The Elizabeth Bowen Review

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Editorial policy

In general, all essays are subject to double blind peer review, however, essays in special editions, such as this one, are subject to double peer review.

We welcome submissions on all aspects of Elizabeth Bowen's life and work. Completed essays for Volume 8 (2026) (6,000 words excluding bibliography and footnotes) should be submitted by 30th April 2026. 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

This is a very special edition of the *Elizabeth Bowen Review*. The essays in this volume all arise from conference papers given at the 'Elizabeth Bowen: Blurring Boundaries' conference held at the University of Bedfordshire on 11th May 2024. The conference was supported by the Research Institute for Media, Arts and Performance, and the School of Education and English at the University of Bedfordshire and was co-organised by Ann Rae, Nick Turner and Nicola Darwood. Over the course of the day, we heard a range of wonderful conference papers, and continued our conversations over coffee, tea and lunch; research and tales were swapped, friends reunited, and new friendships were made. Some of the presenters have kindly agreed to adapt their conference papers for publication in this special edition of the *Review* (other papers are being published elsewhere, or form part of PhD theses – so do keep an eye open for announcements of publications on the Elizabeth Bowen Society website). We hope that you enjoy these essays; we've definitely enjoyed the editing process!

Nick Turner and Nicola Darwood
November 2025

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Editorial Board News

We are delighted to be able to announce that we have two new members on the Editorial Board: Farah Nada and Layla Ferrández Melero. We are looking forward to working with them on the next issue of the *Review*.

Essay competition 2025

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 2025 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 30th April 2026 with the subject line 'Essay competition 2025'). 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 Eight or Nine of the *Review*. The winning essayist will be announced in Volume Eight.

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

We are now accepting essays for volume eight of the *Elizabeth Bowen Review*. Essays should be no more than 6,000 words in length (excluding the reference list) and use the Harvard referencing system. Essays should be submitted by email to bowen@beds.ac.uk by 11.59pm on 30th April 2026. If you would like to discuss a possible essay with the editors, please contact the editors at bowen@beds.ac.uk.

News from the Elizabeth Bowen Society

Reading group: the Elizabeth Bowen Society has continued to host a bi-monthly reading group, meeting on the last Wednesday of alternate months starting in January each year. We are currently revisiting her collections of short stories. If you'd like to know more about the reading group, please email Nicola Darwood (nicola.darwood@beds.ac.uk).

Birthday lectures: on 7th June 2022, we started a tradition of birthday lectures, and since then we've had a series of fantastic lectures.

2022 Professor Allan Hepburn (McGill University, Canada): 'Writing Circles: Correspondence between Elizabeth Bowen and Eudora Welty'.

2023 Dr Heather Bryant (Wellesley College, US): 'An Education of Her Own: The Teaching Life of Elizabeth Bowen'.

2024 Dr Éibhear Walshe (University College Cork, Ireland): 'Treading on Bowen's grave – Writing The Last Day at Bowen's Court'.

2025 Professor Jessica Gildersleeve (University of Southern Queensland, Australia): 'Christmas at Bowen's Court: Elizabeth Bowen's Christmas Ghost Stories'.

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Queering Inheritance in Elizabeth Bowen's *The Heat of the Day* ~ Allison Nick

Inheritance—of houses, of family standing, even of clocks—is a repeated motif in Elizabeth Bowen's writing. Her chronicle of family history, *Bowen's Court* (1942), is perhaps the most obvious example of her interest in inheritance as each chapter charts the history of her family home through her patrilineal heritage. For Bowen, inheritance is physically manifested in Bowen's Court, but also psychologically located in what she describes as the 'continuous, semi-physical dream[s]' that 'run…through a family living in one place' (*BC*: 451). In what follows, I explore how Bowen's orientation towards inheritance shifts in her wartime writing in response to the rise of fascism and the disruptions of wartime. Through the lens of queer time and kinship, I will show how Bowen presents an anti-fascist critique of patriarchy by queering inheritance and using her fiction to reimagine family and kinship outside heteropatriarchal lines. Looking specifically at Bowen's immediate postwar novel, *The Heat of the Day* (1949), I argue that Bowen adds the possibility of queer inheritance in the subplots of Louie and Roderick which then stand in stark contrast to Robert's inheritance of a crypto-fascism dependent on reasserting masculine ideas of domination.

In *Queer Phenomenology*, Sara Ahmed offers a metaphor that helps illuminate Bowen's wartime reflections on inheritance. Ahmed identifies the 'lifelines' that contribute to our various orientations and that demand 'the promise of return' through reproduction (2006: 17). It is the 'lifelines' of her family's Anglo-Irish inheritance that Bowen both romanticises and interrogates in *Bowen's Court* and which then find fictionalisation in Roderick's inheritance of Mount Morris in *The Heat of the Day*. For Ahmed, such an examination of 'the politics of "lifelines" helps us to rethink the relationship between *inheritance* (the lines that we are given as our point of arrival into familial and social space) and *reproduction* (the demand that we return the gift of the line by extending that line)' (2006: 18, my emphasis added). Bowen's own life reflects Ahmed's idea that 'it is not automatic that we reproduce what we inherit'; while she did inherit Bowen's Court, she did not have any children to continue the family line, and ultimately sold the house in 1959 (2006: 17). Bowen grapples with what Ahmed calls '*the pressure*' of inheritance, especially the tug and pull of an inheritance that is both problematic and nostalgic (ibid). Just as Bowen conceives of her own wartime writing as a site of resistance, what she calls 'resistance-fantasies' and 'saving hallucination[s]', Ahmed points out the irony that 'a lifeline' is 'also an expression for something that saves us' (*MT*: 96; 2006: 18). Ahmed's version of 'lifelines' unites the tradition of inherited lines with queer possibility by allowing for the option to 'follow the gift of the unexpected line that gives us the chance for a new direction' (2006: 18). If the patriarchal and imperial structures of Bowen's family inheritances demand reproduction, what kinds of feminist and queer 'lifelines' emerge in her fiction?

Scholars align Bowen's interest in her own Anglo-Irish 'lifelines' with a Burkean conservative theory that Hermione Lee argues heralds a belief 'in the moral effects of property, in benevolent imperialism, in tradition, [and] private ownership', but I suggest that this oversimplifies Bowen's careful consideration of inheritance in her wartime writing, particularly *The Heat of the Day* (1981: 26). The rise of fascism

during the 1930s along with her affair with socialist critic Humphry House forced Bowen to reconsider her more conservative politics even if only temporarily. Patricia Laurence writes that Bowen confronted 'the values in her own life that Fascism defended' and the 'psychological roots' of 'the possessiveness [that] corrupts people and relationships' (2019a: 137-8). Lara Feigel references an article Bowen wrote in 1940 for the first issue of the Irish magazine, *The Bell*, where she questions the sustainability of the Big House. In the article, Bowen realizes that the Big House can be a space of community rather than isolation, a place where we can 'scrap the past, with its bitternesses and barriers, and all meet, throwing in what we have' (2013: 112). To say that Bowen understood the past and the authority of inheritance only through a conservative lens misrepresents Bowen's earnest struggle to reconcile what she called the 'nightmarish big analogies' between her familial history and current events, as well as the intersections of colonialism, fascism, and patriarchy (*BC*: 455).

I propose that when read through the lens of queer theory, Bowen's wartime writing uses stylistic negativity and ambiguity to disrupt heteropatriarchal lines of inheritance that repurpose these 'lifelines' of tradition into ones of resistance and possibility. I look to recent work by scholars like Elizabeth Freeman, Heather Love, José Muñoz, and Sarah Ahmed that considers the temporality and spatiality of queer experiences. Rather than aligning queerness only with the present, I argue that Bowen's preoccupation with the past, even when nostalgic or romantic, works to imagine 'queerness as a temporal arrangement in which the past is a field of possibility in which subjects can act in the present in the service of a new futurity' or what Freeman calls a 'belonging' and 'being long' outside the confines of heteropatriarchal temporalities (2008: 16; 2007: 298-9). In particular, Bowen embeds this queer possibility in the unique aesthetic style of *The Heat of the Day*.[1] Muñoz writes that 'often we can glimpse the worlds proposed and promised by queerness in the realm of the aesthetic' and points specifically to the importance of indeterminacy as a methodology of potentiality and the anticipatory (2019: 1-3). Muñoz refers to Shoshana Felman's concept of 'radical negativity' as a component of a queer utopian aesthetic—embedded in the negation of a negative, a common practice for Bowen, is 'a mode of critical possibility' (2019: 12-13). For both Freeman and Muñoz, such imaginings are not always overt and often require looking for queerness in unexpected places: in the 'cultural debris' or a 'queer visuality' that demands that we 'squint…strain our vision and force it to see otherwise, beyond the limited vista of the here and now' (2010a: xiii; 2019: 20). In what follows, I squint and strain at how Bowen completely, partially, or fails to reimagine inheritance and her love of tradition and family beyond heteropatriarchal expectations of marriage, procreation, and control. I argue that for Bowen, queer time and the disorienting space and time of war often overlap: the anticipatory waiting and the foreclosed future of wartime create space for queer possibility.

Turning now to *The Heat of the* Day, which was written over the course of the war but published in 1948, Bowen's hope was that the novel would act as a 'present-day historical novel' capable of presenting the atmosphere of recent history with some distance (1992: 152). The novel presents a layering of different plot lines: the main story is one of surveillance and intrigue as the protagonist, Stella, learns from a mysterious man that her lover Robert may be a spy. This main plot is intersected by

[1] Maud Ellmann writes that 'Bowen's fiction is "a trap baited with beauty", which constantly outsmarts the interpretative methods brought to bear on it' (2003: 4).

the two sup-plots that deal with questions of inheritance. Stella's son, Roderick, inherits an Anglo-Irish estate, Mount Morris, from a distant Cousin Francis while a young married woman, Louie, navigates newfound sexual freedoms in wartime London, crosses paths with Stella whom she finds alluring, and ends the novel with her newborn baby. The novel's end demands a vision of the future in the ironic light of the immediate postwar period, but Bowen purposefully leaves that moment ambiguous, a hopefulness consistently undermined. In the negation and absence of closure, Bowen insists on the possibility of *queer inheritance* in the legacy of Louie's baby and Roderick's attempt to understand the responsibility of his inheritance.

Given the triangulation of the novel's multiple plotlines, it is natural to pair the subplots of Louie and Roderick—as Anna Teekell points out, their repetitive names, Louie Lewis and Roderick Rodney are double positives (2018: 133). As a foreground to their potential queer inheritances, both Louie and Roderick are characterized by a pastness or non-linear, out-of-time-ness indicative of queer temporality. Louie's queer temporality is often connected to sensual or erotic experiences ambiguously tied to heterosexuality. Louie is described as having 'an infant lack of stereoscopic vision', which causes her to see 'then and now on the same plane' and to 'defer […] in a trouble of half-belief to either the calendar or the clock' (*HD*: 15). She also seems to slip in and out of the present and the past: an evening of 'rainy dusk' causes her to 'return […] with sensual closeness to seaside childhood' and 'the pudding-softness of the hot tarred esplanade or her bare arm up to the elbow in rain-wet tamarisk' (ibid). At the start of the novel, though Louie is listening to a concert in the park, 'she was in effect again in the park rose garden, where she had been walking that afternoon' (ibid). She may have been with 'her Air Force friend', but it is the sensual erotic of the 'great globular roses' that 'burned more as the sun descended, dazzling the lake' rather than the erotic of heterosexuality that seems to pull Louie back to that moment when she 'repeatedly stooped to touch petals, her raspy fingertips being every time entered by their smoothness' (ibid). These moments of temporal slippage highlight Louie's sensuality but locate that sensuality apart from or beyond traditional heterosexual experiences.

Louie's non-normative sexuality—she appears attracted to both men and women and lives in a quasi-lesbian domestic partnership with her boarder, Connie—comes to fruition with her encounter with Stella. In the passage below, Louie attempts to parse out her feelings about Stella, while reflecting on their recent encounter:

> Louie felt herself entered by what was foreign. She exclaimed in thought, "Oh no, I wouldn't be *her*!" at the moment when she most nearly was. Think, now, what the air was charged with night and day—ununderstandable languages, music you did not care for, sickness, germs! You did not know what you might not be tuning in to, you could not say what you might not be picking up—affected, infected you were at every turn. Receiver, conductor, carrier—which was Louie, what was she doomed to be? She asked herself, but without words. She felt what she had not felt before—was it, even, she herself who was feeling? She wondered if she would ever find Stella's house, the steps at whose foot they had said goodnight in the dark, again; still more she wondered if she would want to. "But this is not goodbye, I hope," had been said—but what, how much, had she meant to mean? This fancy taken to Louie, this clinging on, were these some sick part of a mood? Here now was Louie sought out exactly as she had sought to be: it is in nature to want what you want so much too much that you

> must recoil when it comes. Lying in Chilcombe Street, grappling her fingers together under her head, Louie dwelled on Stella with mistrust and addiction, dread and desire (*HD*: 278).

This passage is difficult to unpack, and I find myself 'squinting and straining' to understand what exactly has happened in the encounter between Louie and Stella. Bowen's dense and indeterminate language is on full display; the phrase 'you did not know what you might not be tuning in to, you could not say what you might not be picking up' alone forces the reader into experiencing first hand Louie's inarticulate state.

The uncertainty of the passage is located in the mixture of imagery connected to the idea of contagion. Words like 'foreign', 'sickness', 'germs', and 'infected' imply a fear or panic related to the spreading of illness, but this fear of contagion is also loosely connected to the atmosphere of wartime, the exposure of the radio, and an indeterminate queerness. The passage contributes to the novel's overall commitment to representing the 'doomed' experiences of those living in London during the Blitz. Early in the novel, the narrator remarks on the 'malarial' conditions of the ruins (*HD*: 100). The descent underground during air raids prompted much concern about stagnant air and crowds of people sharing such a small space. Sara Wasson discusses the fears that emerged from the bomb shelters, which were seen as 'a perfect breeding place for various physical infections' (Constantine FitzGibbon quoted in 2010: 9). The fear of contamination also involved 'language of evolutionary deterioration and a sense of moving into a prehistoric past' (2010: 10). Overlaying the general atmosphere of wartime is also a very specific fear of the exposure produced by new technologies related to radio and transmission. The 'air' is 'charged' with intangible and ideologically-inflected transmissions—'ununderstandable' languages, 'music you did not care for'—as well as something more direct, like 'sickness' and 'germs', that is capable of entering and infecting. Words like 'receiver, conductor, carrier' take on double meanings as modes of connection and community (wartime rallying, radio broadcasts connecting the world) become suspect for their ability to contaminate.

There is also a coded anxiety of queerness built into these other moral panics about wartime and technology—what, indeed, is Louie 'doomed' to be, and what does she want from Stella? The fears around queerness in this passage are reminiscent of the negative affects of queerness that Heather Love terms the 'dark, ambivalent texts' of 'feeling backward' and which she locates in an aesthetic of 'modernist melancholia' (2009: 4-5). Louie is 'entered by what was foreign', unexpected feelings that should otherwise be 'some sick part of a mood' and leave her vulnerable to whatever she 'might not be tuning in to'. And yet, whatever is 'ununderstandable' and leaves Louie 'without words' is not wholly bad; Louie ends the passage 'dwell[ing] on Stella with mistrust and addiction, dread and desire'. What is dangerous is also desirable, like the thrill of being the only ones left in London or the magic of turning the radio dial.

Given Bowen's interest in queer forms of kinship, the negative association between queerness and infection might also imply a new way of inheriting queerly. Rather than a familial inheritance, Louie forges a connection to Stella via the 'charged air' of wartime. What makes Louie 'recoil' is not the infection but the surprising realisation that she was now 'sought out exactly as she had sought to be'; the negative affect of this passage is located not in the desire she is feeling, but in the overwhelming

possibility that a connection with Stella might mean. She 'recoils' not at her interest in Stella, but at finally receiving what she had wanted 'so much too much'. Does the 'charged air' of wartime allow for the spreading of other kinds of sexuality? Louie's relationship with Connie suggests that there might be more possibility for queer sexualities given wartime demands on living space—with her husband gone, Louie takes Connie in as a boarder to cover the rent and justify having such ample space to herself. The fact that Stella and Louie cross paths reflects the atmosphere of wartime London, where those that remained in the city found different routines and experiences.[2] Homophobic ideologies have a long history of connecting queerness and contagion, but, as much as this passage depends on fear, it also repurposes the very idea of contagion into a language of queer connection, that, though indeterminate, is not actually unwelcome.

The extent to which Louie's plotline might offer a vision of queer possibility depends on how one reads the ambiguity of the ending of the novel. What kind of legacy does Louie's baby usher in? 'Christened Thomas Victor', the baby's name simultaneously secures his patriarchal legitimacy by falsely connecting him to Louie's late husband and indirectly connecting him to Stella via her late husband (*HD*: 371). For Miller, the ending presents an unrealistically hopeful depiction of working-class, single motherhood and thus undermines the connections between classes elsewhere in the novel (2008: 154). As other scholars have pointed out, on the one hand, the ending could be read as entirely optimistic and thus could reveal Bowen's blind spot in imagining the perspective of working-class women—while her interest in inheritance makes room for queer possibility, she does not take into account, apart from Louie, what inheritance means outside of an upper-class tradition. On the other hand, the impossibility of Louie's hopeful ending, the fact that she lies, and because of societal expectations, must lie her way to a patriarchal lineage for her son, undercuts the promise for the future that the ending seems to offer.

Perhaps there is a third possibility for reading Louie's ending: in the indeterminacy between optimism and irony there is also queer possibility, albeit not fully imagined. Maud Ellmann reads Louie's baby as a 'product of verbal intercourse between the older and the younger women' and a 'union of eloquence and inarticulacy' and thus Louie is queered by this association with Stella (2003: 165). In the naming, the baby becomes a kind of legacy of Louie's ephemeral connection to Stella, whatever it was she 'tuned' into and was entered by in the charged air of wartime. And yet, that association with Stella is only created via a triangulation of masculine names and will most likely remain a secret. In the novel's last lines, Louie gloriously holds the baby up in sight of the 'homecoming bombers', a picture-perfect exaltation of peace. As a symbol of the postwar future, the baby is caught in the middle between a patriarchal tradition that Bowen views as an ironic falsehood and a queer possibility that she can't fully imagine yet.

While Louie's subplot revolves around the ambiguity surrounding her baby's legacy, Roderick's story deals more directly with a material property inheritance. Louie

[2] Lara Feigel describes the sexual freedom of wartime London by quoting the diary of Bowen's lover, Charles Ritchie: 'Wartime London was a forcing ground for love and friendship … for experiments and amusements snatched under pressure … I am temporarily cured of my mania for seeing things in a straight line … time no longer seems to be slipping away from me' (2013: 164). For Ritchie, who inspired Bowen's descriptions of Stella and Robert's romance, wartime creates a new temporality directly related to sexuality.

seems to occupy a temporality of overlap between past and present, but Roderick is characterised by his pastness. Stella observes that the army has changed Roderick's face, making him feel 'anachronistic' (*HD*: 53). As a soldier, Roderick's sense of a future is foreclosed—'war had laid a negative finger on alternatives'—but he finds comfort in his inheritance of Mount Morris from Cousin Francis, which 'establishes for him and was adding to day by day, what might be called an historic future' (50, 52). The temporality of the phrase 'historic future' is intriguing, indicating that the house simultaneously encapsulates pastness and futurity. Part of this concerns its location in Ireland: 'by geographically standing outside war it appeared also to be standing outside the present' (52). Roderick's 'historic future' places him as the lynchpin between the tradition of the past and the possibility of the future. The fantasy of his new life in Ireland provides an escape from his present situation as a soldier, a situation which his mother Stella fears will 'obliterate' Roderick and lead to a 'dissolution never to be repaired' (50). For Roderick, Mount Morris becomes 'the hub of his imaginary life, of fancies, fantasies only so to be called because circumstances outlawed them from reality' (52). For Roderick, this inheritance becomes what Bowen elsewhere refers to as a 'resistance fantasy' to which he can return to again and again to escape his life as a soldier (*MT*: 96).

