed out of the Bowen family' (303), as did its contents, several lifetimes of Bowen possessions which were auctioned off over two days.

For the next few years, Bowen lived in Oxford, leaving it without 'even pack[ing] up her possessions properly', abandoning boxes of paper in the cellar, including a former lover's letters[10] (Parry, 304). With 'no more family silver to sell to fund the purchase of her small red-brick house' (305), she resorted to selling her literary archive, and the year after *The Little Girls* was published, made a final return to Hythe, the place where she and her mother had explored the empty homes, the 'fantasy buildings, pavilions of love', and where '[i]n the last of the villas in which it came about that [they] did actually live, she died' ('Pictures and Conversations', 280). Thus, on an existential level, there was perhaps following Bowen's return to Hythe a sense of reconciliation with things past, and a liberating release from material concerns which may accompany both loss and ageing.

Empty houses and rooms loom large in Bowen's fictional and biographical work. In her family biography *Bowen's Court* (1942), Bowen writes of the rainy day her father left home with her mother, describing how she could see 'that my mother would not come back. Indomitable loneliness once more reigned; the weather reflected itself in the glass bookcases of what appeared to be a finally empty room' (425). An empty room which echoes through the centuries to Henry Bowen's departure in the winter

[10] The letters to Bowen from Humphry House.

of 1816–17, as he packed up in the 'grey of the steadily-falling winter rain – County Cork rain he was to see no more'. She writes, 'Inside himself he was in an empty room' (235).

Preceding the loss of Bowen's Court and the move to Hythe, Bowen travelled twice to Italy, where she wrote *A Time in Rome* and, in 1959, began writing the first chapter of *The Little Girls*. In Rome, she finds the 'ruins have been ruined […] stripped bare! […] Mumbo-jumbo encompassed them […] Much of Antiquity could not be got at – carven doorways, capitals, columns, scraps of inscription' (*A Time in Rome*, 1960, 99). From the Palatine Hill, surveying the Circus Maximus and the Forum, she observes: 'The Palatine taught me what emptiness can be. Life has run out completely: one is alone there. Those existences, artificial as fireworks, have like fireworks died out on the forgetful dark' (64).

And yet it is in this emptiness that she finds affirmation of existence:

> When we call this capital of the world 'eternal,' we have in mind, surely, its unceasingness, its going forward, its going on – and going on living is an untidy business. All the kaleidoscopic small things, – and every moment – somebody rising from a table in a café, a child chasing a cat across a courtyard, the petals blowing from a flowery tree onto a statue – every moment one feels and senses its aliveness, adding further to the eternity of Rome. ('Writing about Rome', 113–114)[11]

By the time *The Little Girls* was published in 1963, Bowen had lost her home, Ritchie having failed to assist her in her attempts to save it. Commenting on the typescript of *A Time in Rome* in 1958, Ritchie wrote of the pressure Bowen was 'beginning remorselessly to apply to me' to help save Bowen's Court and to live with her there, mentioning how she talked about the ''slow burn' of resentment'. (*LCW*, 318) Somewhat cryptically, in 1962 Ritchie writes: 'I said to E that the chilly exhilaration of her new book, 'The Little Girls', springs from revenge. 'Oh yes,' she said, meaning, 'You don't know the half of it.' Revenge on love. Revenge on me.' (*LCW*, 405) These last two sentences, included in *Love's Civil War*, are curiously absent in the version of Ritchie's diary that was published and edited while he was still alive. One can only speculate what he might have meant: what, in the novel or the writing thereof, may have constituted 'revenge'. Could there be a connection to the 'deferred and troubled love story' between Clare and Dinah? Or perhaps the 'revenge' lay ultimately in Bowen's enviable Stoic contentment. Following the demolition of Bowen's Court, along with all its trees, she responded with admirable pragmatism, describing it in the afterword to *Bowen's Court* as 'a clean end. Bowen's Court never lived to be a ruin' (459).[12] In a 1961 essay she writes, 'From the fifties on through the sixties […] these ages hold unforeseen treasure. Detachment, one secret of happiness, strengthens daily; egotism, that nagger, becomes less – the 'I' now no longer a tyrant, proves a trusty companion' ('The Beauty of Being Your Age', 1961, 357). Thus

[11] In a 1957 letter to Ritchie, Bowen declares: 'this great place is eternal: always here to come back to' (*LCW*, 288), calling it a 'symbol of us' (289), and *A Time in Rome* ends, 'My darling, my darling, my darling. Here we have no abiding city.' (160)

[12] This lack of a ruin contrasts with the houses burned down during the Irish War of Independence, the remnants of which appear in several of Bowen's books and short stories, including *The Little Girls*. On Dinah's orchard once stood a farmhouse that 'had after many generations burned to the ground […] taking with it its hopeless, son-less master' (15).

released from the dictates of ego, and with her youthful attitude and the pleasure she took in writing, Bowen seems to have freed herself to live more fully in the 'now'.[13]

Beyond the limits of temporality: uneasiness or the 'eternal "now"'

Divested of her identity, her past, and the retrogressive effects of memory, Dinah is faced with an emerging and profoundly altering reality. This is the 'extra dimension' beyond conventional concepts of temporality, which Bowen refers to variously as 'unceasingness' or the 'eternal "now"' ('Subject and Time', 102).

In a 1945 review for BBC 'Book Talk', Bowen mentions her admiration for Rumer Godden's experimental novel *A Fugue in Time* (1945), the story of a house in which three generations are portrayed living all at once, there being no past or present. 'Everything that has ever happened […] is still happening – and is happening simultaneously' (1945, 82). The book was inspired by Dunne's *An Experiment with Time* and his theory of Serialism, which presents time as multidimensional and occurring contrapuntally on all three planes, like the strands of a fugue, or an endlessly refracting mirror, each moment reflecting memories of related, past moments, or imagined versions of the same event in the future. The following line gives a sense of the polyphony of past, present and future – how the stone wall contains the day's light, the past inherent in the ongoing present: 'The sun had set – though by glimmering as they ran past the car windows stone walls and gateposts still were memorials to the space of light which had been today' (208).

Similarly, *The Little Girls* contains within in what Bennett and Royle (124) call the "revenants' of reading' (124), or as Bowen terms it, the 'compost of forgotten books' ('Out of a Book', 53), as is evident in the many literary allusions and influences of writers such as Proust.[14] This points to a positive aspect of the past operating in the present, whereby the past can be a source of inspiration, as long as it is not looked 'upon as a museum' ('Mental Annuity', 346), or used as a replacement for reality, as happens when people turn to fabrications or replicas in favour of or to avoid experiencing the moment in front of them. As Sheila observes: 'Pictures are what people go for: who wants a street? Streets are six a penny' (189), to which Dinah adds: 'People are glad to feel anything that's already been fabricated for them to feel […] And those things have been fabricated for them by people who in the first place fabricated for themselves. There's a tremendous market for prefabricated feelings' (191).

Rather than standing in the way of a full experience of the present moment, Bowen notes how the past can provide '[l]ively associations' and a sense of continuity through 'linking moments, imparting meanings, suggesting comparisons, throwing light' ('Mental Annuity', 347). Memory is 'vitally interconnected with all experience', and the act of remembering contains valuable lessons for inhabiting the present. We are constantly in the act of 'filling and furnishing memories' (346), and in order to possess good memories it is necessary to fully experience and appreciate the present,

[13] In 1957 Ritchie admits to feeling 'envious of the way she filled her time. I think she herself said that a woman in a widow state goes back to the arts and crafts of her youth in attaching friends, and to her former gregariousness, not to be lonely' (*LCW*: 259).
[14] This influence is notable not only in the preoccupation with themes of time and memory, but also in the resemblance between the recalcitrant and comical house servant Francis and *In Search of Lost Time's* Francoise.

being mindful of the past we are producing. As Bowen writes in 'The Bend Back': 'We perceive the past in terms of vital glittering moments; but, if we had not in ourselves experienced such moments, how should we recognise them?' (59). Another way of putting it: invest wisely in things you would want to revisit in your memory and 'offer it fair fields out of which to make its gleanings' ('Mental Annuity', 346).

Additionally, Bowen suggests, 'One can make a friend of one's memory, one can school it; to memorise – a face, a poem, an idea springing from talk, a lovely room, the play of light on a landscape – is a rewarding, voluntary act' (347). In this sense, the act of memorising in itself becomes gratifying. Similarly, spontaneous reminiscence may evince a timeless, visceral sensation of pleasure, as Dinah observes:

> Because, to remember something, all in a flash, so completely that it's not 'then' but 'now,' surely is a sensation, isn't it? I do know it's far, far more than a mere memory! One's right back again into it, right in the middle. It's happening round one. Not only that but it never has not been happening. It's—it's absorbing! (18)

It was Bowen's intention to enhance the experience of the present, both for the readers of her novels and for herself through the act of writing. A central aim of art, she says, is 'to concentrate and to deepen our sense of the "now"' ('Subject and Time', 149), containing as it does 'something essential which needs divining, perceiving' ('The Bend Back', 60), and which 'touch[es] awake the genius in us' (60). As per her stated aim, *The Little Girls*[15] is a call to take our moments '"straight" – not half-overcast by fantasy, not thinned-down by yearning'. To live fully in the present and experience the truth that 'all pleasure is of the moment: what we desire actually is the "now"' ('The Cult of Nostalgia', 101).

> Why, indeed, should not imagination – without which, granted, happiness is impossible – be able to burn up in the air of today? It was out of zest, out of a sometimes blind vitality, out of barbarian energy, that the past was built. […] Today […] is a time hard to inhabit […] yet we must inhabit it. […] it is our time, in which we as humans live – we are dwarfed, we are shorn of humanity if we fail to know it.
>
> What of the present, the 'now,' the moment – so disconcerting, so fleeting, so fascinating in its quivering inability to be pinned down? What has great art done but enclose that eternal "now"? ('Subject and Time', 101–2)

In the process of writing *The Little Girls* Bowen fully inhabits the present. Casting aside any 'restrictive loyalties' to her former work, she is willing to risk spreading 'disarray in [her] readers' ranks in allegiance to her pursuit of the truth that 'for ever shifts and changes' ('Disloyalties', 61). In seeking this 'extra dimension' and the 'heaven of impersonal curiosity', Bowen, like her protagonist, ventures into the eternal, limitless now. As Dinah declares on the closing page: 'And now, nothing.'

[15] See the 1964 jacket-copy: '[*The Little Girls*] is anti-nostalgic: it could be called a cautionary tale' (quoted in Woolf, 4).

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Concatenation: Reading Irresponsibility in *Eva Trout* ~ Laura Lainväe

Elizabeth Bowen's last novel *Eva Trout* (1968),[1] 'doomed to crash in the fast lane of postmodernism' according to some critics (Ellmann, 2004, 203), is not only a risky piece of writing, but also piece of writing about risk. In mathematics, 'risk' is the chance of harm or loss, to be calculated in order to make the unavoidable voidable. Similar calculations in the novel condense around its eponymous protagonist whose twenty-fifth birthday is feared by both her former teacher, Iseult Arble, and her absentee guardian, Constantine, who equate Eva's financial freedom with the looming 'rack and ruin' (36). 'Ethically perhaps you're a Typhoid Mary' (197), Henry tells her, referring to an Irish-American cook who infected multiple families with typhoid fever even after many explanations and instructions had been given to her about her medical condition. He also associates Eva with one of Robert Browning's characters, Pippa from *Pippa Passes* (1841), seeing her as her opposite:

> you leave few lives unscathed. Or at least, unchanged. […] This girl only had to pass by (though as a matter of fact, she did more than that, she sang away at some length under people's windows) to leave behind the most dynamic results. In a way you're a sort of Pippa – though in reverse. […] Pippa diverted people from lust and villainy, and exactly one or the other of those two things, or both sometimes, do rather seem to spring up where you set foot. (196–197)

However, Henry also points out Eva's lack of intention to cause harm, for unlike Pippa who 'marked people down in advance' (196), Eva is said to be artless and

[1] Page numbers only will be given in parenthetical references to quotations from *Eva Trout, or Changing Scenes*.
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somewhat unaware of her own effect on people. As Henry concludes: '[She rolls] round like some blind indefectible planet. *Sauve qui peut* those who are in [her] course' (196).

Maud Ellmann also underlines the 'chanciness of *Eva Trout*' and the lack of premeditation behind Eva's actions: '[…] the trouble leaks from her, like fall-out from an atomic bomb' (2004, 212). In Ellmann's words, 'Bowen is devising a new kind of novel for an age in which intention is irrelevant, an age in which the world can be destroyed by an accident. In these circumstances the novel can no longer rely on plot and character, for both imply a logic of cause-and-effect in which events proceed according to intelligible laws to a predictable conclusion' (ibid). Yet, a certain chain reaction is brought to the fore on the final pages of the novel where Constantine pronounces the word 'concatenation', which is otherwise missing from *Eva Trout*'s and Eva Trout's vocabulary. Eva's final question: 'What is concatenation?' (301) is left in the air, as the corpse of the heroine, pierced by a bullet, hits the ground.

In Constantine's speech, 'concatenation' is made to refer to the randomness of one's circumstances, which is, in its turn, challenged by the overall economy of the novel – the plot that reveals a correlation between characters' actions and the concatenation of circumstances they find themselves in. Reading such correlations is complicated by Eva's flagrant inability to respond to texts as well as to people around her, which hides a wider problem of reading in the novel.

I argue that in *Eva Trout* Bowen explores irresponsibility and its consequences through the characters' failures to read each other and respond responsibly. I believe this trouble to be rooted in what Bowen's earlier novel has named *The Death of the Heart* or, in other words, a certain unwillingness or inability to feel and feel for others. Irresponsibility in the novel could be seen as a form of illiteracy in its wider sense – as an inability or unwillingness to read not only the nuances of language (in Eva's case), but also complicated situations and most of all other people and their feelings.

This failure to read also contaminates Bowen's readers – *Eva Trout*'s language and setting, perhaps more significantly than that of *The Little Girls*, veers the reader into the world of inconsistencies, uncertainty, and hitherto unthinkable speed.[2] As Hermione Lee wrote: 'This last fiction, its struggle with its own language and structure, and its distressing account of alienation, describes an almost unbearable present, with which the traditional novel of order and feeling can no longer deal' (1999, 203). The unbearable present that Bowen's novel creates corresponds to the challenges of its time and mimics the frustration, or even panic, of having to deal with large-scale events and fast changes that do not keep within the bounds of habitual order and feeling. Eva Trout's world, both inside and outside, is shown to be turning at an unbearable speed (which is something that the traditional novel could hardly accommodate). The frustration created by reading this unbearable present is not accidental, and it is also something we, the readers, are made to share with the heroine who struggles with reading and responding to others' demands. Contrary to

[2] Bowen writes in her autobiography about the twentieth century's vast technological progress: 'The twentieth century […] dawned on a world which already had cause to regard itself as completely modern, and congratulate itself thereupon. Enough was enough. Anything further, one felt, might annoy God' (Bowen, 1987, 287).

several earlier critics of the novel,[3] this essay feeds on the tension that Bowen's 'monstrous' heroine, the novel's strange language, its characters' artificial communication, and its whirlwind of a plot create. The article seeks to unravel some of this high-voltage frustration with which Bowen charged her characters and her readers. To do that, I explore *Eva Trout*'s unbearable present through the frail and furtive links between actions and consequences (in other words: concatenation) that the novel proposes. The article demonstrates both the difficulty of reading those correlations and the *necessity* of reading them, as the refusal or inability to read such concatenations marks the beginning of Eva's irresponsibility, which the novel links to her potential to cause irreparable damage (even in spite of herself).

Chance

Reading is the opposite of movement, reading is concatenation. Reading *Eva Trout* begins with stillness, the reader's but also the book's more permanent stillness and strange stills, as they come together by choice or chance.[4] It is Eva who steals some of that stillness away, under Bowen's command. The novel's full title, *Eva Trout: Or Changing Scenes*, hints at Eva's movements that trigger and vitalize the plot, yet those movements are motivated by one desire – to escape her peers' demands and expectations that she cannot meet or sometimes even understand. Throughout the novel, her inability to read is emphasized. We are told that she 'pored over French novels' whose 'vocabulary she was able to master, but not their content' (239). Her visit to the National Portrait Gallery, where she tries to decipher the notion of identity through art, turns into a metaphorical and literal impasse. Eva's failure to read portraits as well as the intentions of her contemporary peers is followed by her sudden inability to read the infrastructure of London:

> […] the car, trapped in tightening networks it did not recognize, began to convey to Eva its own first exasperation and then terror. So, *she* became trapped, in them and in it. She ran it into an alley that said NO ENTRY, stopped, snatched the keys out and made her escape. Though there was, actually, none' (223).

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[3] Walter Sullivan categorizes Bowen's *Eva Trout* and *The Little Girls* as 'tours de force which did not succeed' (Sullivan, 1976, 142) and Patricia Craig suggest that Bowen 'ended by parodying herself' (Craig, 1986, 135). Neil Corcoran suggests that Bowen's last novels, *The Little Girls* (1963) and *Eva Trout* (1968), are 'notoriously difficult to attach in any unproblematic way to the remaining canon of her work' (Corcoran, 2004, 78). He claims that by ending her engagement with Ireland, they give the feeling of 'ending, as it were, nowhere at all' while also making way towards 'the most unsettling kinds of further writing' (Corcoran, 2004, 78) that Corcoran nevertheless compares to Samuel Beckett's practices of Modernist experimentation.

[4] As Bennett and Royle write: 'Novels are concatenations of […] multiplicitous fictions. Like movies, novels can only move by being still: both are constructed through the imperceptible interstices between frames, convulsions' (Bennett and Royle, 1995, 155). Stills in *Eva Trout* seem to be purposefully piled up. On the opening pages, we are shown a still of a castle. The non-castle (a folly), to which a non-trout (Eva) drives a non-jaguar, is presented to us as having photographic value. Woods are undermined as woods by being 'ink-like'; the lake that is first said to contain 'probably artificial water' (11) is later almost evaporating off the page. With 'photographic distinctness,' 'sightless' (11) white shutters, surrounded by sepia-coloured woods, half-robotic swans, and little to no movement, the folly is reduced to an image on a sheet of paper, which is made even more evident by young Henry's wondering whether the castle has an inside at all (13). That superficiality is made to coincide with Mrs Dancey's inner monologue about Eva's superficiality. The scene appears to be purposefully artificial, playing with our ability to connect the signifier to the signified.

Eva moves around; she escapes to a house named Cathay, to the United States, and to France. Her other mode of escape is making up stories: of her fictitious engagement to a mystery man and of her marriage to another, of sex she never had, of a pregnancy she never endured, and of a false-honeymoon to come. These stories have consequences, but the consequences cannot be read by Eva, according to whom 'situations alter for no knowable reason' and for whom one cannot know what others do, or why they do it (216). Instead, she survives the social impasses she finds herself in through escape (though there is, actually, none), which is fuelled (often quite literally) by her colossal fortune.

Those comings and goings end at the train station with Constantine's final speech to the bridal pair, Eva and Henry:

> The future, as we know, will resemble the past in being the result, largely, of a concatenation of circumstances. Many of our best moments, as well as our worst, are fortuitous. […] I do not say there is no method of human madness. Our affections could not, I suppose, survive – as they do – were they entirely divorced from reason, though the tie is often a rather tenuous one. Well, bless you, Eva; and bless you, Henry! I regret the wholly secular nature of this occasion, but father Clavering-Haight could not be with us. Let this sunshine we stand in be a good omen! Things may break well for you; that has been known to happen. Er – life stretches ahead. May a favourable concatenation of circumstances … No, here I become a trifle tied up, I think. (301)

Constantine's effort to concatenate (from Latin *con-* 'together' and *catenare* 'to chain', *Chambers*) reason, love, and chance into a goodbye speech results in a strange suggestion that rational thinking applies to the matters of the heart: 'Our affections could not, I suppose, survive – as they do – were they entirely divorced from reason' (301), whereas the best and worst moments of life are fortuitous. The bizarre concatenation of circumstances, void of correlations between agency and circumstance, is haunted by another concatenation of images of cutting and tying up, disintegration and integration, with which Bowen paints the scene.

The imagery of cutting begins with Eva's 'extraordinary tears' (300). Her rare teardrops are torn up – 'not a torrent from the eyes, but one, two, three, four tears, hesitating surprised to be where it was, then wandering down' (299). Henry says he has 'burned [*his*] boats' (300) and wishes them to have 'a compartment of [their] own' (300), adding to the imagery of disintegration. Jeremy's play is seen by Mrs Caliber as 'cutting capers' (301) while Constantine suggests the pair 'had better cut the adieux short' (301) before he makes 'parting remarks' (301) speculating that 'things may break well' (301); and, finally, Constantine becomes 'a trifle tied up' (301). From this disintegrating margin of the novel, we must read the story backwards, that is concatenate, as it is becoming clear that the novel now turns its focus to the reader, leaving it up to us to define what Eva failed to understand: *concatenation*.

My first reading is concerned with the chanciness in Constantine's speech, which contradicts Bowen's comment to her cousin Audrey, that Eva 'had it coming to her' (Glendinning, 1979, 257); the latter implies a sense of correlation between Eva's circumstances and her actions. Even though Constantine summarizes life as a fortuitous concatenation of circumstances, a chain of good or bad luck, the negation

of a cause-and-effect logic is challenged by the last, and the most shocking, event of the novel: Eva's death.

Her last words are: 'What is 'concatenation'?' (301). The question's innocence clashes with the reader's knowledge of Eva's many plots and their fatal concatenations. Eva did not leave life to chance: her fictions constructed others' realities, as they did her own. The character whose life was perhaps affected the most by the circumstances Eva created is her son Jeremy. Eva bought him on the black market and decides to give him up as soon as Jeremy starts acquiring language and begins disconnecting himself from the bubble world Eva had conjured up for the two of them. It is hard to read Jeremy's fatal shot as pure coincidence.

