

CREATED SPACES:  
DOMESTIC MYTH-MAKING IN THE NOVELS OF ELIZABETH BOWEN

BY

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## INTRODUCTION

Twentieth-century author, Elizabeth Bowen writes often of children in her various works, yet her novels and short stories could hardly be considered for the consumption or pleasure of a young audience. Nevertheless, there exists an exception within her oeuvre - *The Good Tiger*, a colorful and charming story with illustrations by M. Nebel detailing what happens, “when a not-so-ferocious tiger leaves the zoo”. Written and published in 1965, Bowen’s sole “children’s story” succeeds at speaking not only of but to the young adolescent figures which she so often depicts. While the prose may be more simple, the style less dramatic, the tone and underlying message of Bowen’s book resonates with a theme and method found in the rest of her work. After a day of tea party crashing and convertible cruising, the storybook tiger finds himself in a forest, “not the forest of his dreams. There was no hot sunshine, and the trees were dark because of the rain” (23). “But I do not care”, the tiger says,

“This is where my home is...This is the forest!” and then he thought, “They were good to me back there in the zoo. That was a nice house they gave me, a pretty blue house. But I don’t want a house! Especially a house near those quarrelsome lions. Maybe, though, Sarah will ask me to *her* house again. Houses are all right” (23).

For Bowen, houses are more than “all right”, they are the foundational element with and around which she structures much of her fictional writing.

As an Anglo-Irish modern writer, born in Dublin in 1899 to parents of English ancestry and heritage, Bowen lived her own life moving between various abodes in England and Ireland. While some critics therefore argue against placing her in a strictly Irish canon, Roy Foster points out in his chapter, “Prints on a Scene: Elizabeth Bowen and the Landscape of Childhood” that “critics like Seamus Deane, W.J. McCormack and Declan Kiberd have recently given her work detailed consideration as part of the corpus of Irish literature” (149). Yet also, one cannot ignore as Hermione Lee points out in the Introduction to *Bowen’s Court*, “her fiction owes a great deal to” her English predecessors, “Jane Austen, Flaubert, Henry James, Forster and Virginia Woolf” (viii). Regardless of what camp one decides to place Elizabeth Bowen in, Lee encapsulates her intrigue and the uniqueness of her hybrid identity when she writes that, “In Elizabeth Bowen’s case, Anglo-Irish peculiarities were accentuated by an early transplantation ‘into a different mythology’ ” (vii). This introduction and subsequent incorporation into a new ‘mythology’ as Lee notes, accounts for Bowen’s own dynamism as a writer, for this hyphenated identity allows those “born of displacement” to “instantly strike root into the intersections of any society in which they happen to find themselves” (Foster, *Paddy and Mr. Punch* 122).

Bowen chooses to ‘strike root’ through her writing. While her ancestry and fluid movement between two countries might complicate the literary label under which she is read, Bowen is clear about how she interacts with the world around her. She states in a letter to V.S. Pritchett, “My books are my relation to society” (Pritchett 23). The letter exists as part of a compilation of written exchanges between Bowen, Pritchett and

Graham Greene, produced to provide an example in which “three writers talk of themselves in their own terms” on the question from which the compilation takes its title, *Why Do I Write?* (Pritchett 8). Bowen goes on in this letter to explore the role of a writer, asking and simultaneously realizing,

Actually, isn't it a directive that you seem to give? That you give in writing?

And, also, shape. Shape is possibly *the* important thing. Obsessed by shape in art, you and I may forget the importance of shape in life....I shouldn't wonder if it were the shape, essentially, that the reader, the mass, the public goes to the story for (Pritchett 24).

Modernity for Bowen is defined by the harsh reality of potential shapelessness in the face of two World Wars and for her personally, the Anglo-Irish War of Independence. In response, Bowen through her writing, instills and bolsters her works with shape in the form of the home. Houses serve as foundational institutions within her novels, objects of both geometry and psychology. Bowen tells Pritchett, “the possibility of shape is not only magnetic, it's salutary” (24).

As Maud Ellmann observes in *Elizabeth Bowen: The Shadow Across the Page*, Bowen's “fiction fends off nothing and nowhere with an anxious solicitude for place” (7). Yet I would argue that Bowen's affinity for and adeptness at describing home spaces is not as Ellmann makes it seem, merely a coping mechanism with which to ease the anxieties of modernity, for the homes of Bowen's work vividly encapsulate and illustrate the very fears of dislocation and dispossession brilliantly. Bowen does not shy from

engaging with such themes and in fact these realities could be said to be those for which she is best known.

What Bowen accomplishes with the home is that which James Joyce began in composing *Ulysses*. As T.S. Eliot writes in “*Ulysses, Order, and Myth*”, Joyce’s use of the Homeric myth in his work achieves,

...a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity...It is simply a way of controlling, or ordering, of giving a *shape* and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history [emphasis mine] (167).

In place of *The Odyssey* in Joyce’s rendering, Bowen creates her own ‘myth’ using the concept of home as the basis for her own methodology<sup>1</sup>. Eliot knew the “mythic method” was “a method which others must pursue after him [Joyce]” and he makes the disclaimer that for the reasons listed above, namely the method’s utility in controlling, ordering and shaping, “they [those who adopt or incorporate the practice] will not be imitators” (167). The elements which compose Bowen’s myth are varied and range from animate facades, to spaces which metamorphose, fantastic furniture, labyrinthine corridors and blackout blinds. With her continuous attention to the interiority and exteriority inherent to the concept of home and the domestic objects found within (Ellmann claims, “there is something elegiac in her treatment of objects and appurtenances - this verbal caressing of the stuff of life [8]), Bowen explores the “futility and anarchy” of “contemporary

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this thesis, the legitimacy of Bowen’s inclusion in an Irish canon will not be argued, though I will say, for those opposed her ability to belong in this category, my proposing that Bowen’s work continues in a tradition illustrated by Joyce and “adumbrated by Mr. Yeats”, would certainly suggest that she shares something in common with the great Irish writers (Eliot 167).

history”, namely displacement, dispossession and distrust while lending her stories a cohesion necessary to explore such topics, disorienting by nature.

The homes of Bowen’s writing are not the modern “machine[s] for living” which Le Corbusier envisioned nor “the ‘soulless container architecture’ of much contemporary construction (Kleiner1056, Leach xiii). Rather, they are sites of intimacy, and as such may be interpreted. Living and writing around the same time as Bowen, the French philosopher, Gaston Bachelard notes in his phenomenological look at the field of architecture, *The Poetics of Space: The Classic Look at How We Experience Intimate Places* (1958) that “both room and house are psychological diagrams that guide writers and poets in their analysis of intimacy” (38). It is for this reason, Bachelard remarks, that we (in the universal sense) are able to as he says, “read a house” or “read a room” (14). An influential piece of writing, Michel Foucault writes that,

Bachelard’s monumental work and the descriptions of phenomenologists have taught us that we do not live in a homogeneous and empty space, but on the contrary in a space thoroughly imbued with quantities and perhaps thoroughly fantasmic as well (351).

Elizabeth Bowen’s writing pertaining to the domestic and the immediate environs surrounding these heterogeneous domestic spaces operate under this notion of psychological mapping. For this reason, Bachelard’s work will be paramount in aiding my analysis of Bowen while and the essay from which Foucault’s praise originates, “Of Other Spaces” will be used in my third chapter.

