‘I DO WRITE, I THINK, FROM THE EYE’
THE PECULIAR AESTHETIC OF ELIZABETH BOWEN

by

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ABSTRACT

The style of the novelist Elizabeth Bowen is often found perplexing. As a schoolgirl and young woman she had aspired in turn to be an architect, a visual artist or a poet, and by viewing her fiction from those perspectives I attempt to unravel some of the complexities of that style. In each of her ten novels, she adapts the techniques of the visual artist and the draughtsman, drawing on an eclectic and evolving range of genres. Both place and atmosphere are of primary concern to her, as is the light which she uses to illuminate the setting, something she derives from Impressionism and Post-Impressionism. The principal techniques adapted from genres dealing with perspective and fragmentation (Cubism, Collage, Futurism and Surrealism) are a form of literary collage and a fracturing of her syntax, which I term dyslocution. Within her syntax rhythm, half-rhyme, assonance and alliteration are among poetic techniques to be found: thus she creates a form of poetry.

Her literary collage, sometimes amounting to palimpsest, is arrived at by 'pasting' into her text literary references from various English, Irish and French writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This is often done in a playful way, resembling a game of literary 'Hunt the Thimble': the reader who discovers 'thimbles' will find that they enhance the text. Through her collage she seeks to pay tribute to her predecessors, something of increasing importance as she grows older.

Bowen depicts the human condition, in particular the feminine condition, with the forensic, yet compassionate, detachment of a surgeon. Lurking behind the fractured syntax there is always an awareness of the desire of her characters to fall into a pattern: they find themselves in predicaments, puzzles which they attempt to solve from disparate pieces, but they are often thwarted or left in liminal situations.

Key words: Bowen, light, place, poem/poet/poetry, paint/painter/painting, novel/novelist, pattern, collage, dyslocution, shape, geometry, palimpsest.

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ABBREVIATIONS

For references I have followed MLA8 guidelines. I take the precaution of referencing the title of the work as well as the author and page number, thus (Woolf, *Moments* xx).

Non-fiction

Afterthought	*Afterthought: Pieces about Writing.* Longmans, 1962.
Autobiographical	Autobiographical note for Curtis Brown, 15/10/48, Elizabeth Bowen Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, U Texas, Austin, box 1, folder 5, p. 2.
BC	*Bowen's Court & Seven Winters*. Introduced by Hermione Lee. Vintage Classics, 1999.
Collected 2019	*Collected Stories*. With an Introduction by John Banville. Everyman's, 2019.
Collected	*Collected Stories*. Introduced by Angus Wilson. 1980. Vintage Classics, 1999.
English	*English Novelists: Britain in Pictures,* No. 23. Collins, 1942.
Impressions	*Collected Impressions*. Longmans Green, 1950.
Listening	*Listening In, Broadcasts, Speeches, and Interviews by Elizabeth Bowen*. Edited by Allan Hepburn. Edinburgh UP, 2010.
Mulberry	*The Mulberry Tree: Writings of Elizabeth Bowen*. Edited by Hermione Lee. Virago, 1986.
Orion	'Notes on Writing a Novel'. *Orion,* vol. II, autumn 1945. Nicholson and Watson, pp. 18-29.
'Passage'	'A Passage to E.M. Forster', *Aspects of E.M. Forster*. Edited by Oliver Stallybrass. Edward Arnold, 1969, pp. 1-12.
People	*People, Places, Things: Essays by Elizabeth Bowen*. Edited by Allan Hepburn. Edinburgh UP, 2008.
Pictures	*Pictures and Conversations: Chapters of an Autobiography, with Other Collected Writings*. Allen Lane, 1975.
Rome	*A Time in Rome*. Longmans Green, 1960.
Weight	*The Weight of a World of Feeling: Reviews and Essays by Elizabeth Bowen*. Edited by Allan Hepburn. Northwestern UP, 2017.

Fiction

Bazaar	*The Bazaar and Other Stories*. Edited by Allan Hepburn. Edinburgh UP, 2008.
DH	*The Death of the Heart*. 1938. Vintage, 1998.
Day	*A Day in the Dark*. Cape, 1965.
ET	*Eva Trout*. Cape, 1969.
FR	*Friends and Relations*. 1931. Penguin, 1986.
HD	*The Heat of the Day*. 1949. Reprint Society, 1950.
HP	*The House in Paris*. 1935. Penguin, 1987.
Ivy	*Ivy Gripped the Steps and Other Stories*. Knopf, 1946.
LG	*The Little Girls*. 1964. Penguin, 1982.
LS	*The Last September.* 1929. Vintage, 1998.
TH	*The Hotel*. 1927. Penguin, 1987.
TN	*To the North*. 1932. Penguin, 1987.
WL	*A World of Love*. 1955. Penguin, 1983.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

INTRODUCTION

The novelist Elizabeth Bowen (1899-1973) adapts the techniques of the visual artist and the draughtsman to assimilate into her fiction patterns and images which are more than simple description, creating a synthetic aesthetic peculiar to her. She draws on the techniques used in an eclectic range of two- and three-dimensional visual art genres including, but not limited to, architecture, religious iconography and stained glass, and those dealing with perspective and fragmentation, such as the art of Ancient Egypt, Cubism, Collage and Assemblage, Futurism, the found object and Surrealism. Through these patterns and images, Bowen depicts the human condition, and in particular the feminine condition, with the forensic, yet compassionate, detachment of a surgeon. Dominant among these techniques are her fragmented syntax, a form both of Cubism and of Futurism which I term dyslocution, while her prose shimmers with reflections of other authors to create literary collage. Using these two techniques she creates an individual poetry.

In this thesis I examine their use in her ten novels: *The Hotel* (1927); *The Last September* (1929); *Friends and Relations* (1931); *To the North* (1932); *The House in Paris* (1935); *The Death of the Heart* (1938); *The Heat of the Day* (1949); *A World of Love* (1955); *The Little Girls* (1964); and *Eva Trout* (1969). I also draw on some of her short fiction from the war period. Where it is helpful to do so, I illustrate my argument with a piece of art which has the same or similar characteristics to the piece of prose under consideration.

The Elizabeth Bowen work which was the trigger point for this examination of her aesthetic is her war-time story ‘Oh, Madam’ (*Collected* 578-582). In this short monologue Bowen replicates in her prose the destruction in the bombed house which the housekeeper describes to her mistress in broken up sentences: fractured phrases represent the shards of

glass, the lumps of plaster, the splintered wood and the dust which are in the house. E.M. Forster (1879-1970) recognises this technique in a footnote to his 1941 Rede Lecture on Virginia Woolf when he says of Bowen's war-time stories: 'Elizabeth Bowen is, so far as I know, the only novelist who has assimilated the bombed areas of London into her art; descriptions of them are of course frequent' (Forster, *Woolf* 21).[1] Forster is making a distinction between 'assimilate' and 'describe', something I bear in mind as I examine Bowen's work.

The young Elizabeth Bowen attended painting classes held in Dublin by Elizabeth Yeats; a fellow pupil was Mainie Jellett (1897-1944) who would go on to become one of Ireland's most notable and influential modernist painters. Bowen remembers the excitement of 'crocuses springing alive, with each stroke, on the different pieces of white paper'.[2]

Elizabeth Yeats. *Elementary Brushwork Studies*, Plate XX. 1900.

Bowen's mother, fearful that if her daughter learned to read at too early an age she would develop the mental imbalance suffered by her father, did not allow her to do this until she was seven. Consequently the child heard stories rather than reading them for herself. With her imagination stimulated by the picture or the heard word, rather than the seen word,

[1] At the time Forster was writing, Bowen had published 'Oh, Madam', 'In the Square' and 'The Demon Lover', three of her most powerful war-stories. The footnote appears only in the pamphlet version of the lecture and not in the version in *Two Cheers for Democracy* (Forster, *Two* 249-265)

[2] Elizabeth Yeats (1868-1940), the sister of W.B. Yeats, trained and worked as an art teacher in London before returning to Dublin in 1900. Her *Elementary Brushwork Studies* was published in London in 1900. https://digital.library.villanova.edu/Item/vudl:132444#?c=&m=&s=&cv=&xywh=-3373%2C-239%2C11927%2C4777

Bowen's early childhood was one in which the image would be predominant, and interesting shapes and colours would come to be stored in her memory. As the Polish short story writer Bruno Schulz (1892-1942) puts it:

> I do not know just how in childhood we arrive at certain images, images of crucial significance to us. They are like filaments in a solution around which the sense of the world crystallizes for us. . . . They are meanings that seem predestined for us, ready and waiting at the very entrance of our life. . . . Such images constitute a program, establish our soul's fixed fund of capital, which is allotted to us very early in the form of inklings and half-conscious feelings. It seems to me that the rest of our life passes in the interpretation of those insights, in the attempt to master them with all the wisdom we acquire, to draw them through all the range of intellect we have in our possession. These early images mark the boundaries of an artist's creativity. (Schulz, *Street* 19-20)

Bowen would spend her adult life interpreting the insights of her childhood, translating images into words on the page so that they resemble as closely as possible the original visual image, rather than a string of words. She was aware of this, saying 'I do write, I think, from the eye' in an interview with Walter Allen in 1955 (*Weight* 26).[3] No matter what the genre may be, the images Bowen conjures up in her writing are her life blood; as Dinah says in *The Little Girls*: 'It's by picturing things that one lives, I completely think' (*LG* 48). The Bowen family crest is a hawk, a bird with prodigious eyesight, a fitting emblem for Bowen whose writing would derive more than anything from her keen imaginative eye. Throughout her work, she will use her painter's eye and what she describes as her 'concentration of vision' to bring to life her imagined, unpainted pictures, first of all in her early short stories and subsequently in her ten novels and later short stories (*Listening* 281).

It is possible to see Bowen's oeuvre from a number of viewpoints, none of them 'wrong'. As her agent Spencer Curtis Brown says in his introduction to her autobiography: '[h]erself a many-faceted person, her gifts were many-faceted too' (*Pictures* ix). Each

[3] The 'think' in this sentence could be taken in either of two ways, that of 'believe' and that of carrying out a mental operation.

facet of Bowen reflects back something individual: she has been seen variously as a writer of comedy of manners; a writer of tragedy of manners; an Irish novelist; a writer of psychological novels; a Gothic novelist; a novelist of the uncanny; a novelist dealing with gender and with sexuality; a middle-brow author; a writer of place; a novelist who by the end of her career had lost her way. Nels Pearson has recently placed her with James Joyce (1882-1941) and Samuel Beckett (1906-1989) as an Irish cosmopolitan, positioning her in Europe, rather than in Ireland or in England (Pearson, *Cosmopolitanism*). While her subject matter may be seen as superficially middle-brow, the way in which she delivers it is not. Aimee Gasston tells us: 'There is an almost bourgeois undercurrent of disapproval for Bowen's unique style which she might have got away with had she been less daring and more worried about the basic etiquette of prose-making, the literary equivalent of the manners she would satirise in those texts' (Gasston, 'Not Eccentric' 11). It is above all her disregard for syntax which contributes to her peculiar style. To describe this dysmorphic locution I use the neologism 'dyslocution', a term which needs explanation. The word 'locution' exists in both English and French, but is more commonly used in French. The OED gives as the primary meaning 'a form of expression; a phrase, an expression', while the French meaning 'manière de s'exprimer' or 'façon de parler' can be rendered in English as 'way of expressing' or 'way of speaking'. The OED describes 'dys-' as an "' inseparable prefix, opposed to [eu-], having a notion of hard, bad, unlucky, etc.; destroying the good sense of a word, or increasing its bad sense" (Liddell and Scott)'. By prefixing 'locution' with 'dys-', we arrive at 'dyslocution' or disordered locution. In his essays on 'Reading as Translation' of the works of James Joyce, Fritz Senn (b.1928) uses the prefix 'dis-' to give the term 'dislocution' to describe the dislocations which result from Joyce's 'startling locutions and other disruptive strategies' and the difficulties posed by translating language which is composite. He says:

> *Dislocution* has the advantage of not being predefined. It suggests a spatial metaphor for all manner of metamorphoses, switches, transfers, displacements, but also acknowledges the overall significance of speech and writing, and insinuates that the use of language can be less than orthodox. (Senn, *Joyce's* 202)

My own use of 'dyslocution' is narrower and ultimately more specific to the dysmorphic English syntax found in Bowen. I have restricted my examination to Bowen's use of it in her narrative and have not considered her dialogue at all.

I have chosen to be guided as far as possible by Bowen herself in my investigations, as the titles of most of the chapters indicate. At the same time I have used other lenses in examining her aesthetic and the techniques she uses to achieve it, some of them provided by the following artists and critics: the French Symbolist poet Stephane Mallarmé (1842-1898); the American artist, poet, author and Joyce scholar Guy Davenport (1927-2004); the British neuroaesthetician Semir Zeki (b.1940); and the French actor and director, Jacques Brunius (1906-1967), together with the British film critic Dilys Powell (1902-1995). Mallarmé was to influence the development of the genres of Cubism and Futurism. He affirmed: 'J'invente une langue qui doit nécessairement jaillir d'une poétique très nouvelle, que je pourrais définir en ces deux mots: Peindre, non la chose, mais l'effet qu'elle produit' (Mallarmé, *Correspondance* 137).[4] Like those of Mallarmé, the critical observations of Davenport seamlessly bridge the visual arts and the written word, and often resonate with my own instincts about Bowen. In a 1991 essay he describes a process in the paintings of the metaphysical/surrealist artist Giorgio De Chirico (1888-1978). 'Quite early in modernism there occurred an overflow of poetry into painting. There is a pressure of words just under the surface of a De Chirico, for example, as if a poem had had to abandon the verbal and redefine itself in paint' (Davenport, 'Civilisation' 26). In

[4] I am inventing a language which essentially springs from a very new poetry, which I can define in these two words: Paint, not the thing, but the effect it produces. (My translation)

Bowen, we feel the exact opposite: as if a picture has had to abandon the visual and redefine itself in words. In the same essay, Davenport writes:

> A cliché we hear often enough is that modern art is a break-up, a disintegration, and Cubism and abstract painting are offered as evidence. Exactly the opposite is true: the modern is an integration, a new beginning. It is in part a renaissance that reaches back to the archaic and that in several European cities, New York, Asheville, and Chicago brought together some of the most reactive minds of the century, disseminating energies and ideas which are still enriching the world. In another fifty years we will know more about the forties; it takes the perspective of one century to know another. (Davenport, 'Civilisation' 32)

Bowen's life was one which saw much disintegration as the Protestant Ascendency crumbled around her. On the other hand, she benefited from the pattern of proliferation made by her family network: as David Trotter says she had 'No Shortage of Cousins' (Trotter, 'Cousins' 31). Increasingly we find that she does precisely what Davenport describes; she integrates her work from fragments. Creating something from fragments interested her: in a 1969 interview for the *New York Review of Books* she lists as a hobby collecting scraps to make scrap screens (*Weight* 263). In her interview for the BBC programme *Desert Island Discs* she describes how, if she were stranded on a desert island, she would like to 'try and set up some kind of shell mosaic – [with] possibly different coloured sand patterns in it.'[5] In the same programme she chooses a kaleidoscope as her luxury object, describing its effect as 'brilliant and changing in shape and pattern every time I give it a shake' (*Desert Island Discs,* BBC Home Service, 11 March 1957).

Semir Zeki has made a study of the visual brain in the primate and has written extensively on the techniques of visual artists. In a paper on Salvador Dalí (1904-1989) he describes the painter following the affirmation of Mallarmé to paint not the thing, but what it represents:

> Dalí's aim, unlike that of the Surrealists, was rather to acknowledge the fact that we can perceive the world in very different ways and try to find a solution of sorts

[5] Eva Trout sets out 'a gull's bleached skull and some razor shells and some others, beach gleanings' on a table at Cathay (*ET* 100). By the time she meets Professor Holman on the flight to America this has expanded to her 'shell museum' (*ET* 147).

> for the apparent perceptual confusion and systematize it. His view was closer to that of Piero di Cosimo and Leonardo Da Vinci, who argued that one should not only look at the whole picture but also at the details which can reveal an alternative picture. (Zeki, 'Neural' 4)

As I have argued elsewhere:

> Similarly, Bowen includes details which have no apparent relevance to the narrative, but which reveal an alternative picture, or deepen our understanding of the existing one. These details may take the form of a quotation, or a veiled allusion to another text, or may simply be the name of an author. By treating them as clues to be solved, further details are revealed. (Hirst, 'Easel' 10)

One of the techniques Bowen uses to achieve this alternative picture is that of collage. I intend to use the term 'collage' where a literary critic might use 'intertextuality'. 'Collage' is the term which was used by writers and literary critics who were Bowen's contemporaries, such as Louis MacNeice (1907-1963) and W.H. Auden (1907-1973), thirty years before Julia Kristeva (b.1941) coined the term 'intertextuality'.[6] For Bowen's purposes it is altogether appropriate, melding as it does the printed word and the image. It is a technique used extensively by James Joyce who Davenport links with De Chirico in his essay 'Metaphysical Light in Turin' saying: 'The art of our century is that of collage, involving quotation, parody and cultural inventory' (Davenport, *Objects* 107). An artist may make a cultural inventory so that the work of preceding artists is preserved: in other words, it is a form of memorial or recorded memory. Bowen's cultural inventory is drawn from a wide range of English and French literature, and while some items are evident, others are well concealed. As she writes in 'Notes on Writing a Novel', 'much is to be learnt from the detective story' (*Orion* 19). For the attentive reader she provides clues, involving a game of 'Hunt the Thimble'. This approach is borne out by the views of the film critic Dilys Powell and the actor Jacques Brunius who, reviewing *The Little Girls,* discuss the book from the perspective of the detective novel. Brunius goes on to ask

[6] Patricia Laurence uses the term 'collage' throughout her 2019 biography of Bowen, *Elizabeth Bowen: A Literary Life*.

Powell if she had the same impression that he had, saying that 'it reminded [him] very much of the films of Alain Resnais in a way. This concern with memory, nostalgia, trying to recall the past and that necessity to be aware of tiny details because of this problem of memory'. Powell replies 'I think that's perfectly true'. (*The Critics*, BBC Home Service, 16 February 1964)

The facets of Bowen which I explore are her use of light, of place, of pattern, and of collage; I end by examining Bowen as a poet. These are largely untouched areas of Bowen scholarship. As Heather Ingman says in her 2021 biography of Bowen:

> The influence of her early art training on the intense visual and sensory imagery in her work deserves a full-length study: in a 1950 interview she pointed to the importance of light effects in her writing (*Listening* 280). Her enthusiasm for the new media of photography and cinema, and for the avant-garde movements of Surrealism and Futurism, and the way these played into her literary style merit further exploration. (Ingman, *Bowen* 152-153).

To date, Keri Walsh ('Elizabeth Bowen, Surrealist', 2007; 'Elizabeth Bowen and the Futurist Imagination', 2017), Shannon Wells-Lassagne ('La subversion du descriptif dans les romans d'Elizabeth Bowen', 2007; 'She-ward Bound', 2009), Lauren Elkin ('Light's Language: sensation and subjectivity in Elizabeth Bowen's early novels', 2014) and Michael Waldron ('"The wish to paint": Bowen and the Visual Arts', 2021) are among those who have begun the debate.

The literary world into which Bowen emerged was a rich one and I open my thesis by examining this world in Chapter 1, '*Le tour d'horizon*'. I begin with 'The English Contingent': from Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) and E.M. Forster she would become aware of a sense of place. In Katherine Mansfield (1888-1923) she finds colour and movement, while Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) is full of rhythm and light: with both these writers she shares an awareness of liminality. I next examine her 'Expatriate Compatriots'. Joyce, like Bowen, used dyslocution and collage. His work reflects that of Lewis Carroll (1832-1898), claimed by the Surrealists as an antecedent, and someone who is similarly reflected in

Bowen's work. That said, although Joyce was close to the Surrealists and Futurists, he was never a part of either movement. Beckett uses Gallicisms, evokes liminality, and expresses a feeling of nihilism: like Bowen he was influenced by painters, notably Jack Yeats (1871-1957) and Paul Cézanne (1839-1906). It is with the 'French Alliance' – Gustave Flaubert (1821-1880), Guy De Maupassant (1850-1893), Marcel Proust (1871-1922), Henri De Montherlant (1895-1972), François Mauriac (1885-1970) and Simone De Beauvoir (1908-1986) – that we find the detachment from the fate of characters which occurs in much of Bowen's writing: Bowen cites Flaubert's 'surgical common-sense' and quotes him as saying 'One should write more coldly' (*Impressions* 19). As well as the liminality found in Mansfield, Woolf and Beckett, I examine the need for the blank space described by Mallarmé, Beckett and Ezra Pound (1885-1972).

In Chapter 2, 'Yes, *Let* there be Light', I consider how Bowen uses light in her novels. After a brief look at light, sight, shadow, reflection and refraction, and perspective, I examine the history of the human use of light, drawing on the work of the geographer Nigel Thrift. I first of all compare her use with that of Thomas Hardy: to use Hardy's term, both Bowen and Hardy were 'seers'. I then compare her use of light in the landscape with Impressionist and Post-Impressionist landscapes (Claude Monet (1840-1926), Pierre Bonnard (1867-1947), Cézanne and in Surrealism (De Chirico, Dalí)). I look at c*hiaroscuro* and light reflected (Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840) and Édouard Manet (1832-1883)). I examine Bowen's own writings on light and mirroring alongside criticism by Joyce O. Lowrie and Jonathan Miller, and consider the connection between mirroring and memory. The need to obscure light during the Second World War would give Bowen the different experience of light evident in her war stories and *The Heat of the Day*, while the post-war development of cinema, particularly with Italian and French new wave directors, brings fresh perspectives on light.

In Chapter 3, 'The Meaningful Location: "Nothing Can Happen Nowhere"', I draw on the work of the geographers Tim Cresswell and Yi-FuTuan and consider Bowen's non-fiction writing about place in *Pictures and Conversations* and in 'Notes on Writing a Novel', as well as her writing about 'place-feeling' in E.M. Forster. I then compare Hardy's perspective on the natural world with hers, before turning to specific examples in her novels. In particular I look at landscape and how atmosphere plays an active part in Bowen's prose; the fixed or static place; the liminal space or place; and the mobile place. Chapter 4, 'The Idea Comes as an Abstract Pattern', explores the human patterning instinct as a means of making sense out of experience, of solving the personal equation. Bowen develops abstract patterns in two ways: in the shape of the novels and in the geometry of relationships of her characters. Each of her novels has a distinct shape: they may be circular, arc-shaped, a concatenation, in the shape of a triptych, they may struggle between centrifugal and centripetal forces, or be dependent on chance or balance. In all of the novels relationships are formed by patterns, of twos, threes, fours or sevens.

Chapter 5, 'I Collect Scraps to make Scrap Screens', deals with her use of collage, palimpsest, inventories and catalogues. Without using the term 'collage' herself, Bowen describes her use of it in several ways. Her store of material is found in her 'compost of forgotten books', and she draws from it to pay tribute to her predecessors in two ways which, if explored, reveal information to the reader (*Impressions* 268). Most often she collages snippets of text, sometimes distorting them, sometimes burying them in a way which requires investigation. Her collage comes from fairy tales, the Bible and to a great extent from her literary predecessors. On occasion she draws on a single work more extensively, creating what is effectively a palimpsest: these works include Hans Christian Andersen's *The Snow Queen* (1844), Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Four Quartets* of T.S. Eliot (1888-1965). Increasingly Bowen becomes aware

of the unreliability of memory, and the need to rely on inventories and catalogues. In Chapter 6, 'Rattling the Bars of the Prose Cage', I discuss Bowen's poetic prose. Several critics have referred to her as a poet and to her closeness to W.B. Yeats (1865-1939). Bowen has an urge to write which wells up from the subconscious and takes charge of her writing. Bowen calls this 'the inventive pen' from the epiphany experienced on reading *She* (1886) by H. Rider Haggard which she describes in a BBC Third Programme broadcast of 1947. For her it was the 'first totally violent impact [she] ever received from print' and revealed to her 'the power of the pen' (*Afterthought* 113). I discuss her essays and articles on the art of writing, concentrating on those which focus on the poetic, and draw on comments from critics such as Arthur Koestler, Neil Corcoran, Susan Osborn and Patricia Laurence. Illustrating my comments with examples of her poetry, I look at her texts in relation to the form of the prose poem, and show how her dyslocution is a form of fragmented poetic syntax, and how her jagged and jerky prose is a form of fragmented rhythm. Her prose is concentrated, one of the characteristics of prosody. Its denseness means that the reader needs to work to understand it.

By examining Bowen from these different perspectives, I hope in the course of this thesis to be able to uncover Bowen's final hidden 'thimble': that of her aesthetic, an aesthetic which is peculiar, both in the sense that it is particular to her, and in the sense that it is unusual, strange and odd.

Chapter 1

LE TOUR D'HORIZON

The world of English-language fiction into which the young Elizabeth Bowen was launched in 1923 was formed of a number of overlapping circles. In England an *avant-garde* of novelists, led by Virginia Woolf among others, was beginning to overwhelm the old guard of Arnold Bennett (1867-1931) and John Galsworthy (1867-1933), as much by their criticism as by their fiction. In poetry, T.S. Eliot had published *The Waste Land* the year before, while in a newly-partitioned Ireland Bowen's compatriot W.B. Yeats was celebrating the award of the Nobel Prize for Literature. In France the cosmopolitan James Joyce had enjoyed a *succès de scandale* with the publication of *Ulysses* the previous year. Over the following fifty years, these circles would expand or decrease, and new ones would emerge, something to which Bowen would be very much alive.

In this *tour d'horizon* of the world into which Bowen emerged and through which she would move, I identify some of these writers; those who Bowen acknowledges have influenced her and others with whom she has an affinity. Among the English writers, she shares with Thomas Hardy and E.M. Forster an awareness of the importance of place, while in the New Zealander Katherine Mansfield she finds a strong sense of the use of colour, and writing which has an inner life. The influence Woolf had on her is a more general one: in her letter of condolence to Leonard Woolf she writes that Woolf 'illuminated everything' ('Passage' 5; *Afterthought* 53-74; *Mulberry* 221). Among the Anglo-Irish writers, in Yeats she would find not only poetry but a striving for synthesis between the arts. The affinities with Joyce and Beckett have more to do with the *zeitgeist*: we can draw parallels with Joyce's collage and syntactic fracture and with Beckett's liminality and his keen immersion in the French language. Among poets, like Eliot she uses 'fragments' to shore up her text, and like Ezra Pound she aims to 'find the best in the

past and pass it on' (Eliot, *Collected* 69; Davenport, *Geography* 167). Bowen's world did not consist solely of English-language writers, and among French writers, in Gustave Flaubert, Guy De Maupassant and Henri De Montherlant, she finds a forensic detachment from the fate of their characters, while from Stephane Mallarmé she learns the importance of the blank space and of chance, and in Marcel Proust she is aware of the doubleness of nature and the effects of mirrors. Most importantly, within, yet apart from, this milieu she will develop her peculiar style.

THE ENGLISH CONTINGENT

She was already considered an authority on the English novel when in 1944 the French-language monthly review *Fontaine* brought out a special number devoted to 'Aspects de la littérature anglaise de 1918 à 1940' (Fouchet, *Fontaine* 1944). The title of this retrospective volume is an acknowledgement of E.M. Forster's 1927 *Aspects of the Novel* and the *Introduction* is by Forster himself.[7] Conceived in the middle of the Second World War which necessitated its printing in Algeria, its editors have gathered a remarkable selection of English literature, as André Gide's effusive dedication on the back cover indicates: 'Chaque fois que je me replonge dans la littérature anglaise c'est avec délices. Quelle diversité! Quelle abondance! C'est celle dont la disparition appauvrirait le plus l'humanité'. Bowen's essay 'Panorama du roman' ('Panorama of the Novel') is among the contributions, all by British writers.[8] With her extensive knowledge of contemporary

[7] Forster's Introduction, 'Vingt Ans de Littérature Anglaise', strongly resembles the fifth W.P. Ker Memorial Lecture, delivered at the University of Glasgow on 27 April 1944 and entitled 'The Development of English Prose between 1918 and 1939'; this appears in *Two Cheers for Democracy* (Forster, *Two* 277-289).

[8] It is curious that Bowen does not mention the Francophile Storm Jameson (1891-1986) in the essay, nor is there any contribution from her in the volume. President of the English branch of PEN International during the war years (1938-1944), Jameson had edited something similar two years previously: *London Calling: A Salute to America,* a collection of writings by various British writers to be sold in support of American servicemen. Another Francophile who Bowen does include, but who is now all but forgotten, is Charles Morgan (1894-1958): his 'Lettre à André Gide' follows Forster's Introduction. Gide's accolade translates as 'Each time I re-immerse myself in English literature it is with delight. What diversity! What wealth! Its disappearance would more than anything impoverish humanity'. (My translation)

English literature, gained partly through her reviewing, Bowen's critical eye scans an eclectic output from the previous twenty-five years. Bowen's original English manuscript from which the French translation by Pier Ponti was made is lost, but the printed French has been translated back into English by Allan Hepburn and it is this version which appears in *Listening In* (135-144). This essay follows on from Bowen's *English Novelists*, published two years earlier, in which Bowen anticipates Gide: 'We lose much if we ignore, or honour in name only, so living a part of the English heritage. And, now when the English spirit stands at its full height, to do so would be a double loss'. *English Novelists* is essentially retrospective, and Bowen ends by admitting that she 'cannot see [her] contemporaries [. . .] down the perspective of time. They are many and vitally on the move. To attempt to judge them would be to attempt to immobilise them'. In this 1942 review she limits her contemporaries to E.M. Forster and Virginia Woolf who, she says, 'seem to me both to epitomise English tradition and to have moved forward along lines of their own' (*English* 7; 46). However, two years later, she feels able to see a range of her contemporaries and, starting at 1918, divides her novelists into three groups. The first group includes 'those whose reputations had been established before the [1914-1918] conflict and [who] continued to write throughout the years of combat and, when peace came, continued no less impassively to serve their art'. She continues:

> A second group of novelists began to write and publish during the [1914-1918] war. These writers [. . .] were so fiercely individual that grouping them together is deceiving. [. . .] The third group of writers is comprised of those who had not written anything before or during the [1914-1918] war. [. . .] In their writings, this third group of novelists habitually denigrated masculine values. (*Listening* 136-138)

She goes on to say that '[t]he dominant aesthetic influences continued [. . .] to come from the second group of writers – the group whose art had witnessed, first and foremost, the effects of isolation from the war': here she lists D.H. Lawrence (1885-1930), Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Richardson (1873-1957) and James Joyce. She mentions Katherine

Mansfield as a distinguished writer in this second group, but excludes her from the study since Mansfield wrote no novel (*Listening* 136-139). E.M. Forster straddles the first two groups, partly because of a resurgence of interest in his earlier work as a result of the publication of *A Passage to India* in 1924.

While Bowen herself falls into the third group (those who had not written before or during the First World War), on superficial examination it is the aesthetics of the first two groups which are to be found in her writing. Victoria Glendinning's often cited assertion that '[Bowen] is the link which connects Virginia Woolf with Iris Murdoch and Muriel Spark' would place her firmly in the second group, while her own recognition of her debt to E.M. Forster places her, by her own evaluation of Forster, in both (Glendinning, *Portrait* 1; 'Passage' 12). However, Bowen increasingly employs an individual style which many critics found puzzling or outright misconceived. Indeed, Woolf wrote to Bowen about her 1931 novel *Friends and Relations*, saying: 'I feel you're like someone trying to throw a lasso with a knotted rope' (cited Glendinning, *Portrait* 82). In Bowen's defence, Susan Osborn argues that '[i]n the past, perhaps from a sense of critical largesse, the few uncertain readers who addressed Bowen's prose style saw in it most often an imperfect approximation of Woolf's' and in a endnote cites Glendinning's 'regrettabl[e] claims' adding '[a]s Bennett and Royle have noted, this unfortunate hierarchical comparison has done much to constrain Bowen's literary reputation and to relegate her to the status of a minor novelist' (Osborn, 'How to Measure' 37; 152). Instancing remarks by Hermione Lee, Maud Ellmann and Corcoran in which they disapprove of or show concern for Bowen's style, Osborn continues:

> Were it not for these lapses in taste or judgement, these untoward exaggerations, reads the subtext of these interpretations, many of her novels and stories might be declared master works, or at least be considered exceptional examples of their genre. Were it not considered the result of ineptness or a want of personal resolution, her style might be declared as strikingly complex and original as Joyce's or Beckett's, perhaps even more so. As it is though, the distaste and

> derision elicited by Bowen's stylistic practices suggest that, as arresting as her style is, it has not been considered coherent enough, meaningful enough, or intended enough to warrant thorough examination and analysis. (Osborn, 'How to Measure' 40)

As Osborn notes, Glendinning's assertion has led Bennett and Royle to offer a different perspective on Bowen by suggesting alternative blurbs designed to shock the reader out of any *parti pris*, such as 'Bowen's novels are like Jane Austen on drugs'; 'Bowen's work constitutes the Other of James Joyce'; and 'Together with Beckett's, Bowen's are the greatest comic novels written in English this century' (Bennett and Royle, *Dissolution* xv).

While Bowen is certainly intent on creating her own individual style, she admits on a few occasions to the influence of other writers. Bowen's perception of her literary origins will shift slightly throughout her life. In a 1942 interview with Seán Ó Faoláin's liberal monthly magazine *The Bell*: '"I regard myself as an Irish novelist," she said simply'. She goes on:

> As regards my work, if I've been influenced by anything it's been the French novelists and short-story writers of the past fifty years. . . . I've never been influenced by any English writer, with the possible exception of Jane Austen. Anyhow, the English novelists simply don't influence one. But the French *do*. They both excite *and* influence. (Morrow, 'Meet' 425)

Asked by Walter Allen in 1955 whether she considers herself an Irish novelist or an English novelist, Bowen dodges the question by distinguishing between the Anglo-Irish and the Irish-Irish, saying she is proud to have an eclectic Anglo-Irish literary heredity which includes Bishop Berkeley (1685-1753), W.B. Yeats and Somerville and Ross (1858-1949;1862-1915), and finds that social comedy is present not only in the Anglo-Irish but also in the Irish-Irish – in James Joyce, Frank O'Connor (1903-1966) and Ó Faoláin (1900-1991) (*Weight* 25). Fourteen years later Bowen would admit to an English influence in 'A Passage to E.M. Forster', her contribution to Forster's ninetieth birthday *festschrift*, *Aspects of E.M. Forster* (pp. 1-12). I explore this further in the next section.

Hardy and Forster

Like Hardy, Bowen observed, absorbed and reproduced what she saw: she is a 'seer', a term he uses when he says:

> As, in looking at a carpet, by following one colour a certain pattern is suggested, by following another colour, another; so in life the seer should watch that pattern among general things which his idiosyncrasy moves him to observe, and describe that alone. (Cited Bullen, *Expressive* 13)

'Seer' is a broadening of the French term '*flâneur*', used by Baudelaire for the observer of urban life and Impressionism, but the English term has a more serious, visionary feeling to it. In *Hardy the Novelist* (dedicated to Bowen) David Cecil precedes this citation with this remark: 'Art is a changing of the actual proportions and order of things, so as to bring out more forcibly than might otherwise be done that feature in them which appeals most strongly to the idiosyncrasy of the artist' (Cecil, *Hardy* 40). This echoes Mallarmé's exhortation to 'paint the effect', rather than the thing. Bowen is alert to this characteristic in Hardy, telling us that 'the strangeness of Hardy's novels is counterpoised by their pervasive physical naturalness'; Hardy, she finds, 'although the past works in him, is moved by *a philosophic consciousness of the future*' – he is a 'seer' (*English* 40, emphasis added). As 'seers', both Hardy and Bowen use light extensively in their work, and I discuss this further in Chapter 2.

In 'A Passage to E.M. Forster' she says 'I arrived into [the world of Forster] with a sense of homecoming' ('Passage' 7). She pays tribute to the effect that both *Howards End* and the stories of *The Celestial Omnibus* had on her as a schoolgirl, saying that she can think of 'no English novelist who has influenced me more. [. . .] [H]e considerably affected my view of life, and, as I was to discover, my *way* of writing' ('Passage' 12). It is from this early exposure to the stories in *The Celestial Omnibus* that Bowen first realises how she can allow the power of the pen to explore her subconscious imagination. Bowen writes that as well as the conversations in Forster, it is his 'place-feeling' which whets her

appetite for more. Forster's 'place-feeling' falls into two: what might be described as description with the educated tourist's eye (and indeed *for* that eye), and what might be described as rooted-in-place or the *genius loci*. Thus we find eloquent descriptions of Italy and Greece in the Italian novels and in the Italian and Greek short stories ('The Story of a Panic, 'The Eternal Moment', 'The Road from Colonnus'), while his English novels and short stories display a rootedness in place which we may call topophilia, a term first coined by Auden and defined as something particularly British in his introduction to the American edition of John Betjeman's 1947 *Sleek but not Streamlined* (Forster, *Selected Stories*; Auden, 'Introduction' 11).

> A few general remarks about topophilia may, however, be in order here since, so far as I know, it rarely attacks professional poets in this country [the USA]. Topophilia differs from the farmer's love of his home soil and the litterateur's fussy regional patriotism in that it is not possessive or limited to any one locality. On the other hand, it has little in common with nature love. Wild or unhumanised nature holds no charms for the average topophil because it is lacking in history; (the exception which proves the rule is the geological topophil). [T]hough history manifested by objects is essential, the quantity of the history and the quality of the object are irrelevant; a branch railroad is as valuable as a Roman wall, a neo-Tudor teashop as interesting as a Gothic cathedral. (Auden, 'Introduction' 11)

The following example of rootedness in Ruth Wilcox comes in *Howards End* when, after her death, the Wilcox family discover that Ruth has left Howards End to Margaret.

> To them Howards End was a house: they could not know that to her it had been a spirit, for which she sought a spiritual heir. [. . .] Is it credible that the possessions of the spirit can be bequeathed at all? Has the soul offspring? A wych-elm tree, a vine, a wisp of hay with dew on it – can passion for such things be transmitted where there is no bond of blood? (Forster, *Howards* 84)

Unlike Hardy and Forster whose landscapes we can place geographically or geologically, it is not always easy to identify actual landscapes in Bowen, who sums up her own feelings for place when she writes:

> Am I not manifestly a writer for whom places loom large? As a reader, it is to the place-element that I react most strongly: for me, what gives fiction verisimilitude is its topography. [. . .] The Bowen terrain cannot be demarcated on any existing map; it is unspecific. Ireland and England, between them, contain my stories, with occasional outgoings into France or Italy: within the boundaries of those countries

> there is no particular locality I have staked a claim on or identified with. (*Pictures* 34-35)[9]

I discuss Bowen's use of Place in Chapter 3, 'The Meaningful Location: "Nothing Can Happen Nowhere"'.

Katherine Mansfield

Katherine Mansfield's influence on Bowen is more subtle than that of Forster. Bowen's own early published work consists of short stories, and when her first collection *Encounters* was published in 1923 (the year Mansfield died) to Bowen's surprise contemporary critics compared her work with Mansfield's. Over forty years later, in the Preface to *A Day in the Dark*, Bowen explains that at the time she had not read any works by Mansfield, but acknowledges her debt:

> The chief hint of reproof with regard to *Encounters*, that I was an imitator of Katherine Mansfield, was as a matter of fact not merited: I had read nothing of hers (though I can't think why) when *Encounters* went to my first publisher. But I see that I was in her debt in another way: her lovely performances, early in the 1920s, created a place for an interest in the short story, and at my beginning I profited from that. (*Day* 8)

While accepting that Mansfield had no impact on Bowen's earliest stories, Hepburn writes in his introduction to *The Bazaar*, his 2008 collection of Bowen's unpublished short stories:

> Of all influences on Bowen's short stories, none is stronger than Katherine Mansfield's. [. . .] Guided to some degree by her predecessor's example, Bowen developed an acute consciousness of the short story as a way to convey the partial, the interrupted, and the disconnected aspects of contemporary life. (*Bazaar* 6)

In her introduction to her 1957 selection of Mansfield short stories, *34 Short Stories*, Bowen pictures Mansfield coloured by the strong light of sunset, never in the muted colours of twilight (*Afterthought* 53). She finds that at times Mansfield's stories grow from

[9] This is not strictly true: it is possible to identify Hythe and the surrounding area in *The House in Paris*, *The Death of the Heart* and *The Little Girls* and parts of London and Thanet in *To the North*, *The Death of the Heart* and *Eva Trout*. This contrasts with Thomas Hardy who drew on specific places, simply renaming them.

an internal impetus: they develop themselves irrespective of their author's will; they have their own active being, something Bowen herself experiences as a writer. It is their vibrant colour and the implicit movement in their active being which contribute to the 'lovely performances' to which Bowen is alluding. Melissa C. Reimer emphasises the movement and use of colour and light, showing how it allows Mansfield to achieve the transposition of her Impressionism from the visual to the verbal.

> Among the ways in which Mansfield aligned herself with Impressionism is her use of everyday subject matter and privileging of modernity, her focus on small, seemingly insignificant details at the expense of comprehensive description, her preference for the vignette which provides the reader with only *fleeting* glimpses of people and places, and her preoccupation with colour and her emphasis on surfaces and reflections. Her employment of multiple, *shifting* perspectives which are both subjective and fractured also displays an affinity with Impressionism, as does the attention she pays to the *ephemeral* effects of artificial and natural light, weather effects, and seasonal changes. (Reimer, 'Literary' 36, emphasis added)

Mansfield was acutely aware of what was around her: she describes the process in a letter written to her husband John Middleton Murry when she is in Menton in November 1920.

> What a QUEER business writing is. I don't know. I dont believe other people are ever as foolishly excited as I am while Im working. How could they be? Writers would have to live in trees. Ive been this man been this woman. Ive stood for hours on the Auckland Wharf. Ive been out in the stream waiting to be berthed. Ive been a seagull hovering at the stern and a hotel porter whistling through his teeth. It isn't as though one sits and watches the spectacle. That would be thrilling enough, God knows. But one IS the spectacle for the time. (Mansfield, *Collected* 97)

In her Introduction, Bowen identifies the painter in Mansfield.

> The idea of her as a literary Marie Laurencin [1883-1956], sponsor of a brood of gazelle-eyed heroines, tends too much to be the prevailing one. In fact, in her verve, raciness, husky sensuous poetry, life-likingness, and sense of the moment's drama, she is more often sister to Berthe Morisot [1841-1895]. (*Afterthought* 73)

Thus Bowen rejects the dreamy doll-like women, almost always with dark, almond-shaped eyes and an exaggerated, soft roundness, who populate Laurencin's pastel-coloured canvasses, and instead likens Mansfield to the Impressionist Morisot whose paintings have strong colours and realistic depictions, similar to those of Walter Sickert (1860-1942). Mansfield's introduction to and experience of the visual arts had begun in London in the

years before the First World War, when exhibitions of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist paintings were held at London's Grafton Galleries in 1905, 1910 and 1912. She describes the effect of walking into the 1910 exhibition as being 'like a sudden liberation, a shaking free from Victorian and Edwardian attitudes into wholly new ways of seeing' (Alpers, *Mansfield* 120). She encounters Fauvism on visits to Paris in 1911 and 1912 when she meets the Scottish Colourist and Fauvist-influenced painter, J.D. Fergusson (1874-1961), Middleton Murry's collaborator on the short-lived but influential review, *Rhythm*. Angela Smith writes:

> It is possible to argue that Mansfield developed in her writing an increasingly Fauvist aesthetic, underpinned by a Bergsonian emphasis on *élan vital* and intuitive response. It can be seen as the literary equivalent of the characteristic traits of Fauvist painting: sharply defining lines round figures or aspects of the landscape; a rhythmical design; paint applied thickly in places and sparsely, or leaving the canvas bare, in others; an emphasis on mobility; a thematic concern with the empowerment of any restricted person, including of course women. (Smith, 'Rhythm' 113)

A different aspect of Fauvism is given in a manifesto in the first issue of *Rhythm*, which uses an unacknowledged quotation from another expatriate who spent time in Paris, J. M. Synge (1871-1909): 'Before art can be human it must learn to be brutal' (cited Smith, 'Rhythm' 105). We find that brutality in Mansfield's work: in Pat severing the duck's head in 'Prelude'; in the destruction of the ice pudding in 'Sun and Moon' (Mansfield, *Bliss* 47; 171).

Despite this exposure to the visual art genres which were developing in the early twentieth century, as well as her friendship with several of the artists, Mansfield is not confident. In a letter to Ottoline Morrell dated 13 August 1919 Mansfield writes: 'I am absolutely uneducated about painting. I can only look at it as a writer but it seems to me the real thing. It's what one is aiming at' (cited Reimer, 'Literary' 36). She succeeds in achieving that aim: in 'At the Bay' we find depictions which conjure up at least four different Impressionist or Post-Impressionist painters. The story opens with a Monet-like

depiction of dawn. ‘Very early morning. The sun was not yet risen, and the whole of Crescent Bay was hidden under a white sea-mist. The big bush-covered hills at the back were smothered’ (Mansfield, *Garden* 5). Five pages on, we find a still life reminiscent of Cézanne in her description of the Burnell’s breakfast table.

> Through the wide-open window streamed the sun on to the yellow varnished walls and bare floor. Everything on the table flashed and glittered. In the middle there was an old salad bowl filled with yellow and red nasturtiums. (Mansfield, *Garden* 10)

Then come two portraits of the same woman, the first reminiscent of Amedeo Modigliani (1884-1920), the second of the early Impressionist Honoré Daumier (1808-1879): ‘[Mrs Harry Kember] was a long, strange-looking woman with narrow hands and feet. Her face, too, was long and narrow and exhausted-looking, even her fair curled fringe looked burnt out and withered’ (Mansfield, *Garden* 15). ‘As Mrs Harry Kember came up close she looked, in her black waterproof bathing-cap, with her sleepy face lifted above the water, just her chin touching, like a horrible caricature of her husband’ (Mansfield, *Garden* 17). Bowen also comments: ‘[A] fellow writer cannot but look on Katherine Mansfield’s work as interrupted, hardly more than suspended, momentarily waiting to be gone on with’ (*Afterthought* 54). And this is precisely what Bowen does with her 1941 short story ‘The Demon Lover’ which seems to extend an episode in Mansfield’s short story ‘Bliss’. On arrival at Bertha’s dinner party, Eddie Warren shudders:

> ‘I have had such a *dreadful* experience with a taxi-man; he was *most* sinister. I couldn’t get him to *stop*. The *more* I knocked and called the *faster* he went. And *in* the moonlight this *bizarre* figure with the *flattened* head *crouching* over the *lit-tle* wheel [. . .] I saw myself *driving* through Eternity in a *timeless* taxi.’ (Mansfield, *Bliss* 101-102)

The taxi ride at the end of ‘The Demon Lover’, Bowen’s 1941 short story, takes off where Mansfield’s episode stops: the accelerating speed of the taxi and the screaming of the occupant give the sense that Bowen has continued this journey into the infinite. Ingman

points out ‘it is possible to see “Bliss” as containing within it the seeds of one of Bowen’s most skilful war stories, “The Demon Lover”’ (Ingman, ‘Living’ 38).

> The driver braked to what was almost a stop, turned round and slide the glass panel back: the jolt of this flung Mrs Drover forward till her face was almost into the glass. Through the aperture driver and passenger, not six inches between them, remained for an eternity eye to eye. Mrs Drover’s mouth hung open for some seconds before she could issue her first scream. After that she continued to scream freely and to beat with her gloved hands on the glass all round as the taxi, accelerating without mercy, made off with her into the hinterland of deserted streets. (*Collected* 666)

Virginia Woolf

It is not possible to evaluate Bowen’s work, particularly her early work, without considering that of Virginia Woolf, who achieves different genres of painting in her writing. Ann Banfield tells us that ‘Marianna Torgovnick [. . .] writes’:

> One of her first pieces, Kew Gardens, prompted Arnold Bennett to question ‘the possibility that some writers might do in words what the Neo-Impressionists have done in paint’. [. . .] Woolf replied in a way that suggests that she did, indeed, conceive of her work in this way. There is a connection between ‘short’ and ‘impressionist.’ (Banfield, ‘Time’ 472)

In *Shimmering in a Transformed Light*, her review of the still life in literature, Rosemary Lloyd shows the development of Woolf’s still lifes from the early short story ‘Solid Objects’ with the broken objects which a child finds and treasures, through *Jacob’s Room* with Jacob’s possessions scattered about his unoccupied study in Cambridge, culminating in *The Waves* which contains ‘standard still life objects [. . .] transformed by the quality of light’ yet with a ‘mobile, changing nature’ (Lloyd, *Shimmering* xiv-xv; 119-124; 141). Lloyd also points out the remarkable landscapes in *Orlando*: these are wonderfully colourful especially in the earlier chapters, suggesting paintings full of activity which might fuse the Brueghels with Hieronymus Bosch or which resemble the exuberant paintings and etchings of commercial and industrial activity by Frank Brangwyn (1867-1956), while the later chapters are more muted (Lloyd, *Shimmering* 119). In *Orlando* we

find recurrent motifs, some of which will recur in *The Waves*: the oak tree; the number seven (sometimes 'six and seven'); emeralds; and particularly time (Woolf, *Orlando* 93-95 *inter alia*).[10] In her 1960 afterword to the Signet Classics edition, while she makes no reference to Woolf's landscapes or still lifes *per se*, Bowen makes an interesting point connecting *Orlando* with *The Waves*.

> I have a theory – unsupported by anything she said to me, or, so far as I know, to anyone – that Virginia Woolf's writing of *Orlando* was a prelude to, and in some way rendered possible, her subsequent writing of *The Waves,* 1931. Outwardly, no two works of fiction could be more different; yet, did the fantasy serve to shatter some rigid, deadening, claustrophobic mould of so-called 'actuality' which had been surrounding her? (*Afterthought* 45)

From what Woolf herself says it is evident that much stemmed from how at an early age a sense of rhythm, the *sine qua non* of music, was instilled in her by the sound of waves breaking outside her bedroom window at St Ives in time with waves of light caused by the movement of the blind.

> If life has a base that it stands upon, if it is a bowl that one fills and fills and fills – then my bowl without a doubt stands upon this memory. It is of lying half asleep, half awake, in bed in the nursery at St Ives. It is of hearing the waves breaking, one, two, one, two, and sending a splash of water over the beach; and then breaking, one, two, one, two, behind a yellow blind. It is of hearing the blind draw its little acorn across the floor as the wind blew the blind out. It is of lying and hearing this splash and seeing this light, and feeling, it is almost impossible that I should be here; of feeling the purest ecstasy I can conceive. (Woolf, *Moments* 73)

This rhythm and light manifests itself most freely in *Mrs Dalloway* and *The Waves*. Forster says of *Mrs Dalloway* that it 'has the framework of a London summer's day, down which go spiralling two fates' (Forster, *Woolf* 12). By using 'spiral', both a noun of circularity and a verb of motion, Forster is describing that thing for which he says there is no literary word – it can be expressed visually as the pattern of the novel or musically as the rhythm of the novel (Forster, *Aspects* 151). The pattern or rhythm in *Mrs Dalloway* comes from

[10] Woolf acknowledges Roger Fry's influence when she writes in the Preface to *Orlando* '[t]o the unrivalled sympathy and imagination of Mr Roger Fry I owe whatever understanding of the art of painting I possess' (Woolf, *Orlando* 5).

the handing over of the story from one character to another, in a sort of *contredanse* in which the dancers move through London, lightly touching hands as they pass on the story. In a more complex way, *The Waves* follows a pattern and rhythm, set out like the screenplay for the film of an opera: with directions for settings and lighting, its opening dialogue presents as a libretto, almost demanding from the first page that it should be sung. Since we experience these novels both visually and musically it is worth considering them in the light of what Howard Moss (1922-1987), poetry editor of *The New Yorker,* writes about the opening pages of 'The Past' in Bowen's *The House in Paris*.

> I don't think it has been noticed that the settings [. . .] are heightened – a unique blend of precise description and landscapes that could exist only in the imagination. Natural or urban, they transform themselves quickly into a series of dissolving and reforming paintings. (Moss, 'Interior' 225-226)

The process of dissolving and reforming images which Moss describes is the same as that described by Woolf in *Moments of Being* when she writes: 'That is what is indescribable, that is what makes all images too static, for no sooner has one said this was so, than it was past and altered' (Woolf, *Moments* 89).

Liminality in Mansfield and Woolf

Mansfield and Woolf both employ liminality in their work. 'Temporary inactivity' or 'suspension' equate to liminality: that moment – however long it may be – when an individual is on a threshold. The meaning of the term itself has expanded considerably since its origins in Arnold van Gennep's 1909 *The Rites of Passage*. In van Gennep's work, liminality is to be found in anthropological culture, and his ideas were later developed by Victor Turner in his work on ritual in religion.[11] Subsequent critics have extended its meaning further, so that 'the term is used in such diverse contexts both in the

[11] Turner defines the ephemerality of liminality: '[l]iminal entities are neither here nor there: they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial' (Turner, *Ritual* 95).

arts and in scholarship [that it indicates that such situations are] not only frequent but decisive in human lives in social, political, cultural and aesthetic contexts' (Achilles and Bergmann, *Liminality* 3). Claire Drewery points to the liminality in *The Waves*, particularly in the character of Rhoda 'who reiterates continually that she has no face, and shows an awareness of her own shifting, unstable condition in her assertion that "I shift and change and am seen through in a second"' (Drewery, *Modernist* 4).[12] Rhoda also describes 'the white spaces that lie between hour and hour [that] were my life' (Woolf, *Waves* 136). In *The Waves* characters are often to be found on stairs, and a staircase is, like a threshold, a liminal place, 'betwixt and between' two different floors or spaces. As a child, Neville hears a story of a murder on a stair 'half-way up the landing', and later reassures the group that 'the revelations on staircases, moments of terror and ecstasy' are over (Woolf, *Waves* 13; 80). Jinny hates 'the small looking-glass on the stairs' and skips up to the next landing where she sees herself 'entire' (Woolf, *Waves* 24; 25). Katherine Mansfield writes of stairs as a liminal place in a 1921 letter to Dorothy Brett.

[12] 'No face' puts us in mind of Vanessa Bell's portrait of Woolf in which the features are almost obliterated:

Vanessa Bell. *Virginia Woolf*. 1912. National Portrait Gallery, London. NPG 5933.
https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw08084/Virginia-Woolf

> Don't you think the stairs are a good place for reading letters? I do. One is somehow suspended. One is on neutral ground – not in ones [sic] own world nor in a strange one. They are an almost perfect meeting place. Oh Heaven! How stairs do fascinate me when I think of it. Waiting for people – sitting on strange stairs – hearing steps far above, watching the light *playing* by itself – hearing – far below a door, looking down into a kind of dim brightness, watching someone come up [. . .]. *Must* put them in a story though! People come out of themselves on stairs – they issue forth, unprotected. And then the window on a *landing.* Why is it so different to all other windows? (Cited Smith, *Public* 4)

Liminality is constantly present in Mansfield's world and she uses it in a number of different ways. In the collection *The Garden Party,* 'At the Bay' ends on liminality: does Beryl step over the threshold and submit to Harry Kember as '[a] cloud, small, serene, floated across the moon' (Mansfield, *Garden* 37)? Liminality is caused by the death of the autocratic father in 'The Daughters of the Late Colonel' who are forced onto the threshold of a world for which they are totally unprepared: the story ends with Josephine staring 'at a big cloud where the sun had been' while she and Constantia have both forgotten what they want to say (Mansfield, *Garden* 70). Furthermore, as Andrew Humphries has noted in a recent paper, in Mansfield liminality may be caused by the death of someone unknown as in 'The Stranger' (here one could also include the death in 'The Garden Party') or by transfer between places as in 'The Voyage' (Humphries, 'We have'). In 'The Lady's Maid' the eponymous maid fails to take advantage of liminality: instead of marrying Harry, she steps back off the threshold to remain with her mistress (Mansfield, *Garden* 149-153).[13] Eddie Warren's '*dreadful* experience with a taxi-man' in 'Bliss' is a liminal experience similar to that of Mrs Drover in Bowen's 'The Demon Lover' (Mansfield, *Bliss* 101-102; *Collected* 666). The term 'abeyance', meaning 'temporary inactivity or disuse; suspension; latent condition' is often used by critics for impasses in Bowen. Liminality in the form of impasses, waiting or transforming events occurs in all Bowen's novels, and I discuss some of these in Chapter 3.