In some ways, Roderick's inheritance represents a straightforward nostalgia inspired by the violence of war, but the will from Cousin Francis adds a level of ambiguity to how this legacy is interpreted. Francis leaves the house to Roderick 'in the hope that he may care in his own way to carry on the old tradition' (*HD*: 77). Roderick balks at the punctuation: 'But I want to know which he meant. Does he mean, that I'm free to care in any way I like, so long as it's the tradition I carry on; or, that so long as I care in the same way he did, I'm free to mean by "tradition" anything I like?' (*HD*: 95). Roderick is not the only one to apply an interpretive lens to his inheritance. While attending Francis's funeral, Stella chats with a relative named Colonel Pole, who strongly believes that Roderick should sell the house. In Colonel Pole's view Roderick's 'generation will have no use for' a big house and estate—since the 'future is in their hands', his generation will need to 'travel light' (89). In another small moment, Robert refers to 'Roderick's legacy', but Stella corrects him by saying 'Roderick's inheritance' (176). This running through-line of how to make meaning from Roderick's inheritance of Mount Morris in some ways seems like a sub-plot piling onto the novel's overall obsession with interpretation (Teekell points out that this passage repeats the words 'mean' and 'meant' eight times) as designated by the main spy plot (2018: 141). And yet, read alongside Bowen's other wartime writing, which reveals her own preoccupation with inheritance, the narrative thread of Roderick's inheritance raises a series of central questions. Is it possible for Roderick to create 'an historic future' at Mount Morris, one that is continuous with the tradition of the past but redefines that tradition in a new way? Might Roderick's inheritance from Cousin Francis create a queer lineage, and if so, is that lineage anti-patriarchal?

Scholars disagree on how to read Roderick's orientation towards the tradition that he inherits, but few readings take into account Roderick's potential queerness.[3] Neil Corcoran does acknowledge a potentially coded queer narrative in both Roderick and

[3] Hermione Lee notes his desire to 'make things right', leading to a 'powerful sense of the will for survival in the place itself' (1981: 186). Karen Schneider, on the other hand, like Kristine Miller, aligns Roderick with the traditional and patriarchal, particularly a 'male desire for absolute authority' (2014: 93).

Cousin Francis. However, his reading relies on a vision of the future that casts heterosexual coupling as productive and queerness as a form of 'extinction'. Corcoran writes that

> if homosexuality is coded into this 'story' and also into Roderick's story, then the true Anglo-Irish heritage has become the impossibility of consummating sexual relationships between men and women. And, as the 'tradition' conceives of itself, this is its extinction, whatever anyone manages 'in his own way' (2004: 199).

I argue instead that in leaving Mount Morris to Roderick, Cousin Francis creates a queer line of inheritance. Roderick is aligned with the past and tradition, but with one already coded with queerness from the start, as suggested by Cousin Francis and Nettie's childless status. In my reading, I would flip Corcoran's perspective: the hopeful future is located in the *queer inheritance* of Francis and Roderick, which may be capable of bypassing the violent expectations of heteropatriarchy, whereas Stella's visions in the drawing room of Mount Morris of Roderick's future wife are an ironic fantasy that the same system can produce different results.

Roderick and Cousin Francis share an ironic foil in their orientation towards the past and future. Roderick discovers a 'saving fantasy' in his inheritance's 'historic' pastness, despite his locus as the next generation that carries the future in his hands. Cousin Francis, on the other hand, is the epitome of pastness and has chosen 'with regard to heating, lighting, and plumbing [...] to keep Mount Morris in, almost, its original state' with the farm and land 'worked with few aids unknown in his grandfather's day' (*HD*: 83). And yet, Cousin Francis is 'entranced' by the modern, the 'systems, outfits, fit-ups, gadgets and all forms of mechanised labour-savers, constantly wasting time 'flirting' with 'an air-conditioning plant, a room-to-room telephone, an electric dish-washer and a fireproof roof' (83). This foil suggests the burden of inheritance and its relationship with temporality. Cousin Francis desires the modernity of the future but feels obligated to maintain the house in the same earlier tradition from which he inherited it. Roderick, however, is meant to embrace a new postwar generation that Colonel Pole says must now 'travel light', but he finds more comfort in the security of a past tradition. In passing the house to Roderick, in claiming him as a son outside the particular patriarchal lineage, Cousin Francis creates a jumble of modernity and tradition. Is a new temporality created from 'an historic future' that embraces tradition and modernity? Does that new tradition risk reinscribing the same power dynamics of heteropatriarchy?

The conclusion to Roderick's story is left unknown, leaving Bowen's contemporary, Rosamond Lehmann, to ask in a letter—is Roderick at Mount Morris? However, the sub-sub-plot of Cousin Nettie indicates that Roderick's *queer inheritance* may be different from the previous traditions. At the same time that Cousin Nettie, Cousin Francis's widow who resides at the mental health facility, Wisteria Lodge, rather than Mount Morris, represents a tragic outcome of non-productivity, she also exercises her choice to leave and exist outside of that tradition. As Karen Schneider points out, her madness is a 'false story', one that she actively embraces (2014: 96). For Nettie, Wisteria Lodge is a refuge from the larger fantasies of patriarchal control that govern things like war and the confining gendered spaces of the Anglo-Irish tradition that rendered Nettie 'cloudless'. Cousin Nettie immediately identifies a kinship with Roderick, saying that they are the same, suggesting that perhaps Nettie and Francis's

unproductive marriage results from a mutual queerness. Bowen's reliance on negation, the 'nothingness' of Cousin Nettie's retreat, actually makes room for queer possibility, for Cousin Nettie to be embracing her own otherness. The tragedy that remains in Cousin Nettie's story is that the drab Wisteria Lodge and the 'false story' of insanity are the only viable spaces outside of heteropatriarchy in which Nettie can find refuge.

That Roderick insists on visiting her is important: he feels he has inherited her too and does not want to seem a 'usurper' (*HD*: 225). On the one hand, his tone implies a kind of inconvenience, but I think there is also an earnest desire to safeguard the new tradition of his 'historic future' in a way that does not repeat the trauma of the past. He offers her the chance to return to Mount Morris if that is what she wants. This moment of good faith with Cousin Nettie implies that maybe in accepting Cousin Francis's queer inheritance, Roderick will be able to enact a new kind of tradition, a 'lifeline' that avoids reinforcing the traditional status quo. The attempt to embrace the modern is not a facade to hide a deep commitment to traditional ideas about gender and patriarchy, as is often the case with fascist ideology. Instead, Cousin Francis and Roderick are trying to find ways to reinvent and reimagine modernity and tradition simultaneously. As with Louie's future, Bowen is unable to fully imagine these queer futures, but she embeds the possibility of them into moments of negation and ambiguity.

Roderick's desire to reimagine patriarchal inheritance beyond being a 'usurper' is further emphasised through a contrast with the novel's unambiguous example of fascist thought: Stella's lover, Robert, who turns out to be a spy and crypto-fascist. Robert exposes the connection between fascism and patriarchal ideas of masculinity in one simple line: 'who could want to be free when he could be strong' (*HD*: 302). Stella attempts to make sense of Robert's sudden betrayal, but when she latches on to his mention of being wounded in Dunkirk, he clarifies that his fascist leanings are not recent. Instead, they are his inheritance. Robert describes being 'born wounded; my father's son' and identifies his turn to fascism as a 'new heredity' that 'bred my father right out of me' (307). His childhood becomes associated with a weak and emasculated tradition—he says of his family, 'It never suited them that I should be a man' (313). For Robert, fascism offers a 'new heredity' (a perfect oxymoronic double to Roderick's 'historic future') that can make up for the failures and limitations of the heteropatriarchal family, not by, as with Louie and Roderick, finding a new tradition, but by returning to and reinforcing the 'strength' and 'order' that heteropatriarchy promised in the first place.

Robert's confession puts Stella's visits to his family home, Holme Dene, in context, revealing how Robert's childhood primed him to find in fascist ideology a way to assert or reclaim his masculinity. One of the first things that Stella notices about Holme Dene is that unlike other items that had been moved about from other rooms 'the grandfather clock … must have stood there always—time had clogged its ticking' (*HD*: 117). This clock has been permanently stopped, signalling Holme Dene as a site of rupture in the chrononormativity of a familial tradition. As members of a rising middle class separate from the landed elite, Robert's family cannot claim 100 years of continuous clicking like Clara's family in Bowen's wartime story, 'The Inherited Clock'. The way the narrator describes the set-up of the house implies the inevitability of Robert's crypto-fascism: the house 'had been planned with a sort of playful circumlocution' that perpetuated a lifestyle of hiding, spying, and surveillance

where ‘everyone knew where everyone else was and, in time, what everyone else was up to … it had not been possible for anybody to leave the house unseen’ (*HD*: 287-8). While Robert inherits his father’s ‘unformulated anarchical dreams’, the ‘fiction of dominance’ is passed on to his mother and sisters, continuing the cycle of emasculation (289). In Robert’s middle-class family, the promises of power and domination that come with the tradition of heteropatriarchy are falsehoods that drive him to seek a reclamation of masculinity in fascist ideology.

Set against Robert’s inheritance of a ‘fiction of dominance’, the queer possibility of Louie’s connection to Stella via the ‘charged air’ of wartime and Roderick’s attempt to embrace tradition without the violence of patriarchy become examples of anti-fascist resistance. Louie and Roderick offer parallel queer subplots that use ambiguity and negation to offer glimpses of queer forms of inheritance. While their plot lines leave us wondering what the postwar period will bring and whether it will have room for queer futures, Robert’s death suggests that the end of the war means the end of the line for his ‘new hereditary’. By giving us a glimpse of how Robert inherits his predilection for fascist ideology, Bowen further emphasises the feminist and antifascist qualities of the moments of queer inheritance found in her wartime writing. Robert may die clinging to the ‘fantasy of domination’ missing from his father and childhood, but the ‘resistance fantasies’ of Louie and Roderick, even if ephemeral and not fully realized, persist in the very uncertainty of their endings.

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Locating High-Modernist Motifs in Elizabeth Bowen's *The Heat of the Day* ~ Philip Miles

In this short paper I shall evaluate Elizabeth Bowen's 1948 novel *The Heat of the Day*[1] as a representative narrative that suggests potential for societal gestalt shift at a time of significant upheaval – in this case, the Second World War. *HD* is, in essence, a novel set predominantly in London during WW2 but, despite its urban ambiance, it is a work preoccupied with human relations situated in transient times, with such transience arguably influencing the dynamics of a story based on relationships, trust, power and powerlessness, and the complexities of social class, identity maintenance, and insecurity. This paper is therefore concerned mainly with theorisation of such themes, considered via understanding of reflexive space and identity, rather than in the deeper considerations of complexities of plot. Stella Rodney, the central protagonist, is employed with a government agency and, due to the nature of her work, is effectively given licence to adopt an enacted ambiguity regarding her own public profile and private identity. She encounters others that are also able to adopt such characteristics, but the narrative value here is how 'life' influences values and norms and how action is affected by legacy and circumstance. Recurrent themes in the novel include time/temporality, compressed often by the reflexive and fluid context of war; personal and structural freedom (*from* and *to*); inconsistent, playful, performative identity; and the vision of borderless, ideologically-driven geography and its reflection in a borderless ontology. Such themes align well with the pillars of what is known as 'high modern' sociology – a form of social theory that ostensibly denies the full implications of *post*modernity, asserting instead a tendency of human beings to experience the psychological contradiction of wishing to 'hang on' to the securities of 'grand narrative' certainties in social, cultural, economic, and political life driven by the perceived reassurance of practices, customs, and nostalgia while embracing the 'freedom' of individualisation. Consequently, this theory emphasises the distinction between the forms of positive and negative freedom (or, as mentioned, freedom *to* and freedom *from*) – articulated, *inter alia*, by Issiah Berlin (1961) – and the encompassing foundations of accepted social life and interaction. When times appear to be changing it is argued that people experience a form of 'ontological (and epistemological) insecurity' caused by the threat of removal (or significant *alteration*) of modes of governance, customs and behaviours, and the experience of culture. I argue that *HD* has this narrative characteristic throughout, realised via awareness of the socially haemorrhaging effect of war, but to arrive at

[1] Hereon *HD*
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such analysis it is necessary to understand the embedded nature of social and literary theory in narrative analysis.

Sociology within Literature: High Modernism of the 'social' kind

A brief summary of the intersection of sociology and literature involves a distinction between the *practical* discourse on creativity, power, structure, and economics found in what has been called over the years the 'sociology of literature' and a 'literary sociology' that tends towards a fusion of literary and sociological *theory*. The former is traceable to the emergence of a sociology of literary taste, industry and consumption, and authorial and reader biography associated strongly with pathfinders such as, *inter alia*, Schucking (1931/1944 in translation), Q.D. Leavis (1932), Escarpit (1965), Laurenson and Swingewood (1971), Macherey (1978), Hall (1979), and more recently observed in D.J. Taylor's *The Prose Factory* (2016).[2] Raymond Williams considered the representations of rurality, industrialisation, and social change in two notable outputs *Culture and Society* (1957) and *The Country and the City* (1973), and Diana Spearman (1966) arguably sought evidence of mirrored culture and values in literary output that merged the author, setting of creation, setting of reading, biographies of consuming individuals and groups. Sociology, as it were, appeared seamlessly incorporated into literary criticism, also finding space within the ubiquitous dialogues on a sociology (and theory) of the function of the novel, most notably via Lucien Goldmann (1980). The 'Essex Conference' proceedings of this era collectively debated literature and society in an age of arguable social, economic, and political decline, and the healthy continual engagement with structural social dynamics of author and reader simultaneously developing alongside a wider 'popular culture' discourse (vide. Routh and Wolff, 1977; Barker, 1978; Laurenson, 1978). This led, arguably, to a perception of intellectual distinction between a 'social theory' and a 'literary theory' and the multitude of variables within such a discourse, such as the intersectional dynamics of gender, class, race and so on. Social theory, in effect, was about forge a 'high modern' individual-society distinction via Anthony Giddens (1984; 1990; 1991) and colleagues, but the overlap and spirit of the stubborn *intersectionality of creation and reception* was resilient and flourished into the nineties and beyond via luminaries such as Rita Felski (2015) who declared that it is a 'false picture' to defend (such) dichotomies. '[T]he belief that the 'social' aspects of literature,' she argued, 'can be peeled away from its 'pure literary' ones' is absurd. Thus:

> No more separate spheres! […] works of art cannot help being social, sociable, connected, worldly, immanent […] yet they can also […] be incandescent, extraordinary, sublime, utterly special. Their singularity and their sociability are interconnected, not opposed. (2015: 11)

Felski went on to argue that works of art are 'linked to other texts, objects, people, and institutions in relations of dependency, involvement and interaction' and, in essence, this is the crucial link evident between the social and the literary (ibid.). The social theory of the 1980's was concerned with the significant weakening of the postwar order (or *prevalent system*) and the effects of the rise of individualisation on everything from micro-conceived 'everyday life' all the way through to global geo-

[2] The lineage of interest in fiction and the 'reading public', so to speak, does not start and stop within these publication parameters. Henry Bennett was writing in the 1960's about the book trade, publications, and readership of the sixteenth century (vide. Bennett, H.S., 1961).

politics including conflict, environment, and the plight of capitalism (Giddens, 1990). The argument (or situation), in short, is summarised (albeit in a quite 'Western' context) via the works of sociologists such as Anthony Giddens (Ibid.), Ulrich Beck (1992), and Zygmunt Bauman (2000). These scholars did not exist in vacuum and were not, by any means, the only intellectual individuals or groups to be commentating on the fragmentation of capitalist societies and processes of individualisation, but they do 'summarise' the concept of what became termed 'high modernism' in a sociological context. The age of 'modernism' had been, in effect, governed by a 'solidity and certainty' in the fields of geo-politics, industrial policy and employment, observance of the entrenched norms, mores and values of society, and governed by a 'system' of expertise, deference, and latent authority. By the time the post-war consensus began to significantly fragment – *fragmentation* existing as a background narrative throughout *HD* – the solidity of such structure was slowly dissipating into a more individualised society governed more by reflexivity (self-awareness) and individuality – 'tradition' and 'dream', so to speak, were separated (Cf. Goldthorpe and Lockwood et al., 1969). Within a body of work that stretched from 1984 through to 2006, Giddens, Beck, and Bauman managed to (quite possibly in tandem) crystallise the crisis of hesitant progress for people and societies when faced with patterns of deindustrialisation, the perceived severance of continuity, and what might be considered a simultaneous rise in autonomy *and* interconnectivity (we are free as long as we are connected to the mechanisms *of* freedom). This does, indeed, appear the paradox that it ultimately is, but it summarises a 'social contract with the self and society' that is useful in the analysis of literature that could be described as being 'couched in anxiety'. It is, of course, a theme that exists throughout *HD*, arguably naive in context throughout (involving trust, risk, insecurity, intrigue, intergenerational fragility, and anxiety about futures that was ultimately leading to the rejection of libertarian values and the restoration of an ultimate 'grand narrative' of the post-Beveridge Welfare State) but connected to the 'spaces' featuring a *resistance to the conventional* evidently experienced (and mostly enjoyed) by the characters of war-torn London. High modernism arguably had a narrative form before the postwar consensus it purported to replace.

The 'immediacy of distance'

Elizabeth Bowen's work tends to 'sit' slightly differently to some of her contemporaries in that, in this instance, she locates the majority of *HD* in an urban setting that simultaneously forsakes the essence of sociality found often in Patrick Hamilton and the remoteness of George Orwell, while retaining the physical 'greasiness' of the urban narratives of Jean Rhys, the paranoia and powerlessness of Graham Greene, and the claustrophobia of James Hanley.[3] Within the urban setting there remains a representation of the ubiquitous transience of people, the familiar stranger, the notion of an immediacy of a distance that, while experienced in a London shorn of a good amount of normal population and devastated physically, retains the functionality of sociality set against, as Erving Goffman (1959) would term, an expanding public ('front region') sphere driven by tangible paranoia or a *private* ('back region') sphere of less guarded disclosures. This urban setting

[3] On reading Rhys's 'middle' novels – *Quartet* (1929), *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie* (1931), and *Voyage in the Dark* (1932) – one is struck by both the use of the word 'greasy' and the acknowledgement of a psychological sensation, or an omnipresent physical awareness, of urban dirtiness, both in domestic and wider environmental contexts, such as the air. This can be compared to, for example, Iris Murdoch's repeated tropes on 'dustiness' in her 1954 debut *Under the Net*.

facilitates a narrative that, while engaging with intrigue and a faint whiff of unreliable narration, concentrates almost exclusively on the uneasiness of human transience and the omnipresent (hidden) threat to the structure of society via its entrenched, though fragile and negotiable, values, mores and norms. Conversely, despite the vulnerability of such customs, some things remain more stubborn. For instance, the stratification of social class and physical age is present and explored throughout the novel, utilising techniques to understand inter-generational epistemological standpoints and the notional transience of time and social progress. The omnipresence of strata and subliminal social closure ensures that *HD* is a work that is – on the whole – driven by a continual discourse of individuation, liminality, the immediacy and transience of time-space, and human hesitations. Social action and power, as sociologist Franco Crespi (1992) once opined, were arguably ultimately driven by the articulation of integrated values rather than by uncertainties of reflexivity – in other words, you need to *know you have power* to exploit it. High modern sociology is based almost exclusively on recognition of the effect of continual human reflexivity and it is possible to detect a subnarrative that Bowen employs throughout pointing towards situation-driven choice and response – agency and reflexivity – rather than compliance with the forces of extraneous structure (whether geopolitical or monocultural). Therefore, the narrative of *HD* is arguably subliminally progressive, enticing, and provoking. It is perhaps ahead of its own time in that it motions towards an extraneous 'revolution' potentially brewing in a post-war society, how agency determined structure in the development of the welfare state and the eventual *rejection* (at least for then) of individualisation. Having said this, the novel *is* laden with the ideology of the individual, being something that is driven by reflexive individual strategy within the multitude of interactions that push the narrative along. There are two sociological theoretical dynamics at work throughout here: the 'duality of structure' (or, the 'mutuality of structure and agency', how each influences the function and behaviour of rules-based society and human action) and the 'double hermeneutic' (a useful technique to develop how we may use 'fiction' to understand life and how we use 'life' to understand fiction) of Anthony Giddens (1984). Both ideas embrace the interconnectivity of human responses to the war effort and, for that matter, the continual uncertainty of daily life. Thus, at this early stage, we are able to detect an overwhelming confirmation (via Giddens) of structure-agency synthesis – the story is arguably *driven* by the combination of peripheral factors that affect choice and the power to enact choice. The 'war' brings people together but also individuates their options and choices (war-affects-people-affects-war). Thus, the *immediacy of distance* is to be found in our locations and ways of living but also in our conscious – and unconscious – individualisation.