Mrs Bonnard explains to Eva that leaving Jeremy in their care might inflict a great blow and undo the entire good of Jeremy's visit to see Eva, but she responds: 'This *is*, as you say, a 'visit'. As I can now see clearly, for me and Jeremy there will be in the future nothing but these; and *they*, Madame Bonnard, will well content him. So, I think he should see *I* see he is free of me; and what better way than this to show him?' (288). This declaration shows Eva's intention to reduce her parenthood to mere visitations, but it also draws the reader's attention to the visual communication Eva and her mute son have established. Bennett and Royle underline that Jeremy is presented as 'a telepathic reader, an intrusive or transgressive reader not only of lips, but of minds' (Bennett and Royle, 1995, 143). The harm is not inflicted through words, but more through actions. Indeed, Jeremy too is seen running 'like a boy on the screen' (301) towards Eva and acting: 'The boy executed a pirouette. Everybody laughed. He drew in the firearm, looking about with a certain air of design. A child's ballet enactment of a *crime passionnel*?' (299).

Eva's plan to abandon Jeremy to the care of the Bonnards might be the cruellest of her escapes. The idea of such abandonment taps into our own worst childhood fears, and is also echoed earlier in the novel through Eva's roommate at the strange school for children who are 'bribed into coming [there] by distracted parents' (46). The eleven-year-old Elsinore is said to write and rewrite the same long letter 'denouncing her mother, deriding her step-father, and praising love' (49), before she is caught trying to commit suicide. Eva, as a child herself, makes a connection between Elsinore's behaviour and its cause, for when a school employee refers to the unconscious Elsinore as 'this unhealthy child, who also was trying to go to bed with a Japanese boy' (53), Eva responds: 'She wants her mother, I think' (53). Nobody hears Eva, for she too is one of the abandoned children of distracted parents.

The pattern of abandonment and its profound effects are thus developed from the beginning and are revisited in the final scene with Jeremy. Is it truly unfathomable that a child could replicate an unthinkable act with another?

In *Eva Trout*, as Victoria Glendinning sees it, 'there is no longer a cracked crust over the surface of life. People say and do extreme things' (Glendinning, 1979, 257). Sensitivity is replaced with what could be described as a survival mode and the 'death of the heart'. The most evident survival mode is Eva's, which consists in escaping having to answer for herself and answer to the stories about her. As Eva tells Dr Bonnard: 'I continue going away, but I am awaited' (249).

For instance, we see Eva escaping to Cathay, a house she secretly bought to escape the influence of Constantine and Iseult. However, Iseult's husband Eric and Constantine find her. Their reproaches are met with numbness. Feeling, if there is any, has gone underground, and may be only reflected in the violence of Eva's disfiguring and dismissive yawn (114), which fends off an emotional reaction.

Though Eva's numbness is often underlined, other characters are also shown to build barricades against feeling. For instance, Iseult comments that Constantine could be imagined shedding 'now and then a crocodile tear' (95). The inability to feel is also expressed by Iseult herself. After her divorce from Eric, she returns to their former home to see if she '*could* feel', concluding, 'I can't, I'm cleared. I'm as dead as a doornail' (235). Henry too lashes out against having to feel, when Eva asks him if he could ever love her. He escapes Eva's advances by denouncing all feeling:

> *Feel*? – I refuse to; that would be the last straw! There's too much of everything, yet nothing. Is it the world, or what? Everything's hanging over one. The expectations one's bound to disappoint. The dread of misfiring. The knowing there's something one can't stave off. The Bomb is the least. Look what's got to happen to us if we do live, look at the results! Living is brutalising: just look at everybody! We shan't simply toughen, Eva, we shall grossen. We shall be rotten by compromises. We shall laugh belly-laughs. (262)

Henry's boycott of feeling is a response to the pressures that have become too much to handle. Written during the Cold War, after the significant Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, *Eva Trout* incorporates all the most unthinkable risks of modern technology paired with various socio-economic expectations of how one ought to live, even though this living as well as all life are under the menace of extinction.

Despite various efforts to erase feeling or replace it, to toughen and 'grossen', the novel also shows rather than explains the strength with which emotions tie us to an ethical behaviour that precedes our notions of ethics. When Elsinore tries to walk into a lake, a boy pulls her out of the water and later describes the incident:

> She knew what she was doing, but did I? A reflex. It was disgusting. What fundamentally am I, a Boy Scout? […] Look what I've possibly done to her – she *may* live, you know! Look what she's done to me, though; jumping me into this. *Her* decision was rational, tiresome little thing. (54)

The boy's brave reaction is not represented as a moral decision, founded on some fundamental or personal rule of ethics, but rather as a bodily intervention – being hijacked by Elsinore's decision that 'jump[ed] him' (54) into action.

Frans de Waal, an ethologist, writes that most immediate rushes to the rescue, such as the one imagined by Bowen, are a reaction to stress signals, such as the prototypical reaction of mammals towards their offspring in danger. This reaction extends towards multiple species, that is, it is not proper to a certain human ethics (de Waal, 2018, 146). De Waal explains this behaviour through the notion of empathy, which he understands as a more universal, immediate, and neutral experience than sympathy that has been linked to moral calculations (notably by Adam Smith, in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*). Empathy, as he sees it, is the

ability to translate someone else's experience into a personal experience of a certain emotion, for instance distress (de Waal, 2018, 152).

In *Eva Trout*, the boy's immediate translation of Elsinore's distress goes against his own moral code: 'Look what I've possibly done to her – she *may* live, you know!' (54). Yet, it also makes one question what else is going on in the process of thinking for the other in a situation where one has to be responsible for the other first and then think this responsibility later.

De Waal argues that the pleasure of the company of others and their wellbeing is not a result of a moral code, but proper to our biological aspect (de Waal, 2018, 146). Thus, our responsibility for others might be something far more complex than a calculated moral choice. It might already be linked to an emotional contagion, a concatenation that precedes language (ibid, 160–163) and connects one to others. The kind of responsibility that manifests itself in a crisis is directly linked to responsiveness. However, while this responsiveness is shown to be biological, it is far from being a simple automatism, a reflex, as de Waal argues, otherwise people and other animals would be mindlessly exterminating themselves by not being able to adapt themselves to what is happening in their immediate environment. According to him, a reading that allows such responsiveness is only possible through emotions. Emotions are 'intelligent instincts' (ibid, 258) that play an important part in decision-making in a constantly changing environment; they prepare the organism for an appropriate response (ibid, 113). Emotions are what, to a great extent, help to determine a responsible response. Thus, the numbness that characterizes the novel's protagonists is far from being insignificant. It is, I argue, an impediment to reading and to being read.

Choice

On several occasions we are told that Eva is unable to weep. Her inability to express emotion makes her appear closed-off, unreadable, to other characters. Eva appears almost non-human, which is emphasized through a bust created by her deaf-mute son:

> It was a large knob, barely representational – only he had gouged with his two thumbs deep, deep into the slimed clay, making eye sockets go, almost, right through the cranium. Out of their dark had exuded such non-humanity that Eva had not known where to turn. (209)

Céline Magot interprets this artwork as a revelation of Eva's 'true nature – which is her 'non-humanity'' (Magot, 2012, para. 8), comparing the bust to 'the revelation of Dorian Gray's abhorrent soul' (ibid). She writes: 'Eva is indeed a monster, 'the monstrous heiress', a moral and social monster in the sense that she is a misfit whose behaviour causes not only incomprehension but also disaster around her. Jeremy thus shows what should not be shown – the loathsome face of the monster' (ibid); however the reader is also made aware of Eva's vulnerability and struggle to cope with the world for which she has always already been too odd. As I read, my heart goes out to Eva.

She is said to be 'big-framed' (119) and 'left unfinished' (47). When she was young, other children asked her: 'Trout, are you a hermaphrodite?' (48). We are later told:

"Girl' never fitted Eva. Her so-called sex bored and mortified her; she dragged it about her like a ball-and-chain' (271). Eva, one is shown, cannot fit in anywhere. When Constantine (who himself lives as a gay man) suggests Eva should find a father for Jeremy, in order to give purpose to her life (188), Eva turns down this nearly Biblical ideology of her own incompleteness as a person with: 'Again you are trying to frighten me. I should have stayed in America' (188). She who carries, in her name, the legacy of incompleteness and a certain 'natural' pull towards evil as the 'true' nature of all women, is constantly confronted with the shadows cast by her Biblical namesake. It seems that some of her own fictions have been created to offer other characters an expected version of Eva, so that life, as one *can* live it, can secretly be sustained. Literature knows this character all too well.

The expectations for Eva to fail at being a woman prey on her. Doctor Bonnard tells Eva: 'The way one is envisaged by other people – what easier way is there of envisaging oneself?' (248). He explains that one is 'so much made by' (248) others' opinions: 'It is so hard not to comply with it, not to fall in with it – not to be overcome by it in the very battle one has against it' (248). What Doctor Bonnard suggests has already happened to Eva: her fictions that, I argue, have been created to avoid having to respond to the expectations of others in any real way have also become her reality, demanding more stories. Eva is trapped in an endless concatenation where she is not only trying to escape the situation she is in, but also, to some extent, causes the circumstances she is desperately trying to escape. Constantine's depiction of life as a concatenation of fortuitous circumstances (chance) is undermined by the statement Doctor Bonnard makes to Eva: 'Choice – choice of those who are to surround one, choice of the most likely to see it rightly – is the only escape' (248).

Doctor Bonnard suggests that not every character's reading of Eva, transmitted to the reader, is a responsible reading. The danger of being misread, and of misreading, also concerns the reader who has seen Eva through the eyes and the talk of the other characters. For, as Bowen insinuates through Doctor Bonnard, their gaze is never a pure gaze.

Eva is said to be 'tacitly hysterical' (40), unthinking, unstable, and out of control.[5] Her intelligence and sanity are constantly under attack. Yet, we are told that:

> high scholastic standards not only did not alarm her, she was fervently for them – latitude being allowed her on the grounds of her being partly foreign (this no one queried) and partly handicapped: in what particular or for what reason she was to be taken to be the latter was not gone into' (61).

Eva's handicap, or as Valerie O'Brien reads it – cognitive atypicality (O'Brien, 2019, 75), is also shown to have the power to make others feel insecure in their own ways of living and thinking. That is perhaps best shown in the case of two intellectual figures: Iseult Smith/Arble, her former teacher, and Professor Holman, a Descartes scholar. The latter writes a letter to her, reflecting on the chances of their meeting (both mathematical and divine) and of his letter ever reaching her at the hotel where she is

[5] While Mrs. Dancey describes Eva's attitude as 'monolithic' and not 'the attitude of a thinking person' (4–5), the irregularities of her behaviour (categorised as instability) are also reported back to Constantine by a real estate agent who 'scented pyromania in [Eva's] excitability when he struck matches', and described her being 'in incomplete control of a powerful bicycle' (105–106).

staying. Any chance of this letter reaching her is eliminated by Eva herself, who calls the hotel, cancelling her reservation.

The impression Eva makes on the professor is not that of an unthinking person. He writes: 'Your eyes – Mrs. Trout, it is true to say – rested upon me when I returned the apple. I felt contemplated. Your gaze gives size to what is contained within it: I was' (133). The truncated: 'I was' echoing the 'I think, therefore I am', is linked to the *feeling* of being contemplated. Being no longer feels like a logical deduction by a thinking subject, but is linked to a feeling of being read by another, without words. This Cartesian nightmare, one's *being* being enmeshed within a nonverbal feeling, defined by another subject, is brought on by none other than Eva, who seems to hold the power to make the Cartesian professor feel at odds with Descartes.

Another similar occasion is narrated by Eva herself, when she explains to Father Clavering-Haight her perspective on what happened at her former teacher's house:

> First I was glad to be in their house – I even looked on it as a home. As you know, I had Constantine put me there. Only then I saw that she hated me, hated the work she had feared to finish. And I WAS that work, who had hoped so much – how should I not hate her? She saw. Twice over, she could not abide me there. I became a witness. How she had cast away everything, *she had seen me see*. (204, emphasis mine)

Iseult had given up her academic career to marry Eric. By so doing, she failed Eva as a teacher, but also as a role model. Eva's observation – 'she [Iseult] had seen [Eva] see' (204) – goes to prove that Eva is not as unthinking as she is made out to be. It also betrays a profound sadness about being kept from the opportunity to learn, as she was 'set upon by the swamping, isolating misery of the savage' (199) by her father's inconsideration, and her own peculiarities.

Eva does not appear as a mindless monster, but a monster in the sense Timothy Morton describes them: 'A monster is something *seen* by someone (from the Latin *monstrare*, meaning to show). Monstrosity is in the eye of the beholder' (Morton, 2012, p65–66). Her 'monstrosity' or atypicality becomes a strange mirror to others that reflects their own inconsistencies, oddities, and choices. What could be considered Eva's 'monstrosity' also forces a reader to think about what makes typicality typical, and also, what links this typicality to the idea of responsibility in the novel; and conversely, what links Eva's atypicality to irresponsibility in the eyes of the other characters.

Unable to talk and be understood

The etymological origins of the word 'responsible' indicate a relation to the Latin *respondēre*, meaning 'respond, answer to' (*OED*). Thus, being responsible already presents itself as an exchange of a sort. If being responsible involves a correspondence, or the ability to respond to the needs of another being, irresponsibility cannot be reduced to mere recklessness only, but could also be explored as a certain kind of illiteracy in Eva's case. Her failure to react and respond to typical linguistic structures, and to the meanings they produce, makes others perceive her as irresponsible.

There is something machine-like about Eva's use of language that does not detect nuance. Other characters' perceptions of Eva are shown to be constantly affected by her insensitivity towards language. Bowen writes:

> The five co-existors with Eva in the white dormitory did what they could to put her into the picture. Guidance was offered, in sentences beginning, 'I shouldn't—' or 'I don't think if I were you—'. Having done their utmost, they then went on as though (which they would have preferred) she were not there: not by them, for that reason, was it brought home to Eva, the monstrous heiress, that she was unable to speak—talk, be understood, converse. (62)

Eva's classmates detect and employ the necessary nuances ("I shouldn't' or 'if I were you',' 62) in their language, knowing that these can make or break friendships, by differentiating more authoritative orders from kinder manners of mastery, like suggestions. The reaction of Eva's peers to her insensitivity to these nuances shows that communication largely depends on such sensitivity. Emotions exist outside of language (de Waal, 2018, 160); however, through Eva, Bowen seems to explore the dependence of language use on sensitivity.

Eva's language and reactions often seem to misfire. Since she cannot react to the subtleties of language, she is unable to respond to the requests and queries of her peers. Iseult points out Eva's insensitivity to regular syntactic and semantic relations (that is, concatenations), through the example of her use of 'however': 'I am very heavy, however' (64). Eva's 'however' offers the promise of a follow-up and denies it at the same time, thereby constructing a false passage.

In visual terms, this mock-conjunction recalls Eva's past environment, its strange architecture: the false doors seen in the castle that Eva's father's money had turned into a dead-end school. The context of her sentence, preceded by a suggestion that Iseult is dragging her out from the bottom of a lake, connects Eva metaphorically to Elsinore's drowning. Her 'however' is not a grammatical device; it is telepathic, connecting the reader to Elsinore's distress as well as to the feeling Eva is unable to manifest about her own suffering. This is where literature, as Bowen writes it, becomes a kind of magic, making us see and feel what is not, what cannot be in 'however'.

While readers are made to lie underwater with Eva and Elsinore, Iseult is deprived of the emotional baggage of Eva's sentence that seems to construct her syntax. Thus, she responds: 'Oh, it's pompous, it's unnatural-sounding, it's wooden, it's deadly, it's hopeless, it's shutting-off – the way *you* use it! It's misbegotten!' (64). Eva's bastard 'however' irritates Iseult because it ignores and threatens the habitual patterns of speech that Iseult has taken upon herself to teach Eva.

Iseult defines thinking as concatenation that is supposed to lead to a conclusion, 'rightly or wrongly' (120). She believes that Eva's thoughts do not connect, suggesting: 'try joining things together: this, then that, then the other. That's thinking; at least, that's beginning to think' (61). Valerie O'Brien writes:

Iseult's attitude toward thinking affirms the Cartesian *Cogito*, endorsing the idea that thought engenders being. Early in the novel, she muses, 'To think or not to think—?', revising Hamlet's famous query to privilege thinking over being. Along these lines,

the novel implicitly connects Eva's seeming inability to think neurotypically to her perceived incompleteness as a person. (O'Brien, 2019, 79)

Indeed, Eva tells father Clavering-Haight she had never been, but was beginning to be before Iseult 'sent [her] back again – to be nothing' (203) when she married Eric and abandoned her career as a teacher. Thinking, therefore, is shown to give access to the full dignity of being. However, Iseult's ideas on cognition are challenged by Eva when she comes to visit Eva's house, which is filled with all sorts of machines and gadgets:

> 'My computer will be going into the dining-room.'
> 'Oh really, Eva, how *can* you need a computer!'
> 'It thinks,' said the girl, looking aggrieved. 'That is what you used to tell me to do.'
> 'When,' asked Iseult, mastering herself, 'will it be arriving?' (125)

Eva's comment, made years after Iseult's attempts to correct Eva's 'outlandish, cement-like conversational style' (10) and her way of thinking, is all but innocent; it jars on Iseult's nerves, as it reduces Iseult's elaborate efforts to teach Eva how to think to machine-like automatisms. It is Iseult's thinking that now appears to be hollow, and not even properly human – something a computer could do.

Lying in the dark

Thinking is shown to be more complicated and far more uncanny than the simplified idea of 'joining things together' (61) in order to conclude, for things do not seem to stick together: contradictions arise, images dissolve. Eva's thinking, as perhaps all thinking, inevitably, uncontrollably, moves towards disintegration as well as integration:

> Time, inside Eva's mind, lay about like various pieces of a fragmented picture. She remembered, that is to say, disjectedly. To reassemble the picture was impossible; too many of the pieces were lost, lacking. Yet, some of the pieces there were would group into patterns – patterns at least. Each pattern had a predominant colour; and each probably *had* meaning, though that she did not seek. Occupationally, this pattern-arriving-at was absorbing, as is a kindergarten game, and, like such a game, made sense in a way. (42)

This mobile, fragmented, messy concatenation of patterns – thoughts, as they appear visually to Eva – allude to Bowen's own battle with language and expression. The sentence: 'She remembered, that is to say, disjectedly' (42) structurally acts out the knotted disintegration described in the passage. Yet this is not only symptomatic of Eva's thinking, but also an element of Bowen's own style of writing which is incredibly sensitive to the common uses as well as the possibilities of reinvention. Ellmann writes:

> Frequently accused of imitating Henry James, whose syntax she admitted to finding infectious – 'like a rash' – Bowen achieves a knottedness distinct from his, a style that dramatises, in her own peculiar way, the intolerable wrestle with words and meanings. Her contemporary Samuel Beckett, also Anglo-Irish by descent, described the modern artist's plight as one of having 'nothing with

> which to express, nothing from which to express, together with the obligation to express.' Bowen also seems to feel obligated to express the resistance of nothing to expression. Yet to express nothing is to coerce it into language, and Bowen's twisted sentences (like the stammer she developed in reaction to her father's breakdown) suggest a sense of guilt about the act of writing as a violation against the inarticulate. (Ellmann, 2004, p11–12)

Iseult's idea of thinking as shedding light on a subject is reversed, visually, by Eva's lying in the dark, a sort of feverish submersion into a semi-subconscious disarray where the inarticulate looms large. Iseult tries to shed light on the mystery that is Eva Trout, rightly or wrongly, by attempting to write a book about her. However, Iseult's book that 'was born dead' (253) becomes another figure of the inarticulate.

There is something about Eva's identity that cannot be made viable within the framework of the full ontological presence that Iseult seems to be looking for. Eva's question, which sounds more like a statement, 'You are dragging me up from the bottom of a lake, Miss Smith?' (64) preludes the kind of work Iseult as a writer is executing. Yet Eva's identity is never fully present. Instead, she is described as someone who 'had been left unfinished' (47), which is a trait that correlates with the very notion of identity that remains ungraspable in its totality, 'a slippery fish' (213) that cannot be dragged out of the lake. As Timothy Morton writes: 'Our intimacy with other beings is full of ambiguity and darkness. Strange strangers flow and dissimulate. If we edit out the ambiguity and darkness, we achieve nothing but aggression' (Morton, 2012, 100).

Perhaps thinking simply cannot be dragged, comprehensively, into our language, the present, and under the microscope. Thinking appears to be ephemeral and unmasterable, and deeply enmeshed with emotions. As Sarah Wood writes:

> Thinking doesn't necessarily come across. It is not telepathic communication and it is not the direct experience of the presence of what preoccupies it. Thought's risky attempt to act upon or to reach a direct object directs attention to thought itself as a possible *failure to be*. In this sense the success of thinking is to keep missing what it aims at, not as one misses a target – once and for all – more in the way that one misses a person. This repetitious surprising thinking feeling – braver, more negative and more affirmative than nostalgia or mourning – drives Bowen's fiction. Fictional thinking would be the relation to *ananke* as the absence of a loved one. (Wood, 2014, 42)

Thinking as missing (yearning for) someone or something is represented in the segment where Eva lies 'abed with her heavy cold' (42), in utter vulnerability. Here, thinking also becomes enmeshed with touching and being touched. Her sudden feeling of 'enormous sadness which had no origin that she knew of'' (44) is triggered by a touch from the 'nerve cell' of the Information Age (Riordan, 2019), the transistor radio that was 'angrily ice-cold, colder than anger' (44). The cold touch evokes a memory of a 'darling', a very sick child (42). Searching 'through her store of broken pieces of time' (42), Eva cannot remember who it was, coming through the door towards Elsinore, who had withdrawn into a coma (52). It is the narrative voice that then takes us to Eva's first school and her experience of Elsinore's illness; this unveils the complete opposite of the apparently insensitive Eva who, we were told, was not affected by other children (48):

> To repose a hand on the blanket covering Elsinore was to know in the palm of the hand a primitive tremor – imagining the beating of that other heart, she had a passionately solicitous sense of this other presence. Nothing forbad love. This deathly yet living stillness, together, of two beings, this unapartness, came to be the requital of all longing. An endless feeling of destiny filled the room. (54)

We have a glimpse of another side of Eva who is not only affected by Elsinore's distress, but also infected by her ideas of love. Eva was told: '*You* must not touch her, Eva: you understand?' (53). Yet, it is by Eva's hand that Elsinore, years later, recognizes Eva.