I have chosen three novels with which to discuss Bowen's 'home myth.' My first chapter will take her 1929 novel, *The Last September* as its subject. The story of an Anglo-Irish family and their estate on the brink of Home Rule for Ireland, *The Last September* asks what happens when the home is targeted as an object and symbol to be destroyed. Bowen's work encapsulates aspects of the Irish 'big home' (those estates run by the Anglo-Irish) in Ireland just prior to its downfall. The second novel I address is *The Death of the Heart* (1938), that for which Bowen is perhaps most acclaimed. Set after World War One and prior to the Second, *Death of the Heart* follows the recently orphaned, sixteen-year-old Portia Quayne as she comes to inhabit a new yet temporary home in London with her half-brother Thomas and his wife, Anna. In this liminal space, Bowen blurs the barrier between man and object, exploring how as Maud Ellmann writes, "things behave like thoughts and thoughts like things" (5). It is in this phantasmagoric breakdown that Bowen illustrates how the past is allowed to or inhibited from becoming part of the present moment.

The third and final novel I discuss in my last chapter is that which took Bowen the longest in writing. It was a novel which as Kristine Miller notes, caused Bowen to fear "that the war would force her imagination into a 'passive role'" (142). She does complete the novel though and *The Heat of the Day* was published in 1949. While *The Last September* takes on the violence of wartime in a somewhat removed yet subtly powerful manner, *Heat of the Day* places Bowen's protagonists in the center of London, reeling from the recent blitz and still susceptible to frequent bombings. As the order in which I approach these three novels operates chronologically, it is fitting that Bowen's

characters also progress in age by the time she writes *Heat of the Day*. The novel tells the story of Stella Rodney and Robert Kelway's complicated relationship in the face of accusations of his treason and betrayal of Britain. Bowen illustrates how the home in its various forms (flat, country home, Irish big house) shapes political and personal realities.

While I take these novels as the primary subjects for the subsequent chapters, Bowen's autobiographical works of *Bowen's Court* and *Seven Winters* are key to this discussion as well for reasons which Diana Fuss outlines in the Introduction to *The Sense of an Interior: Four Rooms and the Writers that Shaped Them*. In this project Fuss privileges the home both in and outside of fiction by showing where exactly the two realms meet. Looking into interior spaces belonging to Emily Dickinson, Sigmund Freud, Hellen Keller and Marcel Proust, Fuss illuminates "the powerful guiding influence [these spaces have] on the creative lives of their inhabitants" (1). Although Fuss does not take Bowen as part of her analysis, Bowen nevertheless provides her readers with an equally intimate portrait on the spaces that hold such 'guiding influence' over her in these autobiographical works. In *Seven Winters* Bowen's reader discovers some justification of the 'home myth', for Bowen acknowledges that in Dublin, "I had been born, I see now, into a home at once unique and intensive, gently phenomenal" (469). She goes on to admit that from an early age, "On the whole, it is things and places rather than people that detach themselves from the stuff of my dreams" (470). Myths are shaped by the worlds we know and as Bowen rightly notes, "Home was our first world - it was at one time *the* world: we knew no other" (Home for Christmas 138). Building on this foundation referenced in *Seven Winters* and elaborated upon in *Bowen's Court*, Bowen shows how

the home is not a simple concept or merely a backdrop, not a passive but rather an illuminating structure.

“This is where my home is” the tiger muses in Bowen’s storybook. For the tiger, the problem seems to be solved, yet it is a more complex matter as illustrated by Bowen’s fictional characters. They are instead typified by the equivocation that follows the tiger’s resolute definition, raising questions such as, who constructs this space (“they”, we, I?), who owns the home, what does a home ensure them, how does it appear aesthetically, and what are the resulting benefits or drawbacks of such a place. These questions are those which Bowen’s canon posits and with my thesis I aim to discuss how she delicately balances the tension arising from such queries with the productive act of building and constructing (myth-making) both literally, in the act of creating through writing and textually through the spaces which her figures come to inhabit, those spaces which serve as “scaffolding erected by the author for the purpose of disposing his [or her] realistic tale” (Eliot 165).

## CHAPTER ONE

### Fires in the Wood

While the tiger of Bowen's children's tale enjoys the ability to roam, experience and compare the different homes in which he finds himself and ultimately enjoys the freedom to declare where his newfound home lies, Bowen subverts this blithe notion of independence in her 1929 novel, *The Last September*. While liberty is certainly a key theme operating within the work, set in 1920 in the midst of the the Anglo-Irish War, with this work Bowen asks what happens when the home itself loses some of its freedom, becoming an endangered species. Targeted and hunted, Danielstown, the family estate of the Anglo-Irish Naylor and friends, becomes a subtly sentient entity, responsive to its situation, desirous to protect and preserve, yet unable to resist the forces without. Ultimately, the fate of the home is foreshadowed in the first chapter of the novel in a remark which calls to mind *The Good Tiger* of the Introduction. Bowen writes that her young protagonist Lois, as she walks about the upstairs of Danielstown, "often tripped with her toe in the jaws of a tiger; a false step at any time sent some great claw skidding over the polish" (7). Bereft of life, the tiger has become a domestic adornment, remembered but not living, a similar fate to that of the Irish big home.

The Introduction to this thesis situates Bowen in her 'methodology of home' and with this chapter, I aim to illustrate that which allows a home (in the hands of Bowen) to become 'alive' in a specific historical moment and how this subsequent awareness might chart or utterly fail to influence the fate of the home. Although Bowen writes *The Last September* nine years after that in which the novel is set, her rendering of the decline of

the Anglo-Irish gentry in Ireland is still illustrative of how “the Anglo-Irish ‘literary imagination’ comes into its own just as the privileges and power of this community begin to be curtailed and what had been called an Ascendancy heads down toward an inevitable demise” (Moynahan xi).

Richard Gill writes in his essay, “The Country House in a Time of Troubles” that “an Irish estate, she [Bowen] has admitted, is often ‘something between a *raison d’être* and a predicament’ ”(52). A prominent force behind her own family, the Bowens established a country home within Ireland when, “thousands of acres of rich farmland near Spenser’s Kilcolman” was given to “the Welsh Colonel Henry Bowen...for his services to Cromwell in the Irish Wars of the Great Rebellion” (Moynahan 231). The subsequent line of Bowens fell in the *raison d’être* category of Gill’s observation, making the home and estate their priority and thus living full-time in Kildorrery, County Cork, a region that became “one of the hotbeds of the Rebellion (Moynahan 240). Bowen’s father was the first to establish residence elsewhere, living in Dublin and working as a lawyer while maintaining the home from afar. Nevertheless, the house figured into Bowen’s upbringing as she spent vacations and summers here throughout her adolescence eventually inheriting the estate in 1930. *Bowen’s Court*, published in 1942 is as much a detailed autobiographical account of Bowen’s ancestors in this place as it is a history of the life of the house itself. I will intersperse my analysis of *The Last September* with fitting selections from this work, as it is clear that from this house and Bowen’s personal relationship to it comes her unique ability to “speak [on the Anglo-Irish home] from within” (Gill 51). In *The Last September* Bowen details a big home’s isolation, its

sympathies, and its susceptibility to destruction, for “unlike the low, warm, ruddy French and English manors, they [Anglo-Irish homes in Ireland] have made no natural growth from the soil” a growth which would give them organic permanence. Instead, “the idea that begot them was purely a social one” (BC 26).

The above-mentioned traits of the home are revealed through an analysis of Danielstown’s process of burgeoning awareness in the face of extinction. As Richard Gill writes, Danielstown “functions as both stage and symbol” (53). Beginning with a discussion of the quasi-militaristic tendencies of the inhabitants that reinforce the demarcation of territory and boundaries within the home, I will move to highlight the significance of the home’s synchronicity with Lois Farquar, to then illustrate the subtle yet poignant point at which various natural forces without begin an invasion of the interior. The chapter will conclude with an analysis of how tensions of the cultural moment find physical manifestation in the exterior ‘face’ put forward by the home to the outside world.