The Anxiety of Resilience

Individualisation is a process arguably experienced as involuntary, being an effect of structural renewal. In her own writing on creativity, Bowen stated with some confidence that the author enters a domain and is held captive there, lost (essentially) to the structures and strictures of the 'everyday', being ostensibly 'free' while 'captured' (Lee, 1986: 125). I have also explored the effects of subconscious authorial parameters within the creative process (Miles, 2019; 2020; 2024). This 'unconscious' (but informed) dynamic is translated into the individual character profiles of *HD* – all are at liberty, one way or another, to enact their agency/choice but are constricted by convention, inter-reliability, restrictions on travel, on whom to

speak with, on how to govern their private spaces, and on how to manage the optimism that might lie dormant behind the public face of resilience. War creates disruptions to ontological convention and consequently creates an uncanny insecurity and, while in high modern times there *is* a duality of the individual and society, the relationship is arguably more complex than ever due to the increasing autonomy of the individual over the traditional frameworks of family, employment, tradition and so on. The individual is free to engage with praxis that is unconsciously designed to make more robust a sense of agency that transforms a sense of choice. However, as inferred throughout, with increased choice such liberty is attained with less security – it is, in effect, 'breaking away' from communality to exercise choice over compulsion, but with that comes inevitable risk. Nevertheless, it is all arguably a bit of an illusion. By 'seeing choice as interconnective' we might feel safer, more secure, but *less at liberty*. It is therefore a 'double-hermeneutic' relationship that cannot be *broken*, at least until individual agency is strong enough to sever the tie in an almost 'postmodern' refutation of the communal, imposed 'meaning' of anything. In the meantime, we defer to *soft* 'orderliness' and security. Throughout *HD* there is arguably a subnarrative relating to an 'orderliness of the inevitable'. Flexibility and distortion are only subfields of a permanence we can rely on.

To further emphasise this, Zygmunt Bauman called modernity 'liquid', or 'light', involving a 'seductive lightness of being' – after Kundera and Calvino – that embraces liminality, reflexivity, normlessness, and [the] instantaneous (2000: 119). Ulrich Beck (1992) furthered this high individual standpoint with balancing the light individual with the 'risikogemeinschaft' (or 'risk society'), ostensibly determined by how far from the herd one wishes to attempt to stray and the power of a new biographical-centrism based on a nominal elective connectivity with structure. This reactive instantaneousness and riskiness are commonplace in *HD*, coupled with an acknowledgement of time-space as being managed both via Bergsonian *durée* (or, the recognition of *time itself* as something experienced *in the moment*) as well as an accompanying situational transience, nostalgia, and progression (Bergson, 2002: 255). Stella and Harrison, so central to the narrative structure, use the spaces in which they meet to situate their contrasting instrumentalism while seemingly blocking out the dynamics of the society outside. The transience of locations allows them to be considered 'empty spaces' free of significance, a high modern bonus of war and revised agency – one may utilise them without leaving a trace, so to speak; there is no tradition, or history, or biography in liminal time-space, only the 'now'. To emphasise this, Giddens (1999: Ch.3) has stated that tradition is ostensibly *invented* to give us emblems of security, so why bother inventing anything that can identify a space as significant?

Space, Liminality, Trust, and Security

To turn to Bowen's text in relation to such theory, it is conceivable to consider the author exploring space and space itself exploring *possibilities*; this is a further distinction between the macro and the micro, the diminishing of the public and the private, and the merging of the dramaturgical formal and informal against a backdrop of environmental destruction and the supplementary human experience of anxious insecurities. The London of *HD* is considered best embraced in the mornings as 'a pure and curious holiday from fear' (*HD*: 108) where bombs have created spaces of possibility that erode the 'greasiness' of the air and atmosphere redolent of Jean Rhys. London is *moving* – physical transience, life into death,

traffic, and liminality of interactions are understood in a juxtaposition of nonchalant precarity that embodies '[a] wall between the living and the living [becoming] less solid as the wall between the living and the dead thinned' (ibid: 109). There is a sense that society is continually 'on the cusp' of transition, pensive and hesitant, 'forever on the eve of being in love' (ibid: 115). This is a psychological, pensive hinterland reminiscent of Raymond Williams's (1960; 1973) suggestion that all borders are porous and blurred and inviting transverse movement despite unclear consequences, perhaps representative of Bowen's own cusp of Anglo-Irishness and the sense of continually being on Venn's transitional line. Thus, the novel opens with the changing of seasons: subtle, sensual and instinctive, though difficult to discern with certainty; music suspends the latent anxiety, distracting, dominating; and later Stella (perhaps herself representative of a changing generation), proceeds in a discussion with her son Roderick, already worrying that the war would be causing a 'dissolution inside' of her son – in other words, a dissolving of the borders between psyche, soul, and intellect (*HD*: 58). It is interesting language to be sure, but sets the scene for numerous quasi-soliloquys' throughout, directed at the pensiveness of change, the uncertainties of progress, the untrustworthiness of commitment, and the ceding of acceptance of the impermanence of physical and spiritual emblems of stability. However, Roderick's inheritance of the Mount Morris estate provides us with a useful high modern metaphor early on: this is a house that is 'standing outside [of the] war' as well as 'standing outside of the present' (*HD*: 60), something that exists as a *motif* of that elusive permanence against the backdrop of incessant transformation. This is an interesting literary comparator: the Mount Morris house as a physical thing as well as a *philosophical* thing (or, the notion of the house as something that existed outside of time itself, a fixture, a security for the anxious individual, an emblem or motif of stability (cf. Bachelard, 1964 [2014]). Time passes, everything is in flux, but somehow, when we search, certainty is in plain sight. Thus, when Bowen later writes of Stella observing her immediate interior surroundings, she is noting a distinction of permanence and transience (or, structure and praxis-agency) in that 'the room lacked [...] apprehension of time [...] the senses were cut off from hour and season; nothing spoke but the clock [...]', and the room, she continues, 'remained exaggerated and cerebral'. We may therefore consider the room as both like a brain separated from the body – philosophical – or as an intellectual space that did not require the interference of the outside world (*HD*: 67). The 'room' also becomes a hermetically-sealed space of fantasy, albeit challenging a sense of what one believes to be legitimate, authentic, constructive and progressive; it is a repeating motif. Stella's isolation in the drawing room at Mount Morris enables her to study *herself*, 'like a portrait' in the mirror, a liminal view of stability against the chaos of hesitant relationships, knowledge, and anxiety: she is momentarily alone and in control, the 'lady of the house', though – of course – isolated in the hesitant transience of simultaneous power and *dis*empowerment, anxious that truth and lies are melding she uses touch to 'prove' existence and her reflection to confirm her individuality and identity – she *looks* at herself, she *knows* herself, *only* herself. Stella uses the room to envisage the *generational* transition, from her to Roderick and onwards (Ibid: 208); metaphors abound here, including description of a weird totem of misfortune – the Titanic – framed, and demonstrating of a narrative that is conceived but never fully understood, a future of great promise that is destined for disaster, or maybe just representative of a dissonant mind, trapped in a loop of anxiety that is echoed in the intertextuality of her awareness of the complexities of the Perkins-Gilman-esque patterned yellowed curtains (Ibid: 209). Life moves on. 'There cannot be a moment in which nothing

happens' declares Bowen in her narrative and, perhaps, the continual revision of time-space confirms that reflexivity is the driving force of this proto-high-modern insecurity – there is nothing to hold onto here because *nothing* is fixed and this theme is continued later when Robert and Stella discuss their knowledge of one-another. '[S]urely either we know each other absolutely or not at all – and how can we possibly wonder which?' they muse. This is not about a relationship, per se, but a sense of wondering 'who' they are. They continue, agreeing that '[…] we are friends of circumstance – war, this isolation, this atmosphere in which everything goes on and nothing's said […] all this ruin's made for our perfectness! You and I are an accident, if you like', their pairing diminishes their identities 'outside' of their 'us' (Ibid: 223). It is demonstrably superficial and instrumental, transient and abundantly hopeless. Again, evidence that nothing is fixed and any totems of stability are reduced to existential anxiety and ontological insecurity – who, one wonders, can you rely on?

So, *trust* predictably figures in this wartime narrative as well as the subtle quest for reassurance. To the character Louie, the familiar is the certain and the robust – the media tells the truth, she gets a point of view (the *right* point of view), the nourishment of official news and the sense of inclusion in the struggle of war (Ibid: 179 my emphasis). The double hermeneutic functions as the 'outside' and the 'inside' clash – or merge – in the guise of media, the effect of war, the performativity of citizenship during conflict, and the high-modern consequence of doubt fuelling itself and the yearning for security. There is a subnarrative that experiencing war somehow makes the character *better* and how people tend toward an 'acting out' of a front-regional dramaturgical role in public (ibid: 181-204), but the external, shaping influence of conflict-driven transience is bound to result in scepticism and doubt. An imperceptible nothingness emerges but Stella attempts resistance, contemplating that nothing is *im*perceptible, but conversely that thinking blocks out nothingness, filling spaces of potential anxiety with a functional security whether real or perceived and, very soon later, she is musing that 'there is no such thing as being alone together […] everything is on its way to somewhere else – there is the presence of movement, that third presence […] something is at its work'. (ibid: 227-231). While referring to a relationship between two people, this is also a narrative of powerlessness, individualisation, of conscious strangers, but also a paradoxical effect: ontological security can provide a sense of *permanence in uniqueness* ('I know what I know') that can only be eroded by attachment (it is possible she is referring to the machinations of her own marriage here too). It is also representative of Crespi's aforementioned third dynamic of power along with agency and structure and reminiscent of Bauman's liquidity of modernity (Crespi, 1992; Bauman, 2000). While Stella is, in essence, asking herself who Robert really *is* in this passage, it is also symbolic of the sense of security coming solely from one's own sense of identity that exists beyond the structural realigning 'force' of both ideology and mores and values. Thus, liquidity is that *emancipation from powerless directive* (gaining power over being shaped by another person or institution) while being compromised by the willingness to cede agency (or losing power to shape one's destiny); when Robert later asks why they shouldn't be married, Stella replies (simultaneously blocking him and observing a nihilism created by war) that there 'doesn't seem to be much to marry for, at the moment, does there?' (*HD*: 232). She suggests they wait for whatever happens next, as they always do, waiting for things to unfold, a lack of faith in the future. Trust is diminished in just about everything, emboldened by a fleeting metafictional technique drawing the reader into a dialogue (albeit briefly) on

'fictionality', or the robustness of character narrative, trustworthiness, reliability, and validity (ibid: 166). This is a place-setter, a nod to the torment of reliability that drenches the narrative going forwards. Again, nothing is certain. As the novel enters its final phase, Robert speaks freely, with a totalitarian flavour, that the true anxiety of freedom is essentially understood in the misguided belief that liberty is edifying. 'Do you suppose there's a single man of mind who doesn't realize *he* only begins where his freedom stops?', he asks, illuminating against the backdrop of intrigue, destruction, and insecurity that dictates freedom is freedom from the established mantles of authenticity (ibid: 317). This is, as Beck (1992; 1999) would attest, the foundations of a risk society – a biographical self with nothing to hang on to.

Situating *The Heat of the Day*

Do Elizabeth Bowen's characters manage to 'exist' beyond the era and the circumstances of their creation, or are the settings driving the quasi-subjective narrative of time, certainty, identity, and trust? Gilbert Phelps, writing in the early 1980's, noted that Bowen was a writer of sensibility who explores 'personal relationships [...] within an already dead or dying social ambience' (1983: 419). Thus, arguably, *HD* is *not* a commentary on a potential 'new Jerusalem' but, perhaps, something more intimate and detached. David Daiches takes this further (despite writing decades before Phelps) by saying that, in Bowen's work, moments of contemplation and routine merge 'imperceptibly into this shimmering flux of sensibility' (1949: 308-9). There is, Daiches continues, an *immediacy* of the character within the narrative, consequently a sense that the character is a crucial actor in a dramaturgical flow rather than, perhaps, a subtle brush stroke within a wider scene (ibid.). Bowen's characters therefore *affect* the narrative rather than *assist* it and this can be seen as form and style that correspond with a high modern sociological discourse – namely that the individual is charged with agency (though not, necessarily, aware of such power), distancing from structure, having an individualised control of a situation, and aware (somehow) of the consequences of praxis. Thus, the character influences the structure by action, ostensibly building the atmosphere and the direction of the narrative by utilising agency. Daiches considers this to be a departure point from the work of Virginia Woolf and the significance, says Daiches, 'is an important part of [Bowen's] fictional technique.' (ibid: 308-10). Margaret Crosland, writing in the early 1980's, suggests that Bowen's characters 'belong to no one'; they are individualistic, but not necessarily by choice, they are not rebels but are, instead, focussed on withdrawal, or 'running away', kept fixed to their time by Bowen (1981: 61). This is a suggestion echoed by Harriet Chessman when it is implied that Bowen, by exercising power over her characters, felt 'guilt' based on *leaving them there* (1983: 81). They, as Crosland continues, therefore fail to report 'on social change or disintegration before it actually happened' by virtue of being situated always firmly within the time, but it is their agency that drives each character, their ability to drive the narrative as a 'direct result of their character' that allows the characters freedom to breathe and exist timelessly, free from excessive descriptions (Crosland, 1981: 62). Cultural references are additionally employed to situate the society in which the action takes place through devices relating to social class – caked-make-up, 'imitation' clothing, female knuckles showing signs of manual labour (*HD*: 14) – although, via these (and other) visualisations, there is a tendency for friends Louie and Connie to be 'treated like music-hall [characters] and the result,' says Crosland, 'almost spoils the novel' (1981: 66). However, as Gill Plain later posited, the 'Shakespearean' essence of the novel's structure allowed space for

the working-class narrative of the Connie-Louie friendship to be framed as a submission to conformity, the sponging of revolutionary ire, but this is a rare deviation from the omnipresent juxtaposition with Harrison as the educated symbol of 'order' in an otherwise disorderly world waiting for a semblance of stability (2013: 241).

Along with the opaque juxtaposition of character profile and influence of wider circumstance, jurisdictions of the public and the private are also written all over the narrative; Kristin Bluemel stated that the population of wartime London had become 'watchers', not only literally but metaphorically, the transience of space notable by *requirement* rather than choice and Bowen skilfully uses metaphor to describe the bringing down of borders and barriers (2017: 146); Alexandra Harris noted, in connection to such blurred boundaries, that the windows of houses blown out resulted in the outside penetrating the inside with dust, the external dramaturgy entering the interiors uninvited by penetrative incident, stating essentially that nowhere is off bounds to the dominant discourse of conflict (2015: 262). This illustrates a tension at the heart of the novel – not just in the transition towards (or beyond) midlife in the metaphor of Stella's 'noon', but also the taught nature of the pull between that private and public domain, the desire to hold onto control of those narratives of identity, of agency and so on, and the power of the public dramaturgy of war, ideology, politics, and normlessness. Returning briefly to Franco Crespi, it is the impact of the insertion of a third dynamic into the double hermeneutic that matters – namely that 'power' sits *in-between* agency (choice) and structure (guidance/system). The utilisation of the levers of either is dependent on whether one has the human capital (Bourdieu, 1984) to exploit either. For example, in *The Ministry of Fear* and *Mrs. Dalloway* such dynamics of power are vacant, dealing (as they do) with damaged people, individuals who are paranoid, unstable, damaged by praxis beyond their control – what Crespi would describe as the double hermeneutic *without* the social power (Crespi, 1992: 48). Within the narrative of *HD*, the working classes *are* seemingly aware, informed, but passive; the middle classes are hesitant at all times to make a decision; it seems like the dynamic of power is present but arguably in the wrong hands? Louie seems the embodiment of resilience, comfortable with familiarity, believing those narratives of the media, keen to hang on to emblems of control (*HD*:180) and feels, as Marina Mackay suggests, *bereft* of identity when denied her newspaper, losing her 'directive of feeling', mirroring Raymond Williams's structure of feeling (2009: 1607; Williams, 1961); conversely, as Stella wanders the drawing room at Mount Morris she is seeing reflections of identity, but never seems, to borrow from Abrams (1953 [1971]), able to shine that lamp on the mirror; instead she sees a mute reflection. Harriet Chessman (1983) noted this by suggesting that Bowen 'scatters her novels with female figures who not only resist the narratives they see around them, but who themselves have no language,' (1983: 71). Is this possibly an awareness of that disempowered female narrative in *HD*? The women are part of a 'larger silence', says Chessman, explaining the 'silence between women' in the Mount Morris drawing room (ibid.). The portraits are perhaps speaking without speaking? In essence, there is a strong suggestion (as mentioned earlier) that Bowen does divert from the retrospective and 'suburban' distancing of, say, Hamilton and Orwell in that *HD* is situated as a narrative of paradoxical and simultaneous distancing and connection in an urban zone heavy with the grease of a Rhys novel but lacking the solitude of the back region – Orwell and Hamilton arguably find that back region, while the middle class characters of the *HD* (when they do find a semblance of it) arguably fail to adequately

exploit it. It is a moot point, but perhaps (again) driven by hesitation caused by the uncertainty of war and its unreliable narratives. To Marina MacKay this hesitation is caused by an 'obsession to escape' but with journeys that inevitably lead nowhere (2009: 1608), while Chessman explores the possibility that the working class are depicted as engaging with their own silenced needs, as "female 'outsiders" [that] blunder into the truth' while retaining some power due to their linguistic naivety, with 'redemption [existing] in the artlessness' but the sincerity and security of familiarity at the close of the novel (1983: 72-4).

However, in a novel where language equates to power (a form of human capital) as an exploitation of agency over structure, the structural narrative continues unabated in the background. Nothing is permanent; Ashley Maher notes that certain points of the novel's narrative structure point to hesitations and subtle discourse on destruction of both values and mores and the physicality of what has existed before (2013: 252). Helpfully, she links her argument to the developed dialogues of public/private external/internal exposure to an idea of how we can read an external ideological standpoint in observation of an internal 'view'; while the exterior of Robert's family house Holme Dene is simulacra Tudor, the interior of the Kelway house is complex, individualised, laden with 'repressions, doubts, fears, subterfuges and fibs', representing, as Stella suggests, a vision of England (Ibid.: 272). There is a strong sense that this life, *this house*, is representative of something that must be cleared away, replaced, and modernised in tandem with the simultaneous symbolic use of 'nothingness' representing the transience of life, objects, ideologies, and certainties; in many ways *HD* is sceptical of promises to reinvent tradition, norms, values *et al* due to a pessimism of the robustness of the human spirit. Maher believes that Bowen was ideologically unconvinced that the spectacle of war, its destruction of physicality and the human spirit, could lead to a 'revival' of collectivity; the Welfare State was a concept bound up in idealism and would ultimately lead to a bourgeois individualism (2013: 272-8). In many ways, David Daiches (1949) manages to capture the oscillations of *esprit de corps* by stating that it is the narrative of both Roderick and Louie that represents lasting interest in the novel because both characters seek security out of a high point of insecurity – the war brings a form of chaos, of a future uncertain, but they seek a non-nostalgic 'return' of sorts to a period of certainty, of structure, and of hope. This, in many ways, is a subtle allusion to the welfare state that was to come – an order out of chaos, driven by loss. Louie has lost everything, but desires a combination of freedom with security – the ultimate paradox of high modern, post grand narratological sociology. How can one have both? She is, as Daiches says, 'uninhibited by too many unreal conventions: she was able to come to terms with life' and is, consequently, suitably adjusted due to the devastation and the challenges she faced (1949: 312).

High Modern Sociology and *The Heat of the Day*: A Conclusion

The critic Walter Allen helps us to summarise the essence of *HD* by writing that it is 'characterized by [an] intense relationship between the characters and their *immediate* environments' (1954: 93, my emphasis), later adding elsewhere that as a 'witty observer of manners', like Jane Austen, Bowen was set fair to contemplate agency more than structure – a freedom to utilise language to assert power and strategic dominance (1964: 192). Place matters. The reader identifies, and consequently understands, the ticking of time, feels the atmosphere, detects anxiety and the playing out of social power politics, while retrospectively acknowledging the

retreat to identity and the torment of ontological security when continually placed in powerplays. The novel's characters and the reader simultaneously ask whether they actually know – and trust – what they think they know.