In these moments of unexpected vulnerability (sickness and a shocking chance meeting with Elsinore whom she had thought to be dead) Eva is made to enter an emotional contagion (from Latin *contāgiōn-em* a touching, contact, [*OED*]) with her past selves, and with others. This is not a mere matter of a returning feeling, but also a matter of thinking and remembering; or, as Morton suggests: 'Thinking itself is touching and being touched, not a guarantee of full metaphysical presence, but a disorienting flicker that haunts me or pleasures me or hurts me, and so on' (Morton, 2017, 112). Seeing Elsinore alive after all those years puts Eva in touch with her own, half-forgotten, feelings of anger, love, and sorrow:

> *The hand on the blanket, the beseeching answering beating heart. The dark: the unseen distance, the known nearness. Love: the here and the now and the nothing-but. The step on the stairs. Don't take her away, DON'T take her away. She is all I am. We are all there is.*
>
> *Haven't you heard what's going to be? No. Not, but I know what was. A door opening, how is my darling? Right – then TAKE her away, take your dead bird. You wretch, you mother I never had.* (142)

'The repetitious surprising thinking feeling' that, as Sarah Wood writes, 'drives Bowen's fiction' (Wood, 2014, 42) is both underground and amplified in *Eva Trout*. Quite literally, thoughts are depicted hitching a ride in Eva whenever she is caught off-guard: 'Stopped at an intersection, she lost her armour, mindless speed – a waiting thought leaped on her' (154). Losing that armour, becoming vulnerable, is what seems to allow thinking, and more importantly, thinking about responsibility.

The unexpected reencounter with Elsinore that also revives the memory of caring for her (or rather more than simply caring: '*Love: the here and the now and the nothing-but*,' 142) leaves Eva at a crossroads, literally and metaphorically, having to choose between turning back to ask for Elsinore's contact information, without which she would be unable to find her, and rushing back to the hotel, where a call awaits her, closing the deal with the child snatchers who would be providing Jeremy. Meeting Elsinore in the city was a pure chance, a coincidence of circumstances; yet, at this crossroads, Eva is making a choice to go and retrieve Jeremy. There is a strange, twisted, but not unfeeling sense of responsibility in her decision that no longer only seeks to escape, but extends towards an unknown other – Jeremy. She thinks: 'I could miss him, I could lose him. I could fail him by never knowing [about the time and place of the exchange] so never coming' (154). This answer to the Jeremy who is yet to come into her life is also an attempt to answer for, that is, take responsibility for the infant she has put into that situation in the first place: 'I could

fail him' (154). By considering the consequences of her failure to show up for Jeremy, her thoughts turn towards reading the consequences of her choices, and towards her responsibility for the future of an imaginary other – a certain Jeremy. This imaginary future, a future for the other, which one builds up often through empathy, is not only a known literary device (the writer's ability to imagine or make one imagine), but also a worthy tool for ethics. Imagining for the other, for his or her sake, is the beginning of thinking about responsibility (to the other, for the other), and that is what the reader is asked to do for Eva, when she asks: 'What is 'concatenation'?' (301).

Conclusion

Irresponsibility in *Eva Trout* is a complex phenomenon that is not necessarily linked to malice, but rather a feature that concerns us all. *Eva Trout* perfectly portrays our inability as humans to become divorced from notions such as responsibility and irresponsibility, for co-existing is the very condition of being in the world. Bowen does not demonise irresponsibility: she makes it human. It is hard to see Eva as solely irresponsible, callous, and dumb, for the layered, fast-paced plot in which Bowen unravels her gives off contradicting images. These can kill the 'monster' in the eyes of the one who reads, without defusing the disastrous effects of Eva's lies.

Bowen's *Eva Trout*, though perhaps not an easy read, is profoundly concerned with the ability to read and the complexity of reading and thinking. In that sense, it stands very close to the works of another Anglo-Irish writer, Samuel Beckett. Failure to read the circumstances one finds oneself in, Bowen shows, might have catastrophic consequences. Being responsible, even in the unbearable present of Bowen's novel, demands a certain literacy, as illiteracy is shown to result not only in the breakdown of human relations, in Eva's case, but also in a more general breakdown of communication and thinking about responsibility. The novel is haunted by the tensions of the Cold War and the Cuban Missile Crisis, which were themselves crises of communication breakdown. *Eva Trout* demands from its readers not to 'grossen' and toughen in the face of adversity, but to pick up the *concatenation* at the end of the novel and make it mean something.

We are shown that Constantine's efforts to summarize life as a fortuitous concatenation of circumstances, a chain of good or bad luck, are challenged by multiple causes and effects depicted in the novel. Eva breaks up the Arbles' marriage by insinuating she is expecting a child by her former teacher's husband. She then purchases a child on the black market, presumably causing irreparable damage to the people involved in the child's life, but also to Iseult who, as revenge, plants a real gun on Jeremy, leading to the fatal shooting. Eva's stories, which trigger multiple effects, could be seen, in their turn, as a consequence of other characters' stories about her irresponsibility. The characters' numbness, and their inability to show their own emotions as well as read and care for those of others, result in a destructive chain of misunderstanding. Losing one's insensitivity, that is, becoming vulnerable, is shown as the beginning of the ability to think a responsible response, for it opens the door to reading correlations in a concatenation that is language.

With *Eva Trout*, thinking, writing, and reading become no longer a matter of simply joining things together; they are also profoundly constituted by sensitivity and the forces of dissolution. Rather than going towards the light, the making-rational, one

might make an effort to go towards a metaphorical darkness, towards utter sensitivity-inducing vulnerability and unknowing that permit a different feeling-thinking. A responsible reading, it seems, is less a matter of mastery and more one of a correspondence made possible by fending off the 'death of the heart'; that is, allowing oneself to be inhabited by the emotions and thoughts of others without demanding one should understand them perfectly first. Perhaps it is the discovery that when you read, it is also your voice in Eva's room, coming in softly, saying: 'How is my darling?' (44).

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Letting the tradition lapse: Elizabeth Bowen's Embedded Big House Narratives ~ Tara Werner

Elizabeth Bowen writes novels about fraught houses, both inside and outside her native Ireland. As her career progressed, the homes in her novels became increasingly confining and limiting for the women who inhabit them. This is especially true of her fictional big houses, the Irish country estates of the Anglo-Irish landed class. In her first big house novel, *The Last September* (1929), the larger-than-life Danielstown estate haunts the declining Ascendancy family who inhabit the home. While Bowen did not write her next big house novel until 1955, both *The House in Paris* (1935) and *The Heat of the Day* (1948) feature subplots in which the estates of the Protestant Ascendancy act as spaces of horrified reflection for their female protagonists. While these 'embedded big house narratives' are often considered to be minor subplots in their respective non-Irish novels, this essay relocates them at their ideological centre. Doing so reveals how life inside a big house in cultural decline reverberates through their respective plots, and illuminates one facet of Bowen's preoccupation with the status of the big house in the 20th century.[1]

Though notably referred to as "Irish Interludes" to indicate their location and their departure from the primary plot line of these two novels, this essay prefers to call these subplots embedded big house narratives (Pearson 2015). This choice of terminology indicates not only that these subplots are fixed within the larger contexts of the novels, but also that they are integral to their plots. In each instance, a visit to Ireland by the protagonist of the novel initially seems to stall the movement of the narrative. This interruption, and the relative stillness and calm of the Irish settings, grants the protagonists a reprieve from plot and an opportunity to reflect. These protagonists are both women, both reflecting on what could have been or what will happen in their futures. Both make drastic decisions upon returning from Ireland with the intention of unsettling the momentum of their lives, one permanently and the other only temporarily.

Embedded in novels that are primarily set in metropolitan European capitals, not the Irish countryside, the recurrence of this narrative strategy for Bowen is telling. The big house itself serves a larger function than a mere setting in Bowen's mid-career novels– it is an inflection point for Bowen's protagonists, who are otherwise hurtling towards the conclusion of a marriage plot. Bowen is more than anything a keen observer of the psychological and emotional effects a home has on its inhabitants, and this is true of these two novels, in spite of their border hopping and wartime intrigue. Bowen's interest in these two novels lies not in the universality of the cosmopolitan or the English war effort during World War II, but in the local, at the level of the home. The novels are set in global worlds, but the constitution or dissolution of a family unit is at their cores. As existing scholarship focuses largely on the qualities that distinguish these two novels from each other, an overview of this literature will allow us to narrow in on areas of Bowen scholarship that are still rife

[1] Parenthetical references to *Bowen's Court*, *The House in Paris* and *The Heat of the Day* will read *BC*, *HP* and *HD* respectively.

with possible revelations about how Bowen's female protagonists revolt against the bounds of tradition in her later novels.

An inheritor of a big house herself, Bowen wrote a nonfiction history of her family estate, *Bowen's Court,* in the years between publishing these two midcareer novels. This history is often quoted and used as a lens through which Bowen's fictional big house narratives can be interpreted. However, Bowen's fiction is not always in ideological agreement with her lifelong struggle to keep the estate afloat. Though she worked tirelessly to maintain and upkeep Bowen's Court, her novels repeatedly revise and distort the big house literary genre over the course of her career. Bowen's ambivalence towards the big house can be glimpsed briefly in the afterword to *Bowen's Court*. Speaking of her research process, Bowen writes that "[t]he stretches of the past I have had to cover have been, on the whole, painful: my family got their position and drew their power from a situation that shows an inherent wrong" (*BC*, 453).

Bowen felt the guilt of her landed position, despite her own well-documented attempts to maintain the physical symbol of the aristocracy, the house, that was her inheritance. On that topic, she writes:

> I, remaining at Bowen's Court, tried to carry on the place, and the life which went with it there, alone. Already I could envisage no other home. I should, I thought, be able to maintain this place somehow. Had not others done so before me? But I was unable to. (*BC*, 458)

Bowen struggled for years with the crisis that was the status of the big house in the second half of the twentieth century. The upkeep proved unmanageable, and this inheritance made it impossible for her to imagine another home for herself. Despite her labour over the care of the house and its history, Bowen's relationship with Bowen's Court was not as easy one. As its final inheritor, her personal connection to the big house was fraught with guilt and failure with regards to her Anglo-Irish tradition. If we are to make reference to her biography in order to understand her literature, then her big house narratives can be interpreted as literary experiments that allowed her to imagine other possible homes and explore, in more frank terms, the conflicted feelings inspired in her by her inherited seat.

Despite her urgent desire to keep Bowen's Court afloat in the twentieth century, Bowen's novels treat the big house as a space of the past, where the stillness of time creeps through the people who inhabit them. When the narratives of *The House in Paris* and *The Heat of the Day* travel to these frozen-in-time estates, Bowen's protagonists experience epiphanies about the limitations of their cultural position as women, mothers, or wives. These moments of anagnorisis move the plot forward in such drastic ways that to consider them as secondary would miss a theme that permeates nearly all of Bowen's novels: that traditions, domestic and literary, confine what is possible for her fictional women. Ultimately, the Anglo-Irish settings of Bowen's novels warn of the suffocation of outdated traditions, and the confining fate faced by the female characters who are unable to make a successful escape. If only her protagonists can manage to heed these warnings, they can escape the fatality of the traditions they have inherited.

Constructing Irish Modernism: Writing about Bowen's Irishness

Turning our focus to the existing literature around these two novels exposes a fertile ground for exploration: the intersection between Bowen's Irishness and modernism. The import of these Irish interludes is that they lie at the nexus of two primary areas of Bowen scholarship. These two areas are some of a number of ways in which Bowen's fiction is discussed. There are those, for example, who are interested primarily in the Irishness of Bowen and her novels, while others focus on her contributions to the tradition of the British modernist novel. The most famous of her Irish novels is her first big house novel, *The Last September*. The preeminent Irish studies scholar, Declan Kiberd, dedicates a chapter to the novel in his book *Inventing Ireland*, titled 'Elizabeth Bowen— The Dandy in Revolt'. In the chapter, he writes that '*The Last September* [. . .] tells of a big house whose younger members yearn for some intrusion from the world of actual rebels' (Kiberd 1995, 365). Kiberd's analysis is useful in furthering the larger goal of *Inventing Ireland*, which is 'to situate revered masterpieces in the wider social context out of which they came' (ibid, 3). Symptomatic of this goal, to illuminate Irish literary works with their sociopolitical contexts and construct a unified Irish literary history, Kiberd's reading of *The Last September* treats the novel primarily as an artefact of its time. His cultural project is an ambitious work of canon-building, and many like-minded scholars take a similar approach to Bowen's literary big houses.

The influence of Kiberd and the Irish studies field can be seen in articles like Paul Stasi's "Fumbling Along the Boundaries of the Personal': History and Affect in Elizabeth Bowen's *The Last September*'. Stasi notes early on in the paper that 'All of the novel's peculiar tensions [. . .] take place within this larger historical movement' (Stasi 2017, 715). With history's relationship to affect at the centre of his reading of the novel, he positions the novel as a document of 'history that is passing them by' (736). What is of primary interest in Stasi's reading is how the plot is scaffolded by the historical structure in which the novel is set. The novel, by this reading, is less 'fiction with a texture of history' than history with the texture of fiction (Bowen 1999, 125). For scholars working in this mode, the embedded big house narratives of her mid-career novels are rarely treated in much detail, as their cosmopolitan primary settings complicate their place within the Irish literary canon.

This is evident in the way Bowen's big houses are discussed in an essay from a recent edition of *Reading Ireland*, focused around the literature and legacy of the Irish big house. In her essay 'Elizabeth Bowen's Haunted Hospitality', Sarah Harsh describes her mission as 'chart[ing] the space between Bowen's Big Houses' by analysing Bowen's less-recognized big house novel, *A World of Love*, at length (Harsh 2021, 46). Looking at this final big house novel, Harsh uses the 'social idea' proposed by Bowen in her essay 'The Big House' as a lens through which to view the deterioration of the estates in the long gap between *The Last September* and its later counterpart. The main thrust of the Harsh's essay is a demonstration of how the uncanny social world of *A World of Love* undermines the idea of the social purpose of the big house, and how the social idea itself is impossible in the context of the 'settler colonial project' (55). In pursuing this aim, Harsh elides the embedded big house narratives in the mid-career novels. Turning the focus onto Bowen's novels in the context of her oeuvre, instead, allows us to catch the writer in the act of frequent self-revision, as she uses these embedded narratives to rewrite her own progressively stranger big houses over the course of her career.

The two mid-career novels containing these interludes, *The House in Paris* and *The Heat of the Day*, capture far more interest from another camp of Bowen scholars: the modernist scholars. Rather than focusing on one particular aspect of Bowen's identity, they are interested in what makes Bowen so difficult to classify, such as her belated modernism and hyphenated nationality. These two transitory novels are very useful to scholars interested in deconstructing the binary of the international modernist and the national writer. While many scholarly texts mention the presence of these embedded big house narratives, only a few have treated them at length. One such example is the fourth chapter of Nels Pearson's book *Irish Cosmopolitanism: Location and Dislocation in James Joyce, Elizabeth Bowen, and Samuel Beckett*. Titled 'Irish Interludes in Bowen's European Novels', Pearson utilises these two miniature big house narratives to argue that Irish modern writers resist the traditional notions of Kantian cosmopolitanism. In the service of this larger aim, the peculiarities of this repeated literary technique are lost.

Pearson claims that, since the idea of the Irish nation is a contested site, an Irish writer cannot slough off the idea of nation the way their modern English counterparts are able to in contemporaneous texts (Pearson 2015, 66). Since the identity of Ireland is always being formulated and reformulated in response to its colonial past, these national ties cannot be easily shed in favour of a universalising globalism. Though Pearson suggests these interludes are 'quasi sequels' to *The Last September*, his analysis does not zoom out to consider the implications these big house sections have on Bowen's other big house fiction, such as *A World of Love*, or why the big house setting is a useful recurring narrative device in Bowen's repertoire (85).

Pearson's work is useful in locating Bowen within conversations of contemporary modernist studies, as he uses her work to engage with conversations of 'new cosmopolitan theory'. Michael Spiegel defines and discusses the term in his essay 'Is Modernism Really Transnational? *Ulysses*, New Cosmopolitanism, and the Celtic Tiger' (Spiegel 2015, 88). The term refers to theories that critique traditional cosmopolitanism ideas for treating 'culture as rooted and static' (88). Pearson's focus on these interludes, then, is in the service of revising the modern British canon by introducing the idea of a specifically *Irish* cosmopolitanism. While this focus on Ireland's post-colonial selfhood reveals much about national identity in Irish modernist literature, there is still much to be learned by using these novels to query the importance of big house narratives to Bowen's career. Bridging the gap between the Irish studies and modernist approaches to this pair of novels will allow us to consider their Irishness alongside their more modern, cosmopolitan qualities. In doing so, we will be able to view with deeper clarity the link between what is revealed by the fading Anglo-Irish way of life and the increased success of Bowen's female protagonists seeking independence from tradition in the later novel.

Breaking the Link: Stella's Epiphanies in *The Heat of the Day*

The shared inclusion of miniature big house narratives in *The House in Paris* and *The Heat of the Day* is especially notable when we consider just how different these two novels are, both stylistically and thematically. Both are commonly classified as modernist novels by Bowen scholars generally, but diverge greatly in terms of their plots. *The House in Paris* marks a transition in Bowen's career from strange and uncanny domestic novels to narratives of consciousness in a cosmopolitan Europe.

The novel depicts one day in the life of a young child who has been promised a first meeting with his mother that afternoon. The house is viewed as if through a kaleidoscope, inflected by the monstrously strong feelings and fears of the children who inhabit it. Young Leopold arrives at the titular Parisian house and experiences the day with the fantastic perspective of a young child desperate to understand his personal history. The apparent focus of the latter novel is a more straightforward personal drama with a background of wartime espionage; simply put, *The Heat of the Day* is a spy novel set in London during the Blitz. The novel's protagonist, Stella Rodney, is an air-raid warden and single mother who finds herself caught between her traitorous lover and England's fight against fascism.

In her 2005 essay 'Town and Country: Juxtaposing Ireland's Big House and Europe's Capitals in Bowen's *The House in Paris* and *The Heat of the Day"*, Shannon Wells-Lassange notices the similarities within the more obvious differences between how Bowen portrays Ireland, London and Paris in these two border-hopping novels. Wells-Lassange takes up as her question: 'does juxtaposition necessarily mean opposition?' (Wells-Lassange 2005, 53). Looking closely at the ways in which Bowen's depictions of Ireland compare to her depictions of Paris and London in these two novels, she finds that 'rather than any necessary contrast or clash', these European capitals are connected by Bowen's 'concerted effort to link' them through an almost filmic fade-out (53, 55). Wells-Lassange notes linguistic similarities in opening descriptions of each locale, and describes how Bowen's use of repetition creates what she terms a 'verbal dissolve', blurring London and Ireland in *The Heat of the Day* (56). Rather than being constructed in opposition to each other, the cosmopolitan European capital and the traditional Irish countryside blur together in Bowen's hands. These two scholarly approaches as well, Irish and modernist studies, are better in tandem than in opposition in reading these two novels.

In this essay, Wells-Lassange notes the most compelling comparison between the two novels: that 'though these passages have been appropriately deemed 'interludes' for their relative brevity [. . .] upon examination it becomes clear that Ireland is crucial to their plots' (57). The impetus to major action found in the embedded big house narratives of these novels are in the process of 'expressing the unsaid, or revealing what is generally hidden' (60). Rather than being a site for major movement in the plot of these novels, Ireland is a space of reflection and epiphany that incites long-delayed action in Bowen's protagonists. Ultimately, Wells-Lassagne concludes that these novels are 'evidence of Bowen's own hybridity, both personal and literary, and her efforts to affirm Ireland at the heart of her literature' (64). While this analysis takes seriously the place of these Irish interludes in two of Bowen's most well-regarded modernist novels, there is still more to be said on the position her female protagonists find themselves in when they detour to Ireland, how these interludes act as a larger commentary on how cultural and novelistic traditions traps her female protagonists into a fixed fate as mothers or wives, and how successfully or unsuccessfully her protagonists revolt.

Thus, despite the global concerns of these novels, their true subject is the avoidance of their protagonists in the face of becoming wives or mothers. Throughout *The House in Paris*, Karen Michaelis (Leopold's mother) works to avoid the call of family bonds that will fix her into the role of the matriarch. Tellingly, Karen first feels the terror that comes with this domestic role not at home in England, but in Ireland. Her dread of all things maternal is only later echoed in England and Paris. Despite this

palpable dread, Karen is unable to articulate the horror she feels about becoming a wife and mother. Stella Rodney, like Karen, seeks to avoid being locked into the role of the 'lady of the house', particularly as the lady of the downtrodden big house Mount Morris that she escaped (*HD*, 193). Like Bowen, Stella is a member of the Ascendancy, now well past their cultural prime, and Stella finds that '[l]ife had supplied to her so far nothing so positive as the abandoned past' (*HD*, 125). This avoidance of taking on this domestic role seeps across the borders of Europe, following protagonists to London and Paris, but has as its core their connections to Anglo-Ireland. What is particular to Bowen's Irish locales, then, is shared by the cosmopolitan.