The social roots of Danielstown are apparent in the fact that this is a home hardly left to itself. Constantly welcoming visitors into its rooms, Bowen begins the novel with the arrival of the Montmorencys. Though the couple is described as being adrift in the world, moving between the various homes of their close acquaintances, Hugo and Francie’s presence at Danielstown is palpably felt from their first entrance; “They swept in; their exclamations, constricted suddenly, filling the hall” (4). Bowen’s desire to be attentive to home is immediately apparent, as even the simple description of this welcome highlights not only the men and women and the noise they create, but how exactly their

sounds unfold in this interior space. Though the Montmorencys' arrival is described as consuming, Bowen depicts the house as quietly open to these guests. She notes how,

All the way up the house the windows were open; light came diagonally from window to window through corner rooms. Two storeys up, she [Lois] could have heard a curtain rustle, but the mansion piled itself up in silence over the Montmorencys' voices (5).

Though it is silent in comparison to the loud greetings below stairs, the home opens not only its doors to the newcomers, but its windows also. The freedom with which the natural light upstairs traverses the interior suggests that this place is able to be entered and moved about with ease, exhibiting a sense of Irish hospitality which it manages maintain to the very end when "the door stood open hospitably upon a furnace" (303).

While the home suggests such a facile welcome, Lois and Laurence (representing the younger generation at Danielstown) receive the guests in a more calculated manner. Upstairs, Laurence asks Lois for her opinion of those below and in reply, "She signaled another warning: the Montmorencys were in the hall. To avoid the hall she had to go round to a side door and up the backstairs" (6). Curiosity must be curbed in the name of manners yet Lois's calculated navigation through the interior indicates her familiarity with this space and her ability to manipulate her movements when necessary. The interior of Danielstown comes to be characterized by the patterns which individuals choose and perhaps more importantly do not choose to take throughout the rooms and corridors. Once she is 'safe', Lois meets Laurence where he sits reading in the,

...ante-room, in one of a circle of not very comfortable shell-shaped chairs that no one took seriously...Personally, she liked the ante-room, though it wasn't the ideal place to read or talk. Four rooms opened off it, and 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 (7).

Though Lois is able attain the room without crossing the hall, Bowen highlights the fact that this space still affords little privacy. As the adolescent Lois navigates her desire for the solitary along with the social, for seclusion and attention alike, her occupation of this room where she "always seemed to be talking" complements her well (7).

Nevertheless, the ante-room has a built in vulnerability in its relationship and proximity to nearby rooms and it is the first space within Danielstown to hint at the potential for a space to be rendered defenseless. Laurence later reinforces this possibility as he points out to Lois, " 'It doesn't occur to you,' he said with an air of sinister triumph, 'that the Montmorencys may have come up the front stairs while you came up the back stairs and be both in that room, listening?' " (9). Bowen underscores the fact that possession of a room or space does not render it protected from those forces which surround it on all sides. Likewise, Danielstown, though enclosed by "the screen of trees that reached like an arm from behind the house - embracing the lawns, banks and terraces in mild ascent", is still besieged by hostile forces on all sides. Julian Moynahan writes in *Anglo-Irish: The Literary Imagination in a Hyphenated Culture*,

...if the proprietors showed sympathy for the rebels, they would be burned out by the Black and Tans, and if they were friendly to the British forces and supported

the efforts of the Royal Irish Constabulary to enforce what was still the law of the land, they had an excellent chance of being burned out by the rebels (240).

Danielstown is to the surrounding Irish region as the ante-room is to the four rooms that open off of it.

Lois's response to Laurence and his taunt indicates that she does indeed feel threatened in the situation. She thinks that Laurence's proposition was,

Unthinkable, but the very sound of the thing was a shock. Crimson, she ran to the door of the spare-room: struggling with unreason, knocked defiantly, rattled the handle. She went in, finally, with a sense of impertinence, for the new arrivals were already spiritually in possession (9).

As Lois must watch her step around the house and ensure that her words are either appropriately broadcast or discreetly unheard, it is the men of the household who risk a false step in Part Two of the novel while the women gather together during one of Gerald's visits to Danielstown. Laurence and Gerald, Lois's subaltern admirer, are forced to analyze one another, meandering about the hall as, "The ladies" meanwhile "were in the drawing-room laughing intimately, putting across the open door a barrier of exclusion" (132). As Oliver MacDonagh observes of the Anglo-Irish in *States of Mind: a study of the Anglo-Irish conflict*, "physical precincts were...central to identity" (28). The women stake their claim on this space; they have demarcated their own quarters and mark the drawing-room as their own via an 'intimate' exchange of laughter. Their act enforces a detachment within the house and on the symbolic level, unconsciously predicts the

separation of Ireland and Britain to come. In such a comparison, the intimate and gendered laughter of the women is paralleled by the intimate ties of Irish birth.

Richard Gill writes that, “For all its loveliness, Danielstown is revealed as a world of divisions and separations - between the conventional and the actual, the accepted and the excluded, the private life and the political” (55). Just as the inhabitants create their own spaces through occupying and then excluding, Danielstown also creates new space as it shifts its interior make-up. As members of the household wait before dinner in the drawingroom, Bowen writes that,

The pale room rose to a height only mirrors followed above the level of occupation; this disproportionate zone of emptiness dwarfed at all times figures and furniture. The distant ceiling imposed on consciousness its blank white oblong, and a pellucid silence, distilled from a hundred and fifty years of society, waited under the ceiling (22-23).

Bowen plays with the irony of the word “occupation” as it may be used in both a quotidian, domestic sense and also for its militant, forceful connotations. The duality of these two definitions symbolizes the coexistence of the Anglo-Irish and those who are fighting for Home Rule. In the ambiguity and uncertainty of the historical moment Bowen is describing, both definitions can operate together for the moment, but inevitably one will outlast the other. The ambiguity of ‘occupation’ is soon clarified by the charged diction that follows its use. In the context of “zones of emptiness”, “dwarfed figures and furniture”, an imposing ceiling and silence from society, the notion of “occupation” becomes powerfully threatening.

The home is occupied by inhabitants and also in its spatial “zones” but also filled with objects which reinforce the fact that said inhabitants originally come from elsewhere. In a description fraught with colonial associations, Bowen writes of the upstairs of Danielstown and the souvenirs held within, noting,

Pale regimental groups, reunions a generation ago of the family or neighbourhood, gave out from the walls a vague depression. There were two locked bookcases of which the keys had been lost, and a troop of ebony elephants brought back from India from someone she [Lois] did not remember paraded along the tops of the bookcases (7).

Whether the “pale regimental groups” and “reunions” referenced here are felt through commemorative photographs or perhaps a lingering phantasmal presence remains ambiguous. The fact that ‘regiments’ and ‘troops’ along with ‘family’ and ‘neighbors’ though are used together as common classifications for individuals associated with Danielstown is undeniable. Bowen’s writing that such groups give “out from the walls a vague depression” suggests that a colonial influence has been constant enough to now have been absorbed into the actual structure of the home. In *Bowen’s Court*, Bowen comments, “I know of no house (no house that has not changed hands) in which, while the present seems to be there forever, the past is not pervadingly felt” (19). And Bachelard seconds her opinion, writing in *The Poetics of Space* that “Past, present and future give the house different dynamisms, which often interfere, at times opposing, at others stimulating one another” (6). No matter who the Naylor’s show sympathy for,

Danielstown emanates its English loyalty and ties. Its relationship with Britain is part of its composition and this will ultimately be the cause of more than a ‘vague depression.’