In this paper I have sought to connect the narrative essence of *HD* by Elizabeth Bowen to the pillars of high modern sociological theory via a method of linking key motifs of the theory (as espoused by three key theorists) to the work itself via a generic evaluation of the interactions and use of time-space by characters. In essence, this is ostensibly a commentary on reception rather than authorial intent, but it does reflect the fact that Bowen wrote segments of the novel in war time and then completed it after cessation of hostilities. This is important as, while it remains unclear as to whether the author was utilising a 'small p' political thread into the story, creating a juxtaposition of optimism through intergenerational accession, or simply being *read* that way as time progresses via those liminal, fluid spaces spoken of by Zygmunt Bauman, it *is* clear to the reader that Bowen recognised the (at least *subliminal*) discourse on the crisis of trust, the dynamics of risk, and the additional corrosive effects of war on ontological and epistemological security in the individual. What means one thing today is destined to mean something else tomorrow. High modern sociology is a discourse on competing significance of permanence and fluidity and *HD* has substantial motifs throughout its narrative that embody the fragility of the dynamics of the risk-trust-ontological security framework; in other words, power itself is fragile, knowledge is fragile, institutions and ideology and identity are all fragile, and the liminality of time-space ensures that what passes is necessarily gone, but also unreliable, subject to distortion, unprojectable without the very ideology that weakens its validity. Stella and Robert and Harrison play out a drama of trust and risk whilst Louie and Roderick, although stratified and unfamiliar to each other, play out a narrative of choice. 'Shadows of an idea' are, to paraphrase Bowen, in play throughout, but the truth is that the disparate characters are destined to be 'alone together' as a trial run for a deindustrialised, post consensus late modern capitalist society, drunk on individuation and high on autonomy, that simply breeds anxiety, distrust, and the omnipresent nagging sensation that freedom comes with the most acute cost.

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Neither Dead nor Alive: Bowen's *A World of Love* and Its Surrealist Relocations ~ Michael T. Williamson

The British psychoanalyst Adam Phillips asks in his recent book, *On Giving Up*, 'what do you have to give up in order to feel alive?' He then observes that it is 'glibly or not so glibly true that in order to feel alive one might have to give up, say, one's habitual tactics and techniques for deadening oneself, the anesthesias of everyday life that can seem to make it livable' (Phillips, 2024: 30-31). In *A World of Love* (1954), Elizabeth Bowen devotes herself to mechanisms of renunciation that, paradoxically, make it possible for the novel's characters to give up and feel alive after spending years cultivating various forms of anesthetised death in life. Most readers agree that the 'habitual tactics and techniques' that each character gives up are related to the absorbing but deadening preoccupations of mourning and being haunted by the past.[1] Yet the habits of loss surrounding the memory of Guy Mannering, who was killed in the First World War, do not simply suspend and attenuate the desires of the

[1] Future parenthetical references to *A World of Love* will read *WL*
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novel's characters; they also activate a strange commemorative energy that is enlivening. Habits of mourning do not always deaden.

Furthermore, the setting of the novel – Monteforte, once an Anglo-Irish house of consequence but now a 'small mansion' with 'an air of having gone down' to the point that it has become almost 'nothing more than an annexe of its farm buildings' (*WL*: 9) – acts as both an anaesthetic and a stimulant. Its survival is a testament to the kinds of creative improvisation that mourning usually blocks. Antonia, Guy's cousin, has inherited the house, but Guy's fiancée, Lydia, occupies it and her husband, Fred, to whom both Monteforte and Lydia were bequeathed by Antonia as a kind of informal inheritance of convenience, runs the farm. This informal, non-patriarchal approach to inheritance acts as a preservative. The house has not been burned, since there is no oppressive landlord. Its occupants have not been threatened because they are politically inconsequential. Monteforte has simply been bypassed (passed over) by Ireland's violent history. It has been left out, excluded, overlooked by time.

Tensions between being bypassed (a fortunate event) and being left out (which entails diminution) preoccupy all of the characters, and Guy's presence in their minds indicates how little control they have over either possibility. As a remnant of the past, he shimmers in the heated spaces between their repressed emotions and their capacity for passionate, hopeful, wayward imagining. He flickers into life, then he flickers out. He does not choose them, nor is he chosen. Rather, he occupies the space between their public, social identities, and their dreams, fantasies, and dim memories. By the end of the novel, some of the novel's characters begin to feel alive after spending years cultivating various forms of anesthetised death in life that, paradoxically, sustain them, keep them going in a world that has ignored them. Most importantly, the young heiress to the house, Jane, gives up the fantasies that arise out of her discovery of Guy's letters, hidden in an Edwardian white muslin dress. Guy's dead letters captivate Jane's imagination, and her notions about the continued presence of the dead among the living threaten to bring her emotional and social life to a standstill. By the novel's end, however, she renounces romance, in the form of the long muslin dress that was never quite clean and which by the end of the novel is 'stained' and 'mutilated' (*WL*: 134). Bowen casts this renunciation as a liberating exchange of the past for the sharp outlines of a modern, perhaps émigré, blazer. As she decides what to wear on the journey to an airport that concludes the novel, 'the smell of banishment' returns to the muslin dress and a replacement becomes final: 'Jane crushed up to her face the defeated stuff, desired to wetten it with a tear, but could not: bundling the dress up she thrust it into the bottom of the wardrobe. She took from a hanger a candy-striped blazer, not worn yet, and tried it on' (*WL*: 134). Becoming alive might be as simple as replacing an outdated dress with a sharp new modern blazer.

This straightforward version of self-transformation was attractive to Bowen, for whom tensions between self-discovery, the erasure of the past, and self-annihilation were less fraught than they might have been for other modernist writers. Jane's sudden transformation challenges modernist preoccupations with outmodedness, especially what it might mean to become alive in a world in which, as it seems to Jane, 'too much had been going on for too long' (*WL*: 34). Does restoring a sense of aliveness to such a world require us to be haunted by mourning or to play, as Jane does, with the possibilities for transformation and aliveness? If it is true that 'life

works to dispossess the dead, to dislodge and oust them' (*WL*: 44), as the narrator tells us, is it also true that this work can be a kind of play rather than a haunting?

This question might be reconsidered in terms of dead or outmoded artistic styles. Roger Rothman, for instance, suggests that this is a pressing question for surrealists, who ask 'If an artistic style dies a natural death, can it be brought back to life in the present? And if it can, is it reborn in its original form, or in an altered state, like that of a ghost or a zombie?' (Roffman, 2012: 171). From a psychoanalytic perspective, Phillips urges us to interiorise these questions so that we think about how deadness 'must also be exercising us' (2024: 37) and whether or not we 'want to relinquish or even attack the sensation of life' as though 'we are ambivalent about [it] and can happily, as it were, dispense with it' (2024: 31). Or as Bowen puts it, 'obstinate rememberers of the dead seem to queer themselves or show some signs of a malady; in part they come to share the dead's isolation, which it is not in their power to break down' (*WL*: 44). Bowen's emphasis on remembrance as malady suggests that exterior factors, intractable as they are, might be subordinate to cures that come more easily than unresolved melancholy or a fascination with outmodedness as a haunting might suggest.

In fact, although they may have been 'obstinate rememberers of the dead' for almost two decades, the novel's characters give up other deadening habits with relative ease as they resist the pall cast by the memory of Guy. They find themselves rekindling, remembering, or in Jane's case, discovering, love. *A World of Love* is a happy and optimistic novel. It requires us, however, to give up many of our interpretative habits if we are to let that happiness take root. Throughout, Bowen urges us to control our elegiac impulses, not get hooked by ideas about an exhausted Anglo-Irishness (especially since most of the characters are English or only tangentially Anglo-Irish), to be suspicious of assumptions about the exhaustion that followed two world wars and put aside ideas about tragic displacements or Gothic Irish entrances into late capitalist or post-colonial modernity. Instead, more so than in any other of her novels, Bowen's *A World of Love* engages us in a wonderfully relentless and intensely enlivening surrealist exploration of the energies of imaginative, secular mystical creativity as it jostles with the deadening pull of anachronistic habits.

Locating Bowen's exploration of deadness and aliveness in relation to surrealism's modes of inquiry brings her significant theoretical presence into contact with surrealists who 'sought to fuse the world of the outmoded with the world of the dream', on one hand, and those who sought 'to inhabit the [material] world of the outmoded and to revive it as 'trauma' in the present', on the other (Rothman, 2012: 172). Upon what forms of creativity, or what modes of theorising, does her novel land? Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle point out how 'attention is drawn not only on the intricate configurations of the past within the present, but also on the sense of what is dedicated, transferred, bequeathed to the future' (1995: 104). They also note that the novel's 'radicalism' is that 'it presents a world haunted by a past which is unrememberable, or which never existed' (1995: 105). The deadening effects of the past are thus chosen, invented, created rather than experienced passively as trauma. Locating Bowen's thinking in relation to surrealist thinking helps us to understand this difference.

Surrealist approaches to locations of deadness and aliveness necessarily involve dislocation, since that is a standard surrealist technique, but they also demand more

specifically a disassociation of Bowen from the dominant public figures of surrealism, especially André Breton and Salvador Dali. Keri Walsh has argued persuasively in 'Elizabeth Bowen: Surrealist' that

> Bowen's fiction reveals how the brash, imaginative, and uncouth behavior of the surrealist coterie both energized and irritated her. She adapted the movement's techniques to her own prose, but also challenged its ideology on a range of topics, such as automatic writing, the "femme enfant," childhood, "convulsive beauty," and the world of shock (2007: 128).

Instead of thinking about Bowen's adaptations of or challenges to specific surrealist techniques, I would like to suggest that we think more loosely about how surrealism might enable us to locate Bowen's *A World of Love* within living, or alive-making, imaginative systems other than those to which we are accustomed. Surrealism might thus serve as a mode of transport into specific questions that Bowen asks, rather than a map with specific coordinates laid out and answered. When considering a novel that so profoundly immerses in questions about how we locate ourselves – within, beside, beyond, or otherwise – the 'annihilating need left behind by the dead', surrealism is particularly useful for considering the effect of surrealist disruptions on the sources and objects of our passions and the narrative expectations, which are strange in Bowen's fiction to begin with, that compel us to think and feel differently about our relations with each other.

Tensions between feeling and objectifying are central to Bowen. Keri Walsh points out, for instance, that Bowen draws distinctions between surrealist disruptions that 'merit compassion' because they adjust to the convulsions of human relations, and those that are more tied to 'technique' and our relations with objects (2007: 135-36). Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle suggest that the Bowen develops a 'theory of memory' in *A World of Love* and that this theory that is based on 'a ghostly epistolary and an unmanageable, even laughable, convulsive relation to the future' (1995: 105). The novel doesn't so much shatter our expectations as reorient, or relocate, them to a different part of our minds. 'Identity', as Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle argue, 'is a matter of radical play' (1995: 116). This version of surrealist convulsive identity as play is most apparent in the garden party scene from Chapter 3 of the novel. The scene highlights the need for new kinds of readers whose expectations are shaped by what Bowen calls 'some sort of uneasiness or recoil' in her radio talk, 'Nostalgia':

> am I wrong in saying the inner object of art is not merely to reproduce but to add? Ideally, should not the book, story or poem constitute what has not yet been, what is new? Yet the work of outright imagination sets up, so often, in the first place, some sort of uneasiness or recoil. Why should that be? What is present? It is the unfamiliar, the unforeseen relation between things, the break-through of an unexpected light, the new experience, so far without precedent (Bowen and Hepburn, 2010: 98).

For Surrealists, such a break though involves manipulating 'the shrinking interval between human and nonhuman' (Burke, 2005: 91), compressing time so that the shimmering oscillation of animate and inanimate disrupts temporal narrative trajectories and expectations. In *A World of Love*, every episode of plot development is characterised by similar shrinking intervals, most starkly in a passage that narrates Fred and Lilia's early marriage: 'It is not known what words Fred and Lilia then or in

the following time exchanged. Left there to mate, they mated; but that is never all' (*WL*: 18). Other sections filtered through the imagination of Antonia – the novel's queer absentee landlady, absentee lover, absentee mentor – precipitate an 'uneasiness of recoil' that is more directly related to the themes of inheritance, adolescent development, and ineffective surrogate parenting that preoccupy Bowen in so many of her novels.

The garden party scene in Chapter Three helps us to understand the relationships between the novel's main characters and the external world about which they are, with the exception of Jane, largely oblivious, Bowen positions Antonia on the threshold of change. As the young woman Jane's mentor and as owner of Monteforte, Antonia is positioned by the genre habits of novels about young women in love to guide Jane into the world of marriage. As is so often the case in the novel, scenes that carry with them genre expectations are the most surrealistic:

> The kaleidoscopic shimmer over the Fete spun over and into the shadow of glossy beeches, the cool of which encaved ice cream stalls; while from the mound overspread by a nightlike cedar a handbell clanged or a megaphone bawled in vain. Pungent sweat and heatedly trodden grass, fumes of tea and porter, thrum of hoofs from the paddock, the strikings -up and dyings-down of the band all fused into an extreme for Antonia, whose own senses, boastful, stood up to it. – But then she tripped over a tent peg, jarred the lens in her brain: in the instant revulsion set in, as it now did always. Like a bullet-hit pane, the whole scene shivered, splintered outward in horror from that small black vacuum in its core (*WL*: 29).

The surrealist kaleidoscope of the Fete, with its adjectivally dislocated objects (glossy beeches, encaved ice cream stalls, nightlike cedar), rouses Antonia's senses but the jarring of the 'lens in her brain' splinters the scene. The scene is evoked, upset, retracted and destroyed brilliantly.

This moment of convulsive shock sheds light on one of the most famous surrealist images, Lee Miller's photograph, *Exploding Hand: Guerlain Shop Front, Paris 1930*.

In both cases, a woman poised on the brink of a threshold meets that threshold with a shock, a shiver that transforms the partition through which we think she will pass – glass in both cases – into a strangely electrically charged explosion. For Miller, this is a real handle in a glass door to a real shop. For Bowen, what is at stake is more the 'handling' that goes on at a Fete, which in this case includes integrating one of the novel's heroines, young Jane, in line for a possible marriage, or at least a circulation among potential suitors. Miller's photo enables us to read the scene from *A World of Love* as both comic and as a kind of warning – at the core of our habitual world, there is a 'small black vacuum' – an energy that makes self-assertion a volatile and uncertain business. The 'bullet hit pane' of the fete is a rural version of a shop window, and Jane is like a mannequin on display. Lee Miller considered mannequins as 'intended to place the unwitting spectator into an uneasy position. For a member of the public the mannequin in shop windows, department stores and exhibitions was commonplace and sexually controlled; when kidnapped from the city and restaged by a Surrealist the mannequin became a subversive, sexually uncontrollable creature' (Mahon, 2014: 209). Miller's photograph thus enables us to read the scene of the fete as a displacement of erotic energy, the function of the guardian in securing a marriage, the function of a novel's plot as the advancement and control of this energy and that function. The novel itself becomes surreal, created more by lenses and panes of glass than the transparency of plot and character.

Juxtaposing this passage from Bowen's novel and Miller's photograph also enables us to see just how fraught entrances are. It also suggests an explosive relationship between individual idiosyncrasies and attempts to assert normative communal identity, a tension that is reflected brilliantly in the 'annihilation point of sensation' (*WL*: 69) that Jane reaches when she tries to conjure Guy's ghost at Lady Latterly's dinner party. Annihilation points in the novel are certainly about our relationships with the dead, and Bowen highlights the ways in which these relationships shape our relationships to each other and to the natural world, but they are not necessarily about mourning, absence, or loss. In a famous passage, Bowen describes our relation with the dead by using language associated with deficits and exclusions, or as Phillips says, 'a feeling of being alien, or strange, or unable to participate' (Phillips, 2024: 73):

> Life works to dispossess the dead, to dislodge and oust them [….] When of love there is not enough to go around, inevitably it is the dead who must go without [….] Their being left behind in their own time caused estrangement between them and us, who must live in ours (*WL*: 44).

It may seem as if Jane's discovery of Guy's letters addresses this estrangement, but the following passage suggests otherwise. In a scene that mocks the procreative energies of the cornucopia and Zeus's appearance to Danae as a shower of gold, Bowen has Jane accidentally break the band that ties the letters together:

> down, again, fell the letters, this time altogether spilled out and showering. Vexed by them gathering them up, she endeavored to put them back into their former order – for that there *had* been an order, and that it was significant, she did not question – but found that it could not be done. This datelessness, because the count of time was being kept in some other way, showed the complicity between two people: but what was Jane to make of it? Only by reading all of them was one to come upon their sequence, the 'sooner' or 'later'

> giving them sense and story – and from that understanding Jane shrank, she thought. She had an optic laziness with regards to 'writing' at any time; but there was more to it –she felt a recoil from, a sensuous distaste or disinclination for these husks, left to be nothing more by the evaporation from them of passion (*WL*: 34).

Jane's 'optic laziness' and the 'lens' in Antonia's brain both seem to deaden the potential for love, whether in a romantic or a commodified form. Perhaps, as the narrator claims, there is just not enough to go around, as 'too much had been going on for too long' (34).

For Jane, the language of Guy's letters deadens the imagination. His words are like Tennyson's letters of consolation, 'vacant chaff well meant for grain' (Ricks, 1987:323. Although we might recoil ourselves from her 'optic laziness with regards to 'writing', her predicament is also ours. As Adam Phillips reminds us, 'Aliveness in language may be in short supply, and so we may wonder what it is in ourselves that might want to deaden language; or to put it another way around, what is the fear of aliveness in language a fear of?' (2024: 36). As is often the case in Bowen's novels, what is feared is connection, a too strong immersion in the world of another person, a response to 'the annihilating need left by the dead' that deadens the living. Yet although the words and even the imagined recipient of Guy's letter fail to signify, I think we can turn to another dimension of surrealism to help us to describe the consequences of his letters for the characters in the novel and, of course, for us.

The surrealist project of the 'exquisite corpse' or *cadaver exquis*, sheds further light on the structure of the novel, as it is designed to develop meeting points between individuated imaginative fantasy and collective identity. In this project, bits of a drawing are covered over, passed on, and completed by a series of other hands. As Christopher Bush tells us, 'As with automatic writing and other Surrealist practices, the gambit was that such drawings, like dreams, revealed connections and led to discoveries [as they expressed] complex, sometimes frightening desires [or] affirmed deep affinities and less visible connections of people' (Bush, 2021: 305). I think it can safely be said that Bowen uses this trope as a structuring device. At the core of the novel, one might be tempted to say, there is a dead Guy – Davenport – but it is really the deadening effects of two world wars that is the subject of the narrator's elegiac meditations, and each character adds onto the other's partial, upsetting, numbed, or frightening sense of the past without knowing it. Out of those exchanges, affinities take shape.

As each character in the novel adds a bit to the mostly obscured and mutually unintelligible memories they have of Guy, their conjurings excise bits of the dead from the living and graft them onto those bits of the dead that are shown, while the rest lies hidden. If in 'The Dispossessed' Bowen satirises the overinflated aim of the exquisite corpse project to develop deep communal affinities out of the exercise of solipsism when she has Prothero write the same bits of letters over and over again to the lover he has murdered, in *A World of Love* the surrealist trope works to produce beautiful moments of companionship. My favorite scene of the novel, the garden scene that connects the estranged Lilia and Fred together, is a triumph of surrealist secular mysticism:

> Over everything under the tree lay the dusk of nature. Only the car-tracks spoke of again going or coming; all else had part in the majestic pause into which words were petering out. This was not so much a solution as a dissolution, a thinning away of the accumulated hardness of many seasons, estrangement, dulledness, shame at the waste and loss. A little redemption, even only a little, of loss was felt (*WL*: 104).