Only when Stella returns to the source of the past she abandoned– the big house her son has recently inherited– does the narrator explain why this abandoned past is the aspect of life she finds most positive. The narrator presents Stella's epiphanies frankly in what is one of the most powerful sections of the novel. As she ponders the life she may have led were she to have stayed at Mount Morris, she reflects: 'the fatal connection between past and present had been broken before her time. It had been Stella, her generation, who had broken the link. What else could this be but its broken edges grating against her soul?' (*HD*, 195). Walking through the drawing room, Stella feels the haunting presence of the 'lady of the house' she would have been, had she not 'broken the link' between the past and future of Mount Morris (*HD*, 193). This 'lady of the house' passage, in which Stella reflects on the decisions she made to escape the big house and traditional female domestic roles, is the key to understanding the decisions she makes later in the novel. As Wells-Lassange notes, there is more similar than different in Bowen's depiction of London society and Anglo-Ireland, and as such Stella's reflections bear on Karen's fate as well.

The big house estate in *The Heat of the Day* is explicitly tied in with the past; Stella's Ascendancy ties are the ones she has to sever to succeed in escaping her domestic fate, and succeed in her task to, as she says in her final words of the novel, 'leave things open' (*HD*, 363). A divorced mother living in a furnished flat in London, Stella lives a life of independence rare for women of her time and social status. Keeping her options open, by avoiding Mount Morris and marriage, saves Stella from becoming the lady of the house, big house or otherwise.

During her visit, Stella considers not only her own former experience in the house, but also that of her cousin Nettie. This cousin also took refuge from the big house, but in an insane asylum rather than in rented London flats. After refusing to return to Mount Morris after long stays in hotels, Nettie with her 'uncanny bit of sanity' suggested she move instead into Wisteria Lodge, a home for the old and infirm (*HD*, 241) When Stella's son Roderick visits Nettie in her new home, he expects to meet an insane woman. Instead, he notes that 'nothing was strange in her eyes but their apprehension of strangeness. All Cousin Nettie's life it must have been impossible for her to look at the surface only, to see nothing more than she should' (*HD*, 231). The narrator describes Nettie looking at Roderick with 'her seeing eyes' (*HD*, 242). It is her inability to *not* see the impropriety of her position– married to her own cousin– that sends her looking to the seemingly placeless and timeless Wisteria Lodge as a refuge from the big house. Nettie describes her ill-fated time in Mount Morris:

> Day after day for me was like sinking further down a well– it became too much for me, but how could I say so? [. . .] Nature hated us; that was a most

> dangerous position to build a house in– once the fields noticed me with him, the harvests began failing; so I took to going nowhere but up and down stairs, till I met my own ghost. (*HD*, 242)

The big house turned on Cousin Nettie and Cousin Francis, but the sense of duty carried by Francis– and now inherited by Roderick– made them blind to the danger pervading the house. For Stella and Nettie, however, seeing the danger is 'inexorable' (*HD*, 193).

Prior to entering the Mount Morris drawing room, as she waits to be shown in, Stella dwells on her burgeoning mistrust of her lover, Robert. But, it is Nettie's decision to choose an asylum over the big house that quickly overtakes her thoughts. Her preoccupation with her life in London ends suddenly, however, when Stella catches a glimpse of herself in the mirror and finds, just as Nettie describes, that 'momentarily she was the lady of the house'. She turns away from this vision, and reflects that 'was it not chiefly here in this room and under this illusion that Cousin Nettie Morris– and who knows how many before her?– had been pressed back, hour by hour, by the hours themselves, into cloudland?' (*HD*, 193). What follows is a pivotal passage in the novel, in which Stella ultimately determines that she will break things off with Robert in favour of keeping her options for her future open.

Stella unfolds her past through the narrator, and what she learns from this reflection is a catalyst for much of the progression of the plot. In this passage, Stella reflects that the class 'had taken an unexpected number of generations to die out' and reveals what makes her abandoned past so liberatory (*HD*, 125). When Stella glances at herself in a mirror, she sees a vision of herself as the matriarch of Mount Morris, noting that 'she became for the moment immortal as a portrait'. Confronted in the mirror by 'everything she had lost the secret of being', Stella comes face-to-face with a ghost (193). Following Stella's vision of herself as the undead lady of the house, her reflections continue to reveal the horror contained in this alternate life. Stella feels the presence of the virtue and honour in the big house corrupted by the 'inherent wrong' of the Ascendancy's cultural position, and realises that the role of the women of these houses had become 'the enactment of ignorance' and 'the elation at showing nothing' in response to these corrupted ideals. (Bowen 1999, 453; *HD*, 194).

This ecstatic ignorance, in which these ladies enthusiastically pretended to unsee this failed ideal, could not be compromised even between ladies of the Anglo-Irish tradition who once held forth in these drawing rooms, and for whom the only possible communication was 'their candid and clear looks in each others' eyes [which] interchanged warnings'. Ultimately, 'they were never to speak at all' (*HD*, 194). Their sense of decorum is amplified by their struggle to hold on to the remains of their cultural inheritance, and leaves them unable to articulate their clear-eyed understanding of their unjust position and inevitable decline. As Bowen writes in her essay 'The Big House', 'they had begun as conquerors and were not disposed to letting the tradition lapse'. (Bowen 1940, 88). The inability to speak of their own state of being has left those fixed as the lady of the house drifting further and further into ghostliness.

In the middle of this section, the narrator merges perspectives with Stella, allowing us to access her reflection that: 'Ladies had gone not quite mad, not quite even that, from in vain listening for meaning in the loudening ticking of the clock' (*HD*, 193).

The next description of Stella's physical action is sectioned off by parentheses, making it even more clear that the narrative perspective has moved so close to Stella's interiority that her exterior movement is barely noted. In this moment of immortality as a fictitious lady of the house, Stella communicates directly with the implied reader the terrible belatedness contained in the big house drawing room. This passage consists of nearly four uninterrupted pages of inner reflection in which Stella takes momentary control of the novel (*HD*, 193-196). Stella, in this instance, is able to succeed in expressing the tragedy inherent in what the Anglo-Irish or English middle-class can or cannot imagine for Bowen's protagonists. To focus only on modernity or Irishness of these two novels would miss a larger implication for Bowen's oeuvre: while this tragedy is cosmopolitan in its border-hopping, it is only distinctly expressed only in the big houses of Ireland. To capitalise on the multihyphenate nature of these novels, and of Bowen, would miss this very particular connection between Stella and her predecessor, Karen.

This reflection leads Stella, upon her return from Ireland, to confront her lover Robert about accusations that he is a Nazi spy, and thus is fundamental in moving the plot towards the dramatic conclusion of their relationship and Robert's life. But it is perhaps more interesting to consider the wider role this passage plays within Bowen's oeuvre. The 'lady of the house' passage communicates to the reader why the Irish big house is the ideal site of self-reflection for Bowen's female protagonists. The epiphany Stella experiences, that to be a lady of a big house is to turn endlessly inward on oneself, to gradually be made a ghost, is not the end of her reflections. Like the ladies that come before her, her revelation only leads her to 'reflect again' (Bowen 2002a, 194). As long as she remains in this haunted seat of ancestral power, these hours of reflection are unending– and, ultimately, inspire drastic behaviour on the parts of Stella and Karen in their attempts to escape.

When considering her place in the history of the Protestant Ascendancy, Stella notes that 'her own life should be a chapter missing from this book' (*HD*, 194). A close reader of Bowen's novels can identify two possible substitutes for this missing chapter. The first could be the unfulfilled promise of Stella's marriage to her late Anglo-Irish husband, Victor. His name puns on the line: 'Victory of society— but not followed, for the *victors*, by peace', [emphasis added] and is deeply ironic in respect to his fate during World War I (*HD*, 194). Even Cousin Nettie says to Roderick: 'I am so glad you are not called Victor— poor Victor: really that was expecting too much of anyone!' (*HD*, 231).

Ascendancy men and women are faltering under the unbearable emptiness of their own cultural position. As Declan Kiberd notes, the big house 'remained intact long after the men and women themselves had snapped' (Kiberd 1995, 367). Injured during combat, Victor marries Stella only to leave her for the older nurse who cared for him during the war. Faced with painful betrayal and disillusionment with the institution of marriage, Stella writes herself out of Ascendancy history by inventing a fiction of herself as a femme fatale, forgoing Mount Morris for rented apartments in London. As such, she is able to break from the big house before it drives her to ghostliness and insanity, like Cousin Nettie. Stella chooses once again to break away when she rejects competing offers of marriage towards the end of the novel, and succeeds where Karen does not: Stella keeps her options open.

The other possibility for Mount Morris's 'missing chapter' is Karen's story from *The House in Paris*. The story that this earlier novel tells, that of a failed escape from an anachronistic tradition and the fatal domestic implications for its women, is even more tragic when compared with the story of Stella's escape. Unlike Stella, whose thoughts merge with the narration in order to articulate her epiphany, Karen is set apart; she is seen only in reflections conducted by the narrator or other characters, her own reflections obscured. Readers are left to make sense of Karen's epiphany by looking at its consequences. The shattering of grand cultural narratives in a post-World War II Europe, in which an 'embattled' London becomes 'indifferen[t …] to private lives', allows *The Heat of the Day* to grant Stella a freedom that was unthinkable in a bourgeois, interwar London milieu (*HD*, 109). Karen does not succeed at escaping the pressures of the decorous English home. She is left a ghost, haunting the novel through the stories and reflections of other characters.

The Fate of Family in *The House in Paris*

Karen Michaelis is a proto-Stella, full of desires to escape but with far less success. Her powerlessness to affect her fate even manifests itself in the structure of the narrative. In a typical Bowen evasion, Karen is confined to the centre section of the novel, though she is its emotional core. As Wells-Lassange notes in her essay on these embedded big house narratives: 'from a purely structural standpoint, these Irish sections are central' (Wells-Lassange 2005, 53). However, though located centrally, Karen is never able to take control of the novel in the way that Stella is during her reflections at Mount Morris. Karen, instead, haunts the rest of the novel as the subject of other character's concerns, but when her section is over she almost never reappears.

The novel's chronological plot (the *story*) is at odds with the order in which the plot is delivered to the reader (the *discourse*) (Bennett and Royle 2004, 55). Though the embedded big house narrative comes at the start of the story, it is delayed until the middle of the novel's discourse. This evasion serves to 'defamiliarize our sense of how narratives function–' the chronological beginning is presented in the middle of the novel– and sets the reader on the same shaky ground as Leopold, who is dropped *in media res* when he is born and quickly abandoned by Karen (*HP*, 56). The tripartite construction of *The House in Paris* begins and ends in 'The Present', separated by a centre section set in 'The Past'. As such, the discourse of the novel begins nine years after its story begins. What the narrative delivers to us first is the promise of Karen's impending reunion with the son she gave up for adoption. With Karen concealed and contained in 'The Past', it is her son, Leopold, who is the primary focus of the novel's beginning and end. By constructing the discourse this way, Leopold successfully fixes Karen into the role of the mother before she even appears. Though she is at the novel's core– literally and figuratively– the structure reveals at the start that Karen cannot control this story.

The plot of the novel's present drives towards the bringing together of this family; in terms of the novel's teleology, *The House in Paris* is about Leopold's adoption by Ray and the reluctant Karen. Leopold's childishly intense desire to understand himself wills this meeting with his mother into occurrence. When Karen fails to arrive, the narrator reveals what Leopold wants most out of this meeting: the answer to his desperate questions about his past, 'Why am I? What made me be?' In the first two and a half pages of 'The Past', the narrative voice explains that 'the meeting

[Leopold] had projected could take place only in [. . .] heaven; on the plane of the potential' (*HP*, 65-66). Despite this proclamation, the narrator proceeds to unspool Karen's past in order to attempt the explanations that the narrator claims exist only in the realm of the potential. Karen's past is Leopold's *raison d'etre*, and is raised in strange relation to the rest of the novel. Though impossible for Karen to explain to Leopold, the novel proceeds to reveal her past in order to give meaning to his present.

The narrator is explicit about the form and function of 'The Past', figuring it metaphorically as the

> [. . .] spools of negatives that were memory (from moments when the whole being was, unknowingly, exposed), developed without being cut for a false reason: entire letters, dialogues which, once spoken, remain spoken for ever being unwound from the dark, word by word. (*HP*, 67)

To convey these 'spools of memory' to her son is impossible for Karen, as the narrator suggests that if she were to attempt to develop these negatives, the truth that they held in them would be corrupted by her own inability to see her story clearly and impartially. The past cannot be unwound without being coloured by her own motives or retrospective biases. However, though Karen cannot and will not unspool the past for Leopold, the narrative does just that by taking on an authoritative omniscient third-person narration. The centre section of the novel provides what Leopold can only imagine: an exacting account of how he came to be, and why. The novel takes up this impossible work of answering the questions of Leopold's existence.

We even see the narrative voice address Leopold directly in the moments after his implied conception, during the section of the novel set in the past. As Karen lays awake next to her lover, Max, she begins to wonder at her infidelity. Though the perspective switches from omniscient third-person to first-person narration in the middle of a paragraph a page later, this passage begins not with Karen's focalized thoughts but with the words of the narrator addressing, directly for the first time, its true audience. The moment is tinged with a strange sense of fate, the narrator claiming that Karen began to feel 'the idea of you, Leopold, [beginning] to be present with her' (*HP*, 165). Leopold is not present in this moment for long, and soon Karen's anxious reflections drown out the narrator's aphorisms on time, fate, and escape. Despite its brevity, this moment makes explicit the function of the novel's strange plot structure. 'The Past' not only gives reason to Karen's resistance to playing the maternal role, but also attempts to accurately answer Leopold's existential questions in the only form that this is possible: written, omniscient narration. The novel enacts through expressive form the unspooling of repressed truths— buried in Irish soil. As in *The Heat of the Day*, the novel changes course based on what is to Bowen a fundamentally Anglo-Irish idea: the home is a confining site for women, and one to be evaded at all costs.

If, then, the story of Karen's past is the narrator's attempt to explicate the coming about of Leopold's existence, it is of particular interest that her story begins in Ireland. 'The Past' opens with Karen mid-journey, on her way to visit her relatives at their miniature estate in the neighbourhood of Rushbrook in County Cork. This miniature estate, and the rest of the homes in the neighbourhood, are sites of refuge

for Ascendancy members whose big houses were burned down by Irish rebels during the War of Independence. The embedded big house narrative that follows takes up little more than thirty pages of the novel, but its importance is emphasised by its position at the start of the novel's story. This importance is compounded by repeated references to Karen's experiences in Ireland at pivotal moments of the plot, which lead directly to Leopold's conception.

This raises two important questions: what is it about Karen's visit that brings her to revolt against the life of her privileged English home, and why is it that Bowen locates this pivotal disturbance in a post-mortem Ascendancy neighbourhood? Karen's visit to Rushbrook is borne out of her desire to avoid the spectatorial gaze of her upper-middle class English milieu after her engagement. This engagement to a quintessential Englishman Ray Forrestier, her cousin's cousin, serves to exacerbate her conflicted desire to escape (*HP*, 70). She views Ireland as the ultimate reprieve from the inquisitive eyes of her neighbours and family friends, choosing to visit 'the most unconscious of her relations' in Rushbrook (*HP*, 68).

'Unconscious' is the first characteristic we learn about her Anglo-Irish relations. This post-big house Ascendancy home is inhabited by her Uncle Bent, who Karen's family believes to be '[clinging] to the edges of his own soil', and her Aunt Violet, a transplanted Englishwoman who is 'tranquil [...] obtuse and sweet'. Aunt Violet's move to Ireland appears to Karen's family to be as 'insecure and pointless' as choosing to 'settle on a raft' (*HP*, 75). Bowen paints a chilling picture of an Anglo-Irish Ascendancy in the inter-war years, clinging on to their social position in 'a steep show of doll's houses', poor imitations of now-ruined big houses, and hanging on to the appearance of the 'nineteenth-century calm' that marked the final years of the class's social power (*HP*, 75). From the first, Ireland is portrayed as a half-awake elsewhere to Karen, an ephemeral and unreal world distinctly separated 'behind glass' from the middle-class English life she temporarily escapes (*HP*, 78). Whether behind glass or in 'cloudland' (Bowen 1948, 193), to be set apart from reality is an incitement to escape for Karen, as well as Nettie and Stella.

The pair that occupies Mount Iris is a far cry from the Lady Naylor and Sir Richard of Danielstown, the dominant and controlling big house of *The Last September*. Although Uncle Bent shares Sir Richard's flatness of character, the empty authority of the man of the house, he quickly develops into a caricature. If Danielstown was a house 'constructed [...] around a lack', Mount Iris is the ghostly afterimage of that lack (Kiberd 1995, 367). Bent is seen by Karen's family as a 'hysterical little person who had not even a place'; he anxiously watches the clock, as lateness is but one of the many potential disasters that constantly loom over him (*HP*, 74). Aunt Violet also suffers from a lack of personality, and the home they inhabit together appears 'not so much empty as at a sacred standstill' (*HP*, 77). It appears to Karen that her aunt 'seemed to have lived here always', as if there was something particularly well-suited about Aunt Violet to this post-big house Ascendancy lifestyle.

The sacred stillness of their home is illuminated when Karen observes a curious set of objects:

> The milk-glass Victorian lamps with violets painted on them, the harp with one string adrift standing behind the sofa and the worked Indian shawl for Aunt Violet's feet would no longer be themselves, once put apart from each other and

> gone to other houses: objects that cannot protest but seem likely to suffer fill one with useless pity. (*HP*, 89-90)

The Victorian lamps painted with Aunt Violet's namesake, and the harp and the shawl, evoke three parts of the Empire, just as Bowen brings the empire to life in *The Last September* with a tripped-over tiger rug inside a Danielstown antechamber (Bowen 2002c, 10). This image of the fleeting cultural unity of different components of the British Empire soon to be 'put apart' makes Ireland, for Karen, the final site of cultural stability for the culture that has constructed her. Even this moment of unity is compromised: these objects have already been transferred from the Ascendancy seat of cultural power, the big house estate, into this poor facsimile. This metonymic reference to the splintering of the British empire suggests that a sense of cultural death is looming in the house, helplessly fated.

This impression of Mount Iris as a tomb-like space for both the Ascendancy and the British empire is strengthened by Karen's realisation that Aunt Violet is going to die. From her first moments in the home, Karen feels she can imagine hearing Uncle Bill saying: 'I have touched nothing since my dear wife's death' (*HP*, 77). It seems, between the picture of the burned-down Montebello estate hanging outside the bathroom door and the lateness of the marriage, that Aunt Violet moved Ireland to do little more than die. With her Ascendancy husband taking excruciating pains to watch her every feeble move, this English transplant moves towards death as if it were 'stepping through one more door held courteously open for her' (84). She occupies a space between life and death as the matriarch of this ersatz estate. In the eternal stillness and strange temporality of the left-behind Ireland, Aunt Violet seems to Karen as if 'she already did not live where she lived, but was elsewhere, like the music that had stopped' (*HP*, 82).

To exaggerate the allegorical potential of Aunt Violet in this Anglo-Irish home, Karen sees the blurry temporal nature of her aunt's death (it has happened, is happening, will happen) as a reflection on her own culture's tenuous relationship to time. She writes to Ray: 'something in Ireland bends one back on oneself' (90). While visiting a home containing one of the last images of imperial unity, Karen's sense of her aunt's death forces her to reflect on her own engagement to a very English Englishman. Karen begins in Ireland to become hauntingly aware that making a home within a culture behind, or outside of, time is to do little more than make a home out of a shrine. Karen's acknowledgement of bending back on herself at Ireland's behest is made more interesting by the impact of this reflection on Karen's behaviour when she returns to England.

Karen and her mother witness 'a crack across the crust of life' when Aunt Violet inevitably dies (*HP*, 136). This crack is a moment of heightened possibility for escape, and 'life stood at its height in [the] room' allowing Max, Leopold's eventual father, to enter (*HP*, 137). The association of Aunt Violet's death and Karen's desire for Max makes clear that the time Karen spends reflecting in Ireland is directly related to her decision to begin the affair. Though the narrator gives enough of Karen's perspective to see this causal relation, the shortness of the Irish section and the distance of Karen to the narration conceals the revelation she experiences in Ireland: her resistance to constituting a family with Ray. It is a personal enactment of her wish, as she tells Aunt Violet just before she leaves Ireland, for a revolution 'to happen in spite of me' (*HP*, 87). Karen wishes for the momentum of her life to be thrown off track.

However, the gravity of tradition is too strong for Karen to escape her fate. Though Aunt Violet's death cracks open Karen's reality enough to make room for her affair with Max, and the conception of Leopold, it cannot match the freedom of opportunity Stella finds when World War II shatters the veneer of middle-class life.

The dreaded family reunion is fulfilled in the final section of the novel. In its final pages, it is clear that it was not the intention of Karen's husband, Ray, to adopt Leopold when he takes Karen's place and goes to meet his stepson at the Paris house. However, he finds it impossible to do otherwise. The novel's penultimate paragraph ends: 'Egotism and panic, knowing mistrust of what was to be, died in Ray as he waited beside Leopold for their taxi to come: the child commanded to-night. I have acted on his scale' (269). Though Ray had fantasies of becoming an authoritative father figure only a page earlier, his silent rant is enclosed in parentheticals (*HP*, 268). Even on the page, he has become subordinated to the fatedness of their new family. He is a tool of the child, bringing about what the novel stops just short of depicting: the family unit of Leopold, Ray, and Karen. Tinged with ominous language, it is clear that this reunion is dreaded, not celebrated, by the novel.