Although she is part of the family, living at Danielstown as the Naylor’s niece, Lois establishes herself as a sort of ‘regiment of one’ within the home. She invents a quasi-bunker in chapter eight as she seeks shelter from the unwelcome visitor, Livvy. Here she finds refuge in the box-room among the aged relics of her mother’s. Although successful at evading her peer,

Lois was very melancholy in the box-room. The window was dark with ivy, she could not see out...Lois looked and strained after feeling, but felt nothing. Her problem was, not only *how* to get out unseen, but *why*, to what purpose? (192).

While the ante-room communicates the threat of defenselessness, the box-room hints at the futility of Danielstown’s situation. Here Bowen begins to describe the natural world as it relates to and begins encroaching upon Danielstown. Lois seeks shelter and the ivy-covered window serves her purpose in hiding her, yet the ivy also obstructs her clear vision of the world outside the home. Caught somewhere between the natural world and the realm of the domestic, Lois becomes neutral, ‘feeling nothing.’ This glimpse at her interiority is appropriately communicated in this room, for Fuss remarks on the development of such spaces, writing that, “the eighteenth-century multipurpose room gave way in the nineteenth century to specialized rooms, corridors, hallways, closets, and back-stairwells” providing such privacy that this is when “an interior subject truly begin[s] to emerge” (10). Fuss’s comment also hearkens back to Lois’s earlier use of Danielstown’s back stairwells. The liminal state in which Lois finds herself mirrors the

liminal existence of the Irish big house. While Lois cannot remain in the box-room forever, dodging her burgeoning adulthood, neither will the Anglo-Irish home be able to hide itself from the sweeping movement of the Irish Rebellion.

The surrounding lands which are part of the Danielstown demesne seem to be the first to exhibit symptoms of the potential dangers brewing outside its borders. Bowen offers a poignant panorama from Lois's perspective as she and Hugo drive back to the home one evening. With the estate coming into view,

To the south, below them, the demesne trees of Danielstown made a dark formal square like a rug on the green country. In their heart like a dropped pin the grey glazed roof reflecting the sky glinted. Looking down, it seemed to Lois they lived in a forest; space of lawns blotted out in the pressure and dusk of trees. She wondered they were not smothered; then wondered still more that they were not afraid. Far from here, too, their isolation became apparent. The house seemed to be pressing down low in apprehension, hiding its face, as though it had her vision of where it was (92).

While this voluntary distance gives Lois perspective, it also foreshadows the forced perspective she will take in the future when her distance from Danielstown will be mandatory. Bowen highlights a domestic innocence about this landscape, a landscape which wants to be inviting with its "dark formal square like a rug". Nevertheless, while the estate tries to be 'at home' in this place, it feels and responds to the hostility of "the unwilling bosom whereon it was set" as it "seemed to huddle its trees close in fright and amazement at the wide light unloving country" (92).

Bowen communicates the home's permeability through repeated references to ways in which forces of nature (apparently not those of the frightened landscape) begin to enter Danielstown. While in Part One of the novel, the home seems capable of protecting its interior: "the rain had passed, the trees had shed the weight of it, never a drop came through them [Laurence's windows] or tapped on his window sill", as *The Last September* progresses the house's barriers are weakened. By the conclusion of Part Two, "Through defenseless windows came in the vacancy of the sky; the grey ceiling had gone up in remoteness. More wind came through, flowers moved the vases" (203). Now nature enters the home with no opposition, changing and moving the interior order. With this entry, a distinction between the physical and the intangible is blurred as the "grey ceiling" opens up into endless space, an ironically peaceful rendering signifying the later destruction of Danielstown which will violently and literally 'open' its walls and boundaries up to eternity.

As Phyllis Lassner and Paula Derdiger write at the outset of their essay, "Domestic-Gothic, The Global Primitive, and Gender Relations in Elizabeth Bowen's *The Last September* and *The House in Paris*", "regardless of how insular or stable, domestic space in Bowen's writing is never merely private, but rather always generative of and invaded by the history and politics constituting the public sphere" (195). While the natural world begins to illustrate the penetrability of Danielstown, the subaltern Gerald and his frequent visits to the home are more tangible examples of the invasion of history. Though his intentions are harmless, Gerald's activities and presence here

(outside of the standard tennis parties) heralds war. When he arrives to confess his love to Lois, no one is there to receive him other than the home and thus he,

...stepped to the drawing-room door. The five tall windows stood open on rain and the sound of leaves, rain stuttered along the sills, the grey of the mirrors shivered. Polished tables were like cold little lakes of light. A smell of sandalwood boxes, a kind of glaze in the air from all the chintzes numbed his earthly vitality, he became all ribs and uniform. He was aware of intrusion (125).

The prospect of this interior reflects the mounting tensions building beyond it. Rather than closing itself to the storm and Gerald, rain stutters like bullets against the sill and Gerald is admitted by the home. Such a description is repeated at Bowen's Court where,

Indoors, the rooms with these big windows not only reflect the changes of weather but seem to contain the weather itself...When rain moves in vague grey curtains across the country, or stands in a sounding pillar over the roof and trees, grey quivers steadily on the indoor air, giving the rooms...the resigned look of being exposed to rain (BC 22-23).

Gerald comes upon the home, laid open to the invasion of the exterior elements and exhibiting symptoms of fear through its shivering mirrors and cold lakes of polished table. Maud Ellmann would argue that Gerald's subsequent loss of feeling in these surroundings is a result of the home itself pulling life from him, for she writes in *The Shadow Across the Page* that, "in Bowen, consciousness escapes into the object, leaving human beings as vacant as the landscapes that threaten to devour them" (7).

While I do not hold Ellmann's theory to be valid throughout the entirety of Bowen's oeuvre, her claim is a striking proposition in this particular situation. The home does seem to sap Gerald of all "earthly vitality", but I would argue that this vitality is useless to Danielstown in its already diminishing state. Rather, just as the home is capable of feeling and mimicking the mood of those within; "The sweet peas in the urn before them bore evidence to her agitation: they all slanted to the west like a falling haystack" (32), Gerald is in turn registering a shift in the tone of the home, interpreting (perhaps subconsciously) and responding according to that which Siegfried Kracauer terms 'spatial hieroglyphics.' Kracauer puts forward the notion that "Wherever the hieroglyphics of any spatial image are deciphered, there the basis of social reality presents itself" (Leach xv). I therefore view Gerald's numbness as an unconscious act of empathy towards this space which registers its imminent demise in the form of recognizable distress.

In order to retaliate in a sense against such breaches in the boundaries of home, the inhabitants of Danielstown gather together and close themselves within the big house. While at the outset of the novel, the party begins their evenings on the front lawn listening to Francie ponder whether they will be "shot at" if they "sit out late on the steps?", their nightly routine gradually begins to move indoors (26). Before this move inward though, Lois entertains "A thought that fifty years hence she might well, if she wished, be sitting here on the steps with or without rheumatism" and this "gave her a feeling of mysteriousness and destination" (36). Hardly aware of the severity of the situation (until perhaps her above-mentioned drive with Hugo), Lois, like her relatives,

relates to the escalating violence with a naivety which renders the home even more perceptive in comparison.

Eventually everyone may be found in “The shuttered-in drawing room, the family sealed up in lamplight, secure and bright like flowers in a paper-weight” (42-43).

Windows that were open on the Montmorency’s arrival are now safely drawn in, further exaggerating the insular nature of the big house or as Bowen writes in *Bowen’s Court*, “these house-islands” (20). The insularity of the Anglo-Irish home appears built-in from its very conception for,

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. It is possible that Anglo-Irish people, like only children, do not know how much they miss (BC 20).

Bowen is clear in *The Last September* that that which Lois Farquar is missing is a loyalty to Ireland, for Lois,

She could not conceive of her country emotionally: it was a way of living, abstract of several countrysides, or an oblique, frayed island moored at the north but with an air of being detached and drawn out west from the British coast (42).