[13] With its monologue structure, 'The Lady's Maid' is superficially reminiscent of Bowen's war-time story 'Oh, Madam', the starting point for this thesis, though Bowen's story differs, being essentially Cubist in its fragmentation.

EXPATRIATE COMPATRIOTS

If Bowen's style – or, as she puts it in her Forster accolade, her way – of writing in the early days was similar to Mansfield's, it was to develop, but it never bears any great similarity to that of Woolf. Certainly there are still lifes and landscapes as we find in Woolf, but as it evolves Bowen's style, if not her subject matter, goes beyond Woolf. What is most noticeable is her use of an increasing amount of dyslocution. This dyslocution does not extend to the disruption or construction of individual words encountered in Joyce: Bowen's dyslocution is almost always syntactical. Nevertheless, her style increasingly invites criticism which is at best perplexed or at worst negative. In order to understand Bowen it is helpful and important to reject any prejudice: as John Banville argues in an *Irish Times* article from 2015, 'Had Elizabeth Bowen been a man, she would be recognised as one of the finest novelists of the 20th century'.[14]

Because she sets her novels around predominately female protagonists within an affluent society, it seemed natural to earlier critics to see her as a female writer of the comedy of manners. Bowen's social background is certainly a factor in this expectation, brought up as she was in a tradition which placed high value on good manners, courtesy and etiquette, as she herself admits, and indeed advocates, when in 'The Big House' she writes:

> In the interest of good manners and good behaviour people learned to subdue their own feelings. The result was an easy and unsuspicious intercourse, to which everyone brought the best that they had – wit, knowledge, sympathy or personal beauty. [. . .] Is it a fear that, if one goes into the big house, one will have to be 'polite'? Well, why not *be* polite – are not human manners the crown of being human at all? Politeness is not a constriction; it is a grace: it is really no worse than an exercise of the imagination on other people's behalf. And are we to cut grace quite out of life? (*Impressions* 199-200)

[14] https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/in-praise-of-elizabeth-bowen-by-john-banville-1.2128995 (*Irish Times*, 7 March 2015) Accessed 5 February 2019.

Alas, Bowen's statement is somewhat fatal when it comes to her own female characters, for it is in subduing their feelings and following that code of 'good manners' that they fall on rocky ground. John Hildebidle writes how Bowen's attention 'turns especially to children and unmarried women without independent wealth; people whose "power" is, within the confines of a relatively privileged and thus empowered class, doubtful and limited'. He goes on to point out her 'indebtedness to a long tradition of novels of manners' and concludes that '[o]ne might say that her work is, from beginning to end, an effort to write the modern *tragedy* of manners' (Hildebidle, 'Bowen' 128).

If Bowen's psychological response to tragedy can be perceived in the content of her writing, her aesthetic response to tragedy, in the way she forms her writing, is not generally recognised. This aesthetic is not as remarkable as those of Joyce or of Beckett but it is individual nonetheless: I would suggest that Bowen should be considered not even as a writer of words, but as an artist working *with* words. Her prose is characterised by examples of synthesis between the word and the image: it is increasingly embellished by collage, and on occasion is disrupted by dyslocution. I discuss collage and dyslocution further in Chapters 5 and 6. Essentially Bowen is aiming for a similar effect to that which she finds in Joyce, which she describes in her 1941 eulogy for him published in *The Bell.*

> We are used to receive, from a page of print, *information*. [. . .] We do not [. . .] expect *information* from a symphony or the sound of a waterfall. *Finnegans Wake*, like music or a long natural sound, acts on us. We are affected profoundly, instead of being informed. Sense has been sacrificed to sensation. (*People* 244-245)

In her 1955 interview with Allen, Bowen discusses how with each novel she tries to use fewer words and make the words do more.

> I do want to obliterate words. I want to give the full possibility of sensation and visual power in words so that the sensation I have in mind when I write should go straight to the reader. [. . .] [I]t seemed to me that if I could find one word of one syllable which would do the work of a long paragraph filled with words, that that was the ideal thing to do. (*Weight* 28)

Bennett and Royle identify Bowen's attempts to compress language as early as *The Hotel* (1927) when they refer to 'the intimate and intricate pressures of language on thought and relationships, and at the resistant pressures of stillness on the haunting mobility of people' (Bennett and Royle, *Dissolution* 1-2). The painter Jacques Raverat (1884-1925) and Virginia Woolf explore this idea from a slightly different perspective. In a letter to Woolf of September 1924, Raverat writes:

> One of the things I find most difficult about writing is that it has to be essentially linear. [. . .] Now that's not at all the way my mind works. [. . .] [I]t's as if you threw a pebble into a pond. There are splashes in the outer air in every direction, & under the surface waves that follow one another into dark & forgotten corners of my past. (Pryor, *Woolf* 102)

Woolf responds:

> I rather think you've broached some of the problems of the writer's too, who are trying to catch & consolidate & consummate (whatever the word is for making literature) those splashes of yours. [. . .] I think that [past writers] adhere to a formal railway line of sentence, for its convenience, never reflecting that people don't & never did feel or think or dream for a second in that way; but all over the place, in your way. (Pryor, *Woolf* 109)

In her gradual working towards the effect which she finds in Joyce – that of affecting, rather than informing – increasingly Bowen breaks away, sometimes quite markedly, from what Woolf describes as the 'formal railway line of sentence'. I discuss this further in Chapter 6 under 'Bowen's Dyslocution'.

Together with Yeats and Beckett, Joyce is regarded as one of the lions of twentieth-century Irish writing. Affinities are to be found in Bowen's writing with that of both Joyce and Beckett, and Nels Pearson has recently brought Joyce, Bowen and Beckett together in *Irish Cosmopolitanism*, as 'stylistically innovative writers who left Ireland to live and work primarily in capital cities of international modernism' and who paradoxically were 'international expatriates without having an established or default sense of patria' (Pearson, *Cosmopolitanism* 2). The Irish modernist literary canon consists almost entirely of Anglophone writers, whether expatriate, itinerant or based in Ireland. This leads to an

important factor sometimes overlooked, that the English tongue employed by them can be honed in an Irish manner, or in the case of Beckett, in a Francophone manner. Corcoran points out that '[i]n cosmopolitan European exile Joyce is enabled to write an English which some commentators regard as the ultimate manifestation of his complex feeling about being an Irish writer who does not write in the Irish language' (Corcoran, *After* 3). With their alternative blurbs for Bowen, Bennett and Royle have already directed us to Joyce when they write 'Bowen's work constitutes the Other of James Joyce' (Bennett and Royle, *Dissolution* xv). Hildebidle points us towards Beckett when he writes of Bowen's 1926 short story 'Human Habitation', highlighting the nihilism which characterises the two writers.

> Inner loss – of identity, of the story-making imagination, of any sense of rhythm or order, even of memory and emotion – exactly parallels an increasing sense of outward loss. But this is not only a projection of the self out onto the weather. Rather it is a darkly synergistic interaction between landscape and soul, a distinctly Beckettian inversion of the Romantic intersection of self and nature. (Hildebidle, 'Bowen' 89)

Like Joyce and Beckett, Bowen was, at least partially, rooted in Ireland, she had an intense relationship with both the English and the French languages, and her aim, like that of Joyce, was to create sensation. In her eulogy for Joyce, Bowen celebrates his rootedness in Ireland, his relationship with language, and his aim to create sensation rather than narrative.

> Of his life abroad we have no record of his at all – it is as though that life no more than flowed over him. Ireland had entered him: it was the grit in his oyster shell. Great linguist, he explored and discarded language after language because of the, to him, final inefficacy of any language at all. Sensation was, above all, his subject, and the sensations that were his fever and pain are common – what remains extraordinary is the length he travelled in his efforts to put sensation into words. [. . .] And Joyce had another gigantic faculty – laughter. [. . .] He pounded language to jelly in his attempts to make it tell us what he was laughing at. One may say that he ended by laughing so much that he could not speak. (*People* 239-240; 242-243)

As Corcoran observes, this assessment demonstrates that Bowen was open to even the most extreme experiments of Modernism (Corcoran, *Enforced* 5). She herself became a

consummate wordsmith, capable of moulding, even hammering, language, always conscious that the impression given by the *appearance* of a word may be different to the impression given by the *sound* of that word.[15] Like Joyce, Bowen draws on Lewis Carroll and the Bible for her collage, as well as many other authors, some of whom she would have been introduced to at a young age. We can infer Carroll's importance from the title of her autobiography *Pictures and Conversations,* which recalls Alice's observation in the opening pages: '"[W]hat is the use of a book", thought Alice "without pictures or conversations?"' (Carroll, *Wonderland* 1).

Hugh Kenner opens his chapter on Joyce in *The Stoic Comedians* ('Comedian of the Inventory') by describing how meticulously Flaubert chooses words. 'Flaubert [. . .] was a connoisseur of the *mot juste*, lifted with tweezers from its leatherette box by a lapidary of choleric diligence'. Acknowledging that Flaubert's 'tight, burnished set pieces slacken considerably in translation' he suggests that if 'we want to see something in English that resembles them, we cannot do better than consult *Ulysses*' (Kenner, *Stoic* 30). In Joyce's case, having selected his words, he has then to arrange them and Kenner shows us how Joyce might arrive at dyslocution in the following anecdote. Frank Budgen is recalling their discussion of what had been for Joyce a solid day's work: two sentences. '"You have been seeking the *mot juste*?" "No," said Joyce, "I have the words already. What I am seeking is the perfect order of words in the sentence. There is an order in every way appropriate. I think I have it"' (Kenner, *Stoic* 31).

What, if any, were the visual art genres which might have influenced Joyce and which might have led him to construct his prose in the way he did? He was living in Trieste at the time of the emergence of Futurism and in Paris at the time of the emergence

[15] Discussing W.J. McCormack's comment that Bowen is a post-Yeatsian poet Corcoran imagines 'a meticulous and revealing linguistic study being performed on her prose of the kind which Adam Piette performs on the work of, among others, Joyce and Beckett, in his book *Remembering and the Sound of Words*' (Corcoran, *Enforced* 4). Bowen mentions wanting to 'hammer the words' (*Weight* 22)

of Surrealism: while he was interested in both movements he never formally allied himself with either, although it is possible to find aspects of both in his work. In 1910 Joyce may have attended a lecture in Trieste by Filippo Marinetti (1876-1944), who two years later would publish his *Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature* whose first clause reads: 'It is imperative to destroy syntax and scatter one's nouns at random, just as they are born' (Marinetti, cited Rainey, *Modernism* 16). As a character in Dorothy L. Sayers' 1926 *Clouds of Witness* remarks, 'Joyce has freed us from the superstition of syntax', but whether this is due to the effect of Marinetti or of the *zeitgeist* is not clear (Sayers, *Clouds* 121). Whatever the cause, Eugène Jolas (1894-1952), the American editor of *transition*, the experimental English-language literary magazine published in Paris between 1927 and 1938, places Joyce and the Futurists among those to whom the impulse for the revolution of the word owes its genesis in his 1933 essay 'What is the Revolution of Language?' An earlier edition of *transition* includes the manifesto 'The Revolution of the Word' (1929) (Jolas, *Critical* 116-117; 111-112). Joyce is not one of the sixteen signatories: he did not want to associate himself with this manifesto. Neither did he associate himself with the Surrealists: Keri Walsh tells us that '[i]n Paris in the nineteen twenties, where Joyce's social circles overlapped with those of Breton, Louis Aragon, and Philippe Soupault, the great Irish modernist never affiliated himself with the surrealist group' (Walsh, 'Surrealist' 127). Even so, André Breton (1896-1966), founder of the Surrealist movement, claims Joyce as an influence on Surrealism when in 1953 he traces the literary genealogy of the movement through Joyce and Futurism back to Rimbaud, Mallarmé and Carroll.

> This need to counteract ruthlessly the depreciation of language, a need which was felt in France by Lautréamont, Rimbaud, Mallarmé, and at the same time in England by Lewis Carroll, has not ceased to be just as imperative since that time, as is proved by experiments of quite unequal interest, ranging from the 'words set free' of Futurism to the very relative spontaneity of 'Dada' [. . .] and the outbreak of a 'revolution of the word' (James Joyce, e.e. Cummings, Henri Michaux). [. . .] The evolution of the plastic arts was to reflect the same disquiet. (Breton, *Manifestoes* 297)

Between 1927 and 1938 Jolas published in *transition* Joyce's 'Work in Progress', the fragments which would collectively become *Finnegans Wake*. In 1928, while Joyce was at work on this, Beckett arrived in Paris to take up the post of English language *lecteur* at the École Normale Supérieure and was introduced to Joyce by Thomas MacGreevy (1893-1967), his predecessor at the École Normale. Joyce enlisted the help of Beckett with research for 'Work in Progress': this consisted mainly of reading aloud from books to reduce the strain on Joyce's eyes. Inevitably the younger man became a member of the Joyce circle, which led to an introduction to Jolas who would subsequently publish some of Beckett's early work.

MacGreevy was also instrumental in another important introduction for Beckett, Jack Yeats. Beckett would find an affinity with this painter who, like his older brother W.B., was searching for a fusion of word and image. There is a duality twice over in the younger Yeats' work which appealed to Beckett. Not only do we see artworks with two figures such as *The Two Travellers* or *Tramps* reflected in Beckett's work with the various odd couples that are Vladimir/Estragon and Pozzo/Lucky in *Waiting for Godot* or Hamm/Clov and Nagg/Nell in *Endgame*, but in Jack Yeats' novels and plays (works that are overshadowed by those of his brother) we find the bringing together of word and image. Karen Brown explains: 'At one point in *Sligo*, Jack Yeats theorizes about the potential for words to be comprehended visually as well as aurally when he fictionalizes a "solid memory-saturated man" (his alter ego perhaps)' (Brown, *Yeats* 139). She gives Beckett's response: 'When language consisted of gesture [. . .] the spoken and written were identical. Hieroglyphics [. . .] were not the invention of philosophers for the mysterious expression of profound thought, but the common necessity of peoples' (cited Brown, *Yeats* 139-140). This is the effect Bowen is aiming for and which she describes in her interview

with Allen when she says she wants to obliterate words in order for the sensation to go straight to the reader (*Weight* 28).

Beckett found in Yeats' painting something akin to that of Cézanne. James Knowlson writes: 'For in defining what he saw as Cézanne's recognition that landscape has nothing to do with man, that man was quite separate from and alien to it, he was defining a view that was excitingly close to his own' (Knowlson, *Damned* 196).[16] This idea that landscape and man are separate is something that we also find in Bowen: many of her 'verbal landscapes', although viewed by the human eye, are devoid of humans, and I discuss this further in Chapter 3.

THE FRENCH ALLIANCE

In *A World of Love*, 'rents in the curtains let through what were to be when the sleeper woke shafts of a brightness quite insupportable' (*WL* 10). Here not only does the word order reflect what would be the order of experience, but the syntax in the phrase 'of a brightness quite insupportable' is in the order that it would be in French – 'd'une luminosité assez insupportable.' Bowen further stresses the Gallicism by using the French word 'insupportable' (meaning unbearable): a more conventional English version would be 'shafts whose brightness was quite unbearable.'

While Beckett's use of Gallicisms stems from his life in France as well as his study of French literature at Trinity College, Dublin, Bowen's stems largely from her own reading of French authors of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: she had no formal instruction after she left school. Her introduction to the French language had been a frustrating one: when a matter being discussed was not suitable for childish ears, her

[16] Beckett's allocation of hats to Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot* may derive from Cézanne's series of paintings *The Card Players* in which the players are all wearing hats. Ernest Hemingway was also influenced by Cézanne. In *A Moveable Feast* he writes 'I was learning something from the painting of Cézanne that made writing simple true sentences far from enough to make the stories have the dimensions that I was trying to put in them' (Hemingway, *Moveable* 23).

mother and aunts would turn to French which they spoke fluently, having been brought up by a French-Swiss governess – a tactic known as 'pas devant l'enfant!'. While the language was incomprehensible to the young Bowen, she was intrigued by the difference in the adults' demeanours – when they began their French conversation, 'their faces would animate and their voices quicken; mystery, exclusiveness and elation were in the air' (*People* 63-64). They would almost certainly have used facial expressions and body language, including hand gestures, to emphasise their points, and this would have given the child the idea that language can be moulded. Despite this early introduction to French, Bowen found the spoken language difficult to master; she confesses that she is no linguist, but that being compelled to read *Madame Bovary* in French was the start of a long career of French novel reading. Hepburn observes:

> Bowen understood France, as she understood England and America, through literature. [. . .] Her recognition of French literature as a source of inspiration aligns her with other Irish modernist writers, such as James Joyce and Samuel Beckett, who lived in Paris rather than London and saw themselves as writing within a European tradition. (Hepburn, *French* 1056)

The principal novelists and short-story writers to whom Bowen is referring in her 1942 interview with *The Bell* cited above (Chapter 1, p. 16) are Marcel Proust, Guy De Maupassant, Henri De Montherlant and Colette (1873-1954), but she is also familiar with the works of earlier writers, including René Descartes (1596-1650), Stendhal (1783-1842) and Flaubert: she collages from the works of the latter authors in *To the North* and *Eva Trout*. She reviews works by French authors, usually in translation. Among them are Flaubert, De Maupassant, François Mauriac and De Montherlant, but others include Simone De Beauvoir, Edmond Buchet (1907-1997), the young Françoise Sagan (1935-2004) and Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) (aware of their sensibilities, she warns her *Tatler* readers that they may find certain aspects of Sartre's *The Age of Reason* sordid or repellent) (*Weight* 225-227; 227-229; 215-216). A later author, of whom she would surely

have been aware, is Alain Robbe-Grillet (1922-2008) who reacted more strongly than Bowen to negative criticism finding that '[w]hat surprised me the most, both in the censure and the eulogies, was finding an almost universal implicit – or even explicit – reference to the great novels of the past, which were always set up as the model on which the young writer was supposed to keep his eyes fixed' (Robbe-Grillet, *Towards* 43).

Apart from reviewing and writing essays on French authors, Bowen also attempted translations of their works. If one is familiar with a language, one understands what one is hearing or reading in that language without the need to translate into one's own language. But to translate a work from its original language into your own, dwelling on the meaning of each word and phrase, requires a deeper understanding of not only the language but the mind of the author. In 1932 she began translating Flaubert's *L'Éducation Sentimentale* 'because it seems to me one of the best books in the world' (cited Glendinning, *Portrait* 117). She speaks about her identification with Flaubert and the experience of writing from a 1960 letter to Charles Ritchie.

> What an extraordinary feeling one has towards him: identification, almost. The feeling of identification one has in love. To me he (in the letters) is the only person who transcribes the actual SENSATION of writing – I mean, of being in the grip of it, of being 'at it'. The feeling that everything else is an unreality. [. . .] And one of the grand things is, that the letters, I mean what he says in them, are at once the core of writing and yet applicable to anything (almost) else that one does with passion: a passion at once of mind and senses and soul. (Glendinning and Robertson, *Love's* 361)

The language in her 1947 Preface to *The Flaubert Omnibus* is more technical, given that it was intended for publication.[17] In this essay Bowen uses *L'Éducation Sentimentale* to illustrate her points about the complexity of Flaubert's prose: that the 'structure and motivation [. . .] are like opening the back of a clock. Here is an interrelation of coils and tensions, springs and weights, cogs and hammers. In the plot, nothing does not act upon something else'. She stresses that in this novel:

[17] The translation of *L'Éducation Sentimentale* was not finished; nor was *The Flaubert Omnibus* published.

> As draughtsman and painter [Flaubert] is at his most superb. Few novels hold such interiors or such landscape. [. . .] He renders in words, as did his contemporaries the Impressionists in light-filled colour, the joy, more than half unconscious, of the beholding eye. [. . .] The necessariness, for Flaubert, of distance for vision, of vision for art, is stated. (*Impressions* 32; 33)

Her review of a 1941 translation by Anthony Goldsmith of *Sentimental Education* refers to the translator's faultlessly keeping 'the abruptness and suppleness of Flaubert's prose', and to a 'beauty, immune from feeling, of the thing in itself. Flaubert stands alone as the master of this poetic objectivity' (*Mulberry* 156-157).

Flaubert was literary god-father to Guy De Maupassant and, as Bowen tells us, would 'prune, criticise and sometimes [suppress]' the younger author's work (*People* 249). His advice to De Maupassant reminds us of Mansfield's letter to Middleton Murry quoted earlier (p. 20).

> When you pass by a shopkeeper sitting on his doorstep, or a concierge smoking his pipe, next to a rank of carriages, show me everything about that shopkeeper or concierge [. . .] in such a way that I would never confuse them with any other shopkeeper or concierge. [. . .] In everything, there's something waiting to be discovered, simply because we tend to look at the world only through the eyes of those who have preceded us. (De Maupassant, *Bel* xvi, xvii)

In 'Advice to a Young Writer', Bowen develops Flaubert's counsel:

> Concentrate your *vision* on any material thing you introduce, whether it be a chair, a plate, or a person. No inanimate object is inanimate; everything has something else sheathed in it. [. . .] Have you read Flaubert's novels? He was really a poet-mystic, but he schooled himself to an extraordinarily plain (outwardly, it would have seemed banal) objectivity. [. . .] [E]very time you write the word 'chair' force yourself to break off and contemplate the chair-ness of a chair. (*Weight* 4)

Bowen confessed to Virginia Woolf that De Maupassant 'had sharp sense but really rather a boring mind. You get to know his formula, but there is always the fascination: it's like watching someone do the same card trick over and over again' (cited Glendinning, *Portrait* 117). Reviewing a new English translation of *Bel-Ami* in 1948 she describes the novel as 'admittedly fascinating, but some would say, hateful'. Nevertheless she remarks on his ability to drive his subject 'in the full, dire implication of *what is happening*' and

admires his craftsmanship, commenting on the way the story is 'full of unforgettable pictures' (*Weight* 225-227).

If Bowen is somewhat ambivalent about De Maupassant, for her, as for many of her generation of Anglophone writers, Marcel Proust was a profound influence. As Cyril Connolly (1903-1974) writes in 'The New Mandarins': 'Proust [. . .] has become so familiar as almost to rank as an English novelist' (Connolly, 'Mandarins' 62). Bowen read his work in the original French rather than in translation, and around 1932 began to translate *Le Temps Retrouvé*, though like her Flaubert translation, this was never finished (Hepburn, *French* 1061). *The House in Paris*, the first novel on which she would work after her attempted translation, reflects in places the influence of Proust. In the convoluted way which becomes typical of her collage, here Bowen inserts at least two references which I discuss in more detail in Chapters 5 and 6. However, even earlier she felt she had learnt something from Proust, as she records in a letter to Ritchie after he had read *The Hotel*.

> I know the idea of a [sic] hotel came from Proust – I was reading the Balbec hotel part in *Á l'Ombre de Jeunes Filles en Fleur* when I suddenly remembered the (at the time) appalling hotel at Bordighera where I had spent a winter, 3 years before, with the Colleys. Never was I more bored and depressed – never have I been since – than that Bordighera winter. But I afterwards saw this was a case of what Proust says about boredom being (subsequently) fruitful. (Glendinning and Robertson, *Love's* 139-140)

Her interest in Proust, which continued to the end of her life, was shared with friends and colleagues, notably Moss, who dedicated to Bowen *The Magic Lantern of Marcel Proust*, his 1963 distillation of English translations of the seven volumes, highlighting aspects of Proust which we also find in Bowen. 'A book in which real people, natural objects, and institutions appear, yet resorting, like a fairy tale, to deception to reach the truth, *Remembrance of Things Past* is a house of mirrors' (Moss, *Magic* 14). Here Moss is describing the process of lying in order to reach the truth, something which Bowen would

have understood.[18] Moss would also have known Bowen's fascination with mirrors: for her they 'are magic': her 1967 article for *House and Garden* deals with their many different aspects: the history and secrets they must hold, the splintered mirror with its distorted reflection, their opulence, how in a mirrored room the beholder is never alone (*People* 201-205). Throughout Bowen's work we find a duality, a reflection of her reading of Proust. Moss highlights a further duality in Proust's perspective, telling us how Proust uses figuratively both the microscope and the telescope as instruments of perception, and continuing: 'The microscope and the telescope share in common lenses of magnification. The first deals with the invisibly small; the second with the invisibly distant' (Moss, *Magic* 20). Likewise Bowen uses Proustian perception, sometimes minutely examining close objects, sometimes focusing on the distance. Moss goes on to show how windows in Proust provide a lens – a point of view or perspective through which a subject may look at exterior action. Bowen goes further: her windows are often the eyes of the house. They become the subject, observing and responding to exterior action: as she says in 'Advice to a Young Writer', 'no inanimate object is inanimate' (*Weight* 4).

As well as Flaubert and Proust, Bowen's reading of French literature included contemporary writers, and in October 1937 she writes to William Plomer (1903-1973) that she has been having 'a heavenly time reading Montherlant' (*Mulberry* 204). That month she reviewed the first two volumes of his tetralogy *Pity for Women* for the *New Statesmen,* and she would review the final two volumes for *Purpose* in 1940. Bowen's reviews deal with structure and style: she remarks on De Montherlant's method of random assemblage as 'brilliantly chosen'. De Montherlant has, Bowen tells us, a 'ruthless touch on a good

[18] In 'Notes on Writing a Novel' Bowen insists that lying is at the root of story-telling. 'Plot is story. It is also "a story" in the nursery sense – lie. The novel lies, in saying that something happened that did not. It must therefore contain uncontradictable truth, to warrant the original lie' (*Orion* 18). Lying is necessary not only to fiction, but to all art: Picasso says in a 1923 interview 'We all know that Art is not truth. Art is a lie that makes us realize truth. [. . .] The artist must know the manner whereby to convince others of the truthfulness of his lies' (Picasso, 'Picasso' 315). Oscar Wilde addresses at length the necessity for lying in art in his 1891 dialogue 'The Decay of Lying – An Observation' http://www.public-library.uk/ebooks/27/54.pdf

many illusions'; '*Pity for Women* is a pitiless examination of the whole nature of pity – its range, its variations, its powers and its abuses' (*Impressions* 108-111). The Nobel prize-winner François Mauriac is another author whose work Bowen admired; she describes him as an 'unsparing novelist [who] somehow gives humanity full proportion' (*Weight* 304). All these French novelists, but particularly De Maupassant ('hateful'), De Montherlant ('pitiless') and Mauriac ('unsparing'), deal unremittingly with the pain that their characters, particularly their female ones, suffer: while Bowen appears to make no mention of Gide, one might also include his novel *La Porte Étroite* (1909) in which Alissa dies trying to make her way through the 'strait gate', with those of De Montherlant and Mauriac.

'Technique, plus a gift for analysis – though not of the kind which thins down emotion – always had been a forte of French writing', Bowen says in a short review of four works by French writers in 1957. She goes on:

> Feminine performance shows itself worthy of woman's place in Gallic civilisation. Colette (the unparalleled), Simone De Beauvoir, Louise De Villemorin [sic], and the teenage prodigy Françoise Sagan are among those who bring to the French novel individual gifts – some greater, some less. (*Weight* 308)

In 1948, shortly after she had reviewed *Bel-Ami*, Bowen reviewed Simone De Beauvoir's *The Blood of Others*, finding that while it had resemblance to Sartre's *The Age of Reason* and *The Reprieve* its author was 'considerably less grim that M. Sartre, considerably more given to rendering moments of tenderness and gaiety' (*Weight* 229). Since she reviewed *The Blood of Others* in the year before *Le Deuxième Sexe* was published (and five years before the English translation) Bowen would not at that point have seen the quotation from Dorothy Parker which appears in the latter work, but with which she would heartily have agreed: 'I cannot be fair about books that treat women as women. My idea is that all of us, men as well as women, whoever we are, should be considered as human beings' (cited De Beauvoir, 'Extracts' 4). Had she done, Bowen would surely have placed De Beauvoir and

Parker within a group which, in a 1947 review of Elizabeth Taylor's *A View of the Harbour*, she identifies as women novelists who do not 'make any attempt to bypass the fact that she is a woman – none of the best women novelists, from Jane Austen on through the Brontës, Colette (in France), "Elizabeth" of the *German Garden*, Virginia Woolf [. . .] ever has' (*Weight* 217). Why did Bowen not review the English translation of *The Second Sex*? In a photograph from the time the book is in her lap while she reads James Baldwin's *Go Tell it on the Mountain*, which she reviewed in 1954 (*Weight* 279). The answer may lie in the fact that she would have found it difficult to publish an honest review. While Bowen admired De Montherlant and Mauriac, Simone De Beauvoir did not, and devotes seventeen pages of *Le Deuxième Sexe* to a denunciation of De Montherlant's attitude to women in a section entitled 'Le Pain de Dégoût' ('The Bread of Disgust') (De Beauvoir, https://www.montherlant.be/images/photos/article_63_de-beauvoir-01.pdf Accessed 18 February 2021). Bowen, on the other hand, takes the subject matter as it is in her reviews of De Montherlant and Mauriac, outlining the story clinically and non-judgementally: indeed, she has a similar detachment from the fate of her own characters, particularly the women.

THE BLANK SPACE

There are other similarities to be found in the work of Beckett and Bowen: Corcoran points out that Harold Pinter (1930-2008) brings out the Beckettian aspect of Bowen in the screen play for his television adaptation of *The Heat of the Day* (Corcoran, *Enforced* 200). Pinter's adaptation ends, not with Bowen's original upbeat ending of Louie Lewis catching sight of three swans flying over the Royal Military Canal in Seale/Hythe, but with Harrison and Stella in her new flat during an air raid. His final stage direction – 'They do

not move' – echoes exactly those of both acts of *Waiting for Godot* as well as nodding to 'silence', a direction Beckett uses throughout his play.

> *They sit in silence.*
> *After a time the All Clear sounds.*
> *They do not move*. (Pinter, *Heat* 103)

Thus the film ends in stasis (stillness or abeyance) and silence (absence of sound). Pinter has highlighted a similarity between Beckett and Bowen, and it is helpful here to turn to Mallarmé who, in his introduction to his concrete poem 'Un Coup de Dés', makes the point that:

> The 'blanks' indeed take on importance, at first glance; the versification demands them, as a surrounding silence, to the extent that a fragment, lyrical or of a few beats, occupies, in its midst, a third of the space of paper. https://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/French/MallarmeUnCoupdeDes.php Accessed 3 February 2019

Brown links this poem to Beckett.

> The *space between* the poet/painter and the phenomenal world of which he wrote or painted may be linked to the Modernist conception of the *void*. [. . .] Mallarmé's [poem] demonstrates the most developed use of this space, where the poet seemingly 'threw' words across the blank page to create a constellation of words, based on chance. (Brown, *Yeats* 98)

Blank space (the void), stasis (stillness or abeyance), silence: these are equivalents. The visual arts are essentially physically static: whatever the artist may suggest with his depiction, the painted image is motionless on the canvas, the human or animal depicted is motionless within the marble, in the photograph the moment is frozen in time, in film, each frame is a still image. Music, on the other hand, has motion. Even so, silence is an essential component in music – Mozart is reputed to have said: 'The music is not in the notes, but in the silence between'. Without silence between phrases there would be no dramatic tension. By using silence a composer can create a sense of expectation and so increase the anticipation of what is to come. Silence becomes important to the composers of the Second Viennese School (Schoenberg, Webern and Berg *inter alia*: Stockhausen

and Boulez would follow) while John Cage's *4'33"* requires the listener to contemplate ambient rather than musical sound. Similarly Mallarmé, Woolf, Mansfield, Beckett and Bowen all use physical silence on the page, either in the way Mallarmé describes the 'blanks' (or the white space) as silence, or by suggesting an impasse as so often happens to Beckett's characters. Flaubert too used the blank space: 'Proust, in his essay on Flaubert, singled out for special praise the blank spaces that interrupt the narrative flow of the *Education sentimentale'* (cited Levin, *Memories* 36). And through Ezra Pound in 'Canto XIII', the Chinese philosopher Confucius tells us: 'And even I can remember/A day when historians left blanks in their writings,/I mean for things they didn't know/But that time seems to be passing' (Pound, *Cantos* 64). Bowen's most evident use of the blank space comes in *The Little Girls*, and I discuss this at the end of Chapter 5.

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Having set Bowen within the context of her contemporaries, I now examine her particular techniques under broad headings. In the next chapter I consider her use of light, essential to painters from the Renaissance onwards, and for Bowen the *sine qua non* of experience.

Chapter 2

‘YES, *LET* THERE BE LIGHT!’

In one of her last essays, ‘New Waves of the Future’, Bowen quotes God’s first utterance from the book of *Genesis*, saying ‘Yes, *let* there be light’ (*People* 42). By placing emphasis on the word ‘let’, Bowen pleads for light as a physical and spiritual necessity. Light is always important to her: in an autobiographical note she writes: ‘I have the painter’s sensitivity to light. Much (and perhaps the best) of my writing is verbal painting’ (Autobiographical 1948). Light is an abiding companion in her fiction, and a form of energy the effect of which she turns to time and again, often discussing the eye and sight in her non-fiction. Two philosophers who published treatises on light and to whom Bowen refers in the course of her writing are the Irishman Bishop Berkeley and the Frenchman René Descartes, though she does not discuss their work directly (*Weight* 25; *ET* 144; 149). In this chapter I discuss how Bowen elaborates on light in her essays, articles, speeches and broadcasts, and how she uses it in her ten novels. Not only does she ‘write [and] think from the eye’, she will sometimes use the eye and sight to define her characters: this I discuss at the end of this chapter (*Weight* 26).

Primary sources of natural light are the sun, fire and, from a great distance, the stars; secondary or reflected light comes from the moon and from surfaces both natural and artificial, such as rock faces, water or snow, or mirrors. Light may also be refracted, prisms resulting in kaleidoscopic effects; ocular distortion sometimes creates illusion. Neither light nor its sibling darkness can be perceived without the eyes, the organs of sight. Sight is enabled not only by light, but by shadow and by reflection. Each of these may be aided, or distorted, by functions of the eye, which include focus and perspective or angle of view, or may be aided or adjusted by artificial lenses such as corrective spectacles or a

magnifying lens (the telescope or microscope). Something seen by the eyes may be recorded using a camera.

Different sources of artificial light, called upon to combat darkness, were developed exponentially in the late nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, as the geographer Nigel Thrift explains.

> [The history of the development of light] dates from the end of the eighteenth [sic] century, when, for the first time, a technology that had not significantly altered for several hundred years, began to change. Before this time artificial light had been in short supply. To an extent, the work day had been emancipated from dependence on daylight by candles and oil lamps, but most households used artificial light only very sparingly. [. . .] [R]unning in parallel with the development of gas lighting was the development of brighter and more spectacular electrical light. [. . .]
>
> This history of an ever-expanding landscape of light which we now take so much for granted cannot be ignored. [. . .]
>
> A final change produced by manufactured light was a remetaphorisation of texts and bodies as a result of the new perceptions. There were, to begin with, new perceptions of landscape: the night under artificial light was a new world of different colours and sensations, modulated by artificial lighting, which painters like Joseph Wright of Derby were amongst the first to explore. (Thrift, 'Inhuman' 201-203)

'New Waves of the Future' is a sensational exploration of light and Bowen makes distinctions between electric light and earlier versions of artificial light such as the oil lamp and candle light, and finds that in the twentieth century light can be harnessed in the domestic environment as a form of art. She notes the effects of shadows cast by high-rise buildings in cities, remarking on how the higher the buildings are the more precious light lower down becomes to those below. Light, she says, is persistent and mobile: nothing can keep it out. It slithers in, catches mirrors, paints the scene a shade more dazzlingly. 'Ever changing, shadows are light's language', and almost as frequently as light, darkness appears in Bowen's fiction, often as shadow: a technique employed by the Impressionists. The cousin of light and darkness is reflection, which Bowen sees as light's playmate.

> One great indoor playmate of light is the wall mirror, with its doubling trickery, its extensive power. Outdoors, the fit mate *and* playmate for light is water. Light likes

> pools, ponds, lakes, but is in love with rivers. [. . .] [A]bove all fountains [spring up] into light's embrace' (*People* 42-46).[19]

Bowen's earliest recorded experience of light is in her second-floor nursery in Herbert Place in Dublin whose low windows looked onto a canal, from which reflections cast a 'watery quality of lightness' up into the room (*BC* 471).[20] In a 1950 BBC radio interview with her fellow novelist Jocelyn Brooke (1908-1966), Bowen isolates two reasons for the quality of light in her work, firstly her personal experience of light, and secondly the way that, by changing, light can create and alter atmosphere.

> One [reason is] the purely physical fact that I am extremely short-sighted and therefore tend to see everything at first glance either as a sort of dazzling blur or in a mass of shadows, and the other was already suggested by [a] critic, who being Irish himself spotted the thing in me. In Ireland [. . .] light is a factor, immense factor; it's always changing and it conditions everything by its changes. It can range from the almost magical, really almost celestial, to starkly, grimly, grittily ugly. And the light determines one's mood, one's day, really one's sense of the entire world.

She goes on: '[W]herever I am, I can't escape from an almost fatalistic susceptibility to light'. Brooke responds.

> Yes, I think you once told me, too, that you used to paint and draw a lot when you were a child. That made me wonder, rather, if you hadn't been a writer whether you might not have been a painter instead. [. . .] This might possibly account for your interest in life [light?] and in landscape generally.[21]

And Bowen agrees:

> I can see, in fact, my unpainted picture, and perhaps that concentration of vision, which I might have had as a painter, which a painter has, has accounted for this fact that really the short story which was my first choice of form is really, I think always, the natural and the attractive one to me. (*Listening* 280-281)

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[19] In *Landscape into Art* Kenneth Clark discusses '[Monet's] marvellous capacity for seeing the complementary colours of a shadow. Impressionism gave us something which has always been one of the great attainments of art: it enlarged our range of vision. We owe much of our pleasure in looking at the world to the great artists who have looked at it before us. In the eighteenth century, gentlemen carried a device called a Claude glass in order that they might see the landscape with the golden tone of a Claude – or rather of the varnish on a Claude. The impressionists did the exact reverse. They taught us to see the colour in shadows.' (Clark, *Landscape* 177-178)

[20] This experience is on a par with that of Virginia Woolf described in Chapter 1, p. 24.

[21] The transcript of this radio broadcast gives 'life': it is likely that the transcriber misheard and that Brooke said 'light', which would make more sense in this context.

Bowen's concentration of vision leads to a closely packed canvas, as I will show in Chapter 4, 'The Idea Comes as an Abstract Pattern.' Bowen expands on some of these ideas in her 1955 interview with Allen when she says: 'The situation or the idea is something I see pictorially and it is always surrounded by some sort of atmosphere or time of day or season of the year, even though the story may move to and fro.' Like Brooke, Allen comments that she writes intensely visually, and Bowen goes on: 'I think you must have action and a story, and a plot, but that the aim is to present what happens in the light of imagination. To illuminate it and give it a meaning, you isolate some small story' (*Weight* 26-27). What Bowen is describing here is the process of focusing, of pointing her camera's lens at a certain aspect, something she alludes to when, in 'Notes on Writing a Novel' she asks '[w]here is the camera-eye to be located?' (*Orion* 24).

As I note in Chapter 1, use of light to illuminate is a characteristic which Bowen shares with Thomas Hardy. Both writers are 'seers' and observe, absorb and reproduce what they saw. However, there is one notable difference in how each of them views light and darkness. Hardy's novels are full of light – he frequently writes about sunsets, sunrises and moonlight, something he derives from the influence of Turner – but darkness tends to be menacing and overwhelming.[22] In *The Expressive Eye: Fiction and Perspective in the Work of Thomas Hardy*, J.B. Bullen points out that '[m]any of the journeys in [*Tess of the d'Urbervilles*] – journeys created by the contingencies of the plot – take place at night. It is the obscurity of darkness which causes the death of Prince. Throughout the novel sunlight and darkness are engaged in a battle for supremacy' (Bullen, *Expressive* 201).

> The opposition between sunlight and darkness is absolute; the two are mutually exclusive, and represent contradictory states. The contrast between sunlight and artificial light, however, is rather different. Here there is no 'struggle; instead, artificial light is offered as the deceptive, even demonic, alternative to the light of the sun. It usually comes in the form of firelight, and Hardy exploits the infernal

[22] 'Hardy's treatment of [light and shade, colour, and atmosphere] shows him as the disciple of many masters, the most pervasive being Turner' (Grundy, *Hardy* 51).

> associations of fires as they cast their lurid and unnatural glow over the events of the narrative. (Bullen, *Expressive* 202)

As we saw from Bowen's remarks on light to Brooke, and in her essay 'New Waves', such strong opposition between sunlight and darkness or between sunlight and artificial light is rarely found in her writing: while they may contrast they are often complementary, as in this extract from *The Last September*.

> The screen of trees that reached like an arm from behind the house – embracing the lawns, banks and terraces in mild ascent – had darkened, deepening into a forest. Like splintered darkness, branches pierced the faltering dusk of leaves. Evening drenched the trees; the beeches were soundless cataracts. Behind the trees, pressing in from the open and empty country like an invasion, orange bright sky crept and smouldered. Firs, bearing up to pierce, melted against the brightness. Somewhere, there was a sunset in which the mountains lay like glass.
>
> Dark had so gained the trees that Lois, turning back from the window, was surprised at how light the room was. Day, still coming in from the fields by the south windows, was stored in the mirrors, in the sheen of the wallpaper, so that the room still shone. (*LS* 22-23).

Apart from 'splinter' and 'pierce', most of Bowen's verbs are gentle: 'embrace', 'drench', 'crept', 'melt'. Even 'pierce' is modified by 'melt'. Inside the house daylight is assisted by the mirrors to obviate the need for artificial light. Even in Emmeline and Markie's last fateful car ride in *To the North*, light and darkness complement each other: 'a long lit road running brighter with traffic crossed theirs. [. . .] [h]omely windows were now beginning to darken [. . .] vivid stretches of turf and kerb, sweeping fans of light over ceilings'. After this it is coldness, rather than darkness, which begins to 'tighten upon them as street by street the heat and exasperation of London kept flaking away' (*TN* 238).

BOWEN'S USE OF LIGHT IN HER NOVELS

Bowen's use of light in her ten novels evolves from light-filled Impressionist or Post-Impressionist canvases, through the fragmented perspective of Cubism and the dynamism of Futurism, to reflection, illusion and the cinema of the *nouvelle vague* of the 1960s. In this section I consider her use of light in her first nine novels under the following headings: Impressionist/Post-Impressionist landscapes, Surrealism, light reflected, and mirroring, *chiaroscuro,* light in war-time and how she uses the eye to define her characters. Finally I look at light in *Eva Trout*: in this novel Bowen melds the genres, making it difficult to tease them apart.

Light in Impressionist/Post-Impressionist Landscapes

While Bowen increasingly draws on and blends the attributes of a variety of genres, she never totally discards the Impressionist and Post-Impressionist genres she adopts at the outset. Pictures of land- and townscapes, in which her eye is always conscious of light, are found throughout her oeuvre: she continues to pause as if to set up her easel and paint a scene. As Maud Ellmann notes: '[*The Hotel*] is punctuated by tableaux, in which the scene of action is suddenly immobilised into a picture' (Ellmann, *Shadow* 79). Several of the novels open with a land- or townscape, the most striking being those in *The House in Paris*, *The Death of the Heart*, *The Heat of the Day* and *A World of Love*, while there are notable scenes in *Friends and Relations*, *To the North* and in 'The Flesh' section of *The Death of the Heart*. In all of these she varies the quality of light to suit her narrative and visual purposes.

Bowen demonstrates in these two pictures from *The Hotel* how the effect of light can vary.

> The sun had dipped to the line of the hills, so that the sky had a kind of gold sparkle which reflected itself on figures and faces. Even before the moment of

> sunset the air was already tingling with cold; the dark, keen, upstanding trees about them seemed slightly to shiver. [. . .] The rocky crest of a hill to the east, at a great height, had been suddenly ribbed with scarlet. This vivid colour against the profound and quickly darkening sky was to Northern eyes a challenge to credulity. (*TH* 67-68)

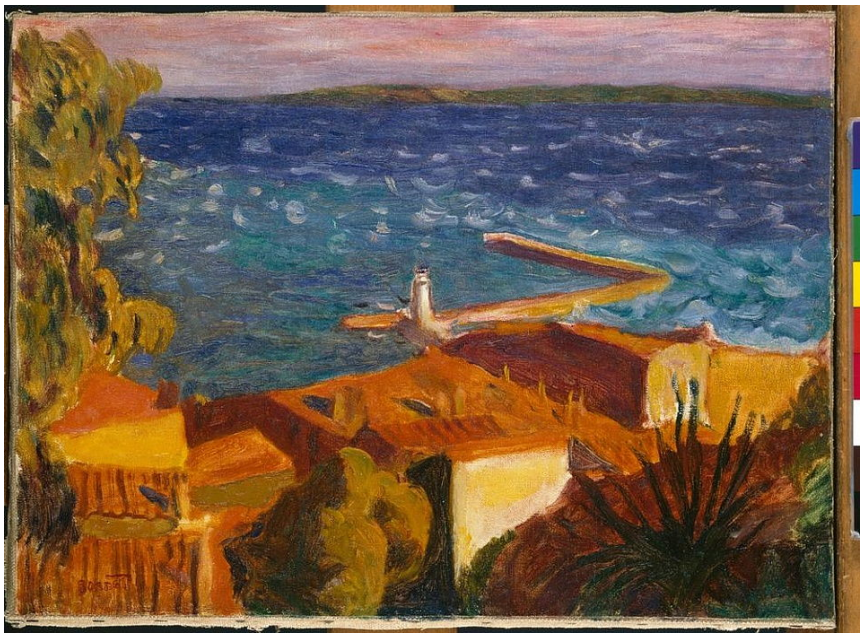
In this depiction of sunset light acts *upon* the landscape, giving the sky a sparkle, reflecting on figures and faces and suddenly changing the colour of a hill. In a similar way, in

Claude Monet (1840-1926). *Valley of the Creuse at Sunset*. 1889. Musée Unterlinden, Colmar. https://www.musee-unterlinden.com/en/oeuvres/valley-of-the-creuse-sunset/

Monet's 1889 painting, the rocky crest is ribbed with gold, the sky is luminous, and the hill has taken on a predominately carmine colour. In this next picture, light is *emitted by* the landscape, casting out such brilliance that there can be no shadow: it is so abundant that the rocks, roofs and campanili are able to give out light back as well as absorb it.

> Others [hills] ran down to the sea in a succession of fine blue noses; headland behind headland fading towards France. The earth had this brilliant morning a kind of independent luminousness; there were still no shadows anywhere and the rocks, flat clustered roofs and campanili seemed to shed light as well as to receive it. For

> miles the bright-blue swelling glassiness of the sea received the coast gracefully among ripples that frayed continually into foam, slipped back into themselves, and slid on again. (*TH* 82)



Pierre Bonnard (1867-1947). *Small Mediterranean Port*. 1912, Private Collection

We find a similar effect in this painting by the Nabis/Post-Impressionist Pierre Bonnard, known principally as a colourist, though his oeuvre is also notable for his use of light. In this painting of a small Mediterranean port, light is bouncing off the walls and the roofs of the buildings, and the sea is frayed by the foam of the small waves.[23] Atmosphere was important for Bonnard as it was for Bowen, and just as Bowen assembles her landscapes 'out of memories', Bonnard painted mostly from memory, using pencil sketches on which he briefly noted the atmospheric conditions at the time: for example, 'beau vif', 'nuageux froid' (*Orion* 22; Gale, *Bonnard* 55-57).

In *The Last September* Bowen continues with Post-Impressionist landscape.

> From the slope's foot, where Danielstown trees began, the land stretched out in a plain flat as water, basin of the Madder and the Darra and their fine wandering tributaries, till the far hills, faint and brittle, straining against the inrush of vaster distance, cut the droop of the sky like a glass blade. Fields gave back light to the

[23] John Banville, in his introduction to *Elizabeth Bowen: Collected Stories*, notes similarities with Bonnard: 'for the sensuousness of her surfaces one would need to go to the paintings of William Orpen or, better again, Pierre Bonnard' (Bowen, *Collected* 2019, xx).

> sky – the hedges netting them over thinly and penetrably – as though the sheen of grass were a shadow on water, a breath of colour clouding the face of light. (*LS* 66-67)

We may compare this passage with one of Cézanne's many paintings of Mont Sainte-Victoire. Here Bowen draws the eye from the trees in the flat foreground across the landscape towards the sharply defined edge of the hills in a manner like that of Cézanne. Light bounces back from her landscape, just as it does from Cézanne's painting by his use of multiple planes of different colours.

Paul Cézanne (1839-1906). *Mont Sainte-Victoire with Large Pine*. c.1887
©The Samuel Courtauld Trust, The Courtauld Gallery, London
https://courtauld.ac.uk/highlights/montagne-sainte-victoire-with-large-pine/

Light in Surrealism

While the landscapes in *The Hotel* are mainly reminiscent of Impressionists and Post-Impressionists such as Bonnard, Bowen does give us one instance of Surrealism. Walking through the town, Sydney 'could be conscious of the street only as a sharp distinction between sun and shadow' (*TH* 57). This 'sharp distinction' is to be found in the work of De Chirico whose paintings are distinguished by architectonic lines and sharp contrast between light and shadow, as in his 1914 *Melancholy and Mystery of a Street*.

Giorgio De Chirico (1888-1978). *Melancholy and Mystery of a Street*. 1914. Private Collection

Throughout her oeuvre Bowen will employ a technique analogous to that of De Chirico's architectonic combination of light and structure with sharp lines to create images depicting empty towns.

In her third novel, *Friends and Relations*, Bowen begins to have the confidence to write in what will become her signature style as she develops her peculiar aesthetic. Bennett and Royle comment on one facet which begins to emerge in this novel – her use of light.

> *Friends and Relations* invites us into an experience and a critical thinking of the novel as a kind of photology or study in light, imposing the strange flourish of a new sense of light, an exposure or exposition that – while we might seek to compare this with cinema or photography, paintings, or other manifestations of so-called 'visual culture' – is not like any of these. (Bennett and Royle, 'Reassessment' 80)

Bowen demonstrates her idiosyncratic 'visual culture' in the opening pages of the novel. The very first paragraph is dark. 'The morning of the Tilney-Studdart wedding rain fell

steadily [. . .] veiling trees and garden and darkening the canvas of the marquee that should have caught the earliest sun in happy augury. [. . .] Clouds with their reinforcements came rolling over the Malvern Hills' (*FR* 7). Already she is suggesting a painting by the use of 'canvas', and within a few pages, she introduces light in this animated surreal sequence.

> The sun descended, the wet garden was staged in light; guests ventured out on duck-boards to see the tulips. The sun, still descending, came in at the side of the marquee, painting the company. Laughter became expressed in glittering teeth, congeniality in a flashing eyeglass. A white kid glove rolled back from a wrist, the half-ruined cake went golden; the faces flame-coloured. (*FR* 13-14)

This active image demonstrates the effects of light as the sun enters the scene, creating a theatre of the garden where tulips are the first protagonists on stage. Its beams probe further as it proceeds to focus on the company as they venture onto the scene: here Bowen is using 'company' as meaning a group of theatrical players as much as a group of guests. Inanimate objects become animate players as Bowen focuses on the detail picked out by light: teeth glitter, an eyeglass flashes, a glove rolls back, while the cake and the faces actively turn, rather than are turned, golden and flame-coloured in response to light. As a still life, the effect is similar to that in Dalí's much more detailed *Nature Morte Vivante*

Salvador Dalí (1904-1989). *Nature Morte Vivante*. 1956. Salvador Dalí Museum, St Petersburg, Florida. https://www.salvador-dali.org/en/artwork/catalogue-raisonne-paintings/obra/708/nature-morte-vivante-fast-moving-still-life

(whose English title is 'Still Life – Fast Moving') where objects are evidently active and where light comes from a number of different sources: from behind the clouds in the top left of the picture, from behind the viewer to cast shadows from the knife and glass, and from above to cast a shadow from the moving apple onto the dish.

In this novel Bowen begins to give animation to inanimate objects by her use of light and perspective. As in the tableaux in *The Hotel*, landscape and the built environment dominate, and humans are mostly absent, but the following two very different scenes mark a development in Bowen's aesthetic: they are no longer purely descriptive but contain animation.

> Today this surely was the wettest village in the world: the poor late lilac was sodden; its leaves ran like gutters. Rain fell over dark doorways; the plaster cottages were distraught with it; the brick cottages sullen. Smoke from the dinner fires hung heavy, clotting the trees, and where under dark eaves the old woman still did not die, geraniums stifled, pressing close to the panes. The International Stores, full of cocoa, stood over its red reflection. (*FR* 66)

This passage has opened on the village of Batts Monachorum, with its dark inhospitable atmosphere. Rain dominates, affecting even the buildings which are 'distraught' or 'sullen'. There is dynamic tension: the old woman is resisting the shadow of death which is trying to enter the cottage, while the geraniums are straining to escape out through the window panes to what light there is. There is sufficient light to reflect the International Stores in the puddles, but the atmosphere is chilly enough for the Stores to need to warm itself with cocoa. This second picture, of Market Keaton, has strong shadow and light which again reminds us of De Chirico's all but deserted urban landscapes.

> Here the town hall clock struck three to an empty square, inattentive, pitted with pole-sockets: not a stall up yet for tomorrow's market. A cat's yawn gave the note of the afternoon. Pavements sleepily glared; over the butcher's a piano played in its sleep. All down the street the lettered awnings were low, and women, girls for the day in brief cotton dresses, crossed from shadow to shadow. The town did not know itself; it became a seaside town high and dry; in contradiction to nature some bright shadow, some idea of unreal pleasure trailed over it. Bow-fronted houses bulged here and there from the flat stucco; in shadow, the Gothic bank was cut out

> in slate on the glare; opposite the bright 'Plough' flushed in a bacchic dream. (*FR* 80)

Buildings and structures are again animate: the square is inattentive, the pavements glare, the piano is soporific, the bank is sharply delineated and the pub flushes. There are suggestions of a heat haze, causing distortions. Women, who have become almost illusory, morph into girls and cross the street 'from shadow to shadow'; while it appears to be inactive, the rural town itself has been turned into a seaside town.

The House in Paris opens as day is breaking, and brief gashes are all the daylight we ever see in 'The Present'. Light in the House is static, subdued, controlled: Mme Fisher's bedroom is 'guarded from natural light' (*HP* 208). It is not until the children leave the House in the company of Ray (who is surely named appropriately) and experience the artificial light of rush-hour Paris, full of movement, that we find active light again, but this time it is artificial. Pavements reflect, lights wheel (*HP* 232). As Leopold and Ray leave the Gare de Lyon, Ray sees Karen's child in the bright light of strong arc lamps. Waiting for the taxi, looking down at Paris 'crowned with signs and starting alight with windows', Leopold asks 'Is it illuminated?' (*HP* 239). The boy feels himself moving from a dark world into a different, brighter one, one which he hopes he might understand and one where he might be understood.