Leopold's willful power to bring about this meeting and rash adoption is not the only force diminishing Ray's character at the end of the novel. Prior to taking Karen's place at the fateful meeting between makeshift father and son, the narrative voice says,

> Karen had done [Ray] one good turn— drained him into herself, so that nothing in him resounding or fluid was left, no nerves left and no blood, so that when he had had to come here, he came as brittle and dry as a dried cuttlefish. What else had been him stayed resisting, suffering with her in the hotel bedroom … (*HP*, 238)

Karen's physical incapacitation as 'she shudder[s] on the Versailles bed' at the idea of meeting her child is not only the result of her own resistance and suffering, but also the suffering of the couple (*HP*, 242). Often described as being 'made three' by their constant silent argument over Leopold, the addition of the true third requires Karen to drain Ray into herself. She becomes the container for their shared dread and resistance. Even further, it seems facing Leopold requires Ray to be nerveless and bloodless, so that only the Englishman's sense of duty compels his empty shell to attend a meeting of which the thought leaves Karen, and the rest of Ray, cowering. This serves to do more than emphasise the danger of this reunion— it removes Ray from the standoff between mother and son. When the empty shell of Ray returns the child to their hotel room, it will not be a trio but dual and opposing forces— Karen versus Leopold— that must meet in this newly constituted family. While the inflection point of the embedded big house narrative introduced the possibility of a break in tradition for Karen, that possibility is not realised in this earlier Bowen novel. In fact, it is the unfulfilled and unarticulated realisations of Karen's that make the dread of this conclusion all the more palpable.

Echoing Outward: Beyond the Embedded Big House Narratives

While *The Heat of the Day* marks the end of Bowen's use of these embedded big house narratives to illuminate the fate of middle-class women in English and Anglo-Irish culture, it is followed up by Bowen's return to the big house novel in its full

form. Bowen's seventh novel, *A World of Love* (1955), is both a 'quasi sequel', in Person's words, to Roderick's inheritance narrative, and a coda to these two mid-career novels. If in *The House in Paris* and *The Heat of the Day* Bowen uses the big house to present her female characters the choice between rootlessness and ghostliness, she uses *A World of Love* to show that ghostliness no longer plagues only the Ascendancy ladies of the house. Ghostliness is the cultural condition of the big house, and the big house novel, at large. The miniature big house narratives embedded in the mid-career modernist novels are the connecting thread that completes the picture of the big house across her career; without them Bowen is understood, in Yeatsian terms, as an apologetic or elegising voice for the last of the Protestant Ascendancy.

As such, focusing on these embedded big house narratives in the larger scope of Bowen's oeuvre allows more than just a better understanding of these two individual novels. Interpreting these miniature narratives in service of doing cultural work within the Irish or modernist canon can prove important and useful to scholarship at large, but narrowing the scope reveals a fundamental concern across Bowen's novels: women struggling against a tradition that seems on the edge of collapse in the heat of the 20th century. These two embedded big house narratives locate this concern for Bowen as an ultimately Irish struggle. By centring these embedded Irish narratives inside their global plots, these two novels reveal that for Bowen, the Anglo-Irish big house is an ideological site of binding, anachronistic tradition. It is also, as these embedded narratives demonstrate, a location that can inspire escape from these conventions. For Bowen, then, the Anglo-Ireland of her generation is a site of unique opportunity to imagine new homes for oneself beyond what has been inherited. The horror these women find in facing these post-mortem homes are ultimately as fraught with possibility as they are with paralysis, so long as they can learn the lessons of the big house.

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Lights! Camera! Action!: Elizabeth Bowen's Use of Cinematic Techniques ~ Diana Hirst

The art of cinema developed in parallel with Elizabeth Bowen's life (1899-1973), and particularly with her writing life (1923-1969). She was very aware of its development and of its kinship with writing, beginning her preface to *The Faber Book of Modern Short Stories* (1936) by saying:

> In its use of action [the short story] is nearer to the drama than to the novel. The cinema, itself busy with a technique, is of the same generation: in the last thirty years the two arts have been accelerating together. They have affinities – neither is sponsored by a tradition; both are, accordingly, free; both, still, are self-conscious, show a self-imposed discipline and regard for form; both have, to work on, immense matter – the disorientated romanticism of the age. (*CI*, 38)

Heather Ingman discusses '[t]he influence of [Bowen's] early art training on the intense visual and sensory imagery in her work', reminding us how 'in a 1950 interview she pointed to the importance of light effects in her writing' and how '[h]er enthusiasm for the new media of photography and cinema, and for the avant-garde movements of Surrealism and Futurism, [...] played into her literary style' (2021, 152-153). Keri Walsh highlights Bowen's hybrid genre when she draws attention to Bowen's 'willingness to [...] experiment with techniques influenced by painting, cinema and radio' (2007, 128). Bowen does indeed experiment with various techniques from cinema and, within her novels as well as her short stories, we find prose sequences which can be likened to various forms of cinematic sequence.

In this essay I identify techniques which Bowen adapts from cinema, including backlighting (often creating a *chiaroscuro* effect), dissolve, focussing, framing, montage, panning and zooming, and examine the effects this has on her prose. Lighting is always apparent and significant in her fiction, as is the camera angle. In 'Notes on Writing a Novel' Bowen asks: 'Where is the camera-eye to be located?' and concludes that it is best, even if it appears naïve, in the breast or brow of the omniscient storyteller (the novelist).[1] She continues:

[1] This is similar to Christopher Isherwood, when he writes in 'A Berlin Diary: Autumn 1930', 'I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not thinking. Recording the man shaving at the
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> The cinema, with its actual camera-work, is interesting study for the novelist. In a good film, the camera's movement, angle and distance have all worked towards one thing – the fullest possible realisation of the director's idea, the completest possible surrounding of the subject. [...] With both film and novel, plot is the pre-imperative. [...] The cinema, cinema-going has no doubt built up in novelists a great authoritarianism. (*CI*, 257)

Cinema – the motion picture – differs from the written word because the director can ensure that it *does* move. While Bowen does not mention motion by name, she implies its necessity, saying 'Plot must not cease to move forward. [...] The *actual* speed of the movement must be even' just as in cinema the film is shot at a constant number of frames per second, even if the effect is of varying speeds (*CI*: 250).

Two examples of that movement come at the beginning of 'The Past' in *The House in Paris* (1935)[2] when Karen is on board ship travelling to Cork. Bowen uses a porthole as a lens in both cases. As the ship approaches land, through the porthole Karen sees 'green hills beginning to slip by', and goes on deck. Bowen quickly dissolves the scene, allowing Karen's backstory to be told (*HP*, 69-71).[3] On the second occasion in *The House in Paris*, trees begin to pass the portholes, and again Karen goes on deck. This time, Bowen concentrates on the passing landscape in a passage of which Howard Moss remarks: 'Natural or urban, [the settings] transform themselves quickly into a series of dissolving and reforming paintings': in other words a series of merging shots (*HP*, 71-72; 1986, 226).

Bowen's first experience of cinema-going is likely to have been to the Electric Theatre, which opened in Grace Hill in Folkestone in May 1910. Her lifetime saw film develop from silent movies to the 'talkies' in the 1920s, from black-and-white to the wider use of colour in the late 1930s, and above all it saw the emergence of Hollywood as an industry. There was a huge growth in cinema during the Second World War which boosted the morale both of the troops and of the general population. While Hollywood was affected by McCarthyism in its aesthetic if not in the volume of its output from the late 1940s, at the same time the Spaniard Luis Buñuel, already established before the war as a notable surrealist director, was working in self-imposed exile in Mexico and there was a proliferation of European post-war art cinema genres including the rise of Italian neo-realism and the French *nouvelle vague*.[4] In Britain, Ealing comedies designed to reflect the 'Britain can do' spirit of the post-war period were followed by films reflecting the social changes of the 1960s. In the 1950s came the wider affordability of television sets and the

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window opposite and the women in the kimono washing her hair. Some day, all this will have to be developed, carefully printed, fixed.' (9)

[2] Future parenthetical references will read *HP*.

[3] A more extended and dramatic example of dissolve into backstory is found in David Lean's 1945 film *Brief Encounter* when, in an internal monologue, Laura recalls her 'brief encounter' with Alec, while sitting sewing with her husband in a chair opposite.

[4] Neo-realism: a new form or a revival of realism (in various senses); spec. a naturalistic movement in Italian literature and cinema that emerged in the 1940s. Important exponents of Italian neo-realism include the writer Italo Calvino and the film director Federico Fellini. *Nouvelle vague*: a movement in French filmmaking from the late 1950s to early 1960s, characterized by an emphasis on individual directorial style, innovative editing and filming techniques, and a preference for existentialist themes. (OED, accessed 18 November 2022) There was a similar growth of art cinema in Asia in the 1950s, with directors like Satyajit Ray in India and Akira Kurosawa in Japan.

increase in the number of television networks, which began to reduce the cinema-going audience. New techniques emerged: for example, wide-action shots became possible with the introduction of Cinemascope in the 1950s. While Bowen does not appear to have written about films she has seen, in her 1938 article 'Why I go to the Cinema', she says she visits the cinema as 'a fan of cinema, not a critic'. (2010, 193) Nor do her characters routinely visit the cinema, though in her fiction on at least two occasions she deals with the harmful effects of an individual being taken over by cinema, of stepping out of the real world into the illusory world of film, as I discuss later.

Tracking Shots, Moving Pictures

The openings of Bowen's novels are invariably cinematic. She will often open a novel or a chapter with the depiction of a setting, with her camera panning across a landscape. She pans across Romney Marsh and towards Hythe in the first of the two chapters of *The House in Paris* devoted to the weekend Max and Karen spend in Hythe, focussing first on one feature, then on another. 'Rain drifted over the Channel and west over Romney marsh; there was no horizon, the edgeless clouds hung so low.' She then pans along the shoreline before zooming towards the town itself. The town is 'high and dry with a stretch of sea-flattened land between town and beach. The grey barracky houses along the sea front are isolated. […] Across fields dry with salt air, the straight shady Ladies' Walk, with lamps strung from the branches, runs down from the town to the sea.' (*HP*, 148) 'No horizon', 'clouds [hanging] low', 'sea-flattened land', 'isolated': these descriptions do not bode well for the outcome of the weekend. Bowen provides the same focus in relation to the location in the central section of *The Death of the Heart* (1938),[5] but this time she concentrates on the light and its effects. Looking towards Southstone the gilt dome of the Splendide receives 'at about sunset [its] full glory' while the 'dimming gleaming curve' of the coast 'is broken only by the martello towers, each smaller, each more nearly melted by light'. Portia is 'learning to live without Irene [her mother]' and we feel optimistic that life will improve for her (*DH*, 147-148).

The opening of *A World of Love* (1955)[6] focuses on a landscape which is responding to a heatwave whose mirage-like effects prepare us for the illusory nature of the action, while the opening of *The Heat of the Day* (1949)[7] captures the contrast between the bright light of the open park and the crepuscular atmosphere in the open-air theatre in Regent's Park as the audience is drawn into the darkened auditorium by the sense that they might be 'missing something' (*WL*, 9; *HD*, 7). The openings sometimes depict journeys, as in the first part of *The House in Paris* ('The Present') in which Henrietta's taxi-ride from the Gare du Nord to the rue Sylvestre Bonnard on a dark February morning is a sequence of montage made up of different snapshots or short clips:

> 'The same streets, with implacably shut shops and running into each other at odd angles, seemed to *unreel* past again and again' — 'Cafés were lit inside, chairs stacked on the tables' — 'Men stood at a steamy counter drinking coffee' — 'A woman came out with a tray of mimosa and the raw daylight fell on the

[5] Future parenthetical references will read *DH*.
[6] Future parenthetical references will read *WL*.
[7] Future parenthetical references will read *HD*.

> yellow pollen: but for that there might have been no sky'. (Emphasis added: here Bowen is hinting at repeated shots. *HP*, 17.)

There is then a static shot during which there is a conversation between Henrietta and Miss Fisher, and then the montage begins again.

> '[Henrietta] was glad to see shutters taken down from one shop: a woman in felt slippers was doing this' — 'A paper-kiosk opened to take its stock in' — 'A lady in deep mourning attempted to stop a bus'. (*HP*: 18-19)

When Henrietta travels to the Gare de Lyon with Ray and Leopold at the end of the day, her journey is represented as another sequence of montage, a reprise of the morning journey, but in a different lighting mode:

> 'They drove past the dark gardens into the bright boulevard, downhill' — 'Wet pavements reflected the cafés' — 'Lights wheeled in the artificial dusk' — 'The taxi stuck in blocks, jarred, swerved clear, darted between lit buses solid with heads' — 'The taxi pumped itself through wet-evening Paris in jerks' (*HP*, 232-233)

Bowen is giving us Henrietta's first impressions of Paris as a series of snapshots. As she drifts off to sleep on the sofa after her arrival at The House the reel of still shots begins to wind back on its spool, and 'that image of the streets in furtive chaotic flight, and of the Seine panorama being rolled up, was frightening for the first minute'. But then a dissolve into a dream sequence takes place, with Henrietta 'never not hearing the vibrations of Paris, a sea-like stirring, horns, echoes indoors, electric bells making stars in the grey swinging silence that never perfectly settles in volutions of streets and empty courts of stone'. (*HP*, 26-27)

In the central part of *The House in Paris* ('The Past' – an extended flashback), the final sequence from the Hythe weekend is a static frame which Karen and Max enter and within which there is action:

> The bridge coming near, the chimneys behind it, again made a small town picture, like the view from the hill. But as they approached the bridge their figures entered the frame. Lighter even in body with happiness, Karen ran on up the slope to the road beside the parapet. She looked back and saw Max coming more slowly after her, looking back for the last time at the canal. (*HP*, 166)

Both are looking back – neither of them is looking forward to the future. However, Bowen returns to montage for Karen's return journey from Folkestone to London. Again she picks up on lighting in several of the shots.

> 'She drove to the station along tree-planted roads of mansion villas, alight early, for this time of year, because of the thick dusk' —'Tips of shrubs glittered under the big windows' —'Karen saw quick pictures, upstairs and down: a girl parting her hair in a cool hurry' — 'A family at a Sunday supper gathered round silver dishes' — 'Four people at bridge under a lamp'. (*HP*, 167)

These pieces serve to demonstrate that 'normal' life goes on, despite what has happened between Karen and Max.

Shades of Light and Dark

Bowen uses a range of cinematic techniques in her fiction, including *chiaroscuro*, where light and dark are intensified and contrasted to create moods that are at times mysterious or frightening, at times simply beautiful. Bowen was very conscious of the play of light and shadow, writing in her 1969 essay 'New Waves for the Future', '(e)ver changing, shadows are light's language' (2008, 43). *Chiaroscuro* is found in films by directors such as Alfred Hitchcock and Orson Welles, as well as Carol Reed in his 1949 film *The Third Man*. Bowen certainly recognized an affinity with Reed: Victoria Glendinning tells us that in 1952 Bowen wrote to her agent: 'I always think my stories are more suitable for films [...] than for plays. Do you know Carol Reed? I hear he often talks of my work, and I do wish someone would push him over the edge!'(198).

There is a notable scene in *The Death of the Heart* where the use of *chiaroscuro* is reminiscent of Reed's use of it in *The Third Man* when, for example, the toe of Harry Lime's brogue catches the light in a totally dark doorway. As Matchett cautiously opens Portia's bedroom door 'a line of light from the landing [runs] across the darkness into the room'. (*DH*, 72)

> [Portia ...] saw the bend of light cut off, and heard Matchett crossing the floor with voluminous quietness. As always, Matchett went to the window and drew the curtains open – a false faint day began again, tawny as though London were burning. Now and then cars curved past. In the intricate half darkness inside Portia's room the furniture could be seen, and Matchett's apron – phosphorescent, close up as she sat down on the bed. (*DH*, 73)

> [Matchett] sat sideways on to the bed, her knees towards Portia's pillow, her dark skirts flowing into the dark round, only her apron showing. Her top part loomed against the tawny square of sky in uncertain silhouette; her face, eroded by darkness like a statue's face by the weather, shone out now and then when a car fanned light on it. (*DH*, 77)

When Matchett discovers Eddie's letter under Portia's pillow she switches on the light. The very sudden 'anaesthetic' white light transforms the scene, but instead of opening her eyes, Portia has a lucid dream 'sealed under her eyelids'. This takes the form of a silent sequence very dependent on lighting for its drama. The camera begins with a wide lens on landscape, which it gradually zooms in to focus on Portia and Eddie.

> Portia lay and saw herself with Eddie. She saw a continent in the late sunset, in rolls and ridges of shadow like the sea. Light that was dark yellow lay on trees, and penetrated their dark hearts. Like a struck glass, the continent rang with silence. The country, with its slow tense dusk-drowned ripple, rose to their feet where they sat: she and Eddie sat in the door of a hut. She felt the hut, with its content of dark, behind them. The unearthly level light streamed in their faces; she saw it touch his cheekbones, the tips of his eyelashes, while he turned her way his eyeballs blind with gold. She saw his hands hanging down between his

> knees, and her hands hanging down peacefully beside him as they sat together on the step of the hut. She felt the touch of calmness and similarity: he and she were one without any touch but this. What was in the hut behind she did not know: this light was eternal; they would be here for ever. (*DH*, 85-86)

This sequence is purely visual: Bowen emphasises this when she writes that 'the continent rang with silence'. Time is arrested: while it is late sunset, the light is eternal and, in Portia's vision, she and Eddie are united for ever. But alas, Portia does not heed Matchett's warnings about Eddie, and her vision is not to be the way things will turn out: she has yet to discover the dark contained within the hut.

The Second World War was a time when a number of writers, particularly those living and working in London, employed cinematic techniques in their work. In her chapter on 'The Cinematic Blitz', Lara Feigel, writing at length about work by Stephen Spender, Henry Green, William Sansom, Louis MacNeice and Graham Greene, as well as by Bowen, portrays Stephen Spender's experience of an air raid as a writer as 'now the photographer and viewer of an already photographic conflagration' (2010, 193). Bowen describes her own experience as that of a photographer who takes 'disjected snapshots – snapshots taken from close up [...] in the middle of the *melée* of a battle' (1946, xiv) and uses these snapshots in several war-time short stories as sequences of montages. In 'Mysterious Kôr' (1945), for example, the moon is an active character creating *chiaroscuro* both outside and in: the moon is cruel when it illuminates the city to the extent that it becomes defenceless, and relentlessly inquisitorial when it penetrates through the blackout curtain into the flat which Perdita shares with Callie. When Callie switches out the bedside lamp, the moon takes over, and 'a beam like a mouse ran across her bed. A searchlight [...] might have been turned full and steady upon her defended window; finding flaws in in the blackout stuff, it made veins and stars' (*CS*, 734). Perdita's dream of Kôr anticipates films of the *nouvelle vague*.[8] The 'wide, void, pure streets between statues, pillars and shadows [and] the stairs down which nothing but moon came' are echoed by the long empty corridors, gardens and statues in Resnais' 1961 film, *Last Year at Marienbad*. (*CS*, 739)

The Final Three Novels

Bowen continues to embrace the techniques of post-war film directors with her last three novels, and each one contains a number of cinematic sequences. It is evident from her 1950 lecture 'The Poetic Element in Fiction' that she was aware that the contemporary aesthetic was changing:

> The novelist can no longer rely on the full picture, the crowded canvas and the circumstantial account. It would have to be a reduction of the novel in any case, and it does appear that the novel is learning its simplification and its concentration on the imaginative side to a certain extent from the short story, to a very great extent, I think also, from the cinema. (2010, 158)

One of Bowen's most notable cinematic episodes comes in the middle of *A World of Love* (1955). Rummaging in the attic, the *ingénue* Jane has discovered some love

[8] Neil Corcoran points to the similarity of the opening of this story to the work of the painter De Chirico: the film critic Vernon Young considers De Chirico to have been an influence on the film directors Alain Resnais and Michelangelo Antonioni. (Corcoran, 166; Young, 184-195)

letters, apparently from her mother Lilia's former fiancé Guy. Guy had been killed in the First World War, and as a result of the discovery of the letters, he begins to haunt the neighbourhood and his family. Invited to a dinner party hosted by Lady Latterly, Jane enters the drawing-room which is 'black-and-white at the door with standing men', at which point 'the sound-track stopped'. As Glendinning remarks, this reference makes it more cinematic than theatrical (*WL*, 58; Glendinning, 197-8). Jane's vision becomes distorted by her unaccustomed intake of alcohol, and she sees things in soft focus; the other guests become illusory, and shadows seem to take on solid forms. Nothing is certain, but when Jane utters Guy's name, a dissolve begins to take place. She has caused him to manifest himself, and she becomes exhilarated by the sensation that he is present in the room. But when she tries to focus on his image she finds that it has faded out (*WL*, 64-69). Later Jane's aunt, Antonia, will experience a similar brief dissolve and fade out after she realises that Guy's photograph which hangs in the hall has been witness to Jane's return from the dinner-party (*WL*, 76-78). The following day Jane's mother, Lilia, imagines she hears Guy come into the garden and goes to meet him with 'the majesty or immunity of a sleep-walker'. A dissolve again takes place: she is already seeing him, but then there is a fade out: 'The Guy who had come in her eye with her [...] was transfixed first here, then there, then nowhere' (*WL*, 98). With the sharply defined black-and-white of the guests at the dinner party and the soft focus around Guy's illusory appearances, these sequences can be compared to the films of Italian neo-realism or the French *nouvelle vague*, or of Buñuel (who uses the dinner party as a setting in several of his films).