If Anglo-Irish houses are built on ‘social’ grounds as Bowen says they are, then it follows that one might look to those inhabitants who currently exist socially here for an appraisal of the strength of this home. Taking Lois as the measure (and she is one of the more ‘feeling’ individuals in the novel) Bowen suggests that the foundation of Danielstown rests on little.

Bowen's simile illustrating the family "secure and bright like flowers in a paper-weight" is rather powerful as it mimics what she does with the novel itself. The family is described in a state of preservation, 'like flowers in a paper-weight.' Bowen captures scenes in the lives individuals of a particular class and ancestry within a moment in history, knowing that destruction is impending to both their way of life within Ireland as well as for the material signs of their existence. About to be extinct, Bowen preserves them in the literal 'paper-weight' of her novel.

The home, by now something of a sentient being, witnesses the family's movement inwards for,

Inside, they would all be drawing up closer to one another, tricked by the half-revelation of lamplight. 'Compassed about,' thought Lois, 'by so great a cloud of witnesses,' -chairs standing round dejectedly; upstairs, the confidently waiting beds; mirrors vacant and startling; books read and forgotten. contributing no more to life, dinner-table certain of its regular compulsion; the procession of elephants that throughout peaceful years had not broken file (43).

A similar passage elaborates on the home's insight or literally its ability for 'sight indoors.' Objects hitherto static come to life for Lois and as far as her relationship with Gerald is concerned,

The ante-room chairs, now looking at Lois askance, knew also. What she had done stretched everywhere, like a net. If she had taken a life, the simplest objects could not more have been tinged with consequence. The graded elephants on the

bookcase were all fatality. She went into her room...looking round with patronage at the virginal wallpaper (237).

While this passage could be read as a trope or adolescent tendency towards melodrama, the growing signs of perceptiveness in Danielstown throughout the novel indicate that this should be read as more. The interior of Danielstown and the objects within act as reflective witnesses to the domestic panorama of life here.

As Bowen remarks that the Irish big house was begotten of social causes, the influence of the human, social hand which crafted the home at Danielstown is felt to be alive in the animation of the exterior structure of the house. “Bowen, like many Anglo-Irish writers,” R.F. Foster notes, “treated houses as personifications” (Paddy 108). As well as insight, Danielstown exhibits an exterior presence. The home puts forward a true façade (from the Italian “facciata” meaning “face”) and what stands out about this surface is Bowen’s description of how it seems to take in the scene around it: staring, expressing emotion and ultimately communicating through “forming lips” (OED, LS 243). In *Bowen’s Court*, Bowen writes that, “Character is printed on every hour, as on the houses and demesne features themselves. With buildings, as with faces, there are moments when the forceful mystery of the inner being appears” (20).

Lois returns from the dance given by the Rolfes and Gunners and as everyone gathers in greeting and curiosity at the front steps, “Above, twenty dark windows stared over the fields aloofly out of the pale grey face of the house. The trees had rims of light round them; everything seemed a long way away” (233). At night the ‘pale grey face’ “had that excluded, irrelevant sad look outsiders of houses do take on in the dark” (43).

And on one of Gerald's final visits to Danielstown, "The house so loomed and, and stared so darkly and oddly that he showed a disposition - respectful rather than timorous - to move away from the front of it" (249-250). Perhaps in a memorable and final gesture, Lois experiences how,

The unbelievable future became fixed as the past under the flutter and settling down of a flock of comments, which as she turned in imagination back to the house and steps and saw lips forming themselves in unconscious readiness, seemed already uttered (243).

The 'unbelievable future' to which Lois refers consists of her marriage to Gerald and her belief in the inevitability of such an event. Nevertheless, it fits that the burning of Danielstown might also be substituted for this future. The persona that Bowen endows Danielstown with makes the final "execution" of the home all the more powerful.

While Bowen's Court survived the widespread burnings of Anglo-Irish homes during the War of Independence, Danielstown does not. "The death - the execution rather", Bowen writes, "of the three houses, Danielstown, Castle Trent, Mount Isabel, occurred in the same night. It seemed, looking from east to west at the sky tall with scarlet, that the country itself was burning" (303). Subsequently, these homes and their absences become part of a landscape which Bowen describes at the beginning of *Bowen's Court*. "It will have been seen", she says, "that this is a country of ruins" (15). Bowen writes that "Yes, ruins stand for error or failure - but in Ireland we take these as part of life" (BC 17). These houses may have become extinct for their "social roots", but

ironically in their destruction, the big houses of this era become an everlasting and permanent part of the Irish landscape.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Leaving the Cage

For the sake of continuing the discussion, let us resurrect the tiger from the Danielstown floor and revisit his tale. While *The Last September* picks up where *The Good Tiger* leaves off, in the ‘dream wood’ of Ireland, perhaps it could be said that Bowen’s later novel, *The Death of the Heart* (1938) reveals why the tiger wanted to leave the zoo in the first place. Not all homes are created equally Bowen seems to suggest in the tiger’s desire to roam. While the tiger moves from containment to freedom in his storybook tale, Portia Quayne, the young protagonist of *The Death of the Heart* experiences a reverse trajectory. The novel begins as the orphaned sixteen-year-old is sent to live with her half-brother, Thomas and his wife, Anna in their London home for a year. And yet, Bowen indicates that Portia was rather settled and satisfied with the romantically transient life she formerly lived with her mother. Taken from this lifestyle and transplanted at Windsor Terrace, the London home becomes something of a cage to Portia where she is now without privacy and constantly on display. In her novel, Bowen asks how and where does one escape in a home of ‘bars’?

Although she is now somewhat trapped, Portia, like the tiger, does manage to have adventures of her own for it is through the discovery of hidden interior lives within domestic objects, the engaging of the imagination in oneiric musings, and extended trips to the sea that Portia moves beyond the ‘bars’ of Windsor Terrace. In doing so, she realizes that a home should have a past, the senses are awakened and realigned in the act of imagination and transparency does not indicate emptiness. In this chapter I will first

illustrate how Portia's situation mirrors the autobiographical story of Bowen herself. From there, I will depict the cage in which Portia finds herself while living in London, detailing what constitutes these 'bars' at Windsor Terrace and how Bowen's protagonist is on display in this place. Following this, I will begin to explicate Portia's various forms of escapism beginning with her awakening to the interior life of furniture, followed by vivid dreams of a future love and concluding with a detailed description of Waikiki, the other home in which Portia finds herself in the course of the novel as this place, the opposite of Windsor Terrace in every way, reaffirms Portia's love of the freedom to roam.

In her former lifestyle, Portia and her mother used to "strike roots in a day", "in unfamiliar places, they unconsciously looked for familiarity" and as Bowen concludes, "wherever we unconsciously feel, we live" (180). Moving from hotel to hotel, their scenario mimics that of Bowen and her own mother, who became somewhat transient following the diagnosis of Henry Bowen, Elizabeth's father, as mentally ill. Julian Moynahan writes how Florence and Elizabeth,

...left Ireland when the child was seven, leading for the next five years or so a fairly unsettled English existence at English south-coast resort towns such as Folkstone and Hythe. They put up in hotels, spent time in boarding houses and furnished flats, and visited for varying periods in the homes of some English-based aunts and cousins (232).

Taking this lifestyle into consideration and setting it as the foundation of Portia's own experiences, Bowen suggests and perhaps insists with *The Death of the Heart* that home

is a dynamic concept, benefitting from an occasional rearranging and found in some cases in what might be considered unconventional ways.

I therefore disagree with Richard Gill's statement in his essay, "The Country House in a Time of Troubles" that,

In her later fiction, moreover, Elizabeth Bowen - rather like Forster and Waugh - finds her symbols of isolation and rootlessness in townhouses, city flats, provincial villas, and forlorn hotels - places...divorced from any human past and suggesting only transience (56).