Light Reflected: Mirroring

In 'Mirrors are Magic', a late essay, Bowen gives us a short history of the mirror and mirroring, starting with Narcissus and the Romans, and goes on to explore the characteristics beyond mere function of the mirror: how it is more than an inanimate object, varying as it does in different circumstances and lighting states. 'Much of a mirror's verdict is conditioned by its situation and lighting'. She talks about large mirrors hanging on walls alongside portraits: '[T]he mirrors outdid their rivals in one particular –

they were living pictures, their subject, the subject the current moment. [. . .] They dramatized life. [. . .] They extend, or seem to extend, space; they increase light' (*People* 201-203). Here it is helpful to consider Joyce O. Lowrie's opening discussion of the mirror in *Sightings: Mirrors in Texts, Texts in Mirrors*:

> To look into a mirror is both a reflective and a reflexive experience. J. Baltrusaitis claims that the mirror is an allegory not only of precise vision, but also of profound thought, of examining a problem attentively. *Reflectere,* he asks, does it not mean 'to send back . . .' and 'to reflect,' does it not mean 'to meditate'? The verb, in Latin, according to D. Colin, means to 'curve backwards,' or 're-curve.' When we see our reflection in a mirror, he said, we are projected 'backwards,' as it were into our past; it is an action that has to do with memory. A 'reflection,' a 'reflex,' the verb 'to reflect,' all of these expressions have the same etymology. (Lowrie, *Sightings* 1; Baltrusaitis, *Miroir* 9-13)

In the case of Bowen, the mirror often examines the action in her novels and becomes a repository of memory, while through her dyslocution her prose sometimes appears to bend back on itself.

In *The Hotel* Bowen not only creates images which resemble paintings, she also experiments with mirroring and reflection. When Sydney considers her own reflection, as in the following passage, it is as though she is having an internal conversation, questioning herself and answering her questions through the mirror. She becomes aware of her perception of herself, at the same time realising that others, from their side of the mirror, may have a different perception of her, and acknowledges that the perception others have of themselves may not be the same as the perception she has of them.

> [Sydney] frowned at her own reflection: was this what all these people really saw when they looked at her? She was accustomed to stare at people as from a point of vantage, forgetting that she too had a face. They had thoughts, too (with these she often forgot to credit them); did *they* also think as they looked at oneself? The strangeness is that a cat can look at a king and *see* him: we kings forget so often that cats are more than objective. (*TH* 17)

The reference to a cat looking at a king in this passage gives us an early example of Bowen's literary collage, in this case Alice's retort to the King of Hearts in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (Carroll, *Wonderland* 113). Sydney again questions herself in

the mirror when preparing to go out for a walk with James Milton. 'She [. . .] returned more than once to the looking-glass to review herself critically' (*TH* 79).

We know of Bowen's attachment to the Alice stories through her frequent collage from them. In *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, while Alice does not pass through a mirror as she does in *Through the Looking-Glass*, there are episodes of textual mirroring or chiasmus both in her encounters with the Cheshire Cat and at the Mad Hatter's Tea Party. The perceptual distortions that Alice encounters in *Through the Looking-Glass* are more complex than those in *Wonderland*, yet still fall into recognisable patterns: in the later story we find not only the mirror image, but also the fact that a mirror image is hardly ever an accurate reverse of the original. Once through the looking-glass, Alice finds that the landscape is not a reflection of the world she has left and therefore a reversed world: indeed there is little logic as it is understood in the 'real' world. These distortions are true for paintings, too: a painting of a scene or still life is a reproduction of that scene or still life in the perspective of the viewer. But when a painting is of a mirror or other reflection, it may incorporate imperfections, just as a mirror or moving water might give a distorted reflection. These imperfections often throw up questions: in Manet's *Bar at the Folies-*

Édouard Manet (1832-1883). *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère.* 1882. The Courtauld Gallery, London
https://courtauld.ac.uk/highlights/a-bar-at-the-folies-bergere/

Bergère, for example, we cannot quite believe that the barmaid who faces us with dreamy cast-down eyes in the centre of the painting is the same barmaid whose back is seen in the mirror leaning towards, apparently engaging with, the customer whose smudgy larger-than-life image makes him lack focus, yet makes him threatening. A further perspective comes from Jonathan Miller, that 'in contrast to a sheet of plate glass with which we can painfully collide without any warning, it is impossible to get that close to a mirror without meeting yourself coming in the opposite direction'; it is therefore 'decidedly odd Alice fails to notice the fact that [the looking-glass room] is occupied by someone who looks and acts just like her'. Alice is able to believe that 'the reflected room is an actual room, but only by pretending the glass has softened enough to let her through, can she visit the looking-glass house' (Miller, *Reflection* 119; 120; 119). This is similar to the way Jean Cocteau's character Orphée is able to pass through glass in the film *Orphée*, something I discuss in Chapter 5, p.189, in relation to *The Little Girls*.

Bowen writes of *A World of Love*: 'It's on the periphery of a passion – or, the intensified reflections of several passions in a darkened mirror' (quoted Halperin, *Eminent* 119). In this novel each of three women – Jane, Lilia and Lady Latterly – reflect on themselves in mirrors, examining themselves emotionally as well as physically. The morning after Jane has found the batch of letters sent by Guy to an unknown woman, she goes to Antonia's bedroom, where Antonia '[chooses] to fail to bring the girl in the sunny dusk into focus'. In 'Mirrors are Magic' Bowen asks 'Do we act up to mirrors?' (*People* 205). In the following passage, Jane is certainly doing that. There is a pause, some conversation, and then Jane goes the looking-glass.

> There she stood, back turned to the bed, searching impersonally for the picture Antonia had failed to care to find – or for the meaning of the picture, without which there could be no picture at all. [. . .] Fred's child's first blank then utterly stricken look, in reflection, was to be watched by the woman left behind on the bed; until Jane, suspecting this might be so, hurriedly bent over the dressing table to make a play of absorption in what was on it. [. . .] But the play broke down. (*WL* 25)

Returning from the Fête at Lady Latterly's the previous day, Lilia sees herself in a mirror.

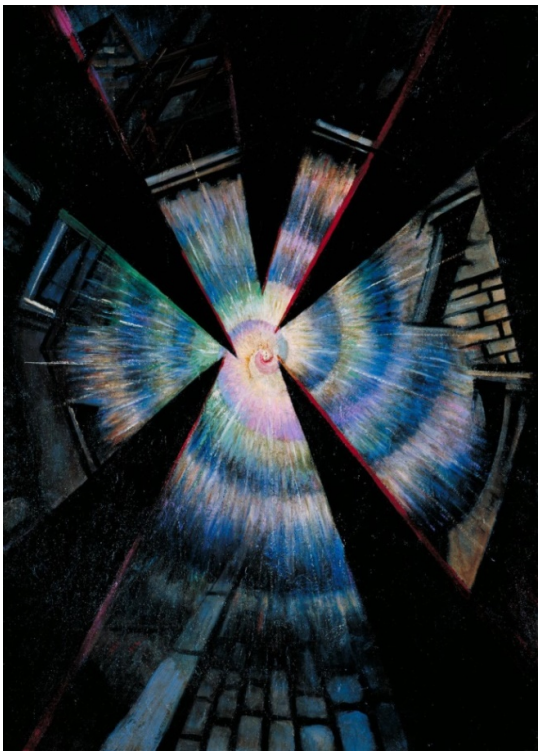
> Inside the drawing-room, facing the door, a mirror embosked in gilt ferns filled up an alcove. Lilia therefore advanced to meet a figure fit for the Royal Garden Party – white cart-wheel hat, gloves to the elbow, crêpe floral gown. She and her image confronted each other and the day's disillusionment, of which the marvel was that it should recur – summer after summer, the same story. Who else was to know what had been hoped for, always, in spite of all? Disappointment for ever is fresh and young – she could no longer sustain it; she turned away and vanish[ed] from her own eyes. (*WL* 30)

This mirror has been privy to Lilia's life ever since she arrived at Montefort twenty years previously. Rather than be reminded of the disappointments over that time, she moves away, leaving them contained within the mirror, despite the fact that she looks every inch the chatelaine. The following evening Lady Latterly, sitting in front of the triple mirror in her bedroom, is assaulted by light.

> The bedroom gained still more unreality by now seeming trapped somewhere between day and night – this marvel of marbling and mirror-topping, mirror-building-in and prismatic whatnots being at the moment a battleground of clashing dazzling reflections and refractions. Crystal the chandelier dripped into the sunset; tense little lit lamps under peach shades were easily floated in upon by the gold of evening. Day had not done with the world yet; trees were in the conspiracy. The outdoors, light-shot, uncannily deepening without darkening, leaned through the too-large windows – a blinding ray presently splintered over the dressing table. With a cry, Lady Latterly downed tools.
>
> 'I can't see myself, you see! I can't see a thing!' (*WL* 56)

This passage describes some of the ways in which light can be manipulated to create different visual effects and in which it can, indeed, blind the viewer. Many of Bowen's light leitmotifs are contained in it: crystals and prisms, mirrors and windows, reflection and refraction, and sight itself – or the lack of it.

Splintered light also occurs the previous day. As a 'kaleidoscopic shimmer over the Fête [spins over] into the shadow of glossy beeches', Antonia trips over a tent peg, and '[jars] the lens in her brain. [. . .] Like a bullet-hit pane, the whole scene shivered, splintered outward in horror from that small black vacuum in its core' (*WL* 29). In this



C.R.W. Nevinson (1889-1946). *Bursting Shell* TO3676, 1915
https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/nevinson-bursting-shell-t03676

painting of a bursting shell from 1915 by Nevinson, we see splintered light spiralling outwards, though from a white core rather than a black one.

Of all Bowen's novels, in *The Little Girls* her use of active light is least obvious, but like *A World of Love* it is one where her fascination with mirrors and reflection comes into play. In her Introduction to the 1999 Vintage edition, Penelope Lively writes: 'The children's burial of a coffer with carefully chosen objects that is to serve as a time-capsule becomes a metaphor for the selective information of memory' (*LG* 1-2). For Bowen, memory is often to be found in mirrors: as she tells us in 'Mirrors are Magic' 'if an ancient mirror could speak of its young days, if its memories could be photographed back to us – what stories! [. . .] Look deeper into this mirror: the Past itself inhabits these watery purplish depths' (*People* 202).

Bent on procuring artefacts to place in a 'coffer' which they intend to bury in their school grounds, so that at some point in the future posterity will discover it, the little girls

(Dinah/Dicey, Sheila/Sheikie and Mumbo/Clare) are in the Old High Street in Southstone (Bowen's alias for Folkestone). Bowen describes the window of a shop that not only sells pictures of the Old High Street, but which also reflects and distorts the original image. It is something which Bowen must have experienced as a child in Folkestone, as in the glittering windows in this reproduction of a photograph of the Old High Street from 1913, the year after Bowen left the area and just a year before she sets the novel. That experience would have been a revelation to the child, and an important stage in the development of Bowen's awareness of the creative possibilities of light.

> This was an Old High Street window not to be missed: it guaranteed a sensation like no other – that of looking at pictures of where one was. [. . .] All this was to be wondered at through two layers of glass – the picture-shop's windows and the glass in the gilt or ebony frames. But the greater wonder was that, outside the pictures, there the Old High Street actually *was*. You could verify simply by turning round: there, it indeed remained – a magnified picture. [. . .] Moreover, a portion of the Old High Street (that exactly across the way from the picture shop) reflected itself not only in the shop window but in the glass of these numerous pictures of itself. The reflection itself looked like a large painting. (*LG* 97-98)

The Old High Street, Folkestone, 1913. www.warrenpress.net

At a first reading this passage, with its wonderful description of the possible effects of the combination of glass and mirroring when allied with its images of the Old High Street, would appear to be a set piece, a picture, but unlike the picture of Lady Latterly and her

mirror it does have a bearing on the narrative. When years later the Little Girls, now women in their sixties, conspire to exhume the coffer one dark autumn evening, only to find it empty, Dinah becomes disillusioned. The artefacts – their physical memories – that were stored in that coffer for posterity have vanished into thin air. Later that evening, Dinah admires a watercolour of the Old High Street hanging in Sheila's living-room. When she learns that the picture is of 'historic interest', the High Street they knew having been found unsafe and demolished (presumably because of damage in the Second World War) and replaced by something 'quite picturesque-looking', she is in shock: another memory has been wiped out. She rejects this newer representation as a lie: as children they were *in* the street, and it is now no longer the same street. On reflection she apologises to the painting, arguing that it would be better not to have reminders of the past.

> I owe an apology to this picture. It is not such a lie, really, as lies go. I was too ready to think it must be a lie because of its even attempting to be a picture. And also because it's here when the street is not – when the street's gone, you tell me? It might be better to have no pictures of places which are gone. Let them go completely. (*LG* 169)

The shock is the beginning of Dinah's uncomfortable realisation that she has to face the fact that she must leave childhood behind and have adult relationships with both Sheila and Clare, particularly with Clare.

Chiaroscuro

As well as using the contrast between light and darkness to develop her narrative, Bowen also uses it to distinguish her characters. In *Friends and Relations* Laurel is associated with light while Janet is associated with darkness: Janet is 'dazzled' by light (*FR* 132). This *chiaroscuro* emphasises the difference between the two sisters, as well as demonstrating that Laurel is trying to throw light on Janet, to illuminate her. It is Janet's darkness that Bowen focuses on throughout the novel: we read much more of this than of Laurel's

lightness, which is concentrated towards the end of the novel. At Edward's and Laurel's wedding, Janet is 'a heavy-lidded and rather sombre Diana', who looks 'darkly in at the Daubeneys' (*FR* 10). Looking 'blankly up [at her mother] with her very dark eyes' she is a dark horse: 'No one knew what she thought' (*FR* 15). Once or twice, 'in her dark way' she would be certain to look beautiful (*FR* 15-16). When she tells her parents of her wish to marry Rodney 'her rare dark look remained as ever intent, searching, with nothing of a child's in it but an oblique directness that paused and turned away' (*FR* 16). (Here, the contradictory phrase 'oblique directness' foreshadows the 'Egyptian effective defect' which I discuss in Chapter 4, p.146-147 (*FR* 122).) When Laurel and Janet meet after Janet has become engaged to Rodney, she is wearing 'dark clothes' (*FR* 22). She greets Edward in 'her decided low voice' and many of her subsequent encounters with Edward involve darkness (*FR* 26). Meeting at Lady's Tilney's house, '"Why are we all in the dark?" asked Edward. [. . .] Feeling his way from switch to switch [Edward] turned on all the lights. He blinked; the darkness gone from the room seemed to inhabit him' (*FR* 48-49). '[Janet] remained dark in the doorway' to watch the departure of the Tilney children to the hairdresser in Market Keaton (*FR* 79). '[Janet] made for the door quickly, drawing shadow after her black dress' (*FR* 109). 'Less communicative than ever, her dark daughter' (*FR* 117). Here, in the following long sentence (forty-six words) about the effect which Janet has on Edward as she is making it clear to him that she believes they have no future together, we have an early example of Bowen's idiosyncratic style. She starts with a slight dyslocution and an apparent contradiction between 'perplexed' and 'enlightened' in the first phrase, but afterwards she adopts a different technique, layering phrase upon phrase, each time increasing the distance between Janet and Edward.

> While [Janet] exposed to his eyes her suddenly very young, perplexed, enlightened and very lovely face, he could feel her assemble, give out through her very wound itself some power, dark in the light she had from him, impalpable to the senses, impenetrable by the spirit. (*FR* 133)

Edward feels that the person who Janet is *assembling* from her own disparate parts is gradually disappearing from him. First she is darkened: she is returning to her normal lighting state. Then he is unable to connect with her senses, and finally unable to connect with her spirit.

Laurel's association with light is hinted at during the marriage ceremony, when 'the sun came out [. . .] so that Laurel's married way down the aisle was gold from successive windows', the graves 'glitter' and she trails 'light in her veil' (*FR* 7-8). Her association with light becomes more evident after the debacle at Batts caused by Theodora's letter to her. Lunching with Mrs Thirdman, Mrs Bowles and her mother:

> Laurel's quick bright look went round the table and hung in space a moment with a pensive tilt of the eyelids. Her thoughts fled by like water, as elusive, spinning their own shadow. With a composed movement, a ghost of Janet's, she once more took up the menu. (*FR* 114-115)[24]

In the next paragraph 'Laurel's brilliance [worries Mrs Studdart] like electric light burnt too extravagantly' (*FR* 115). At the very end of the novel:

> Once or twice Mrs Studdart looked in, very late, to find Laurel curled up on her side, staring at the shell-shadow the electric light shade always cast on the ceiling. She could fall asleep from this; light had never affected her. 'Poor Edward's light bill must be tremendous,' said Mrs Studdart, darkening the room severely. In the darkness there was a movement, as though Laurel held her arms out, as though she were nine years old. Her mother continued: 'Does Anna stare at the light?' (*FR* 156)

By 'darkening [Laurel's] room severely', Mrs Studdart is perhaps attempting to bring her daughters closer together. Even so '[Laurel] affected the very clocks; nothing seemed quite in order. She was there, brilliant, like sun that discovers a picture at five o'clock for a few days only; the accident of a season' (*FR* 156).

It is not only Edward's wife Laurel who is associated with light in this novel, but also his mother, Lady Tilney. As William Heath points out: 'She is usually described in

[24] By 'composed movement', Bowen almost certainly means a movement which has been put together or assembled, rather than one which is controlled or self-possessed.

terms of blinding light – in settings of sunshine, colour, brightness – and is at the same time a morally "light" woman: "[Elfrida] had persistently sought the light man in him [Considine], match for her light woman"'(Heath, *Bowen* 57; *FR* 68). Listening to Lady Elfrida talk about the two Studdart sisters at the reception, as 'Lady Elfrida's glittering look ran round the confused Mrs Daubeney like lightning', the perceptive Theodora intuits that she would have preferred Edward to marry (the dark) Janet rather than (the light) Laurel: in other words she would prefer a daughter-in-law who would complement rather than compete with her, thereby creating a *chiaroscuro* (*FR* 12).

Chiaroscuro is present in other Bowen pre-war novels. In *To the North* she distinguishes between Markie and Emmeline in a similar way to that in which she distinguishes between Janet and Laurel in *Friends and Relations*. Markie is associated with heat and anger, and with dark, earthy colours. Emmeline on the other hand is associated with the moon, cold and ice and with light colours – silver, white, green and yellow – and is often referred to as 'angel' or 'angelic', giving her an ethereal quality. Emmeline is drawn to the north with its cold bright light, the same north towards which, with its 'cold breath', Cecilia is traveling when she returns from Milan to London in the first pages of the book (*TN* 5).[25] The crux of the relationship between Emmeline and Markie comes when Markie accompanies Emmeline on a business trip to Paris. Their journey begins at Croydon airport on a 'huge blue June day [which fills] the aerodrome and reflect[s] itself in the hall' where Emmeline waits for Markie. Once in the plane, '[f]or Markie the earth was good enough' but Emmeline delights in the light which she experiences on the flight (*TN* 135).

> [A] bright white wave broke on their window: they cut through a cloud. [. . .] An intenser green blue, opaque with its own colour, showed far down in a sparkling glassiness [the plane's] tiny cruciform shadow: they were over the sea. Very white

[25] I have discussed this at greater length in 'Shaking the Cracked Kaleidoscope: Elizabeth Bowen's use of Futurism and Collage in *To the North*', *The Elizabeth Bowen Review,* vol.1, May 2018, pp. 63-75.

> cumulus clouds afloat like unperilous ice-bergs along a line of blue ether were their companions: over France more glittered, aerial dazzling cliffs. (*TN* 137)

The following day, after Emmeline has been 'kind' to Markie, she begins to realise what has been evident to the reader from the outset, that she and Markie are complete opposites: they are not compatible. After dinner they climb the steps up to the Butte Montmartre and walk on the terraces around Sacré Coeur. This is Emmeline's choice: Markie would much rather visit the dimly-lit *boîtes* of Montmartre. The contrast of the quality of light here with that on the journey to France could not be stronger: it is now menacing. Instead of the comfortable 'bright white wave' and 'very white cumulus clouds afloat like unperilous ice-bergs', the Basilica, already white, is 'blanched with moonlight' which falls 'glacial, sinister, Doréesque on the roofs of the city', while '[t]he breath of Paris came up chilled by the hour. [. . .] On this mean bare terrace one was served up cold to the moon' (*TN* 149-150). The light no longer has sparkle and glitter: these are gone from the relationship, which deteriorates from now on.

The frantic journey which ends the novel is full of fractured light. As Mark and Emmeline leave the house in Oudenarde Road, 'the hem of Emmeline's dress glitter[s] past him and out down the steps with their carpet of light'; '[h]er white fur coat [. . .] showed a silver knee and some quenched light running among the folds of her dress' (*TN* 236; 237). 'The cold pole's first magnetism began to tighten upon them. [. . .] The glow slipped from the sky and the North laid its first chilly fingers on their temples' (*TN* 238). '[F]rom beyond, The North – ice and unbreathed air, lights whose reflections since childhood had brightened and chilled her sky, touching to life at all points a sense of unshared beauty – reclaimed her for its clear solitude' (*TN* 242). Alas, Emmeline, already short-sighted, has been blinded by the light from the North, and fails to see the danger presented by sharp massive fragments of ice whose surfaces reflect so brilliantly the moonlight, evident in this painting by Caspar David Friedrich of a ship overwhelmed by

ice in moonlight, which like many of Friedrich's landscapes has a northern aspect brilliant with the luminosity of winter. Friedrich's painting was originally exhibited as *An Idealized Scene of an Arctic Sea, with a Wrecked Ship on the Heaped Masses of Ice* and was inspired by William Parry's account of his 1819-1820 expedition in search of the Northwest Passage.[26] Here by his use of light and dark he is demonstrating the overwhelming power of ice when the magnetism of the North draws humans towards it. Emmeline stands no chance against that magnetism.

Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840). *Das Eismeer* 1824, Hamburger Kunsthalle.
https://online-sammlung.hamburger-kunsthalle.de/de/suche?term=das%20eismeer

In 'Light's Language', her essay on Sensation and Subjectivity in Bowen's early novels, Lauren Elkin discusses how, in *The Last September*, 'Lois's becoming is articulated through encounters with light and sensation', and concentrates her discussion on the most important of Lois's encounters, the scene in the mill where Lois and Marda are confronted by a pistol-wielding Irish Republican (Elkin, 'Light's' 190). We may extend Elkin's proposition to the entire narrative, whose drama Bowen gradually builds up by

[26] Although one of Parry's ships was broken in the ice on a subsequent expedition, neither was on this occasion.
It is interesting to note that Friedrich influenced De Chirico: in his essay 'Nostalgia of the Infinite: Notes on De Chirico, Antonioni and Resnais', Vernon Young tells us that 'the most important inspiration for [De Chirico's] artistic maturity was the landscape painting of the German Romantic, Caspar David Friedrich' (Young, *Film* 185).

using light effects in her imagery. She prepares us for something being afoot in an early paragraph where, standing in the darkness of the shrubbery, Lois becomes aware that someone bent on concealment is approaching.

> A shrubbery path was solid with darkness, she pressed down it. [. . .] Now, on the path: grey patches worse than the dark. [. . .] The laurels deserted her groping arm. She had come to the holly. [. . .] Then steps, hard on the smooth earth; branches slipping against a trench-coat. [. . .] His intentions burnt on the dark an almost invisible trail. (*LS* 33-34)

Subsequently, as Lois, Marda and Hugo walk towards the mill, Bowen warns us that something sinister is about to happen in this paragraph in which different lighting states also highlight the derelict condition of the mill (incidentally a metaphor for the crumbling Protestant Ascendancy).

> The river darkened and thundered towards the mill-race, light came full on the high façade of decay. Incredible in its loneliness, roofless, floorless, beams criss-crossing dank interior daylight, the whole place tottered, fit to crash at a breath. Hinges rustily bled where a door had been wrenched away; six stories up panes still tattered the daylight. (*LS* 123)

Lois is reluctant, but Marda compels her to enter the mill, under the 'frightful stare of the sky'. Once inside '[t]he sun cast in through the window sockets some wild gold squares twisted by the beams; grasses along the windows trembled in light. [. . .] [T]here was a further door, into darkness'. Here, within the darkness, Marda discovers first stairs, then a body. 'Behind him, stairs went up into visibility, to a gash of daylight' (*LS* 124). The sleeping man wakes and covers them with his pistol: the sight of the pistol freezes them just as if they were 'confront[ed by] a camera', having their photo taken. Meanwhile outside the mill, Hugo, unaware of what is happening, watches the river, 'dark with its own urgency'. 'Split light, like hands, was dragged past the mill-race, clawed at the brink and went down in destruction' (*LS* 125). With her use of light and dark in various negative modes – twisted, trembling, gashed, dragged or clawing – Bowen's brutal imagery is reminiscent of the First World War paintings of her compatriot William Orpen (1878-

1931) or of Frank Brangwyn. The gun goes off, grazing Marda's knuckle, at which point Bowen ceases to use any references to light or darkness, as if to separate the earlier part of the narrative.

Lois is loved by Gerald Lesworth, a young subaltern with the army of occupation. Her aunt and guardian, the manipulative Lady Naylor, disapproves of the relationship, something she makes plain to Gerald in a secretly arranged interview. When Lois and Gerald meet subsequently, for what will be their final encounter, Bowen uses light and darkness to chart Gerald's emotions. '[T]hey wheeled off down the path together [. . .] and came into the plantation ribbed with shadow and lanced across with light about the eye-level'. 'Gerald's face, in a band of light, remained impassible'. Then '[a] light ran almost visibly up inside him' and finally, 'the light was gone from his face, moving down the trees, it had disappeared' (*LS* 189-191). Not long after, Gerald is killed while out on patrol, and Lois is sent away to France by her aunt, who settles down to enjoy the autumn at Danielstown. But she is to enjoy it for the last time. 'By next year light had possessed itself of the vacancy': the house Danielstown is a ruin, having been torched by the Republicans. The novel ends:

> A fearful scarlet ate up the hard spring darkness. [. . .] It seemed, looking from east to west at the sky tall with scarlet, that the country itself was burning; while to the north the neck of mountains before Mount Isabel was frightfully outlined. The roads in unnatural dusk ran dark with movement, secretive or terrified; not a tree, brushed pale by wind from the flames, [. . .] not a gate too starkly visible but had its place in the design of order and panic. At Danielstown [. . .] the thin iron gate twanged (missed its latch, remained swinging aghast) as the last car slid out with the executioners bland from accomplished duty. [. . .] Above the steps, the door stood open hospitably upon a furnace. (*LS* 206)

Light in War-time

Bowen's use of light in that penultimate paragraph of *The Last September* anticipates that of the war stories and *The Heat of the Day*, written between twelve and twenty years later.

During the Second World War Bowen wrote nothing but short stories and non-fiction, finding that she lacked the periods of concentration necessary for writing a novel, and a gap of eleven years would elapse between *The Death of the Heart* and *The Heat of the Day*. Set in the autumn of 1942, the middle year of the war, for Bowen the title contains 'a triple idea of noon – the noon of our century, the glaring ordeal of that mid-war period, and the fact that the principal characters are undergoing the test of the middle years. Relentless midday seems to seek out and demand truth' (*Weight* 11). For the first time in her life Bowen is forced to see light as a threat. While her narrative is conducted with a searchlight on the action, paradoxically real war-time requires that night-time should be devoid of light, with windows blacked out, minimal lighting in transport and no street lighting. As an air raid warden Bowen would have been acutely aware of the importance of this. 'It was a time of opening street doors conspiratorially: light must not escape on to steps' (*HD* 43). Bowen's reaction to the suppression of light behind closed doors and how it translates to her writing is evident from her preface to *Ivy Gripped the Steps*, the American collection of the war stories:

> [T]he stimulus of being asked for a story and the compulsion created by having promised to write one were both good – I mean, they acted as releases. Each time I sat down to write a story I opened a door; and the pressure against the other side of that door must, I found, have been very great, for things – ideas, images, emotions – came through with force and rapidity, sometimes violence. [. . .] They were sparks from experience.
>
> Painters have painted, and photographers who were artists have photographed, the tottering lacelike architecture of ruins [. . .] and the untimely brilliance of flaming skies. I cannot paint or photograph like this – I have isolated; I have made for the particular, spot-lighting faces or cutting out gestures. (*Ivy* vii; viii; xiv)

At times Bowen does more than spotlight faces: she discovers strong daylight in the city streets which illuminates previously unnoticed aspects, and she uses it in the forms of reflection and floodlight or of darkness to create the atmosphere of a scene or to make a

social comment. ‘In the Square’ (1941) takes place on a ‘hot bright July evening’ in a completely empty square in which:

> [A] whitish reflection, ghost of the glare of midday, came from the pale-colour façades on its four sides and seemed to brim it up to the top. [. . .] The sun, now too low to enter normally, was able to enter brilliantly at a point where three of the houses had been bombed away; two or three of the may trees, dark with summer, caught on their tops the illicit gold. [. . .] [T]he painted front doors under the balconies and at the tops of steps not whitened for some time stood out in the deadness of colour with light off it. (*Collected* 609)

A visitor to one of the houses remarks: ‘How curious that light is’ as he looks towards the gap between the houses opposite the first-floor drawing-room window (*Collected* 615). ‘That light’ is revealing not only the changes wrought in the environment, but also the changes in the *mœurs* of the inhabitants. As Bowen tells us in the introduction to the collection, the house’s hostess ‘has not learned with grace to open her own front door’ while ‘(t)he ghostly social pattern of London life [. . .] appears in the vacant politeness of “In the Square”’(*Ivy* ix). This is a very different scene to that in ‘The Demon Lover’ (1941) (discussed in Chapter 1, pp. 22-23). In this story menace lurks as Mrs Drover returns to her shut-up house to look for some things, watched by ‘no human eye’. ‘[T]he trees down the pavement glittered in an escape of humid yellow afternoon sun. Against the next batch of clouds, already piling up ink-dark, broken chimneys and parapets stood out’. Inside the house ‘no light came down into the hall. But one door, she could just see, stood ajar, so she went quickly through into the room and unshuttered [the window]. [. . .] A shaft of refracted daylight now lay across the hall’. It falls on a letter lying on the hall table which she takes up to her bedroom where, mystified as to how the letter could have arrived in the shut-up house, she lets in light in order to read it. The menace mounts as Bowen tells us ‘the sun had gone in; as the clouds sharpened and lowered, the trees and rank lawns seemed already to smoke with dark’. Bowen then gives us the back story to the threatening letter, which takes place in the dark, with only ‘spectral glitters in the place of [the

writer's] eyes' (*Collected* 661-663). As the denouement approaches, Bowen eschews the use of light or of darkness: Mrs Drover is caught in a void from which there is no escape.

What is arguably her most celebrated war story, 'Mysterious Kôr' (1944), opens with a floodlit picture.

> Full moonlight drenched the city and searched it; there was not a niche left to stand in. The effect was remorseless: London looked like the moon's capital – shallow, cratered, extinct. It was late, but not yet midnight; now the buses had stopped the polished roads and streets in this region sent for minutes together a ghostly unbroken reflection up. [. . .] The futility of the black-out became laughable: from the sky, presumably, you could see every slate in the roofs, every whited kerb, every contour of the naked winter flowerbeds in the park; and the lake, with its shrinking twists and tree-darkened islands would be a landmark for miles, yes, miles, overhead. (*Collected* 728)

On a real level Bowen is demonstrating the utter vulnerability of London to aerial assault, and on another level she is preparing us for what her character Pepita sees, the place she tells her lover Arthur that she thinks of all the time, 'Mysterious Kôr'.

> Mysterious Kôr thy walls forsaken stand,
> Thy lonely towers beneath a lonely moon –

These lines come from Andrew Lang's 1888 poem 'She', dedicated to Rider Haggard (1856-1925), the author of the 1886 eponymous adventure novel. Bowen had read this novel at the age of twelve and describes its effect on her in 'The Crisis', a 1947 radio broadcast, citing the adventurers' first impressions of the ruined city of Kôr.

> And, still, the moon was to rise. 'Court upon court, space upon space of empty chambers, that spoke more eloquently to the imagination than any crowded street. It was a wonderful sight to see the full moon looking down on the ruined fane of Kôr. A wonderful thing to think for how many thousands of years the dead orb above and the dead city below had thus gazed upon one another. . . . The white light fell, and minute by minute the slow shadows crept across the grass-grown courts'.

Bowen tells her audience that she saw Kôr before she saw London, and that when she did see London she was inclined to see it as:

> Kôr with the roofs still on. The idea that life in any capital city must be ephemeral, and with a doom ahead, remained with me – a curious obsession for an Edwardian

> child. At the same time I found something reassuring and comforting in the idea that, whatever happened, buildings survived people. (*Afterthought* 110-111)[27]

But Bowen goes further in her story, examining what happens when buildings do survive people, when there is no place within those buildings for people. Pepita and Arthur discuss the singularity of Kôr: how despite its age (thousands of years) and with no population (it is forsaken) it is pristine, with no weeds and no sign of wear on its stones and monuments. It is a sterile, non-existent place, yet Pepita tells Arthur she thinks of them as being alone there, that they *are* alone there now. Arthur develops the fantasy by suggesting that they should populate Kôr, but this opens up the bald truth: they are homeless on this first night of his leave, in London without any hope of any place of their own because Pepita shares her flat with Callie. When they arrive, Callie's presence means that they must sleep apart, although the moon does its insistent best to invade the flat. Pepita's dream is of being in the city of Kôr which she has entered with Arthur.

> With him, she looked this way, that way, down the wide, void, pure streets, between statues, pillars and shadows, though archways and colonnades. With him she went up the stairs down which nothing but moon came; with him trod the ermine dust of the endless halls, stood on terraces, mounted the extreme tower, looked down on the statued squares, the wide, void, pure streets. He was the password, but not the answer: it was to Kôr's finality that she turned. (*Collected* 739-740)

Pepita has experienced the moon in two ways: outdoors in a real world, and outdoors in a dream world. Callie, too, experiences it, though her experience is indoors. As she anxiously waits for Pepita and Arthur to return, light insinuates itself round the edge of the blackout curtain into her bedroom and Callie draws back the curtains and comes face to face with the moon laying siege to London. Inside, the room is transformed as its light marches in, bringing to attention the white marble mantelpiece with her family photographs. Its presence calms Callie, who comes to understand why Pepita and Arthur

[27] Bowen goes on to recall her childhood question: did she aspire to be 'She', Ayesha, the two-thousand-year-old Queen of Kôr? She finds that she rejected the idea because she would have been obliged to enter fire, the thing she was most afraid of. That Bowen should have chosen to become an air raid warden is testament to the fact that she had overcome that fear.

have not yet returned. Outside the siege of light is only relieved once the moon's power over London and over the imagination declines. Corcoran rightly comments on how Bowen conjures up a 'mysteriously almost Di [sic] Chirico-like cityscape' in this story (Corcoran, *Enforced* 166). De Chirico would influence post-war filmmakers, and the derelict scenarios in this collection of war stories anticipate the Italian neorealist films of the immediate post-war period when directors such as Pasolini and Visconti took their cameras to the streets of stricken Italian cities, while the final paragraph of 'Mysterious Kôr', with its long, moonlit perspectives and architectural detail, has the effect of Alain Resnais' 1961 film *L'Année dernière à Marienbad* with its many perspectives in the hotel corridors and statued gardens, and its concentration on *chiaroscuro* lighting and mirroring effects.

After the war Bowen was able to concentrate on writing *The Heat of the Day* and she uses light to highlight the difference between Britain at war and Ireland at peace in when, in October 1942, Stella travels to Ireland. Both in Dublin and at Mount Morris it is the windows which she notices disseminating light in Ireland, something they are unable to do in war-time Britain.

> The exciting sensation of being outside war had concentrated itself round those fearless lights – though actually, yesterday night as her ship drew in, the most strong impression had been of prodigality: around the harbour water, uphill above it, the windows had not only showed and shone but blazed, seemed to blaze out phenomenally; while later, dazzling reflections in damp streets made Dublin seem to be in the throes of a carnival. Here, tonight, downstairs, those three yellow oblongs cast unspoilt on the gravel by the uncurtained windows had spelled ease. (*HD* 160)

Yet, despite the light and the relief it brings, particularly at Mount Morris, Bowen anticipates the hell to come by describing the 'Danteësque features' of the caretaker Donovan when he is turning up the oil lamps in the library at Mount Morris (*HD* 157). This is developed when, on her return to London where at Euston the 'few blued lights of the station just showed the vaultings up into gloom', Stella sees the crowds as '[a]rrival of

shades in Hades, the new dead scanned dubiously by the older' (*HD* 173-4). The fulcrum of the plot comes when Harrison takes Stella to dine in a restaurant which is a modernist Inferno – an Inferno that has no hiding place, a hermetic place. 'The phenomenon was the lighting, more powerful even than could be accounted for by the bald white globes screwed aching to the low white ceiling – there survived in here not one shadow: every one had been ferreted out and killed' (*HD* 217). Stella expects that she will accept Harrison's suggestion that, if she becomes his lover, he will ensure that Robert's double-agency is not investigated. But she is distracted by the intervention of Louie and the dog Spot, and finally Harrison reacts angrily, telling Stella and Louie to 'go along together': Stella has failed to convince Harrison that she will accept his proposal (*HD* 232). When Robert joins her later in her flat, Stella is still affected by a feeling of the infernal.

> [Stella's] room was bathed in a red appearance of heat from the electric fire; shadows jutted out sharply; a mirror panel reflected the end of the bed on which Robert sat. As though the sensation of this red half-dark of so many nights having within the moment become infernal communicated itself from her to him, he reached across and turned off the fire. (*HD* 258)

As the night draws on it seems to Stella that the window, and its reflection in the mirror, are paler: she senses that dawn is approaching. She knows that Robert will expire, and reviews how their relationship has played out, often against light: 'crystal ruined London morning [. . .] street after street fading into evening after evening, the sheen of spring light running on the water towards the bridges on which one stood, the vulnerable eyes of Louie stupidly carrying the sky about in them' (*HD* 265). But it is in darkness that Robert falls, or perhaps leaps, to his death (*HD* 281). Lis Christensen makes an interesting comparison with 'Musée des Beaux Arts', Auden's ekphrastic poem on Brueghel's *The Fall of Icarus* in which other characters in the picture are completely unaffected by Icarus' fall, and resume their lives – assuming that they had even been momentarily interrupted. For the ploughman it was 'not an important failure', the ship that 'must have seen/Something

amazing [. . .]/Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on' (Christensen, *Bowen* 170-171). Bowen's characters, too, have somewhere to get to: Stella finds herself a new flat; Roderick makes plans for assuming responsibility for Mount Morris; Louie has given birth to a son who she takes back to Seale, and the novel ends as they stand by the canal and watch three swans flying westward.

Defining characters by their eyes; ocular communication

Bowen is frequently specific about her characters' eyes and the way they communicate with them. When Sydney refuses Milton's proposal, she cannot comprehend his distress.

> In the unique encounter of eyes they had had, as with raised hat he was turning away from her, he had shown her nothing of what he felt but astonishment: a profound astonishment, at which of them she could not be sure. Those pale-grey eyes with their penetrating blankness were still vivid to her, but though she now intensely desired to reproach herself she could not wring from her memories any sense of his emotion. (*TH* 85)

When Sydney does agree to marry him, Milton wonders why she agrees so quickly. 'He met her eyes, straight, searching up for him, eyes nearly black, overcharged, impenetrable, crying out to be read' (*TH* 124). Already we sense Sydney's doubts about their engagement, and these doubts do not diminish. Returning from another walk on the hillside in the falling dusk, '[e]ye to eye they looked at each other questioningly, as though trying to learn from one another if they had been together; then each looked away, as though afraid to read they had been forgotten' (*TH* 150).

Here in *The Heat of the Day* Louie observes Harrison at the concert: we get the sense that this is a man with two conflicting perspectives.

> [N]ow that she had him full-face a quite other curious trait appeared – one of his eyes was or behaved as being just perceptibly higher than the other. This lag or inequality in his vision gave her the feeling of being looked at twice – being viewed then checked over again in the same moment. [. . .] This was a face with a gate behind it –a face that, in this photographic half-light, looked indoor and weathered at the same time; a face, if not without meaning, totally and forbiddingly without mood. (*HD* 10)

When Stella is psyching herself up to accept Harrison's suggestion that if she and he were to become lovers, Robert might be spared his treachery being revealed, she uses her eyes but fails to understand what is hidden behind Harrison's eyes.

> [F]or this command performance she opened her lids wider than usual, which sent her eyebrows up. Remembering how embarrassingly repugnant the human eye, in almost all cases, was found by Robert, she looked at and into [Harrison's] eyes with curiosity, wondering whether now, if ever at all, she was not to be overtaken by Robert's feeling. Also, this could have been the moment to establish exactly what *was* queer, wrong, off, out of the straight in the cast of Harrison's eyes. But she failed to do so. (*HD* 219-218)

In *The Little Girls,* the Maltese house-boy Francis has an eye-defect.

> [N]ot a squint but a cast – one eye stayed riveted to his profile, leaving the other to dart where it would. The arrangement seemed, if anything, to suit him: he saw the more. [. . .] [H]e met himself constantly in the mirrors and looking-glasses about the house not only without turning a hair but with, by all signs, fortified self-esteem. (*LG* 24)

Juan Gris (1887-1927). *Portrait of Picasso*. 1912. Wikimedia Commons.

Thus enabled to see more, Francis is devious, doing things behind the scenes when Dinah is away or unaware. Both Harrison and Francis, with their 'discordant' eyes, remind us of cubist portraits, such as the portrait of Picasso by Juan Gris.

Eva Trout

Bowen's different ways of using light overlap in *Eva Trout* and so I deal with the novel as an entity. Eva Trout's childhood has been a series of disconnected journeys all over the world which has left her unschooled and unsure of her identity: she has been 'left unfinished' (*ET* 58). Subconsciously she realises that something better is possible, and her often-stated wish is 'to become'. Bowen's use of light and darkness to illustrate this process is more fragmentary than in her earlier novels.

Eva's first contact with other children comes at the age of fourteen, when her father, an international business man, sends her to a school whose foundation he is funding. It is housed in a castle on a lake, and Eva's experiences of it are through light. She arrives in 'shimmery amber weather', and as autumn progresses mist makes the lake, into which 'melted the lighted windows', become greater and wraithlike, and 'short days glistened in the transparent woods' (*ET* 59). 'Down the perspectives were many painted doors – some of them were unreal, they did not open' – again we have a similarity with the corridors and doorways in *L'Année dernière à Marienbad*. Dawn comes to her in her octagonal bedroom where:

> Through the curtainless window day stole in, fingering its way slowly [. . .]. This redemption from darkness was for Eva, who had witnessed it nowhere else, a miracle inseparable from the castle. Her bed had its back to the window, but a looking-glass faced it – in that she could see existence begin again. (*ET* 60)

By seeing herself in the mirror, Eva can be sure that she exists and is on the way to becoming. But various disasters strike the school, forcing it to close and Eva, deemed by her father to have 'had enough schooling for the time being', resumes her international wanderings (*ET* 66). Two years later she persuades her father to send her to another school, Lumleigh. Up till now, Eva has been in shadow, the shadow of her father's 'total attachment to Constantine' Ormeau (*ET* 18). But here Eva is dazzled by the teacher Miss Smith (Iseult) who, with dark springy hair and a high white forehead, is a combination of

dark and light (*ET* 20). The meeting which marks the beginning of their relationship takes place outside, the sun causing Iseult to seem to move towards Eva as if on a shaft of light, while '[h]er dark suit might have been the habit of an Order' (*ET* 67). Associated with lamps throughout the first part of the novel, Iseult lights Eva's way to becoming by encouraging her to learn how to think (as in Descartes' proposition 'Je pense, donc je suis') by suggesting she try to connect her 'sometimes [. . .] startling' thoughts (*ET* 71). Consequently associating Iseult with light, Eva learns Herbert's poem 'Evensong' which deals with God's double identity as both light and dark, and she recites the final three of the six stanzas to Iseult, beginning with the line 'But thou art Light, and darkness both together'. Their relationship turns moments after: as Eva starts to leave Iseult's room, the garden chestnut trees begin to darken (*ET* 76-77). The relationship falls apart, and henceforth we see more of the dark side of Iseult than of the light.

Eight years later we find Eva as Iseult's paying guest, with a heavy cold in a darkening bedroom. Eva soon breaks away by setting herself up in Cathay, a semi-derelict mansion near Broadstairs, but her whereabouts are discovered and Iseult sends her husband, Eric, to verify that she is alright. When Constantine unexpectedly arrives, also seeking to check up on her, again Eva sees herself reflected, this time in a window, which further reassures her that she is on the way to becoming.

> By chance, a step or two off the hearthrug had carried her into sight of her reflection; across the room, in one of the windows. 'A handsome girl,' had said Eric. A handsome girl . . . There, indeed, was Eva! One felt reinforced. The Evas exchanged a nod, then stayed rapt in mutual contemplation. (*ET* 122)

Three months later Iseult waits to meet Eva in Fort House, once the home of Charles Dickens: the day is full of light and Broadstairs has radiant streets, yet Iseult perceives the house as a Dark Tower (I discuss the Dark Tower further in Chapter 5, pp. 171-172). When she and Eva go to Cathay, 'the June sun [takes] on the heightened voltage of studio lighting', while the sun lounge is filled with 'brightly light-riddled darkness' which is

'almost tropical' and Iseult recalls a song '"When day is done and the shadows fall"' (*ET* 138-140). For Iseult, the shadows do indeed fall when Eva falsely gives her to understand that she is pregnant, the implication being that the father is Eric.

Eva's eyes are described in many different ways: they are 'cartwheels' when she meets the other girls at the first school, and Iseult describes them as 'consuming' and as 'dramatic orbs' (*ET* 58; 106; 107). Of all the characters in Bowen's novels, it is Eva Trout's adopted deaf-mute son, Jeremy, who is most dependent on sight: Mr Dancey remarks of Jeremy: 'Sight to me is the thing – the thing above all things. And more seeing eyes than his I have seldom seen' (*ET* 181). Bowen's experiment in depriving Jeremy of hearing and speech may have arisen from Rayner Heppenstall's *The Blaze of Noon*, his 1939 novel for which Bowen wrote the Preface (*Impressions* 53-55). In this novel, Heppenstall's protagonist Louis Dunkel (*dunkel* translates as dark), a blind masseur, meets Amity Nance who is not only blind, but deaf-mute as well. Heppenstall, like Bowen, was influenced by French writers including De Montherlant, and this is perhaps one of the influences from which they derived the surgical way in which they both deal with their subject matter. Sight is the sense that Eva does share with Jeremy, but there is an ominous moment when Eva sees for the first time the clay head Jeremy is making of her: 'Out of [the eye-sockets'] dark had exuded such non-humanity that Eva had not known where to turn' *(ET* 223). Perhaps most importantly, soon after she arrives at her second school, Lumleigh, she tells Iseult: 'Do you know, I have never wept, never cried?' In her last moments, she arrives at Victoria Station 'tall as a candle, some accident of the light rendering her luminous from top to toe. [. . .] [H]er eyes were increased by the now mothy dusk of their lashes'. Henry tells her that he is going ahead with the marriage, causing her to cry for the first time (*ET* 77; 310). Eva has become and Bowen's final novel ends with Eva's eyes functioning as fully human organs, able for the first time to express emotion,

with her tears splashing onto the diamonds of her brooch. But almost immediately her eyes will cease to function when Jeremy, her sighted son, shoots her dead. In snuffing out the candle that is Eva, it is as though Bowen has acknowledged finality: light *can* be extinguished and at that point we return to the dark void, to nothing.

Bowen also uses light and darkness to create the atmosphere of a place, and in the next chapter I examine place itself.

Chapter 3

THE MEANINGFUL LOCATION:

‘NOTHING CAN HAPPEN NOWHERE’

In *Place: a short introduction* the human geographer and poet Tim Cresswell tells us that the most straightforward and common definition of place is ‘[a space] which people have made meaningful [. . .] a meaningful location’. ‘Place’, he adds, ‘is not just a thing in the world but a way of understanding the world’ (Cresswell, *Place* 7; 11). Cresswell defines the difference between landscape and place in the following way. ‘Landscape is an intensely visual idea. In most definitions of landscape the viewer is outside of it. This is the primary way in which it differs from place. Places are very much things to be inside of’ (Cresswell, *Place* 10). Bowen does not make such a clear distinction between ‘place’ and ‘space’, Nevertheless, place is always a meaningful location for Bowen and I now look first at Bowen’s use of place generally, and then consider it from sometimes overlapping perspectives: landscape; architectural space and the fixed or static place; the mobile place; the liminal space or place; and the hiding place or archaeology.

As we saw in Chapter 1, Bowen puzzles at the fact that few people have shown curiosity as to the places in her stories, asking ‘Am I not manifestly a writer for whom places loom large?’ (*Pictures* 34). She gives a description of the part which place can play in fiction in ‘A Passage to E.M. Forster’, her tribute to Forster in *Aspects of E.M. Forster*. In this she highlights what she terms Forster’s ‘place-feeling’, something which she first encounters in *The Celestial Omnibus*.

> Ultimately [. . .] the central, most powerful magnetism of the *Celestial Omnibus* stories was in their ‘place-feeling’. In each of [these stories] action was not only inseparable from its setting but seemed constantly coloured by it and, in one or two cases, even, directly and fatefully set at work by it. [. . .] My own tendency to attribute significance to places, or to be mesmerised by them even for no knowable

> reason [. . .] became warranted by its large reflection in E.M. Forster. Formerly I had feared it might be a malady. (‘Passage’ 5)

What does Bowen mean by ‘place-feeling’? In *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* the geographer Yi-FuTuan tells us: ‘[f]eelings and ideas concerning space and place [. . .] grow out of life’s unique and shared experiences’. He goes on to develop this idea.

> There is far more to experience than those elements we choose to attend to. [. . .] Pictorial art and rituals supplement language by depicting areas of experience that words fail to frame. [. . .] Art makes images of feeling so that feeling is accessible to contemplation and thought. [. . .] The images of place are evoked by the imagination of perceptive writers. By the light of their art we are privileged to savor experiences that would otherwise have faded beyond recall. Here is a seeming paradox: thought creates distance and destroys the immediacy of direct experience, yet it is by thoughtful reflection that the elusive moments of the past draw near to us in present reality and gain a measure of permanence. (Tuan, *Space* 19; 148)

If we apply these thoughts to Bowen, we find that the points Tuan makes are crucial ones. As an artist Bowen had a need to express and record her experiences and her feelings. She was dissatisfied with her early attempts to do so through visual art, and thus turned to the word. Yet she did not – or was not able to – abandon her visual instincts: as she puts it, ‘[i]t seems to me that often when I write I am trying to make words do the work of line and colour’ (Autobiographical 1948). We may compare her with Thomas Hardy, who Joan Grundy tells us ‘in his novels is a painter using words as his medium instead of paint. He makes no attempt to disguise or camouflage this fact; on the contrary, he draws attention to it by his use of the technical language of the painter: “foreground”, “middle distance”, “perspective”, “plane”, “line”, “curve”, “tone”, “chromatic effect”’ (Grundy, *Hardy* 19). In *Hardy the Novelist* David Cecil remarks:

> [His] combination of botanist’s microscope and astronomer’s telescope is unique, and it gives Hardy’s vision of the natural world a unique force. Its detail endows it with the concrete recognisable actuality of something we know. It has also the compelling imaginative power of a picture which exhibits something known in a new, grander perspective, extending our field of vision so that we see what we

> know in relation to the greater conditioning forces we do not know. (Cecil, *Hardy* 73)[28]

In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* Hardy zooms out when Tess arrives close to Talbothays so that:

> Tess [stands] still upon the hemmed expanse of verdant flatness, like a fly on a billiard-table of indefinite length, and of no more consequence to the surroundings than that fly. The sole effect of her presence upon the placid valley so far had been to excite the mind of a solitary heron, which, after descending to the ground not far from her path, stood with neck erect, looking at her. (Hardy, *Tess* 125)

Bowen shares Hardy's ability to vary focus, giving the reader a sense of zooming in or out of a landscape. Unlike Hardy, Bowen rarely introduces figures *into* her landscapes, but she very often zooms out of landscapes as in the description of the flight from Croydon to Paris in *To the North*.

> A bright white wave broke on their window: they cut through a cloud. Emmeline once more looked down; the serrated gold coast-line and creeping line of the sea were verifying the atlas. An intenser green blue, opaque with its own colour, showed far down in a sparkling glassiness their tiny cruciform shadow: they were over the sea. (*TN* 137)

In this case, rather than the figures of Emmeline and Markie themselves, it is the shadow of the aeroplane which contains them which is visible in the landscape.

While Hardy renames his places, they are identifiable through their topography, something which enhances our appreciation of his work. Bowen discovered at a young age the significance of place in literature and how knowledge of it could enlarge the reader's experience, giving as an example how, on reading *Kipps* by H.G. Wells, she was 'made dizzy by the discovery that [she] had, for years, been living in two places, Hythe and Folkestone, that were in a book' (*Impressions* 268). Her childhood experience is similar to one described by Tuan when he asks 'What is a place? What gives a place its identity, its aura?', and relates how when the physicists Niels Bohr and Werner Heisenberg visited Kronberg Castle in Denmark Bohr said to Heisenberg:

[28] But see Moss's discussion of Proust's figurative use of microscope and telescope (Chapter 1, p. 40).

> Isn't it strange how this castle changes as soon as one imagines Hamlet lived here? As scientists we believe that a castle consists only of stones, and admire the way the architect put them together. The stones, the green roof with its patina, the wood carvings in the church, constitute the whole castle. None of this should be changed by the fact that Hamlet lived here, and yet it is changed completely. Suddenly the walls and the ramparts speak a quite different language. [. . .] [W]e hear Hamlet's 'To be or not to be'. Yet all we really know about Hamlet is that his name appears in a thirteenth-century chronicle. [. . .] But everyone knows the questions Shakespeare had him ask, the human depth he was made to reveal, and so he, too, had to be found a place on earth, here in Kronberg. And once we know that, Kronberg becomes a quite different castle for us. (Tuan, *Space* 4)

Bowen would go on to use her imagination to develop her images of place out of experiences stored in her memory: as she acknowledges in her 1946 essay 'Out of a Book', she has 'in [her] make-up layers of synthetic experience', and 'the most powerful of [her] memories may only be half-true'. That synthetic experience has been built up from childhood: starting with picture books 'the magic stored up in those years goes on secreting under today's chosen sensations and calculated thoughts. What entered the system during childhood remains; and remains indistinguishable from the life of those years because it *was* that greater part of the life' (*Impressions* 264).[29]

This ability to create and replicate place marks Bowen out as a topophil as defined by W.H. Auden (Chapter 1, p.18). Bowen assembles a dossier on which to draw: this is topophilia in practice. In 'Out of a Book' she writes 'I was and I am still on the look out for places where something happened: the quivering needle swings in turn to a prospect of country, of a town unwrapping itself from the folds of landscape or seen across water, or a significant house' (*Impressions* 267). Here she refines her thinking from a year earlier in 'Notes on Writing a Novel', in which she lists 'Scene' (which is how she here defines 'Place') before 'Dialogue', thus emphasising its necessity as a stage or canvas upon which a story can be begin to be unfolded in words or in pictures. She makes the following points:

[29] This recording of experience is allied to 'cultural inventory', which I discuss in greater detail in Chapter 5.