However, it is *The Little Girls* (1964)[9] which is Bowen's most cinematic novel. Arthur Calder-Marshall likens it to 'a film that has been exposed, but needs to be developed and printed in the mind of the reader'. He goes on to cite the novel's 'blurb':

With its wit and its characteristically brilliant texture, *The Little Girls* should be read with that attention to detail generally accorded to a detective story. There is little explanation in *The Little Girls*, but there are many clues. Even inanimate objects can be important, and random sayings or seemingly trivial events may acquire, retrospectively, a strange significance. (BBC European Service Weekly Book Summary no. 2174, 20 February 1964)

Picking up on the suggestion of 'clues', the film critic Dilys Powell and the actor Jacques Brunius, reviewing *The Little Girls* on the BBC programme *The Critics,* discuss the book from the perspective of the detective novel. Brunius then asks Powell if she had the same impression as him, saying 'it reminded [him] very much of the films of Alain Resnais in a way. This concern with memory, nostalgia, trying to recall the past and that necessity to be aware of tiny details because of this problem of memory'. Powell replies 'I think that's perfectly true', before the chairman abruptly changes the subject leaving us ignorant of what more Powell might have said (BBC, 1964). The plot of the novel springs from an exploration of memory, both voluntary and involuntary. One of the protagonists, Dinah, is creating a time capsule for posterity, when she spontaneously recalls burying a similar capsule as a schoolgirl. Intent on exhuming the memories contained within the earlier capsule, she contacts her co-conspirators, but while they locate the container, the contents have vanished: the memories have gone. Subsequently, Dinah is very disturbed by a painting of the

[9] Future parenthetical references will read *LG*.

Old High Street in Southstone/Folkestone which she finds is a travesty of her childhood memory of the street. A few days later she is discovered by her manservant Francis, sitting in a chair holding her head, where subsequently a great bruise will appear. Francis has just been to see a French film, which he describes as 'psychological' and '*avant garde*'. Asked by Dinah's sons what he thought when he found her, he replies 'I thought I was still looking at that film'. She refuses to have any medical attention, saying: '"If you bring anybody in here, I'll go through that window. I don't mind glass," she said, "I'll go through the glass"'. (*LG*, 206) While Brunius likens the book to the films of Alain Resnais, Dinah's threat that she will go through 'the glass' is more reminiscent of Jean Cocteau's 1950 film *Orphée* in which Orpheus moves through '*une glace*' [a mirror], as though through water, to visit the underworld, where he first of all arrives at 'the Zone [which] is made of men's memories and the ruins of their habits' (Cocteau, *Cinema* 1950), as well, perhaps, as signalling Lewis Carroll's Alice. Cocteau ends his film by allowing Orpheus and Eurydice to return to the world through the mirror, with all that has transpired erased from their memories. By going 'through the glass' Dinah might be able to retrieve her memories of the High Street, but would she be able to return the High Street to what it was fifty years previously? The implication is that Dinah must move on, leaving her past memories behind. (*LG*, 237)

As Brunius suggests, we find both fallible memory and inventories (or shopping-lists of *bric-à-brac* as Bennett and Royle describe them in their chapter on *The Little Girls*) in the early feature films of Alain Resnais, and it is helpful to consider how Bowen achieves similar effects in *The Little Girls* in parallel with *Muriel, ou le temps d'un retour*, Resnais' feature film released in 1963, and therefore an almost exact contemporary of *The Little Girls* (1995, 130-131). There are further connections: for example *Muriel* is set mostly in Boulogne, just across the Channel from Southstone/Folkestone, where parts of *The Little Girls* are set. Bowen's novel is set at times of international turbulence when people might be thinking about what to conserve in the face of approaching Armageddon, and how to conserve it: the central part takes place shortly before the outbreak of the First World War, the outer parts in the early 1960s at a time of high tension between the Soviet Union and the United States of America. Resnais' film is set in the aftermath of two catastrophes: the Second World War, which meant the destruction of much of Boulogne, and the brutal Algerian War of Independence during which Hélène's stepson Bernard witnesses the torture and death of Muriel.

Resnais gives us clues but no solutions, as the director Jacques Rivette explains in a 1963 *Cahiers du cinema* roundtable discussion:

> From the moment of the opening shots what you are given is just clues, every shot is a clue – in other words, it's both the imprint left by an action and what the action entails, its mystery. The motive of the investigation or investigations is never revealed, any more than the end of the film provides solutions, or at least a resolution. Each shot is a clue exposed, but for its own sake. And it is the actual accumulation of these clues, the momentum they generate, which is absorbed into the dynamic structure and roundabout movement of the film, or rather which creates it. (Cited in Kite, 14)

We feel a need to discover what the objects or shots represent or express, but there are too many to focus on, apart from a few introductory shots in the opening sequence of the film which include a gloved hand, a door handle, a kettle, a chandelier. The main female character, Hélène, is an antique dealer who works from home, so that her flat is full to bursting with furniture and knick-knacks in the same way that Dinah's mother's sitting room is bursting with the display of her china.

When the film opens Alphonse, Hélène's lover from twenty years earlier, is about to arrive. Just as Bowen takes us into the streets of Folkestone to see shop windows full of objects in a pre-First World War episode of *The Little Girls*, Resnais takes us from the station to Hélène's flat through the streets of Boulogne, past shop windows full of objects, and restaurants full of people whom the characters observe through plate glass windows as though they were objects. Resnais cuts from shot to shot, focusing on now one, now another object in a form of visual inventory.

There are many cinematic episodes in *The Little Girls*. When the adult Dinah visits Clare's shop, 'five or six gazing persons were moving about in a tranced state which looked like culminating in buying', reminiscent of the aimless wandering of characters in the films of post-war directors such as Fellini's *Giulietta degli Spiriti* or Truffaut's *Jules et Jim* (*LG*, 137). In the final chapter, Frank and Clare independently wander around in the *chiaroscuro* of the garden, seemingly supernumerary characters excluded from the action, yet remaining within the purlieu of the house, ready – and hoping – to come in, if and when they are required to re-join the action (*LG*, 214 onwards). It is a scene which could easily translate into film for, as Harry Strickhausen writes: 'This concluding chapter, which has scene shifts from one group of characters to another, abruptly, as in a film, is a perfect section of the novel and is among the best prose that Miss Bowen has ever written' (161).

It is only when Dinah reacts to the painting of the Old High Street on Sheila's wall, initially finding it a 'lie' since with the rebuilding of the street the original no longer exists, that we begin to wonder how much of the past has been accurately remembered. In *Muriel,* 'Boulogne [...] stands as memory's objective correlative: the original object has been destroyed, what now stands are attempts at reconstruction and the assertion of the new on spaces still saturated with association for surviving inhabitants' (Kite:11). Resnais' retrospection is much more fragmented, giving much less certainty than that of Bowen. It is sometimes clear when the action is in the past, because Resnais uses blurred and grainy sepia shots, but memory is vague. We find ourselves suddenly shifted forward in the action without warning: one scene will overlap another. 'The image [...] mimics the way memory and the unconscious work: it flashes on shots temporally or spatially outside the immediate action' (Thorngate, 27). Kite observes of *Muriel* '[W]e're never given access to [anyone's] thoughts, only what they say or do' (19). In a similar way, Bowen does not allow us to be aware of her characters' inner motives. In 'Notes on Writing a Novel', written twenty years earlier, Bowen had said: 'Characters should, on the whole, be under rather than over articulate. What they *intend* to say should be more evident, more striking (because of its greater inner importance to the plot) than what they arrive at *saying*' (*PC*, 182). In *The Little Girls*, she leaves gaps, as if creating memory loss, just as Resnais does in *Muriel*. Spencer Curtis Brown tells us:

> In *The Little Girls*, she for the first time deliberately tried, as she said when discussing with me the writing of it to present characters entirely from the

> outside. She determined never to tell the reader what her characters were thinking or feeling. She recalled that once when she had remarked to Evelyn Waugh that he never told his characters' thoughts, he had replied, 'I do not think I have any idea what they are thinking; I merely see them and show them.' In a way vastly different from Waugh's, she set herself the technical puzzle of writing a book 'externally.' (*PC*, xxxviii)

This led to the critic Hermione Lee finding that:

> Such 'meaning' as there is appears in fragmentary and diffused form and is presented without depth or resonance. [...] The whole effect is dubious and disconcerting. Bowen has decided, now, to give up the controlled, elaborate commentary and the sharp, minute, inward presentation of character of her earlier novels. *The Little Girls* has, from the start, a provisional, indeterminate air. (196)

With the benefit of hindsight we see that this is precisely the effect which Bowen was seeking to achieve: fragmentary, diffuse, indeterminate; all characteristics of post-war cinema.

In his review of *Eva Trout, or Changing Scenes*,[10] Howard Moss writes that '*Eva Trout* moves with the flickering rapidity of the movie camera. We are transported from quickly from place to place, from character to character' (1969, 218). In *Eva Trout* (1969) Bowen uses a number of different techniques, including flashback and *chiaroscuro*; for example, when Bowen describes Eva's first encounter with Iseult, the sun causes Iseult to seem to move towards Eva as if on a shaft of light, while '[h]er dark suit might have been the habit of an Order' (67). Iseult is associated with lamps throughout the first part of the novel, but subsequently we see more of the dark side of Iseult than of the light, giving her a more sinister aspect which matches her strange behaviour: she kidnaps Jeremy, and is instrumental in enabling him to access the gun with which he will kill Eva.

The scene at the Chateau de Fontainebleau with Eva and Dr Bonnard is an example of a static frame in which dissolving action takes place: the camera's focus does not move:

> Backs to the door, they stood overlooking the scene where they had walked. All was sensuously dissolving, yet was gentle as a sigh, breathless – day, a dying yellow suffusion, was at its last. Wandering lovers were about – some faded trance-like into the distance, but where the pool gleamed two slowly embraced. (*ET*, 264)

This scene lulls the reader into believing that Eva is on the way to finding a positive solution to the problems of both Jeremy and herself: the reader is unprepared for what will happen in the closing scene.

Bowen wants her reader to understand that the gathering of characters in sun-filled Victoria Station for Eva's departure on her fantasy *voyage de noces* is cinema, and she does this through Mr Denge, who observes: '*Something* or other's afoot further

[10] Future parenthetical references will read *ET*.

down this platform! Film either being shot or they're televising a royalty or celebrity: cameras galore!' (*ET*, 265). In an extraordinary sequence, Eva herself appears framed with light, rather as the Virgin Mary might be backlit as she is assumed into heaven (as indeed, unknown to the readers/viewers, Eva is about to be), or, on a more mundane level, like the woman in the logo for Columbia films holding aloft her torch. In Eva's case the torch is replaced by the huge brooch dripping with diamonds which was given to her mother on her wedding day:

> [I]n one of those chance islands of space, [Eva] stood tall as a candle, some accident of the light rendering her luminous from top to toe – in a pale suit, elongated by the elegance of its narrowness, and turned back little hat of the same no-colour; no flowers, but on the lapel of the jacket a spraying-out subcontinent of diamonds: a great brooch. A soft further glow had been tinted on to her face; her eyes were increased by the now mothy dusk of their lashes. (*ET*, 261-262)

Eva's relatives, unrecognised by her, drift aimlessly along the platform, in the same fashion as the anonymous characters in Clare's shop in *The Little Girls*. Already they are 'mist-like phantoms', in soft focus, dissolving.

But *Eva Trout* contains a warning. Two-thirds of the way through the novel Bowen tells us that Eva and Jeremy had formed an early bond through watching film during the first years of Jeremy's life: because of Jeremy's deafness they lead a 'cinematographic existence with no sound track' (*ET*, 188) In the American years, 'they had lorded it in a visual universe [distinguishing] little between what went on inside and what went on outside the diurnal movies, or what was or was not contained in the television flickering them to sleep. From large or small screens, illusion overspilled on to all beheld' (*ET*, 189). Jeremy's capering and clearly rehearsed routine with Eric's revolver, putting into practice what he had seen in the films he and Eva had watched, culminates in Eva's despatch to oblivion.[11] His early immersion in cinema leaves him with a confusion between reality and illusion which will have a catastrophic effect. Valerie O'Brien observes:

> Yet as Jeremy's shooting of Eva at the end of the novel demonstrates, the blurring of fiction and reality also has dangerous implications. As [Ellmann and Nicola Darwood] have noted the moments leading up to Eva's death employ cinematic language to frame the novel's tragic ending. Jeremy's approach is described as a 'performance' that draws a crowd. Crossing 'the stage, or platform,' Jeremy takes out a gun 'in a manner evidently rehearsed'. His audience believes the weapon is merely 'a stage dummy', and they laugh as he

[11] With its wavering between reality and illusion, and with the death of one of the characters, this episode has the same roots as Bowen's 1929 short story 'Dead Mabelle'. The bank clerk William Stickford has been struggling for some time to understand the nature of reality. When he is 'introduced' to the film star Mabelle Pacey, he becomes obsessed by her and even more confused: if her film persona were real, his obsessive visits to performances of her films would have amounted to stalking. The obsession increases with her real death, and when he views her final film, which features her screen-death, he can bear it no longer, and shoots himself with a pistol. (*CS*, 276-285) David Trotter ends his essay 'Virginia Woolf' with a brief discussion of this story, saying 'Stickford discovers in the images on screen at once too much presence and too much absence. Mabelle on screen seems to him an abstraction among abstractions: every movement she makes is an outrage to his understanding of the physical world' (2007, 176).

> ‘execute[s] a pirouette’ and ‘[draws] the firearm looking about with a certain air of design’ (85; *ET*, 265-266).

The film ends abruptly. We sense the titles rolling across the screen as Jeremy continues running up the platform and is caught before he can trip over Eva’s dead body:

THE END

This bravura cinematic ending was effectively the bravura ending of Bowen’s fiction writing: as Spenser Curtis Brown puts it in *Pictures and Conversations*, *Eva Trout* is in many ways the culmination of all her skills (*PC*, xl). These skills included her use of an idiosyncratic syntax and of liminality, her use of her curiosity and of what she terms ‘place-feeling’ (or topophilia), but above all her use of the effects of light and shadow. In an autobiographical note from 1948 she wrote that she had ‘the painter’s sensitivity to light. Much (and perhaps the best) of my writing is verbal painting’. While she may not have recognised it as such, some of the best of her writing can also be seen as verbal cinema.

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Remembering what never happened: the ghosts of imagined futures in *The Heat of the Day* ~ Huw Jones

Elizabeth Bowen's 1948 novel *The Heat of the Day* describes the shocking impact of war on the lives of the novel's key protagonists Stella Rodney, Roderick Rodney and Louie Lewis: Stella's lover falls to his death from the roof of her flat; Louie's parents are killed in an air-raid, and her soldier husband dies fighting overseas; Roderick's father succumbs to wounds from an earlier war; and Roderick may also have lost his lover.[12] Some critics have argued that eventually Bowen's characters are reconciled to

[12] Parenthetical references to *The Heat of the Day* will read *HD*.
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these terrible events. Heather Bryant Jordan explains how 'Roderick will go on to refurbish Mt Morris, Stella will contentedly marry a member of her race and Louie will devote herself to bringing up a fine young son who may better the future' (1992, 168). Bryant Jordan concludes that Elizabeth Bowen 'shows herself closer to a resolution about the war' and 'remained somewhat optimistic'(ibid) about its aftermath. However this essay will argue that throughout the novel Stella, Roderick and Louie visualise darker post-war outcomes. They are nostalgic for previously imagined but unrealised futures, deeply dissatisfied with the post-war reality. These imagined futures haunt the protagonists, preventing any satisfactory resolution. Utilising recent critical reassessments of Bowen's work, and based on a close reading of the text of *The Heat of the Day,* I will argue that Stella, Roderick and Louie's lost futures ultimately reflect Bowen's own pessimism about life in post-war Britain.

Bryant Jordan's thoughtful study *How Will The Heart Endure* (1992) assesses war's impact on nationality, class and personal relationships in Bowen's novels. While the social, political and personal context is clearly important, definitive interpretation of Bowen's work is frequently subverted by textual ambiguity and uncertainty. Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle argue that in Bowen's work 'the realism of the novel in the twentieth century is dissolved' (1995, xvii), and that 'Bowen's novels present dissolutions at the level of personal identity, patriarchy, social conventions and language itself' (ibid, xix). Dissolution in this context means the inability to conclude definitively about character, motive, structure, narrative thread or meaning, because the texts are structurally complex, lacking in linear narrative continuity, syntactically eccentric and linguistically idiosyncratic. These concepts are developed further in Damian Tarnopolsky's perceptive essay on 'Trying (Not) to Understand Elizabeth Bowen'. He emphasises the elusiveness of meaning, writing, for example, that 'paradox is presented paradoxically so one can never get to a final understanding of it' (2019, 114). In response, he seeks the 'meaning of the meaninglessness' (ibid, 119) through a close reading of the text and an examination of the work's social and political context. He recognises uncertainties, absences and ambiguities; 'taking a slightly different critical approach, one can focus not on understanding a desired 'end result' (an interpretation of a paradox), but instead on observing the process of relating something and nothing' (ibid, 122). Acknowledging Tarnopolsky's influence, this essay will examine how Bowen creates this ambiguity and elusiveness of meaning, for example in the frequent contrast of 'something' and 'nothing', or 'presence' and 'absence'. This instability of meaning compounds the novel's focus on ambiguous lost futures for its key protagonists. Not only are the many possible futures uncertain, it is unclear whether they can even be accurately articulated.

Furthermore, *The Heat of the Day* is a 'hauntological' text, in Jacques Derrida's phrase, because it reveals ghosts of previously imagined futures that haunt the characters' present. At the same time, the novel is profoundly concerned with nostalgia. Svetlana Boym's *Future of Nostalgia* (2001) argues that the idealisation of memories mythologises the past in a way that profoundly impacts the present. *The Heat of the Day* is nostalgic for imagined futures which may have provided an alternative to the state-controlled socialist austerity of post-war Britain, or the nationalist Catholic theocracy of mid-century Ireland. This hauntological approach also recognises that Bowen's work, especially in her wartime stories such as 'The Demon Lover' or 'Mysterious Kôr', often has a spectral feel. Gothic ruins, the dead victims of wartime bombing, and the ghosts of deceased patriarchs roam *The Heat of the Day*. Dead father figures haunt Roderick's imagined future in the Irish 'Big

House', Mount Morris, to which I will turn first. I will then explore Stella's apparently futureless relationships with Kelway and Harrison, and finally, look at Louie's attitude to her impending motherhood. I will conclude by connecting the characters' outcomes with Elizabeth Bowen's own lost future.

Roderick Rodney: a child out of time

Bryant Jordan predicts that Roderick will live to renovate Mount Morris. However, the text conceives other futures both for Roderick and the house. When Roderick first arrives at Stella's Mayfair flat, we learn that 'possessorship of Mount Morris affected Roderick strongly. It established for him, and was adding to day by day, what might be called a historic future' (*HD*, 60). Roderick's imagined future, however, is almost immediately destabilised because 'the house, non-human, became the hub of his imaginary life, of fancies, fantasies only so to be called because circumstance outlawed them from reality' (*HD*, 60). Roderick's reality in 1942 is his life as a soldier – Mount Morris is still an illusion. Maud Ellmann writes persuasively that in Bowen's novels 'things behave like thoughts, and thoughts like things, thus impugning the supremacy of the consciousness' (2003, 5). In this context, Mount Morris is the 'thing that behaves like thought'. Bowen seemingly unnecessarily emphasises that the house is 'non-human', but this superfluous description then becomes ironic. The house impacts Roderick more than any human; of his pre-war friends Roderick admits, 'I haven't got anything to say to them' (*HD*, 71). Roderick is a child out of time, living in a misremembered past or his imagined future. He no longer meets his old friends as he is now 'in the past tense' (*HD*, 70), and he cannot be the person he once was. His mother shares this temporal dislocation, as she 'stared at him, repeating 'I am so sorry about tomorrow'' (*HD*, 71). Stella does not imagine a positive outcome for Roderick. His future destabilises, as the certainty of his imaginary life in Ireland has been undermined.

When Roderick eventually comes to Mount Morris in February 1944, this dislocation continues. He looks back with some confusion on the time when he first imagined this future: 'the whole thing was a muddle – I was never let know what was going on' (*HD*, 365). On arrival he feels compelled to 'go out and get the hang of everything – so far I hardly realize I have arrived' (*HD*, 365). His perception of reality is distorted because he appears to be elsewhere in both time and space and not physically or emotionally present. Later that night he confronts his reality with terror: 'this was the hour of the never-before – gone were virgin dreams with anything they had had of himself in them, anything they had had of the picturesque, sweet easy, strident. […] The consummation woke in him, for the first time the concept and fearful idea of death, his' (*HD*, 368). The legacy of his three absent fathers (his actual father Victor, Cousin Francis and the 'unadmitted stepfather' Kelway) haunts him: 'had they each, when it had come to a point, laid down what had become impossible to finish?... It was a matter of continuing – but what, what?' (*HD*, 369). The contrast with his dreams of the time to come from 1942 is stark. The imagined future that sustained him through the earlier days of the war is now confronted by the impossibility of continuing the legacy of his Anglo-Irish ancestors, and the risk of his own death as a soldier in the coming invasion of Europe. Furthermore, throughout the novel, Roderick's future as a soldier and as the inheritor of the Irish estate is also haunted by the ghostly presence of his fellow officer Fred. Fred appears physically once, fleetingly, but critically, when he is seen by Stella at the station with Roderick the Sunday morning after Kelway's death. Roderick and Fred had also been together the

previous evening. It is clear that they are lovers who have spent the night together. Stella asks Roderick: " You and Fred haven't looked at the Sunday papers?' Roderick replies: 'No I don't think so. Why?' Stella did not answer' (*HD*, 350). Stella's lack of response could refer to the soldiers' knowledge of the death of Kelway, or it could be tacit recognition of their relationshiThe absence of explanation signifies more than the presence of certainty. Fred does not appear again, but the potential for his return provides another possible future for Roderick. Fred's absence in 1944 could also imply that he has already been killed in the war. Fred's simultaneous absence and presence throw another layer of uncertainty over Roderick's future. His imagined future from 1942 is a nostalgic memory in the face of the insecure reality of 1944.