Unlike *The Last September*, "the futility and anarchy which is contemporary history" is not felt in this novel through regional violence or even the threat of destruction and the fears associated with war. Rather, these modern themes of dispossession and isolation occur in a respectably traditional London home.

Portia is received by her relations in London as a foreign and disruptive presence and is thus shuffled between interiors throughout the novel. With the exception of *The Last September*, Portia is a prime example of, how R.F. Foster recognizes in his essay on "The Irishness of Elizabeth Bowen" in *Paddy and Mr. Punch: Connections in Irish and English History*, "Bowen characters...are always in transit", perhaps because this act of mobility, whether necessary or chosen characterizes much of Bowen's own life (107). While Thomas and Anna Quayne go as far as fulfilling their duty to adopt Portia (for a year), they do little to help adapt her to Windsor Terrace. Though Portia finds shelter here, Windsor Terrace is a home felt to be unreal and without roots.

Bowen sets the scene of Windsor Terrace in an exterior view. Apparently “modelled on Bowen’s own establishment at 2 Clarence Terrace”, the home sits with its neighboring row houses and as “dusk set the Regency buildings back at a false distance: against the sky they were colourless silhouettes, insipidly ornate, brittle and cold. The blackness of windows not yet lit or curtained made the houses look hollow inside” (Ellmann 130, DOTH 10). Even the architecture with “pilasters” that “ran up into glassy black night air” suggests a prison of sorts (52). The apparent emptiness of the interiors described above is made even more strange as Bowen incorporates imagery of that which would normally be found inside the home situated instead in its external surroundings. She writes that outside the house, “beside the criss-cross diagonal iron bridge, three poplars stood up like frozen brooms” (14). Of course, this is only Bowen’s description of winter’s bare tree, but odd inversions and ironies such as this come to typify Windsor Terrace, a place which is “set for strangers’ intimacy” (50).

Lacking the animated facade of Danielstown, the absence and emptiness in these “silhouettes” is further exaggerated by the consuming silence which Portia encounters upon her arrival. Here, “Everywhere, she heard an unliving echo: she had entered one of those pauses in the life of a house that before tea time seem to go on and on” and “Through the big windows, darkness and silence had naturally stolen in...and begun to inhabit” (23). Before even the other inhabitants of Windsor Terrace are well-introduced, Bowen suggests that the presence of intangible forces as darkness and silence are quite ‘at home’ here already. When sound does emerge in this place, it is distorted and unreal to the senses for Portia takes note of “the vibration of London” which “was heard through

the shuttered and muffled window as though one were half deaf...the house held such tense positive quiet” (37). The pairings in phrases such as “unliving echo” and “positive quiet” reiterate the fact that Windsor Terrace is a paradoxical place and one which is not quickly or rationally understood.

The distortions in this home extend beyond sound and although the space is most often experienced and relayed through Portia’s character, she is not the only inhabitant affected by a skewing of the senses. Bowen writes that, “When Thomas comes in he looks as though he was smelling something he might not be let eat. This house makes a smell of feeling” (140). As a result of such strange inversions and a “home life” filled with “puzzles” or symbolic ‘cage bars’, those living here appear to lack the ability to properly digest the present moment and due to these inherent characteristics of the home, Windsor Terrace hardly promises anything resembling a future nor sufficient perspective to encourage a connection with the past (72).

Along with the bizarre sounds and smells of the home, the significance of sight or more specifically, the light that allows such vision, both literal and imaginative, figures a key role in Bowen’s novel. Gaston Bachelard references in *Poetics of Space*, “one of the greatest theorems of the imagination of the world of light: *Tout ce qui brille voit* (All that glows sees)” (34). Such a theorem lends agency not only to those who operate within said light but also to the very source of light itself. Bowen would support the truth of this phrase and yet she also complicates and questions the theorem through animate descriptions of the light fixture in Windsor Terrace. Not only does the light within the home appear strong enough to possess the power of vision, but also to *control* this power

of sight, illuminating where it so chooses but also casting its *shadow* in a manner equally as determined.

For example, as Portia encounters Matchett upon her return to Windsor Terrace one afternoon, the two come face to face in the entryway. Despite their proximity Bowen notes, “They could barely see each other” and thus, “her [Matchett’s] hand went up decidedly to the switch between the arches” (24). “Immediately, Anna’s cut-glass lamp sprang alight over their heads, dropping its complex shadow on the white stone floor” (24). While Matchett initiates the switch, the lamp appears to control itself, springing to life so vividly as if of its own volition. Though its object is to highlight and illuminate, the light appears to neglect its purpose. Not fully revealed, Portia “stood askance under the light” which ironically shines “over the heads” of the two women, somehow bypassing the subjects beneath and instead choosing to drop “its complex shadow on the white stone floor.” Bowen therefore questions Bachelard’s referenced theorem, highlighting instead the shadows within the home, adding to the vague sense of unreality and an inability to see things clearly which is so characteristic of Windsor Terrace.

Such unreality is reiterated in Thomas’s study, a room with multiple personalities according to the wishes of its inhabitants; “Anna wanted this room to look cheerfully casual, Thomas made it formlessly untidy” (41). As if unsure of its purpose, desired to be disparate things to different people, the room avoids meeting any expectations at all and thus becomes artificial. This artificiality is highlighted as Thomas entertains (or subtly evades) Major Brutt in the study upon the latter’s unanticipated visit. At the beginning of

his call, Major Brutt happily wallows in his fantasies of and idealism about the Quaynes' domestic establishment, reminiscing how he was,

...brought that first night to Windsor Terrace...[he] already began to attach himself to that warm room...The glow on the rug, Anna on the sofa with her pretty feet up, Thomas nosing so kindly round for cigars, Portia nursing her elbows as though they had been a couple of loved cats - here was the focus of the necessary dream (115).

And yet Bowen quickly de-romanticizes this dream of Brutt's, for in Thomas's room, "loneliness lay on [this] study like a cloud. The tumbled papers, the ash, the empty coffee-cup...Even the fire only grinned, like a fire in an advertisement" (115). Where Brutt expects to find genuine warmth, there exists merely an artificial flame.

In fact, the fires here are never described as real and Bowen highlights this sense of deficiency during Portia's later stay at Waikiki as she thinks back on Windsor Terrace. Portia thinks, "something that should have been going on had not gone on: something had not happened. They had sat round a painted, not a burning, fire, at which you tried in vain to warm your hands" (192). Powerful, roaring fires are non-existent at Windsor Terrace and instead the inhabitants sit before a "pallid flare" (333). What is key to remember is that Portia, having 'roamed' before, knows and is able to recognize what she is now missing. Using such unreliable flames at Windsor Terrace as precedence, the doomed nature of Portia's love for Eddie, the suave, charming business partner in Thomas's advertising agency, is foreshadowed in a letter he writes to Portia asking, "Wouldn't it be nice if you were poking our fire and expecting me home any

minute?” (197). Of course he captivates Portia with his conventional image of domestic bliss (she *is* sixteen), yet there is no evidence that this hearth would be more authentic than those previously established within Bowen’s novel (197).

The space which allows Portia to imagine her love of Eddie (one form of escape which will later be elaborated upon) is her bedroom within the Quaynes’ home. The room evidently provides moments of refuge and yet it is described as being not altogether suiting. “I made that room so pretty before she came” Anna tells St. Quentin and yet (rather appropriately) it is set with “a high barred window”, a space that “could have been the nursery” (5, 47). The window described as belonging to Portia is one which in fact originates in Bowen’s own childhood for she writes in *Seven Winters*, “My nursery reached across the breadth of the house; being high up it had...windows, and bars had been fixed across these” (471). Portia’s arrival accentuates the absence of children within Anna and Thomas’s marriage which Bowen addresses in noting, “The Quaynes had expected to have two or three children: in the early years of their marriage Anna had two miscarriages” (46). Placing her in this space signifies the Quaynes’ inability to understand Portia in her young adulthood, hoping she is still a child they can relegate to this pseudo-nursery. Anna never fully turns this space over to Portia and this is apparent in the excuses she gives for prying in this space.