Our habits of deadening ourselves, Adam Phillips argues, can act as important counterpoints to the over-confident assertion that we know 'where aliveness is – in defamiliarization, in language, in idiolect, in spontaneity, in surprise' (2024: p.48). Aliveness is not 'there' in surrealism's disruptive project of defamiliarization, although so many of its proponents vaunted that grandiose claim as they embraced the traumas of modernity. Bowen counters that notion even as she explores the fear that fantasying, as opposed to confrontation, might leave us like a 'witless piping in the bushes', as Rebecca West warned it might (1918:180). If, as Bennett and Royle argue, *A World of Love* concentrates our attention on 'the sense of what is dedicated, transferred, bequeathed to the future' (1995: 104), then perhaps 'a little redemption' of loss is part of that future, and perhaps the kinetic energies of surrealism might serve as a dedication to the future. Surrealism, after all, is a movement that has lasted for well over one hundred years in one form or another. It has ranged across the globe. Locating Bowen among the surrealists enables us to consider questions of being dead or alive in her language. These questions have been largely addressed in terms of mourning. Neil Corcoran argues, 'The novel is, at its deepest imaginative level, a work of profound personal and cultural mourning; and, in the Freudian sense, it performs the work of mourning too' (2004: 72). Bennett and Royle argue more persuasively that Bowen 'engages the force and effects of refusal or impossible mourning, the force and effects of being traced, tracked, inhabited by the dead, by the unknown presence or unreachable 'love' of the dead' (1995: 112). Guy's ghostly return to Monteforte is read as an 'eerie irruption of the past' (Mooney, 2009, 80) , and for other readers of the novel, this return is fraught with an enlivening anxiety. Clair Wills points out the parallels between Guy's unsettling presence and a 'concern over extinction and survival' (2009: 141) that was prompted by alarming reports in which 'death and emigration are seen as equivalent as far as population in concerned' (ibid: 147) and concludes that 'in his sudden reappearance Guy is a version of the returned emigrant – still trapped in the past, but with the power to unsettle the present with expectations' (ibid). These arguments enable us to encounter the novel as a narrative of trauma. Surrealism suggests a more optimistic reading, one that enables us to manage a conundrum that Barbara Seward noticed almost 70 years ago: Bowen locates us in the middle of an 'impassive existence' that is 'more negative than death' (Seward, 1956: 36), then tells us where we might turn to become alive again. Elements of surrealist play, rather than an embrace of the discourses of mourning and memorialization, can bring us into a world of life and love.

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Estrangement Beyond Exile: Eva Trout: Forfeited Birthrights, the Stolen Child and Unaccommodated Vestiges of Ireland's Past ~ Ann Rea

Elizabeth Bowen's final novel, *Eva Trout* (1968), extends the exploration of orphanhood and estrangement begun in her earlier fiction. Like various novelists from Charles Dickens onwards, (Corcoran 142), Bowen shows orphans as unaccommodated by domesticity and social norms and therefore *unheimlich* and by implication linked with the uncanny. But not only are most of Bowen's protagonists orphans, and therefore bereft of family ties, but many are also disinherited, such as Lois in *The Last September* whose Anglo-Irish heritage is becoming obsolete. Neil Corcoran argues that *Eva Trout*'s plot 'may be considered a disfiguration of the plots of the orphan child in her earlier books' and that it reconfigures or disfigures 'some of the obsessive preoccupations of her earlier work' (2004: 134, 130). Her young protagonists lack permanent homes: Portia, Henrietta, Leopold, Lois, and the most deracinated and disconnected of all, Jeremy, who, like his adoptive mother Eva Trout is 'rootless and alienated' (Walshe, 2009: 157). Jeremy, oddly is only, we read 'in a manner of speaking [...Eva's] little boy' (*ET*: 168). Several novels also portray children born out of wedlock (Leopold, Portia) and many adults in Bowen fiction, like Iseult, Eva's surrogate mother, are childless, and therefore lack heirs. This familial estrangement extends to a lack of domestic roots: hotel rooms are the closest
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Eva comes to providing a home for Jeremy, something he clearly resents. We read that 'she considered [the Ritz] part of Jeremy's heritage' (*ET*: 224).

Eibhear Walshe asserts that 'dispossession comes to the fore' in *Eva Trout* and *The Little Girls,* Bowen's final and often critically underestimated novels (2009: 154). Corcoran observes that the motive for Jeremy's 'matricide […] would be Eva's failure to provide him with the much longed-for "home" which she has promised him' (2004: 136). Bowen often intricately and inextricably ties orphanhood and childlessness to uprootedness and geographical dislocation, but this deracination also excludes many of her characters from their lineage, both as an inability to inherit property and tradition, and as a lack of emotional family ties, although uncharacteristically, *Eva Trout* shows Jeremy as the Trout heir, even if he does not fully belong to the family bloodline.

In Bowen's imaginative world, inheritance and heirs are part of the apparatus of belonging to a culture, a place, and of course a home, and yet increasingly throughout her career she deprives her characters of roots, appearing to consider deracination and dislocation as characteristic of the experience of modernity, even that they offer a preferable unaccommodated outsider position from which to more accurately view modernity. She only provides substitutes, often inadequate, for parents and offspring: only temporary homes. When Constantine, a notably self-interested and inattentive guardian, asks Eva, 'Can you never take root?' he observes Eva's own propensity for homelessness after years of her parents and guardians such as himself ineffectually accommodating her (*ET*: 188). At the novel's outset the announcement that Eva, 'the Trout heir,' (*ET*: 152) 'all but lived at the Danceys' is qualified by the phrase, 'these days' (*ET*: 9). But we learn further that 'she did not live with them,' but instead they are the people 'with whom she looked like making an indefinite stay,' while she is supposed to be a 'paying guest' with the Arbles (*ET*: 9). This arrangement with the Arbles was made by her guardian Constantine, later referred to as her 'Wicked Guardian' (*ET*: 166) who ensures that the 'big heiress' on the brink of coming into 'her fortune' (*ET*: 9) is disposed of unproblematically for him. Her background is this:

Her existence had gone by under a shadow: the shadow of Willy Trout [her father's] total attachment to Constantine. […] It was in him to deviate: <u>that,</u> Constantine had unerringly sensed … Willy's child had not been the only defrauded one. His wife fled, two months after the birth of Eva. Mrs. Trout was then almost at once killed in a plane crash. Willy's own death, twenty-three years later, was as abrupt, though in a different manner. It left Eva, a legacy, on the hands of Constantine till the [Arbles] solution came to be found. (*ET*: 11)

So Eva is firstly abandoned by her mother, then orphaned twice, in her father's case by his suicide, and then she becomes Constantine's 'legacy' (*ET*: 11) although he has no biological or apparently, emotional, tie to her. The 'solution' (*ET*: 11) of her staying with the Arbles depends on their childlessness: another characteristic of familial dislocation in Bowen. In this novel, married couples are often childless, and children exist without parents.

In *Eva Trout* the absence of family ties causes a lack of rootedness in speech and language. We read that the younger Eva's speech causes her 'to express herself like a displaced person' (*ET*: 10). Her speech is 'cement-like' because of the absence of love

and attention in her life, we read. Her mouth expresses her awkwardness and uncouthness. Indeed, mouths and orality feature so prominently in this novel that Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle observe, '*Eva Trout* is about mouths' (1995: 140). Another prominent character, Mr Dancey, a vicar, suffers from yearlong hay fever and cannot predict from one day to the next whether his voice will desert him so that 'not a sound' will come, or whether his voice will sound 'like a great vocal bell' (*ET*: 282). Eva's apparently adopted, though we suspect stolen son, Jeremy is deaf-mute, and as a result embodies the mystery of his origins in his silence. Even though the early adoption of a child precludes its family knowledge, Jeremy's inability to speak serves as a metaphor for his unknown parentage, and his foundling story, which a different type of narrative might tell, as well as how he came to Eva. But Jeremy's silence also begins to suggest recalcitrant opposition to his circumstances as Eva's adopted son. By being unable or unwilling to speak he maintains secrets.

The novel is also about language. When Jeremy, somewhat traumatically and on Eva's part somewhat reluctantly, begins speech therapy with the French Bonnards it seems likely that if he speaks, it will be in French. Potentially his emergence into speech threatens to create a barrier between him and his adoptive mother. Eva begins to learn French in preparation but, nevertheless, their relationship never recovers from the combination of their separation during the treatment and the end of their idyllic non-lingual bliss. He returns from his sessions to self-consciously, even defiantly, place the mirror and the objects he uses in his therapy in the hotel room where he stays with Eva. And sometimes we even suspect that Jeremy can hear, not merely lip-reading, as Eva claims he can do with her only, and that his apparent silence may be a pretence. A visit from Constantine raises this suspicion when Eva says, '"Jeremy, Mr. Ormeau has no tea cake." [We read] Jeremy flourished the lid off the plated hot dish' (*ET*: 184). This suggests that he withholds communication by maintaining his muteness.

Arguing that the Irish mouths function 'as a metonym around which, with possibly unique cultural force, various sets of bodily practice in both their uncertain disciplining and their unruly eruptions,' David Lloyd cites 'recalcitrance and resistance,' as potential forms of defiant Irish mouths (Lloyd, 2011; 4). The mouth can serve to both embody the identity assigned to the Irish, and simultaneously as an assumed and perhaps also parodic identity. Lloyd explains the belief that the Irish mouth, stereotypically, shows a propensity to talk too much, drink too much, 'sing [...] blather, bawl as we brawl' (2011: 1). Lloyd evokes perceptions of the Irish as '[g]iven to verbal play, we excel in invective' (ibid) but sees this also as 'counterpoint[ed] by lack [...] starv[ing and] ambiguous and melancholy silence [...It can be] dissimulating. Subversive, unstable' (ibid). And since Jeremy may be Irish, although his origins are shrouded in silence as everything else about this deaf-mute child is, perhaps Lloyd's portrayal of the Irish mouth also applies to this deaf-mute child.

Although people around Eva assume that Jeremy is 'a love-child' (*ET*: 209), Eva acquires him by a financial transaction, an illegal adoption, or '[n]ot by the usual means,' as Henry Dancey puts it (*ET*: 163). In a bizarre interstitial chapter entitled 'Interim,' Eva visits America's Midwest, and obtains Jeremy, who is twice referred to as a 'stolen' child, (*ET*: 218, 220) in a Yeatsian allusion that suggests the Celtic folkloric supernatural. Eva accidentally and implausibly meets Elsinore, the frail girl from Willy and Constantine's ineptly run boarding school, housed in a false castle,

which Eva attended as a young child. Having developed a quasi-maternal attachment to Elsinore, which echoes Jane Eyre's attachment to the sickly Helen, Eva had assumed that Elsinore had died, but she turns up in America, ironically as the mother of triplets, her aptitude for maternity exaggeratedly emphasized in her being, 'top-heavied by her mother's equipment' (*ET*: 153). Eva waits with Elsinore in the Anapoupoulis family's apartment for the phone call that will announce that her child is available for collection, being luridly regaled, firstly, by Mr Anapoupoulis's recollections of Eva's wealthy father's suicide, which rocked the stock market at the time. Then Mr Anapoupoulis also offers sensational warnings about the

> black market in infants, unknowing babies: are you conscious they can be purchased, they can be traded? *Are* you aware, those who cannot by law adopt, due to ineligibility, become buyers? Are you aware that this is a market in which demand has come to exceed supply? Have you ever conceived, ma'am, the means resorted to that that demand may be met? (*ET*: 150)

Believing that he is warning Eva to *protect* her child from kidnappers, since she exhibits only vague knowledge of her child's whereabouts, Mr Anapoupoulis serves to alert the reader to this black market in children that Eva is poised to exploit. *Eva Trout* is always narrated indirectly: we only ever read another character's view of someone else, never having access to a character's interiority. Usually, Bowen's free indirect discourse offers an omniscient narrator's account of the characters' interiority as part of her larger narrative perspective. But *Eva Trout* undermines this technique, introducing additional instability to important parts of the novel by at times only offering, for example, Mr Anapoupoulis's monologue about the trade in stolen children. He holds forth offering important background information:

> This network I speak of [...] does not hesitate to traffic in kidnapped babies, when those to be got by bargain have given out. This network asks astronomic prices — as well it may. It is organised on a scale which could be admired. It deals with clients happy to ask no questions; or, should they ask, wanting the happy answer — which is supplied. And not only does it operate, with diabolic impunity, from coast to coast, it has machinery in continents other than this. It has agents in many an unsuspecting city, contacting and able to be contacted by means of passwords, code signs. It is absolutely expert in frontier-running. You put down money, it goes ahead. It gives you first rate service; it fixes, fakes. Birth certificates, visas, details of origin, blood-group documents. (*ET*: 150)

The chapter ends with Eva receiving a phone call in her hotel room, exchanging the password, 'Cat on the wall' in reply to the caller's 'Dog in the ditch' (*ET*: 155) using 'passwords and code signs' (*ET*: 150) like those to which Mr Anapoupoulis referred. Exemplifying the 'indirect style' of narration to which Heather Bryant refers, (Corbally Bryant, 2021: 121), this scene never directly informs us of Eva's illegal adoption of Jeremy, but instead infers it (*ET*: 121).

Later, after a narrative lacuna which avoids the mind-boggling mystery of how Eva would care for an infant, the speech therapist assigned to Jeremy, Gerard Bonnard, labels Eva's version of motherhood as 'mimicry' (*ET*: 247) and therefore false. And Eva is never able to provide a home for Jeremy, though Henry Dancey observes to Eva that Jeremy '"Takes after you,"' but then notes that Jeremy is a 'deaf mute,' and that Eva was 'sold a pup,' observing, 'You can't get your money back; you're wrong

with the law' (*ET*: 165-6). Later, Iseult Arble, Eva's former teacher, abducts Jeremy from his ceramics teacher's house where he has been engaged in making a grotesque bust of Eva in clay that appears to protest against her. Iseult's abduction appears motivated by revenge because she believes her husband Eric was the boy's father. But the teacher of sculpture comments to the distraught Eva, '"This is not the first time Jeremy has been stolen,"' alluding to how Eva obtained him (*ET*: 220). References to Jeremy as having been 'stolen,' (*ET*: 218, 220) echo Yeats's 'The Stolen Child,' with its folkloric fairy thefts of children, that purport to remove them from a world of sorrow.

Heather Bryant has argued that Jeremy may originate from another part of the Irish past shrouded in silence: the illegal adoptions of Irish babies born in Mother and Baby homes, many of whom were sold for adoption, often to the U.S. Bryant cites one report that 'at least 2,000 children were trafficked from Ireland to the United States for adoption,' but this comes from a 2018 newspaper article, and later figures suggest much higher numbers, and that a similar number of children may have been trafficked to the U. S. between 1949 and 1973 alone (Gallen, 2002:163). Similarly to the babies Mr Anapoupoulis talks of, these Irish babies were largely undocumented or falsely documented. We may speculate that, like most Irish people, Bowen would have been aware of the trans-Atlantic traffic in babies, and although *Eva Trout* offers no evidence that Jeremy came from Ireland, Eva clearly obtained him criminally and he is unable to speak about his origins, which carries an implication of trauma and repression. The result is that Eva's relationship with Jeremy is defined by inauthenticity and possibly, illegality.

And Eva is oddly complacent about Jeremy's linguistic silence. Having always been suspicious of language herself, she develops a 'mistrust of or objection to verbal intercourse' (*ET*: 207) and she and Jeremy enjoy a 'cinematographic existence, with no sound track' (ibid). This period of their lives in hotels, watching television and going to the cinema, is their happiest time. Henry Dancey wonders why Eva didn't find someone who could cure him, asking, '"Oh come, Eva, who would not wish to speak?"' She replies, '"I have never wished to [speak]. What is the object? What is the good?"' (*ET:* 169). In this novel, visual images on television and cinema screens appear poised to usurp the power of language, and Eva and Jeremy happily, 'lorded it in a visual universe' (*ET*: 208). But Eva suddenly becomes 'ready to talk' which she fears is 'traitorous to the years with Jeremy' (*ET*: 207) and the efforts to cure Jeremy's muteness destroy the 'mimicry' of the bond between the inauthentic mother and her purchased child (*ET*: 247*)*. Lloyd can help us to understand this when he argues that, 'the oral is reproductive rather than productive; it rapidly becomes femininized, summoning up old crones and kitchen tables, connotating subjection to natural cycles and atavistic beliefs and impulses' (2011: 5). To Lloyd, the oral, distinct from the literate, designates 'a negative and inadequate way of being in the world' (ibid). At the novel's end the deaf-mute boy with a gun symbolises the overthrow of Eva's efforts to usher in orality, as if his identity comes from the American Western and the 'cinematographic existence' which he and Eva had previously enjoyed (*ET*: 207).

When Gerard Bonnard, the speech therapist, tried to understand Jeremy's muteness as an expression of his relationship with Eva, he referred to the 'lacuna' of 'the child's heredity [which] cannot be known' (*ET*: 246, 247) he explains:

> It would be irresponsible to ignore, altogether, the physical incidences which are part of the physical composition of a heredity — to have known something of Jeremy's could have been to a point helpful, but that we have been able to do without. What is important, and what we are taking into account, is what you have supplied him with instead — the character of what you have given him. From his demeanour, from his assurance, one would take him to be a child in the main line of a powerful family. You are bringing him up to be your father's son —conventionally, one should say grandson. Now we come to what I should like to ask you: had you or had you been given to think you could not give birth to a child? Otherwise, what made you prefer mimicry to what could have been the actual continuance of flesh-and-blood? (*ET*: 247 emphasis mine)

Not only is heredity 'helpful' in the diagnosis of a physical problem, and by implication also a psychic trauma, but Jeremy will become heir to the Trout fortune, as a reference to his worth being 'platinum' suggests (*ET*: 230). Inheritance — whether of a child as in Constantine's case, or of a fortune — in Jeremy's case, becomes misdirected, lacking in consanguinity, incomplete, or even undeserved. Like Eva's version of motherhood, it mimics a line of inheritance instead of embodying a birthright.

But, as Heather Bryant observes, 'The child who cannot speak becomes a menace,' and the daughter of the Trout millionaire who became a mother by illegitimate means is murdered by this menacing child who would have inherited everything from her, as Constantine confirms (Corbally Bryant, 2021: 125). Temporarily housed, in hired lodgings, they live without sanction from conventional domesticity. An orphan and never permanently housed herself, Eva as a mother is also unable to suitably house the adopted or stolen orphan, continuing his *unheimlich* and hence uncanny state. Even though he has gained a mother, this orphan is still unaccommodated by the domestic family. Jeremy's muteness implies that he can reveal shattering hidden truths and while a baby born in an Irish Mother and Baby Home would be unable to talk of this fact, Bowen nevertheless renders Jeremy's silence threatening and ghostly. Capable of violent revelations, now that he is learning to talk, his sinister potential increases, perhaps because of anger at Eva's pronouncement that their odd domestic arrangement no longer satisfies her.

While fiction's orphans suggest unaccommodated remnants of the past, and so are disconnected from the past, in Jeremy's case the disconnection carries extra, mysterious connotations, perhaps exploitative, but ultimately violent. Eva also struggles to find family ties as we see in the scene at the station just preceding her death. The staged going-away as if a wedding has taken place, yet another mimicry of an event, even though Henry has finally agreed to an actual marriage, nevertheless shows her longing for family connections. She asks Constantine, '"All the same, Constantine, am I like nobody? […] My father told me my eyes are like my mother's — are they? I believe my forehead is like my father's: is it?"' (*ET*: 297). She wonders, 'What would it have been like to have had the enjoyment of aunts, uncles, cousins […] She had first been withheld from and then *forfeited her birthright* [emphasis mine] of cricket matches and flower shows' (*ET*: 210). Even in such indirect narrative representation, which affords us only other characters' perspectives, and withholds interiority, we nonetheless see Eva pondering identity.

Learning that Iseult was the person who kidnapped Jeremy from his ceramics lesson, Eva sees her former teacher's identity undergoing a 'dissolution' (*ET*: 212). Eva's strategy is to visit the National Portrait Gallery to ponder individuality, thinking:

> Anyhow, what a slippery fish is identity; and what *is* it, besides a slippery fish? […] What *is* a person? Is it true, there is not more than one of each? If so, is it this singular forcefulness, of forcefulness arising from being singular, which occasionally causes a person to bite on history? All the more in that case, what *is* a person? (*ET*: 213)

In the Tudor and Reformation rooms at the National Portrait Gallery, she 'learned' that it 'had been an age when ends were dire' and notes 'the smell of blood,' suggesting both the violence of that era for notables. But 'the smell of blood' also suggests consanguinity (*ET*: 214). 'Blood' ties assign birthrights and worth, among the nobles in the paintings and claimants to the throne, but unsurprisingly, given her own dislocation from family ties and domestic family life, and her unsanctioned means of becoming a mother, Eva's investigation into identity leaves her powerless over the present and the future, and the unsettled past.