> Nothing can happen nowhere. The locale of the happening always colours the happening, and often, to a degree, shapes it. [. . .]
>
> Scene, being physical, is, like the physical traits of the characters, generally a copy, or a composite copy. It, too, is assembled – out of memories which, in the first place, may have had no rational connection with one another. [. . .]
>
> Almost anything drawn from 'real life' – house, town, room, park, landscape – will almost certainly be found to require *some* distortion for the purposes of the plot. [. . .][30]
>
> Wholly invented scene is as unsatisfactory (thin) as wholly invented physique for a character. (*Orion* 22)

Here we find important tenets held by Bowen: the importance of the setting; the need to draw on images from memory as well as from 'real life' and to rearrange those images in order to create those settings. However I would argue that her use of 'assembled' and 'distortion' in the above citation implies too much manipulation on the part of the writer: the process with Bowen, I am sure, is far more organic. She says as much in her chapter on 'Places', written thirty years later: the world of her fiction is composed of fragments, 'something of a mosaic'. It is not something which she herself has assembled:

> [I]t is something that assembled itself. Looking back at my work, I perceive that the scenes of my successive, various stories predetermined themselves. And not only that, but they predetermined the stories to a greater extent than I may have known at the time. (*Pictures* 37)

However, it is difficult to reconcile what Bowen says about her terrain assembling itself with what she says two paragraphs earlier:

> Since I started writing, I have been welding together an inner landscape, assembled anything but at random. [. . .] A writer needs to have at command, and to have recourse to, a recognisable world, geographically consistent and having for him or her a super-reality. (*Pictures* 36)

The verb 'weld' with its association with forges and metal is an unusual one for Bowen. When an object is made of parts welded together, though the joins may still be visible,

[30] Both Hardy and Bowen acknowledge that distortion of the original image is almost inevitable. Bullen tells us: 'Art, Hardy argued, involves a disproportioning – (i.e. distorting, throwing out of proportion) – of realities, to show more clearly the features that matter in those realities, which, if merely copied or reported inventorially, might possibly be observed, but would more probably be overlooked. Hence "realism" is not Art.' (Bullen, *Expressive* 13-14)

those parts become inseparable and the object is therefore finite and incapable of change except through fracture. Is it possible Bowen used the softer, more visual and dissolute verb 'meld' and that the typist misread it her handwriting? Meld would allow her inner landscape to evolve in her imagination and allow it to have an atmosphere created by changes in the weather or in the time of day or season, something which is remarkable in her fiction.[31]

Both the variety of Bowen's settings and the variety of the ways in which she depicts them are immense. Susan Hill says of her, 'Places and their significance were extremely important to Bowen, in the way that they were to Hardy. Landscapes are much more than simply backdrops to events, houses have character in the way that human beings do'. Often a landscape or a place will be a metaphor for the situation in which a character finds him- or herself: Hill cites Hermione Lee: 'landscapes of dereliction are made to illustrate states of mind' (Hill, *Howards* 139).

Of all her contemporary critics, it is Brooke who has the most empathy with her sense of place, as well as with her awareness of light. Brooke grew up in Sandgate close to Hythe and, like Bowen, experienced the atmosphere of the area as a child. In a pamphlet on Bowen written for the British Council in 1952 Brooke says: '[It is] Miss Bowen's evocations of places – houses, streets, country gardens – which linger in one's memory when, often enough, the story and the characters have been forgotten' (Brooke, *Bowen* 5; 6). In an earlier radio interview with Bowen, Brooke observes:

> [T]here are two kinds of novelist. The kind who's primarily interested in character and plot, and the kind whose interest lies chiefly in a sense of place or in what's commonly called atmosphere. Novels of this kind seem to me to spring from a vision of a landscape with figures, rather than from a direct interest in the figures themselves. [. . .] I tend to remember scene and atmosphere, landscape or interiors of houses, especially interiors in your case, in any novel of yours, much better than the characters themselves. Would you agree about this?

[31] *Pictures and Conversations* was published after Bowen's death: she could not have proofread it.

Bowen agrees: ‘Yes, yes, I think you’re right. Several of my novels and a very great number of my short stories have come from a sort of vision of a place [. . .] an insistent and compelling one, a vision that seemed to draw one into itself’ (*Listening* 274). The drawing into the vision of place or fusion of place with character is something David Trotter lights on when he says of Bowen’s novels: ‘Atmosphere is what a person makes of a place, while in the process being made by it. An atmosphere is both inside us and all around us’ (Trotter, ‘Cousins’ 31).

In ‘A Sense of Place: Elizabeth Bowen and the Landscape of the Heart’, a review of the American edition of *Pictures and Conversations*, Walter Sullivan writes in a similar vein to Brooke:

> Other novelists might begin with a concept of character or with a germ of a story or with a human situation that they feel compelled to probe. But with Elizabeth Bowen there was first the deliberate limning of the landscape or the drawingroom [sic] or the street or the park. Of all the places that she described, houses were obviously her favorites. Think of Anna's house in *The Death of the Heart* and of the house in Paris which gives one novel its title and of Stella's flat with its curtains to seal in the air and the light in *The Heat of the Day*. Though her characters move about – there are sequences which take place in Ireland and England in *The House in Paris* – it is impossible to read Miss Bowen and not be aware of how architecture and topography give weight to her fiction. (Sullivan, *Sense* 143)

The verb ‘to limn’ is an unusual but excellent choice for Bowen’s mode of depicting place, variously meaning to illuminate; to adorn or embellish with gold or bright colour; or to paint, portray or depict, sometimes in water-colour or distemper. Illumination is her forte: light is projected from various viewpoints, sometimes brilliant, at times all but absent. She adorns her prose as a poet might, with carefully selected words, chosen for the colour of their vowel sounds and the delineation – the edges – created by their consonants. And she always portrays, sometimes with sharp outlines, sometimes more hazily. Through her prose there moves a succession of two- and three-dimensional images, often depicting place in its broadest sense – a landscape, a house, a room. As Sullivan says, both

architecture (the fixed place) and topography (landscape, the moving place and what lies hidden beneath the surface) do indeed give weight to Bowen's fiction.

LANDSCAPE

Hardy is widely considered to be the master of English landscape writing. Cecil writes that 'Hardy's picture of Wessex is the most elaborate study of landscape in English letters. For one thing, it combines, as no other does, breadth and intimacy' (Cecil, *Hardy* 69). For Hill:

> Hardy taught me that landscape (and weather) can be as important as character in a novel. He also revealed much about the link between paintings and the novel, and not only the sense that painters have taken narrative subjects. Scene after scene is illuminated from outside, or from within' (Hill, *Howards* 212-213).

Much of what Hill writes about Hardy can be applied to Bowen, for whom landscape and atmosphere (which includes weather) are of primary importance: like Hardy, she excels at landscape writing.

Bowen will often begin her novels with dramatic landscapes which set the tone for the novel. In *Truth and Fiction* she writes: '[S]peaking as a reader, I [. . .] am tremendously influenced for or against a book by the manner of the opening, and [. . .] as a novelist myself I have put great stress and interest into the openings of my own books' (*Afterthought* 115-116). The lowering skies in the opening paragraph of *Friends and Relations* hint that this novel will not be 'roses all the way' after the impending wedding: Bowen tells us that the bride's relations frown in their sleep and are wakened with 'a sense of doom' (*FR* 7). In *The House in Paris*, as Henrietta travels through Paris as dawn breaks she is introduced to a succession of images: as she rests after breakfast '[t]hat image of streets in furtive chaotic flight, and of the Seine panorama being rolled up, was frightening for the first minute' (*HP* 26). The first part of *The Death of the Heart* opens to brittle coldness, something the recently-orphaned sixteen-year-old Portia will experience, yet the second part, 'The Flesh', opens in a different mode with one of Bowen's most perceptive

and beautiful meldings of the changing of atmosphere with the changing of the seasons, leading us to expect a warmer environment in which Portia might be expected to flourish.

> In fact, it is about five o'clock in an evening that the first hour of spring strikes – autumn arrives in the early morning, but spring at the close of a winter day. The air, about to darken, quickens and is run through with mysterious white light; the curtain of darkness is suspended, as though for some unprecedented event. (*DH* 123)

The Heat of the Day opens on an almost ephemeral world, reflecting the war-time atmosphere, while *A World of Love* opens on a landscape that appears magnified and pregnant: like Mary 'great with child', the land is 'great with distance' and the reader is primed that something miraculous is about to happen (*HD* 5; *WL* 9). The exception is *The Hotel*, which as Ellmann notes begins *in medias res*, as if the reader were already well-acquainted with the place and clientele (Ellmann, *Shadow* 80).

Bowen will often use the atmosphere of place and its physical topography to move her narrative forward. When Max and Karen visit Boulogne and Hythe in *The House in Paris*, we get much more of a sense of what the characters are feeling through Bowen's descriptions of the port and the towns than we do from their interaction and conversation. Karen's arrival in Boulogne is to an animate landscape, playing its part in the piece of theatre about to unfold. 'Dykes, earthworks and idle cranes appeared; two long black-and-white wooden piers ran out to meet the ship. [. . .] The long line of quay-side hotels and cafés smiled, expectant of the incoming ship. France met her approach coquettish, conscious, gay' (*HP* 134). From Karen's point of view not one human being is present in this scene, as is often the case with Bowen: it is all land- and townscape. The hotels and cafés smile to welcome the ship, vying for custom from the arriving day trippers. And France herself is part of the welcome, a charming hostess awaiting her guests. Boulogne is a happy hospitable place; pleasure is anticipated.

But between Karen's arrival in and departure from Boulogne there is a change in mood. After the initial anticipation of their meeting, there is very little joy about it: Max and Karen seem to know that this is the beginning of something inevitable, something unavoidable. The turning point comes when the restaurant begins 'to darken with Sunday people, and Mme Fisher seemed to have come in too' (*HP* 140). Max and Karen have become like 'wax people', struggling to communicate: their conversation is of 'wars, treaties, persecutions, strategic marriages, campaigns, reforms, successions and violent deaths' and not of their feelings (*HP* 141; 143). The vocabulary Bowen uses to describe the scenes after lunch and at the end of the day illustrate how the relationship is doomed. Trams are 'unwilling'; houses have 'sad windows'; the 'glaring, shuttered streets oppress' Karen and Max, who sit on an 'unsafe parapet'. 'An incoming tide of apartness [creeps] between Max and Karen', who '[dread] solitude now'. The real tide is out, and the embankment walls are covered with 'dark slime' (*HP* 144-145). A day which started on such a positive note ends with a feeling of deflation.

Bowen opens the first of the two chapters devoted to the weekend in Hythe with the words 'Rain drifted over the Channel and west over Romney marsh; there was no horizon, the edgeless clouds hung so low'. Thus she sets the scene: damp, oppressed by the clouds, with no defining limits. She then changes tone, surprising the reader by describing the town and its environs in a passage which reads like an entry in one of Arthur Mee's mid-twentieth-century topographical and history series, *The King's England*. While this passage may stem from Bowen's own affection for the town, its matter-of-fact description is at odds with the atmosphere of what will follow in the episode itself. I would suggest that by opening in this vein Bowen intends that the anguish that Max and Karen will go on to experience should become more marked against the backdrop of the normal life of the town. The final phrase of Bowen's opening paragraph ends on the same note that it began:

the bugles are 'muffled by low clouds' (*HP* 148). In the next paragraph, describing Karen's retrospect on the weekend, Bowen moves into the present tense: 'Karen cannot divide the streets from the pattern of rain and rush of rain in the gutters'. When Bowen changes tense there is always an intention behind the change and in this case it is to emphasise that the retrospective image is persisting. For Karen, Hythe has become its own atmosphere, in which the streets *are* the rain, where the trees sigh with rain, not wind: there is no wind (*HP* 148). The rain is such that before they even arrive in Hythe they have to stop in Folkestone for Max to buy a mackintosh. In these dismal circumstances, their relationship is consummated and Leopold is conceived. The following day there is little evidence of post-coital joy or increased bonding between Max and Karen, due perhaps to 'the desperateness of their meeting', as that morning they walk in 'the snug town', made 'an island, a ship content to go *nowhere*' by 'the stretch of *forlorn* marsh and *sad* sea-line' (*HP* 157, emphasis added). After lunch they walk again, along the canal, where Max exclaims: 'Karen, you made me feel this was pleasure between enemies', to which she replies 'There has been no time to feel anything but compulsion' (*HP* 165). There is some brief respite towards the end of the visit when we feel that the gloom may be lifting slightly as Bowen tells us that '[l]ast night seemed to be undone'; there is a 'beginning of love'.

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

However, this beginning of love is only momentary: while both are looking back spatially, they are also looking back on the relationship, wondering how they came to be where they are. Bowen leads us to believe that Hythe has been a 'nowhere' place in the sense that

nothing has happened here, but as we will discover, something has happened: Leopold has been conceived.

Initially Hythe has a more positive atmosphere in Bowen's next novel *The Death of the Heart*, though she writes: 'A good deal of the [seaside] section has seldom been commented on except as rattling comedy. Passages in this section are as near to tragedy as I have ever come' (*Listening* 272). Portia is living with her step-brother Thomas and his wife Anna in their well-appointed but 'queasy and cold' house – in no way is it a home – in Regent's Park (*DH* 170). While they go to Italy Portia is sent to stay with Anna's former governess, Mrs Heccomb, in Seale. (Bowen has now given Hythe a modesty veil, calling it 'Seale-on-Sea'.) Going through Seale with Mrs Heccomb on the way from the station Portia finds that the shops, though very small, look 'lively, expectant, tempting, crowded, gay': 'cake shops, antique shops, gift shops, flower shops, fancy chemists, and fancy stationers'. Eventually they cross the canal bridge and 'the sea-line [appears] between high battered rows of houses, with red bungalows dotted in the gaps' (*DH* 131-132). They get out and scrabble up the shingle to the Esplanade. Brooke recognised the house as '[t]hat terrible house called Waikiki' (*Listening* 279). Waikiki and the 'battered' Esplanade may have appeared 'terrible' to Bowen's pre-war bourgeois readers compared with Regent's Park, but Waikiki has guts: '[c]onstructed largely of glass and blistered white paint, [it faces] the sea boldly, as though daring the elements to dash it to bits', a home for its uninhibited inhabitants, Mrs Heccomb's step-children, who clatter and bang about in an echo of Waikiki's plumbing (*DH* 131-133). On Portia's first morning, light of a pure seaside quality floods in with 'a smell of seaweed', enticing her out onto the Esplanade. Here the view to the east is of the imposing bluff of Southstone crowned by the most major of its major hotels – here called the Splendide – while to the west there is the 'gleaming curve' of the marsh, with light 'shining, shifting', making shadows (*DH* 146-147). All

seems set for a jolly good time, a time when Portia might flourish after her winter in London. But the landscape and place themselves are about to take a hand in directing the narrative.

In London Portia has fallen in love with a mercurial young man, Eddie, and arranges for him to visit Seale. It is disastrous. The first evening the young people go to the cinema, and in the dark she catches sight of him holding hands with Mrs Heccomb's stepdaughter. She challenges him about this the following day when they illicitly explore an empty house which, though empty, rustles with sea noises living in its chimneys and cupboards. The stairs creak, the banisters are loose. The doors are warped by sea damp, draughts make the wallpaper flutter. The rooms on the top floor are a dead end. Portia's love for Eddie has nowhere to go: the house is a metaphor for their relationship. (*DH* 195-201) Later they go for a walk in woods behind Hythe station; again the difficulties in the relationship are spelt out through the topography. Portia has been looking forward to her Sunday with Eddie, but 'woods had played no part in the landscape she saw in her heart'. And rightly so. 'Thickets of hazel gauzed over the distances; [. . .] there were tunnels, but no paths' – they have to double up to get under the hazels (*DH* 210). Portia has to unlace twigs in front of her face and gets flies in her hair. The disastrous weekend ends with a group of young people meeting in Southstone's East Cliff Pavilion, where Eddie gets tight on pink gins and has to go back to London in disgrace. The topography has accelerated the deterioration of the relationship.

ARCHITECTURAL SPACE: THE FIXED OR STATIC PLACE

Bowen had at one time thought of becoming an architect: in a biographical note on the back cover of the 1945 Penguin edition of *To the North* she tells us '[h]ad she not been a

writer, she would have liked to be an architect'. Tuan discusses the connection between architecture and language in his chapter on 'Architectural Space and Awareness'.

> Once achieved, architectural form is an environment for man. How does it then influence human feeling and consciousness? The analogy of language throws light on the question. Words contain and intensify feeling. [. . .] The built environment, like language, has the power to define and refine sensibility. It can sharpen and enlarge consciousness. Without architecture feelings about space must remain diffuse and fleeting. [. . .] Architectural space reveals and instructs. (Tuan, *Space* 106-107; 114)

For Bowen a building is a space, a crucible or melting pot in which transformations can take place, and is often an animate entity containing smaller animate objects. As Tuan's statement suggests is possible, she is able to use her architectural instincts to structure a novel. We have seen in Chapter 2 how she is particularly adept at visualising her unpainted picture, and she transfers this ability in order to construct and organise space in her writing. She says in the 1942 interview with *The Bell* that 'the Place is *frightfully* important', giving instances when she has seen and known the place 'long before the characters came into [her] mind' (Morrow, 'Meet' 423-424).

Bowen always has at least two contrasting buildings in her novels, and each building influences the action through its own peculiar atmosphere. These are most often domestic houses, of varying size and age and in varying states of repair. Each of these she will describe in detail, giving us not only a sense of its size and structure, but of its atmosphere which will lead us to anticipate the characters to be found there, and what might be expected to befall them, although Bowen leaves us in ignorance of what will actually befall them. Bowen has a spectrum of atmospheres in her static places, ranging from the benevolent Oudenarde Road in *To the North* to the malevolent houses in the rue Sylvestre Bonnard (*The House in Paris*) and at Holme Dene (*The Heat of the Day*).

In his chapter on 'Intimate Experiences of Place' Tuan discusses the home as

> [A] place [that] is full of ordinary objects. [. . .] an intimate place. We *think* of the house as home and place, but enchanted images of the past are evoked not so much

> by the entire building, which can only be seen, as by its components and furnishings, which can be touched and climbed as well: the attic and the cellar, the fireplace and the bay window, the hidden corners, a stool, a gilded mirror, a chipped shell. 'In smaller, more familiar things,' says Freya Stark 'memory weaves her strongest enchantments, holding us at her mercy with some trifle [. . .]. This surely is the meaning of home – a place where every day is multiplied by all the days before it.' (Tuan, *Space* 144)

Here one may draw parallels with the work of the phenomenologist Gaston Bachelard (1884-1962), who in his chapter on 'The House' in *The Poetics of Space* tells us that:

> An entire past comes to dwell in a new house. The old saying: 'We bring our *lares* with us' has many variations. And the daydream deepens to the point where an immemorial domain opens up for the dream of a home beyond man's earliest memory. The house, like fire and water, will permit me [. . .] to recall flashes of daydreams that illuminate the synthesis of immemorial and recollected. In this remote region, memory and imagination remain associated, each one working for their mutual deepening. In the order of values, they both constitute a community of memory and image. (Bachelard, *Poetics* 27)

Cresswell enlarges on this.

> In Bachelard's book *The Poetics of Space* he considers the house/home as a primal space that acts as a first world or first universe that then frames our understandings of all the spaces outside. The home is an intimate space where experience is particularly intense. (Cresswell, *Place* 24)[32]

The theories of Tuan and Bachelard tend to a view of the house or home which has a warm, nurturing atmosphere, a primordial space from which experience – the feeling of place – will grow. However we must bear in mind that these authors are writing from an essentially bourgeois and male perspective: Gillian Rose points out that '[w]hat both place and space have in common, however, is the exclusion of women (among others) from the geographical through certain masculinized understandings of geography' (Rose, *Feminism* 62). Cresswell cites Rose, saying that:

> [M]any women do not share the rosy view of home/place that humanistic geographers place at the center of the discipline. Communities can be stifling and homes can be and often are places of drudgery, abuse and neglect. Many women, Rose argues, would not recognize a view of home/place that is 'conflict-free,

[32] Bachelard terms this 'felicitous space' and uses the term 'topophilia' for his investigations of the space – he may have coined this himself, or he may have borrowed it from Auden, though this is unlikely (Bachelard, *Poetics* 19).

> caring, nurturing and almost mystically venerated by the humanists'. (Rose, *Feminism* 56; Cresswell, *Place* 25)

What Rose describes is much more the kind of experience of home that we will come to find in Bowen's novels, though one must allow for the fact that none of Bowen's principal characters is a conventional drudge: with the exception of Matchett in *The Death of the Heart* female servants are largely invisible or, with the occasional exception, are Forsterian 'flat' characters.[33] Psychological damage occurs, or has already occurred, in all the novels, either caused by deliberate or involuntary abuse by one character on another, or self-inflicted.

An early example of the oppressed woman can be found in *The Hotel*. Mrs Lee-Mittison, supportive of her overbearing husband to a fault, longs to break away from the need to make a home from the nomadic life which she and her husband are forced to lead.

> [She feels] sick at the thought of their hotel bedrooms that stretched, only interspersed with the spare-rooms of friends, in unbroken succession before and behind her. [. . .] [F]or how many mornings more [would she] have to turn the washstand into an occasional table by putting away the basin and the jug in the cupboard and [draping] with Indian embroideries the trunk in which they concealed their boots. (*TH* 36-37)

On an expedition into the hills, organised by her husband as a way of playing to the gallery of the young people at the hotel, she is sitting 'with the packets of lunch piled up around her like some homely goddess' when the view suddenly prompts her to envision a very different life.

> She looked down the slope beside her into the valley below and saw a little house, with a blue door whose colour delighted her, beside the bed of a river. Two lemon-trees were beside it, and this little house which she seemed at once to inhabit gave her the most strange sensation of dignity and of peace. She saw herself go climbing up the garden from terrace to terrace, calling the goat, and the goat, beautiful in its possessedness, come loping down to meet her, asking to be milked. At this she paused in perplexity, for she had never milked anything and turned cold at the thought of touching the udders of an animal. But in a moment this was over and

[33] It is the Irish women servants who are least 'flat': Kathleen in *The Last September*, Donovan's daughters in *The Heat of the Day*, and Kathie in *A World of Love.* Donovan himself and the Maltese manservant Francis in *The Little Girls* are also exceptions.

> she carried the milk frothing warm in the pottery jug inside, into the dark interior of the house which would not be dark from within. (*TH* 36)

But although her imagination has crossed the threshold, the house remains dark inside and now only negative images come to her.

> Here something turned her back and she could not follow herself; she saddened, feeling excluded from some very intimate experience. The house was lonely and in autumn, when the river was brimming, the rushing past of the water must be terrifying; its echo would line with sound the upright walls of the valley. On still spring nights the thud of a falling lemon would be enough to awake one in terror. (*TH* 36)

Mrs Lee-Mittison has recognised that escape of this kind is impossible. Almost immediately the behaviour of the young people begins to annoy her husband and she is inevitably obliged to go to his help and attempt to organise them, something which brings her back to reality.

Those who oppress Bowen's women are not always men. Very often the space of younger women is oppressed by older women, such as Lady Naylor or Lady Waters, and especially Mme Fisher, chatelaines of their estates or 'Big Houses' who exercise an unwritten *droit de grande dame* over the younger women.[34] Mme Fisher's house in *The House in Paris* is perhaps Bowen's most actively malevolent building. Henrietta's first sight of it does not augur well. It stands 'clamped to the flank of a six-storied building'. 'At each end, the street bent out of sight [. . .] and seemed [. . .] to lead nowhere. [. . .] [S]hutters were unwakingly shut. [. . .] It would not really have surprised Henrietta if no one had ever walked down that street again' (*HP* 22). Once inside the house, the physical atmosphere becomes static, but despite this the house still remains 'antagonistic'. The physical stasis is emphasised by the hall and stairs which are dark and undraughty, with no

[34] I would suggest that Mme Fisher is from the same mould as Mme Beck from Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*. Corcoran writes: 'If Mme Fisher has [Henry] James's Mme Merle somewhere in her origins, as I have suggested, she is also a compound – or a compost – of those earlier domineering elderly women in EB, beginning with Mrs Kerr in *The Hotel* and prominently including both Lady Naylor in *The Last September* and Lady Waters in *To the North*, who all presumptuously interfere in the lives of younger women and daughters, sometimes disastrously – in the case of Lady Waters to the point of the young woman Emmeline's final act of murder and suicide' (Corcoran *Enforced*, 91-92).

visible windows and 'stuffy' red wallpaper whose stripes look like bars (*HP* 24). With the bar-like wallpaper pattern and its hostile atmosphere, Bowen is suggesting that the House is the equivalent of a prison, almost of a torture chamber. Who or what are the prisoners? Although Mme Fisher herself is physically immobile, trapped in her own weak body and confined to her bedroom, she is nonetheless chief gaoler, controlling the House. Max had been controlled by her, but commits suicide to escape; Naomi is trapped both by her filial duty to her mother and by her sense of duty to Karen and thus to Leopold; Karen herself, who up to the time of 'The Present' has been unable to escape her guilt at her betrayal of Naomi, the conception of Leopold, and her part in the death of Max, is also trapped, despite no longer being physically present in the House; and Leopold, the child of prisoners, is imprisoned by their past and, like Henrietta, is physically trapped in the House for the day because of circumstances. Leopold is also trapped with his adoptive parents, the Grant-Moodys, something of which he becomes painfully aware when reading their letter to Naomi setting out their list of 'petty rules and constricting protocols for [his] regulation' (Bennett and Royle, *Dissolution* 46). Leopold is the only prisoner who by the end of the novel has definitely escaped, by refusing to return to Italy and his adoptive parents.

Bowen gives an example of how she exploits stasis in one of the scenes in Mme Fisher's bedroom in *Pictures and Conversations*.

> Staticness: the all-out of the dead weight. Yet this passage makes contradictory use of four vigorous anti-static verbs: 'sent spirals up,' 'fell,', 'drank,' 'turned.' It brings into the picture three (anti-static) lately completed acts: jalousies pulled to, quilt rolled back, door shut behind Henrietta. Further, there is an evocation of action thwarted (or withheld energy): light (because of the jalousies) does *not* fall across the head of the bed; ornate clock, glassy bottles, etc., show but 'without glinting'; Mme Fisher's hand does *not* stir on the sheet – though it could have. [. . .] The room, felt by the child as 'so full and still,' is a case not of mere immobility but of immobilisation. (*Pictures* 39)

In this static house Mrs Fisher is slowly dying, but Henrietta's experience is very different to that of Karen ten years earlier in the Rushbrook house where Aunt Violet is also dying. That house and its contents are animate, but there is never the feeling of entrapment. Nevertheless Karen begins to feel uneasy almost as soon as she comes ashore at Queenstown: the boat has arrived late, and as she comes to understand later, Uncle Bill will have been working through a 'catalogue of [unforeseen] calamities' (*HP* 74). By the time she reaches Rushbrook, Karen is on her guard, alert to the mutation she will undergo.

> It is a wary business, walking about a strange house you know you are to know well. Only cats and dogs with their more expressive bodies enact the tension we share with them at such times. The you inside you gathers up defensively; something is stealing upon you every moment; you will never be quite the same again. These new unsmiling lights, reflections and objects are to become your memories, riveted to you closer than friends or lovers, going with you, even, into the grave. [. . .] By having come, you already begin to store up the pains of going away. From what you see, there is to be no escape. Untrodden rocky canyons or virgin forests cannot be more entrapping than the inside of a house, which shows you what life is. (*HP* 77)

It is in this frame of mind that Karen spends her first days at Rushbrook, subconsciously anticipating a catalyst as she goes for walks in the afternoon. 'She either felt nothing or felt, wherever she was, the same something approaching, like steps in the distance making you stand still. Her passivity made the hills [. . .] seem to be behind glass.' That glass shatters when she receives a letter from Ray, asking 'if she truly *wanted* to marry him'. She writes back immediately 'with a great deal of impatience' to say that she does but, staring into the 'grin of the pillar-box' as she posts the letter, she realises that she 'want[s] to be with some gaunt contemptuous person who twist[s] life his own way' (*HP* 78-79). She returns to the pillar-box an hour later to post another letter, this time to Mme Fisher in Paris with the ulterior motive of meeting Max once again. Karen's turbulence is exacerbated when she learns from Uncle Bill that Aunt Violet is to have an operation: the implication is that this is cancer. A few days later, Aunt Violet comments that Karen 'always seems to know what [she] wants to do next', and they go on to discuss Ray and

their marriage and whether Karen will go on with her painting. The conversation ends when Aunt Violet asks her: 'Was there anyone else you liked?' and Karen replies: 'Yes, there was. But he made me miserable' (*HP* 86). So much has changed during her visit – she has learned Aunt Violet is dying, Ray has cast doubts on their suitability as a couple, causing Karen to think about Max and to take steps to meet him again – that it is not surprising that when she comes to leave Rushbrook for what will certainly be the last time she finds the house itself is readying itself for change.

> Looking round the room she had looked round that first morning, she found it new now in an unforeseen way, for she was not likely ever to see it again. The milk-glass Victorian lamps with violets painted on them, the harp with one string adrift standing behind the sofa and the worked Indian shawl for Aunt Violet's feet would no longer be themselves, once put apart from each other and gone to other houses: objects that cannot protest but seem likely to suffer fill one with useless pity. (*HP* 88)

While Bowen obviously has some affection for 'Waikiki' in *The Death of the Heart* (despite not disagreeing with Brooke's description of the house on Hythe sea front on which it is based as 'a terrible house'), she has absolutely none for Holme Dene in *The Heat of the Day* (*Listening* 279). This bourgeois Edwardian house with its closed rooms and dark rambling passages has moral poverty and is not a home: it represents Robert Kelway's secretive and devious behaviour and compares unfavourably with the poverty-stricken though still vital Big House, Mount Morris, in war-free Ireland which Stella visits later in the novel. Bowen's descriptions in two episodes gradually build a 'Hammer House of Horror'. Despite being set back from the 'otherwise empty road' in a rather secretive way, its approach is advertised by a sign declaiming loudly 'CONCEALED DRIVE'. The Virginia creeper which partially drapes (in order to conceal?) the façade is 'blood red'. The petit-bourgeois nature of the occupants is emphasised by the fact that 'vegetables of the politer kind' are planted in the flower beds in front of the house. It does not impress Stella, 'who could not stop looking', but 'could think of nothing to say' (*HD* 100; 101). The

lounge (it does not qualify as a drawing-room) is 'so blackly furnished with antique oak, papered art brown and curtained with copper chenille' that it consumes the light coming in through the three sizeable windows (*HD* 102). The room is built with as many complications as space allows; there are a great number of exits, archways and outdoor views, and an atmosphere of secrecy is contributed to by screens of varying heights which have been placed about the room in order to block draughts. With her view out of the windows, Mrs Kelway controls the house and the grounds, though by no means as malevolently as Mme Fisher controls The House in *The House in Paris*. Mrs Kelway's house may be 'a bewitched wood', but her power comes to an end at the white gate, as does her world (*HD* 104).

When Robert shows Stella his room, she is struck by his 'narrow glacial bed': to her the room feels empty and she smells mothballs as if the room were already closed up. The photographs which are hung 'in close formations on two walls' 'only made this room as though [Robert] were dead'. Robert describes them as his 'criminal record', 'a pack of his own lies' (*HD* 111-113). Indeed, several of them are hung crooked, something Ernestine spots and hastens to straighten (*HD* 118). As they look into the garden, Bowen gives us an untypically short sentence of four words: 'There were no rooks' (*HD* 116).[35] When Bowen uses a short sentence, the purpose of its brevity is to make the reader take notice. In this case Bowen is telling us that hope for Robert is lost. Rooks are harbingers of death, and they have already left.

[35] In *Howards End* E.M. Forster describes how as Ruth Wilcox's coffin approaches the church the woodcutter's boy up in the elm trees notices that 'the rooks had cawed, and no wonder – it was as if rooks knew too' (Forster, *Howards* 75). Mark Cocker describes a similar event in *Crow Country*. 'This forewarning of doom was virtually a specialist of the species. Proofs of the rooks' gift of second sight were everywhere in Victorian publications. "A singular circumstance is reported," ran one typical account, "in connection with the recent suicide of Mr Graves, of Linwood Grange. Near the house a colony of rooks had established themselves, and, on the day of the funeral, immediately on the appearance of the hearse, the birds left the locality in a body, deserting their nests, all of which contained young."' (Cocker, *Crow* 119)

Robert visits Holme Dene on his own on what will be his last evening on earth, in order to discuss with his mother and sister whether or not the house should be sold. Bowen continues to ramp up the macabre atmosphere and to give hints of Robert's treachery. Ernestine, already a caricature, has become a grotesque creature, communicating with Robert on the telephone 'in a series of groans, warning hisses and hydrophobic laughs'; during the interview she sits on a coffin while their mother is knitting 'with that unflickering velocity which had alarmed Stella': she has become a *tricoteuse* waiting for the guillotine to fall. The three of them communicate in 'the dead language' (*HD* 242-243). Above-stairs Holme Dene is represented as a metaphor for Robert's life.

> [I]t has been planned with a sort of playful circumlocution – corridors, archways, recesses, half-landings, ledges, niches and balustrades combined to fuddle any sense of direction and check, so far as possible, progress from room to room. [. . .] [They were] flock-packed with matter – repressions, doubts, fears, subterfuges and fibs.

Bowen goes on to adumbrate the futility of Robert's treachery, to indicate that there is no way out for him. '[U]pstairs life, since the war, had up there condensed itself into very few rooms – swastika-arms of passage leading to nothing, stripped of carpet, bulbs gone from the light-sockets, were flanked by doors with their keys turned' (*HD* 247-249). He is already in a netherworld, in limbo, having sold his soul. Bowen describes this with one of her trademark dyslocutions: 'Extinct, at this night hour Stygian as an abandoned mine-working, those reaches of passage would show in day-light ghost-pale faded patches no shadow crossed' (*HD* 249).

THE MOBILE PLACE

Thrift tells us that '[mobility] signifies a shift in the realm of human experience' (Thrift, 'Inhuman' 191). He goes on to deal specifically with the way of 'writing mobility'.

> It is undoubtedly the case that communicating mobility demands a change in style of 'writing'. Indeed, as I have argued, that might be one of the ways in which this

> structure of feeling might be able to be described. Yet, on the whole, while declarations of intent have abounded, actual demonstrations have been rather thin on the ground. The reasons for this are not always clear. One may be that it is difficult to represent something that is not always meant to be open to representation. (Thrift, 'Inhuman' 234)

Far from having difficulty writing mobility, it is something which Bowen undertook very successfully. She tells us that she was not born into the age of speed, but that it came into being around her and was something that she found exciting to grow up with.

> [Speed's] intensifications, however, we were to discover was good for art. It alerts vision, making vision retentive with regard to what only may have been a split second. By contrast, it accentuates the absoluteness of stillness. Permanence, where it occurs, and it does occur, stands out the more strongly in an otherwise ephemeral world. Permanence is an attribute of recalled places. (*Pictures* 43, 44)

In her novels speed and mobility are to be found depicted in two ways: the mobility of her characters, but more particularly the mobility of places in which the characters are contained. Of the first kind Bowen writes:

> Someone remarked, Bowen characters are almost perpetually in transit. Arguably: if you are to include transitions from room to room or floor to floor of the same house, or one to another portion of its surroundings. I agree, Bowen characters are in transit *consciously*. Sensationalists, they are able to re-experience what they do, or equally, what is done to them every day. They tend to behold afresh and react accordingly. An arrival, even into another room, is an event to be registered in some way. When they extend their environment, strike outward, invade the unknown, travel, what goes on in them is magnified and enhanced: impacts are sharper, there is more objectivity. (*Pictures* 41-42)

Umberto Boccioni (1882-1916). *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*. 1913, cast 1972, Tate TO1589
https://www.moma.org/collection/works/81179

The kind of mobility Bowen describes in her last sentence can be found in Umberto Boccioni's 1913 sculpture, *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*. Here a human body is striding forward purposefully, with speed suggested by the way the bronze flows behind, apparently caused by the body's impact on the air.

Not only do Bowen's characters have mobility, her places can also have mobility. Susanne Langer describes this: '[A] ship, constantly changing its location, is nonetheless a self-contained place, and so is a gypsy camp, an Indian camp, or a circus camp, however often it shifts its geodetic bearings. Literally, we say the camp is *in* a place; culturally, it *is* a place. A Gypsy camp is a different place from an Indian camp, though it may be geographically where the Indian camp used to be' (Langer, *Feeling* 95). With this kind of mobility, Bowen characters find themselves in a place which is itself moving. Not only does the location of the place change, the narrative advances. An example of a place changing location while the narrative advances is found in *Friends and Relations*. Following Janet's provisional breaking off of her engagement to Rodney as the result of a quarrel with Edward in London, Lewis offers to drive her back to her parents' home in Cheltenham in his new car.

> [T]ill Uxbridge she sat like a sad Holbein; at High Wycombe he made her laugh, before Oxford she was cheerfully looking about her. Afternoon light for years was stored on the Cotswolds; Lewis, swerving along the taut ridge road, kept offering his companion the horizons and the sky. Cheltenham, white in trees, appeared grander than London; on the hills around, villas tilted comfortably in their gardens at a deck-chair angle were past amazement. [. . .] Rodney kissed her and did not speak of yesterday – they were, of course, to marry. (*FR* 50-51)

This benign passage charts not only Janet's physical journey in Lewis' car, but her journey from sadness at the ructions of the previous day to the resumption of the status quo.

Bowen's next two novels, *To the North* and *The House in Paris*, are full of moving places: *To the North* contains several of Bowen's memorable moving places. The novel begins in Milan in April (Eliot's 'cruellest month') and there is already a sense of unease

as Cecilia waits to board the train. This train, a moving place, contains a nightmare journey, begun in the afternoon and lasting through the night. In an ominous pre-echo of Nazi transports, Cecilia feels that she is 'in a cattle truck shunted into a siding'. The St Gothard tunnel, already dubbed a catastrophe, seems endless and as they emerge into Switzerland, dusk falls in 'sheets of rain'. The exterior landscape has become two-dimensional, made of 'wet cardboard', the train rocks (here Bowen uses the present tense for greater effect), the restaurant car windows steam up, and in these unpromising circumstances she is joined at her table by Markie, who has 'the impassive bright quick-lidded eyes of an agreeable reptile' (*TN* 5-7). The train continues to move through this nightmarish landscape, while Cecilia and Markie guardedly converse and observe each other. The following day they meet again on the ferry which arrives at Folkestone where 'England showed a blank face' (*TN* 11). By 'blank face' one might imagine England wishes to be in ignorance of this journey which has established the shaky foundations on which Bowen builds her novel.

Another moving place is the plane which takes Emmeline and Markie from Croydon to Paris. What emerges on this journey marks the turning point of the novel, but the relationship does not evolve as Emmeline hopes it will. Markie is 'so very late' that Emmeline fears he will miss the plane. In the plane, conversation between Emmeline and Markie is impossible because of the roaring hum of the engine and they are obliged to gesticulate or write notes to each other. It becomes evident from their written communications that they are at odds, and this difference will develop when they are in Paris. They are also at odds in the way they experience the journey: for Markie 'the earth is good enough', while Emmeline is ecstatic at being up in the clouds with the landscape visible as a map, so much so that she '[gives] up the earth' (*TN* 135; 136). But while Emmeline had imagined that the relationship might develop one way, Markie writes that

he is not interested in marriage, but hopes she will 'be kind' to him, and that she understands what that means. Emmeline is forced back to reality.

> Feelings of all kinds had stolen from her in this cold new reality of the cloudscape; conscious of the remoteness and uneagerness of his attitude she felt he, too, had written what he had written not on impulse, in urgency, but in a momentary coldness and clearness of feeling that was showing him where they stood (*TN* 138).

Bowen uses the view through the windows of the plane to chart Emmeline's position.

> Stayed by this feeling of unimmediacy she reviewed one by one the incidents of their friendship, each distinct from the other as cloud from cloud but linked by her sense of something increasing and mounting and, like the clouds, bearing in on her by their succession and changing nature how fast and strongly, though never whither, they moved. She was embarked, they were embarked together, no stop was possible; she could now turn back only by some unforeseen and violent deflection – by which her exact idea of personal honour became imperilled – from their set course. (*TN* 138)

'No stop was possible'. There can be no deflection, violent or otherwise, from 'their set course', which does end violently, with the final episode taking place in another moving

C.R.W. Nevinson (1889-1946). *Searchlights* 1914-1916. Manchester Art Gallery, 1920.149
https://manchesterartgallery.org/collections/title/?mag-object-1691

place, Emmeline's little car. Initially unaware of Emmeline's intentions – he thinks she is driving him to King's Cross – Markie's reptilian tongue becomes tied when he realises that she means to drive him to Baldock. In a miniature Vorticist image reminiscent of Nevinson's *Searchlights*, '[a]mong street lights crossing like spears his thoughts were at every angle' (*TN* 237). The turbulence of this journey reflects Emmeline's growing frustration over the previous months at the deterioration of their relationship. Markie tries to placate her, but because she is fixated on driving – and driving fast – his efforts are fruitless as the car itself takes charge and they are swept into the vortex – 'the heart of the fan'.

> Head-on, magnetized up the heart of the fan of approaching brightness, the little car, strung on speed, held unswerving way. Someone, shrieking, wrenched at a brake ahead: the great car, bounding, swerved on its impetus. Markie dragged their wheel left: like gnats the two hung in the glare with unmoving faces. Shocked back by the moment, Emmeline saw what was past averting. (*TN* 245)

Thus the aeroplane in which Emmeline and Markie travel to Paris and the little car in which Markie and Emmeline hurtle to the North are discrete places in themselves: the first contains the turning point of the relationship, and the second contains so much pent-up emotional energy that it cannot resist swirling into the vortex. There are resonances of the description of the car crash which Iris Storm inflicts on herself in her great Hispano-Suiza in Michael Arlen's 1924 *The Green Hat*, although Iris kills herself for more complex reasons than Emmeline and the motion is different.

> The two great lights ahead lit the countryside. Then they seemed to shorten, and Harrod's [the tree] stood like a pillar of light against the darkness. The silver leaves, the giant trunk . . . in the lights of Iris's car. The stork screamed hoarsely, once, twice, thrice. . . . There was a tearing crash, a tongue of fire among the leaves of Harrod's. [. . .] Once again the great tree was lit by a shivering light, then from the darkness there came a grinding, moaning noise as of a great beast in pain. (Arlen, *Green* 265-266)

The House in Paris contains several moving places: the taxis in the outer sections of the novel which Henrietta and Leopold take at the beginning and the end of their day in

the House, and the ships which Karen takes in the central part. Bowen uses the latter when she continues her discussion of staticness in *Pictures and Conversations*:

> [O]ne can break the staticness down by showing scene in fluidity, in (apparent) motion. For that, the beholder must be in motion himself, on foot or on or in a conveyance of whatever kind, at whatever speed. The greater the speed, the more liquefying the process. [. . .] He does not merely – as he would were he at a standstill – *see* scene, he *watches* its continuous changes, which act upon him compulsively like a non-stop narrative. (*Pictures* 40)

She gives as an example one of her most beautiful animate images, Karen's arrival in Cork.

> The sun brightened the vapoury white sky but never quite shone: both shores reflected its melting light. The ship, checking, balanced uncertainly up the narrowing river, trees on each side, as though navigating an avenue, leaving a salt wake. [. . .] The wake made a dark streak in the glassy river; its ripples broke against garden walls. Every hill running down, each turn of the river, seemed to trap the ship more and cut off the open sea. [. . .]
>
> The river kept washing salt off the ship's prow. Then, to the right, the tree-dark hill of Tivoli began to go up, steep, with pallid, stucco houses appearing to balance on the tops of trees. Palladian columns, gazeboes, glass-houses, terraces showed on the background misted with spring green, at the tops of shafts or on toppling brackets of rock, all stuck to the hill, all slipping past the ship. (*HP* 71-72)

In the first paragraph, the ship moves cautiously up the Cork river 'as though navigating an avenue' until the landscape seems to 'trap the ship' so that in the following paragraph, the ship is apparently at a standstill: it is the landscape which is moving. The river washes salt off the ship's prow, and then the 'tree-dark hill of Tivoli' begins to go up, and the scenery, stuck to the hill, all '[slips] past the ship' (*HP* 71-72). Bowen is using this series of serene moving images to illustrate Karen's frame of mind as she approaches Ireland. Karen has recently become engaged to Ray, and Bowen has spent the previous two pages outlining the events which have occurred prior to Karen's journey, beginning with the sentence: '[Karen] felt calm enough to have steadied a ship in a rough sea' (*HP* 69). But as we saw in 'The Fixed Place' (pp. 102-103 above), this calmness will soon dissipate.

THE LIMINAL PLACE OR SPACE[36]

In *The Heat of the Day* Mount Morris is quite different to Holme Dene. The poverty here is material, not moral, and the stultifying atmosphere of Holme Dene is absent. Instead there is a feeling of airiness, of freedom, of light and movement, and of mirroring and reflection both inside and outside the house, which seems to stem from something more than the fact that Ireland is not at war. Endowed with 'immortality', Mount Morris is more than a house; it is a liminal space, in abeyance since Cousin Francis' death while it waits for the arrival of Roderick, its new owner. It sits surrounded by mountains and its demesne woods in its own landscape, to which it devotes 'the whole muted fervour of its being to a long gaze' (*HD* 159; 155). Sky is reflected in the rows of the vast glass panes of the windows; reflections from the river prolong daylight as Stella arrives. Even inside, the house feels as though it is part of the outdoor world, despite the shadows and darkness and the little amount of light given out by the few candles and lamps which Donovan and his daughters are able to supply. It is a house of mirrors and memories: the house is familiar to her, despite an absence of twenty-one years, and Cousin Francis has left tangible memories in the collections of objects and papers in his study.

> On every side remained the meticulous preparations made for his departure. Inconceivably many magazines, pamphlets, prospectuses, circulars, their edges showing every age and stage of brownness, had been corded up into bales, ticketed, stacked on and underneath sideboards, sofas, tables. Balanced upon the bales, a tribe of tray-shaped baskets invited Stella's inspection of their contents so carefully sorted out – colourless billiard balls, padlocks, thermometers, a dog collar, keyless key-rings, a lily bulb, an ivory puzzle, a Shakespeare calendar for 1927, the cured but unmounted claw of a greater eagle, a Lincoln Imp knocker, an odd spur, lumps of quartz, a tangle of tipless tiny pencils on frayed silk cords. . . . (*HD* 156)

This ephemeral collection of objects brings to mind Holbein's 1533 painting *The Ambassadors*. There has been much discussion over the meaning of this double portrait.

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[36] Bowen often uses the term 'abeyance', and Bennett and Royle use 'Abeyances' as the title of their chapter dealing with *The Hotel* and *The Last September* (Bennett and Royle, *Dissolution* 1). Meaning 'temporary inactivity', this is a term similar to 'liminality' which is a transitional state in which the subject is temporarily inactive: they cannot yet move on.

Hans Holbein the Younger (c.1497-1543). *The Ambassadors*. 1533. National Gallery, London. NG1314[37]
https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/hans-holbein-the-younger-the-ambassadors

My own interpretation is that these young men are in a liminal space, given the facts that it is bears a date which was Good Friday, that there is a crucifix hanging at the extreme edge of the painting, that an anamorphic skull (which resolves to a normal shape when viewed from a certain angle at the extreme right of the painting) floats near their feet, and that the pattern on the floor forms pathways leading away into the dark. Conscious that they are about to embark upon a journey, they have gathered a collection of terrestrial objects as mementoes on the lower shelf and a collection of objects that might guide them on a celestial journey on the upper shelf. In a similar way, Cousin Francis has prepared for his final journey, assembling the past in these bales and baskets, but as well 'he ha[s] thought ahead', sticking cards which are 'still fresh', with injunctions, admonitions and warnings,

[37] On the left Jean de Dinteville, Ambassador of François I of France to the court of Henry VIII of England, on the right Georges de Selve, bishop of Lavaur, shortly to become Ambassador of François I to Venice. Painted 1533, dated April 11, which was Good Friday that year, and also the date on which Henry VIII made known to the Royal Council his secret marriage two months previously to Anne Boleyn.

underlined or enringed with red of actions to be taken in the case of his death, into the frame of the old painting of 'horse-men grouped apprehensively at midnight' (*HD* 156).[38]

Stella herself is in a liminal situation.[39] She longs to remain at Mount Morris: 'to stay [there] for ever playing this ghostly part', and not to return to London where her life will be no less problematic than it was when she left (*HD* 157). But it is at Mount Morris that we find the fulcrum of Bowen's novel. Stella discovers that when Cousin Francis was alive Harrison had visited him there: Donovan describes him as 'a chap or gentleman with a very narrow look, added to which he had a sort of discord between his two eyes' (*HD* 163). This confirmation that Harrison had indeed had dealings with Cousin Francis leads her to reflect on the veracity of his allegations about Robert's treachery, and to consider from what she has observed of Robert's behaviour whether Harrison has been lying or not. The following day Donovan shouts to her as she is returning from exploring the valley that 'Montgomery's through! [. . .] It's the war turning' (*HD* 170-171).[40] Thereafter Stella's own personal war takes a decisive turn, and she steps out of her liminal situation, challenging Robert with Harrison's allegations on her return to London, and deciding to accept Harrison's offer to protect Robert if she will become his lover.

Bowen characters are often in liminal situations, but in *The Last September* we have an example of a physical liminal space being used to emphasise the character's liminal situation. It is the height of the Irish War of Independence and Lois Farquhar has left school with nothing arranged for her subsequently. Thus Lois, like Ireland itself, is very much at a cross-roads, something she recognises when she tells Mr Daventry at the

[38] This is almost certainly a print from the 1839 set of four by Henry Alken of *The First Steeple Chase on Record*: prints of the set were very popular. https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1940-0210-3
[39] Several of Bowen's war-time protagonists are in liminal spaces, notably Mary in 'The Happy Autumn Fields' (*Collected* 671-685).
[40] Although Bowen is specific that Stella's walk takes place on 'a day of October size' Montgomery's breakthrough in the Second Battle of El Alamein was not completed until 4 November 1942. (*HD* 169)

dance that '[she doesn't] live anywhere, really' (*LS* 157). Her liminality is focused on a first-floor ante-room in Danielstown.

> Personally [Lois] liked the ante-room, though it wasn't the ideal place to read or talk. Four rooms opened off it; at any moment a door might be opened, or blow open, sending a draught down one's neck. People passed through it continually, so that one kept having to look up and smile. Yet Lois always seemed to be talking there, standing with a knee on a chair because it was not worth while [sic] to sit down, and her life was very much complicated by not knowing how much of what she said had been overheard, or by whom, or how far it would go. (*LS* 9)

This ante-room is exactly that, a place for waiting in, with a number of possible exits. But here one can be trapped into the mistake of going out by the wrong door, and there are physical traps in the ante-room as well – a tiger-skin rug whose teeth may snap at you in the dark, or you may skid on the floor which is so well polished that it resembles a lake across which 'the circle of not very comfortable shell-shaped chairs that no-one [takes] seriously' are stepping stones (*LS* 9; 56). This space with its four doors is reminiscent of the liminal paintings of Dorothea Tanning (1910-2012).[41] As with Tanning's paintings, we do not know where some of these doors will lead: although there are four doors, Bowen tells us only that one leads to Lois' own bedroom while another leads to the Blue Room which Francie Montmorency and her husband are occupying during their visit. Lois is ready to move on ('it was not worth while to sit down') and various exits suggest themselves throughout the novel: a British army officer, Gerald Lesworth, falls in love with her and they become informally engaged; there is talk about going to a school of art, of learning German or Italian, but none of these materialise. Her aunt Lady Naylor is

[41] On the title page verso of *Elizabeth Bowen – The Later Fiction* Lis Christensen remarks: 'Doors and doorways are recurring features in the world of Elizabeth Bowen's fiction. They are part of the wartime background in *The Heat of the Day.* They may be entrances into other worlds, as they are in *A World of Love*. They may reflect social standing, as they do in 'A Day in the Dark' and *The Little Girls*. And they underscore the all-important theme of communication, for an open door is a sign of hospitality and a wish to relate to other people; such is the door of the impoverished vicar's family in *Eva Trout*, while it is a sad sign of the economic and cultural decline of the dilapidated Big House in *A World of Love* that "the door no longer knew hospitality".'

Dorothea Tanning (1910-2012). *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik*. 1943, Tate, T07346
https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/tanning-eine-kleine-nachtmusik-t07346

manipulative: despite the fact that she thinks 'all young people ought to be rebels; she herself had certainly been a rebel', she attempts to control Lois (*LS* 120).

Another example of a liminal place is Major Brutt's bedroom with its doll's house window, dark behind a parapet at the top of the 'sad gimcrack cliff' of the Karachi Hotel where Portia finds herself in the closing pages of *The Death of the Heart* (*DH* 318). Like Portia, Major Brutt is in a liminal situation: having left the Army, he is always waiting for an iron to come out of the fire (*DH* 48). As Portia and Major Brutt make their way up to his room, Bowen tells us that '[Portia's] day had been all stairs': she has been in an acute liminal situation all day (*DH* 291).[42] Events have effectively driven her in a corner: she has been let down by everyone, by her half-brother and sister-in-law Thomas and Anna, by the cad Eddie, by her friend Lilian, by the housekeeper Matchett, and above all by Anna's friend St Quentin. Major Brutt is the only person who has constantly seemed sympathetic: apart from anything else he has been kind enough to send her jigsaw puzzles. Her enjoyment and her application in doing these are symbolic of her efforts to make sense of the puzzle of her life, and she sees him as the puzzle-solver. But Major Brutt is in no

[42] See my discussion of stairs and liminality in Woolf and Mansfield in Chapter 1, pp. 26-27.

position to help and telephones the Quaynes, who send Matchett to retrieve her. Portia will have to leave this liminal space. Will she return to Windsor Terrace with Matchett; if she does, will her life change or will it retreat to what it had been before? Does Portia have any other alternatives? When Matchett takes a quick look round Portia's bedroom just before leaving, 'the room [seems] to expect nobody back', yet Matchett does anticipate that Portia will return, for she switches on the electric fire (*DH* 313). Even so, unlike *The Last September* when the reader is told that Lois has emerged from liminality by being sent to learn French in Tours, on this occasion the reader, as well as Portia, is left in liminality.[43]

THE HIDING PLACE

Bowen became interested in archaeology as a young child in Kent, when history 'appeared to burst from under the contemporary surface at every point' (*Pictures* 25). The two most obvious physical hiding places in her novels are the two time-capsules in *The Little Girls*, while Guy's letters have a succession of hiding places in *A World of Love*. Robert's bedroom in *The Heat of the Day* is a place where he hides what has made him a traitor. The pistol in *Eva Trout* has a succession of hiding places. But Bowen's hiding place *par excellence* is her prose. Using the technique of collage she hides snippets of the texts of other writers at differing levels in her own prose which the reader who cares to investigate will find, thereby increasing their understanding of the narrative: this is Bowen's game of 'Hunt the Thimble'. This I deal in Chapter 5: 'I Collect Scraps to Make Scrap Screens'.

Working in tandem with light, place is rarely an impartial canvas against which Bowen's narratives play out. It is an animate participant in her narrative, capable of directing the action, as in the Hythe episodes in *The House in Paris* and *The Death of the Heart* (pp. 93-96 above). Against and within its canvas, Bowen's characters attempt to

[43] Tours is traditionally where the 'purest' French is found, and therefore the place of choice for foreigners wishing to learn the language.

resolve the challenges which are presented to them, as we will see in the next chapter when I come to discuss the geometry of relationships.

Chapter 4

‘THE IDEA COMES AS AN ABSTRACT PATTERN’

In this chapter I explore Bowen’s use of pattern in two areas: the shape of the novel and the geometry of relationships between characters. We find that these areas are in conflict: restrained within the shape of the novel the relationships of the characters strain against each other. I also consider balance. In *The Patterning Instinct,* his exploration of humanity’s search for meaning, Jeremy Lent tells us that ‘[the] human instinct for patterning is embedded in our cognition, maintaining its activity throughout our lives’. He cites the anthropologist Clifford Geertz who describes a human being as a ‘symbolizing, conceptualizing, meaning-seeking animal’, whose ‘drive to make sense out of experience, to give it form and order, is evidently as real and as pressing as the more familiar biological needs’. Geertz sees religion, art, and ideology as ‘attempts to provide orientation for an organism which cannot live in a world it is unable to understand’ (Lent, *Patterning* 31; 32). The characters in Elizabeth Bowen’s novels, faced with problems in their lives, attempt to understand the world in which they find themselves, and often try to make sense through patterning. In her 1942 interview with *The Bell*, Bowen says that ‘[t]he idea for a book usually comes to me in the shape of an abstract pattern’ (Morrow, ‘Meet’ 423). Bowen’s abstract patterns create a densely packed canvas, one which requires careful study in order to tease its components apart.