The nature of Anglo-Irish relations during World War Two forms the historical and political context of Roderick's inheritance of Mount Morris. Cousin Francis' wish to fight on the side of the English, and the housekeeper Donovan's celebration of Montgomery's victory at El Alamein, emphasise the closeness of the relationship between England and the decaying Irish Protestant ascendancy represented by Mount Morris. Bowen was a descendant of the declining Anglo-Irish aristocracy, which had been displaced by Irish independence in 1921. Bowen's 1929 novel *The Last September* had articulated a nostalgic longing for the Ireland of her childhood, while recognising that its days were past. Her history of the family home, *Bowen's Court,* published in 1942, is a paean to her Anglo-Irish forbears, tracing her family back to the soldier who left South Wales with Cromwell's army to seize the lands of his dispossessed Catholic Irish predecessor. *The Heat of the Day* continues to reflect the author's mixed feelings towards Ireland. Stella Rodney's secret work for the XYD department on military intelligence is an echo of Bowen's reporting on Ireland for the British Ministry of Information during the war. Lara Feigel asserts that Bowen's former lover Sean O'Faolain saw this work as 'a betrayal of herself and of Ireland' (Feigel, 2013, 194) . Furthermore, Mount Morris may also go on to share the fate of Bowen's Court. By 1959 Bowen could no longer afford its upkeep. She sold it to a property developer, who later demolished it. The shared future of the two houses, both fictional and real, is the history that Roderick feels is 'impossible to finish'. Mirroring the fate of the Anglo-Irish, Roderick's future at Mount Morris will inevitably involve decline, penury and failure.

Stella Rodney's nostalgia for imagined futures

The Heat of the Day visualises several uncertain futures for Roderick Rodney. His mother's potential resolution of her wartime experience through marriage to 'a cousin of a cousin' (*HD*, 379) is also merely one possible outcome. Throughout the novel, Stella is motivated by nostalgia for her memories of what might have been. Robert Kelway's death in September 1942 destroys her chance of happiness with him, while also paradoxically appearing to thwart her relationship with the counterspy Harrison. When Stella later meets Harrison during a bombing raid in early 1944, her nostalgia for the early days of her relationship with Kelway rekindles her feelings for Harrison. She reminisces that it is ''quite like old times' […] kneeling down, with her back to him, by the fire. 'Before I met you, even'' (*HD*, 371). She regrets the lost opportunity of a future with Harrison, confessing that 'I wish you had come before. There was a time when I had so much to say to you. There was once so much I wanted to know' (*HD*, 374). Harrison too looks back wistfully on that time: ''Funny, you know', he confessed, 'how I still seem to be seeing that other place. That other place where you were'' (*HD*, 375). Throughout the novel, Harrison often

materialises like a spectre, but in this exchange seems to be dissolving both temporally and spatially. It appears that the alternative reality of a love affair between Stella and Harrison could only have happened had Kelway remained alive. The mood then suddenly changes. Harrison admonishes Stella for taking risks during the air raid, because she now has 'prospects' in the form of her potential marriage. She counters unexpectedly that 'prospects have alternatives' and that 'she has always left things open' (*HD*, 380). Harrison offers to stay until the 'All Clear', but we are left in suspense as to whether he does. It seems clear that Stella is anything but content to marry the cousin of the cousin. It is by no means certain that the marriage takes place. She may even have begun an affair with Harrison on that night in February 1944, driven by nostalgia for her meetings with Robert back in 1940.

In September 1942 Stella's love for Robert was already characterised by her nostalgia for the time of the Blitz. Boym writes that 'nostalgia is the rebellion against the modern idea of time, the time of history and progress' (2001, xv). Stella's rebellion is driven by the memory of sensation. 'They had met one another, at first not very often, throughout that heady autumn of the first London air raids' (*HD*, 107). 'For Stella, her early knowing of Robert was associated with the icelike tinkle of broken glass being swept up among the crisping leaves, and with the charred freshness of every morning. She could recapture that 1940 autumn only in sensations; thoughts, if there had been any, could not be found again' (*HD*, 110). The sound sensation of the destruction of the buildings - the tinkle of broken glass - is contrasted with the natural crispness of the beautiful autumn leaves. Waking with Robert in the morning is fresh, but the smell of burned buildings is superimposed on this freshness. The sensations of smell, touch and sound are associated with the 'knowing' of Robert, the beginning of their physical relationship. Stella's nostalgia maintains their relationship through these two years, because in her mind it is frozen in the memory of 1940, as 'a sort of growing smiling regard, a happiness of which it seemed that the equilibrium became every day surer' (*HD*, 119). This nostalgia creates a mythology of the Blitz as a time of excitement and when 'everybody in London was in love' (*HD*, 112), eliminating the grim reality of death and ruin.

Kelway's traumatic experience at Dunkirk further mythologises their relationship. Stella had fallen in love with Robert in part because he was wounded at Dunkirk, based on 'her awareness, his unawareness of what was so deep a component of their intimacy that she wondered, what, had they met before 1940, would have taken the place between them of his uncertain knee' (*HD*, 107). Tarnopolsky has written about the influence of 'unwords' in *The Heat of the Day*, such as 'unaware' and 'uncertain'; 'something absent becomes present in the form of a negative 'unword', so we are led to the presence of something that is at once absent' (2019, 116). Stella is aware of a limp that is not always there, and it causes her to fall in love with Robert. He is not aware of it, although he does not always limp. She is unaware of his work as a Nazi spy, he unaware of the nature of her relationship with Harrison. The 'presence that is at once absent', hinted at by Tarnopolsky, and symbolised by Kelway's injured knee, is the psychological damage resulting from Dunkirk. Kelway reveals to Stella shortly before his death that 'we're to be avoided – Dunkirk wounded men [...] Dunkirk was waiting there in us – what a race! A class without a middle, a race without a country' (*HD*, 322). This disillusionment destroys Kelway's attachment to the past, his family and his cause. Spying for the Nazis gives him 'a new heredity' (ibid) and lays bare the myth that the evacuation of the tired, but undefeated army from Dunkirk by the little ships had been a sort of victory. After this shattering revelation, Stella takes refuge in

nostalgia, suffering once again temporal and spatial dissolution as ‘of that country she did not know how much was place and how much was time. She thought of leaves of autumn being crisply swept up, that crystal ruined London morning when she had woken to his face’ (*HD*, 324). The memory of leaves and shattered glass recalls the early days of their relationship, but now it signifies despair and betrayal, the end of their affair. Stella’s emotional attachment clashes so fiercely with Kelway’s unattachment that there can be no future for them, even if Kelway were to survive the evening.

During their final meeting, Kelway arouses in Stella a nostalgia for their lost future. He tells her 'best of all Stella if you can remember what never happened, to live most in the one hour we never had' (*HD*, 340). This unlived future links Stella Rodney and Elizabeth Bowen, providing a deeply personal context for Stella’s journey. Stella (‘younger by a year or two than the century’ (*HD*, 31)) and Bowen (born 1899) are women in their forties; they remain in London during the war; Stella works for the British government’s XYD department, while Bowen writes reports for the Ministry of Information; they have family connections to big houses in Ireland; and they conduct passionate, but hopeless love affairs. Bowen’s lover, Canadian diplomat Charles Ritchie, had married his cousin Sylvia in 1948. Although married herself, Bowen, who was working in Prague at the time, was bereft. She wrote to Isaiah Berlin that she ‘spent most of my 3 weeks in Central Europe in floods of tears’ (quoted in Feigel, 2013, 376). The sense of betrayal felt by Stella Rodney maybe mirrors that felt by Bowen. Ritchie wrote of Bowen’s love after her death that ‘I had that and it is gone, but its ghost, thank God, remains to haunt me till I die’ (quoted in Feigel, 2013, 463). Both Stella Rodney and Bowen were haunted by the spectres of unlived lives with the unattainable men that they had loved.

Louie Lewis: locked in a permanent present

By summer 1944 both Stella and Roderick Rodney are nostalgic for the memory of the futures they imagined in 1942. However, Louie Lewis, whose story opens and closes the book, feels nostalgia differently. For Louie, past, present and future form a permanent present. The narrator tells us that ‘Louie had, with regard to time, an infant lack of stereoscopic vision; she saw then and now on the same plane; they were the same’. (*HD*, 21) In summer 1944, Louie moves with her son back to Seale-on-Sea on the South Coast. As a returning exile, Louie has a nostalgic relationship with Seale, such that she appears to inhabit both the past and the present simultaneously. Boym calls this ‘reflective nostalgia’, which ’cherishes shattered fragments of memory and temporalizes space’ (2001, 49). The first time Louie walked on that shore at Seale was before the war, ‘where the family had already spent happy holidays’ (*HD*, 19). She met her husband in Seale. For Louie, temporality and place are merged in deeply-felt physical sensation. Lying in bed ‘alongside the hollow left by Tom’s body…. she almost always returned with sensual closeness to seaside childhood’ (*HD*, 21). As Boym concludes, ‘reflective nostalgia is a form of deep mourning that performs a labour of grief both through pondering pain and through play that points to the future’ (2001, 55). As Louie walks in the marshes her past, present and future merge as she contemplates her grief at the death of her parents and husband in a space where they had all been together in a remembered happiness.

This temporal dislocation undermines Louie's sense of reality. She reacts to her pregnancy by telling her friend Connie that 'half of the time this is not half real to me' (*HD*, 382). Louie's admission exemplifies a syntactical technique, noted by Tarnopolsky, by which 'Bowen relates the positive and negative stylistically, extends their connection thematically, and elaborates on the relation in historical terms' (2019, 113). The sentence is a total paradox, making no literal sense. We understand that Louie's life has an air of unreality, but it is uncertain which parts of her life are real and which are not. Louie feels a conflict within herself, between the audacious hedonist who approaches Harrison for sex at the beginning of the novel, and the dutiful wife she is encouraged to be by the newspapers. She only feels comfortable about that part of herself which conforms with the press's idealised view of a woman: 'she could not have survived their disapproval. They did not, for instance, leave flighty wives or good time girls a leg to stand on' (*HD*, 180). Her existence as a person during the war becomes dissolved because she does not know who to be. Connie's pragmatism forces Louie to confront the reality of her pregnancy: 'having had our supper, how about if we thought? We shall require to' (*HD*, 383). In response Louie connects her baby's due date to history, remarking that 'no doubt we will have the Second Front by that time also' (ibid). Louie inhabits a world of unreality, Connie confronts reality. The intertwining and unwinding of their perception of reality are related to the historical unfolding of the course of the Second World War. By the time Louie takes the baby back to Seale her prediction of the future second front has indeed been realised.

Ultimately Louie is reconciled to her future as a mother. She tells Connie that 'I sooner would be a mother. I can't somehow wish to be as before' (*HD*, 385). Her changed perception of the character of Stella Rodney transforms her in this respect. When Stella reveals the details of her personal life at Kelway's inquest, 'for Louie, subsidence came about through her now knowing Stella not to be virtuous. Virtue became less possible now it was shown impossible by Stella' (*HD*, 361). Stella tells the inquest into Kelway's death that '[Y]es, I have other men friends I suppose … I beg your pardon; I mean *yes,* I have other men friends' (*HD*, 356). Reading this in the press, Louie realises that she and Stella are doubles. At the same time, their future is determined by the ghostly presence of Harrison. Louie admits to Connie that the father of her child 'must be some friend I made … I don't think the name would mean anything to you, Connie' (*HD*, 383). There is the merest hint that Harrison may be the father, paradoxically for Stella 'the one living person she would have given anything to see' (*HD*, 355). When Stella, Louie and Harrison meet by chance in the nightclub, Louie, frustrated by Harrison's refusal to sleep with her, ties the three of them together with a typically idiosyncratic Bowen double negative, telling Stella that 'I don't wonder you don't care to stay alone just with him if you can help it' (*HD*, 283). Stella, feeling blackmailed by Harrison into the relationship, replies that 'one cannot always choose' (ibid). Louie, Harrison and Stella are linked in a romantic triangle whose outcome remains indeterminate to the end.

The haunting of the present by ghosts of imagined futures has a profound impact on Roderick Rodney, Stella Rodney and Louie Lewis, as they contemplate their lives in wartime Britain in 1944. They share a nostalgic love for the unfulfilled futures they imagined in 1940 and 1942. As Boym has written, this nostalgia for an unlived future has its roots in dissatisfaction with the present. The novel's lost futures reflect a pessimistic view of post-war Britain. Bowen had left Britain after the war to return to Ireland, unhappy with the socialist experiment of Attlee's Labour government. She

wrote in a letter to the literary editor William Plomer that she 'couldn't stand all those little middle class Labour wets with their old LSE ties and their women … I've always felt, when Mr Churchill goes, I go' (Bryant Jordan, 1992, 171). *The Heat of the Day* is influenced by Bowen's nostalgic longing for the early days of her love affair with Charles Ritchie during the Blitz, and pre-war memories of Bowen's Court, filtered through her disdain for the new elite in British society. The novel is consequently in part a post-war reflection on the social change wrought by war. The advent of socialism, her lover's marriage, the death of her husband, depression and money problems leading to the sale and demolition of Bowen's Court created a future for Bowen that mirrors the disappointments and uncertainties that befall her characters Stella and Roderick Rodney. Perhaps only new mother Louie Lewis, with her childlike ability to live simultaneously in the past, present and future, offers the prospect of resolution following the bitter trauma of war.

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Reviews

Bowen in Media Res:

The Wireless Past: Anglo-Irish Writers and the BBC, 1931-1968 by Emily C. Bloom (Oxford University Press, 2016); *Ireland's Gramophones: Material Culture, Memory, and Trauma in Irish Modernism* by Zan Cammack (Clemson: Clemson University Press, 2021); *Public Opinion Polling in Mid-Century British Literature: The Psychographic Turn* by Megan Faragher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021); *Wastepaper Modernism: Twentieth-Century Fiction and the Ruins of Print* by Joseph Elkanah Rosenberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021)

The books considered here all consider Bowen's interaction with the media in some form or another, with two considering her affiliation with two public bodies – the BBC and the Ministry of Information (MoI) – as part of radio broadcasting and intelligence gathering, and another two examining her relationship to specific material objects, namely the gramophone and wastepaper. Each book takes an individual theme and explores its influence upon Bowen's literary output, and places her work in dialogue with those of contemporary authors.

Megan Faragher's *Public Opinion Polling in Mid-Century British Literature: The Psychographic Turn* in its own words 'follows the winding path of psychography – the writing of the group mind' in the twentieth century up until the end of World War II, 'demonstrating that the new methods of inquiry into individual and [...] collective psychology galvanized an understudied subfield of mid-century aesthetics' (3). The fifth and final chapter explores the MoI in the works of Cecil Day-Lewis and Bowen, and posits that Bowen's wartime work reporting to the UK administration on civilian morale in Ireland 'suggests the inextricability of the private from the political', and that 'her aesthetics reflect the increasing materialization of consciousness realized in her wartime work' (180). Faragher documents the widely contemptuous response that Bowen's clandestine reporting activity has received and sees *The Heat of the Day* as functioning as an allegory for her own wartime position, with Stella 'affiliated with a fictionalized MoI' (208), exploring themes of observation and disclosure. The chapter also analyses 'Britain in Autumn' and 'The Demon Lover' to conclude that in Bowen's work 'war destabilizes the boundary between materiality and consciousness, as psychology becomes increasingly materialized by the ghostly other, while objects disintegrate into dust' (215). The book's key focus on the cultural history of polling in Britain, one which is very much alive and influential on current UK policy making, and which has evolved into a range of online data collection exercises which invoke privacy issues, is particularly timely and relevant today.

Zan Cammack's *Ireland's Gramophones: Material Culture, Memory, and Trauma in Irish Modernism* germinated from an initial conversation about 'stuff' in Bowen's novel *The Last September* (3), and accordingly focuses on the communicative powers of objects in Bowen's fiction rather than their disappearance. It is a testament to Bowen's own fascination with things and the corollary enthralment she inspires in her readers that one such object provides enough material for a whole book, and one

which feels rich and apposite. Its overarching thesis is that the gramophone, as both object and instrument, 'embodies accounts of a culture frequently traumatized through violence and disruption' (9). Bowen's novel The *Heat of the Day* and the story 'Songs My Father Sang Me' are drawn upon as part of the book's wider analysis, and in a table of works published or set between the Civil War ceasefire and the end of the 1930s, Bowen contributes four out of a total of 28. (135). However, it is in the third chapter, 'Gramophonic Violence: The Gramophones of the Irish Revolution', where Bowen is most prominently showcased. This section features an analysis of *The Last September* (1929) alongside Sean O'Casey's play *Juno and the Paycock* (1924). Cammack argues that in these works gramophones 'take on valences of shell-shock or post-traumatic stress disorder by embodying memories, scars, and ghosts of the violence in Ireland' (94). Cammack fruitfully analyses the role of the gramophone in the context of war outside its usual domestic sphere, including in hospitals and at the Front. In her exploration of Bowen's novel, Cammack traces the ways in which 'Bowen forges a link between the physical traumas of gramophonic recording and the metaphysical and psychological trauma of experiencing or witnessing war in its many iterations' (111). Exploring elements such as cracks and scars and verbal repetition, Cammack shows how well a discrete object can function as a cipher through which wider political and cultural events can be played out and amplified. Her analysis of Lois's relationship with the gramophone as one which can far better relay her relationship to violence than her own verbal expression is particularly compelling.

In *The Wireless Past: Anglo-Irish Writers and the BBC, 1931-1968*, Emily Bloom explores '[r]adio modernism' (18) as it applies to a quartet of Anglo-Irish writers, W. B. Yeats, Louis MacNeice, Samuel Beckett and of course Elizabeth Bowen, arguing that radio 'became an ideal medium for writers who were experiencing a sense of displacement and homelessness' (20). The introduction includes analysis of a fragment of a radio script by Bowen held at the Harry Ransom Center, for which there is no extant programme recording. Set during the Blitz, the script depicts the eighteenth-century novelist Frances Burney returning from heaven to bear witness and, according to Bloom, this underscores the ephemeral nature of radiogenic aesthetics in the face of wider textual claims to authorial immortality. This was not the only time Bowen raised literary spirits. and the third chapter, entitled 'Exorcising the Ghosts of Print: Elizabeth Bowen's Spectral Radio', argues that Bowen used the radio to create a series of literary hauntings within a cultural context of book burning, paper rationing, and government censorship. Bloom argues that Bowen cared about 'developing the auditory features of the novel and focusing on the ephemerality of the present rather than re-inscribing nostalgic representations of the past' (24). She specifically notes that it was in the 1940s and 1950s that Bowen 'embarked on a campaign, enacted in her radio broadcasts and late novels, to retrain readers and to retrain herself as a writer in an anti-nostalgic mode that could reclaim the "now" for a print literature that seemed increasingly relegated to the past' (94). This book builds on existing work by Allan Hepburn to provide a valuable and scholarly review of Bowen's involvement with the world of radio, showing that once she embraced the medium it was with an appreciation and understanding of its transience, with the Gothic themes in her radio work 'addressing anxieties about the death of literature in an age of mass media' (105).

The final book considered here, *Wastepaper Modernism: Twentieth-Century Fiction and the Ruins of Print,* by Joseph Elkanah Rosenberg, considers a longer standing

medium, that of paper, also in a context of anxiety. The book works through the ways in which authors such as Bowen, Henry James, James Joyce and Vladimir Nabokov variously imagine the death of paper in a context of emerging forms of media such as the radio and the cinema, generally enacting a process by which waste is transformed into literary form as an expression of futility. This 'imagination of the limits of literature', argues Rosenberg, 'prompts us to see the modernist media ecology not as an antagonistic struggle among media, but as a reckoning with the nature and limits of the literary medium itself' (15). In the book's second chapter , 'Elizabeth Bowen's Junk Mail', Rosenberg suggests that Bowen's fiction is as full of letters as Portia's desk, with personal communications 'reduced to wastepaper', and with letters in novels such as *The House in Paris* and *A World of Love* functioning as 'junk mail', which is also 'a menacing remainder that shatters the boundary between the interior world of memory and consciousness and the exterior world of objects and others' (32). Following on from work already carried out in this area by authors such as John Lurz and Maud Ellmann, the study views Bowen's work through the lens of a key tenet of literary modernism: notions of waste and failed communication.

Opening with a discussion of Portia's perverse predilection for collecting junk, and the desk in which the diary with its uncomfortable truths lies, Rosenberg goes on to suggest that one of the elements which Bowen inherited from Henry James was 'the formlessness and uncommunicating communication that mark wastepaper modernism' (83), one that is also embodied by Portia who 'becomes an object of exchange between relatives' (85). Portia, however, in turn transforms 'formlessness [into] form' by keeping the circulars and 'tak[ing] the semblance of intimacy for the real thing', 'mistak[ing] waste-matter for something meaningful' (85), while by the end of the novel her illusions have been disavowed and waste-as-waste abounds. The chapter then pays attention to *The House in Paris*, to conclude that the paper trail laid in the novel amounts to nothing but waste, with the 'torn letters and empty envelopes that circulate through the novel offer[ing] the promise of a trail home', but one which 'ultimately leads nowhere' (106). Analysis of *A World of Love* finds the letters there functioning as a 'sort of paper husk' which is 'the best defence against the haemorrhaging violence of the page torn from history' and 'a way of buffering oneself against its effects' (115). The concluding chapter shows how apposite Bowen's work is to a study of this nature, with 'wastepaper modernism' exemplifying a 'moment in which literature recognised its own materials as occupying the border between meaning and unmeaning' (198).

Rosenberg views Bowen, in comparison with James Joyce, as the 'far more radical writer (or, at the very least, the more radical wastepaper modernist)' (90), and the books considered here share an appreciation of her vital experimentalism. All these works reveal Bowen as a writer very much attuned to her age and its advancing modernity, and - as part of that - the evolution of media throughout the twentieth century, with all its technological, aesthetic and political implications. She comes through as a writer very much wedded to the moment, to what is new, skeptical of nostalgia, and deftly keeping pace with the century that was as old as she was.