Efforts that 'Jeremy [be] put right,' (*ET*: 241) as Eva describes it, threaten to foist him on to a level of linguistic functioning that resembles the logic of literate cultures replacing oral ones, which David Lloyd identifies, and therefore, for Eva and Jeremy, as Lloyd would argue, 'Literacy induces individuation and interiorisation, putting an end to the communal forms of oral culture. Literacy brings with it, above all, *the historical consciousness within which its own developmental suppositions can be thought at all*' [emphasis mine] (2011: 5). In Jeremy's case, this 'historical consciousness,' even on an individual and abstract level, threatens to devastate his tie to Eva, even to expose, metaphorically at least, her illegal and perhaps exploitative means of obtaining him.

Whether because of this process of ushering Jeremy into language, or because they were separated while he underwent the process, his reunion with Eva exhibits complex disruptive emotion in each of them. The text says:

> They were glad to be seeing each other again: anything beyond that, anything *primitive*, [emphasis mine] was gone. Who knew when it had breathed its last, or where its grave was? Like as they were, they were *not* of each other's flesh-and-blood, and they both knew it. The dear game was over, the game was up' (*ET*: 285).

This marks the end of their former 'primitive' relationship that existed outside language, that was based on cinematographic 'illusion' (*ET*:208). It consisted of 'Mimicries and secret signals,' (*ET*: 208) even characterized by the use of 'passwords, code signs' (*ET*: 150) used in the process of Eva's acquisition of Jeremy. The unmoored narrative voice ponders whether the Bonnards' purpose was 'To bring about this undoing? To rid not only the child of Eva but the child and Eva of one another' (*ET*: 286). From Jeremy's former silent, prelinguistic 'site […] of recalcitrance and resistance' as Lloyd would describe it, (2011: 90) Jeremy now 'exhibits pleasure in home-coming like a magazine child' (*ET*: 286), while secreting a gun in a drawer. This unaccommodated, unhoused orphan introduces the potential for violence into the mimicry of domestic life which is all that Eva can offer.

While Bowen and W. B. Yeats were both Anglo-Irish, of course, neither comes from the oral peasant culture where the stolen child legend originates, nor from the oral culture that Lloyd cites, but Bowen was fascinated with the domestic uncanny, which she links to orphans by equating them to ghosts, her other narrative preoccupation. Bowen's uncanny emerges from psychic disturbances and eruptions of unruly unaccommodated emotions and primitive remnants into the rational and the modern. The uncanny persists as vestiges of the past, which include orphans. As the ultimate Bowen orphan, Jeremy comes to embody these impulses, destructively, effectively choosing to violently eradicate his adopted lineage, perhaps fearing that Eva threatens to do this. And as a stolen child he suggests origins that are even more disturbed than Eva's. Eva voiced serious misgivings about linguistic communication, but before she and Jeremy can enter this state, Jeremy destroys that possibility and with it the source of the psychic drama between them, their 'misbegotten' unity. In the end, Jeremy, oddly was only, we read 'in a manner of speaking [...Eva's] little boy' (*ET*: 168).

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'This may not reach you ...': letters as a location of narrative in Elizabeth Bowen's fiction ~ Nicola Darwood

In 'Notes on Writing a Novel', Elizabeth Bowen writes that '[n]othing can happen nowhere. The locale of the happening always colours the happening, and often, to a degree, shapes it' (1975: 177). When I embarked on this paper for the Elizabeth Bowen conference in 2024, I thought I had a relatively simple task on my hands: identify some letters; consider their part in the narrative; and think about the
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consequences of the act of writing. But as the weeks passed, I recalled an earlier struggle with Bowen's statement which, in my mind, produces a conundrum. The phrase '[n]othing can happen nowhere' is, in itself, surely problematic. It appears to be ungrammatical and needs untangling; I take it to mean that for something to happen, it has to happen somewhere. But what happens when that locale isn't a physical space, where the 'something' occupies a metaphorical or an imagined space, a 'nowhere' where '[n]othing can happen'?

Letters in Elizabeth Bowen's work often occupy a liminal space – a 'nowhere' perhaps or, in Victor Turner's terms, 'an interstructural situation'[1] – they are often lost, and sometimes found (1979: 234). Whatever their physical location, both within the text and in the plot, they play an important role in much of her fiction – from delayed letters in *The Hotel*, hidden letters in *A World of Love*, to an undeliverable letter in *Eva Trout, or Changing Scenes*. They can be considered, to borrow Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan's words, hypodiegetic elements of a text, narrated by a diegetic narrator. Hypodiegetic narratives have, Rimmon-Kenan suggests, a number of potential functions: actional, that is maintaining or advancing the action; explicative, providing an explanation of diegetic narrative; and thematic, providing an analogy which acts as either to highlight a similarity or a contrast to the diegetic narration (1983: 93-4). Lost, delayed, or found, the letters in Bowen's fiction all serve a narrative function; they impart knowledge, or indicate the emotions of the letter writer secure, perhaps, in the knowledge that the letter will not reach its intended recipient. There are also letters which disrupt, and deliberately confuse; their late arrival may lead to misunderstanding and confusion. They might, by the withholding of the name of the narrator or the narratee, give rise to the emotions of love and reconciliation, but also envy and greed, or they might cause terror perhaps in the heart of a woman reading a letter written decades before its eventual delivery, a terror which plays its part in the 'rising tide of hallucination' exhibited in *The Demon Lover, and Other Stories* (1945: 49).

The use of letters in fiction can be traced back to the eighteenth century and earlier, where the development of the epistolary novel used, as Bernard Duyfhuizen argues, a 'double narrative' which 'is produced within a textual society created for the reader by the private correspondence of its members' (1985: 1). While Duyfhuizen is particularly referring to novels such as *Clarissa* (Richardson: 1748),[2] the 'double narrative' can also be seen in a number of Bowen's novels and short stories. Through a discussion of a small number of letters, I will start to trace Bowen's use of this narrative device, questioning and discussing the letters' relevance to the furtherance of plot, as Bowen experiments with form and function. I will look first at some of the letters between Emmeline and Markie in *To the North*, before turning to a consideration of use of letters in *A World of Love*. Finally, I will discuss the letters that can be found in the pages of Bowen's last published novel, *Eva Trout, or Changing Scenes*. In *To the North* and *Eva Trout, or Changing Scenes,* and in others, Bowen could, I would argue, be seen to be drawing on the structure of epistolary novels of the eighteenth century (perhaps, for example, Francis Burney's *Evelina*), and the concept of the *Briefwechselromanen* (a novel centred on

[1] Turner is, of course, referring to liminality in rites of passage, but I believe it can be used in relation to the letters in Bowen's fiction.
[2] The full title of Richardson's text is *Clarissa; or, The History of a Young Lady: Comprehending the Most Important Concerns of Private Life. And Particularly Shewing, the Distresses that May Attend the Misconduct Both of Parents and Children, In Relation to Marriage.*

correspondence), where letters provide information about events and characters, and serve to provide much of the impetus of the plot. According to Bowen, plot is the essential element of a novel – in fact, as she writes, it is '[t]he Pre-Essential' element of good fiction (1975: 169). However, Bowen also seeks to confuse and manipulate the experience of the reader and, in so doing (particularly in the letter from Professor Portman C. Holman addressed to Mrs Trout, and Guy's letters in *A World of Love*), often articulates a philosophical conundrum about presence and absence.

To the North

To the North, published in 1933, was written in a period which could be considered 'betwixt and between' (to appropriate Turner's phrase), it is 'a restless age' according to Julian in *To the North*, one which Lady Waters argues is 'decentralized.[3] From week to week, there is no knowing where anyone is' (*TN*: 170). It is at Lady Waters' country home, Farraways, 'a small country house in Gloucestershire, [...] left to Georgina [Lady Waters] for life by her first husband, Cecilia's uncle'(*TN*: 43),[4] that Emmeline receives her first letter from Markie Linkwater:

> Dear Emmeline — As Wednesday does not suit you, what about Friday? I can put something else off: we must not let this fall through. So please do wear yellow and do not be late again. I'm sorry you found me tiresome the other night, though you cannot expect me to agree with you. Had that never happened before? It is quite usual. And really there did not seem to be much to say; you do rather dispose of any little thing one brigs up. However no doubt we shall find more to say later on.
>
> If it would restore confidence, we will go and dance somewhere on Friday, instead. Or you can tell me more about trains — you did not seem to think much of my books. Anything you like. I do miss you; it is that funny look in your eyes, like a foal coming to wind to inspect you. I would do anything to amuse you, but the fact is you are so dazzlingly beautiful I really don't care if your amused or not.
>
> Don't be late on Friday; there's never enough time. And don't put off, like last week, or I shall come round and fetch you. Cecilia would be amazed. How nice she is; I'm so glad I talked to her in the train. Remember me to your aunt — or cousin? — who said I must be an extrovert.
>
> Yours,
> Markie.
>
> P.S. — Friday: 8.15 (*TN*: 46-47)

Echoing an earlier conversation with Lady Waters and Sir Robert, Emmeline considers the letter to be 'bumptious'. Markie berates her for her timekeeping ('do not be late again'), and the manner of her conversation ('And really there did not seem to be much to say; you rather dispose of any little thing one brings up'). The letter finishes on a slightly threatening note: 'Don't be late on Friday; there's never enough time. And don't put off, like last week, or I shall come round and fetch you. Cecilia would be amazed'. The letter serves to demonstrate both Markie's inherent belief in his own superiority, and his lack of understanding of Emmeline's strength of

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[3] Parenthetical references to *To the North* will read *TN*.

[4] 'Farraways' also appears to occupy a liminal position – its name suggests that it is placed outside of normality, somewhere distant, where people visit in order to escape from the rigours of daily life.

character. His hectoring tone suggests that he can bully Emmeline into acquiescing to his instructions: 'do wear yellow'; 'do not be late again', 'don't put off'; 'I shall come round and fetch you. Cecilia would be amazed'. And yet Emmeline feels the need to respond quickly 'before reflection could intervene'; her reply is both explanatory and conciliatory: 'I will try …', 'I am sorry you thought me unreasonable …', but also questioning his attitude to her sister-in-law: 'But why should Cecelia be 'amazed'?' (*TN*: 47).

A later letter written to Markie early on a summer's day refers to its own liminality. Much like the moonlit scene in 'Mysterious Kor' (published in *The Demon Lover and Other Stories* in 1945), this letter draws on the notion of an extra day, but one which might not be noticed by the recipient of the letter. 'Dear Markie,' it starts in a conventional manner: 'Thank you for the letter I found at the office, and for the copper electric kettle which came yesterday afternoon. It boils very well. It will be nice to have tea without smelling of gas'. But Emmeline continues:

> I'm sorry you didn't like the people you went to lunch with; why did you go? What you said in your letter makes me feel very happy. But you mustn't think all that. I am quite ordinary. If I seem stupid sometimes when I am with you, or as though I were somewhere else, it is because nothing else has been like this. (*TN*: 101)

Emmeline's acknowledgement that sometimes she may appear to be absent is more to do with her lack of experience, rather than a desire to be elsewhere. But there is a narratorial gap – the reader cannot know what Markie says to Emmeline in his earlier letter (the one to which this one is written in response), but instead has to draw on their own understanding of Markie's character in order to 'fill in the gaps'. And so the reader might deduce that Markie has spoken about his admiration for Emmeline, but also might guess at Markie's acerbic comments about his hosts.

Her letter then takes a more whimsical, perhaps philosophical turn:

> This morning looks beautifully early, I wish you were awake. It looks like a day slipped in between Monday and Tuesday, that has nothing to do with the week. I wish you were here. There is so much I should like to say that I seem to have nothing to say. Perhaps someday words will be different or there will be others. When you get this it will be Tuesday evening and what I see will be gone … (*TN*: 101-102).

This passage demonstrates Emmeline's approach to the visual, for although she says that she is 'short sighted in every sense' when in conversation with Julien, in fact her understanding goes far beyond the superficial (*TN*: 25). Her acknowledgement of the ephemeral nature of life can be seen in this letter: 'when you get this it will be Tuesday evening and what I see will be gone …', and her observation that the 'morning looks […] like a day slipped in between Monday and Tuesday, that has nothing to do with the week.' But this also suggests a mythical day – a day perhaps for regeneration and rebirth, a chance to be the person who can speak the words that Emmeline would like to say when she appears to have nothing to say, enabling her to give voice to thoughts that remain hidden. In both these letters – the initial one from Markie to Emmeline, and the one just discussed – the reader can learn much about

the individual characters: their fears and their foibles, the ego of Markie, and the ability of Emmeline to see beyond the surface.

Forgotten letters

Over the following decades, Bowen continued to use letters as a form of manipulation of both plot and reader. So, for example, there's a trio of letters in *The Death of the Heart*: the first from Matchett (where we learn, from her signature, that her first name starts with R) to Portia in Seale-on-Sea where she is staying with Mrs Heccomb; the second from Eddie, a self-absorbed missive in which he berates the fact that Portia has gone away; the third from Major Brutt, signed Eric E J Brutt, which speaks obliquely of his loneliness, but which is also (in a possible foreshadowing of Professor Holman's letter to Eva Trout) written without any real expectation of it being delivered.

In *A World of Love* the forgotten letters from Guy to his fiancé, Lilia, occupy a central position in the history of Fred, Lilia, and Antonia.[5] Yet the letters, unlike those in other novels by Bowen, are not physically present in the text, but inhabit a liminal space in time, ostensibly forgotten in the attic amongst Antonia's discarded belongings: a physical manifestation of the ownership of Montefort which lies with Antonia, rather than with Fred and his wife, Lilia. The reader, however, is not given access to the substance of the letters, knowing only that one letter refers to the obelisk standing in the grounds of Montefort (the family home which later becomes the setting of a reconciliation between Fred and Lilia), and another contains an emotional outpouring: '*I thought* […] *if only YOU had been here*' (*WL*: 48).

The reader is, though, very aware of the effect that these letters have on the characters, not least on Jane, who having read that line, responds: 'But here I am. Oh, here I *am*!'. Jane has clearly placed herself within this narrative, positioning herself as the addressee of the letter which appears to have its own agency:

> Seeing how brief all time was it seemed impossible she could be too late: this valley held waiting in its keeping, suspense in the glitter of its air. Here was the hour, still to be lived! Impatient the letter shifted inside her dress as rolling over she put an ear to the ground, to one of the turfy spaces between bracken, to seem to be hearing returning footsteps as a pulse in her head started to beat down. Between him and her dwindled the years: where indeed was he if not beside her? They could not now miss one another, surely.
>
> His letter had been no more delayed than on its way to her. (*WL*: 48)

The effect on Fred, however, is explosive according to Maud (who should probably not be considered a reliable narrator): '[t]he sight of them [she reports to Antonia] threw him into that fury', a fury which led him to hit her, tread on her toe and twist her arm (*WL*: 107). While Maud is probably exaggerating the effect of the letters on Fred, it is evident that the fact of their existence further heightens the emotions of all those living at Montefort, giving rise to jealousy, love, regret and, on the part of Maud, a chance to improve her financial situation by engaging in a (failed) attempt at blackmail.

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[5] Future parenthetical references to *A World of Love* will read *WL*.

Eva Trout, or Changing Scenes

Whereas the words of Guy's letters are present only in a liminal manner in the written text, conversely letters truly litter the narrative *Eva Trout, or Changing Scenes*. In the main, these are explicative, revealing details of Eva's life, but they also reveal much about the writer and the intended recipient. For example, there is a letter from Constantine Ormeau, Eva Trout's guardian, to Iseult Arble (nee Smith), Eva's former teacher with whom Eva lives as a young woman, providing details of a visit from Eva which are only known to the reader through Constantine's letter. The Arbles' house, Larkins,[6] is, so far as Constantine is concerned initially, a place of 'harmony', and yet he has had a 'dismaying visit from Eva'. However, noting his surprise that he has not heard from Iseult: 'That I have not done so [he writes] leads me to hope that the situation of which she spoke to me does not, in fact, exist outside her own fancy' (*ET*: 32).

The letter, and Iseult's reaction to it, provides us with a greater sense of her and Constantine's characters, even when it does not really add much to our knowledge of Eva. So, as Constantine expresses his astonishment that Eva should be so unhappy, the reader is aware that as he's given so little thought to Eva's life (the daughter of his dead lover, Willy Trout) that any communication from Eva about her living arrangements would have been, one could suggest, an unwelcome intrusion into his comfortable life. And Iseult feels gratified by the letter, having felt herself to have been dismissed out of hand by Constantine once terms (financial and logistical) had been arranged for Eva's stay at Larkins: '[m]ade use of, made sure of, she had been written off [...] Now the tune began to be different; or did it not. The reader [the narrator tells us] felt herself smile ...' (*ET*, 33).

There are, of course, other letters in the novel, but the one that I want to focus on for the remainder of this essay is the letter from Professor Portman C. Holman, a professor of philosophy from the University of Wyana, written to Eva following their airplane flight to America. Holman uses the letter to express his thoughts about, of course, Eva, her past and her future, but it also considers philosophical ideas of absence, of abeyance, of lacunae, of the permeability of life. These are motifs visited throughout the novel where buildings no longer house their original occupants (the castle which is no longer a school, for example), where characters disappear (Iseult's disappearance (believed to be in France) is one such occurrence), or where a life can be taken in a concatenation of events. That permeability of life is apparent, both in Holman's letter but also when Constantine and Eva meet to discuss both her childhood, and her attempts to be a mother to Jeremy. In an echo of both Bowen's essay 'London, 1940' and her 1948 novel, *The Heat of the Day*, Constantine says that '[t]he wall's very thin [...] between the dead and the living' (*ET*: 173) – there is a sense of a fear of liminality, of limbo in Constantine's words and this notion of permeability is one explored by Holman. His letter forms a central episode in the novel, it is (to use Turner's phrase) an 'interstructural situation', the sole element of a chapter titled 'Interim' which suggests (again using one of Turner's phrases) a 'betwixt and between' episode. In the theatre, the interim period forms the interval between acts, where nothing is performed on stage, and the audience often finds itself in a form of limbo, queueing for a drink, waiting for the performance to start.

[6] It is possible, perhaps, that the name was taken from H E Bates' novel *The Darling Buds of May* published in 1958.

But in *Eva Trout*, this interval is part of the performance, apparently providing the reader with a greater insight into the character of Eva.

However, the letter from Holman is both an epistolic expression of admiration, and also one of epistemological and philosophical enquiry befitting a professor of philosophy. It starts with a statement of being in limbo, and of disappearance: 'Your vanishing in the customs was a dislocation [...] There at my side one minute, gone the next.' Holman writes his letter conscious that Eva might never receive it; indeed it is possible to assume that he does not expect her to read the letter, and so it becomes, in essence, a philosophical essay of the nature of being, and of nothingness:

> I launch forth this letter to an address from which you already may have departed (short, you said, was to be your stay in New York) leaving no other behind. The Drake Hotel will no doubt direct it back to me in due course. I foresee the day of finding it in my mail. Knowing for sure it has missed its mark, what shall I then feel? Chagrin? Relief? (*ET*, 122)

In writing the letter, Holman desires to place Eva within the concrete realm of reality, rather than as an abstract notion: 'I shall preserve this letter [...] as sole tangible proof of your existence.' (*ET*: 123)

Much of this letter draws on notions of being, of existence, as Holman pursues an ontological examination of Eva's place in society and his relationship (or lack of) with her. The notion of absence is threaded through the letter: Eva has no reading matter for there was 'none in evidence then or later' (*ET*: 124) or in the 'no-hour' which follows lunch,

> the enormity of an airborne post-noon [where] an unreal torpor fills the pressurized air; bodies abandon themselves to daylit slumber in contorted attitudes of death. [...] Outside, the glare: inimical, contemptuous, landmarkless, unabated, unchanging. The nullity of speed, the nullity of height. [...] No longer the critical individual but one alert lest he cease to be. (*ET*: 125-126)

In his letter, Holman retells the story of Eva's life, but it is a romanticised version, told by one passenger to another, perhaps just to pass a dull hour or two. In this version, Eva is portrayed as an English rose, living in a typical English home with a 'traditional kitchen, [...] a garden leafy and green through every season' (*ET*, 126). But this version of Eva stirs thoughts in Holman's mind about marriage, relationships (or rather his lack of a relationship), but also about the apparently despicable behaviour of Mr Trout (who, of course, is a figment of Holman's imagination, rather than a person of fact).