Bowen gives an example of abstract patterning in her *Desert Island Discs* interview when she says that she is ‘good with her hands in arranging things the way [she likes] them to be’ and as part of the civilising process, should she be cast away on a desert island, ‘[she’d] try and set up some kind of shell mosaic – all possibly different coloured sand patterns in it’ (BBC Home Service, 11 March 1957). She gives another example in ‘Toys’,

an essay from 1944 in which she describes how a child might assemble disparate objects to make a toy.

> Left to itself [. . .] the child finds or makes its own toy – the bone, the queer-shaped pebble or bit of wood, the bunch of grass (doll-shaped), the empty box or spool – for resourceful is the imagination, forceful are the imperatives of play. But to be ideal the toy should have something added. *Is* it too much to say that it should have magic [. . .]? (*People* 178)

We may draw parallels with the descriptions by Paul Nash (1889-1946) of his *objet trouvé*, *The Nest of Wild Stones*. Here Nash has collected stones which he is arranging in such a way that the 'found object' makes sense.

> The idea of giving life to inanimate objects is as old as almost any record of fable. It has varied in conception throughout very different histories; fairy lore, mythology, and the Bible. The sudden assumption of life and speech, in the human sense, by inanimate things is a commonplace in fairy tales, and occurs quite naturally also in most mythologies. [. . .]
>
> The more an object is studied from the point of view of its animation the more incalculable it becomes in its variations; the more subtle, also, becomes the problem of assembling and associating different objects in order to create that true irrational poise which is the solution of the personal equation. (Nash, *Writings* 137; 139)

Paul Nash (1889-1946). *The Nest of Wild Stones*, Tate TGA 7050PH/536
https://www.tate.org.uk/art/archive/items/tga-7050ph-536/nash-black-and-white-negative-the-nest-of-wild-stones

It is the assembly of disparate objects in a way that makes sense that both Nash and Bowen are describing, responding to the realities of the modernist age and trying to understand the

apparent enigma that its fragmented structure presents by piecing together those fragments in order to make a new whole. In algebraic terms it might be expressed as $x + y + z = 1$. Hildebidle highlights Bowen's tendency to use equations to interpret her characters within their topography, both physical and historical.

> [T]hose occasions on which Bowen seems most intent upon building up such equations are often when her fiction shows strain and mannerism. But to Bowen the equation, and the dark terms in which it must be couched, are fundamental facts. (Hildebidle, 'Bowen' 93)

The 'dark terms' to which Hildebidle alludes rule many of Bowen novels: her characters are frequently thwarted in their attempts to make a pattern or solve an equation.

In *Eva Trout*, both Jeremy and Eva experience the problem of assembly and association noted by Nash as they attempt to solve their own personal equations. It is Jeremy who is successful when he assembles and associates his *objets trouvés* from the Vicarage ash heap.

> The boy straightway tipped his handfuls of treasure on to the rug at Eva's feet, then crouched down, absorbedly starting to sort things out – half of a mangled teaspoon, a minute wheel off some minute toy, the crushed empty shell of some wild bird's speckled egg, three or four slivers of splintered mirror, particles of Woolworth willow-pattern, flowerpots, Crown Derby and, not least, one orange wooden button. Could his hands have held more, more would have been deployed. What there was, he was making into a pattern. [. . .] Jeremy put the slivers of mirror into sun-rays surrounding the orange button; *his* patterns made sense. (*ET* 177; 178)

Eva's attempts are spread out over a longer period, and begin when she is in bed with 'flu. 'Time, inside [her] mind, lay about like various pieces of a fragmented picture. [. . .] To reassemble the picture was impossible; too many of the pieces were lost, lacking. Yet, some of the pieces there were would group into patterns – patterns at least' (*ET* 52). In Chicago as she sets off to take the phone call which will give her the arrangements for collecting Jeremy, any pattern she had achieved up to now has fallen apart: 'Tomorrow was a banged-about Bethlehem star, yesterday a writhing unravelled pattern' (*ET* 166). When she returns to England eight years later, she tries to pull together the strands of that

unravelled pattern by re-visiting Worcestershire and Broadstairs but fails: Iseult and Eric are gone from Larkins and '[u]nmeaningness reign[s]' at Cathay (*ET* 191).

Bowen had a fascination for the kaleidoscope, saying in her interview on *Desert Island Discs*: 'I would like to have something beautiful to look at, but I'd like it to change a bit or I might get bored with it. [. . .] I'd like a kaleidoscope, brilliant and changing in shape and pattern every time I gave it a shake' (BBC Home Service, 11 March 1957). Part of the attraction of the kaleidoscope for Bowen is chance: it is not possible to predict the pattern which will be created. Normally, a kaleidoscope is twisted manually, altering the position of the fragments of glass so that they are reflected in an unpredictable way, making patterns which are abstract, yet geometric and symmetrical, aleatoric, formed by chance. The astrophysicist Arthur Eddington (1882-1944) discusses chance when he writes in a footnote to the section on 'Thermodynamic Equilibrium' in *The Nature of the Physical World* that 'all the patterns [made by a kaleidoscope] are equal as regards random element [i.e. chance], but they differ greatly in elegance'. He asks: 'Might not the assemblage become more and more *beautiful* (according to some agreed aesthetic standard) as time proceeds?' (Eddington, *Nature* 86). But rather than allowing the pattern to become more pleasing, Bowen wants to distort it. Bowen describes in her BBC interview with Brooke how, in *The Heat of the Day*, she wanted to give 'an effect [. . .] of a smashed up pattern. [. . .] [She] wanted the convulsing shaking of a kaleidoscope [whose] inside reflector was cracked' (*Listening* 283). She hopes that by using a cracked reflector, the reflections of the fragments of glass would not be equal and so the pattern would not be symmetrical.

From childhood on Bowen was conscious of shape and how it could be created. In a 1959 BBC interview she says: '[T]he profession I did want to have when I was at school was architecture [. . .] but I went no further. I certainly wouldn't have had a great career as an architect, and I realise that I was not mathematical. [. . .] I was always drawing

elevations and modelling and thinking I'd like to build something' (*Listening* 330). Despite believing she had no aptitude for mathematics, Bowen has an intrinsic understanding of both geometry and algebra and uses both branches of mathematics in constructing her novels. The shape of the novel is always distinctive: architectural or geometric. In an earlier BBC interview, Bowen had told Glyn Jones that she does not plan her novels ahead, for they 'almost always "break shape" as they go along': despite the fact that she is 'good with her hands', she allows them to develop of their own accord (*Listening* 270; BBC Home Service, 11 March 1957). Like a building, the novel is a three-dimensional container, initially an empty shell but one which is flexible, changing in response to the needs of its commissioners: in Bowen's case these are its characters. Within the architecture of each novel, Bowen's characters emerge and arrange themselves to form a pattern. She herself does not create them, they are found. In 'Notes on Writing a Novel' she says: 'They reveal themselves slowly to the novelist's perception – as might fellow-travellers seated opposite one in a very dimly-lit railway carriage. [. . .] [I]n each of the characters, while he or she is acting, the play and pull of alternatives must be felt' (*Orion* 19). Bowen is geometric in her arrangement of personal dynamics but it is through that 'play and pull' that geometry changes. While relationships are initially expressed in basic geometric terms, it is through algebra that they develop: character a + character b = outcome c. Hildebidle comments:

> [Bowen's] novels are never shapeless. In fact they are full of architectural arrangements, of patterns of defining parallels and echoes, of 'pairings' at the metaphorical level which are much more persistent than the romantic or marital pairings which make up the plot. [. . .] Bowen's plots almost invariably betray a predilection for mathematical patterns, for proliferations of two and threes, of symmetries in uneasy proximity to asymmetries. (Hildebidle, 'Bowen' 121-122)

Again there are similarities with Hardy: by the time he comes to write *Jude the Obscure* some critics feel that he has abandoned an earlier pictorialism for a sort of geometry which could be likened to twentieth-century art genres. Joan Grundy remarks on this change:

> To see *Jude*, with its combination of geometrical sub-structure (two 'eternal triangles' within a quadrilateral of characters, enclosing a balanced series of contrasts and linear relationships) and chaotic surface, as actually anticipating later artistic developments such as Cubism or Futurism would perhaps be fanciful. Yet the experience of modern life imagined at the start of the novel in Jude's (literally Vorticist – he is called 'the whirling child) suffering [. . .] certainly suggests a context similar to that out of which such art movements have sprung. (Grundy, *Hardy* 66)

In Bowen's case, characters struggle on their own to make sense of their situations by trying to fit pieces back together into a pattern, or even to fit unrelated pieces together, in order to find a solution to the dilemma in which they find themselves. These pieces are occasionally represented by the presence of a physical puzzle in the narrative: Portia is given jigsaw puzzles by Major Brutt; Clare is entranced by Mrs Piggott's Chinese ivory puzzle.

As Bowen writes, her syntax begins to form distinctive patterns which sometimes result in distorted syntax: her dyslocution. Again, there are similarities with Hardy. Grundy tells us:

> The oddity of Hardy's diction, its mixture of archaisms, dialect words, coinages, and so on, its stubborn individualism and defiant uncouthness, bring to mind the 'rough and harsh terms' of Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar*. [. . .] Marsden [. . .] describes the effect upon the reader as being to force him 'to realize that there is a *complicated* pattern here, and yet encouraging him by assurance that there *is* a *pattern*'. (Grundy, *Hardy* 178-179)

The same can be said of Bowen: her dyslocution underlines the fact that her characters are dealing with complicated patterns which resemble puzzles, puzzles needing to be resolved.

THE SHAPE OF THE NOVEL

In 'Pattern and Rhythm', the penultimate chapter of *Aspects of the Novel*, E.M. Forster considers something for which he says there is no literary word– it can be expressed as the pattern of the novel (visually) or as the rhythm of the novel (musically). 'We will borrow from painting first and call it the pattern. Later we will borrow from music and call it

rhythm. Unfortunately both these words are vague.' For Forster it is plots which form patterns: he gives the examples of *Thais* [sic] by Anatole France and *The Ambassadors* by Henry James, both of which he finds are in the shape of an hour glass, while Percy Lubbock's *Roman Pictures*, a social comedy, is in the shape of the Grand Chain, the formation dance in which a dancer is passed from one partner to another until they complete the chain by meeting up with the original partner (Forster, *Aspects* 151).

Like Miss Pym in *The Hotel*, Bowen finds society 'fascinating, so like a jigsaw puzzle' (*TH* 6). She reflects this in her novels through a variety of shapes, of architecture or geometry which determine the pattern and rhythm of their plots. In at least two of the novels, *The Last September* and *Eva Trout*, the characters themselves attempt to change the pattern or to form their own patterns. Five of the novels are in three parts: *The Last September*, *Friends and Relations* and *The Death of the Heart* are ordered chronologically, while *The House in Paris* is a triptych as is *The Little Girls*: each of the last two has outer parts set in the present with a central part set in the past, although their rhythms differ. *The Last September* and *To the North* both has a variety of Vorticist forces at play: they are at the same time centripetal and centrifugal. *The Hotel* and *The Death of the Heart* are both circular, coming back to the same point from which they started. *The Heat of the Day* and *A World of Love* are both arc-shaped, with the action rising to a zenith and then falling. The geometry in *Friends and Relations* and throughout the two parts of *Eva Trout* includes balance, that part of applied mathematics where weights on a beam either side of a fulcrum are counterpoised so that the beam remains horizontal. Disturbance to balance may depend on the chance placing an additional weight on one or other side of the fulcrum or changing the distance of the weight from the fulcrum. We find chance in *The Little Girls*: Bowen was aware from the outset of her writing career of the possibilities offered by chance, and in the Preface to the 1952 edition of *The Last September* she explains how in that novel

and *The Hotel* she used 'the device of having my men and women actually under the same roof – to remain there, whether by choice or chance, for such time as the story should need to complete its course' (*Mulberry* 123).

In *The Hotel* Bowen bookends the novel with a broken relationship on the first page and its reconciliation on the final page, and in doing so creates a circle (*TH* 5; 175). In between, patterns are formed by groups of people, each group with its own sub-plot. *The Death of the Heart*, which is again circular, is in three consecutive parts, 'The World', 'The Flesh' and 'The Devil', titles which Bowen has taken from the text of the Anglican service of The Litany. Several critics, including Harriet Blodgett, develop a Christian theme with the intriguing suggestion that Portia is portrayed as a Christ figure, betrayed by all those around her as she undertakes a form of pilgrimage, suggesting something teleological.[44] It is very unlikely that Bowen had this in mind: Roy Foster tells us that 'it annoyed Bowen that her heroine was seen as the sacrificed victim rather than the wrecker' (Foster, *Life with the Lid Off*, BBC Radio 4, 28 September 1983). I would argue that, rather than a linear pilgrimage, the entire novel is circular in that by the end the sixteen-year-old Portia has arrived at exactly the same place from which she started out: in the cheapest room in an hotel.[45] She has gone round the circumference of a circle. Her life in the sterile Regent's Park house, belonging to her step-brother Thomas and his wife Anna, is completely at odds with her peripatetic life with her mother, spent in genteel poverty moving from hotel to hotel in Europe, and she strains to find some pattern in her life. 'In her home life (her new home life) with its puzzles, she saw dissimulation on guard. [. . .] Outdoors the pattern was less involuted, very much simplified' (*DH* 59). She keeps a diary in which we see her response to that new life as well as her immaturity and vulnerability.

[44] In *Patterns of Reality* Blodgett's reading of Bowen is *au fond* Christian, with some mythical references. In her introduction she refers to Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*: her chapter on *The Death of the Heart* is entitled 'The Great Hero' echoing the title of the Campbell work (Blodgett, *Patterns* 18).
[45] As Corcoran tells us, 'Portia therefore ends in the novel where we are told she began: in yet one more poky, cheap, and, of course, temporary hotel room' (Corcoran, *Enforced* 106).

During the course of the novel she is sent two jigsaw puzzles by Major Brunt. These jigsaw puzzles play a particular part, not just for her work on them, but also for the action and reaction of others. For Portia solving them is a metaphor for the way she is trying to make sense of her life. While Thomas and Anna go to Italy, she is sent to stay with Anna's former governess, Mrs Heccomb, in the seaside town of Seale. Not only is Portia vulnerable, but the puzzles are too, for soon after she arrives she receives a letter from Matchett, the housekeeper in London, telling her that the maid had disturbed the puzzle in her room '[upsetting] the sky and part of the officers' and that she, Matchett, had put the pieces in a box (*DH* 150). In London Portia has developed a relationship with a mercurial young man, Eddie, and he is invited to come to Seale. The second jigsaw puzzle comes a few days before his arrival. 'There in the sun porch stayed the unfinished puzzle, into which, before he came, she had fitted her hopes and fears' (*DH* 190). For Portia, Eddie has become a jigsaw puzzle, and when they explore the empty house in Seale, Eddie accuses her of treating him like one.

> No, and I also thought you were the one person who didn't take other people's completely distorted views. But now you're like any girl at the seaside, always watching and judging, trying to piece me together into something that isn't there. You make me – (*DH* 198).

Daphne, Mrs Heccomb's unsympathetic step-daughter, berates Portia for doing her puzzle in the sun porch, telling her to 'just take that awful puzzle up to your room and finish it there, if you're really so anxious to. You get on my nerves, always picking about with it' (*DH* 204). When Portia returns to London she discovers that Anna has been reading her diaries (Portia has already recorded how she has found Anna in her bedroom, doing her puzzle) (*DH* 250; 119). For Portia this is the ultimate betrayal, and she goes to Major Brutt, the provider of jigsaw puzzles, in the hope that he will be able to help her sort out her life-puzzle. He is clear that he cannot, and the novel ends on liminality – will Portia return to the cold Regent's Park House, or will she find some other solution?

The Last September focuses on events in and around Danielstown, a Big House in County Cork. Bowen describes the centripetal nature of the generic Big House in *Bowen's Court*. 'Each of these houses, with its intense, centripetal life, is isolated by something very much more lasting than the physical fact of space: the isolation is innate; it is an affair of origin' (*BC* 20). Here she is using the mathematical term 'centripetal', suggesting a gravitational attraction, rather than 'inward-looking' or 'introverted'. Danielstown is centripetal but this is balanced by a reverse, centrifugal force found in many of the characters. In the first half of the novel characters are drawn to Danielstown, but by the end of the novel Marda has left for Kent, Gerald is dead, Lois has been despatched to Tours, the Montmorencys and Laurence have gone. Mrs Trent leaves after 'a flying visit' (*LS* 205). Only Sir Richard and Lady Naylor remain to witness the destruction of the house five months later, the point at which the centripetal force is sucked into a vortex, taking the

Gino Severini (1883-1966). *Expansion of Light. (Centrifugal and Centripetal*)
Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, Madrid. Inv. No. 252 (1981.53)
https://www.museothyssen.org/en/collection/artists/severini-gino/expansion-light-centrifugal-and-centripetal

bricks and mortar of Danielstown into oblivion. The restless centrifugal/centripetal movement of the characters in *The Last September* anticipates Bowen's use of Futurism in her novels of the 1930s. In *To the North* Lady Waters remarks: 'All ages are restless. [. . .] But *this* age [. . .] is far more than restless: it is decentralized' (*TN* 170). The subtitle of the Severini painting above, *Centrifugal and Centripetal*, echoes the restlessness Lady Waters describes, with the conflicting directions of the forces suggested by the sharp angles formed by the edges of the patches of colour: there is no evident vanishing point. I note in 'Shaking the cracked kaleidoscope: Elizabeth Bowen's use of Futurism and Collage in *To the North*' that Bowen's paragraph beginning 'An immense idea of departure' towards the end of the novel embraces ideas very similar to Marinetti's first Futurist Manifesto of 1909 (Hirst, 'Shaking' 69).[46]

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

Marinetti's Manifesto reads:

> We will sing the great masses shaken with work, pleasure, or rebellion; [. . .] shall sing the vibrating nocturnal fervor of factories and shipyards burning under violent electric moons; bloated railway stations that devour smoking serpents; [. . .] adventurous steamships that scent the horizon, locomotives with their swollen chest, pawing the tracks like massive steel horses bridled with pipes, and the oscillating flight of airplanes, whose propeller flaps at the wind like a flag and seems to applaud like a delirious crowd. (Marinetti, cited Rainey, *Modernism* 5)

Both paragraphs deal with the release of energy, with vehicles of many different sorts moving violently, and this has a transforming effect in the case of Emmeline. As Ellmann

[46] Keri Walsh finds that *To the North* has at its heart Futurism but draws on the 1910 *Technical Manifesto for Futurist Painters*, rather than Marinetti's 1909 manifesto (Walsh, 'Futurist' 21).

points out '"spinning" [is] a recurrent term' in *To the North* (Ellmann, *Shadow* 104). A particular British branch of Futurism was Vorticism, and I would suggest that it is this short-lived genre with its circular motion and still centre which is the movement at the root of *To the North*, just as Grundy suggests that Hardy anticipates it in *Jude the Obscure*. The vortex has a superficial centrifugal motion whose forces cause ripples moving outwards from its centre, making a discernibly regular pattern, but its central core is treacherous: the forces there are centripetal, spiralling downward as in a whirlpool.[47] In *The Pound Era* Kenner defines a vortex as 'a circulation with a still centre: a system of energies drawing in whatever comes near ("Energy creates pattern")' (Kenner, *Pound* 239). Like the vortex, *To the North* is both centrifugal and centripetal.[48] Emmeline is going round in circles: herself essentially centripetal (or introverted), she first becomes aware of an opposing centrifugal force when she and Markie are in the park at St Cloud. In a passage which anticipates Eliot's 'Burnt Norton', Emmeline stands still with her hand on the bark of a tree, and longs 'to stand still always. She longed suddenly to be fixed, to enjoy an apparent stillness, to watch even an hour complete round one object its little changes of light, to see out the little and greater cycles of day and season in one place' and when Markie remonstrates, says that she doesn't mind where they are 'so long as [they] *stay* where [they] are' (*TN* 144). Emmeline is resisting, but the centrifugal force is gaining momentum. Markie attempts to counter it by 'wheeling her angrily round where perspectives met', causing them to '[describe . . .] a fairly wide circle' (*TN* 145). After their Paris visit and the consummation of their affair, the centrifugal force begins gradually to dominate. But when Emmeline leaves Oodenarde Road to take Markie to Kings Cross, she does not intend to kill Markie – she never does intend to kill him – the centripetal force

[47] 'The Vorticist Wyndham Lewis (1882-1957) explains: "You think at once of a whirlpool. At the heart of the whirlpool is a great silent place where all the energy is concentrated; and there at the point of concentration is the Vorticist"' (Goldring, *South* 65).

[48] Ellmann writes: '*To the North*, as its title implies, moves relentlessly in one direction, teleological in the extreme' (Ellmann, *Shadow* 96). On the contrary, I find that Emmeline is flung out by a centrifugal force.

which takes hold of her is irresistible. In the end both she and he are sucked down into the vortex.

The House in Paris is a triptych, but it is also a palindrome: Bowen terms it her 'most "shapely" novel' (*Listening* 272).[49] The central section, 'The Past', is flanked by two outer parts both entitled 'The Present': 'The Past' could stand on its own as a separate novella, as could the two 'The Presents' taken together. 'The Past' takes place more in the open air than in buildings: the two 'The Presents', on the other hand, are mostly confined within the eponymous House. The opening of the first mirrors the closing of the second: both are violent taxi journeys through Paris, one beginning at a railway station, the second ending at a railway station, while after and before the taxi journeys the inner sections in the static and oppressive atmosphere of The House also mirror each other in the emotional violence meted out. There is an emphasis on motherhood in this novel, which I explore later in this chapter (pp. 137-139), and which enables us to recognise the shape of the novel specifically as a devotional triptych, one which often venerates the Madonna and Child, in which the two outer panels are hinged enabling them to close over the central panel. The two parts of 'The Present' resemble the outer panels of the triptych which when

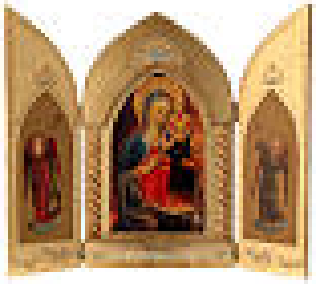
Abrupt journey from railway station Physical violence *recto*	THE PRESENT Imprisoned in the house Emotional violence *verso*	THE PAST Lyrical landscapes but gently Futurist (particularly the entries to Cork, Boulogne, Hythe) Freedom of movement	THE PRESENT Imprisoned in the house Emotional violence *verso*	Abrupt journey to railway station Physical violence *recto*

Shape of *The House in Paris*

[49] Ellmann writes: '[T]he movement of The House in Paris is centripetal, circling back to the enigmas of the past' (Ellmann, *Shadow* 96). However, Bowen herself remarks on the static quality of the outer parts, comparing it with the fluidity of the central part (*Pictures* 39-40).

Closed devotional triptych

Open devotional triptych



opened reveal the central part of 'The Past': in each case the recto represents the taxi journey and the verso the events within the House.

Corcoran sees *The Heat of the Day* as 'a kind of vortex which has sucked the outer wartime atmosphere into itself and vertiginously whirls it around, even in its syntactical structures, in a motion all the more unsettling for the confined space in which it occurs' (Corcoran, *Enforced* 172). Harriet Blodgett also sees it as a kind of vortex: she draws parallels with Eliot's *Four Quartets*, finding that it has a pattern whose detail is movement, but at whose core there is a still centre (Blodgett, *Patterns* 155). I see its pattern as an arc whose ascending trajectory is one of exploration and uncertainty, and whose descending curve one of inevitability which begins when Stella is in Ireland and has validated

Harrison's claims of association with Cousin Francis, lending truth to his assertions about Robert's treachery. Bowen tethers the arc firmly to the ground at either end of the novel with Louie in the open air: by beginning with her meeting with Harrison at the concert in Regent's Park, and by ending with her pushing her son in his pram beside the canal in Seale.

Up to this point, Bowen's novels have been predominately geometric, which has allowed us to view her through a painterly lens. She now begins to move with the times in terms of visual genre and no longer suggests movement in a Futurist fashion, instead employing moving images. That she was aware that the contemporary aesthetic was changing is evident from her 1950 lecture 'The Poetic Element in Fiction'.

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

She was conscious of a strong cinematic element in her work. Glendinning tells us that in 1952 Bowen wrote to her agent: 'I always think my stories are more suitable for films [. . .] than for plays. Do you know Carol Reed? I hear he often talks of my work, and I do wish someone would push him over the edge!'(Glendinning, *Portrait* 198). As well as cinema, Bowen looks to kinetic art: while early pieces of kinetic art had been created in the 1920s and 1930s, it was in the 1950s and 1960s that the movement established itself. Bowen's final novels have elements of this genre as well as drawing on film, as I discuss in Chapter 5.

A World of Love has a transitional form. Like its predecessor *The Heat of the Day*, it has the trajectory of an arc, traced by the obelisk which functions as a gnomon, but Bowen incorporates cinematic illusion throughout. The action takes place during a heatwave at Midsummer, and Bowen links this novel to its predecessor in the very first

line: '[t]he sun rose on a landscape still pale with *the heat of the day* before' (*WL* 9, emphasis added). The 1949 novel is still shimmering in a cinematic dissolve in her imagination. The most notable cinematic episode comes in the centrepiece of the novel, the dinner party hosted by Lady Latterly on the second evening which forms the zenith of the arc.[50] As Glendinning points out, Bowen clearly intends us to perceive this episode as a piece of cinema: Jane enters the drawing-room which is 'black-and-white at the door with standing men' at which point 'the sound-track stopped' (Glendinning, *Portrait* 198; *WL* 58). Jane's focus becomes distorted by her unaccustomed intake of alcohol; the other guests become illusory, and shadows seem to take on solid forms. When she utters Guy's name, she becomes exhilarated by feeling that he is present in the room (*WL* 65). Later Antonia will experience a similar exhilaration when she senses Guy's presence as she stands in the front door of Monteforte looking out into the night (*WL* 76-78). It is on the fourth day, when the zenith of the arc (and incidentally of the solar year) is past, that the obelisk becomes two-dimensional and stationary, looking 'like the enlarged photograph of a monument' and therefore ceasing to be part of a moving picture or to act as a gnomon (*WL* 132).

Externally *The Little Girls*, like *The House in Paris*, is a triptych. Its central part is set fifty years previously, rather than ten, and the two outer parts combine to form a continuous narrative over two or three months, from September to November, rather than from dawn to dusk the same day. Within the triptych, the shape is dependent on chance, starting with a chance recollection by Dinah. In the closing pages of the novel Clare reflects on the part that chance has played from the very beginning when they were children.

[50] This chapter was published as 'The Dinner Party: A Chapter from a New Novel' in the first edition of *The London Magazine*, vol. 1, no. 1, February 1954.

> We were entrusted to one another, in the days which mattered, Clare thought. Entrusted to one another by chance, not choice. Chance, and its agents time and place. Chance is better than choice; it is more lordly. In its carelessness it is more lordly. Chance is God, choice is man. You – she thought, looking at the bed – chanced, not chose, to want us again. (*LG* 236) [51]

Each time a fresh chance event or the memory of a chance event occurs, the narrative swings in a new, unexpected direction. Although there is no evidence to support this, Bowen may have had in the back of her mind the opening lines of Mallarmé's 1897 poem *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hazard* ('A throw of the dice will never abolish chance'), whose implication is that however you try to control the throwing of the dice, you cannot control the outcome: chance will always be the winner. (This is an alternative interpretation to that of Beckett who Brown suggests is experiencing the 'space between' and the 'void' as common denominators between modern poetry and painting in this poem (Brown, *Yeats* 98).)

Dinah is creating a time capsule – a form of memorial for posterity – in a cave in her garden. By chance, her attention is drawn to the swing: while it hangs unevenly it is apparently safe, though 'when it swings it twirls' (*LG* 20). She experiences what Coleridge terms the 'hooks and eyes of the memory' and recalls the crooked swing at her school, where just before the First World War she had buried an earlier time capsule with Sheila and Clare: this was in response to a chance remark about archaeology by a school-friend's aunt which caused her to want to imitate the Romans (Bodkin, *Archetypal* 40; *LG* 23; 90). Bent on exhuming the earlier time capsule, Dinah succeeds in tracing the other two and reuniting the three of them at her house. Here, observing the swing from the landing window, Clare also recalls the earlier swing and how each of them had mastered its uneven motion in different ways (*LG* 55). The 1914 time capsule is recovered, but its contents are missing. Here is a paradox: for those who created it the memory of its contents remains,

[51] Margaret Mills Harper points out that 'Chance' and 'Choice' are taken from Yeats' poem 'Solomon and the Witch' from his 1921 collection Michael Robartes and the Dancer, saying that they are 'impossible oppositions that seem to comprise human destiny'. (Harper, 'Excess' 110)

yet that memory conflicts with reality: its contents no longer exist. The realisation that she has left childhood behind hits Dinah hard, something Bowen emphasises when Dinah is literally hit hard, knocked out, by the swing in her garden – the swing which caused this attempt to return to childhood. She sleeps, watched over by Sheila and it is only when she recovers consciousness that she realises that she must accept the passage of time and embark on a new, adult relationship with Clare. The 'Little Girls' are little girls no more.

The anonymous reviewer in the *New York Times* focuses on chance.

> What Miss Bowen appears to be telling us is that chance is the shaping genius of our affairs and that we are stuck to a large extent with what it provides. More often than not, our longings and joys must be expressed through those who are put in our way. We accommodate to the necessities of others in order to be answered in our own. Hell may be the other people, as Sartre has contended, but other people provide the indispensable sense of oneself.
> https://www.nytimes.com/1964/01/12/archives/the-genius-was-chance-the-little-girls-by-elizabeth-bowen-307-pp.html Accessed 21 March 2021

Eva Trout's shape is more complex. As Bowen informs us through Eva's last words, it is a concatenation, a sequence of events linked together: it could be viewed as a gallery or exhibition in which each chapter is a different room or artwork. While John Coates argues that Bowen takes the novel's subtitle, *Changing Scenes*, from the hymn 'Through all the Changing Scenes of Life', I would suggest that it is more likely to refer to the changing scenes as the audience moves from room to room in the gallery, or indeed to changing theatrical scenes, especially given the demise of the Castle school: 'down came oblivion – asbestos curtain' (Coates, 'Misfortunes' 61; *ET* 65). The term 'asbestos curtain' is a theatrical one: when Bowen was writing safety curtains, lowered by law at least once during a performance, were made of asbestos. Thus Bowen is telling us that one act or scene has come to an end. Balance conflicts with this concatenation: Mr Dancey's *magnum opus* is not called *The Faulty Scales* for nothing, and I discuss this below under 'Balance' later in this Chapter.

THE GEOMETRY OF RELATIONSHIPS

Although Bowen says in her interview with Glyn Jones, '[f]undamentally, I doubt whether I have any great interest in character', in 'The Poetic Element in Fiction' she discusses the need for the novelist to reflect on the patterns made by the characters (*Listening* 268).

> There must be the outward action, however placed and however staged. There must be the conflict between consciousness of the one and of the other person. There must be the movement and the impact of the passion upon the passion, the project on the project. [. . .] And that really, that fact that it concerns itself with two people, with three, with an unnumbered cast of persons, placed in a pattern relating to one another and acting upon one another, does constitute the hold [sic] and the future promise of the story. [. . .] [T]he fact of reactions and opposition, the consequence of one person upon another and one action as following another, will always be desired and will always be needed to be plain. (*Listening* 160)

Trotter observes, '[i]t could be argued that the most productive family relationship in Bowen's kinship network is not husband and wife, or parent and child, or brother and sister, but cousinhood'. After Bowen's mother died of cancer she was brought up within an extended family in which '[t]here was no shortage of cousins, Irish and English' (Trotter, 'Cousins' 31). Her experience of the patterns within this extended family would lead to the patterns, made in various permutations of characters, which occur throughout Bowen's novels. Most often found are patterns made from two and three, but four and seven occur in several novels. There are also relationships involving balance, and I discuss these later in this chapter.[52]

Among the relationships between two individuals are several mother-child relationships: almost every Bowen novel is notable for its mothers, either by their presence or their absence, or for its matriarchs, and for the effect on their offspring or charges. Fathers may also be absent, but rarely do they play an active role: the mother is the important parent whether present or absent. Unlike Woolf who says she laid her mother's

[52] Three and seven frequently appear in fairy tales and rhymes, as well as in the Bible and astrology. In *The Uses of Enchantment* Bruno Bettelheim discusses the use of three and seven in various ways in fairy tales and fables and the Bible. (Bettelheim, *Enchantment* 215-224; 84; 209) This is an interesting echo of Paul Nash cited above: 'The sudden assumption of life and speech, in the human sense, by inanimate things is a commonplace in fairy tales, and occurs quite naturally also in most mythologies' (Nash, *Writings* 137).

death to rest in writing *To the Lighthouse*, Bowen seems never to have laid her mother's death to rest.[53] Ellmann tells us that Bowen's 'famous stammer, which emerged during her father's mental illness, consistently balked on the word "mother". But the bereavement that scarred her speech galvanised her writing, for the dead mother stalks her fiction in many guises and personae' (Ellmann, *Shadow* 24). The substitute-mother, the matriarch who controls or affects events is a stock character in Bowen's novels: for this she draws on her experience of the 'committee of aunts' who supervised her life immediately after her mother died (Glendinning, *Portrait* 28).

The implication of Trotter's observation is that the parent-child relationship is not productive, and indeed it is often destructive as we see in the two novels in which motherhood plays a central role: *The House in Paris* and *Eva Trout.* Bowen emphasises the importance of the mother-child relationships in *The House in Paris* through her use of the devotional triptych discussed above (pp. 131-132). In this novel the relationships are many and unconventional, and as so often with Bowen, distortion is everything: none of the characters in *The House in Paris* appears to have a 'normal' mother-child relationship. Central is Karen's imagining of Leopold during a long interior monologue even before he is conceived. Even though Karen knows that conception should not have been possible, yet already the idea of Leopold is sown in her mind and in the night she tries to see Max's face to see what his child would be like but is unable to (*HP* 153). But on waking in the morning, Max and Karen make love again and Leopold is conceived: she has become a mother. Karen's imagining of Leopold is balanced by Leopold's imagining of Karen when he holds to his head the empty envelope which had contained Karen's letter to Naomi and pretends to read aloud what he imagines she would have written. Unlike Karen's lengthy musing, Leopold's thoughts are straightforward and to the point: Karen intends to be alone

[53] 'I rubbed out a good deal of the force of my mother's memory by writing about her in *To the Lighthouse*' (Woolf, *Moments* 119).

with Leopold and to arrange to take him back to England with her, since she has come to the conclusion that she cannot do without Leopold: he is the only person she wants.

The primary matriarch is the manipulative Mme Fisher, yet she is physically dependent on Naomi. When Karen says to Naomi that she would like the child to live with her, Naomi says that is impossible because of her mother. Karen asks: 'Why should your mother come first, though? She doesn't love you'. Naomi replies that it is 'because she needs me': on one level this is a reversed mother-child relationship (*HP* 188). Naomi resembles the Biblical Ruth rather than the Biblical Naomi, since she acts in a caring role towards everyone: to her mother, to Max, to Karen, and to Henrietta and Leopold while they are in the House. The relationship between Karen and her own mother is not normal: during her interior monologue Karen twice thinks of Ray as being like her mother: 'To be with Ray will be like being with mother' and how Aunt Violet saw 'Ray was my mother' (*HP* 153; 154).

For Eva Trout, her final mother and her strangest, Bowen draws on two different mothers from Judeo-Christian sources, Eve and Mary.[54] *Eva Trout* is linked to the Creation story – Part I is entitled *Genesis* – and the final chapter, 'Coffee Shop' ends with a reverse 'Nativity' which I discuss further in Chapter 5, p. 165. Eva purchases 'motherhood', paying a price for it in more ways than one, since Jeremy is a deaf mute. The novel is littered with other mothers: Eva's own mother who abandoned her at the age of two months; Elsinore's 'corrupt mother'; the three young matrons in the coffee shop in Chicago; Iseult whose novel resulted in an emotional hysterotomy [an abortion] (*ET* 45; 65; 151-167; 266). Mrs Dancey is the person who comes closest to what might be seen as 'motherly' in all Bowen's novels: she is always kind and welcoming and concerned for others. Her only fault is to 'leak' Eva's whereabouts in Paris to Iseult (*ET* 249).

[54] Bowen's Nativity Play was performed in Limerick Cathedral 10-12 December 1964: she was working on this at the same time that she was beginning work on *Eva Trout*. (Glendinning and Robertson, *Love's* 424)

Three occurs most frequently in Bowen's groupings of characters, and these relationships may be social or sexual, though they are sometimes parental. Three may be contained within another number such as four and seven. Four, being an even number, might be thought to be calm and balanced but this is never the case: Bowen manages to introduce friction, particularly when four is expressed as three plus one rather than two plus two. This rupture of four is similar to that found in Ford Madox Ford's 1914 novel *The Good Soldier*, described here by Rose De Angelis.

> Two triads—part European, part American—are interwoven into a complex tapestry that covers the truth as it uncovers it. Leonora and Edward Ashburnham and Florence and John Dowell, with Florence and Edward serving as the disrupting forces, form the triangles in *The Good Soldier*, but within the geometrics of the novel, one also finds Florence as mediator of Dowell's unconfessed homosexual desire for Edward and Nancy Rufford as mediator of Florence's adulterous love for him. (De Angelis, 'Narrative' 425)[55]

Bowen has a variation on three: 'The Shadowy Third' was the title of one of her first published short stories, and a 'shadowy third' permeates much of her fiction, reminiscent of the third who is there, and at the same time isn't there, in Eliot's 'What the Thunder Said'.[56] By attempting to focus on the third being, the viewer finds that the being dissolves.

In *The Hotel*, Bowen forms simple patterns of mainly twos and threes, only to rearrange them: most of the pairs created fail to survive the passage of the novel. Ellmann points out that 'connections [. . .] unravel stitch by stitch': the novel opens as the pair of Miss Pym and Miss Fitzgerald has just unravelled (Ellmann, *Shadow* 70). Sydney's quasi mother-daughter relationship with Mrs Kerr is viewed as a pair by the drawing-room

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[55] 'John Rodker famously called Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier* 'the finest French novel in the English language'. But I think that *The House in Paris* can lay claim to the title too, profoundly immersed as it is, in its sense of structural and psychological possibility, in the work of Flaubert and his successors' (Corcoran, *Enforced* 88-89).

[56] Who is the third who walks always beside you?
When I count, there are only you and I together
But when I look ahead up the white road
There is always another one walking beside you
Gliding wrapt in a brown mantle, hooded
I do not know whether a man or a woman
—But who is that on the other side of you?
(Eliot, *Collected* 67)

ladies, but comes under threat with the arrival of Mrs Kerr's son Ronald. Mrs Kerr has told Sydney that she, Sydney, is like her son, and later says how she had wanted the two to be friends: in other words to be a pair (*TH* 116). Indeed Milton notices that the two are like each other: '[T]hey had the same build and the same carriage and might have been brother and sister' (*TH* 147). The relationships have already unravelled when Sydney comes to Mrs Kerr's room to say farewell. Ronald is there and offers to leave but Sydney says 'Oh no, *don't* go,' thereby suggesting a triad: when 'the room seem[s] too small for three people' it is Sydney who acknowledges the unravelling and leaves (*TH* 167).

When Milton invites Sydney to go for a walk, Sydney, pestered by Cordelia, agrees that the girl can come with them, thus making the pair into a triad. Having despatched Cordelia to buy dates, ensuring that he and Sydney are at least temporarily a pair, Milton asks Sydney to marry him. She refuses and he then departs, leaving Sydney and Cordelia to form a pair when the latter returns with the dates: Cordelia cheerfully observes that 'two's better company' (*TH* 85). Even when Sydney later tells Milton that she does want to marry him, their kiss is watched by an unobserved, shadowy third, Mrs Lee-Mittison (*TH* 124).

In *The Last September*, as in *The Hotel*, Bowen assembles her characters under one roof, but while in *The Hotel* their relationships with the building are essentially transitory, in this novel each character is connected in some way to Danielstown. Lois tells Marda: 'I like to be in a pattern. [. . .] I like to be related; to have to be what I am. Just to *be* is so intransitive, so lonely' (*LS* 98). The pattern she finds herself in, at least temporarily, has two married pairs: Sir Richard and Lady (Myra) Naylor, and Hugo and Francie Montmorency. Grouped together with these four individuals are Lois herself (a niece) and Laurence (a nephew), with the visitor Marda bringing the total number of principal characters to seven, a number we find in both *Friends and Relations* and *The Death of the*

Heart. In his fascinating chapter on 'Seven' in *One to Nine: The Inner Life of Numbers*, the mathematician Andrew Hodges writes that '[s]even needs sifting and sorting out'. Despite finding the number seven 'a celebrity, with many fans: vices, virtues, league boots, year itches, and of course dwarves', he calls it 'an awkward customer who demands one over the odds, and comes back with the complaint that what they bought yesterday doesn't fit after all. Seven is the number of Nature, which has so far refused to be cleared up' (Hodges, *One* 215-238). In *The Last September*, two of the seven characters attempt to 'clear up' the novel by altering the configuration. As Corcoran tells us:

> [Laurence, the would-be novelist] remorselessly unpicks what the novel has held tenuously together. In his dissolving oneiric version, 'in a kind of unborn freedom' – which we might read as an arresting phrase for the novelistic imagination – Laura, Lois's mother, would have married Hugo; Richard Naylor, master of Danielstown, would have married Francie; Myra would have remained unmarried; and Laurence himself, the dandy, would have blown his brains out 'at – say – Avila, in a fit of temporary discouragement without having heard of Danielstown'. Lois 'naturally, was not born at all' – since, of course, her parents would not have married. (Corcoran, *Enforced* 41-42)

Jessica Gildersleeve points out that 'Laurence is not the only one to create this kind of supplementary narrative. Hugo authors an alternative narrative plot in which, avoiding the futurelessness and passivity of his nomadic life with Francie, he can act on his love for Marda' (Gildersleeve, *Trauma* 39). This comes after Marda has left, when, on an island in the stream, he finds a ruined cottage. Earlier Hugo's liaison with Laura had been obliterated. 'Recollections of Laura were now wiped out for him from the startlingly green valley, leaving the scene dull'. Nothing that he sees – '[n]ot a turn of the rocks with the river, not a break-down of turf along the brink, not the Norman keep with perishing corners' – allows the memories to revive. Instead Hugo embraces his detachment and, released from Laura, is free to devote his attentions to Marda (*LS* 121). Bowen moves into the present tense to give his thoughts more immediacy.

> [H]e set up a stage for himself: the hall's half-light. Marda's hand is on the wide scrolled curve of the baluster rail: he touches her still and electric hand with the

> deliberation of certainty, all the sense running into his touch. She stares recognition fixedly, darkly back [. . .] her very features became his actors. (*LS* 176)

Discussing *Friends and Relations,* Ellmann describes the pattern formed by the characters.

> [T]here are two married couples [. . .] but the wife of one pair is entangled with the husband of the other. In addition to these double couples, two free-floating women, a lesbian and a retired adulteress, stretch the four-cornered love affair into a hexagon. These shadowy presences inhibit the fulfilment of desire but also enable it to circulate, fanning its flames while hindering its satisfaction. (Ellmann, *Shadow* 71)

Having considered Bowen's use of three, Ellmann continues: 'In *Friends and Relations* [. . .] the third presence is subjected to hectic permutation dividing into fourths, fifths and sixths' (Ellmann, *Shadow* 73). Bowen's 'hectic permutation' is further complicated by her characters, particularly Theodora and Janet, who like Hugo and Laurence in *The Last September* are straining to create alternative narratives. The dynamics in the relationships between the four married people are not four-square. Janet is connected directly to Laurel and to Rodney. Over the progress of the novel her connection to Edward changes from being at three removes to a direct connection. It was Janet who originally fell in love with Edward, only to lose him to her sister. When she meets Rodney she feels that she can connect vicariously to Edward through Rodney's uncle Considine, the former lover of Edward's mother, Lady Tilney. 'I wanted to be related', she later confesses to Lady Tilney: like Lois, she wants to be in a pattern (*FR* 106). While Laurel is connected directly to Janet and to Edward there is little indication of any connection to Rodney. The two men are connected through their wives, and all four are connected in some way to the fifth character Lady Tilney: Ellmann's sixth character is Theodora Thirdman. In common with many critics when considering Bowen, Ellmann is dealing with sexual relationships. However, it is important to look at those relationships which are not sexual as well as those that are. Hildebidle, pointing to the patterns of relationship in Bowen's fiction, notes that

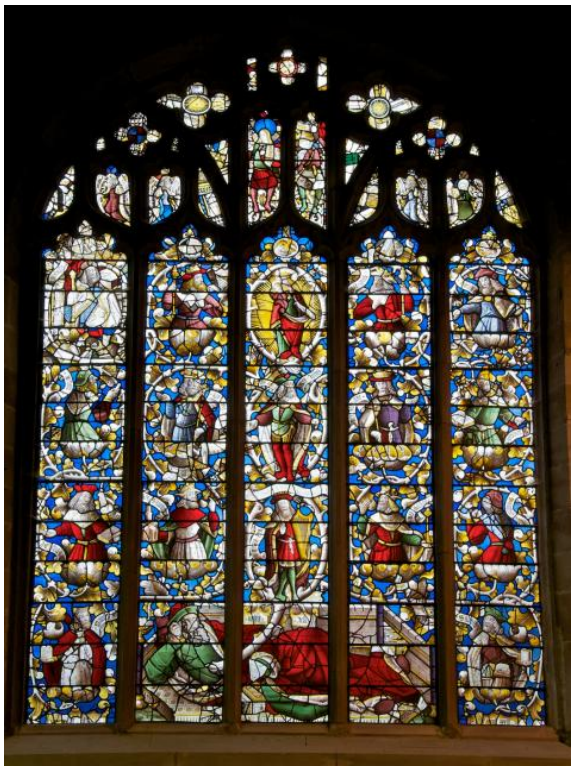
those 'that dominate [. . .] are *social*. They rest upon complex but definable relationships of family – the uses and limitations of which are peculiarly the subject of the novel *Friends and Relations*' (Hildebidle, 'Bowen' 123; 124, emphasis added). Lewis Gibson is no one's lover, but he is a seventh focus in the pattern: indeed, he can be seen as a fulcrum. He appears first as Edward's best man, and is connected to all the main characters, who often call upon him to sort things out for them. '[Lewis] had understood Edward's mother perfectly from the first (better, he saw, than Edward) and often felt himself called up to interpret her' (*FR* 40). Lewis's part is evident in the following passage from which we see his connection to Theodora (who shares a flat with his sister), to Lady Elfrida, and to Edward:

> Lady Elfrida said there had been enough Tilneys at Batts and had soon afterwards left them for Ireland. Theodora exclaimed to Janet: 'I can't stand this, you are an icicle!' and confounded by Rodney's politeness, Janet's lassitude and the approach of the Nursing Fete, went away impressively to re-open the flat. Here she commanded a visit from Lewis, mixed some powerful drinks and told him Edward had finally ruined himself with Janet. Lewis reported to Lady Elfrida in Ireland that Edward went about looking wretched over this Batts affair and Lady Elfrida wrote crossly of Edward to Janet that he was giving himself a nervous breakdown. Rodney advised Janet to discount almost all of this. Considine went abroad. (*FR* 121)

The only principal character missing from the passage is Laurel herself. Even so, she is connected to Lewis, as the narrator tells us in the morning after Edward's disappearance: 'It was Lewis, if anyone, that Laurel ought to consult. He was the prepared surface [i.e. ready to receive paint], utterly confidential' (*FR* 141). Inside the larger pattern made by these seven foci are smaller patterns. More than anyone, it is Janet who is conscious of the threads connecting the foci and who will explore them.

Theodora attempts to change the pattern when she writes to Laurel that both Lady Tilney and Considine are at Batts while Laurel and Edward's children, Anna and Simon, are staying there. If her plan is to bring herself closer to Janet, it backfires. Edward finds out and is furious, descending on Batts to take the children away from this pernicious

influence, but not before he and Janet have met and become intensely and mutually aware of the attraction each has for the other, though without acknowledging it. That evening, after he has gone, Janet begins her exploration of the pattern during her conversation with Elfrida. Elfrida bursts out: '*This* is a fiasco' (*FR* 103). Uncertain how much is encompassed by '*This*', Janet looks back to a time before her first sight of Edward and begins by interpreting '*This'* as Considine and Elfrida's adultery; she then looks beyond them to contemplate the 'fatal apple-tree', the tree of knowledge of good and evil, as it might appear in a stained glass window, since this depicts the original 'old branching sin'. By her use of 'branching', Bowen gives sin an organic nature and implies that it can



The Tree of Jesse (1533). Church of St Dyfnog, Llanrhaeadr, Denbighshire
http://stdyfnog.org.uk/

spread. But rather than Adam and Eve, or even Janet and Edward, it is Considine and Elfrida who stand either side of the trunk in Janet's vision, their only apparent function to balance the design. A cinematic dissolve takes place in Janet's mind: 'this one painted tree associated itself, changed to another, the tree of Jesse; that springing [. . .] from a human

side, went on up florescent' with faces which bear a resemblance to one another. If Jesse's tree is felled and tumbles, the danger is that the geometry of relationships, the pattern, will be disrupted and no-one will be connected any more (*FR* 104). But before this can happen, while Janet continues to examine herself because of her deception of Laurel, a shadowy third has morphed between the two sisters to form a tripartite relationship. Although we are not made aware of what Laurel feels, it is evident that something has happened: the two sisters have drawn apart a little, and into the gap created a third sister, reminiscent of Eliot's third character, has interposed.

> [A] preposterous profile that to each, at the very edge of her vision, was somehow darkly familiar. [. . .] This ever-presence in profile had, for each of the sisters, the Egyptian effective defect: from Janet's side or from Laurel's – could either have seen her, she was so close, or, faced her, she was so dreadful – two eyes were visible, focused elsewhere with an undeviating intentness. (*FR* 122)

Shannon Wells-Lassagne sees the intrusion of this third as a distortion, an attempt to render something three-dimensional as two-dimensional, which she demonstrates by allusion to Egyptian art.

The Book of the Dead of Hunefer from Thebes, Egypt, c.1290 BC. British Museum
https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA9901-3

> En effet, dans les romans de Bowen, l'accent est souvent mis sur la qualité nécessairement artificielle et partielle de la représentation en deux dimensions: cet aplatissement de l'image (comme l'aplatissement du globe sur un planisphère) ne peut pas se faire sans distorsion. Ainsi dans *Friends and Relations*, quand les deux protagonistes, qui sont sœurs, se rendent compte qu'elles sont toutes les deux

> amoureuses du même homme, l'image que chaque sœur a de l'autre est décrite comme un tableau déformé.
>
> Les images respectives de chaque sœur ne correspondent pas à une représentation fidèle de leur personne, mais à un simple tableau, qui effectue le passage de trois dimensions à deux. L'image qui en résulte est distordue: le narrateur utilise ici la métaphore des procédés utilisés dans la peinture égyptienne, où les figures sont un mélange de plusieurs perspectives (dans l'art égyptien le visage est vu de profil, l'œil de face, le torse de face, le bassin de trois quarts, et les jambes de profil et décalées). (Wells-Lassagne, 'Subversion' 11) [57]

Bowen's fractured relationships, with their sharp edges and points, are often left unresolved by the end of her novels. However, in the case of *Friends and Relations,* unusually we have an *envoi*, in which Colonel Studdart walks into Cheltenham, a daughter on each arm (*FR* 158). As Heath remarks, 'Miss Bowen [. . .] has been constrained by her "idea" to force a conclusion, to solve her equation' (Heath, *Bowen* 57).

The number three dominates *The House in Paris*. Not only is the novel in the shape of a triptych, the geometry of relationships is largely formed of triads. Even when Karen and Max are ostensibly alone, they are joined by a third person: this may be something abstract like the sun, but it is often a shade of Mme Fisher. Bowen hints at the difficulty of being two people alone.

> With three or more people, there is something bold in the air: direct things get said which would frighten two people alone and conscious of each inch of their nearness to one another. To be three is to be in public, you feel safe; the person so close before becomes a face at the other side of a tray. (*HP* 115)
>
> There are degrees in being alone with someone. It was not till they had driven down Sandgate hill [. . .] that [Karen] saw what made them completely alone for the first time: there being no sun. Always before, at Twickenham or Boulogne, the sun by happening to shine had been a felt presence, adding itself the whole time. Till today they had not, when alone, ever been two; always either three or one. (*HP* 149-150)

[57] Effectively, in Bowen's novels, the accent is often on the necessarily artificial and partial quality of two-dimensional representation: this flattening of the image (like the flattening of a globe on a planisphere) cannot be achieved without distortion. Thus, in *Friends and Relations*, when the two protagonists, who are sisters, realise that they are both in love with the same man, the image that each sister has of the other is described like a distorted picture. [. . .] The respective image of each sister is not a faithful representation, but a simple picture in which three dimensions are reduced to two. The image which results is distorted. The narrator uses here the metaphor of the process used in Egyptian painting, where features are a mixture of several perspectives. In Egyptian art, the face is seen in profile, the eye front-on, the torso front-on, the pelvis three-quarters-on and the legs in profile and side-by-side. (My translation)

Both in the Boulogne restaurant and in Hythe, the sun is absent: in Boulogne its place is taken by Mme Fisher; during the night in Hythe a light from the street insists itself as Mme Fisher on their hotel bedroom ceiling (*HP* 155). Leopold is adopted not by a couple, but by *three* Americans, Mr and Mrs Grant Moody and Mrs Grant Moody's sister. Ray has an 'intense feeling for Leopold' as a third person even before the events of 'The Present' take place, and Bowen departs from prose to script an unspoken dialogue between Ray and Karen which must be read against the background of Leopold's life. The narrator describes this 'unspoken dialogue' as 'circular, [with] no end'. Karen insists that she wants to be back where she and Ray started, to be alone, but his response is that this is not possible: Leopold exists, and seems more real to him than the stillborn child who was his own (*HP* 215-218).

Like *Friends and Relations*, *The Death of the Heart* is based on a pattern of seven. In both the outer sections ('The World' and 'The Devil') there are two triads with a seventh who provides an anchor or fulcrum. The ingénues (Portia, Eddie and Major Brutt) contrast with the worldly Anna, Thomas and St Quentin, while Matchett provides the anchor and the fulcrum. In the central section ('The Flesh') we have three pairs, Daphne and Mr Bursley from the School of Musketry, Dickie and the long-suffering (and wealthy) Clara, and Portia and Eddie (who when absent is replaced by Cecil). Mrs Heccomb is the amiable but ineffectual anchor, unable, or perhaps unwilling, to control events. As discussed earlier (pp.126-127), Portia has her own need to make the pieces of her puzzle form a pattern.

Bowen tells us that the shape of *The Heat of the Day* is based on 'three': in this novel characters are also arranged as triads. The principal triad is formed of Robert, Harrison and Stella, but there are other configurations. When Harrison and Louie meet at the concert, Stella is a shadowy third, present by implication since Harrison is thinking about his coming meeting with her: all three will come together in the hell-like restaurant.

Robert, Ernestine and Mrs Kelway form a triad: at their final meeting '[Robert's] keeping in movement thus gave the Kelway triangle an unfixed third point' (*HD* 243). And in an instance of the non-human shadowy third, just after Stella has revealed to Robert that Harrison suspects him of treachery, Bowen tells us 'their time sat in the third place at their table' (*HD* 187). At the very end of the novel, two years after Robert's death, when Harrison visits Stella, she questions the pattern the three of them had made.