Within the strange ‘cage’ of Windsor Terrace, Portia is set on display through the various ways in which her privacy is violated. The novel begins with Anna and her friend St. Quentin walking outside as the former relates her latest findings in Portia’s

diary. Although St. Quentin tells Anna she was “mad ever to touch the thing”, Anna goes on to describe how she first came by the object, telling him,

Her white dress came back with one of mine from the cleaners...I took hers to hang it up in her room...All I did...was to take one look around, rather feeling I ought...Well, that wretched little *escritoire* caught my eye...The flap would not shut - papers gushed out all round it...So I scooped the the papers all out and dropped them into the armchair...and under the exercise books [there was] this diary, which, as I say, I read (5-6).

Anna feels an entitlement to engage with Portia’s room in her absence due to her dissatisfaction with the way in which Portia is using it. “She’s more like an animal [remember the tiger]...I had no idea how blindly she was going to live”, Anna tells her companion. Using this as her pretense, Anna in turn *does* treat Portia as if an animal that she must clean up after and then figuratively parade as a topic amongst her acquaintances through the the sharing of her diary with not only St. Quentin but Eddie as well.

Anna describes the *escritoire* where she finds Portia’s diary as “wretched” for a reason though; the desk has a past. She tells St. Quentin that that,

...little *escritoire* thing that came from Thomas’s mother’s - her father may well have used it. I’d had that put in her room: it has drawers that lock, and quite a big flap to write on. The flap locks too: I hoped that would make her see that I quite meant her to have a life of her own (6).

Bachelard offers profound insight into the psychological significance of objects such as this, writing that “Wardrobes with their shelves, desks with their drawers, and chests with

their false bottoms are veritable organs of the secret psychological life” and going on to suggest that “a lock is a psychological threshold” (78, 81). The *escritoire* speaks more to the psychological life of Anna than Portia though as Anna does not establish this *escritoire* with the capacity for security for Portia’s benefit alone, but rather in an imitation of her own habits of safekeeping and secrecy.

“With the theme of drawers, chests, locks and wardrobes, we...resume contact with the unfathomable store of daydreams of intimacy”, Bachelard writes (78). This notion, though easily accepted as true, is supported in the third and final installment of the novel. Anna and Thomas return from Capri where they have been vacationing and while the latter and Portia go for a walk outside of the house, the reader watches Anna sit down at,

...her *escritoire* which in a shadowed corner of this large light room, was not suitable to write more than notes at. In the pigeonholes she kept her engagement pad, her account books: the drawers under the flap were useful because they locked (321).

It is here that Anna keeps old letters from Pidgeon and Eddie. The *escritoire*, a piece of furniture that both Anna and Portia use would seem to connect the two women yet instead emphasizes their differences.

While one woman has lived enough to require and have built a life of enforced privacy, the other is young enough (at the outset of the book at least) to be unaware that her intimate world as symbolized by her room, her *escritoire*, and her diary are threatened and/or threatening. Maud Ellmann would say that this interaction between Portia and

Anna is exemplary of what occurs between Bowen and her readers as well, for as Ellmann writes, “In prying into Bowen’s secrets [in this case, those of her novels] we are likely to betray our own” just as Anna’s provision of and subsequent interference with Portia’s *escritoire* is a commentary on her own practices of intimacy (4). Ellmann perfectly summarizes Bowen in saying that “Her fiction interprets the interpreters, shaking our assumptions, undermining our defenses” (4-5). Perhaps in reading of the intimate lives of others (often within the domestic sphere where such intimacy takes place), we as readers are opening the ‘drawer’ of the novel.

As mentioned, the *escritoirs*, both Anna’s and Portia’s, indicate a literal and figurative interior life to furniture. Although illustrated by said *escritoirs*, this is a phenomenon which Portia comes to better understand through Windsor Terrace’s housekeeper, Matchett. Concerned by the apparent apathy around her and the distortions in this house, Portia shares her concerns with Matchett, with whom she forms a particular bond. One evening as the housekeeper visits the girl before she goes to bed, Portia tells her companion, “Except for you and me, nobody cares” (99). In reply Matchett concedes, “No, there’s no past in this house” (99). “What makes them so jumpy?” Portia asks of her guardians. And Matchett tells her,

They’d rather no past - not 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 (99).

Matchett continues talking and begins to pine for her former mistress, Thomas’s mother, and elaborates on her legacy as experienced through the furniture which has now come to

Windsor Terrace. Matchett, it turns out, sought to follow the furniture rather than the son in coming to Thomas's home. "I hadn't the heart...to let that furniture go: I wouldn't have known myself" she explains (100).

Portia, slightly confused and yet striving to understand, asks, "The furniture would have missed you?" (101). And Matchett begins one of the most memorable passages within Bowen's oeuvre on the relationship between human and home. She says,

Furniture's knowing all right. Not much gets past the things in a room, I daresay, and chairs and tables don't go to the grave so soon. Every time I take the soft cloth to that stuff in the drawingroom, I could say, 'Well, you know a bit more.'

My goodness, when I got here and saw all Mrs. Quayne's stuff where Mrs.

Thomas had put it - if I'd have been a silly, I should have said it gave me quite a look. Well, it didn't speak, and I didn't (101).

While the furniture maintains its silence in this instance, Matchett is clear in her belief that that doesn't mean it has nothing to say. Rather, the furniture knows its place. She reveals, "Good furniture knows what's what. It knows it's made for a purpose, and it respects itself...Oh, furniture like we've got is too much for some that would rather not have the past" (101). Matchett's conversation lends itself to the observation made by Bachelard that, "Objects that are cherished in this way [respected as vessels of the past and present] really are born of an intimate light, and they attain to a higher degree of reality than indifferent objects, or those that are defined by geometric reality" (68).

While the furniture can 'keep its drawers shut' it is easy to ignore the history which it has seen and ultimately come to stand for. Portia is slightly harder to ignore, but like the

furniture, reminds Thomas and Anna of the past (including the elder Mr. Quayne's indiscretion in his affair with Portia's mother). Gradually though, Portia, just as the furniture does, comes to realize her purpose and ultimately concludes that it is a purpose greater than to amuse Anna, St. Quentin, and Eddie. With this realization, she breaks some of the 'bars' of her cage.

As the provider of such knowledge to Portia (on the lack of past in this place) and the closest thing to a friend (stoic yet compassionate) of Portia's within Windsor Terrace, Matchett proves an interesting figure. She is one of the only constant individuals within the novel and is described as such through direct characterization and the comparisons made between her and objects of durability throughout the house. On one of her nightly visits, Portia, as Matchett sat on her bed, "had unconsciously pushed, while she spoke, at the knee under Matchett's apron as though she were trying to push away a wall. Nothing, in fact, moved" (98). As she is adjusting to the unreality of this place, Portia is surprised to find something solid on which she might literally and figuratively lean. In other instances Matchett is defined as equally steady. Bowen describes how almost every aspect of this figure is representative of strength;

Matchett stayed with her hand propped on the pillar. She had an austere, ironical face, flesh padded smoothly over the strong structure of bone. Her strong springy lustreless hair was centre parted and drawn severely back...one hand seemed to support the fragile Regency pillar" (24-25).