Overall, though, the brief encounter of Eva and Holman leads the professor to question his own existence; where once he was a man of substance, he is now 'prone to abeyances, lacunae'; his life has been irredeemably altered by this chance meeting on an airplane, and he has become a man of indecision: 'Mrs Trout, do I destroy this, or do I mail it? It may not reach you. Which is to be desired?—I am not certain' (*ET*: 128-129). It is evident though that he does post the letter, as it is returned to him as 'nothing had been heard of the addressee since she telephoned cancelling her

reservation, (*ET*: 129) and yet Holman's indecision is indicative of his own existential crisis.

Conclusion

The various letters that I have discussed in this brief essay all serve to highlight the liminal nature of correspondence; but what, I implicitly asked at the beginning of this essay, do they tell us about the characters in the novels? A I mentioned, when I started writing this essay, I thought I had a relatively simple task on my hands: identify the letters; consider their part in the narrative; and think about the consequences of the act of writing. But, of course, this is the fictional world of Elizabeth Bowen where nothing is simple. Each letter that I have discussed has had a different narrative function – whether that is to fill in a narratorial gap, to provide information about a character, or to be the vehicle for the examination of emotions – but in each case, Bowen manipulates our understanding of plot and character. Sometimes we learn about concrete events, but more often than not the reader discovers something that adds to the complex characterisation of individual protagonists.

Of those, it is, in this essay perhaps, the letter from Professor Holman to Eva that provides the greatest episode of authorial manipulation – we learn of the story that Eva tells in the plane, but we can also learn of some of the greater existential issues of loss, of abeyances, of 'nothingness', where the medium of a letter can provide the 'locale' of a philosophical discussion, where the very act of writing provides the 'somewhere'; in a way, Bowen's use of letters truly sums up the idea of 'nothing can happen nowhere', with the act of writing providing the 'nowhere' where nothing can, truly, happen.

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Chocolate, Art, and Indigestion in 'Mrs Moysey': Elizabeth Bowen and High Modernism[1] ~ Kaya Matsui

The Distance between Bowen and (High) Modernism

'Mrs Moysey'[2] was originally published in 1929 in the short story collection *Joining Charles*. In 2009, Patricia Coughlan noted that Bowen's first three short story collections – *Encounters* (1923), *Ann Lee's* (1926), and *Joining Charles* (1929) – were under-discussed (2009:41). More than a decade later, the situation does not seem to have changed significantly. In particular, there has been little discussion of 'Mrs Moysey', except that in 1991 Phyllis Lassner, in her comprehensive study of Bowen's short stories, featured it as one of the 'comedies of terror' (1991: 70).

One reason why Bowen's stories from the 1920s have received so little attention is that this was a period of so-called 'high modernism'. Compared to the experimental works of writers such as Virginia Woolf and Katherine Mansfield, Bowen's works, retaining traditional techniques like plot and omniscient narrator, may have appeared somewhat dated. Bowen seems to have deliberately distanced herself from modernism as evidenced by her remarks in the preface to *The Faber Book of Modern Short Stories* published in 1936, in which she contrasts Maupassant, the 'born popular writer', with Chekhov, who had a profound influence on British modernist writers, and complains about the tendency for works influenced by the latter to be so celebrated:

> In this country, within the past fifteen years, the non-commercial or free short story – that is to say, the story unsuitable, not meant to be suitable, for the popular, well-paying magazines, and free, therefore, not to conform with so-called popular taste – has found a wider opening: it has come to have an eclectic vogue … It is too generally taken that a story by being non-commercial may immediately pretend to art. (Bowen, 1950: 42)

Given Bowen's admiration for Chekhov, and Adrian Hunter's remark that 'Bowen's account of the inner workings of the short form is strikingly similar to that of the modernists' (2007: 115), this quote cannot be taken as a simple criticism of modernism. What can be seen from this is her conviction that art and the public should not be separate. Her choice not to give up traditional techniques should not be seen as a sign of a rejection of modernism, but rather as an indication of her willingness to embrace modernism while rejecting 'high-hat complacency' often found in 'arty work' of high modernism (Bowen, 1950: 42).

The purpose of this study is to show how Bowen's stance on (high) modernism is reflected in 'Mrs Moysey'. In this story, to eat and not to eat, and what is taken into the body and the mind, are key themes. The question of art and the public also arises when we examine the connection between modernism and food.[3] Alys Moody points

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[1] A Japanese version of this paper has been published in *Elizabeth Bowen Tanpen Hyouron-Syu (Elizabeth Bowen: Reading Her Short Stories)* (Elizabeth Bowen Kenkyu-kai, 2024).
[2] Page numbers only will be given in parenthetical references to quotations from 'Mrs Moysey'.
[3] Drawing on Mao and Walkowitz, Derek Gladwin states that the examination of modernist literature and food leads to renegotiation of 'traditional barriers between "high art" and popular forms of culture' (Gladwin, 2019: 8).

out that some modernists[4] were inclined to use terms such as 'culinary', predigested', or 'pudding' to express their 'disdain for appetitive art' and says:

> It [the modernist scorn for culinary art] suggests that art that is too readily consumed is unserious and unaesthetic, and seeks to demarcate a zone of high art, uncontaminated by the temptation of easy pleasures or the desires of the flesh. (2018: 13)

Later I examine Mrs Moysey's chocolate-filled bedroom, which is 'a zone of *mass* art, *contaminated* by the temptation of easy pleasures or the desires of the flesh' [emphasis mine]. It is worth examining the space of food and art that Bowen depicted during the time of modernism to understand her creative attitude.

Mrs Moysey's Domestic Space and its Staggering Disorder

Let us first look at Mrs Moysey's domestic space as a whole. Although 'Mr Moysey had now been dead some time and her household had got out of a gentleman's ways' (355), it reverts to a male-dominated space when her nephew Leslie, who has returned from Japan, suddenly arrives and takes up residence there. Later, when he flees and his wife Emerald appears and temporarily leaves their two young children at Mrs Moysey's to pursue him, her household adapts to 'Daph's and Bobby's' (361) ways. Thus, her domestic space is stirred up and transformed by the incomers, and each time she is forced to fulfill the role of a Victorian woman, taking care of Leslie to make him comfortable and then taking care of the children.

However, whether under Leslie's ways or Daph and Bobby's ways, an unsettled atmosphere soon begins to pervade in Mrs Moysey's home; problems over meals invariably erupt there. Leslie's behaviour of 'turn[ing] his food over and over with his fork, frown[ing] and push[ing] his plate away' (357) infuriates the cook and the parlourmaid. The problems concerning Daph and Bobby are even more serious. They begin to refuse to have proper meals, presenting symptoms of indigestion and becoming extremely agitated. While the parlourmaid and the cook find the children's behaviour of not eating the food provided unacceptable and believe they should not be spoilt, Mrs Moysey is flustered and is unable to respond sternly to them; she does not serve as an appropriate supervisor of the children. Her space, far from the respectable one that Emerald expects for her children, falls into disorder.

The responsibility for the disorder lies with none other than Mrs Moysey. Despite seemingly capitulating to someone else's ways, she has kept to her customs since her husband's death; she secretly purchases large quantities of chocolate boxes and stores them in her bedroom. She is not an alcoholic, as Leslie and her neighbours believe, but a chocolate addict. Even though no one is allowed to enter the room, one day Daph and Bobby are found 'engulfed in the innermost secrecy of that secret house' (363) and have been gorging on chocolate ever since. The mistress and the children all suffer from indigestion. What prevents the establishment of Victorian domestic order in Mrs Moysey's house is her own space in the depths of the house.

[4] The modernists named here are Berthold Brecht, Henry James, George Orwell, Roger Fry, Clive Bell, and Katherine Mansfield (Moody, 2018: 13-14).

Mrs Moysey's Bedroom: The Space of Chocolate and Art

The composition of Daph and Bobby being 'engulfed' into Mrs Moysey's chocolate-filled bedroom deep in the house is reminiscent of that of 'Hansel and Gretel', where a young brother and sister, left behind by their parents, are lured by a wicked witch into a house made of bread, cake and sugar deep in a forest. However, whereas Hansel and Gretel deceive the witch and succeed in getting out of the house, Daph and Bobby do not attempt to escape. With thick chocolate stains all over their faces, shouting at each other, they reject Emerald, who has come to rescue them, and cling to Mrs Moysey. She has 'turn[ed] two young children into her addictive equals' (Lassner, 1991: 73-74), like Dracula. Lassner categorises the story as one in which 'those who see themselves as scapegoats wreak their revenge' (1991: 54), and it certainly seems reasonable. Mrs Moysey, who had been freed from a 'gentleman's ways' but forced into the role of proper mother by Emerald, may have taken revenge on her, and on the patriarchy itself, by corrupting the children. Near the end of the story, when Emerald, betrayed and eliminated by the allied three – her children and Mrs Moysey – sobs, the omniscient narrator speaks for her: 'there was no place, no home in the world for decent women' (370).

Yet it would be one-sided to view Mrs Moysey's bedroom solely as a space for revenge; she is a 'most unwilling victor' (370) and does not appear to have any clear intention of using Daph and Bobby as instruments of revenge. In this room, where both 'a gentleman's ways' and 'Daph's and Bobby's' ways have been locked out, Mrs Moysey goes on a chocolate binge. The most striking feature of this room, arguably, is the large quantity of chocolate boxes. While they appear to be nothing more than gifts from 'very rich men' to 'very immoral ladies' to Emerald's eyes (368), they have an entirely different meaning to Mrs Moysey. She says to Emerald:

> 'I don't throw my boxes away . . . They are so artistic, I think — well, look at that sunset, for instance; you couldn't buy a picture like that for quite a large sum if you asked for it in a gallery. I've made quite a little collection, haven't I, all these years? As a matter of fact, I look at them quite a lot.' (368)

She appreciates chocolate box paintings as art and her bedroom functions as a museum that houses many works of art. This room is not only a space where she gives in to the physical desire to eat as much chocolate as she likes, but also a space where she enjoys art to her heart's content. She takes chocolate into her body and the art of the chocolate box into her mind.

The relationship between the chocolate box and chocolate box art, and their relationship to modernism, are interesting and noteworthy. Although by the 1920s chocolate was mass-produced in advanced factories in the UK, the design of the box belied that fact. Of chocolate box art, Diane Barthel states: 'To the Modernist movement, the chocolate box was a symbol of outmoded Victorian design; of everything Modernism was revolting *against*. […] Indeed, the chocolate boxes of the 1920s and 1930s were largely sentimental holdovers of Victorian romanticism' (1989: 429).

The adjective 'chocolate(-)box' has been used since the end of the nineteenth century to mean 'excessively decorative and sentimental, as the pictures or designs on some boxes of chocolate candy' (*Dictionary.com*), 'resembling or reminiscent of the

stereotypical decoration of a chocolate box; pretty in a conventional or sentimental way' (*Oxford English Dictionary*). The paintings of the chocolate boxes in Mrs Moysey's room, for example, are as follows: 'Flower-sprays or Zoo scenes, dragons in synthetic embroidery, 'The Angelus', 'Lady Hamilton', girls' heads in the popular manner, the Tower of London by moonlight, hunting scenes, the Prince of Wales, 'The Monarch of the Glen'' (366-367).

'The Angelus' is an 1859 painting by Millet, while 'The Monarch of the Glen', with its majestic red stag, is an 1851 painting by the English painter Edwin Landseer. Lady Hamilton was the mistress of Admiral Nelson, and there are many portraits of her painted in the late eighteenth century by George Romney, probably one of which is used here as the design on the chocolate box. In addition to these well-known paintings, there are also unknown, commonplace pictures of flowers, girls, and so on; on the lid of a box that 'spun like a platter at Emerald's feet' is 'a pussy cat's head looking out of a horse-shoe' (366). The collection can only be described as miscellaneous, but there is no doubt that all the paintings seen here are popular art, probably somewhat familiar or nostalgic to many people. And the most obvious commonality is that they give no hint that the chocolate inside the box is an industrial product, mass-produced in a modern factory. That is to say, the chocolate box can be described as modernity masked by traditional, sentimental, nostalgic appearances.

The chocolate box art Mrs Moysey considers 'so artistic' is deemed 'outmoded Victorian design', the very opposite of the modernist 'high art'. As we have seen, in Moody's description of 'high art', modernists seek to demarcate it as a zone 'uncontaminated by the temptation of easy pleasures or the desire of the flesh,' and, this being the case, high art should be far removed from the physical activity of eating. Mrs Moysey's room is, on the other hand, 'a zone of *popular* art, *contaminated* by the easy pleasures or the desire of the flesh'.[5] There, 'too readily consumed' (Moody, 2018: 13) art and large quantities of chocolate, and the desire and pleasure of enjoying both, make it possible to see that the act of eating and enjoying art are very close, or rather that the two are inextricably linked.

How to Deal with 'Beautiful Things': Creation and Reception of Art

In view of the divergence between the chocolate box packaging and what lies beneath, it is suggestive that Mrs Moysey is an 'excessively decorative and sentimental', that is, a 'chocolate box' woman. The 'chocoholic' Mrs Moysey is plump, her hair and clothes giving the impression of being overdecorated, abundant, and out of fashion. She appears at dinner with Leslie, 'with her pale fluffy hair whipped up beautifully on the top of her head like confectioner's cream [...] and a string of green shells brought round twice and knotted over the bosom' (355). At her first meeting with Emerald, she 'trailed over the drawing-room carpet her long purple skirts', 'expansive, with a curious toppling expression from the Pompadour-curves of her coiffure' (358). Then again, when Emerald bursts into her bedroom, a startled and frightened Daph and Bobby 'fled into [Mrs Moysey's arms]', and '[t]he blonde and the dark head pressed deeper into the crimson capaciousness' (367).

[5] Diane Barthel also writes: '[The chocoholic] is a regressive identity celebrating female weakness and surrender to temptation' (1989: 431).

Her excessive and curvy figure is in clear contrast to that of Emerald, who is described as 'a wife without curves' (358). On her first meeting with Mrs Moysey, she wears a mackintosh and appears to have insufficient clothing underneath, which leads Mrs Moysey to think that 'perhaps she [is] hungry' (358). Later, when Emerald is stunned by the large number of chocolate boxes, Mrs Moysey explains that they are an art collection. Their ensuing conversation highlights another contrast between the two.

> 'Did you ever show them [your chocolate boxes] to Leslie?'
> 'Oh no. I mean, he'd have thought me so silly, you know. Gentlemen never seem to me to have quite the same feeling for beautiful things. Do you think so?'
> 'I can't say; I've never had any – beautiful things, I mean.' (368)

A crucial difference between the two is their relationship to 'beautiful things'. Perhaps having little interest in food, Emerald also has no interest in 'beautiful things.' We may say that there is a clear correlation between their interest in food, or the act of eating, and the way they relate to art, or the beautiful. Here we should recall that Leslie displayed shocking arrogance when he was served food at Mrs Moysey's house; checking out the appearance of the food and pushing it back without eating it. Furthermore, he sits most of the day in the dining room window, watching the people, especially 'ladies with nice figures,' passing by (355). While he wants to know who these women are, he does not enjoy the moment at all when he is in their presence; 'Leslie liked the ladies' conversation less than their figures' (356). His haughty behaviour and his tendency to see only the surface of something and not go any further may be in keeping with the tendency, to which Bowen critically referred, for stories to be considered art simply because they are non-commercial (Bowen, 1936, 42). In other words, his attitude can be seen as an irony against the trend to celebrate the formal novelty of modernist works.

By taking such a large quantity of chocolate and 'outdated Victorian design', Mrs Moysey is creating art. In her bedroom, 'tasting […] the sweetness of self-betrayal,' she reveals to Emerald that she is writing a book.

> 'Oh yes, I wrote a good deal – a life of myself. Well, not my life strictly, that wouldn't be interesting to me; I do touch things up here and there. There are so many points in a life when things so nearly . . . I don't see any harm myself in putting those sorts of things in […]. Then there are some things, of course, I leave out. Well, you wouldn't expect to find in a book about anyone's indigestion . . . Daph and Bob are loving the story, they listen entranced –' (369)

What is immediately apparent here is that she is penning life-writing rather than autobiography. Life-writing 'involves, and goes beyond, biography,' and '[i]t encompasses everything … from the fictional to the factional' ('What is Life-Writing?': 2020). '[S]o many points in a life when things so nearly . . .' indicates that there are many situations in her life where something was likely to happen and did not, and she can make that something happen in her own writing. Through this act of creation, she is reconstructing her life based on whether it is 'interesting' to her. It is a process of taking back into her own hands the life that has long been under the 'gentleman's ways'.

Moreover, it is noteworthy that Mrs Moysey is clearly aware of the presence of readers of her work, as evidenced by her statement that no one 'expect[s] to find in a book about anyone's indigestion'. Until Daph and Bobby arrived, Mrs Moysey kept it a secret that she was writing because '[s]o few people would understand,' which 'sound[s] terrible' to her (369). She needs someone who understands. 'That's what's wonderful about children, isn't it; they understand. Bobby and Daph enter into everything' (369). As Emerald points out, they are probably too young to 'understand' the content. Still, there is no doubt that they 'accept' her work. Her creation seeks to be accepted, which is the opposite attitude to the 'high-hat complacency' (Bowen, 1936, 42) often found in the 'arty work' that is conscious of High Modernism. It can be assumed that Bowen's belief that art and the public should not be separate is reflected here.

Furthermore, I would like to emphasise that Daph and Bobby are not only the appreciators of Mrs Moysey's art, but also creators themselves. The first thing Emerald sees when she rushes into Mrs Moysey's bedroom is their work, an unfinished 'empire of chocolate boxes' (366) which Emerald has unintentionally partially destroyed; there are towers and bridges made by piling up the chocolate boxes that are 'very artistic and striking', as well as a kind of road system made of ribbons. The children soon undertake to rebuild their empire; 'Daph placed the Prince of Wales on The Angelus, Bobby knocked him off again' (369). It is apparent that they are creating their empire through an iterative process of constructing, destroying, and reconstructing. We should pay attention to the fact that the process is analogous to the creation of Mrs Moysey's life-writing. In her bedroom, all three are both recipients and creators of art, indulging in the sweetness of chocolate, the sweetness of eating as much as they like, and the sweetness of creating and accepting another world; this space is, indeed, an 'empire of sweetness'.

Indigestion and the Absence of Authority: Bowen's Trust in Mass Art Form

Nevertheless, it is obvious that Mrs Moysey's 'empire of sweetness' is 'a zone of popular art, contaminated by the easy pleasures or the desire of the flesh', disorderly and grotesque. Among the huge quantity of chocolates and chocolate boxes, all three of them are suffering from indigestion and the faces of Daph and Bobby are smeared with chocolate; 'Thick brown stains, dispersed from their mouths by the dabbing of Mrs Moysey, echoed over their faces. A thin brown dribble of chocolate ran down Daph's frock' (369). Their indigestion caused by their excessive consumption of chocolate can be seen as a signifier of their deviation from social norms. Near the end of this story there is a confrontation between Emerald, who does not tolerate any deviation, and Mrs Moysey. From her point of view as a mother who values respectability, she and her children are victims of Mrs Moysey's entrapment. She shouts:

> 'They are never allowed any [chocolate]! They *know* they're never allowed any! *You* know they're never allowed any. No wonder they're sick and poisoned and don't know their own mother. Sold!' said Emerald slowly, 'that's what I've been!'
> [...]
> 'Stolen!' said Emerald. 'That's what they've been . . . my own children.'

> She said no more, for her virtue, her indignation more awful than eloquence mounted into a wave that, dwarfing her, even toppled over the room. As though the weight of that wave were to crash down both women put their arms for the menaced children. (370)

At this moment, Daph and Bobby cling to Mrs Moysey, and Emerald, who challenges this deviant space with her 'virtue' and 'indignation', is completely defeated. Her repeated phrase 'never allowed' is a clear indication of her authoritative nature. Her defeat therefore highlights how such authority does not fit in with Mrs. Moysey's 'empire.' Her collection of chocolate box art includes masterpieces and sentimental secular paintings by unknown artists, that are all equivalent in that they are chocolate box art. There is also no hierarchy between Mrs Moysey, Daph and Bobby in their enjoyment of chocolate and art and their suffering from indigestion. It is fair to say that elements reminiscent of authority are thoroughly eliminated from Mrs Moysey's space.