> Were you then, somehow, love's necessary missing part? You brought that into us, if you killed him. But now, you and I are no longer two of three. From between us some pin has been drawn out: we're apart. We're not where we were – look, not even any more in the same room. The pattern's been swept away, so where's the meaning? Think! (*HD* 309)

The pattern has irrevocably changed.

In *The Little Girls* the triad of the women is formed as a schoolgirl plait, interwoven years ago and still bound by a ribbon in the form of the conspiracy surrounding the burial of the coffer in the central part of the novel. When they meet again after a gap of fifty years, their relationships seem still to be those of schoolgirls and not to have matured as they might have done had they been in regular contact. It is the discovery that the coffer is empty which unties the ribbon and leads to a chain of events which ends with Clare's and Dinah's realisation that it is time for them to let go of the past and to become adults.

> Turning to go, [Clare] thought of her last sight of the sands, from the seawall: the wide sands and the running figure.
>
> 'Good-bye, Dicey,' she said – for now and for then.
>
> The sleeper stirred [. . .] saying 'Who's there?'
>
> 'Mumbo.'
>
> 'Not Mumbo. Clare. Clare, where have you been?' (*LG* 236-237)

Dinah has called Clare by her adult name. As Ingman says: 'The ending of *The Little Girls* suggests that Dinah's collapse eventually produces a belated maturity, an acceptance that

the past, her childhood self, her mother, Feverel Cottage and the coffer have gone for ever and Clare will never be Mumbo again' (Ingman, 'Ageing, Time and Aesthetics' 50). The plait has unravelled, ready to be freshly plaited or restyled in some other way.

Rather than three or seven, Bowen's *A World of Love* is based on four. Set at midsummer, this is Bowen's reworking of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and like the play is set over four days As well as *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* underlying the novel, almost as a palimpsest, is Eliot's *Four Quartets* and I discuss this in Chapter 5, pp. 181-186. The main protagonists are four: a triad of women, Jane, Antonia and Lilia, all in love with the fourth character, Guy, who had died in the First World War, but who is present during these four days as a revenant recalled through Jane's discovery of his letters in the attic. The three women swirl round Guy like moths round a lamp; they are magnetised to him as if he were a lodestone, a lodestone which is represented physically by the obelisk. While Guy's presence is felt, he is never seen, only manifesting as a split-second illusion in the corner of the eye. At the same time, there is a concatenation of seven in the way that Guy's letters are passed from person to person, not always intentionally or willingly – from Guy originally, to Jane to Maud to Fred to Lilia to Antonia to Kathie (who wears in her hair the ribbon that originally bound them together) and finally back to Jane who is responsible for their immolation. This immolation releases Guy's hold on the three women, leaving Jane free to fall in love with a living being, Fred and Lilia to resume 'that air they wore on their wedding day', and Antonia to accept the situation, saying 'But for the future [. . .] we'd have nothing left' (*WL* 140; 141).

BALANCE

Within Bowen's patterns, balance is always important. She uses it in several of her novels, beginning with *Friends and Relations* and it is a major factor in *Eva Trout*.

Hildebidle discusses the importance of balance in Bowen's patterning:

> The symmetries and balances within the world of a particular novel are just as evident and just as prevalent as the asymmetries, isolations, and disruptions in the lives of individual characters, major and minor. If there is a hope to be found, a counterweight that can resist, if not quite balance (and certainly not override), the darkness that is both outside and within the self, it is to be found in *pattern*, which provides the possibility of meaning, if not always of comfort. (Hildebidle, 'Bowen' 122)

In *Friends and Relations*, while the balance within the married quartet is already disturbed, there are two other characters capable of overbalancing things, Lady Elfrida and Theodora. Neither has much time for the other and in any case they are at opposing ends of the pattern. Both descend on Batts within a short time of each other and both contribute to the debacle. Soon after she arrives, 'Lady Elfrida, not finding anyone here, looked at the lake. [. . .] Unaware that her coming had tipped a delicate balance, she delighted in what she had found' (*FR* 72). Theodora's attempt to tip the scales is, on the other hand, deliberate and malevolent. She arrives unexpectedly and uninvited at Batts and the following day sets out to monopolise Janet, trying to throw her out of balance. '[T]he whole of Theodora's attention weighted [Janet's] movements' (*FR* 74).

> There were moments – Edward's handwriting on an envelope, his name casually in Janet's talk – when Theodora, exasperated, sighted a large possibility of destruction; when Janet's composure became something precariously but calmly held, some very delicate glass or a dish piled high with fruit that balanced curve on curve just not tottering. To splinter the vase, to knock the dish out of Janet's hand, Theodora had only to cry: 'You still love him' (*FR* 78).

In *The House in Paris* both Max and Leopold exercise balance. When Karen meets Max at lunch with Naomi, she remembers how when she lived in the House, Max, 'his weight shifting from foot to foot, [leaning] on the mantelpiece talking to Mme Fisher, filled her with uneasiness' (*HP* 107). When Leopold and Henrietta first meet in the salon, '[i]ntent on balance, [Leopold] sometimes bowed right forward and jerked hastily back: his hands stayed in his pockets the whole time. He became his own rocking toy whose equilibrium flattered him' (*HP* 30). When Ray arrives, Leopold meets him, shifting 'his

balance on to his other foot with a creak on the parquet' (*HP* 215). Bowen emphasises these balancing acts for two reasons: firstly to emphasise that the characteristic has been passed down from father to son, and secondly to let us know that Leopold is uneasy and aware that his fate could be decided either way: it is in the balance.

Throughout *Eva Trout* weights and counterweights build up on either side of the scales. Dark and light are balanced in Iseult: 'with her patient, sometimes ironic insistence on fact, as fact, went what could be called her opposite capacity – that of releasing ideas [. . .] into unbounded flight' (*ET* 67). Balance is paramount in Eva's relationship with Henry. In a letter to her publisher about Philippe Jullian's draft for the dustcover, Bowen writes:

> 'But [underlined three times], where I am concerned there are two fatal objections to it. [Eva and Henry in the boat] (1) They were NOT (I mean in the story) sitting side-by-side. [. . .] They were sitting at opposite ends of the boat, facing each other. This is for various reasons, very important. They always did sit at opposite ends of things – e.g. the long sofa in the vicarage drawing-room. That characterised their whole (peculiar!) relationship?' (Elizabeth Bowen letter to Anthony Colwell, Jonathan Cape, 16 September 1968).

When Henry and Eva discuss the sale of the Jaguar, they are 'seated at either end of a *long lean sofa* draped in a cretonne cover, facing the fire' (*ET* 80, emphasis added). When she revisits the Vicarage after her eight years in America: 'Eva settled into her former place, at her particular end of the *long lean sofa*, Jeremy seating himself beside her. [. . .] [Henry] stood *in balance*, one foot on the seat of the sofa at his end' (*ET* 174, emphasis added). By describing it as 'long' and 'lean' Bowen means us to view the sofa as a kind of see-saw. By keeping his foot on his end of the sofa, Henry is endeavoring to act as a counterweight to the combination of Eva and Jeremy, but once Jeremy goes into the garden where he will excavate the ash heap, Henry 'cast[s] himself on to the sofa in his corner' (*ET* 176). After Henry has realised that Jeremy is a deaf-mute:

> [H]e took up a preparatory new position – leaning, this time, lightly against the chimneypiece, hands in pockets, one foot trailing over the other, on which he stood. The pose put him back some way into equilibrium. [. . .] Now the nonchalance he enacted quite soon returned to him. (*ET* 178)

When Eva and Jeremy visit Henry in Cambridge, Eva is fascinated by the mobile which hangs in his rooms. Henry says to her:

> 'I shouldn't think there's anybody you've ever gone *out* for, is there?' [. . .]
>
> Eva turned away to examine the mobile. She seemed unconscious that a reply was sought.
>
> 'Unless me,' he said – as though in parenthesis.
>
> Looking with fervour, with passion almost, into the geometry of the mobile, Eva uttered no word. She nodded, however. (*ET* 210)

Alexander Calder (1898-1976). *Antennae with Red and Blue Dots* c.1953. Tate T00541
https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/calder-antennae-with-red-and-blue-dots-t00541

With its different weights carefully positioned at the end of wires of differing lengths, Alexander Calder's mobile demonstrates the intricacy that is required to balance the whole. Eva says nothing because she is afraid that in doing so she will upset the delicate balance between Henry and herself, something precious to her, and which he has just acknowledged. Balance persists throughout Part II. At the lake, Henry tells Eva he is in a state and he is uncertain why. He puts forward various future scenarios, and the conversation turns to his father.

> '– You remember he once was writing a book? Well, he still is. Every now and then, he comes up against something which makes him have to go right back and re-cast the whole thing from the beginning. It's called "The Faulty Scales".'

> ‘What’s it about?’ [Eva asks.]
>
> ‘Justice.’ [Henry replies.] (*ET* 278)

Henry would have been more accurate to say that his father was writing about ‘Injustice’, which is implicit in the title of his book. Some days later, after a brisk discussion with Henry during which it is evident that Mr Dancey is aware that Henry is becoming ‘all over the place’ (or losing his balance) because of his relationship with Eva, the vicar goes to his study. ‘Sermon to finish. That done, he continued work on “The Faulty Scales”. A good session, this time. [. . .] Straight ahead went Mr Dancey, this afternoon – taking no reckoning of such injustices as are possible in exorbitant love’ (*ET* 294). Bowen’s implication is that excessive love simply cannot be balanced on scales; it can only cause them to be faulty. Her close study of Flaubert had made her aware of the importance of balance. In her Preface to *The Flaubert Omnibus*, Bowen writes:

> To examine the structure and motivation of *L’Éducation Sentimentale* is like opening the back of a clock. Here is an interrelation of coils and tensions, springs and weights, cogs and hammers. In the plot, nothing does not act upon something else. (*Impressions* 32)

Balance is implicit here: the balance wheel is essential to a mechanical timepiece. Henry refers to this obliquely in a letter sent to Eva in Fontainebleau. ‘Have you read *L’Éducation Sentimentale*? [. . .] There’s a Fontainebleau part. I should not half mind being Frédéric, going delicious [sic] drives in that well-sprung carriage.’ His letter ends ‘I seem to have run out – or run down, like something wound up that gives out’ (*ET* 255-256). He is beginning to lose his balance when Eva arrives on the platform at Victoria Station: ‘his sensational dash to reach [Eva] left Henry breathless and out of balance’ (*ET* 310). When they are alone on the train, ‘[a]s though the train had started and started swaying, they swayed slightly’ (*ET* 315). The scales are now beginning to teeter. Henry tells Eva he is not getting off the train, causing her to cry for the first time ever, and the

teetering increases as '[t]he illusory swaying [. . . becomes] more marked' (*ET* 316). As Francis Wyndham remarks, '[a]s soon as a genuine relationship becomes a possibility, the artifice [Eva] has created proves stronger than reality and she is destroyed' (Wyndham, 'Eva Trout' 90). Moments later, as balance is lost, Eva is dead.

****

It is with a combination of these patterns within the shape of the novel and the tussle caused by the geometry inside them that Bowen builds up her complex images. But she then needs to embellish, or as Sullivan puts it 'to limn', her work. In a letter to Graham Greene she writes:

> Had I not been a writer I should probably have struck out in designing and making belts, jewellery handbags, lampshades or something of that sort – my aim being that these should catch people's fancy, create a little fashion of their own, and accordingly be saleable by me at a rising price. (*Mulberry* 226)

Her embellishments are stylish in every way, catching the reader's eye. But she also has a sense of fun and sometimes hides her embellishments in games from childhood: 'Hunt the Thimble', 'Pass the Parcel', puzzles, cutting out and sticking, which I consider in the next chapter.

Chapter 5

‘I COLLECT SCRAPS TO MAKE SCRAP SCREENS’

In this chapter I look at Bowen’s use of collage and palimpsest, at how she deals with memory through cataloguing and recall, and at similarities between her technique and that of the film director, particularly in *The Little Girls*. Both collage and palimpsest are ways of preserving fragments by reusing them: in collage the fragment selected is likely to be a singleton, while in palimpsest several fragments from a specific work will be evident. Increasingly after the Second World War, Bowen becomes aware of the passage of time, and of her aging and potentially unreliable memory, leading to the necessity to preserve things by catalogue and list. Always an *aficionada* of the cinema, she is alert to the techniques of the new wave of film directors which emerged in France and Italy after the Second World War.

COLLAGE

‘I collect scraps to make scrap screens’ (*Weight* 263). This was Bowen’s response when asked if she had any hobbies in an interview published to coincide with the appearance in the USA of *The Heat of the Day*. As a child, growing up in a middle-class post-Victorian environment, Bowen is certain to have seen many scrap screens created by previous generations, and may even have assisted in their making, by cutting out images which she liked, as James Ramsay cuts out images from The Army and Navy catalogue in the opening page of *To the Lighthouse*, or as the children Pamela, Emma and Coralie cut out images from magazines in *The Little Girls* (Woolf, *Lighthouse* 1; *LG* 216-218).

> In the Victorian home an elegant scrap screen was an almost indispensable piece of furniture. Families rejoiced in the pleasant and profitable hours to be found in this fascinating recreation and saw the scrap screen as the practical and artistic outcome of many hours of enjoyable home-work. http://www.scrapalbum.com/pat7.htm Accessed 16 October 2020

Victorian Scrap Screen

The act of pasting a scrap of paper or card onto a screen and then lacquering it is a form of collage, and the scrap screen anticipated the collage or *papiers collés* described in an essay on Picasso by Herbert Read.

> Picasso's aim has always been to extend the material of the artist, to overcome the limitations of the normal equipment of the painter. From 1913 to 1915 he experimented with *papiers collés* [. . .] in designs made up of coloured and printed papers, gummed on to a canvas or board, sometimes completed with details in oil or pencil. On the basis of these experiments we then have a series of paintings which create designs of a much more complicated structure and more varied texture. (Read, *Defence* 215)

At the same time that visual artists were developing collage, poets, notably Pound and Eliot, were doing something similar. With Eliot, collage is most evident in *The Waste Land* but more subtle examples are to be found in his later work, including *Four Quartets*. In 1936 Auden enthusiastically embraced the approach in his *Letter to Lord Byron*.

> Every exciting letter has enclosures,
> And so shall this—a bunch of photographs,
> Some out of focus, some with wrong exposures,
> Press cuttings, gossip, maps, statistics, graphs;
> I don't intend to do the thing by halves.
> I'm going to be very up to date indeed.
> It is a collage that you're going to read.
> (Auden, *Selected* 84)

This poem was written when Auden was in Iceland with Louis MacNeice in 1936, and the pair would obviously have discussed the genre which MacNeice describes in his 1938 *Modern Poetry*.

> The poetry of Eliot and Pound is especially difficult because they use other writers' images *lifted out of their context*. [. . .] The early Eliot's diction is more difficult to analyse [than that of Yeats] because, like parts of Joyce's *Ulysses*, it is often a *collage* of other people's writing. Phrases and whole sentences (and in various languages) are lifted from other authors into his verse. (Pound in his Cantos lifts chunks of official documents.) In such passages naturally a study of the detailed workmanship of the diction is as out of place as a study of brush-work in a picture which is a *collage*. (MacNeice, *Modern* 104; 144)

In 'The Pound Vortex' Davenport tells us that it was Pound's aim 'to find the best in the past and pass it on' (Davenport, *Geography* 167). Kenner echoes MacNeice when he discusses Pound's 1909 collection *Personae* in 'The Broken Mirrors and the Mirror of Memory'.

> [Pound] will ensure our awareness of his existence, exploring, voyaging, selecting, *gathering experiences*. [. . .] *This commerce of the old and the new slips into the scheme of the poem with an unobtrusiveness so precise that a new reader is unlikely for some time to grasp its thematic weight*. We have grown accustomed to watching the modern poet in the act of wresting his materials out of their own contexts into the dramatic contexts he provides for them (Kenner, 'Broken' 3-4, emphasis added).

As with Pound, we find that Bowen's collage is unobtrusive and the reader needs to be alert to the possibility that it exists. In 'Metaphysical Light in Turin' Davenport discusses the recycling by artists and writers of the work of their predecessors, and how each art-form can morph into, or imitate, another. He cites examples from Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936) and from Joyce as well as from the artist De Chirico.

> The art of our century is that of collage, involving quotation, parody, cultural inventory. Collage is by genre and by strategy the art of still life, which begins as a duplication of reality in an image, grows into an enduring depiction of symbolically interacting objects in the service of one sentiment or another, and in our time takes on a new significance as a way of deploying dramatic information (as in the hundreds of still lifes in *Ulysses*), or as the only way of stating the new enigma of reality that came in with the century. (Davenport, *Objects* 107)

Elsewhere Davenport says of Joyce: 'It is difficult to think of writers other than James Joyce the understanding of whose works is so dependent on knowing what they read' (Davenport, *Gracchus* 60). In her review of *Finnegans Wake* Bowen anticipates Davenport's comments on the importance of knowing what Joyce read when she suggests 'an ordinary knowledge (just up, perhaps, to School Certificate standard) of English, and Anglo-Irish, literature' as one 'possible outfit for approaching the comprehensibility of Joyce' (*Weight* 88). Like Joyce, Bowen had read widely, storing her material in the 'compost of forgotten books' to which she refers in her 1946 essay, 'Out of a Book'.

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

Bowen is aware of her debt and does not act dishonestly: rather she acts honourably, saying '[w]hen I write, I am re-creating what was created for me' (*Impressions* 269). She is paying tribute to her predecessors, by preserving their work: for her, collage is a form of memorial. She also increasingly creates inventories or catalogues of things that she considers need to be remembered. As Ellmann remarks, *Eva Trout* is a 'kaleidoscope of literary reminiscences' (Ellmann, *Shadow* 212).

In a way similar to that of Picasso, therefore, Bowen creates prose of a more complicated structure (as many critics have observed) and a more varied texture. In doing so, she extends the material of the novelist, and overcomes the limitations of the normal equipment of the writer. Collage is used by Bowen in different ways. Sometimes she complicates matters by distorting her collage; for example, she will allocate a property to an individual who does not correspond to the individual to whom that property was allocated by the original author. At times collage is subtly concealed, only becoming evident after careful research. However, for the reader curious enough to investigate the origin of the collage, additional information will be revealed. At times Bowen offers clues,

by repeating the name of an author or place: in *The House in Paris* there are fourteen mentions of the Trocadéro and multiple references to Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, while in *Eva Trout* the name of Descartes and Browning's 'The Dark Tower' are both mentioned twice, and there are several mentions of the Goodwin Sands and of crystallized apricots. These I discuss later in this chapter.

There is also a similarity with the work of the Italian Futurist painters which requires the painter to enable the viewer to see beyond the frame. In the catalogue for the 1912 exhibition of Italian Futurists at London's Sackville Gallery, the signatories declare:

> You must render the invisible which stirs and lives beyond intervening obstacles, what we have on the right, on the left, and behind us, and not merely the small square of life artificially compressed, as it were, by the wings of a stage. (Boccioni et al., *Exhibitors* 12)

This Futurist technique also resembles that of Salvador Dalí, described by Semir Zeki. 'His view was [. . .] that one should not only look at the whole picture but also at the details which can reveal an alternative picture' (Zeki, 'Neural' 4). By giving her reader glimpses of apparently unrelated ideas, Bowen is enticing them to see beyond the frame, and to be aware of the alternative picture.

The material Bowen uses for collage, and which she finds in her own 'compost' heap, is drawn from a wide range of sources which fall broadly into three categories, and I deal with them in the order in which Bowen is likely to have been exposed to them: fairy tales; the Bible and Christian liturgy; and the wider field of literature. Both fairy tales and the Bible are cited by Nash as places where life may be given to inanimate objects, something Bowen frequently does (see Chapter 4, p.125).

Fairy Tales

As Lorna Sage says in her Introduction to Mansfield's *The Garden Party and Other Stories*, '[f]ables and fairy tales are age-old and used to be passed around by word of

mouth' (Mansfield, *Garden* vii). Bowen tells us that she was not allowed books other than picture books before the age of seven, but says nothing about what was read *to* her. But we can be sure that stories *were* read to her: even though her mother was 'reserved in the telling of fairy tales' on the grounds that she might confuse fairies with the angels, Bowen must have encountered the fairy tale at an early age (*BC* 472). For her, the fairy tale is something which should be told, not read, often demanding 'all-out vocal histrionics' (*People* 294). However, Bowen's mother was free with 'the jingle of nursery rhymes', teaching her the names of the characters in the nursery-rhyme dado which ran along the walls of her nursery: in an early example of making the inanimate animate, when Bowen was supposed to be resting she would try to force action on these characters (*BC* 472; 486). Bowen's favourite characters are Rapunzel, Goldilocks and Red Riding Hood: it is their resourcefulness which attracts her. With the exception of these three, she writes 'most fairy-tale girls play the same role: they are first Victims, later Awards' (*People* 292). Bowen herself wrote several stories for children, of which two at least ('The Unromantic Princess' and 'The Good Earl') could be seen as fairy tales with assertive protagonists, as could the unpublished short story 'Fairies at the Christening' (*Bazaar* 99-110; 120-134; 274-291). Her older women resemble witches in varying degrees; her younger women are in the middle of quests which are often fraught with danger.

Fairy tales are collaged in the two outer parts of *The House in Paris*. Henrietta, on the way to visit her grandmother, could be seen as Little Red Riding Hood. However, Bowen distorts things: for identification purposes, instead of a red hood, Henrietta wears a cerise cockade, though her dress has a red belt and red buttons (*HP* 17; 38; 47). Mme Fisher is in bed, like the wolf who pretends to be the grandmother (*HP* 46; 47). Despite her immobility, she appears very predatory, and like the wolf has big eyes – when Leopold goes to see her, they '[burn at him] like an old lion's out of their caves of bone' (*HP* 201).

When she invites Leopold to envisage her as 'so much gingerbread' – something he could be tempted to eat and digest – she is recognising her own dual nature as the narrator of and a character in a fairy tale, a fairy tale in which Leopold is also a character (*HP* 200). She tells Leopold that she doesn't care for fairy tales and says she imagines that Leopold doesn't either, yet cites typical motifs from fairy tales: the enchanted wood full of dumb people, 'the young man with the sword who goes jumping his way through' the wood (*HP* 200). Bowen goes on to use the latter image: Leopold willingly accepts Ray as a knight who breaks through the surrounding thickets to rescue him from Mme Fisher and her quasi witch's gingerbread house. At the end of the novel, Ray strides out of the Gare de Lyon taking Leopold with him, 'like a robber with one babe through a wood' (*HP* 238). In her introduction to the 1976 Penguin edition, A.S. Byatt writes: '[Ray] is in a fairy-tale' [sic] as he "rescues" Leopold' (*HP* 14). It could be said that Leopold himself is in a fairy tale: as the novel ends, it seems he is about to be successful in his quest for a lost mother.

Naomi is a Sleeping Beauty, the fairy-tale character whom Bowen finds is an 'outstanding passive [. . . who] can't dodge predestined fate', a description which fits Naomi well (*People* 292). Max describes an occasion when, just after Mme Fisher has left the room, he says 'something, and [Naomi] started and pricked her finger' (*HP* 162). This time we may imagine Mme Fisher as Carabosse, the wicked fairy godmother of Tchaikovsky's ballet *The Sleeping Beauty*, whose scenario derives from the Grimm version of the tale. Piqued because she has not been invited to the christening, Carabosse puts a curse on Princess Aurora that she will prick her finger and die. But once again Bowen distorts the image: Naomi does not die. It is Max who will die.

Biblical and Liturgical Collage

In *The Uses of Enchantment* Bruno Bettelheim sees a close connection between fairy tales and Biblical tales. 'Many Biblical stories are of the same nature as fairy tales. [. . .] Most fairy tales originated in periods when religion was a most important part of life' (Bettelheim, *Enchantment* 13). As a child in Dublin, Bowen would have heard Bible readings and Bible stories at home as well as at church on Sundays. Her first extensive collage from the Bible comes in *Friends and Relations* when Janet begins her exploration of the family pattern during her conversation with Elfrida, discussed in Chapter 4, pp.145-147.

In 'The Past' in *The House in Paris* Karen wakes in the small hours after her first lovemaking with Max, and considers maternity from different perspectives. Despite the fact that she has taken precautions not to become pregnant, Karen conceives a child with thoughts (which Bowen realises in the following words): 'having done as she knew she must she did not think there would be a child, all the same, the idea of you, Leopold, began to be present with her' (*HP* 151-2). A paraphrase of the Gospel according to St John would read: 'And the *thought* was made flesh and dwelt among us' (emphasis added).[58] This perhaps explains Bowen's drawing on the Anglican doxology to the Lord's Prayer as Karen continues her thoughts: 'While it is still Before, Afterwards has no power, but afterwards it is the kingdom, the power and the glory' (*HP* 152). During her long interior monologue, Karen considers that she might die childless, like Aunt Violet, dying wondering what else there was: this thought is associated with two collages from another prayer, the Roman Catholic 'Hail Mary', when Karen says 'I thought tonight would be the hour of my death' and 'It would have been the hour of my death' (*HP* 153). The usual English-language version of the prayer begins:

[58] In their discussion of this passage, Bennett and Royle refer to a 'post-coital and *cerebral* conception of Leopold' (Bennett and Royle, *Dissolution* 56).

> Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed be the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

Notable by their absence from the monologue are any lines from the Magnificat: there is no sense of wonder at either imagined or real conception.

In an early instance of Bowen creating a three-dimensional image, Max describes to Karen how, after Naomi pricks her finger, he comes to propose marriage and how, just after he has proposed to her, he comes to see her as 'a figure of stone pity'. 'Pity' is the English translation of the Italian 'pietà', and a *Pietà* is a depiction of the sorrowing Virgin cradling the dead Christ: a *Pietà* may be a painting, but is more often three-dimensional – a sculpture or carving: thus for 'stone pity' we may read 'stone Pietà'.[59]

> When I see how the stony lines of her dress and her entirely unsurprised face moved me, I see now that it was the madonna trick – my nerves tricking my senses with the idea of peace, making someone to make for me an unattackable safe place. This was so strong that I found it hard to remember that I, in fact, stood above her, beside her chair and looking down at her face, and was not standing looking up from below at a more than life-sized figure, lit as far as the knees, then rising into the dark. I have never passed a figure like that unmoved; I am not rational: there is too much force in a figure of stone pity. (*HP* 162)

Max's view of Naomi as the Virgin – or the Madonna - holding the dead Christ is prophetic: it is Max himself who will die, and Naomi who will be responsible for dealing with the aftermath of his death. In the case of a three-dimensional *Pietà* the viewer would normally view it either from below or on the same level. Max sees Naomi from a more unusual viewpoint, from above, and a different lighting state – he 'was not standing looking up from below at a more than life-sized figure, lit as far as the knees, then rising into the dark' (*HP* 162). This gives Max a perspective similar to that which Karen describes to Ray in her letter from Ireland: 'The way [Max] and Mme Fisher ignored Naomi, and at the same time lorded it *over* her, always made me furious' (*HP* 89,

[59] Corcoran implies that the 'figure of stone pity' is Mme Fisher (Corcoran, *Enforced* 93). I believe that it is Naomi, since Mme Fisher has left the room before this episode.

emphasis added). Yet Max's perspective changes on the next page and he comes down to view the statue at eye level. 'Imagine the statue's face on your own level, spoilt with anxiousness, following where you go. Her eyes snatch at me and she cannot do things calmly' (*HP* 163).

Michelangelo. *Pietà*, St Peter's Basilica, Vatican. Wikimedia Commons

We find several collages from Biblical texts in *Eva Trout.* On the plane an apple escapes from Eva's bag and 'symbolically bound[s]' towards Professor Holman on the opposite side of the aisle. He returns it to her, expressing the hope that it is not bruised, to which she replies that she likes the taste of bruised apples. The apple could be seen as the golden apple of mythology, but given the bruising, it is more likely to be the apple from the garden of Eden, the forbidden fruit which the serpent tempted Eve to eat, whereat God cursed the serpent, saying that the descendants of Adam and Eve would bruise its head, while it would bruise their heel (*ET* 145; *Genesis* 3.15). Here Bowen is transferring the bruising to the apple, and playing with the idea of Eve, the first woman. The serpent has been collaged earlier in the novel and I deal with this under Literary Collage below (pp.170-171). As well as Eve, the first woman, Bowen plays with the Virgin Mother

identity and Part I ends with Bowen drawing on the New Testament in 'Coffee Shop' which has the epigraph of 'Silent Night/Holy Night/All is calm/All is bright . . .' (*ET* 151). This reverse spooling of a distorted Annunciation and Nativity is perhaps the funniest piece in the whole novel, and should prepare us for what will be a strange variation on the Virgin Birth. In Chicago, on a night that is artificially bright, but certainly not silent, Eva meets three ditzy young matrons (not three wise men) in a coffee shop (not an inn). One of them takes away with her, rather than brings as a gift, the toy bear Eva has bought for the child she is yet to acquire, rather than give birth to. The annunciation comes at the very end of the chapter in a telephone call from an anonymous, definitely not angelic, voice giving her instructions about the 'delivery' of the child (*ET* 167).

Literary Collage

Bowen began *thinking* in collage before she began using it in her fiction. In an unpublished article from 1944, 'The Idea of France', she writes that before she had ever visited the country and when she was still living with her aunt but had already begun to think of writing as a career, she was introduced by an 'intellectual and emancipated London woman' to *Madame Bovary*.

> *Madame Bovary* was the start, with me, of a long career of French novel reading. I read indiscriminately; always with one ulterior object – that of trying to know what France was *like*. I pieced word-pieces together, inside my own mind, into what must have formed a more fantastic collage than any Surrealist has yet achieved. (*People* 64)

Bowen draws on a wide range of English and French novelists and poets. There are two deeply entrenched, yet connected, pieces of literary collage in *The House in Paris*. The first is found in the name of the street in which the House is situated, the rue Sylvestre Bonnard, which is taken from the 1881 novel by Anatole France (1844-1924), *La Crime de Sylvestre Bonnard*. Jean Radford draws attention to the similarities between that novel and

The House in Paris, noting that '[t]he "crime" committed by Sylvestre Bonnard is to kidnap/rescue a young charge from the *pensionnat* where she is badly treated' and suggesting that Bowen acknowledges this in her naming of the street (Radford, 'Face' 101). In this case, it is Ray who rescues Leopold, the son of Karen who has been ill-served by her association with Madame Fisher's *pensionnat*. Furthermore, France connects us to Proust: Bowen would later reason that France was the prototype for Bergotte, the elderly writer in Proust's *Á la Recherche du Temps Perdu* (*Pictures* 101). The second is the Trocadéro: after Naomi suggests that Henrietta might like to 'see a little of Paris', proposing in turn the Arc de Triomphe, the Luxembourg, Napoleon's tomb, Notre Dame, and the Louvre, Henrietta insists fourteen times in all that it is the Trocadéro she wants to visit (*HP* 37). Bowen was well-acquainted with the life and works of Proust and would have come to associate Proust with the Trocadéro, particularly because of Bergotte's fatal visit there, which I discuss in Chapter 6, pp. 216-217, and I would suggest that Bowen is intending that the reader should uncover Proust beneath her collage of the Trocadéro. There is perhaps another reason why the Trocadéro is mentioned. Between 1882 and 1936, it housed the French national Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro, where artists such as Vlaminck and Picasso first saw the masks which inspired Fauvism and Cubism, both genres which Bowen would draw on in her work. At the time she was writing *The House in Paris* the influence of these ethnological artefacts was not universally recognised, but Bowen is drawing attention to their importance in the development of the visual arts. Naomi is resistant to Henrietta's wish to go there, saying it is 'not historic, not in very good taste' (*HP* 37). In this she reflects the opinion of the usually forward-looking art critic Frank Rutter who wrote in his 1926 *Evolution in Modern Art* that 'mere students who held themselves proudly erect before the works of Raphael and Velazquez would prostrate themselves in all humility before the idols of the Congo' (Rutter, *Evolution* 55).

In *The House in Paris* there is extensive collage, amounting to palimpsest, from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and I discuss this in the next section. Collage from *Wonderland* appears briefly in other novels, as well as in the title of her autobiography *Pictures and Conversations*. Lis Christensen points out that when Robert and Stella retreat smiling from an upper window in *The Heat of the Day*, like Cheshire cats they leave 'grins behind them on the air in the window' (*HD* 117; Christensen, *Bowen* 172). Markie's reflection in a silver kettle makes him look like a 'Frog Footman' in *To the North*, while the phrase 'You're nothing but a pack of cards!' with which Alice dismisses the characters in *Wonderland* occurs in both *A World of Love* and *Eva Trout* (*TN* 106; *WL* 61; *ET* 229).

Eva Trout is full of literary collage, the most important of which fall under two headings: Eva's attempts to 'become' through learning to think, and the warnings that those attempts will not be successful. In *Eva Trout* Bowen is initially occupied with assembling Eva as a woman, trying this way and that, just as she admitted to assembling Portia in *The Death of the Heart*, saying 'Yes, I required her. I needed her so I assembled her' (*Listening* 279). Like a theatre designer sketching a character's costumes in a sketch pad, Bowen plots Eva in a variety of forms, among them a 'giantess', 'larger than life in the frame of the humble door', 'a ghost said to walk through walls'; she is variously monolithic, an Amazon, a cuckoo in the nest, a she-Cossack, and is asked if she is a hermaphrodite (*ET* 13; 33; 58; 13; 85; 93). When she first attends school, she finds that 'even the smallest seemed wondrously physically complete to [her], who had been left *unfinished*': despite the fact that she is still in the process of assembling her character, Bowen is sending her out into the world (*ET* 58, emphasis added). Jeremy also begins to assemble Eva when he creates his golem-like head – 'barely representational – only he had gouged with his two thumbs deep, deep into the slimed clay, making eye-sockets go, almost, right through the cranium' (*ET* 223). Even towards the very end of the novel, when

Eva and Jeremy are in Fontainebleau, Bowen tells us that Eva has a 'mighty gait and *unfinished* handsomeness' (*ET* 253, emphasis added).

The nub of the matter is that in order to become a complete, finished person, Eva needs to be able to think. She herself realises this, and when she is about to become sixteen, she tells her father she would like to go to school 'to learn' (*ET* 66). She is sent to Lumleigh, where the English teacher Iseult Smith takes an interest in the strange girl and encourages her to think.

> 'I *should* like you to think, though. You have thoughts, I know, and sometimes they're rather startling, but they don't connect yet.'
>
> 'Are they startling?' asked the gratified owner.
>
> 'They startle you, don't they? – But try joining things together: this, then that, then the other. That's thinking; at least, that's beginning to think.' (*ET* 71-72)

Thinking arises again when, years later, Eva takes Iseult to Cathay, the house she has rented in Broadstairs, where she is installing 'outstanding examples of everything auro-visual [sic] on the market this year, 1959'. When Eva remarks that her computer will be going in the dining-room, Iseult exclaims: "'Oh, really, Eva, how *can* you need a computer!" "It thinks," said the girl, looking aggrieved. "That is what you used to tell me to do"' (*ET* 138).[60] Bowen's clue to Eva's attempts to become through thinking are indicated by the name 'Descartes' mentioned twice in Professor Holman's convoluted letter in the chapter 'Interim' which comes towards the end of Part I. Holman, an American academic, has been researching Descartes in Paris, and is returning to the States on the same plane as Eva. If we use Bowen's Futurist technique of looking outside the frame, we find Descartes' proposition 'Je pense, donc je suis,' thus confirming Eva's

[60] Autistic subjects often find a computer a helpful device. Eva Trout displays signs of autism and Valerie O'Brien points to this in '"A Genius for Unreality": Neurodiversity in Elizabeth Bowen's *Eva Trout*'. *Journal of Modern Literature,* vol. 42, no. 2, winter 2019, pp. 75-93.

attempts to become through learning to think.[61] Eight years later Eva still equates learning with becoming when she tells Father Clavering-Haight how she feels she was let down by Iseult as a teacher. He asks "'– Wait a minute: what were your hopes?" "To learn," said Eva. A long-ago tremble shook her. "To be, to become – I had never been." She added: "I was *beginning* to be'" (*ET* 216). When Eva visits the National Portrait Gallery to try to discover how life is given to faces, she is disappointed: they are 'nothing but a pack of cards? [. . .] There was no "real life"; no life was more real than this' (*ET* 229-230).

The warnings that Eva will fail to become grow more numerous and toll at increasingly frequent intervals from the time when Eva leaves Larkins. Eva's time in Broadstairs offers examples of two different methods of collage. The first method involving deeply set collage begins when Iseult recalls that '[n]ear where [Eva] is on the map are the Goodwin Sands, the mariners' peril. There's a German poem about them, a schoolroom poem likening them to a snake'. Bowen then quotes two lines in German: '[S]ie schieben sich, langsam, satt und schwer, wie eine Schlange hin und her', which translate as 'they slither replete, heavy and slow, like a serpent, to and fro' (*ET* 109). The two lines signify little on their own, even when translated into English. Here the reader needs to use the Futurist technique of looking beyond the frame to investigate the poem from which they are taken. In doing so, they will discover that these are the third and fourth lines of an 1847 ballad by Theodor Fontane (1819-1898), in which the Sands are more than a snake, they are a hidden malevolent serpent, and they are also a graveyard (Fontane, 'Goodwin-Sand'). The poem reads as follows:

> Das sind die Bänke von Goodwin-Sand,
> sie sind nicht Meer, sie sind nicht Land,
> sie schieben sich, langsam, satt und schwer,
> wie eine Schlange hin und her.

[61] Just as Elizabeth Bowen the novelist assembles her character Eva Trout, Descartes is reputed to have assembled an automaton to replace his daughter Francine who died at the age of 5. https://www.nytimes.com/2002/08/25/books/chapters/edisons-eve.html Accessed 12 November 2020. For her part Bowen tells us that as a child she prayed for a doll 'with jointed fingers' (*People* 181).

Und die Schiffe, die mit dem Sturm gerungen
und die schäumende Wut der Wellen bezwungen,
und die gefahren über die Welt,
unzertrümmert, unzerschellt,
sie sehen die Heimat, sie sehen das Ziel,
da schiebt sich die Schlange unter den Kiel
und ringelt Schiff und Mannschaft hinab,
zugleich ihr Tod, zugleich ihr Grab.
Die See ist still, die Ebb' ist nah,
Mastspitzen ragen hier und da,
und wo sie ragen in die Luft,
da sind es Kreuze über der Gruft;
ein Kirchhof ist's, halb Meer, halb Land, -
das sind die Bänke von Goodwin-Sand.[62]

The Goodwin Sands become something of a death knell, which Bowen emphasises when Iseult herself goes to Broadstairs. Iseult, who is translating a French tome on Dickens, is visiting Fort House, Dickens' house overlooking the sea, and recalls Dickens' accounts of a wrecked cattle ship on the Goodwin Sands. '(Yes, the Goodwin Sands.)', repeats the narrator, as if to say to the reader 'Sit up and take notice!' (*ET* 131). Later at Cathay, Eva's house, Iseult asks where the Sands are, but 'Eva did not know': Eva is ignorant of the Sands and of the malevolence lurking nearby (*ET* 137). A second warning, less deeply collaged, comes when Iseult muses on Fort House itself and concludes it is a forbidding house. '"Tall, solitary, [. . .] the house in question is a square sullen structure – hard and bleak." One thought of it as beheld from; beheld, it was a truly Dark Tower' (*ET* 130-131).

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[62] These are the shoals of the Goodwin Sands,
they are not sea, they are not land,
they slither replete, heavy and slow,
like a serpent, to and fro.
And ships, which have grappled with storm
and overcome the raging foam
and travelled all over the world
without being shattered, without being wrecked,
see their homeland, see their goal.
Then the serpent slithers under the keel
and coils round the ship, coils round the crew
pulling them down to their death, their grave.
The sea is still, the ebb is near.
Mast-spikes stick up here and there
And where they surface in the gloom
they are crosses over the tomb.
This is a churchyard, half sea, half land, -
these are the shoals of the Goodwin Sands. (My translation)

The Dark Tower is a reference to *Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came*, the narrative poem by Robert Browning (1812-1889). Browning takes the closing words of the scene in *King Lear* where Edgar pretends to be the madman Tom O'Bedlam: 'Child Rowland to the dark tower came/His word was still, – Fie, foh and fum/I smell the blood of a British man' (Shakespeare, *King Lear,* Act III, Scene 4). At the behest of a 'hoary cripple', who he suspects of lying, Browning's Childe Roland unwillingly sets out on a quasi-chivalric quest following in the footsteps of others who have sought the Dark Tower. His journey takes him, full of foreboding, across an unlovely barren land and at its end he realises it is a 'trick of mischief'. Yet again there is warning of a shipwreck.

> The round squat turret, blind as the fool's heart,
> Built of brown stone, without a counter-part
> In the whole world. The tempest's mocking elf
> Points to the shipman thus the unseen shelf
> He strikes on, only when the timbers start.
> (Browning, 'Childe' 182-186)

The Dark Tower looms again when Eva and Henry are on their idyllic picnic by the Castle. After exploring the outside of the Castle, Henry pronounces it 'The Dark Tower', while for Eva it has changed from the place she had fallen in love with nearly twenty years earlier. 'To top all, this elevation had a constricted look she had not remembered' (*ET* 272). Finality is confirmed for Childe Roland when he sees his confreres 'ranged along the hill-sides, met/to view the last of me' (Browning, 'Childe' 199-200). This pre-echoes the '[m]ist-like phantoms, the aunts, uncles and cousins [who] in passing [bend] phantom eyes upon Eva' as they drift along the platform to witness Eva's departure from Victoria Station which they anticipate will be by train, but will in fact be from this life (*ET* 312).

Another warning collage comes when Eva and Jeremy are installed at Paley's Hotel. Bowen labours the fact that Jeremy likes crystallized apricots, with eight references in twenty-eight pages (*ET* 190; 193; 194; 204; 214; 215 (2); 217) and a ninth as the denouement approaches (*ET* 300*)*. The penultimate time, the box of apricots is seen

holding down a number of letters. In her unpublished 'Preface to the Flaubert Omnibus' Bowen describes Madame Bovary as a 'guilty innocent, for whom rightly or wrongly one must weep. It is terrible for her [. . .] when she receives the basket of apricots' (*Impressions* 24). The basket contains a letter from her lover Rodolphe telling her that he is not going to elope with her. 'Rodolphe had a basket-full of apricots picked. He arranged the letter in the bottom, under some vine leaves, and straightaway ordered Girard, his ploughman, to carry this with all delicacy to Madame Bovary's house' (Flaubert, *Bovary* 193). Bowen has distorted Flaubert's apricots as a warning that Eva's plans to 'elope' with Henry (as yet unknown to the reader) will not come about.

A more obscure warning comes with the less obvious collage of the chateau in Henri Alain-Fournier's 1913 *Le Grand Meaulnes*. Bowen had read this novel in 1946, describing it to Charles Ritchie as 'an absolutely heavenly book' (Glendinning and Robertson, *Love's* 90). The adolescent Meaulnes, tramping across the wild forests of the Sologne, finds a chateau where a fête is taking place, despite the fact that it is winter. What is remarkable is that the guests are all children, gathered for a marriage and awaiting the arrival of bride and bridegroom. But they never come, and after a few days the children begin to realise that the marriage will not take place, and gradually leave the chateau. Eventually Meaulnes learns from Frantz de Galais, the bridegroom, that his fiancée has decided that she will not marry him. In *Eva Trout* the Castle is associated not once but twice with a marriage which fails to take place: the novel opens with Eva's assertion to the Dancey children that the Castle 'is where we were to have spent the honeymoon', implying an aborted marriage just as in *Le Grand Meaulnes* (*ET* 11). The title of the long final chapter 'This is where we were to have spent the honeymoon', reprises Eva's opening statement (*ET* 239). Eva and Henry revisit the Castle at a time when their relationship is blossoming, but again no marriage will take place: the use of the conditional perfect tense

in the title of the chapter itself already predicts that. Despite the fact that Bowen describes the Castle in *Eva Trout* as a 'Bavarian fantasy' (one might imagine Ludwig II's

Philippe Jullian. Design for the dust jacket of the 1969 UK edition of *Eva Trout*

Philippe Jullian. One of a *Suite d'illustrations sans texte en noir* for *Le Grand Meaulnes*. (1950?)
https://www.association-jacques-riviere-alain-fournier.com/reperage/alain-fournier/Jullian.shtml
Accessed 17 November 2019

Neuschwanstein perched on its rocky outcrop), the Castle's roots in the chateau in *Le Grand Meaulnes* were apparent to Philippe Jullian, the designer of the dust jacket for the British edition of *Eva Trout*, for he drew on some etchings he had made nearly twenty years previously for illustrations for *Le Grand Meaulnes.* While there are no characters in the published version of Jullian's dust jacket, an earlier version had apparently shown Eva and Henry sitting side by side in a boat, just as the boy and girl are sitting side by side in this etching. Bowen was emphatic that they should not sit side by side, but at opposite ends of the boat. In her letter to Anthony Colwell of Jonathan Cape, dated 18 September 1968, she writes 'They always *did* sit at opposite ends of things – e.g. the long sofa in the Vicarage drawing room. That characterised their whole (peculiar) relationship' (Elizabeth Bowen letter to Anthony Colwell, Jonathan Cape, 16 September 1968). In other words, Eva and Henry are always in balance with each other until Eva's last moment.

PALIMPSEST

The OED defines palimpsest as:

> A parchment or other writing surface on which the original text has been effaced or partially erased, and then overwritten by another; a manuscript in which later writing has been superimposed on earlier (effaced) writing. In extended use: a thing likened to such a writing surface, esp. in having been reused or altered while still retaining traces of its earlier form; a multilayered record. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/136319?rskey=v0FdBn&result=1#eid Accessed 19 June 2018

When Bowen collages extensively from a single text she gives an effect of palimpsest: effectively her own text appears to be written over a pre-existing text, so that parts of the latter text are visible, protruding sufficiently often for the attentive reader to become aware of the palimpsest. In this section I discuss Bowen's use of palimpsest in *To the North* and *The House in Paris*.

The chapter in which Bennett and Royle examine *To the North* is entitled 'Shivered', the past participle of the verb 'to shiver' (Bennett and Royle, *Dissolution* 23-41). In its transitive form 'shiver' means to break into small fragments or splinters, and in its intransitive form to tremble, shake or quiver; especially to tremble with cold or fear. Shivers in both senses, those which are sharp fragments and those which are caused by cold, permeate Bowen's novel in which the protagonists are ultimately drawn to magnetic North. In *To the North* she creates an extensive distorted palimpsest over Andersen's *The Snow Queen*, a tale in which splinters (or shivers) of glass from the Evil One's shattered mirror distort the vision, both physical and moral, of a young boy Kai, and also penetrate his heart causing it to be frozen (Andersen, 'Snow' 266).[63] He is kidnapped by the Snow Queen and taken to her palace where he is given a puzzle, to sort blocks of ice so that they read 'Eternity', but he cannot do this because he is unable to focus due to the splinter frozen in his eye. Kai has a friend Gerda who sets off to rescue him: when she finds him her hot tears melt the ice splinters in his eye and heart, at which the blocks of ice jump for joy and arrange themselves in the solution to the puzzle. Bowen's clue to the reader is Cecilia's remark that the character Gerda is like a 'bad illustration to Hans Andersen' (*TN* 95). Here is an example of Bowen distorting the original: Gerda herself has only a minor part in Bowen's novel, but her name opens a door on Andersen's story. Of Emmeline's attraction to Markie, Bowen remarks: 'A splinter of ice in the heart is bombed out rather than thawed out' (*TN* 47). Later when Emmeline is vacillating over whether or not to give Markie a letter she has just written, Bowen draws on Andersen to describe that vacillation.

> Yet, embracing once more her integrity, Emmeline's heart smote her. [. . .] [T]his idea of pleasure as isolated, arctic, regarding its own heart only, became desolating to Emmeline as a garden whose flowers were ice. Those north lights colouring the cold flowers became her enemies, her heart warming or weakening she felt at war

[63] I have discussed this palimpsest at length in 'Shaking the cracked kaleidoscope: Elizabeth Bowen's use of Futurism and Collage in *To the North'* http://www.bowensociety.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/The-Elizabeth-Bowen-Review-Volume-1-May-2018-1.pdf pp. 63-75.

> with herself inside this cold zone of solitude. She desired lowness and fallibility, longing to *break the mirror* and touch the earth. (*TN* 106, emphasis added)

Emmeline experiences distress after the break-up of her relationship with Markie and finds that '[b]roken up like a puzzle, the glittering summer lay scattered over her mind, cut into shapes of pain that had no other character' (*TN* 225). When Emmeline abducts Markie and drives at increasing speed to the North, it is because she hopes to find the pieces of her puzzle and for them to arrange themselves as they did for the boy Kai in *The Snow Queen*. Bowen both reminds us that Emmeline is referred to as 'angel' and alerts us to the fact that she is about to take flight at Cecilia's dinner party when she writes: 'just the tip of an angel's wing brushed the table' (*TN* 231).

In the two outer parts of *The House in Paris* Bowen creates a palimpsest over *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Bowen does not give us any detail of Henrietta's experience of English houses, but even so on first arriving at the House Henrietta is aware that it is not only strange, but hostile.

> The inside of this house – with its shallow door-panels, lozenge door-knobs, polished brass ball at the end of the banisters, stuffy red matt paper with stripes so artfully shadowed as to appear bars – was more than simply novel to Henrietta, it was antagonistic, as though it had been invented to put her out. She felt the house was acting, nothing seemed to be natural; objects did not wait to be seen but came crowding in on her, each with what amounted to its aggressive cry. Bumped all over the senses by these impressions, Henrietta thought: if *this* is being abroad . . . (*HP* 24)

When Henrietta wakes after her sleep to see Leopold standing there, Bowen immediately takes us to *Wonderland*.

> She had lain, hair hanging down, like someone in a new element, a conjurer's little girl levitated, rigid on air, her very sleep wary. But now she woke her manner at once took on a touch of clear-sighted over-riding good sense, like Alice's throughout Wonderland. (*HP* 28)

During the day, all sorts of questions occur to Henrietta, including the question of identity.

> Today was to do much to disintegrate Henrietta's character, which, built up by herself, for herself, out of admonitions and axioms (under the growing stress of: If I

> am Henrietta, then what is *Henrietta*?) was a mosaic of all kinds of prejudice. She was anxious to be someone. (*HP* 25)

This reminds us of how Alice questions who she is after eating the cake marked EAT ME.

> Dear, dear! How queer everything is to-day! And yesterday things went on just as usual. I wonder if I've been changed in the night? Let me think: was I the same when I got up this morning? I almost think I can remember feeling a little different. But if I'm not the same, the next question is, Who in the world am I? Ah, *that's* the great puzzle! (Carroll, *Wonderland* 17)

When Leopold shakes her attaché case, causing the contents to fall out Henrietta cannot believe [Leopold] 'could go so small' (*HP* 35). This time Henrietta is observing what happened to Alice, who shrinks to only ten inches high after she drinks from the bottle marked DRINK ME (Carroll, *Wonderland* 8). In Mme Fisher's bedroom Henrietta feels extremely uncomfortable. 'Here she had dropped down a well into something worse than the past in not being yet over' (*HP* 50). Alice 'found herself falling down a very deep well' after she goes down into the rabbit hole (Carroll, *Wonderland* 3). When Henrietta returns from seeing Mme Fisher and discovers Leopold 'mindreading' his mother's empty envelope, she exclaims 'Whatever *are* you doing? There are enough mad people in this house!' (*HP* 45). Alice asks the Cheshire Cat:

> 'What sort of people live about here?'
>
> 'In THAT direction,' the Cat said, waving its right paw round, 'lives a Hatter: and in THAT direction,' waving the other paw, 'lives a March Hare. Visit either you like: they're both mad.'
>
> 'But I don't want to go among mad people,' Alice remarked.
>
> 'Oh, you can't help that,' said the Cat: 'we're all mad here. I'm mad. You're mad.'
>
> 'How do you know I'm mad?' said Alice.
>
> 'You must be,' said the Cat, 'or you wouldn't have come here.' (Carroll, *Wonderland* 81-82)

After these experiences, '(f)eeling like a kaleidoscope often and quickly shaken, [Henrietta] badly want[s] some place in which not to think' (*HP* 54). Sitting on the stairs,

she eyes 'the barlike stripes of the paper [and feels] a house like this [is] too small for so much to happen in' (*HP* 57). Like Alice, Henrietta has experienced not only a succession of changes in the dimensions of the space she is in, but also the chance element in life, which Bowen sums up at the start of the second 'The Present', saying '[Henrietta] would grow up to date her belief that nothing real ever happens from Leopold's mother's not coming this afternoon' (*HP* 191).

MEMORY, TIME AND CATALOGUES

With *A World of Love*, published in 1955, we find a fundamental change beginning in Bowen's novels: as Bennett and Royle note, the novels become concerned with the past and its memories (Bennett and Royle, *Dissolution* 135). The final three novels are much more illusory and she employs extensive literary collage as a form of memorial, considers the importance of memory, and lists, catalogues or makes inventories of objects. In a 1951 broadcast, 'The Cult of Nostalgia', she says: 'Our wish for illusion, that is the striking thing. [. . .] Reading is an aid; and the past, lately, has proved one unfailing source: memoirs, biography, old diaries found in old desks, agreeable works of history, rich historical novels' (*Listening* 100). In 'The Bend Back', an essay from 1950, she writes:

> How few, all down history, have been the favoured few – of the past as a whole we might say, 'We are well out of it!' The human dilemma, the dilemma inherent in being human, was at no time less than it is now. As things are, the past is veiled from us by illusion – our own illusion. (*Mulberry* 58)

A World of Love lies in a bed of reality within a world of illusion. Eyes and illusion are recurrent themes, as is the elasticity of time. When Bowen was at work on this novel she was reading Eddington's *The Nature of the Physical World* and substance, illusion and time are among the topics he touches on.[64] She writes to Ritchie: 'In an extraordinary way,

[64] Bowen would have enjoyed Eddington as much for his frequent use of collage to illustrate his points as for his scientific discourse: he draws on *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Dickens, 'Humpty Dumpty', Milton and Shakespeare, *inter alia*!

[*The Nature of the Physical World*] illuminates what is the matter of [*A World of Love*]' (Glendinning and Robertson, *Love's* 173). Eddington says in his introduction: 'The external world of physics has thus become a world of shadows' (Eddington, *Nature* 10). This novel is full of shadows cast by Guy, the revenant, and by the obelisk, and Bowen adds to the atmosphere by setting the novel in shimmering heat during a heatwave where not only the physical landscape shimmers, but events have a mirage-like quality about them or are caught only in the corner of the eye: they are illusions. For example, at the dinner party Guy is the '[d]ominator of the margin of vision' (*WL* 69). Eddington discusses the relationship between reality and illusion, saying: 'the mind, the weaver of illusion is also the only guarantor of reality that reality is always to be sought at the base of illusion. Illusion is to reality as the smoke to the fire' (Eddington, *Nature* 307). Eddington also tells us '[s]pace and time are words conveying more than one meaning. Space is an empty void; or it is such and such a number of inches, acres, pints. Time is an ever-rolling stream; or it is something signalled to us by wireless' (Eddington, *Nature* 24-25). Despite the illusory nature of the novel, Bowen is unusually precise about its 'real' time span: it takes place over four days and three nights at Midsummer. This is not by coincidence: four days and four nights is the time span of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. As Ingman points out in '"Like Shakespeare," she added . . . "or isn't it?"' – the title of her essay is drawn from *The Last September* – 'Bowen's appropriations of Shakespeare throughout her work are many and various' (*LS* 82; Ingman, 'Shakespeare', 153).[65] Bowen was familiar with Shakespeare's play from an early age: in *Pictures and*

[65] 'In addition there is, throughout her work, and in ways which sometimes raise interpretive difficulties, a constant return to the cultural resource and huge influential anxiety that is Shakespeare who is as present to Bowen as he is to Joyce, even if in more muted and intermittent ways' (Corcoran, *Enforced* 5). 'Bennett and Royle in *Elizabeth Bowen and the Dissolution of the Novel*, 84, observe that "references to Shakespeare's plays, whether in the form or narratorial allusions or in discussions between characters, are woven throughout Bowen's work: her novels are demonstrably and powerfully Shakespearean". I agree.' (Corcoran, *Enforced* 44)
[The collages from *Macbeth* in *The Little Girls* are a case in point, raising interpretive difficulties.]