Aimée Gasston

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Irish Lesbian Writing Across Time: A New Framework for Rethinking Love Between Women by Anna Charczun (Peter Lang, 2021)

In *Irish Lesbian Writing Across Time: A New Framework for Rethinking Love Between Women*, Anna Charczun brings forth a complete and thorough study of prose work—novels, short stories, plays—written in English by major Irish women writers, including Northern Irish, diasporic authors, and those from non-White backgrounds, and focuses on the influence that the whole island of Ireland might have had on their *oeuvres*. Her revision of the history of Irish lesbian writing takes as its starting point the emergence of the New Woman in the nineteenth century and divides its course into five different phases by reconceptualizing Vivienne Cass's theoretical model of 'Homosexual Identity Formation' (1979). Charczun considers that the evolution of lesbian narratives and their increasing presence in Irish literature conforms with Cass's taxonomy of the stages of LGBTQI+ identity development.

The first stage—*identity confusion*—is renamed by Charczun as *hesitation* and perceived as running from the early nineteenth century to the turn of the twentieth century. Starting with the Ladies of Llangollen, the first Irish example of a lesbian couple, the author argues that these women's bond not only marks the beginning of the expression of female homoeroticism in Ireland, but also provides the seeds for what would later become New Woman writing. She considers cross-dressing, cross-gendering, and transgendering of female characters in the context of romantic friendships and contends that the representation of 'actions of gender performativity, or of performing female masculinity', associated with the figure of the New Woman, were both 'early representations of lesbian desire' (6) and a way to 'access the public arena' (59). In this phase, the portrayal of homoeroticism is heavily coded, but the allusions to same-sex desire become more and more implicit at the turn of the century. Charczun suggests that this is due to 'the use of the lesbian phallus and *situational heterosexuality*' (14), which is often triggered by the lack or inaccuracy of the symbolic representation of the male phallus. Although the lack of the male phallus allows for a more intense bond between women, the stories nevertheless end up with unsuccessful attempts to create a lesbian narrative, giving way to heterosexual pairings.

The second stage, Cass's *comparison*/Charczun's *exploration*, takes up most of the twentieth century and is characterised by a more suggestive articulation of homoeroticism. Charczun analyses some of the works of Elizabeth Bowen, Molly Keane, Kate O'Brien, and Edna O'Brien to illustrate how their narrative techniques, sometimes deemed experimental and postmodernist, entail depictions of lesbian characters through the authors' stylistic practices. In order to do so, Charczun draws on previous theories such as the use of the adolescent, Adrienne Rich's *lesbian existence* and *continuum*, Patricia Juliana Smith's *lesbian panic* and *de rigueur* lesbian presence, and Maud Ellmann's interpretation of lesbian desire as 'bracketing' the dominant heterosexual plots. Charczun observes a clear bifurcation between the authors' pre- and post-war novels in the portrayal of lesbian desire as women become more and more aware of their relegated position in society throughout their lives, something that had a great impact on literature given the restrictive government's views on social norms and gender roles, and the harsh judgement of

the Censorship of Publications Board. Whereas the former comprises stories of (sexual) awakening in adolescents and young women, the latter presents mature heroines whose sexual identity is affected by the social heterosexual expectations of domestic duties, which in turn constrain their expression. In Bowen's case, the division might not be unequivocal, since in two of her four post-war and final novels, the protagonists—Jane in *A World of Love* and Eva in *Eva Trout*—are in their early twenties and their behaviour, puerile at times, does not respond to the maturity Charczun seems to discern in other novels. It is also remarkable how authors like Kate O'Brien and Edna O'Brien, whose works were repeatedly censored in Ireland, shift their work to foreign settings for the lesbian affairs in the story to materialise, detaching them from their homeland. Indeed, as Shari Benstock points out in her critical study of expatriate women writers living in Paris in the first half of the twentieth century, 'to write as a lesbian was to make a commitment to lesbianism as an artist and as a political being,'[1] a stance not many writers were willing to take. Some preferred to remain under the protection of the norm, both on a personal and a professional level, and the idea of belonging to a subculture was out of the question. As Bowen put it, while discussing the matter briefly having watched *Mädchen in Uniform*, 'there is nothing I like better than feeling one of a herd.'[2] Ultimately, the importance of the authors discussed in this section is, Charczun posits, their imprint on 'the emergence of an openly lesbian fiction in the 1980s' (131).

The third and fourth stages, *tolerance* and *acceptance*, are enclosed within a time of political progress by the end of the twentieth century. During the 1990s, when homosexuality was finally decriminalised in Ireland, the stages of *tolerance* and *acceptance* seem to merge in an ongoing process as the transition from one to the next took place over a short period of time: from individual coming-out stories to social integration in a matter of a decade. The texts from this period prevail upon the swift change in politics, and by the end of the century the number of texts that reflect a more open stance on dissident sexualities increases exponentially. This progression leads to the final two stages, *pride* and *synthesis*, which Charczun combines in one and refers to, at some point, as 'post-decriminalisation' lesbian fiction (156). She explores the transformation of lesbian narratives in the work of Emma Donoghue and Mary Dorcey, where lesbian and bisexual women are shown to be functioning equally with heterosexuals in a more accepting and tolerant Irish society. Charczun culminates her reconceptualization of Cass's model by appraising the broadening range of lesbian representations and advocating thorough consideration of the differences within the lesbian community in order to overcome them.

In the last two chapters of the book, Charczun examines Irish lesbian writing from the diaspora, providing an account of the significant variations presented by writers such as Anna Livia Julian Brawn and Shani Mootoo, who were not subjected to the religious context of Ireland and its negative attitude towards homosexuality, as well as writings from Northern Ireland, in which the political situation impeded the emergence of lesbian narratives and their development. The analyses involve, therefore, an examination of the 'transmigrancy and transculturality' (208) inherent to the writing of such authors, even as their respective particularities rise to the surface: whereas the diasporic authors feel at ease writing about lesbian desire,

[1] Shari Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank: Paris 1900–1940* (London: Virago Press, 1987), p. 334.
[2] Elizabeth Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree*, ed. by Hermione Lee (San Diego, New York, London: Harcourt Jovanovich, 1987).

experience, and existence, Northern Irish lesbian writing seems to rather stall in the two first stages—*confusion* and *exploration*—while engaging the subsequent stages in only a rapid and fragmentary way. Her examination of the three waves of Irish migration in the 1920s/1930s, the 1950s/1960s, and the 1980s, which mainly affected women who rejected family life (187), leads Charczun to consider the 'interrelation of Irish women's migration and queer diaspora' (188) as portrayed in the postcolonial discourses that transpired in the 1960s. This way, the author highlights the hybridity of the very act of the dispersal, as it 'provides a space that is inclusive of identification with the country of origin and the country of arrival' (189).

Charczun's attempt to evince the importance of the connection to Ireland in her analyses of Anna Livia and Shani Mootoo might appear somewhat inconsistent, since, although both authors were born in Ireland and had a shared experience of relocating to different countries—what makes Mootoo refer to herself as a 'multiple migrant' (210)—, neither of them spent a considerable amount of time in Ireland, so as to have developed a deeper sense of rootedness to the land and its culture. These authors, however, draw attention to the complexity of identity formation within a context of migration/diaspora and postcolonialism, which bears a resemblance to the ambivalent sense of national identity and belonging of the other authors examined in the book.

Charczun provides a valuable diachronic analysis of lesbianism in the work of Irish, Anglo-Irish, and Irish-born migrant authors from the birth of the New Woman, as an identity set of traits as well as a literary trope, up to the twenty-first century, when the expression of non-conforming sexual desires is finally destigmatised and socially normalised. A study like Charczun's, concerned with the understanding of the evolution of sexual minorities in a specific setting, serves a double purpose: a political claim and a sociological assessment. Charczun takes us on a journey covering two hundred years of Irish history and shows how an Irish lesbian narrative, heterogeneous but communal, has contributed not only to portray the current political climate of the time, but also to channel the preoccupations and inner states of mind of those writers who, to a greater or lesser extent, felt compelled to reflect the existence and momentum of dissident sexualities in their works.

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The inheritance of narrative and space: 'Houses in Paris, Houses in Cork: Elizabeth Bowen and the Modernist Inheritance' by Lauren Elkin in *Late Modernism and Expatriation*, edited by Lauren Arrington (Clemson University Press, 2022).

As will be seen in other reviews in this volume of the *Elizabeth Bowen Review*, a number of significant books and essays have been published recently. One such essay is Lauren Elkin's contribution, 'Houses in Paris, Houses in Cork: Elizabeth Bowen and the Modernist Inheritance', to the collection of essays edited by Lauren Arrington. *Late Modernism and Expatriation* is a wide-ranging examination of a range of authors and poets: Sam Selvon, Roger Mais and George Lamming (J Dillon Brown); Herta Müller (Michel Mallot); Zadie Smith (Amanda Golden); Caryl Phillips (Lucienne Loh); Christopher Isherwood and Theodore Adorno (Will Norman); Grahame Greene (Maurice Walsh); Basil Bunting (Neal Alexander); Ezra Pound (Zhaoming Qian); W H Auden (Bonnie Costello); and a range of Irish poets including Theo Dorgan, Derek Mahon, Vona Groarkes and Collette Bryce (Lucy McDiarmid).

Arrington's useful introduction places the essays in the collection within both the literature of expatriation and late modernism. She considers first Gertrude Stein's position as a privileged expatriate, living in a 'utopian transnational artistic space' (2). Of course, as Arrington highlights, many who considered themselves to be expatriates would not recognise the space inhabited by Stein, a privileged exile with social, political and economic capital. Instead, she draws on Edward Said's comment, when referring specifically to Paris, that it was 'a city where unknown men and women have spent years of miserable loneliness' (Said cited in Arrington, 2). Such a bleak exile was not, of course, one experienced by Elizabeth Bowen who, while not always having the economic capital of her forebears, maintained a relatively privileged existence while living in England.

Arrington argues that 'geopolitical realities' (3) have led critics such as Elleke Boehmer to consider the ways in which the sometimes harsh realities of expatriation can be seen in the narratives, and the formal structures employed by expatriate writers, leading to a reconsideration of the notion of 'Late Modernism'. The collection of essays, Arrington suggests, 'is an experiment that seeks to test how we can begin to think about Late Modernism in terms of formal characteristics that are evident when we look within and also beyond historical contexts' (5). She argues that 'our understanding of Late Modernism can be enriched by an open-mindedness when it comes to Late Modernism's political, temporal, and geospatial manifestations' (ibid), that:

> Late Modernism is not late Modernism. It is not a paradigm of "belatedness" in which a specific time or geography is privileged and in which non-U.S./European literatures are considered to have arrived late to the scene. Rather, Later Modernist writing is a transtemporal phenomenon. (4)

Drawing on the work of Tyrus Miller (*Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction, and the Arts Between the World Wars*), Arrington further argues that there is not one political model for Late Modernist writing (seen, arguably, in High Modernism) but instead that 'markers' of Late Modernist writing include 'irony, instability, and rupture', where different forms 'take on different politics in different contexts' (7).

Lauren Elkin's essay, 'Houses in Paris, Houses in Cork: Elizabeth Bowen and the Modernist Inheritance' (47-62), explores those 'markers' in Bowen's fiction, discussing the ways in which English literature and Bowen's Court provide the model for both the houses and the narrative structure in Bowen's 1935 novel, *The House in Paris*. Elkin considers Bowen's story of her family history and of the family, *Bowen's Court*, and the almost simultaneous publication of *English Novelists* (both were published in 1942), as publications which provided Bowen with the opportunity to 'retrace a personal history that rooted subjective experience in its historical context, and to situate her own work within a larger literary tradition' (47). *English Novelists* can be seen as Bowen's homage to English literature; she writes about novelists from the sixteenth century through to the early twentieth century — her final novelist is Virginia Woolf — extolling the virtues of their writing.[1] She discusses, amongst a range of authors and texts, John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (described as 'one of our grandest examples of storytelling' [1942b, 10]) and his near contemporary, Aphra Behn, herself an ex-expatriate. Behn, Bowen writes, 'had one great merit: she wrote from experience. She had lived abroad, and she had lived life to the full' (ibid). The variety of authors discussed in *English Novelists* highlights Bowen's interest in, and understanding of, the writing of authors such as Dr Johnson, Oliver Goldsmith, Jane Austen, George Eliot, the Brontë sisters, Anthony Trollope, and Thomas Hardy, as well as writers who are no longer, perhaps, read so widely.[2]

It was both her family history, and her understanding of English literature, Elkin argues, that informed Bowen's own writing, and indeed, in *English Novelists*, Bowen argues that: 'We lose much if we ignore, or honour in name only, so living a part of the English heritage [...] England's past in art, as well as in history, has helped to build up her heroic Today' (1942b, 7). But Elkin also considers the influence being an expatriate might have had on Bowen's psyche, commenting that it is 'Bowen's own particular outlook as a late modernist and someone who is never quite at home anywhere that shapes the literary shelters she constructs in her work' (47). While the inheritance of a literary tradition or a material possession might be considered a positive experience, Bowen's relationship with her Anglo-Irish inheritance is not an uncomplicated one — Bowen's Court was, of course, an Anglo-Irish house, one built on land which would have formerly belonged to Irish Catholic families — and Bowen acknowledges the ramifications and difficulties that the colonisation of Ireland, and the subsequent displacement of the Irish Catholics by the English, brought to Ireland. And while Bowen might well have taken pleasure in her family's connection

[1] *English Novelists* is part of a series of short books called 'Britain in Pictures: The British People in Pictures' published by William Collins. Other notable authors in this series include Vita Sackville-West (*English Country Houses*: 1947); Edith Sitwell (*English Women*, date); Graham Greene (*English Dramatists*, date); Sylvia Lynd (*English Children*, date); and Rose Macaulay (*Life Among the English*: 1946). Bowen was indebted to Macaulay whose help led to the publication of *Encounters*, Bowen's first collection of short stories, in 1923).

[2] Bowen's talk 'Anthony Trollope: A New Judgement' was first broadcast on the BBC on 4th May 1945 and was subsequently published by Oxford University Press in 1946, and reprinted in *Collected Impressions*.

with Bowen's Court, she was also only too aware of the vulnerability of these Big Houses in Ireland during the 1920s, when fears of houses being burned to the ground were only too real. It is a fear that is played out in *The Last September* and, in particular, on the last page of the novel: 'Sir Richard and Lady Naylor, not saying anything, did not look at each other, for in the light from the sky they saw too distinctly' as their home, Danielstown, burns to the ground, the victim of an arson attack (*LS*, 206). However, unlike Danielstown, Bowen's Court stood until it was sold in 1959, but it feels as though Bowen's fears for her own home manifest themselves in the houses that permeate her novels. Indeed, Elkin argues that 'Bowen treats houses not only as the symbols of inheritance, continuity, and power, but as texts overladen with signification, which despite their air of permanence are always open to — or at risk of — being remade', continuing that 'this understanding helps to nuance our view of the ambivalent relationship between late modernism and continuity in the 1930s and 40s' (49). Conversely, in the preservation of the past, of Big Houses, of the literary tradition identified by Bowen in *English Novelists*, a sense of stability can arise, but Elkin argues that in Bowen's life and fictional world, even notions of stability can be seen to be 'fragile and ephemeral' (53).

Elkin continues with the theme of the ephemeral, of instability, when she considers *The House in Paris*, highlighting those aspects of the text that she considers uncanny and unstable, including characters' relationships with places and spaces and, in particular, the effect of Aunt Violet's house on Karen, as she tells the story that she might have told Leopold, her son. In turn, Bowen's characters try to make sense of her own inheritance, but this, as so often in her fiction, is an inheritance which can be used as a metaphor for all that has been lost by the Anglo-Irish. In her discussion of the house in Cobh, Elkin draws on Bachelard's notion of the house as an organic space, and sees Aunt Violet's house as one whose very history enfolds its inhabitants, a house which 'collapses past, present, and future in a fatalistic accordion of accumulated experience' (60). Elkin perceives Madame Fisher's house — 'a house which bulges with all of the history it can't quite contain' (56) — as the locus of inheritance, not in material terms, but in terms of an emotional legacy: of past relationships and past disappointments. It is, according to Elkin, this very instability that feeds into the narrative of the novel, the structure of which:

> allows Bowen to achieve a singular feat of narrative, managing to convey to the reader Karen and Max's tragic affair and the night in Hythe when Leopold was conceived, but in such a way that it is highly ambiguous who is recounting it, and to whom. (56).

In 'Notes on Writing a Novel', Bowen states that: 'Nothing can happen nowhere. The locale of the happening always colours the happening, and often, to a degree, shapes it' (1975, 177). Elkin's essay explores the ways in which the houses in *Bowen's Court* and *The House in Paris* 'colour the happening' of the narrative; in her concluding paragraph, Elkin argues that 'Bowen would write the house again and again, in an attempt to understand what space means, what it blots out and what lingers on' (62). The ideas formulated and tested in this essay, and this edited collection, provide a new way for us to read Bowen. Arrington identifies the markers of 'Late Modernism' as those of 'irony, instability, and rupture' (7); Elkin's essay demonstrates how these elements can be seen in Bowen's work as she 'makes visible what might have become invisible — but not ineffable — in time' (62).

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Afterword: First Encounter, True Encounter ~ Nuala O'Connor

Elizabeth Bowen liked parties, so it is maybe fitting that I first remember being told about her at a party at Kilmatead House, Corkagh, her Uncle George and Aunt Edie's home in west Dublin, a place Bowen often visited. I was at a midsummer fancy dress party hosted by Finlay Colley – Bowen's second cousin – a fundraiser, if memory serves, for the local branch of An Taisce, the National Trust for Ireland, which my father and Finlay were members of.

I was a teenager – it was the mid-1980s – and it was the longest night of the year, dry and bright. There were swans on Kilmatead's millpond; there was music, food, and a bonfire. The estate and house – known as Little Corkagh – were the perfect place to step back in time and celebrate summer's pleasures. My sisters and I had made Austenesque costumes and, as bookish, let's-put-on-a-play kind of girls, we loved this chance at dress-up fun.

Someone mentioned that Finlay's aunt was the late Elizabeth Bowen and, as an aspiring writer, I was captivated. Finlay – bearded, avuncular, modest – had A Writer in the family, a thing I found exotic and enviable. And even though I wrote a lot, and wanted to be A Writer, it didn't seem quite a real thing – writers were, I thought, charmed, wealthy individuals who had special knowledge of the publishing world, or some mysterious 'in'. Could I, a working-class kid from Dublin, ever really be a writer? I wasn't convinced.

When I got home from Corkagh that night, I quizzed my mother about Bowen and her face lit up; she was able to put her hand to several Bowen-related books on the shelves, including *Seven Winters: Memories of a Dublin Childhood,* and a book about Irish writers' homes by Caroline Walsh that featured Bowen. My mother – who left school at twelve – was a great reader, with a particular love for books of Irish interest; as a family, we were vultures around the book stalls at local sales-of-work and garden fêtes. I read everything but had a particular love for stories set in the past, preferably in an interesting house. Predictably I worshipped at the altar of the Brontës, Austen, Waugh, Maugham, Lawrence, and E.M. Forster, and Irish writers
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such as Liam O'Flaherty, Mary Lavin, Walter Macken, and Molly Keane. When I came to them, the fiction of Bowen and Woolf I found a little trickier. Their language was dense, almost impenetrable; their plots were decidedly unplotty. Often, I simply didn't understand what was *meant* in their novels – I felt left out of their characters' cryptic dialogue and strange reactions to small occurrences. And, so, I drifted away from Bowen.

But there comes a time in a writer's life – perhaps also a reader's – where certain authors can no longer be ignored or feared. So, I dove once more into Elizabeth Bowen and was charmed by not just her writing, but by her fearless life, the blended nature of her bohemian and well-to-do sides. I was drawn to her self-proclaimed mix of the 'solitary and farouche', that I identified with. In Bowen's narratives I found echoes of my own interests, as woman and writer: cross-generational friendships; travel and its joys and strains; nature as succour; the power of observant, fierce children; love gone awry; the business of trying to fit in; buildings as living entities that can hold joy and malevolence, and occupy the heart as surely as a beloved person. I wondered about the contrast between Bowen's solid marriage and her mercurial lovers; her straddle of two worlds – Ireland and England. And at the centre of enjoying the work, there was the bewitching romance of Bowen's Court, the destruction of which so many of us lament, and that gave the writer, in her own words, 'a nervous breakdown'.

In Bowen's language I found delicacy and precision, and some of the most astonishing, envy-making metaphors I had ever encountered in the English language. I was wooed by her short stories; comfort-blanketed by the novels; fascinated by the woman. What a joy then, eventually, to join the Bowen Reading Group, to read the work together, and praise and unpick it all with other Bowenites.

Elizabeth Bowen once described the Corkagh atmosphere as 'cheerful', and 'astringent' – the perfect party brew, you might say, and Little Corkagh certainly held cheer that 1980s midsummer night when Bowen's name first floated into my ear. I'm happy that Bowen was able to build a life in which she could prioritise writing, so that the rest of us could benefit from her talent. I'm grateful to her as writing foremother, for providing a model for women to understand the devoted labour and various sacrifices a writing life requires, how it's hard won and challenging, but also possible. I appreciate, too, that her fiction makes me want to work on my metaphors, burrow deeper and soar higher, and attempt what she called 'verbal painting', which I experience as a concrete clairvoyance that holds pure magic. If by reading Elizabeth Bowen, I can absorb some of this otherworldly skill and produce imagery as effortlessly ripe and imaginative as hers, I will have achieved something worthwhile in my writing indeed.

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