Here we are reminded of the authoritative nature of 'high art', which is not supposed to be 'readily digestible', or easily understood by the masses. As mentioned in the first section of this paper, Bowen refers to the 'high-hat complacency' of the 'arty' works in the preface to *The Faber Book of Modern Short Stories*. Underlying her argument that art and the public should not be separate must be her discomfort with the authoritative nature of high modernism. Mrs Moysey's space is filled with the joy of savouring art, which has the power to nullify authority and hierarchy. The strength of the space must be a testament to Bowen's trust in the mass art form. The chocolate box, Mrs Moysey's space, Mrs Moysey herself and Bowen share the same characteristic of thoroughly enjoying novelty under an old-fashioned exterior. Mrs Moysey's room retains holdovers from the past that high modernism tries to deny, and yet it is still a place where new worlds are constructed. Her bedroom is neither a mere outdated space nor a space of 'high art' of high modernism, but an unclassifiable chaotic space that is grounded in the previous century and in mass art.

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Within Walls and Artifacts: Object-Driven Identities in Elizabeth Bowen's "Look at All Those Roses" and "Attractive Modern Homes" ~ Andrea Zvoníčková

Attraction, allure and urgency of perception lie at the heart of the titles of both short stories – 'Look at All Those Roses' and 'Attractive Modern Homes'.[1] They immediately draw us into a world of perfection and idyllic sceneries represented by gorgeous houses, colourful flowers, overflowing vases, impressive cars, and polished tea sets. A world where beauty shapes the very fabric of the narrative, and most importantly a material world at the core of Elizabeth Bowen's writing so crucial for her conception of human experience, perception, and identity. My main aim is to point out the profound role and influence of space, place and objects in these two short stories.

Both 'Look at All Those Roses' and 'Attractive Modern Homes' capture a deceptive allure – while their titles suggest a sense of beauty and charm, the narratives unfold in places that feel unsettlingly alienated, creating a sharp contrast between appearance and experience. Each story is grounded in Bowen's distinctive approach to materiality, in which the protagonists' understanding of their surroundings – and by extension their identities – is deeply tied to the objects around them. Through material objects, they navigate a world that appears attractive on the surface, yet their interactions with these objects reveal a profound disconnection, offering insight into the elusive and often fragmented nature of perception.

Bowen's reflective objects

Although Bowen explores her narratives while employing free indirect discourse, the story often tends to be focalised through a particular character within a specific narrative. Elke D'hoker notes that this leads to a 'fragmented, multifocal perspective, which questions rather than affirms reality.' (2016: 55) Indeed, reality in Bowen's short stories is often unreliable, precisely because it is observed through the eyes of a certain character. D'hoker continues to say that 'the houses and homes [...] in

[1] Future parenthetical references will read 'Roses' and 'Homes' respectively.
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Bowen's fiction do then not just express their inhabitants' personalities, but also the focaliser's consciousness.' (2016: 56)

As Bowen attempts to uncover the abstract through the palpable, she relies heavily on material objects positioned in her stories. In fact, Bowen herself noted that a story 'must not fail to give […] an impression of physical actuality (concreteness), and that the scene […] can be an important character' (quoted in Ingelsby, 2007: 312). She does so by having her characters continually interact with their surroundings, being constantly aware of their environment and of the objects around them. Bowen's characters constantly find themselves not only wondering about but overthinking their relationships with their possessions. In order to imitate this feeling of uneasiness and subsequent drowning in one's material surroundings, the reader is faced with a high number of lists, as if taking a mental note of all that one sees at any given time, a mental note which attempts to ground, but rather overwhelms. In 'Attractive Modern Homes', for example, one of these lists goes as follows, when the focaliser of the story, the deeply unhappy Mrs Watson, looks around her unfinished home: 'the half-built houses with their skeleton roofs, scaffolding, tubs of mortar, stacks of piping, and salmon-pink window frames' (Homes: 584).

This raw image evokes that of a body, of a skeleton and guts and flesh, waiting to be assembled, waiting to be whole, just as Mrs Watson is anxiously waiting to finally feel a sense of belonging in her brand-new house, reflecting the interconnectedness of space and mind. In the conversations about Bowen's treatment of things, there's one question in particular which is relevant - do the objects in Bowen's writing inherently possess the ability to influence human consciousness, or is this ability imposed upon them by human consciousness itself?

Bowen's portrayal of objects extends beyond mere decoration or symbolism but rather suggests that material things and human consciousness are entwined in an extremely delicate way. In her article about expressive objects, Elizabeth C. Ingelsby considers Bowen's objects as endowed with emotions not simultaneously occupied by her characters and as having relationships with one another without the need for a human mediator as a source of their personification (2007: 307). However, while this autonomy challenges the traditional hierarchy where mind reigns supreme over matter, many of Bowen's narratives complicate this by maintaining a character that constantly observes and interprets the world around them. Therefore, even if objects had such a quality of meaningful existence unattached to human consciousness, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to observe it, especially in the context of Bowen's ever-present focaliser in these narratives.

The question of whether objects can have meaningful existence detached from human perception lingers, as her characters often struggle to fully grasp the emotions and relationships contained within their material surroundings. Although objects in Bowen's stories may seem to act independently of human consciousness, the presence of the human observer often keeps them tethered to the world of perception, suggesting that while objects may have a degree of autonomy, they are still intricately bound to the act of observation – and this act of observation is what allows them this autonomy in the first place. Bowen presents us with a subtle tension between the autonomy of objects and the supremacy of perception and exposes 'the supposedly solid relationship between subject and object'. (Mattison, 2015: 392) While material things exert influence and exist beyond the characters' control,

embodying feelings and histories that are not necessarily human, the act of observing and perception, of focusing one's attention on the material world, imbues these objects with another layer of meaning, a layer more readily available for human perception. Bowen continuously blurs the line between subject and object, presenting the material world as both a mirror and a mysterious hidden force in her exploration of perception and identity.

In 'Phenomenology of Perception', Maurice Merleau-Ponty reconsiders the role and agency of one's body in relation to objects and to the world as a whole. He points out that it 'continuously breathes life into the visible spectacle, animates it and nourishes it from within, and forms a system with it' (2012: 209). To explain his theory, Merleau-Ponty proposes to us to imagine a cube being observed by a spectator, by a body. While he understands and agrees that all six equal sides of the cube exist, he emphasises the fact that it exists in such a way for itself. But for us as observing and perceptive bodies, that in itself does not constitute meaning and significance - the cube does not exist for itself, it exists for the subject of the perceiving body as an object (2012: 210). This concept of perception, where objects acquire meaning through constant interaction with a conscious human observer, deeply resonates with Elizabeth Bowen's treatment of materiality. While the objects in her writing seem vividly alive and emotionally resonant, they do not possess true autonomy. They are never fully detached from the human consciousness that engages with them, and instead they remain reliant on it to produce and retain meaning.

Elke D'hoker talks about 'thoughts and feelings evoked by certain objects [which] are projected onto those objects and translated into characteristics of material reality itself' (2016: 57), essentially proposing that it is human consciousness as a driving force behind one's identity, but filtered (or translated, in Elke D'hoker's words) through objects. Bowen's characters are faced continuously with this constant feedback loop with themselves.

Alienating houses

Bowen often positions a female character into the forefront of her stories, typically in order to explore the family home which 'stands out as both a common setting and a dominant poetic image' (D'hoker, 2016: 51). Through this scenery imbued with hidden messages to be found and decoded, Bowen frequently presents us with detailed descriptions of houses, homes, and domestic spaces, which are not just physical settings but also emotional and psychological landscapes. Her characters' relationships with these spaces are often fraught with tension, nostalgia, and a sense of dislocation. The hidden codes are illegible, jumbled, unreachable. In the domestic space, Bowen seems to complicate her relationship to materiality even further, as objects once again assume the role of a mirror. The certainty and authenticity of objects is questioned by both Lou and Mrs Watson, who 'had looked forward to having her own things round her again, and come, perhaps, to expect too much of them' (Homes: 582), only to have her enthusiasm diminished by the less than ideal reality, as the rooms and the house still smell of plaster, the stairs shake and shavings are filling the garden, and there is persistent hammering from the surrounding houses.

Even Lou, at first enchanted by the beauty of the garden overflowing with colourful roses and clinging to it in hopes of finding authentic beauty and life, is at once

disillusioned. After their car breaks down and they approach the house of Mrs Mather and Josephine, she notes that 'there stood the house, waiting. Why should a house wait? Most pretty scenes have something passive about them, but this looked like a trap baited with beauty, set ready to spring.' (Roses: 573), and goes on further to animate it by noticing that its 'dark windows stared with no expression through the flowers' (Roses: 571), an imagine which is reflective of her empty and somehow secretive relationship with Edward.

If there is a message hidden in objects, Lou and Mrs Watson struggle to comprehend it when faced with the stark contrast of emptiness and alienation hidden beneath the facade of beauty and allure, of the stunning and strikingly brilliant roses in contrast to the dead musty air of the house and the underlying mystery and violence, the glamour of a newly built home in contrast to the loneliness and raw sterility. Liggins aptly comments on this by writing that 'the unhomeliness of modernity surfaces when the ideal home produces a soulless alienation rather than the promised security' (2020: 246) This disconnection of ideal and reality puts both these female characters into a strange trance and pushes their own bodies into liminal spaces. Mukherjee thinks about this as 'female characters […] in a perpetual dream-like and transient state, drifting at the borderline of sleeping and waking, and roving at the threshold of being dead and living' (2017: 238).

In 'Attractive Modern Homes', Mrs Watson feels terribly lonely in her brand-new house. At first, she attempts to accept it graciously and turn it into a loving home for her young family. Gaston Bachelard notes that intimate spaces evoke emotions and memories that influence our sense of self and our relationship with the world around us and he also emphasises the dialectic of the inside and outside as a contrast of the security of one's home and the vastness and mystery of the outside world. (2015: xxxvii) Here, Bowen's approach is intriguing as she positions her characters in unfamiliar places, or rather places which should feel homely, but give off a feeling of the unknown, of the uncanny. Homes in both 'Look at All Those Roses' and 'Attractive Modern Homes' are unknown, unknowable, and threatening. They feel as an inauthentic betrayal of one's expectations. When Mrs Mather asks Lou to wait in the parlour, Lou looks 'around the room, to make sure it was ordinary. This window-ended parlour was lined with objects that looked honest and worn without having antique grace. A faded room should look homely. But extinct paper and phantom cretonnes gave this a gutted air' (Roses: 577). In the Watsons' house, Mr Watson

> screwed the bronze name-plate on to the gate, while (Mrs Watson) immediately put up the orange style curtains to give the facade style and keep strangers from looking in. But her things appeared uneasy in the new home. The armchairs and settee covered in jazz tapestry, the sideboard with mirror panel, the alabaster light bowls, even the wireless cabinet looked sulky, as though they would rather have stayed in the van. (Homes: 582)

Mrs Watson, however, does not wish to keep strangers from looking in, but rather secretly wants to be seen as part of her space, seen and perceived as a beautiful object worth everybody's attention. During a brief moment of self-reflection, she admits that 'everything that had happened to her seemed natural - love, marriage, the birth of Freddie, then Vera - for she had seen it happen to someone else' (Homes: 585) and she feels disheartened by the fact that 'no one remarked their curtains, no one glanced at their door' (Homes: 583). This longing for recognition reveals a profound

connection between her identity and her domestic space, as her home serves as an extension of herself, embodying her desires, hopes, and disappointments. Her idea of life events seeming natural underscore a sense of resignation and detachment but also the realisation that she relies on others to position and arrange her in her own life.

Away from her friends and their constant company, Mrs Watson at first enjoys the melancholy their moving away arouses, but slowly morphs into another domestic object, but an object with no one to imbue it with meaning. She is alienated, she is physically incapable of escaping their new house as the roads are unfinished, essentially rendering their car impractical, she is afraid of stepping into the mud and spends a considerable amount of time wiping it off her children's shoes at the doorstep, and the lamps along the road are few and dim. Finally, she expresses both anger and frustration at her spatial restrictions by saying that 'this place isn't anywhere' (Homes: 588), which her husband who enjoys the freedom of leaving for work every day does not seem to comprehend.

Elke D'hoker similarly reads Bowen's homes as ones with 'emptiness at the heart of the house, which threatens to rob the women of any personality or sense of self' (2016: 63), and goes on to highlight the juxtaposition of the male and female attitudes towards the home. She notes that 'the very ideal of home as warm, comforting and protective is mocked as a male fantasy' (2016: 64) which the woman must upkeep but which will ultimately destroy her.

Elizabeth Bowen's portrayal of domestic spaces reflects deep tension between the old and the new. As Victoria Glendinning points out, 'Bowen writes about a vanishing way of life, especially during times when all homes and lives were threatened' (quoted in Liggins, 2020: 242) This sense of threat paired with the haunting emptiness of these homes also allow for an insightful exploration of gendered perceptions of domestic space. When the woman such as Mrs Watson is tasked with producing and maintaining the sense of a welcoming home, she rightfully expects the house to already be imbued with tradition and history. But what stories are there to know and uncover in 'the strangely unhistorical nature of the new house, often contrasted with the grandiosity of the ancestral mansion'? (ibid: 243)

The modern home, despite being designed to offer comfort and security, often fails to do so in Bowen's fiction. Instead, the façade of domesticity hides deeper, often unsettling truths. Maud Ellmann similarly suggests that Bowen's houses often turn out to be mausoleums, filled with unspoken secrets that haunt the present (2003: 247). This juxtaposition of the new and the old in Bowen's stories creates a complex dynamic, where the promise of modernity is shadowed by an inescapable past. When faced with these empty walls and meaningless surroundings, Bowen's characters realise their own profound dependency for identity in social context and recognition by a social group. Her characters frequently search for an identity that is significant to both themselves and others, often in the absence of traditional family structures. The search for identity is closely tied to their desire for acceptance and their attempts to fit into the moral and social order around them, which is echoed by Mr Watson being appalled upon finding a body in the woods - not being horrified by the potential corpse he stumbled upon, but by the fact that it's his wife lying on the ground covered in mud, scolding her for acting in an improper way.

The character of Lou is in its nature not a home-maker, but rather a home-wrecker. Similarly to the uncertainty of her relationship to Edward, she does not see the place they occupy together as a solid home to come back to:

> [Lou and Edward] looked forward with no particular pleasure to London and unlocking the stuffy flat, taking in the milk, finding bills in the letter-box. They were going home for the purely negative reason that there was nowhere else they could as cheaply go. The weekend had not been amusing, but at least it had been 'away'. Now they could foresee life for weeks ahead - until someone else invited them - the typewriter, the cocktail-shaker, the telephone, runs in the car out of London to nowhere special. Love when Edward got a cheque in the post, quarrels about people on the way home from parties (Roses: 571).

Their home is disappointing and unhomely due to the overwhelming number of mundane objects, reminiscent not of fond memories, but rather of the raw practicality of every day. Here, Bowen's use of objects to explore identity is also evident as she reveals the folly of clinging to objects as containers of human identity. Yet her characters fail to escape it and end up being swallowed by it.

It is significant that both stories involve a passage of the main character lying down on the ground, closing her eyes, resting in the grass or mud, and for a second becoming one with the space, free from the overwhelming task of reflecting upon one's surroundings. In this moment, the character becomes disconnected from space and begins to drift away. Bowen seems to imply that such momentary tranquillity may be found in nature, a space where there are no human-made objects which would require constant perception and interpretation. Instead, it becomes a place where one might begin to peer beyond the palpable reality and catch a fleeting glimpse at one's true self.

This reprieve from material objects contrasts with the alienating experience of human-made spaces, where objects are imbued with personal meanings, demanding constant interpretation and engagement. Bowen's stories suggest that people project their identities and emotions onto their surroundings, investing objects with significance in a way that shapes and can even consume them because of such constant cycle of perception. Yet Bowen hints at a way to overcome this trap. The fleeting peace her characters find in nature, removed from the press of human-made objects, implies a need to reimagine our relationship with space. Rather than solely reflecting on objects, there is a potential for a reciprocal communication with one's environment. In this sense, by engaging with space in a dynamic way, individuals may escape its isolating effects and instead could transform space into a source of renewed significance and personal freedom.

Rewriting space

In *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre talks about space being a product of social, political, and economic processes, and he also puts emphasis on space being something created by human agency. (1991) Similarly, Gaston Bachelard focuses on the intimate nature of dwellings and claims that it is imagination which increases the real value of space (2015: 5), thus also highlighting the involvement of conscious mind. The experience of shelter and protection in the home is for the inhabitant based in reality; in the actual palpable walls of one's home, but created in the mind.

In Bowen's writing, characters ascribe meanings to objects and give these objects the ability to influence them in return. It is always an activity done by an individual, typically by a woman. But an important part of this human agency in space is the profound potential for resistance hinted at by both Bachelard and Lefebvre, and at times explored as a resolution of Bowen's stories. For Bachelard, this resistance is seen through personal imagination and memory, allowing people to create intimate, personal spaces that push back against the standardisation of modern society (2015: 43). Lefebvre, similarly, argues that individuals can reclaim control of space from dominant power structures (1991: 31). Therefore, if the mind can create meaning in space, it also has the power to reshape it.

However, before this resolution can be reached, Bowen positions her characters into margins of uncertainty, they are dislocated yet clinging onto their material surroundings. In 'Look at all Those Roses', Lou is described as someone who 'sees life in terms of ideal moments' (Roses: 572). Her experiences are shaped by her physical relationship with Edward, a man who is not entirely hers and likely never will be, as his wife refuses to divorce him. Amid Lou's feelings of detachment and absence, she yearns for something palpable. Upon seeing the house whose garden is overgrown with beautiful roses, she expresses her wish: 'I wish we lived there […]. It really looked like somewhere' (Roses: 572). Lou is inherently incapable of understanding the world and her own place within it unattached to its objects. Upon meeting Mrs Mather who lives isolated in a large house with her only child Josephine, who struggles with mobility, Lou considers her lost and disconnected from her surroundings. Lou notes that 'she must have lost contact with the outer world completely: there was now nothing to 'place' her by' (Roses: 574), highlighting Mrs Mather's detachment from the community and external reality. This sense of disconnection is contrasted when we learn that for Lou, 'her idea of love was adhesiveness' (Roses: 575). This suggests a need for closeness and bond that anchors people together. Lou's understanding of love underscores the alienation she perceives in Mrs Mather, who seems suspended in isolation without meaningful attachments. It is precisely this bodily closeness or distance (or even absence) which both Lou and Mrs Watson from 'Attractive Modern Homes' utilise in order to place themselves in the world and understand their place within it. When such certainty is shaken and Lou finds herself in an unfamiliar house and Mrs Watson in an unfamiliar city far away from all her friends, the horror of abstraction sets in.

The destruction of their identities and change into one of the objects in the house stems not only from the excessive obsession with materiality, but also from the lack of authentic connection which to hold on to, especially in terms of communication. Mrs Watson, as she watches her daughter receiving a peppermint from their neighbour over the fence, is almost jealous of not being invited to tea, not even over the fence, not being spoken to. Her husband, similarly, does not speak to her and even declares his intention to stop having any remarks at all. Josephine, the disabled girl who due to the abuse from her father has been lying flat on her back in an invalid wicker carriage for six years, is never spoken to by her mother, as if existing purely as another object within their home, unable to move on its own, unable to leave. Finally, when Lou wheels Josephine's carriage out into the garden and lies down beside her, they agree not to talk and instead to close their eyes. In this proximity to Josephine and in the silence surrounding them, Lou starts to mirror Josephine's descent into rigidity, she advances towards the edge of herself.

Perhaps Bowen suggests that finding oneself in a liminal space, on the margin, is not destructive, but constructive. Lou seems to gain an understanding about herself, noting that 'I only think I want things, I only think I want Edward' (Roses: 580). Mukherjee writes that 'Bowen's female characters [...] are either at the transitional phases of maturation or clinging to the thin line that separates life and death' (2017: 235). Doesn't this intentionality, then, mirror Lefebvre's idea of the importance of language and expression as a tool for reclaiming and reimagining space?

Merleau-Ponty notes that perception is not just a passive reception of sensory data, but rather an active and intentional process that shapes our understanding of the world. Perception is deeply rooted in the body and its relationship to the world, which Bowen reaffirms by giving her characters a resolution after being lost in the margins as they snap back into reality, Mrs Watson is approached by a female neighbour in a similar situation looking to make friends, and Lou gets away from the lurking horrors and violence of the house overgrown by roses, escaping its seductive allure of becoming nothing at all.

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There's also the Elizabeth Bowen Society Facebook page for all those interested in Elizabeth Bowen and her work.

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