Conversations she describes how with the Salmon children in Old Cheriton she staged a performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* ('or at least the Titania parts') with 'a cast of penny dolls glamorised by gauze' (*Pictures* 18). Bowen organises her lovers, not in Shakespeare's neat pair (Hippolyta and Theseus) or temporarily disrupted pairs (Demetrius and Helena, Hermia and Lysander), but as a triad of women all in love with the same man, Guy, who has been dead for nearly thirty years: Antonia, Guy's cousin; Lilia, his fiancée (their meeting was 'ill met [. . .] by [. . .] moonlight' – a collage of Oberon's observation to Titania in Act II); and Jane, Lilia's daughter by another of Antonia's cousins, the 'byblow' Fred (*WL* 15). Bowen writes that Jane, the 'idol of Fred's, this golden changeling [is], insofar as she [belongs] to anybody, Antonia's', suggesting a distortion of the tussle between Oberon and Titania over the Indian boy changeling in Act II (*WL* 52). Bowen's 'rude mechanicals' are a group of wealthy indolents who gather round the *parvenue* Lady Latterly at her 'unusually banal' and restored castle (*WL* 57). Unlike Shakespeare's characters, they are met, not to 'rehearse a play', but to create the twentieth-century equivalent, a piece of cinema: a histrionic dinner party which is also attended by Guy the revenant, giving a nod to Banquo's ghost's appearance at Macbeth's banquet.[66] Here Bowen emphasises the fact by telling us that at the dinner party 'Even Shakespeare had stalked in. He and drink played havoc with known dimensions' (*WL* 67). Thus Jane's vision is deranged by the number of Martinis she ingests, rather than by the drops in the eye which Puck administers to Titania. Lis Christensen suggests that the suspense is held when the butler announces that 'the young lady's cousin has come for her'. We would not be surprised if this were Guy. But it is Antonia. (Christensen, *Bowen* 44-45; *WL* 71)

As well as Shakespeare, Bowen collages extensively from Eliot's *Four Quartets*, her collage almost amounting to a palimpsest. Eliot himself collaged extensively in his

[66] *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* Act III, Sc.2, 11; Appearance of Banquo's ghost, *Macbeth*, Act III, Scene 4.

sequence: as Helen Gardner comments 'the poems were soaked in literary reminiscences'. This results in extensive literary genealogy, which I discuss further below (Gardner, *Composition* 30).

The World of Love opens on a landscape which is 'expectant', waiting for something to happen (*WL* 9). Time is holding its breath along with the landscape: in this novel time is not Eliot's time present, nor time past, nor time future, but time arrested. Monteforte is a place in stasis, in waiting, and has been ever since Guy's death over thirty years previously. Although attempts have been made to take account of the passage of time – in the kitchen hangs 'a still handsome calendar for the year before' – 'the disregarded dawdling and often stopping of the cheap scarlet clock wedged in somewhere between the bowls and dishes, spoke of the almost total irrelevance of Time, in the abstract, to this ceaseless kitchen' (*WL* 21). As Corcoran points out, '*A World of Love*, like [Beckett's] *Waiting for Godot*, is a remarkable representation of the desuetude, melancholy, exasperation and resignation attending on "waiting" for what will almost certainly be nothing very much' (Corcoran, *Enforced* 63).

Corcoran points to a passage which he finds alludes to both 'Burnt Norton' and 'Little Gidding' and lights in particular on a description of Guy's photograph which Bowen uses to describe the revenant at Lady Latterly's dinner party.

> [T]his was the face of someone here to the full – visible, and visible all at once, were the variations and contradictions, the lights and shades of the *arrested torrent of an existence.* Invisibly concentrated around him was all the time he had ever breathed: his todays, his yesterdays, his anticipated tomorrows – it could be felt how and understood why something had emanated from him so strongly into the experience of the room when he joined the party. (Corcoran, *Enforced* 70; *WL* 68-69, emphasis added)

While Eliot's time is that 'concentrated around [Guy's] todays, his yesterdays, his anticipated tomorrows', for Lilia and Antonia time has been arrested since Guy's death: a stopped clock overshadows his 'studio portrait' on the hall wall (*WL* 69; 68). But with

Jane's discovery of Guy's letters in the attic and the snapping of the rubber band holding them together, and with Jane's choice of where to read them – standing with an elbow propped on the ledge of the gnomon-like obelisk – Time is preparing to move on (WL 27; 10).[67] With the final immolation of the letters in the kitchen fire, the women – and Time – are released. It is the final laying to rest of the dead Guy which 'completes' the lives of Antonia and Lilia, as much as the flowering of Jane is brought about by her release from her entrapment by Guy through his letters. Each of the three women becomes free to move forward.

Bowen takes various motifs from Eliot's two poems and works them into her text, sometimes distorting the image. The relevant passages from 'Burnt Norton' read:

> Quick, said the bird, find them, find them,
> Round the corner. Through the first gate,
> Into our first world, shall we follow
> The deception of the thrush?
> [. . .]
> And the bird called, in response to
> The unheard music hidden in the shrubbery,
> And the unseen eyebeam crossed, for the roses
> Had the look of flowers that are looked at.[68]
> [. . .]
> So we moved, and they, in a formal pattern,
> Along the empty alley, into the box circle,
> To look down into the drained pool.
> [. . .]
> Go, said the bird, for the leaves were full of children,
> Hidden excitedly, containing laughter. (Eliot, *Collected* 177-178)

> Sudden in a shaft of sunlight
> Even while the dust moves
> There rises the hidden laughter
> Of children in the foliage. (Eliot, *Collected* 182)

While that from 'Little Gidding' reads:

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[67] Indications that time is beginning to move on are also associated with Maud, who plays 'clock golf' at the Fete, and who, on the final evening, waits by the wireless in the kitchen waiting to hear '[p]assionless' Big Ben chime nine o'clock: as Eddington says time is 'signalled to us by wireless'. (*WL* 30; 129; Eddington, *Nature*, 24-25)

[68] These last two lines about the roses are drawn from Chapter 2 of *Through the Looking-Glass*: Bowen would certainly have recognised them.

> The voice of the hidden waterfall
> And the children in the apple-tree. (Eliot, *Collected* 209)

The garden at Montefort is a 'rampart garden', a derelict *hortus conclusus* where the 'roses had run to briar, the wall so loosened as to start falling stone by stone down into the ravine' and there are at least three passages which appear to draw on 'Burnt Norton' or on 'Little Gidding' cited above (*WL* 82; *WL* 97). '[Lilia] and Antonia were under a twisted apple tree silvered over with lichen. Jane had found a bed inside a box-edged oval; and not far off stood the sundial [. . .]. Below, the river had almost ceased to run' (*WL* 83). 'A young thrush flew in affright from the twisted apple tree, and away in a corner a door creaked; somebody had come in and was in this garden' (WL 96-97). Particularly striking is the following sentence: 'The Guy who had come in her eye with her round the corner was transfixed first here, then there, then nowhere against the creeper – facelike seemings of faces, but never his, were everywhere on the chequer of light-and-shade' (*WL* 98). Bowen's lines echo, yet distort, the lines of the Eliot poems cited above: someone comes in through the door rather than the gate; the box circle becomes a box-edged oval; the drained pool a river almost ceasing to run; the apple tree is twisted and silvered; while the children in the foliage become facelike seemings of faces.

The genealogy of Bowen's collage can be traced through Eliot to Kipling and then to Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-1861). It is an example of a succession of authors re-creating from what has been created for them. In a letter of John Hayward, dated 5 August 1941 and discussing the first draft of 'Little Gidding', Eliot describes:

> [T]he children in the apple tree [as] meaning to tie up New Hampshire and Burnt Norton (with a touch, as I discovered in the train, of 'They' which I don't think I had read for 30 years, but the quotation from E.B. Browning has always stuck in my head, and that may be due to 'They' rather than to the Bardess herself). (Cited Gardner, *Composition* 29)

Gardner comments:

> Some of these [literary reminiscences], like the memory of Kipling's story 'They', not read for thirty years, or of Mrs Browning's poem, read some twenty-five years before and I suspect not re-read, lie buried very deep and were recalled unconsciously (Gardner, *Composition* 30).

Kipling's 1904 short story 'They' is a gentle tale of the benevolent haunting by children of an isolated estate and manor house owned by a blind woman. The narrator arrives after an apparently aimless, but intuitive, drive during which '[o]ne view called [him] to another' (Kipling, *Traffics* 303). Immediately he catches a glimpse of a child at the window, then another. In all he makes three visits to the estate, during which he glimpses and hears the children in the house and its shrubbery and woods, but only on the last visit does one of them kiss his palm: this touch means that he can no longer visit the domain. As Gardner tells us, Eliot recognised the song quoted in 'They' 'as being a quotation from a poem ['The Lost Bower' (1844)] by Elizabeth Barrett Browning': it is in fact the opening stanza, and in Kipling's story it is sung by the blind woman, but without the 'marring' fifth line (Gardner, *Composition* 40).[69]

In the pleasant orchard-closes,
'God bless all our gains,' say we;
But 'May God bless all our losses,'
Better suits with our degree. (Kipling, *Traffics* 326)

Barrett Browning's poem describes an experience in her younger days of breaking her way through a wood near Malvern where she lived between the ages of three and fifteen. 'Under-crawling, overleaping/Thorns that prick and boughs that bear,/I stood suddenly astonished – I was gladdened unaware' (Barrett Browning, *Poetical* 205). Whether the bower she discovered was formed by shrubs and trees or was a deserted building is open to interpretation, but suddenly she hears music which she cannot place. She leaves, resolving to go again, but is never able to find the way back. Like the narrator in 'They', the place is

[69] The 'marring' fifth line reads: 'Listen, gentle – ay, and simple! listen, children on the knee!'

in future forbidden to her.[70, 71] Bowen would have understood: as she says in 'Out of a Book', 'it is not only our fate but our business to lose innocence, and once we have lost that it is futile to attempt to picnic in Eden' (*Impressions* 265).

Another collage from 'Little Gidding' comes after Lilia has bidden Guy farewell as he is about to depart from Charing Cross for what will be the last time. 'Hardly more than three steps was she from where he was, with no shelter from him but her turned-away back. Somebody then heaved in between him and her. She had no means of not overhearing him exclaim: '*You*!'' (*WL* 95-96). The Eliot reads:

> And what the dead had no speech for, when living,
> They can tell you, being dead. (Eliot, *Collected* 202)
> So I assumed a double part, and cried
> And heard another's voice cry: 'What! Are *you* here?'
> Although we were not. (Eliot, *Collected* 204)

This is a further example of literary genealogy: Helen Gardner tells us that for the last two lines, Eliot was drawing on Dante's encounter with Brunetto Latini (*Inferno* XV) which closes with 'Dante's cry of horrified recognition: "*Siete voi qui, Ser Brunetto?*"' (Gardner, *Composition* 174-175).

Eliot writes towards the end of 'Little Gidding':

> This is the use of memory:
> For liberation – not less of love but expanding
> Of love beyond desire, and so liberation
> From the future as well as the past. Thus, love of a country
> Begins as attachment to our own field of action
> And comes to find that action of little importance
> Though never indifferent. History may be servitude,
> History may be freedom. See, now they vanish,
> The faces and places, with the self which, as it could, loved them
> To become renewed, transfigured, in another pattern. (Eliot, *Collected* 206)

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[70] We may trace this genealogy even further into the past: Linda M. Lewis suggests that 'The Lost Bower' drew on Wordsworth – either 'Nutting' or 'Tintern Abbey'. 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning: A Poet's Quest for Ultimate Reality', *Ultimate Reality and Meaning*. U Toronto P, vol. 28, iss. 1, March 2005, pp. 4-20. Arnd Bohm suggests that for 'Nutting' Wordsworth drew on Ovid's 'Nux'. 'Wordsworth's "Nutting" and the Ovidian "Nux"'. *Studies in Romanticism*. Johns Hopkins UP, vol. 45, no. 1, spring 2006, pp. 25-48.

[71] Both 'They' and 'The Lost Bower' have pre-echoes of *Le Grand Meaulnes* in which Meaulnes is never able to find the chateau which he visited: they become 'lost domains'.

And at the end of *A World of Love* just that has happened: after the liberation of Guy's memory, the faces and places have become renewed, transfigured, in another pattern.

Although it was not published until 1964, Bowen had *The Little Girls* in mind as early as January 1957, telling Charles Ritchie that it was to be called *Race with Time* (Glendinning and Robertson, *Love's* 258). By this time Bowen was approaching sixty, and as Patricia Laurence remarks, the novel 'reflects Bowen [. . .] circling around the topics of aging, memory, and past and present time' (Laurence, *Bowen* 303). The following year, 1958, Bowen visited Rome for research on *A Time in Rome*. In her opening chapter, 'The Confusion', she writes:

> I was in the hold of memories as positive and obsessive as they were faulty. I was constantly brought up short with, 'I could have *sworn* . . . !' Ingrained pictures refused to be broken up; I had lived with them, lived on them, for how many years? Trite as they were, poor as they came to seem [. . .] they had been 'Rome' for me. What I recollected could not be found again: it had not existed. (*Rome* 10)

She had learned that memory is fallible.

Bennett and Royle tell us that '[o]ne of the characteristic rhetorical strategies of [*The Little Girls*] is the inventory or list' (Bennett and Royle, *Dissolution* 130). Inventories, or lists, or catalogues, serve to remind us: they are concrete memories, records of things we do not want to forget.[72] Ingman points out that as early as *The Death of the Heart* Matchett opines that:

> [T]he Quayne's refusal to preserve memories and traditions, together with Anna's failure to produce an heir [are] part of their 'mistaken approach to life': 'They'd rather no past – not to have the past, that is to say. No wonder they don't rightly know what they're doing. Those without memories don't know what is what'. (Ingman, *Bowen* 99)

In the opening pages Dinah tells Frank: 'I've been cataloguing, before I forget what's whose. Once I do, there'll be little to tell me – or indeed anyone' (*LG* 10). Several

[72] Bowen had already used catalogues in earlier novels – for example when Cecilia returns from Italy in *To the North* '[her] eyes [parade] a whole array of dear objects, sentimental and brittle' which smile at each other on her mantelpiece, and Bowen catalogues the effects in Cousin Francis' study in *The Heat of the Day* (*TN* 20; *HD* 156-157; see Chapter 3, p.112).

catalogues are associated with Clare, who will become the owner of Mopsie Pye, 'a chain of speciality gift shops': when Dinah visits her, we are given a catalogue of the stock room (*LG* 138). We see Mrs Piggott's collection of china catalogued through Clare's eyes. It has a history: it is 'reputed to be or have been priceless'. In a rare example in Bowen of physical pieces of a broken puzzle, their fragments have been brought back together, so that handles are enabled 'to keep their grip on cups', there are 'healed wounds' where heads or forearms have been fitted back onto china bodies (*LG* 76). The Old High Street picture-shop window, the 'Curios' shop, Sheikie's bedroom, and the contents of the coffer are among catalogues in the central section, while it is implicit in the final part that the adult Sheila's White Elephant stall will be comprised of a collection of objects (*LG* 97-98; 99-100;108;118;149).

CINEMA

With her last three novels Bowen begins to embrace the techniques of the post-war film directors, and all contain a number of cinematic sequences. Bowen was alert to the example offered by camera work, saying it is 'interesting study for the novelist. In a good film, the camera's movement, angle and distance have all worked towards one thing – the fullest possible realisation of the director's idea' (*Orion* 25). As Victoria Glendinning remarks, the dinner party in *A World of Love* is theatrical: with the sharply defined black-and-white of the dinner guests and the soft focus around Guy's illusory appearances, it reflects the films of the *nouvelle vague* (Glendinning, *Portrait* 197). Bowen describes the gathering of characters on Victoria Station for Eva's departure on her fantasy *voyage de noces* in short clips, each focusing on a group, while she emphasises that it is cinema through Mr Denge, who observes: 'Film either being shot or they're televising a royalty or celebrity: cameras galore!' (*ET* 313)

But it is *The Little Girls* which is perhaps Bowen's most cinematic novel, and at the same time the one in which she leaves more blank space than any other. Arthur Calder-Marshall likens it to 'a film that has been exposed, but needs to be developed and printed in the mind of the reader' and goes on to cite the novel's blurb.

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

In *The Critics* the panel discusses the novel's similarity to a detective story, and the film critic, Dilys Powell, says: 'But surely the clues are tiny material clues, the way a curtain is hung or a swing is hung, or the way somebody holds a feather in her hand, surely that's the way the clues are intended' (*The Critics*, BBC Home Service, 16 February 1964). Davenport also lights on the clues in *The Little Girls*, and in what is apparently his only review of Bowen's work, writes: 'The real plot is out of sight, somewhere over our left shoulder; our attention has to make do with a chaff of hints and clues' (Davenport, 'Distaff' 163). Two of the most obvious clues Bowen gives us are references to French film (*LG* 190; 205). Some days after Diana has castigated, then apologised to, the picture of the Old High Street, she is discovered by her manservant Francis, sitting in a chair holding her head, where subsequently a great bruise will appear. Francis has just been to see a French film, which he describes as 'psychological' and '*avant garde*'. Asked by Dinah's sons what he thought when he found her, he replies 'I thought I was still looking at that film'. She had refused to have any medical attention, saying: '"If you bring anybody in here, I'll go through that window. I don't mind glass," she said, "I'll go through the glass"' (*LG* 206). In French, as in English, there are two almost interchangeable words for mirror and looking-glass: *miroir* and *glace.* As I note in my Introduction, pp.7-8, in *The Critics* Brunius likens the book to the films of Alain Resnais, but Dinah's threat that she'll

go through 'the glass' is more reminiscent of Jean Cocteau's 1950 film *Orphée* in which Orpheus moves through '*une glace*', as though through water, to visit the underworld where he first of all arrives at 'the Zone [which] is made of men's memories and the ruins of their habits' (Cocteau, *Cinema* 1950). https://www.criterion.com/current/posts/13-orpheus Accessed 5 December 2019. Cocteau ends the film by allowing Orpheus and Eurydice to return to the world through the mirror, with all that has transpired erased from their memories. The implication of going 'through the glass' is that Dinah might be able to retrieve her memories. But would she be able to bring them back with her if she returned?

As Brunius suggests, we find both fallible memory and catalogues (or inventories) in the early feature films of Alain Resnais, and it is helpful to consider how Bowen achieves cinematic effects in *The Little Girls* in parallel with *Muriel*, *ou le temps d'un retour*, Resnais' feature film released in 1963, and therefore an almost exact contemporary of *The Little Girls*.[73] In a way similar to Bowen, Resnais gives us clues but no solutions, as the director Jacques Rivette explains in a 1963 *Cahiers du cinema* roundtable discussion:

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

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

[73] *Muriel* is set in Boulogne: given Bowen's affection for the town, she is almost certain to have seen the film.

therefore be a memory for someone. When the film opens Alphonse, Hélène's lover from twenty years earlier, is about to arrive. Just as Bowen takes us into the streets of Folkestone to see shop windows full of objects in *The Little Girls*, Resnais takes us from the station to Hélène's flat through the streets of Boulogne, past shop windows full of objects, and restaurants full of people whom the characters observe through plate glass windows as though they were objects. Resnais jumps from image to image, his shots focusing on now one, now another object in a form of visual inventory. Both Bowen and Resnais are reflecting how each object or person may hold within itself a memory for someone, and are anxious that the memory should not dissolve. Anna Thorngate observes that characters in *Muriel* recite 'the names of food and objects in an almost incantatory way', almost as though they are memorizing them lest they be forgotten (Thorngate, 'Special' 31).

One may draw attention to many cinematic episodes in *The Little Girls*, which include Dinah's last view of Clare as she leaves Wanchurch beach, '[h]er blouse, all of it untucked from her skirt, ballooned in the wind [. . .]. Her shock of hair waged its individual battle with the wind': Clare is literally being blown out of Dinah's life (*LG* 133). When Dinah visits Clare's shop, 'five or six gazing persons were moving about in a tranced state which looked like culminating in buying' (*LG* 137). In the final chapter, Frank and Clare independently move around in the *chiaroscuro* of the garden, seemingly supernumerary characters excluded from the action, yet remaining within the purlieu of the house, ready – and hoping – to come in, if and when they are required to rejoin the action (*LG* 214 onwards). As Harry Strickhausen writes: 'This concluding chapter, which has scene shifts from one group of characters to another, abruptly, as in a film, is a perfect section of the novel and is among the best prose that Miss Bowen has ever written' (Strickhausen, 'Reality' 161).

We should note that in her working title Bowen uses *with* rather than *against* Time: time is not an enemy. Ultimately, the importance of time is perhaps less evident in *The Little Girls* than in *A World of Love*, and Bowen uses it in a different way, and in a different way to Resnais. The novel is set at times of international turbulence when people might be thinking about what to conserve in the face of approaching Armageddon, and how to conserve it: the central part takes place shortly before the outbreak of the First World War, the outer parts in the early 1960s at a time of high tension between the Soviet Union and the United States of America. Resnais' film is set in the aftermath of two catastrophes: the Second World War which meant the destruction of much of Boulogne, and the brutal Algerian War of Independence during which Hélène's stepson Bernard witnesses the torture and death of Muriel. Recently returned from that war, Bernard records things both visually, with a movie camera, and aurally, with a tape recorder. 'Boulogne [. . .] stands as memory's objective correlative: the original object has been destroyed, what now stands are attempts at reconstruction and the assertion of the new on spaces still saturated with association for surviving inhabitants' (Kite, 'Everything' 11). In *The Little Girls* it is only when Dinah reacts to the painting of the Old High Street on Sheila's wall, initially finding it a 'lie' since with the rebuilding of the street the original no longer exists, that we begin to wonder how much of the past has been accurately represented. It is more difficult to reconcile the empty coffer: each of the women is certain what objects they had placed in it, but they never question why it is now empty, even though it still exists.

Bowen is precise about the period of each of the three parts of *The Little Girls* – present, past, present. Resnais' retrospection is much more fragmented, giving much less certainty. It is sometimes clear when the action is in the past, because Resnais uses blurred and grainy sepia shots, but memory is vague. While clocks and watches are consulted

regularly in a vain attempt to keep time in check, time is not 'tick-tock perfect' in this film. We find ourselves suddenly shifted forward in the action without warning: one scene will overlap another. 'The image [. . .] mimics the way memory and the unconscious work: it flashes on shots temporally or spatially outside the immediate action' (Thorngate, 'Special' 27). Kite observes of *Muriel* '[W]e're never given access to [anyone's] thoughts, only what they say or do' (Kite, 'Everything' 19). Thus initially we take everything that Alphonse says as truth, though we begin to question his veracity when we see him sitting in a bar, a *raconteur* surrounded by a group hanging on his every word: he has them in his power. It is only when Ernest confronts him and a fight breaks out that we see the whole truth – that Alphonse is a fantasist – if indeed Ernest can be believed. In a similar way, Bowen does not allow us to be aware of her characters' inner motives. In 'Notes on Writing a Novel', written twenty years earlier, Bowen had said: 'Characters should, on the whole, be under rather than over articulate. What they *intend* to say should be more evident, more striking (because of its greater inner importance to the plot) than what they arrive at *saying*' (*Orion* 24). In *The Little Girls*, she has put this into practice, leaving gaps, creating blank space. Spencer Curtis Brown tells us:

> In *The Little Girls*, she for the first time deliberately tried, as she said when discussing with me the writing of it to present characters entirely from the outside. She determined never to tell the reader what her characters where thinking or feeling. She recalled that once when she had remarked to Evelyn Waugh that he never told his characters' thoughts, he had replied, 'I do not think I have any idea what they are thinking; I merely see them and show them.' In a way vastly different from Waugh's, she set herself the technical puzzle of writing a book 'externally.' (*Pictures* xxxviii)

This led to the critic Hermione Lee finding:

> Such 'meaning' as there is appears in fragmentary and diffused form and is presented without depth or resonance. [. . .] The whole effect is dubious and disconcerting. Bowen has decided, now, to give up the controlled, elaborate commentary and the sharp, minute, inward presentation of character of her earlier novels. *The Little Girls* has, from the start, a provisional, indeterminate air. (Lee, *Bowen* 204)

With the benefit of hindsight – and time – we see that this is precisely the effect which Elizabeth Bowen was seeking to achieve: fragmentary, diffuse, indeterminate. She would have been pleased by these remarks, had she lived to read them.

Chapter 6

RATTLING THE BARS OF THE PROSE CAGE

In his Introduction to *The Penguin Book of the Prose Poem*, Jeremy Noel-Tod remarks that 'Poetry, we might say, bends the bars of the prose cage' (Noel-Tod, *Prose* xxi). In the case of Bowen, we can hear poetry *rattling* the bars of the prose cage, and in this chapter I consider how Bowen goes about this.

One of her most extreme examples is found in *A World of Love* when Jane is with Lady Latterly in her bedroom, as she dresses for her dinner party which Jane is about to attend.

> The bedroom gained still more unreality by now seeming trapped somewhere between day and night – this marvel of marbling and mirror-topping, mirror-building-in and prismatic whatnots being at the moment a battleground of clashing dazzling reflections and refractions. Crystal the chandelier dripped into the sunset; tense little lit lamps under peach shades were easily floated in upon by the gold of evening. Day had not done with the world yet; trees were in the conspiracy. The outdoors, light-shot, uncannily deepening without darkening, leaned through the too-large windows – a blinding ray presently splintered over the dressing table. (*WL* 56)

In this passage a number of different light sources are battling for supremacy and ending by not only obliterating themselves but blinding Lady Latterly who 'can't see [herself]' (*WL* 56). What Bowen is seeking to do here is discussed by MacNeice when he says in *Modern Poetry* that he does 'not recognize any great gulf between poetry and prose'.

> Roughly speaking the poet wants his *words* to be listened to or looked at more than the prose-writer does. [. . .] [H]e will naturally arrange them towards this end. And he will find that if he arranges them in certain repetitive patterns, this repetition will hold the reader's attention and unify the writing. (MacNeice, *Modern* 114)

With its abstract pattern, the passage has no obvious metre and only occasional rhythm, but it does have other poetic attributes: the half-rhyme and alliteration of marvel/marbling/mirror/prismatic/moment, of reflections/refractions and deepening/darkening; the alliteration of 'little lit lamps'; the assonance of

Crystal/dripped/little/lit; the anastrophe of 'Crystal the chandelier'. The consonant clusters, bright vowel sounds, and gerunds all contribute to the energy which brings about the blinding ray, strong enough to fracture the sources of light and reflected light in this image. While there are no conventional repetitive patterns in this passage, there is a succession of nouns and verbs indicating different lighting states, almost as though Bowen has run through entries in *Roget's Thesaurus.* She has certainly arranged her words to shock the reader into paying attention: 'Look, I'm smashing my kaleidoscope!'

In this chapter on what I term Bowen's poetry I examine her dyslocution; her views on poetry and how others viewed her as a poet; her use (or not) of form; the poetic techniques she employs; her vocabulary; the need for the reader to play a part; and her choice of subject, giving examples from her work to illustrate my points.

BOWEN'S DYSLOCUTION

Perhaps Bowen's most distinctive characteristic for most critics and many readers is the distorted syntax which we see in the above example. This dyslocution, her fragmented and apparently aleatorically reassembled syntax, is Bowen's innovative technique: in poetic terms, it is a form of extended anastrophe. Her style becomes increasingly individual and moves away from any obvious stylistic genealogy, puzzling to critics and often difficult for the reader to follow: yet in her lifetime she maintained a high profile, respected by her peers and publishers and with a dedicated readership. Her often quoted statement in her 1948 biographical note that '[m]uch (and perhaps the best) of [her] writing is verbal painting' suggests working in a two-dimensional form, but what she says in her Harvard lecture of 1953, *The Technique of the Novel*, suggests as well an aim for something three-dimensional: as well as its use for driving nails (or points) home, a 'hammer' is used metal-beating or (as a mallet) for chiselling stone or wood.

> There may be moments when we want to hammer the words we have in mind from their very strangeness and discordance onto the consciousness of the reader. We are trying to convey something disturbing or harsh. And we will, in that case, use harsh, discordant words. We will turn our sentences upside down. [. . .] [W]e will deliberately break up every conception of style and produce something – what is for the time being – convulsive or over-loud. (*Weight* 22)

With its emphasis on rearranging and breaking, almost to the point of violence, the second half of this paragraph has a resonance of the first clause of Marinetti's 1912 *Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature* cited earlier (Chapter 1, p. 33), a statement particularly pertinent to Bowen: 'It is imperative to destroy syntax and scatter one's nouns at random, just as they are born' (Marinetti, cited Rainey, *Modernism* 16).

In *A Room of One's Own* Virginia Woolf examines a hypothetical novel by a hypothetical author, Mary Carmichael, saying:

> She may be beginning to use writing as an art, not as a method of self-expression. [. . .] I tried a sentence or two on my tongue. Soon it was obvious that something was not quite in order. *The smooth gliding of sentence after sentence was interrupted*. [. . .] She is like a person striking a match that will not light, I thought. (Woolf, *Room* 74-75, emphasis added)

> For I feel as one feels on a switchback railway when the car, instead of sinking, as one has been led to expect, swerves up again. Mary is tampering with the expected sequence. *First she broke the sentence; now she has broken the sequence*. Very well, she has every right to do both these things if she does them not for the sake of breaking, but for the sake of creating. (Woolf, *Room* 76, emphasis added)

Much of what Woolf describes could be applied to Bowen, particularly the idea that Mary Carmichael is 'beginning to use writing as an art'. Carmichael breaks the sentence, breaks the sequence, in order to create, just as Bowen does when using the technique of dyslocution. However, it is unlikely that Woolf has Bowen in mind: her only novel to have been published at the time that Woolf was writing (*The Hotel*) is not remarkable for the dyslocution which is evident in her later work. Rather, Woolf's text is prophetic. Although there are examples of dyslocution in Bowen's work from the 1930s onwards, it seems to have become an issue around the time of the publication of *The Heat of the Day* in 1949. Glendinning tells us that Bowen's 'contortionist manner of sentence construction is

enough in evidence to be picked up by those who disapproved of it' and instances a sentence towards the end of *The Heat of the Day*: 'In the street below, not so much a step as the semi-stumble of someone after long standing shifting his position could be, for the first time by her, heard'. She comments that while contorted, this is effective: 'One hears that slight shifting of the feet on the pavement' (*HD* 280; Glendinning, *Portrait* 152). Bowen achieves this by the irregular rhythm she uses, which creates the 'semi-stumble'. Ulrika Maude reminds us that when asked by her editor to modify the text of *The Heat of the Day*: 'Bowen refused to change her prose, replying in a letter that "I'd rather keep the jars, 'jingles' and awkwardnesses – e.g. 'seemed unseemly,' 'felt to falter.' They do to my mind express something. In some cases I want the rhythm to jerk and jar – to an extent, even, which may displease the reader"' (Maude, 'Tender' 90). Jerking and jarring rhythms are to be found throughout Bowen's prose and are often the cause of negative criticism from critics who, because they expect to see syntactically 'correct' prose, do not look imaginatively at it. Through her dyslocution, Bowen is often able to condense her prose as a poet might. Charles Ritchie relates something Bowen told him which suggests an aim to concentrate her prose: she likens her method of writing to clay-modelling. 'When she is writing a scene the first time, she always throws in all the descriptive words that come to her mind. . . . Like [. . .] someone doing clay-modelling who will smack on handfuls of clay before beginning to cut away and do the fine modelling' (Glendinning and Robertson, *Love's* 29). Bowen's prose will sometimes break away, curling back on itself to give the tight sculptural form which Bowen describes to Ritchie, but at the expense of immediate clarity. *Eva Trout* is full of such dyslocution, ranging from the simple but unusual placing of a preposition to the extremely convoluted. Eva's response to Iseult when asked if 'here' (the school Elmleigh) seems strange is: 'Anywhere would seem strange to me that did not' (*ET* 68). This sentence turns back on itself and we are not clear – we wonder – what Eva

means: is it ‘everywhere seems strange to me, it would be strange if it did not’? The Descartes scholar Professor Holman has several examples including this one which is almost incomprehensible. ‘Your being not or other or less than that is, I have to tell you, wholly out of accord with the image of you less formulated by me than formulated for me by its own forcefulness’ (*ET* 148-149). And when Eva visits Henry in Cambridge, ‘the beautiful agonizing mirage of the university was inescapable from’ (*ET* 211). Bowen has arranged her words in the order of experience: the first thing that strikes Eva is the beauty of the university and the preposition has to come last: alternative versions are comparatively clumsy and longer. ‘It was impossible to escape from the beautiful agonizing mirage of the university’ or ‘[t]he beautiful agonizing mirage of the university was impossible to escape from’ have three and two more words respectively.

BOWEN’S VIEWS ON POETRY – BOWEN VIEWED AS POET

Bowen feels an urge to write on an almost physical level. Here she describes the genesis and gestation of the short story in the Preface to *The Faber Book of Modern Short Stories*: her argument can be applied equally to poetry.

> The first necessity for the short story, at the set out, is *necessariness*. The story, that is to say, must spring from an impression or perception pressing enough, acute enough to have made the writer write. Execution must be voluntary and careful, but conception should have been involuntary, a vital fortuity. (*Impressions* 42-43)

Like the short story, a poem will *need* to be written, and once conceived, the work will continue to obsess the writer while it is gestating. Its germ will lie like a sliver of organic matter in a Petri dish, growing of its own accord. In her interview with Brooke, Bowen describes how, in *The Heat of the Day*, ‘the rest of the plot germinates, comes out of the love story’ (*Listening* 283). And once germination begins, Bowen is in thrall: in a broadcast interview she tells Glyn Jones: ‘Once a story or novel is on its way, *it so much commands me* that it returns to me at all times. So much so that it can be agony for me to

be out of reach of my manuscript; I find myself wanting to dash back to make some alteration or note some new idea' (*Listening* 268-269, emphasis added).

Bowen feels a responsibility as a writer to capture the marvel of that moment of conception and to convey to the reader the experience of amazement at these fresh discoveries, writing in the Preface to *The Faber Book of Modern Short Stories*:

> Amazement – involuntary and to a degree fathomed – is part of poetry. In the short story, semi-poetic, amazement is not only not fathomed but not stated; but has to be made evident. The writer must so strip fact of neutralizing elements as to return to it, and prolong for it, its first power: what was in life a half-second of apprehension must be perpetuated. (*Impressions* 41)

Amazement is the experience the bilingual poet and French *académicien* Michael Edwards (b.1938) describes in his preface to *De l'Émerveillement*, his 2006-2007 series of lectures at the Collège de France, when he urges us to allow ourselves to continue to experience it in adult life, and not resign it to children.

> Au lieu de supposer que l'émerveillement est le propre des enfants et des ingénus, une émotion agréable et passagère [. . .] [ce livre] invite à penser qui'il n'y a rien de plus adulte ni de plus sérieux que de s'émerveiller. Il soutient que l'émerveillement n'est pas une simple émotion, mais une capacité de l'être; qu'il nous ouvre au monde, révèle heureusement notre ignorance et nous offre une forme de connaissance à la fois plus libre et plus intime. (Edwards, *Émerveillement* 7)[74]

The process of conveying amazement to the reader without any loss of the original sense of wonder is through the flow of creativity which starts in the mind of the writer, passing through their brain onto the printed page and thence via the eyes of the reader into their mind. In 'The Crisis', broadcast on the BBC Third Programme in 1947, Bowen calls this 'the inventive pen' when she describes the epiphany she experienced on reading *She* by H. Rider Haggard. For her it was the 'first totally violent impact [she] ever received from print' and revealed to her 'the power of the pen. The inventive pen' (*Afterthought* 113).

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[74] Instead of believing that amazement is unique to children and the naïve, a pleasant and fleeting emotion [. . .] [this book] invites us to think that there is nothing more adult nor more serious than to be amazed. It argues that amazement is not a simple emotion, but a human ability; that it opens us to a world where our ignorance is serendipitously revealed and offers us a sort of knowledge which is both more free and more intimate. (My translation)

What she is suggesting is that the writer does not have intellectual control over the language which they use: it is intuitive, and only at the revision or editing stage will the intellect be applied. Characters, 'as they become three-dimensional, develop sometimes a volition of their own' (*Weight* 17). 'The great virtue of imaginative writing [. . .] is that it is not done entirely under the direction of the brain or under the control of the judgment' (*Weight* 20). Corcoran alludes to this when he writes: 'There is [. . .] an anxiety that the mere writer herself may not remain in control of the riot [of words]' (Corcoran, *Enforced* 3). As Edwards puts it in a later poem: 'The white page vibrates, there is nothing more/than natural in its sudden dazzle, the sun/has simply shot though a cloud and touched it. [. . .] The words/came./It knows me better than I do, it writes me,/this English language, my mother's tongue' (Edwards, *Lipp* 54).

Apart from three poems in her school magazine Bowen published no conventional poetry. Nevertheless several critics and commentators refer to her as a poet. Reviewing *The Demon Lover and Other Stories* in 1945, Henry Reed writes: 'She has [. . .] that gift which prose can share with poetry: the ability to concentrate the emotions of a scene, or a sequence of thoughts, or even a moral, into an unforgettable sentence or phrase with a beauty of expression extra to the sense' (Reed, 'Bowen' 302). Discussing 'The Demon Lover' itself, W.J. McCormack notes half-rhymes in her prose ('Mrs Drover', 'taxi driver', 'demon lover'), commenting that this is 'post-Yeatsian' poetry: Paul Muldoon allies her with the poetics of both Beckett and Joyce (McCormack, *Burke* 402-403; Muldoon, *To Ireland* 18-24).[75] Cyril Connolly wrote in her obituary in *The Sunday Times* that she was 'a poet working in prose', while Francis Wyndham tells us that 'Miss Bowen's great distinction and originality as a writer of imaginative fiction have depended on the subtle

[75] Discussing McCormack's comment that Bowen is a post-Yeatsian poet Corcoran imagines 'a meticulous and revealing linguistic study being performed on her prose of the kind which Adam Piette performs on the work of, among others, Joyce and Beckett, in his book *Remembering and the Sound of Words*' (Corcoran, *Enforced* 4).

fusion of two separate gifts: for social comedy, and for sensuous poetic intensity'. While not specifically classifying Bowen as a poet, in an essay of 1946 Arthur Koestler sets out to explain to us her poetic thinking. A more recent opinion comes from Patricia Laurence: 'We go to her for the poetry that weaves in and out of her style. [. . .] She was a poetic chronicler of her times who forged new visual and sensory paths' (Connolly, 'Bowen' 1973; Wyndham, 'Eva Trout' 90; Koestler, 'Future' 82-86; Laurence, *Bowen* 8).

Never one to be too explicit about her motives, she aligns the poem with the short story when she writes: 'Like many prose writers I probably would wish to have been a poet, and it is agreed that the short story, with its uniting of mood and possible lyricism, approaches most nearly to the condition of poetry' ('My Best Novel' 3). She never pretends to be a poet, but in the introduction to the 1949 edition of *Encounters* describes herself as a 'poet *manqué*', while when asked in a 1949 interview for the *New York Times Book Review* what comment about her work she liked most said that it was to be described as 'a muffled poet' – one who 'transposed poetry [. . .] into terms of the short story or novel' (*Mulberry* 119; *Weight* 262-263). Charles Ritchie, possibly the person who would come to know her most deeply, recorded in his diary soon after he met her: 'The first time I saw Elizabeth Bowen I thought she looked more like a bridge-player than a poet. Yet without having read a word of her writing would not one have felt that something mysterious, passionate and poetic was behind that worldly exterior?' (Ritchie, *Siren* 115-116).

Bowen first discusses poetry in prose in an oblique way when she outlines the section on 'Plot' in her 1945 'Notes on Writing a Novel'. Here she says:

> Plot must further the novel towards its object. What object? the non-poetic statement of a poetic truth.
>
> Have not all poetic truths been already stated? The essence of a poetic truth is that no statement of it can be final.

> Plot, story, is in itself non-poetic. At best it can only be not anti-poetic. It cannot claim a single poetic licence. It must be reasoned – only from the moment when its none-otherness, its only-possibleness has become apparent. Novelist must always have one foot, sheer circumstantiality, to stand on, whatever the other foot may be doing. (*Orion* 18-19)

Koestler lights on these statements, opening his discussion with the following paragraph.

> Elizabeth Bowen said somewhere, that the novel is the non-poetic statement of a poetic truth. As a recent convert to semantics, I began to doubt whether I knew what a poetic truth is, though I always thought I did. I imagined Professor Ogden taking the class:
>
> 'In current usage we call a scientific truth a statement of the type that the attraction of a heavy body decreases in inverse ratio to the square of the distance. Now, Bowen, will you give us an example of what you call a statement of "poetic" truth?' – 'The wine-dark sea, I suppose.' – 'Is that a *statement*, Bowen? And how, by expressing it in non-poetical form, is it supposed to become a novel?' (Koestler, 'Future' 82)[76]

Koestler continues that he sides with Bowen, but that her formula needs elucidation. He then takes a sentence of the German dramatist Gerhart Hauptman: 'Poetry is the distant echo of the primitive word behind the veil of words', saying that it seems to him that:

> [T]he action of the novel is always the distant echo of some primitive action behind the veil of the period's costumes and conventions. The word 'primitive' is used here in the sense of the archaic and perendial [sic], the Jungian archetype.[77] [. . .] The statement of a poetic truth thus becomes the statement of a specific experience, conflict or situation under its generic aspect, *sub specie aeternitatis.* [. . .] Novels which are not fed from archetypal sources are shallow or phoney. They are like a house with elaborate plumbing, bathrooms, cold- and hot-water taps, which the builder forgot to connect with the main. (Koestler, 'Future' 82-83)

In other words, the action of any novel will always have an ancestor: this takes us back to Bowen's 'compost of forgotten books' from which slivers of memory will be retrieved (*Impressions* 268). Furthermore, no matter how complex the structure of the novel, if it doesn't flow, it is pointless. Not only must it flow, the author must ultimately be in control of the flow, as Bowen explains in her 1962 essay 'Exclusion'.

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[76] 'Charles Kay Ogden (1889-1957) was a Cambridge contemporary of I.A. Richards, largely forgotten in the twenty-first century. 'His *The Meaning of Meaning* (1923) (co-authored with Richards) made the relationship between sound and meaning the essence of Modernism.' (Sandelescu 2013, https://editura.mttlc.ro/carti/57_Charles_Ogden_Basic_English_volume_three.pdf Accessed 29 July 2020

[77] 'Perendial' may be a misprint for 'perennial': this makes more sense in the context of Jung.

> Novel-writing, however, is more than [story-telling]: it is when we come to the narrative's 'why's' and 'how's', the complex causes of action, the ripples of its effect, the shadowy ambience of the personality, that we touch what makes the essential novel. We pass outside the ranges of concrete fact: more will be needed from now on, than direct telling. Perception, evaluation are called to come into play. From now on, the writer must cause the reader to perceive and evaluate for himself – or at least, to imagine that he does so. [. . .] Where the author has failed to know, there will be a vacuum. (*Afterthought* 217; 218)

In 'The Poetic Element in Fiction' Bowen notes the development of poetry as it grows closer to prose, a development which her own prose mirrors as it moves closer to poetry.

> It would appear to me that the poet, on his side, is borrowing more and more for his imagery, for his language, even for his subject, on the domain of fact, that he is drawing his images from what used to be considered not assimilable by poetry, that he turns his back on no technicality, no prosaic or everyday scene, and that poetry is reinforcing itself from what was once considered to be, in so far as it was the material of anything, the rather gritty material of prose. (*Listening* 161)

In this paragraph Bowen is hinting that there needs to be a change in how poetry is formed, that there is a need to break the mould. By this time (1950) Bowen had already been going about this, ignoring poetic form, and using both conventional and innovative techniques.

BOWEN'S USE (OR NOT) OF FORM

Poetry has an innate three-dimensional tangible, malleable quality: when asked to define poetry, a workshop participant will often make moulding gestures with their hands while their mind searches for the words. Indeed we should remember that Bowen has a tactile side, saying that she was 'good with her hands in arranging things the way [she likes] them to be' (BBC Home Service, 11 March 1957). None of Bowen's poetry has a conventional poetic form: we must bear in mind that she was writing what would be marketed as a novel, as prose. In 'The Technique of the Novel' she discusses form.

> The novel is, above all things, a free form. [. . .] I believe form, or shape, to be implicit in the conception of the story. It comes with the idea, with the situation. And above all, it is not a restricting thing. [. . .] Because if the form is conceived of in the first place, the reality will grow up inside that. When I mean form I mean quite straightforward, structural things that I believe one should know: more or less what the length of the story will be; what the plan will be; what the time and place;

> the number of characters to be involved. [. . .] It can be altered; it can be adapted. But that should only be very deliberately done. And in that case, form, rather than being restrictive, will make for strength. It will make for the concentration, which is the absolute secret of any force of language, or feeling, or expression in creative writing. (*Weight* 14; 23)

The important point Bowen is making is that the writer must work towards concentration within a certain structure. Here she is successful, as we have seen from critical remarks about her concentration and intensity above.

One of the main differences between the forms of prose and of poetry is that poetry has line breaks which are ordained by the poet rather than by the typesetter or word processor. The exception to poetry with line breaks is the prose poem, as Noel-Tod offers with this definition. 'A prose poem is a poem without line breaks. Beyond that, both its manner and its matter resist generalisation'. He cites D.W. Harding who in his study of rhythm notes 'all the prose we ever read is chopped up into lines; we rightly pay no attention to them' and continues: 'Yet it is not uncommon for verse-like currents to eddy beneath the placid surface of a paragraph' (Noel-Tod, *Prose* xix-xx). This can be said of Bowen's prose, that sections of it are poems without line breaks. One may contrast her with Virginia Woolf, whose prose becomes increasing poetic, particularly so in *The Waves*. While Ellmann lists the prose poem among the many genres she finds blended in Bowen's work, she argues that Woolf is a finer prose-poet than Bowen, saying that 'Bowen *thinks in fiction*: her ideas are inseparable from her objects, settings, plots and characters, and from the oddities of her unnerving syntax' (Ellmann, *Shadow* x; 7). However, I would argue that it is precisely Bowen's 'unnerving syntax' – her dyslocution – which makes her a poet. Despite what she wrote to Jacques Raverat about breaking away from the 'formal railway line of sentence' (cited in Chapter 1, p.30), Woolf's poetic prose flows forward, observing syntactic rules: in her case we find '[t]he smooth gliding of

sentence after sentence' (Woolf, *Room* 75). Raverat's description of the visual artist's creative process is more akin to that of the poet than of the prose writer.

TECHNIQUES

Synthesis

R.D. Foster, like McCormack, aligns Bowen with Yeats, implicitly disposing of Glendinning's view that Bowen is the link between Woolf and Iris Murdoch. 'Like Yeats, Bowen longed for order, abstraction, classical symmetry, yet wrote most brilliantly at times of dislocation and conveyed in her best writing a sense of chaos: her style is, in itself, a subversion' (Foster, *Paddy* 103; Glendinning, *Bowen* 1). Even though she would come to subvert his style, Bowen owes something to Yeats, and it is instructive to uncover parallels and differences between the two writers.

The most striking parallel with Yeats is that Bowen's aesthetic is a synthetic one: that synthesis of the arts which Yeats was exploring in his essays around the turn of the twentieth century, particularly in 'Symbolism in Painting' (1898) and 'The Symbolism of Poetry' (1900), where he brings together his thinking on how sound, colour and form might be amalgamated.[78] Often described as the 'Sister Arts' or 'Literary Pictorialism', this is something which has been discussed over the centuries since Horace first posited 'ut pictura poesis' in *Ars Poetica*, and which was the subject of reflection by both Ruskin and Baudelaire in the nineteenth century. Karen Brown confirms Yeats's success in achieving a form of synthesis: 'When pictorialist poems are scrutinized, it becomes clear that poets such as Baudelaire, Rossetti, and WBY were indeed appropriating elements of pictorial form into their work' (Brown, *Yeats* 10).

[78] http://www.ricorso.net/rx/library/authors/classic/Yeats_WB/prose/Ideas_G-Evil/Symbolism.htm Accessed 26 March 2021

Rhythm

One striking difference between Yeats and Bowen is rhythm. In 'The Symbolism of Poetry' Yeats writes:

> The purpose of rhythm, it has always seemed to me, is to prolong the moment of contemplation, the moment when we are both asleep and awake, which is the one moment of creation, by hushing us with an alluring monotony, while it holds us waking by variety, to keep us in that state of perhaps real trance, in which the mind liberated from the pressure of the will is unfolded in symbols. http://www.ricorso.net/rx/library/authors/classic/Yeats_WB/prose/Essays_Intros/Symbolism.htm, III. Accessed 5 May 2021

'Hushing us with an alluring monotony' is completely at odds with Bowen's wish for a jerking, jarring rhythm to strike the reader's ear. Bowen does not want to lull her readers into Yeats' trance-like state, rather to keep them on the *qui vive*, so that they are alert to the complex pattern of her text and on the look-out for the 'thimbles' she may have hidden for them to hunt for. Her dyslocution is a conscious process, but she is always aware of rhythm: in a letter of 1946 to Frank Rouda, a student at Columbia University, who has asked about her style, she says:

> I write for sound, rather than for the eye; after saying the sentences aloud, under my breath, as one might test out a line of poetry. Stress and rhythm seem to me as important in prose as in poetry – at any rate, for my purposes they are as important. (Huntington, HM 52858)

An example of Bowen writing for sound comes in the closing episode of *The House in Paris* when, surrounded by the cacophony which is the Gare de Lyon, Ray contemplates inertia within its atmosphere of movement, until he realises that Leopold is expecting something to happen, something he expects Ray to bring about.

> Where are we going now? The station is sounding, resounding, full of steam caught on light and arches of dark air: a temple to the intention to go somewhere. Sustained sound in the shell of stone and steel, racket and running, impatience and purpose, make the soul stand still like a refugee, clutching all it has got, asking: 'I am where?' You could live at a station, eating at the buffet, sleeping on the benches, buying your cigarettes, going nowhere next. The tramp inside Ray's clothes wanted to lie down here, put his cheek in his rolled coat, let trains keep on crashing out to Spain, Switzerland, Italy, let Paris wash like the sea at the foot of

> the ramp. And a boy ought to sleep anywhere, like a dog. But the stolen boy is too delicate. Standing there on thin legs, he keeps his eyes on your face. (*HP* 237)

The passage is full of strong rhythms associated with railway poems, some of which are reminiscent of R.L. Stevenson's 'From a Railway Carriage' or of the irregular metres of Auden's 'Night Mail'. In Bowen's prose poem, the first four lines have occasional dactyls – 'the **| sta**tion is | **sound**ing, re | **sound**ing', '**rack**et and | **run**ning, im **| pat**ience and | **pur**pose' – which suddenly, and appropriately, halt at the spondee '**stand still**'. The rhythm then changes to the anapaest 'I am **where**?' – the stress on the third word emphasises that this phrase is a question – and then moves on to mainly trochees – '**eat**ing | **at** the | **buf**fet, | **sleep**ing | **on** the | **bench**es' – and back to dactyls for '**wash** like the | **sea** at the | **foot** of the | **ramp**'. The spondee of '**thin legs**' is effective, emphasising the delicacy of Leopold, standing on two feet, and the passage concludes with two anapaests 'keeps his **eyes** | on your **face**'. Bowen uses assonance, differing the vowel colour: 'n**ow**', 's**ou**nd'; '**ar**ches', 'd**ar**k'. She uses alliteration: '**st**ation', '**st**eam', '**st**one', '**st**eel', '**st**and **st**ill'; '**r**acket', '**r**unning', **r**efugee'; and occasional harsh consonant clusters: 'da**rk**', 'ra**ck**et', '**cr**a**sh**ing'. Her use of the gerund makes the text economical, as does her succession of phrases beginning with simple verbs: 'put', 'let'.

Other Techniques

As I indicate above, the conventional techniques which Bowen uses include alliteration, assonance, consonance and half-rhyme, as well as various metres: trochaic, dactylic and iambic. But she also uses some innovative techniques including focusing, framing and scanning. Most of her novels open with a prose poem which both scans and focuses on a landscape, as here in *The Death of the Heart.*

> That morning's ice, no more than a brittle film, had cracked and was now floating in segments. These tapped together or, parting, left channels of dark water, down which swans in slow indignation swam. The islands stood in frozen woody brown

> dusk: it was now between three and four in the afternoon. [. . .] Bronze cold of January bound the sky and the landscape; the sky was shut to the sun – but the swans, the rims of ice, the pallid withdrawn Regency terraces had an unnatural burnish, as though cold were light. (*DH* 7)

Here Bowen scans the park, moving from the ice to the islands, then up to the sky, and finally to the houses. Each time she focuses on some aspect – the movement of the ice on the dark water, replicated by the swans; then for a moment she focuses on the islands, discovering the curious sunless light with its burnished bronze effect. The Regency terraces are withdrawn: here she has zoomed out. Susan Osborn remarks on the impressionistic descriptions in this passage, pointing out the essential poetry. '[Bowen's] language dwells sensually on the scene described [. . .]. The description is heavily burdened by assonance and alliteration, the erotic "mouth music" that ties Bowen's work to that of poets like Heaney' (Osborn, 'How to Measure' 38). This passage also has rhythm and cadence, imitating the movement of the ice and the swans, while there is careful choice of vowel sounds: some are onomatopoeic, some suggest colour: as always, Bowen makes us aware of the effect light has on the scene. Later in her essay Osborn finds that there are 'two conspicuously occurring features [. . .] that most trouble [Bowen's] readers and interfere with their appreciation of her prose', that 'the irregular aspects of her prose style interrupt the easy concord between the reader and the writer', and that the 'apparently undisciplined ways that Bowen's prose sometimes draws the reader's attention away from the "inside" of sentences, the place where meaning is supposed to lie' (Osborn, 'How to Measure' 40; 46). I would suggest that this is part of the structure of Bowen's poetry, and requires work on the part of the reader, as I outline below.

The Heat of the Day opens towards the end of a fine day in early September 1942 as crowds are drawn to an open air concert in Regent's Park. The passage offers examples of focusing and scanning.

> All they had left behind was in sunshine, while this hollow which was the source of music was found to be also the source of dusk. War had made them idolize day and summer; night and autumn were enemies. And, at the start of the concert, this tarnished bosky theatre, in which no plays had been acted for some time, held a feeling of sequestration, of emptiness the music had not had time to fill. It was not completely in shadow – here and there blades of sunset crossed it, firing branches through which they travelled, and lay along ranks of chairs and faces and hands. Gnats quivered, cigarette smoke dissolved. But the light was so low, so theatrical and so yellow that it was evident it would soon be gone. The incoming tide was evening. Glass-clear darkness, in which each leaf was defined, already formed in the thicket behind the orchestra and was the other element of the stage. (*HD* 5)

Here Bowen's camera eye is initially within the theatre, and she focuses on the people who are gradually being drawn into the theatre by the sound of music. Despite their idolizing of day and summer, times when light is dominant, they are prepared to leave light behind and enter darkness for the sake of the music. She then scans the interior of the theatre which they are entering: it is tarnished, suggestive of light that has lost its lustre and which is no longer able to fill the space of the auditorium. Light tries its best to remain, even putting up a fight using blades and igniting branches before taking its seat on chairs. We are given a sense of something subliminal with the quivering gnats, with the dissolving cigarette smoke, with the anticipation that the light will finally change, swept away on a tide of darkness. We are reminded of the experience of Persephone on her way to the Underworld, and Bowen's final sentence in this passage – 'glass-clear darkness [. . .] was the other element of the stage' is an overture to a novel in which the three principal protagonists each experience their own hell. [See Chapter 2, pp.76-77 where I discuss Bowen's use of light and allusion to the infernal in this novel, particularly during and after the restaurant scene.] This passage has almost no rhythm of any sort apart from in these two anapaestic phrases: 'each **leaf** | was de**fined** |' and 'the **thick** | et be**hind** |'. But apart from these and sporadic iambic feet, there is not any notable metre or rhythm. That said, the two spondees of '**glass-clear** | **darkness**' temporarily halt the flow.

In the opening paragraph of *A World of Love* Bowen selects her subject, framing it and lighting it.

> The sun rose on a landscape still pale with the heat of the day before. There was no haze, but a sort of coppery burnish out of the air lit on flowing fields, rocks, the face of the one house and the cliff of limestone overhanging the river. The river gorge cut deep through the uplands. The light at this hour, so unfamiliar, brought into being a new world – painted, expectant, empty, intense. The month was June, of a summer almost unknown; for this was a country accustomed to late wakenings, to daybreaks humid and overcast. At all times open and great with distance, the land this morning seemed to enlarge again, throwing the mountains back almost out of view in the south of Ireland's amazement at being cloudless. (*WL* 9)

She begins to scan this extensive landscape as a director might use Cinemascope, then focuses on first one, then another feature. She pauses to allow the viewer to accustom themselves to the scene, to relish the light. Finally she zooms in on the enlarging mountains. There is an example of focusing in the paragraph which follows. 'Out in front of the house, on a rise of rough grass, somewhat surprisingly stood an obelisk; which, now outlined by the risen sun, cast towards Montefort its long shadow' (*WL* 9). Our eye is drawn across the grass, to focus on the obelisk, which we realise is itself focusing on the house. This prepares us for the central role that the house and its inhabitants, dead and alive, will play in this novel.

Focusing on its own occurs in *A World of Love* when Jane returns to the drawing-room at Lady Latterly's the day after the dinner-party, and the narrator observes that '[p]yramidal the flowers were upon the piano'. Bowen's explanation for ordering the words in this phrase, as she explains in an interview with Walter Allen, is that the words are ordered 'in the way they would have struck the beholding eye'. The viewer would first have noticed the shape formed by the flowers, then that they were flowers, and finally that they were displayed on the piano. (*WL* 117; Weight 28) There is another brief moment of focusing towards the end of *Friends and Relations* when Laurel is trying on summer dresses, while Edward is watching, his 'eyes on the pink flounce'. 'To his reflection stole

her long tender look that her looking-glass only received and perhaps recorded' (*FR* 131). Edward's reflection in the looking-glass, as he watches Laurel in the real world, is the focus of this sentence, and Bowen positions it first, followed by Laurel's response to the mirror-world image, unseen by Edward, but noted by the looking-glass itself. In the extract from 'Mysterious Kôr' discussed in Chapter 2, pp. 74-76, Hermione Lee is convinced by the dyslocution in the second half of this sentence, commenting that this expresses the oddness and dislocation of the wartime experience. 'It was late, but not yet midnight; now the buses had stopped the polished roads and streets in this region sent for minutes together a ghostly unbroken reflection up'. By ending her sentence on 'up', Bowen is making the reader travel with the light from its source into the air. (*Collected* 728; Lee, *Bowen* 159)

Many of Bowen's tableaux discussed in Chapter 2, p. 50, are framed. In her later novels she creates series of cinematic frames. As we saw above in Chapter 3 (p.94), the final image from the Hythe weekend is a frame which Karen and Max enter. Karen's return journey to London is a series of frames:

> She drove to the station along tree-planted roads of mansion villas, alight early, for this time of year, because of the thick dusk. | Tips of shrubs glittered under the big windows. | Karen saw quick pictures, upstairs and down: a girl parting her hair in a cool hurry; | a family at a Sunday supper gathered round silver dishes; | four people at bridge under a lamp. | A car pulled up at a kerb and couple in evening dress went eagerly in at a gate: you could see how occupied you could be without love. (*HP* 167)

In *Eva Trout*, the scene at the Chateau de Fontainebleau with Eva and Dr Bonnard is an example of a single frame in which the action takes place: the camera's focus does not move.

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

When Henry and Eva return after their idyllic, illusory day by the 'stained, sham castle', whose façade has an 'air of having nothing behind it', and which appears like 'a propped-up canvas', the journey is another example of successive cinematic frames.

> The remaining miles to the vicarage began to be demolished silently, evenly; and as evenly, time demolished itself. | The landscape insidiously melted into a known one; | names of signposts, |inn signs, |sayings on notice-boards began to talk a familiar language. |A green pond, | a rustily locked smithy, | the bus stop at the mouth of the turn to Larkins, | a coppice of sycamore | and a mount with no history | and away back over the fields the stump of a building were less landmarks than re-tellers of an obsessive story. Back again one was coming, into the web. The innocent theatricality of evening made all this at once more tender and more menacing. (*ET* 272; 270; 271; 283-284)

LANGUAGE

In *Life for Life's Sake: A Book of Reminiscences*, the Imagist Richard Aldington writes: 'We wanted clear outlines, directness, concision, unhackneyed rhythms' (Aldington, *Imagist* 40). Both concision and unhackneyed rhythms are terms we can apply to Bowen's writing; she was certainly aiming for a clear outline, telling the reader in 'Advice' that 'our ideal therefore, must be a language that is clear as glass' (*Afterthought* 213). Her choice of word may sometimes strike the reader as unusual or discordant, but for her it is always *le mot juste*. Corcoran quotes from 'Advice': '[w]hen we write we endeavour to be exact, but also we must be sensitive, imaginative as to words themselves – for they are there not merely to serve our purpose: they are charged with destinies of their own, haunted by diverse associations' (*Afterthought* 212). Here again we get the sense that, for Bowen, language is capable of selecting itself. Corcoran comments on this passage:

> This sounds much more like a lyric poet's than a prose writer's intense sensitivity to the semantic, acoustic and etymological interconnections between words, to the autonomy of their dealings with one another, and to the way one might feel possessed or acted upon by them, passive before their suasions and invitations. (Corcoran, *Enforced* 4)

Indeed, although Bowen is primarily a visual writer, the sound of words is also important to her as we know from her letter to Rouda: she uses the vocal colour and the percussion of consonants in her writing. While Bowen herself may test her prose for sound orally, even an attentive reader is unlikely to experience it immediately as oral sound, but will translate in a two-step process, seeing the words and only then, if ever, imagining their sound.

As well as her debt to her predecessor Yeats, there is a connection to her younger compatriot Beckett. Sinéad Mooney points to two similarities, saying that:

> [T]he twin charges levelled at Bowen by dislikers of her characteristic style – intractable opacity and a wilful disordering of English syntax – are virtual signatures of the kind of writing we know as 'Beckettian', but they attract in Beckett scholarship none of the opprobrium with which they are associated in studies of Bowen (Mooney, 'Unstable Compounds' 14).

Something which Bowen and Beckett share is a tendency to use Gallicisms. As Catherine Belsey explains, the spectrum of the meaning of words varies between languages, so that the meaning of a word in one language may fall between two words in a second language and no amount of consultation of the dictionary or thesaurus will provide an exact translation. Belsey gives several examples between English and French and between English and Welsh in her section on 'Post-Saussurean Linguistics'. (Belsey, *Critical* 37-47) Individuals familiar with two or more languages and cultures are liable to find *le mot juste*, not necessarily in the language currently being used, but in another. Thus the Red Queen in *Through the Looking-Glass* advises Alice to: 'Speak in French when you can'n't [sic] think of the English for a thing!' (Carroll, *Looking-Glass* 41). Between English and French this leads to Gallicisms. Beckett's use is well-documented, occurring increasingly as he moves towards writing predominantly in French, but that of Bowen is rarely remarked on, even though her use of French constructions and words at times contributes to what is perceived as fractured syntax. Discussing *Watt* (the last of Beckett's novels to be written in English), Mooney describes it as 'a novel obsessed with the intimate workings

and failures of language [. . .] the text, with its pervasive Gallicisms, is testament to a linguistic identity under severe pressure' (Mooney, 'Unstable Compounds' 25). At the beginning of the novel, a character sitting on a bench excuses himself for not getting up, saying 'I do not rise, not having the force' (Beckett, *Watt* 5). The equivalent French would be: 'Je ne me lève pas, n'ayant pas la force'. The order of Beckett's English words is the same as the French: a more exact translation would be 'I won't get up, I haven't got the strength'. Here Beckett is importing the French word 'force' whose English equivalent is 'strength.' The meanings of the two words in English are close enough not to cause confusion, but on the following page Watt says to his companions that he will 'favour [them] with the primeur' of a letter (Beckett, *Watt* 6). 'Primeur' is often attributed to early vegetables or young wine, but here might be translated here as 'first sight'. Bowen's use of Gallicisms is notable as early as *The House in Paris*. Bowen is alluding to Gallicisms when Henrietta remarks on 'Miss Fisher's peculiar idiom, which made [her] giddy. Often when she spoke she seemed to be translating, and translating rustily. No phrase she used was what anyone could quite mean' (*HP* 19). When Henrietta visits Mme Fisher in her bedroom 'Mme Fisher's unmoved regard was a battery', and later Henrietta feels 'Mme Fisher once more turning full upon her the battery of her look' (*HP* 47; 49). By using the words 'regard' and 'battery', which exist in both languages, but which have a more formal feeling in English than in French, Bowen has given Mme Fisher's look an extra aggression, and despite it being 'unmoved', either in the sense of being motionless or of being unresponsive, that 'regard' is able to assail Henrietta with its 'battery' (or collection of artillery). During Henrietta's visit, Mme Fisher remarks that Naomi 'has much to support' (*HP* 49). Here Bowen is using 'support' in the French sense of 'to bear, endure, put up with' rather than its primary English sense of 'to hold' or 'prop up'. When Max describes Naomi when he proposes to her, he says there is 'too much force in a figure of

stone pity' (*HP* 162). 'Strength' would be a more usual word than 'force' in English, which contains more aggression in English than in French. In *Eva Trout* Eva observes that Constantine is swallowing pills and asks: 'Are you deteriorating?' (*ET* 116) This is another Gallicism: the equivalent French would be: 'Vous vous détériorez?', meaning 'Is your health getting worse?'

After *Watt*, Beckett wrote predominately in French. James Knowlson tells us that writing in French was more exciting for him and that the shift may have been an important way of escaping from the influence of Joyce. 'Using French also enabled him to "cut away the excess, to strip away the colour"' (Knowlson, *Damned* 357). Mooney cites Corcoran who considers that *Eva Trout* is the result of a 'process of intense writerly scruple [like] the disciplines of abstinence which characterise the later prose of Samuel Beckett' (Mooney, 'Unstable Compounds' 28). Bowen may have concurred with Beckett that French is a better language of expression and this may lie behind Eva's entrusting Jeremy to the French speech therapists, Dr and Mme Bonnard, after 'inaudible years' during which '[h]armony had been broken in upon only by the tussles with ear-and-speech men, or women, to whom she faithfully took him'. '[A]s the month of May went on [Jeremy's] lips began to formulate, or attempt to formulate, French words, and he started to accord to the lips of speakers, other than Eva, a level, exacting, scientific attention denied formerly' (*ET* 221; 254).[79]

Bowen is sometimes castigated for her use of double negatives, something which is generally frowned on in English grammar. The grammarian H.W. Fowler tells us that '[g]enerally speaking, English grammar today regards two negatives as cancelling each other and producing an affirmation', with which Ernest Gowers concurs, giving the mathematical example of $-(-x) = x$ (Fowler, *Dictionary* 384; Gowers, *Complete*178).

[79] Maud Ellmann notes: 'By learning to speak French Jeremy follows the example of an Anglo-Irish writer very different from Bowen, Samuel Beckett, who extricated himself from both sides of his hyphenated nationality by recreating his identity in French'. (Ellmann, *Shadow* 219)

However language is not mathematics, nor is it an exact science. Bowen's most often quoted double negative 'Nothing can happen nowhere' does not have the same meaning as 'Anything can happen anywhere', or 'Something can happen somewhere' (*Orion* 22). It means that nothing can happen in a space that is null and void. Her awareness of the importance of 'nowhere' and 'nothing' may stem from her reading of *Through the Looking-Glass* in which the White King congratulates Alice on her ability to 'see nobody on the road', something confirmed by the Messenger who replies 'Nobody' when the King asks him who he passed on the road (Carroll, *Looking-Glass* 127-131). This negativity or nihilism is another thing shared with Beckett: Mooney tells us that:

> With its tortuous double negatives and inversions, its velleities of nuanced deadliness, [Bowen's syntax] appears to do subtle battle with a devouring nothingness which resists expression: the struggle to resist and contend linguistically with an underlying void makes its way into the grain of Bowen's language, as it does Beckett's. (Mooney, 'Unstable Compounds' 16)

THE READER NEEDS TO PLAY A PART

The reader must be involved in the holistic process of writing: he is the final stage on that journey of amazement which the writer wishes to share. Reading prose from a page is a sequential affair: in Western European languages one begins on the left-hand side and works along to the right, then begins again at the left, and so on. With the exception of the prose poem, reading poetry is not so definite. For a start lines tend to be shorter, and one is more likely to return to an earlier line in order to understand a subsequent one, to zig zag around. One's eye may be drawn to a phrase in the middle of the page. It is more analogous to studying a piece of visual art: one looks at the whole, but immediately one's eye will be drawn to some feature or other. Bowen gives a good example of this in 'The Art of Bergotte' when she describes the visit of Proust's writer to the Trocadéro to see Vermeer's painting *View of Delft*. Bergotte is familiar with this painting, but on this occasion his attention is drawn to a feature he has not noticed before.

Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675). *View of Delft*. Mauritzhuis, The Hague, 92
https://www.mauritshuis.nl/en/our-collection/artworks/92-view-of-delft/

> At last he came to the Vermeer which he had imagined he knew by heart, which he remembered as more striking, more different than anything else he knew. And so it was. This time, thanks to the critic, he remarked for the first time some small blue figures. There, too, more precious than ever in substance, was the tiny patch of yellow wall. (*Pictures* 108)

Critics are uncertain as to which yellow patch is the one Proust describes: there are several which suggest themselves. But it is easy to see why Bergotte would have noticed the small blue figures in the foreground. It is the viewer's spontaneous response at the time of viewing that determines which feature should be first to catch the eye: the artist can only suggest or offer images or ideas in his painting, while the position in which it is hung and the way it is lit are certain to attract the eye to aspects. It is not always easy to read Bowen's text sequentially, step by step: because of the dyslocution the reader may not understand immediately what is before them, and may have sometimes to double back in a sentence to return to certain phrases in order to consider them first on their own, and then in the context of the rest of the text. Susan Osborn describes this process.

> [W]e often have the sense when reading [Bowen's] work of seeing or hearing something that is not always manifestly there, something oscillating between the

> formed and the perceived that cannot always be accounted for by reason or an appeal to the logical coherence of a theory. [. . .] Despite this conspicuous and disconcerting quality, in the past, Bowen's stories have most often been read thematically. (Osborn, 'Reconsidering' 187-188)

Reading Bowen often requires more effort, and a different, not necessarily logical, order of examination. Thus Bowen makes a contract with the reader of her prose similar to that between a poet or a visual artist and their audience. Bowen is aware of this: in 'The Poetic Element in Fiction' she tells us that the breakthrough in [style] was 'at the cost of a demand for more intuition and more understanding in the reader', while in 'Out of a Book' she writes: '[T]he process of reading is reciprocal; the book is no more than a formula, to be furnished out with images out of the reader's mind' (*Listening* 160-161; *Impressions* 267).

> In so far as the writer has known more than he says, the reader will in his turn draw from the pages more than is there in print. More will appear to him to exist, more will appear to him to be going on that has been described or recounted. One assumes, of course, that the reader brings to the novel a certain capacity of his own. (*Afterthought* 217)

In one sense, the reader must look outside the frame, as Boccioni suggests, or look for the alternative picture as Zeki suggests in the case of Dalí (Boccioni, 'Exhibitors' 12; Zeki, 'Neural' 4). The reader becomes the novelist's studio assistant or, as Koestler suggests, an accomplice, working on behalf of the author to bring the work alive. Other critics draw attention to this two-way relationship. Shannon Wells-Lassagne emphasises the importance of the reader. 'I would argue that the *reader* is in fact the recurrent image of the detective in Bowen's novels, and must constantly be reading actively for clues as to the deeper meaning of her work' (Wells-Lassagne, 'She-ward' 110). Lis Christensen writes:

> Bowen's device-laden style [. . .] can also be seen as a source of her strength, in that it provokes readers to seek behind the elaborate expressions of the narrative persona to form their own version of the story, perhaps even its 'poetic truth', to quote a favourite term of Bowen's. [. . .] So we must ultimately fall back on our own judgment and our own imagination; Bowen's fiction does not invite passive reading. (Christensen, *Bowen* 32-33)

BOWEN'S CHOICE OF SUBJECT

The examples above of Bowen's poetic texts include her use of rhythm and her choice of place and the effects of light as subjects. Her subject matter also includes the themes of departure, portraiture, and the state of mind of individual characters. It rarely depicts interaction between characters. Below I give further examples of these different categories.

Light

I have lightly edited the following two passages, introducing line breaks, to demonstrate how tightly Bowen's prose is constructed and how close it comes to poetry: few words are superfluous.[80] The first is calm: Bowen's choice of words makes light reflective and the passage itself is reflective, while in the second light changes with the time of day.

> In fact it is about five o'clock in an evening that the first hour of spring strikes – autumn arrives in the early morning, but spring at the close of a winter day. The air, about to darken, quickens, and is run through with mysterious white light; the curtain of darkness is suspended, as though for some unprecedented event. (*DH* 123)

> About five o'clock in an evening
> the first hour of spring strikes.
> Autumn arrives in the early morning,
> spring at the close of a winter day.
> The air, about to darken, quickens,
> run through with mysterious white light;
> the curtain of darkness suspended,
> as though for some unprecedented event. (*DH* 123)

This passage from *The Death of the Heart* is gentle, with a sense of wonder and liminality, and there is little, if any, dyslocution. There are few harsh consonant clusters and the vowel colour tends towards less brilliant sounds. In *The Little Girls* there are several passages which depend on light, including this one in the opening chapter which opens with a declamation, and proceeds to describe various lighting states.

> 'We're right in our own light.'

[80] In *The Old Ways* Robert Macfarlane tells us how the poet Robert Frost demonstrated to Edward Thomas that his prose was poetry. '[Frost tells Thomas that he is] a poet behind the disguise of prose. [Frost] takes lines from one of Thomas's travelogues and rearranges them in verse, so that Thomas can see what he's been doing all along without knowing it' (Macfarlane, *The Old Ways* 342).

> They were. Their two tall forms, backs to the entrance, not only overshadowed the table, but further darkened the cave – blocking away from it outdoor daylight which, down here, was subdued at the best of times. Only round noon did sun strike the circular pit's floor. It was now within an hour of sunset – unpent, brilliant after the rainstorm, long rays lay over the garden overhead, making wetness glitter, setting afire September dahlias and roses. Down here, however, it was some other hour – peculiar, perhaps no hour at all. (*LG* 10)

> 'We're right in our own light.'
> Their two tall forms, backs to the entrance,
> overshadowed the table, further darkened the cave,
> blocking away from it outdoor daylight which,
> down here, was subdued at the best of times.
> Only round noon did sun
> strike the circular pit's floor.
>
> Now within an hour of sunset –
> unpent, brilliant after the rainstorm,
> long rays lay over the garden overhead
> making wetness glitter,
> setting afire September dahlias and roses.
>
> Down here it was some other hour –
> peculiar, perhaps no hour at all. (*LG* 10)

This 'poem' has full internal rhyme – right, light; ray, lay – and internal half-rhyme, relating to light – darken, block, strike.

Poems about departure

As well as its similarities to the 1909 Futurist Manifesto (described in Chapter 4, pp. 129-130) Emmeline's experience as she drives to her death in *To the North* is a prose poem.

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

The ‘immense idea of departure’ is contained in the number of different ways of travelling Bowen enumerates in the first three lines: her use of the gerund five times in the first sentence suggests the build-up of energy which will launch the ‘long arrow’ at the end of the sentence. The force contained within that sentence propels Emmeline, breaking her free from the fetters of love. She becomes almost ecstatic. Emmeline moves higher and higher away from the earth and the gerunds return as love drops away. Bowen has been giving us clues to this outcome throughout the novel. Emmeline is referred to at least twenty-two times as ‘angel’ or ‘angelic’ (Chapter 2, p. 67) and she also has an association with the moon: it would be too fanciful to say she is going to heaven – Bowen certainly intends no Christian significance – but Emmeline is being released in order to leave this world and her troubles behind.

As well as its similarities to Marinetti’s manifesto discussed in Chapter 4, this passage has similarities with Goethe’s 1774 poem ‘An Schwager Kronos’, which with its forward impetus traces the journey of the poet to Hades, driven by Kronos, or Time.[81] He too feels exultation on this journey.

> Trunken vom letzten Strahl
> Reiss mich, ein Feuermeer
> Mir im schäumenden Aug
> Mich geblendeten, taumelnden
> in de Hölle nachtiliches Thor.[82]

Bowen may have known this poem from its setting by Schubert in which, by his constant key changes, the composer emphasises the different colours suggested by Goethe’s original poem.[83] The pianist and lieder specialist Graham Johnson says in his notes for Hyperion Records:

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[81] Goethe uses the name Kronos (father of Zeus) rather than Chronos, the classical personification of Time.
[82] Blind in the sunset/drunk with its glory/dazed with billowy fire/lost in utter bewilderment/ hurl me forth into Hades' dark night.
[83] In *The House in Paris* Bowen associates Schubert with death when she writes: ‘Up there in the drawing-room Aunt Violet began playing Schubert: notes came stepping light on to the moment in which Karen realized she was going to die’ (*HP* 80).

> Nicholas Boyle in his magisterial *Goethe: The poet and the age* terms it 'an exuberant, semi-articulate free-verse'. Boyle continues: 'The poem likens [Goethe's] life to a coach journey, in rhythms now labouring and clotted for the time of difficulty, now smooth and sovereign as it reaches the heights, now rattling rapidly down to a conclusion: let the end be quick and ecstatic, this young Achilles exclaims, a fiery consummation that compels the applause of a pagan underworld.' https://www.hyperion-records.co.uk/dw.asp?dc=W1943_GBAJY9402421 Accessed 15 March 2021

Another 'poem' on the theme of departure is found towards the end of Bowen's previous novel, *Friends and Relations*: this is an example of a successful synthesis of word and image on the lines that Yeats was positing. On the one hand the two stanzas form an extremely complicated essay in visual perspective and on the other they are profoundly poetic. Lewis is contemplating the fact that Edward and Janet appear to have eloped (*FR* 147). The following discussion draws on a paper in which I examine these two paragraphs from a visual perspective in '"I do write, I think, from the eye": Verbal Painting in Elizabeth Bowen's *Friends and Relations*'. https://core.ac.uk/reader/328769710

> Watching a ship draw out you are aboard a moment, seeing with those eyes: eyes that you can no longer perceive. You see the shore recessive, withdrawing itself from you; the familiar town; the docks with yourself standing; figures – but later (where was the crowd?) all gone. The high harbour crane is dwarfed by spires behind; there are buildings very distinct, paste-board houses: you can still count the windows. Indifferently, you perceive some unknown relation, the hill right over the church – lovely, the light church backed by the dark hill: you often went in without looking up. The opera house and the station are brothers, with twin arcades. The steep avenue to the observatory you never mounted – now the whole town is ruled by that grave bubble. The climbing terraces are in order, lending each other grace. You look – as this all retreats – with regret but without desire. The figures in trouble are inconceivable, gone. Your tear perhaps is for some fine house with a portico, unknown, always to be unknown.
>
> — So you looked back with those aboard, for a moment only. So they depart; traitors to you, with you, in the senses. The ship, those eyes, are for you ashore now inconceivable, gone. Under the very high crane a winch creaks, clocks strike from the dwarfed spires behind. The church hides the hill, terrace blocks out terrace. The crowd that you are breaks up, looks out no longer, recognises futility. You all stand apart but still return to the town two and three abreast in a kind of familiarity. There is some awkward gesture, a word or two between strangers, a handkerchief put away. But now, you all part; the ship is forgotten. So you relinquish the travellers, the ship vanishes. That last exchange, that identity of a moment, has taken everything; you have lost even regret. The close town receives you in its confusion. (*FR* 147)

On a visual level, these two paragraphs are a diptych and may be compared with the Futurist painter Boccioni's 1911 triptych on the theme of departure, *Stati d'Animi* (*States of Mind*).[84] In order to include the fourth dimension – a sense of movement – in his paintings, Boccioni uses 'force-lines'. 'The invention of force-lines as a means of conveying a sense of the inner dynamism or rhythm of objects can be [seen as an] attempt [. . .] to interpret ascending, descending, and horizontal lines as universal symbols of human emotions' (Poggi, *In Defiance* 171-172).

> Boccioni describes 'The Farewells', the first painting in his triptych.
>
> In the midst of the confusion of departure, the mingled concrete and abstract sensations are translated into *force-lines* [. . .] mark the undulating lines made up of the combination of figures and objects. The prominent elements, such as the number of the engine, its profile showing in the upper part of the picture, its wind-cutting fore-part in the centre, symbolic of parting, indicate the features of the scene that remain indelibly impressed upon the mind.

Umberto Boccioni (1882-1916). *States of Mind: The Farewells*, 1911. Museum of Modern Art, New York. https://www.moma.org/collection/works/78648

In 'Those who Go', the second painting:

> Their state of mind is represented by oblique lines on the left. The colour indicates the sensation of loneliness, anguish and dazed confusion, which is further illustrated by the faces carried away by the smoke and the violence of speed. One

[84] Keri Walsh also draws on Boccioni's triptych to illustrate Bowen's use of Futurism in two other novels, *To the North* and *The House in Paris*. (Walsh, 'Futurist' 2017)

> may also distinguish mangled telegraph posts and fragments of the landscape through which the train has passed.

Umberto Boccioni (1882-1916). *States of Mind: Those Who Go*, 1911 Museum of Modern Art, New York. https://www.moma.org/collection/works/37284

Finally, 'Those Who Stay':

> The perpendicular lines indicate their depressed condition and their infinite sadness dragging everything down towards the earth. The mathematically spiritualised silhouettes render the distressing melancholy of the soul of those that are left behind. (Boccioni, 'Exhibitors' 20)

Umberto Boccioni (1882-1916). *States of Mind: Those Who Stay*, 1911. Museum of Modern Art, New York. https://www.moma.org/collection/works/78660

In her essay 'Notes on Writing a Novel', Bowen asks, '[w]here is the camera-eye to be located?'; in each of her two paragraphs she has allocated it to 'you', using it in

several different modes as singular, plural, indefinite, possessive and reflexive pronoun (*Orion* 24). Both of Bowen's images are remarkable for the way in which, by swivelling the perspective of 'you' between ship and shore, Bowen is able to create multiple force-lines in a way similar to Boccioni. Her equivalent to 'The Farewells' and 'Those Who Go' starts with the force-line from the camera eye on the shore looking towards the ship; then it immediately reverses and is now on the ship looking to the land. Next the line of vision becomes two-way; the camera eye is in two places at once. It not only sees through the eyes on the ship, but at the same time has a view point from the shore, from where it is no longer able to perceive those eyes on the ship. Then, from the ship, it scans the town, creating force-lines between itself and various structures: the municipal buildings, the pasteboard houses laid out like playing cards. Now the camera eye on the ship is a fixed point: it is the town which is moving, retreating and diminishing. And because the presumed elopers ('the figures in trouble') are no longer visible *from* the camera eye which is on the ship looking towards the shore – they are 'inconceivable, gone' – they must be presumed to have been at one time on shore, but to have disappeared, to have dissipated.

At the joining of the two images, Bowen moves from the present to the past tense: 'So you looked back with those on board, for a moment only'. Bowen's use of the past tense here is very important, having the effect of separating the two images: in the French translation the translator has used the present tense, and the effect of two separate images is lost – they simply run together. In Bowen's second picture of the diptych, equivalent to 'Those who Stay' the text returns to the present tense: the narrator confirms that the first part of the episode has closed. The force-lines have changed completely. The camera eye is now located at ground level in the docks, and buildings which were visible before are no longer seen. Whereas the church spires previously dwarfed the crane, now the crane dwarfs the spires; the church which was backed by the dark hill now obliterates it; the

terraced houses which gracefully climbed up the hillsides now block each other out, almost like a deck of cards closing up. The opera house, railway station and observatory have disappeared. The town is then seen from a completely different perspective, and the multiple 'you' penetrates it, breaking into its component parts, its individual 'yous,' effectively creating a Cubist image, as they dissipate into the 'close town' at the end of the second half of the diptych.

Portraits

Some of Bowen's finest images from any of her novels are the portraits of Constantine in *Eva Trout*. This is the first, when Iseult meets him to discuss Eva's wish to leave Larkins.

> The blond, massaged-looking flesh of Constantine's face seemed, like alabaster or indeed plastic, not quite opaque, having a pinkish underglow. It padded the bone-structure beneath it evenly – nowhere were there prominences or hollows or sags or ridges. The features, though cast in a shallow mould and severally unremarkable, almost anonymous, all the same were curiously distinct. What was strangest about them was, their relation to one another was for the greater part of the time unchanging: this was the least mobile face one might ever have seen. Now and then some few creases came into being, to supply their owner with such degree of expression as at that particular moment he chose to grant himself – or occasionally (though this was rarer) there was a calculated levitation of the eyebrows. Anything of that sort was, though, almost instantly wiped away.
>
> Colour entered the picture, though used sparingly. Lips, for instance, were the naive fawn-pink of lips in a tinted drawing. Less perceptibly pencilled-in were the eyebrows, lashes, the exhausted pencil employed being gold-red. And the same tone reappeared in the hair; well nourished, though back from the forehead. And the eyes? These too were in the convention: a water-colourist's grey-blue. If they glinted beneath their lids, this appeared phenomenal. They were to see with, chiefly. (*ET* 41)

Bowen builds this three-dimensional image, starting – as a sculptor using modelling clay would – with the raw material, and going on to give it shape. The flesh 'pads' the bone structure; the features are 'cast' in a 'mould'. Unwanted material can be 'wiped away'. The head remains immobile, just as a sculpture or clay model would when being worked on. In the second stanza she begins to embellish it. Colour is 'tinted'; features are lightly

'pencilled-in' and she chooses to use the same colour for the hair as for the eyebrows and eyelashes. The eyes themselves are 'to see with', giving no sense of two-way

Salvador Dalí (1904-1989). *Portrait of my Father*, 1925.
Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona. 068839-000
https://www.museunacional.cat/en/colleccio/portrait-my-father/salvador-dali/068839-000

communication: the whole is static and appears impassive. It has similarities with this two-dimensional portrait of his father by Salvador Dalí. The skin is very smooth, particularly the brow and pate, and the hands, and the body is in a state of stasis. The eyes are alert but we do not learn what the sitter is thinking: it is as though he were holding his breath.

The State of Mind of a Character

Bowen uses her dyslocution to convey the state of mind of a character. This cemetery scene is a prose poem full of apprehensive undercurrents, reflecting Sydney's confused state of mind after she has declined Milton's proposal of marriage.

> Gashes of over-charged daylight pressed in through the cypresses on to the graves: a hard light bestowing no grace and exacting each detail. In the shade of the pillared vaults round the walls what already seemed the dusk of evening had begun to thicken, but the rank and file of small crosses staggered arms wide in the arraignment of sunshine. In spite of the brooding repose of the trees a hundred little shrill draughts came between them, and spurting across the graves made the decorations beloved of Cordelia creak and glitter. A wreath of black tin pansies

> swung from the arm of a cross with a clatter of petals, trailing colourless ribbons; a beaded garland had slipped down slantwise across the foot of a grave. Candles for the peculiar glory of the lately dead had been stuck in the unhealed earth: here and there a flame in a glass shade writhed, opaque in the sunshine. Above all this uneasy rustle of remembrance, white angels poised forward to admonish. (*TH* 86)

Throughout this passage light is variable. It begins violently ('gashes') and becomes 'hard', then disappears and loses luminosity (dusk has 'begun to thicken') while the sunshine is accusatory. The graveyard is not a tranquil place – there are shrill draughts which spurt, the pansies clatter rather than scatter, earth is unhealed. There is a small regiment of crosses which stagger, rather than shoulder, arms. And Sydney – who is allowed 'no grace' – feels she is being admonished by angels who are white, and therefore more pure than she is. Bowen begins with three dactyls: '**ga**shes of | **o**ver-charged | **day**light'. The spondee of '**hard light**' with its strong consonants prepares us for another spondee '**no grace**'. She goes back to dactyls – '**sta**ggered arms | **wide**'; 'In | **spite** of the | **brood**ing re | **pose** of the | **trees'; 'arms** of a | **cross** with a | **clat**ter of **pet |** als'; 'the | **foot** of a | **grave**'.

This passage has expressed Sydney's state of mind through the place and its atmosphere. In a second example of a state of mind, from the opening chapter of *The Heat of the Day*, Bowen concentrates on the physical responses of Harrison himself, using dyslocution to convey Harrison's turbulent emotions.

> New, only he knew how new, to emotional thought, he now saw at this first of his lapses, the whole of its danger – it made you *act* the thinker. He could, now, do no better than travesty, repeat in order to judge exactly how much it showed, his originally unconscious trick of the hands; he recalled this trick in his father, not before in himself – but it must have been waiting for him. Yes, he had recourse to it, fallen to it, this evening out of some unprecedented need for emphasis in the body. Yes, he had been forced to it by the course of what in the strict sense had not *been* thought at all. The futility of the heated inner speed, the alternate racing to nowhere and coming to dead stops, made him guy himself. Never yet had he not got *somewhere*. By casting about – but then hitherto this had always been done calmly – he had never yet not come on a policy which both satisfied him and in the end worked. There never had yet not been a way through, a way round or, in default of all else, a way out. But in this case, he was thinking about a woman. (*HD* 12)

As well as dyslocution, we find repetition, internal rhyme and half-rhyme, even if they are spread out: 'n**ew**', 'kn**ew**', 'h**ow**', 'n**ow**' and a number of 'nots'; 'rec**all**', 'f**all**en', 'at **all**', '**al**ways', 'def**aul**t', '**all** else'. 'Yes, he had rec**ourse**'/'Yes, he had been f**orce**d to it by the **course**'; '[n]ever yet had he not'/'he had never yet not'/'never had yet not'/. Rhythmically, the passage begins with an irregular dactylic pentameter '**New**, only | **he** knew how | **new**, to e | **mot**ional | **thought**', soon followed by two dactyls 'the | **first** of his | **laps**es, the | **whole** of its | **dan**ger'. There are two dactyls which echo each other: '**trick** of the | **hands** [. . .] this | **trick** in his | **fa**ther'. Dawn Potter writes of this passage:

> [Bowen] may not be writing in lines and stanzas, but undoubtedly she is allowing word choice, syntax, and punctuation to unreel the complexities of her characters and control her dramatic arc. Immediately [. . .] Bowen tosses her reader to the language lions. "New, only he knew how new"? With a sentence opener like that, how does she expect me to concentrate on Harrison? The repetitions are so harsh, the comma so precisely placed, that the diction feels almost comic – except that, somehow, it isn't funny at all. (Potter, 'Rereading' 14)

An Envoi

The following 'poem' is not descriptive, but contemplative, coming at the end of *The Little Girls* as Clare reflects what has underpinned the enduring relationship between the three women. Again I have lightly edited it.

> We were entrusted to one another, in the days which mattered, Clare thought. Entrusted to one another by chance, not choice. Chance, and its agents time and place. Chance is better than choice; it is more lordly. In its carelessness it is more lordly. Chance is God, choice is man. You – she thought, looking at the bed – chanced, not chose, to want us again. (*LG* 236)

> We were entrusted to one another,
> in the days which mattered, Clare thought.
> Entrusted to one another by chance, not choice.
> Chance, and its agents time and place.
>
> Chance is better than choice; it is more lordly.
> In its carelessness it is more lordly.
> Chance is God, choice is man.
> You chanced, not chose, to want us again.

Indeed, if we take this ‘poem’ out of its context and apply it to Bowen herself, it could be seen as Bowen describing her own enduring relationship with writing: how she arrives at her images by chance, rather than choice.

‘Poems’, similar to these examples, occur throughout Bowen’s oeuvre. While her prose technique may evolve, her inspiration does not: it is constantly welling up from deep in her subconscious. At times the rhythm of her work suggests line breaks, at others not. The examples amply demonstrate Bowen’s strengths as a poet, despite her protestations that she was not one. Her work may be considered by some to be ekphrastic, but I would argue that it does not constitute ekphrasis, since the image and the verbal are bound up together, occurring simultaneously: the word does not respond to the image, nor the image to the word. Her art is a synthetic one, and these ‘poems’ are examples of her individual and peculiar aesthetic. Bowen’s work goes beyond ekphrasis, becoming synthetic in the way Yeats was seeking to achieve.

CONCLUSION

In his 1964 review of *The Little Girls* Anthony Burgess writes: 'When Elizabeth Bowen's name is mentioned, other women novelists are mentioned too – often ineptly. [. . .] To fit Miss Bowen into a group is one thing, to find her origins quite another' (Burgess, 'Treasures and Fetters' 254). Even now, nearly fifty years since her death, critics, anxious to fit her in to a group, continue to search for her origins. The main body of criticism is still found within the fields of psychology and relationships drawing on the social and sexual lives of both her characters and Bowen herself, something which she would almost certainly have found distasteful. She is most often placed as an Irish writer of the novel of manners, be it comedy or tragedy, or of the uncanny. There are few explorations of her use of place or the visual arts, or of what I term her poetry. Her plea and politely-phrased complaint in *Pictures and Conversations* is still largely ignored.

> Few people questioning me about my novels, or my short stories, show curiosity as to the places in them. Thesis-writers, interviewers or individuals I encounter at parties all but all stick to the same track, which by-passes locality. On the subject of my symbology, if any, or psychology (whether my own or my characters') I have occasionally been run ragged' (*Pictures* 34).

This thesis has endeavoured to look at Bowen from a different perspective to most previous criticism. The impact of a single short story of just over five pages ('Oh, Madam') has led to an exploration of Bowen's aesthetic, taking us through her ten novels and a large body of her non-fiction. I have, as far as possible, been guided by Bowen herself, as is evident from my choice of title for four of the chapters and for the thesis itself. I have explored the world into which she emerged as a young writer, her use of light and shadow, her use of place and atmosphere, the geometry she chooses in designing her novels – or which her novels develop for themselves – first in the shape of the novel and secondly in the arrangement of the characters, her use of 'scraps' from other writers as collage, and her peculiar form of poetry. Like Bowen I have collaged texts which, while

relevant to my discussion of Bowen, are important to me. Throughout I have drawn attention to her dyslocution. But that is able to take me only so far.

Before attempting to sum up Bowen's peculiar aesthetic, I will turn to other writers who created or aimed to create synthetic art. I already have pointed to the Yeats brothers who drew on a largely French school of thought which had its roots in Baudelaire; to the painters Cézanne and De Chirico; to Katherine Mansfield who fused painting with her writing; and to T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound who incorporated collage into their work. Literary criticism also recognises those writers who fused music into their writing: they include Mansfield's cousin Elizabeth von Arnim (1866-1941), E.M. Forster (tutor to von Arnim's daughters in Germany in 1905) and Virginia Woolf. Each of these authors was influenced by Wagner's concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Living in a cultural milieu in Germany at the turn of the twentieth century, von Arnim was inevitably exposed to Wagner. Little literature on von Arnim's musicality exists: she trained as an organist at the Royal College of Music and was deemed sufficiently proficient to perform for Cosima Wagner, the composer's widow. Jennifer Walker has written perceptively of von Arnim's incorporation of musical form and themes within her twenty novels, especially her 1920 work *In the Mountains*, written as the world was emerging from the First World War (Walker, 'Elizabeth' 40-55). Walker highlights von Arnim's use of rhythm, repetition, sonata form, and leitmotifs drawn from nature. Forster first saw Wagner's Ring Cycle in Dresden in March and April 1905 on his way to von Arnim's home in Pomerania, and the composer's influence is felt in both 'The Celestial Omnibus' and *The Longest Journey*. His best-known essays on music appear in *Two Cheers for Democracy* ('The C minor of that Life' (130-133) and 'Not Listening to Music' (133-136)) and in *Aspects of the Novel*: the chapter on 'Pattern and Rhythm' is discussed above briefly (Chapter 4, pp. 124-125). He sought to create musical structure in his novels, notably in *The Longest Journey* which has

a three-movement symphonic shape and which Elizabeth Heine discusses in detail in her 'Afterword' to the Penguin edition (Forster, *Longest* 291-349). In *Difficult Rhythm: Music and the Word in E.M. Forster* (2010) Michelle Fillion considers the influence of Wagner, Beethoven, Tchaikovsky and Britten on his work. For her part, Woolf acknowledges that she has musical form in mind when writing: in a letter to her friend Elizabeth Trevelyan, who perceived the musical qualities of her biography of Roger Fry, Woolf [writes] that 'its [*sic*] odd, for I'm not regularly musical, but I always think of my books as music before I write them' (Woolf, *Letters* vol. VI, 426). Emma Sutton, among others, has written extensively about the influence of music on Woolf, most recently in *Virginia Woolf and Classical Music: Politics, Aesthetics, Form* (2015). In Bowen's case, if there is any sound in her aesthetic, it is that of fracture, of things breaking: as Woolf says of Mary Carmichael 'she has every right to do both these things if she does them not for the sake of breaking, but for the sake of creating' (Woolf, *Room* 76). Bowen herself is not breaking things, but merely showing that they *are* broken. In this she stands to one side, impartial, just as the French novelists she refers to as influences in her interview with *The Bell* stand to one side, and like them she does not allow the narrator to enter to help the characters reassemble their broken pieces.

Bowen gives us some clues to discovering her aesthetic with several statements. The way the idea comes as an abstract pattern is discussed in Chapter 4. As I have cited above, she writes: 'It seems to me that often when I write I am trying to make words do the work of line and colour. I have the painter's sensitivity to light. Much (and perhaps the best) of my writing is verbal painting' (Autobiographical 1948). I have demonstrated how she adopts and adapts the techniques of the visual artist in her writing. But she does more than that. In my Introduction (p.3), I draw attention to the remarks of her agent Spencer Curtis Brown in his introduction to her autobiography: '[h]erself a many-faceted person,

her gifts were many-faceted too' (*Pictures* ix). With her use of different facets, she creates three-dimensional work, or work which gives the impression of being three-dimensional. In order to do this, she needs to create different perspectives, and this involves the use of dyslocution. I would suggest that Bowen's work is much more like that of James Joyce as she describes it in her eulogy published in *The Bell* in March 1941, in that she is not aiming to convey information, but sensation. (*People* 244-245). In other words, we do not need to understand a writer's work intellectually: rather we must absorb it through our senses, sometimes with a sense of revelation. Forster touches on this in his 1925 essay 'Anonymity: An Inquiry', when he asks:

> What is this element in words that is not information? I have called it 'atmosphere', but it requires stricter definition that that. It resides not in any particular word, but in the order in which words are arranged – that is to say, in style. It is the power that words have to raise our emotions or quicken our blood. It is also something else, and to define that other thing would be to explain the secret of the universe. This 'something else' in words is undefinable. (Forster, *Two* 89).

While Forster is unlikely to have had Bowen in mind, since only *Encounters* had been published at the time he was writing, his point that atmosphere resides in the order in which words are arranged is particularly pertinent to Bowen. As Forster suggests, it is all but impossible to define, just as he finds it difficult to decide on a literary word to describe the pattern or the rhythm which decides the shape of the novel (Chapter 4, p.124).

Each of my chapters has demonstrated a different facet to Bowen's work. In visual art an object with 'facets' implies an object that is three-dimensional and polyhedral, an object which will appear differently when seen from different perspectives. Depending on its composition, its surfaces may be capable of reflecting light. The perspective depends on the place where you stand and from where and how you shine the light, what kind of light you shine, and how you focus it. Another facet is the ability to allow patterns to develop of their own accord as the light on them increases, revealing more detail as it does. Bowen

clearly regarded her fiction writing as an organic activity: her use of the word 'compost' in the paragraph below (already cited in Chapter 5, p.159) confirms this.

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

'Creative', 'fruit', 'compost': these are words to do with bringing something into being, enabling it to flourish. Just as the gardener or agriculturalist prepares and nourishes young plants to enjoy when they reach their prime, either by looking at them, by smelling them or by consuming them so, Bowen is suggesting, the fiction writer prepares and nourishes their work for the reader to enjoy once the work is completed: it is a comparable organic process.

Another facet is Bowen's sense of fun which was a characteristic until the very end of her life.[85] This comes through not only in the humorous episodes and shorter, impish asides in her texts, but in her natural, child-like delight in party games, particularly those which involve concealment. Games of 'Hunt the Thimble,' 'Pass the Parcel,' 'Hide and Seek' or the Bran Tub have to be played in most of her novels. The games in turn highlight a further facet, her wish to acknowledge and give further life to what has been 'created for [her]' by collaging from the works of her predecessors (*Impressions* 269). As well as games to be played, there are puzzles to be solved, for her readers as well as for her characters. Here she is generous to her readers: provided they put their backs into it, they will find almost always find enough clues to solve the puzzles. Even her dyslocution is a form of puzzle: the reader must often pause in order to grasp the meaning of the phrase or sentence. She is not always so generous to her women characters: poor Emmeline gives up on her life puzzle and smashes it, while Eva is just about to solve hers after a lifetime of

[85] Bowen's cousin, Hubert Butler 'was used to have light-hearted discussions about Ireland with Elizabeth. [. . .] It must have been a shock when she lost her sense of humour in her last illness.' I am grateful to Butler's cousin, Andrew Clarke, for this information.

trying, when it is cruelly snatched away from her. Others are left in liminality: Sydney leaves Italy, to return to what? Lois is sent to Tours: will she be able to find a pattern to be in once Danielstown burns to the ground? As Ingman points out, uncertainty hangs over her. 'Her future is left open-ended, her identity perpetually in question: "every time she would wonder: what Lois *was* – She would never know"' (*LS* 60; Ingman, *Irish* 92). How will Karen adjust to the pattern of a life with Leopold, when the Shadowy Third becomes a real third person? What will Portia do, once Matchett has persuaded her to return to Windsor Terrace? A veil is drawn over the lives of Laurel and Janet: the pieces of the puzzle are swept under the carpet: bourgeois propriety will prevail. In examples of physical puzzles, we never learn whether Portia manages to complete either of the two jigsaw puzzles given to her by Major Brutt, while as an adult Clare is still unable to solve Mrs Piggott's Chinese ivory puzzle which intrigued her as child of eleven (*LG* 227). Only in *The Heat of the Day* and *A World of Love* does it seem possible that the women will go on to experience puzzle-free and happy lives. At the closing of *The Heat of the Day* Louie and her baby Tom Victor are safe at Seale, while Stella is safe in the knowledge that both she and Roderick have survived the war, that she will probably be married and that Roderick is beginning to look after Mount Morris '*in his own way to carry on the old tradition*' (*HD* 318-319; 311; 83). In *A World of Love* at Shannon Airport Jane and Richard Priam have 'no sooner looked than they loved', while back at Monteforte Lilia and Antonia are making new beginnings (*WL* 149).

Part of Bowen's multi-faceted nature may be due to her ability to see things from different points of view. As an impressionable small child, in Ireland she saw two contrasting places, rotating between the winter of urban Dublin and the summer of the countryside of Cork. In East Kent she again saw two contrasting landscapes; here it is possible to see in one sweep the hills to the north and west of Folkestone and Hythe and

the flat lands of Romney Marsh to the south and west. She was particularly struck by the contrast between the formal buildings of Dublin and the exotic seaside villas of East Kent. Visible to the east from the Leas in Folkestone are the cliffs of France, gleaming in the evening sunlight. Those glimpses of France were enough to kindle an interest in that country, which would eventually lead to an immersion in its literature. As Hepburn writes: 'Bowen understood France, as she understood England and America, through literature' (Hepburn, 'French' 1056). The fact that she was Anglo-Irish but lived much of her life in England meant that she had two cultural viewpoints: her family connections were Anglo-Irish, while her education and much of her adult social life were English. Her long affair with the Canadian diplomat Charles Ritchie and her frequent post-war residencies in American Universities gave her a perspective from either side of the Atlantic. She had two linguistic viewpoints: her immersion in French literature would add a second to her English tongue. While these bi-cultural facets are sometimes seen as a drawback, leaving her somehow stranded in the middle of the Irish Sea, I would argue that all of them benefited and enriched her writing. More work remains to be done both on the increasing French influence on her work and on the importance of East Kent's part in her development as a writer, something which is often underplayed.[86]

Because of her fractured syntax, reading Bowen is not a straightforward exercise: as Anne M. Wyatt-Brown says: 'Bowen's fiction resists superficial reading' (Wyatt-Brown, 'Liberation' 164). It needs to be read as one reads poetry, pausing on the meaning or implication of a word or phrase, and going back, time and again if necessary, to clarify that meaning or implication. Bowen partly explains this in her response to Walter Allen, cited in Chapter 6, p.210, that she tries to put the words in a sentence 'in the way they would have struck the beholding eye', to which Allen replies: 'in [. . .] an attempt to render

[86] David Yeats observes of *Eva Trout*: '[T]he language is interesting and quite different from *The House in Paris* and *To the North*. Definitely written for sound and is like French'. (email, 12 August 2021)

the visual image as a painter would render it' (*Weight* 28). But Bowen is giving only one facet of the answer to Allen's question, and not explaining the occasions on which the sequence of words is not the sequence of 'beholding'. Learning to read Bowen takes time. In a similar way, Seamus Heaney found that learning to read Eliot took time, and here in the T.S. Eliot Centenary Lecture at Harvard he describes how he eventually came to understand it.

> Poetry that was originally beyond you, generating the need to understand and overcome its strangeness, becomes in the end a familiar path within you, a grain along which your imagination opens pleasurably backwards towards an origin and a seclusion. [. . .] The sense that the poem ['Ash Wednesday'] stood like a geometry in an absence was what caused my original bewilderment. [. . .] But perhaps most important of all, perhaps, was a definition of the faculty which he called 'the auditory imagination'. This was 'the feeling for syllable and rhythm, penetrating far below the conscious levels of thought and feeling, invigorating every word; sinking to the most primitive and forgotten, returning to the origin and bringing something back . . . [fusing] the most ancient and civilised mentalities.' (Heaney, *Finders* 28-34)

Tellingly, Corcoran also draws on Eliot, remarking that Bowen's writing 'in the terms of T.S. Eliot's [. . .] "auditory imagination" engage[s] in a rhythm of "returning to the origin and bringing something back", of fusing "the most ancient and the most civilised mentality"' (Corcoran, *Enforced* 9).

Neither image nor words on their own were sufficient for Bowen. In her need and desire to express herself, Bowen first turned to the visual arts, then to poetry. As I suggest in Chapter 1, p. 29, Bowen should be considered not as a writer of words, but as an artist working *with* words. I have drawn attention to the way that in her work it sometimes seems as though a picture has had to abandon the visual and redefine itself in words (Chapter 1, p. 6). Finally she found her outlet in prose, but a prose into which she fuses both the visual arts and poetry. It becomes a synthetic aesthetic which embodies the visual arts of the first half of the twentieth century at the same time that it reflects the poetry of the period – the collage of Eliot and Pound, and an awareness of the tenets of the Imagists. Bowen's own

collage is often deeply embedded and not always superficially evident, and draws on a huge range of English literature and other sources. And as a child might win a prize by playing 'Hunt the Thimble', the reader discovers more by peeling back the layers of her literary collage. Just as with the visual arts the viewer learns gradually by inspecting the detail in a work over a period of time (as we saw with Bergotte in Chapter 6, p. 216-217), in a similar way the reader learns gradually from poetry, as they hear the contrast between the sounds of vowels and consonants, and feel the rhythm and cadences. As I point out in Chapter 6 (p.203), a workshop participant will often make a gesture of moulding when asked to describe poetry: even though poetry is physically invisible, it is three-dimensional and tactile. Bowen's poetry is sometimes hard to recognise because it does not have an accepted form. Nor is she what, in 'The Government of the Tongue', Heaney refers to as 'a purveyor of ready-made meaning' when he discusses how poetry changed with the new movement which was the subject of C.K. Stead's 1964 *The New Poetic*.

> [Stead] referred to that movement, critical and creative, which was instituted in the late nineteenth century against discursive poetry. [. . .] One of [Stead's] purposes was to show how in *The Waste Land* Eliot made a complete break with those popular poets of the day whom Eliot's contemporary, the Russian poet Osip Mandelstam, would have called 'the purveyors of ready-made meaning' – bluff expositors in verse of arguments or narratives which could have been as well conducted in prose. (Heaney, *Government* 91)

Many words have been written or spoken about Bowen's prose, but it is Forster who in a single sentence identifies Bowen's aesthetic, and I return to his remarks on her war stories which exist only as a footnote in the pamphlet version of his Rede Lecture on Virginia Woolf. 'Elizabeth Bowen is, so far as I know, the only novelist who has assimilated the bombed areas of London into her art; descriptions of them are of course frequent' (Forster, *Woolf* 21). Here Forster is distinguishing between simple descriptive passages and the synthetic art which Bowen makes her own, and I would suggest Forster has identified what is distinctive about Bowen's work.

Bowen stands out as *sui generis*. One last comparison may be made with the artist De Chirico, who like Bowen fits loosely into a modernist group but has no exact equivalent. I have noted how each of them expresses in one art form what they are unable to express in another: poems morph into paintings, paintings morph into prose. Both responded to the loss of a parent. As Ellmann tells us: '[T]he bereavement that scarred [Bowen's] speech galvanised her writing, for the dead mother stalks her fiction in many guises and personae' (Ellmann, *Shadow* 24). For De Chirico it was the death of his father: Robert Hughes writes that: 'A constant theme of de Chirico's early work is the loss of his father, the railroad engineer commemorated in those white statues, phallic smokestacks, cannons, towers and trains' (Hughes, 'Chirico' 163). In many of his paintings De Chirico confronts an enigma he constantly perceives: several of his works are entitled 'The Enigma of [. . .]'. In seeking a solution he uses a sharp *chiaroscuro*, draws on architecture and on the past (particularly classical sculpture), and is alert to notion of movement, principally that associated with the railway engine. Thus we have similarities with Bowen whose characters are confronted by puzzles – or enigmas – and who uses dark and light – or chiaroscuro – to contrast her characters in particular. Like De Chirico, she draws on architecture (as I discuss in Chapter 3) and on the past (as I discuss in Chapter 5), and like him she uses mobility, associated with the motorcar, the aeroplane and the railway train (Chapter 3, p.105-111).

I wrote in the Introduction to this thesis that I would be guided by Bowen. I have attempted to follow her example by using her techniques of lighting and collage; by attempting to spotlight aspects of her work, and by collaging a large number of extracts from her work as well as that of others, including some to whom I myself wish to pay tribute. I hope that I have couched my arguments in a language which straddles the poetic and the academic. However, just as Forster had difficulty defining the thing that is pattern

or rhythm in the novel, or that element in words which is not information, it is difficult to define Elizabeth Bowen's aesthetic in words that are not information. This thesis is an imperfect attempt to do so.

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