This woman is the practical 'pillar' on which Windsor Terrace is built. When it is suggested that Matchett be the one to retrieve Portia from Major Brutt's at the end of the

novel, St. Quentin asks, “Matchett - is that the woman with the big stony apron, who backs to the wall when I pass like a caryatid?” (409). This final description is an appropriate one as it captures the degree to which Matchett is not only a presence within Windsor Terrace but more accurately, a part of the home itself, that part which is not illusory.

Much like Matchett, other figures in Bowen’s novel are illuminated in their comparison to objects found within the home. Such a comparison “exposes the fundamental role of the built environment in creating the categories we use to organize and understand who we are” (Rosner 2). For example, when Major Brutt accompanies the Quaynes home after a film one night, his astonishment at finding the domestic comforts at Windsor Terrace is relayed in language of the home itself (or lack thereof). He relates to this place, “Like an empty room with no blinds” as “his imagination gapes on the scene, and reflects what was never there” (54). Although in context, Brutt is reflecting on his own lack of such a space, this simile highlights “what was never there” at Windsor Terrace as well, namely (in the opinion of Matchett and Portia) the past.

Anna recognizes the aptness of human-house similitude when she admits to herself, “She [Portia] makes me feel like a tap that won’t turn on” (323). Mrs. Heccombe (of Waikiki) and her fastidiousness are also well illustrated using domestic terms as Bowen notes, “In pauses that could but occur in the talk, Portia could almost hear Mrs. Heccombe’s ideas, like chairs before a party, being rolled about and rapidly rearranged” (245). Bowen continues the domestic metaphors in writing how, “when Daphne’s homecoming step was heard on the esplanade, Mrs. Heccombe had learned to

draw a shutter over her nerves” (177). Such human “shutters” are not singular to Mrs. Heccombe though, for they also serve to describe and highlight the vacancy with which Eddie conducts his personal relationships. In a moment he spends with Portia while they explore the abandoned lodging house at Seale, Eddie approaches Portia and “staring into her eyes” he tells her, “You do know I’m serious with you, don’t you, Portia?” (260). And although Portia’s adoration of Eddie should render her willing to hear and believe such a thing, there is a moment when,

In his own eyes, shutters flicked back, exposing for half a second, right back in the dark, the Eddie in there. Never till now, never since this half-second, had Portia been the first to look away (260).

Just as the home operates according to a system of interior and exterior, Bowen uses this now familiar and established system and the language associated with it to allude to a parallel structure in respect to the human body itself, a physical exterior surrounding the emotional, intellectual and psychological interior life of the individual. The disjunction between these two is what Portia feels for the first time in the abandoned home where the emptiness of her strange surroundings mimic the emptiness which she finally observes in Eddie.

Matchett’s solidity and incorporation into the home of Windsor Terrace contrasts Eddie’s merely theatrical presence in the places he inhabits. The role he plays at Windsor Terrace is indicated one afternoon as he visits with Anna in the drawingroom. Here,

Eddie turned away and stood looking out of the window at the park. Shoulders squared, hands thrust in his pockets, he took the pose of a chap making a new

start. Her aquamarine curtains, looped high up over his head with cords and tassels, fell in stately folds each side of him to the floor, theatrically framing his back view (86).

Eddie “lent himself gladly and quickly, or appeared to lend himself, to Anna’s illusions about living” (81). Such illusions are based on appearances and Anna likewise often strikes an image. As if in a still life, she reclines on the sofa or as she does with Eddie the same afternoon, “She got up from the sofa and went to lean on the mantelpiece...She could stay so still” (85). The affectations of the pair render Portia blunt and naive, yet sincere in contrast. One evening the party gathers at Windsor Terrace and “Anna swung her feet up on the sofa, a little back from the others, and looked removed and tired - she kept touching her hair back” (55). While Anna is calculated and withdrawn, Portia bursts forth, open to and interacting with the space around her as her “first animation was in the room somewhere, bobbing up near the ceiling like an escaped balloon” (56). Portia is obviously not one to be contained. Eddie’s performances and Anna’s posturing are artificial in the face of Matchett’s resilience and Portia’s genuine innocence, lending credit to their notions that something is lacking in this home.

Theatricality can be rather attractive though and Eddie’s charming influence over Portia is powerful. Not far into her stay with Thomas and Anna, she falls asleep in her room at Windsor Terrace and a recent letter from Eddie under her pillow infuses her subsequent dreams. Halfway between wakefulness and sleep, Portia’s oneiric musings occur while she is “safe for the minute” and therefore, “sealed down under her eyelids,”

Portia imagines. In this moment, Portia escapes Windsor Terrace to a place which allows for a future. She,

...saw herself with Eddie. She saw a continent in the late sunset, in rolls and ridges of shadow like the sea...The country, with its slow tense dusk-drowned ripple, rose to their feet where they sat: she and Eddie sat in the door of a hut (106).

Her imagination continues to inform her senses, no longer obscured by the inversions of the London home and she,

...felt the hut, with its content of dark behind them. The unearthly *level light* streamed in their faces...She *saw* his hands hanging down between his knees, and her hands hanging down peacefully beside him as they sat together on the step of the hut [emphasis mine] (106).

In the first chapter of *Poetics of Space*, Bachelard addresses this concept of the “hut dream” and in order to do so he references Henri Bachlin’s *Le serviteur*. In an account of his own father’s life, Bachlin writes of the boy’s “daydreaming of primitiveness, daydreaming that accentuated solitude to the point of imagining that he lived in a hut in the depth of the forest” (30). Bachelard elevates this excerpt to be more than a childhood scenario, showing that it is rather a tapping into something ancient and shared, the “hut dream,” “well-known to everyone who cherished the legendary images of primitive houses” (31). Perhaps this is what the tiger feels he finds at the end of his story and Portia in her dreaming, a primitive place which lends itself to a home.

Bachlin's father's imagination conjures a representation of the solitariness of his childhood home and translates this into a space wrapped and protected in the depths of the forest (perhaps what allows the Tiger to feel "at home" in a similar place). Here he remains awhile "delighted in imagining" yet gradually returns to his immediate surroundings (30). The hut eventually becomes pleasingly interchangeable with the boy's own home as Bachlin's protagonist removes himself from his dreamscape to reality once more. Little appears lost though as the house becomes the true manifestation of safety and warmth. "Our house replaced the hut for me," Bachlin's young narrator states, "it sheltered me from hunger and cold; and if I shivered, it was merely from well-being" (31). While Bachlin uses the hut to communicate a primitive space of safe loneliness, Portia engages with the "hut dream" as an oneiric escape in which she is not alone.

In envisioning herself with Eddie, Portia,

...felt the touch of calmness and similarity: he and she were one without any touch but this. What was in the hut behind she did not know: this light was eternal; they would be here forever (106).

Portia invokes the hut as her own home space and although she envisions herself sharing this place with Eddie, it belongs to her more fully than her current establishment at Windsor Terrace. As Bachelard notes, "When we are lost in darkness and see a distant glimmer of light, who does not dream of a thatched cottage or, to go more deeply still into legend, of a hermit's hut?" (31). Eddie provides Portia with that "glimmer of light" in the form of potential love and the hut, it is not Windsor Terrace, belonging to Anna and

Thomas, nor it is the hotel rooms which she and her mother once inhabited. In this moment Portia disregards the unknown, “what was in the hut behind” and instead is allowed to focus on that which she feels, “the hut with its content of dark, behind them” (106).

Portia’s image of happiness with Eddie is still an escape although this image is fated to become increasingly complicated. In Portia’s rendering, the reader is taken back to the first chapter of the novel in which Anna outlines the Quayne family history to St. Quentin as they walk along the lake. She details Thomas’s father’s affair with Portia’s mother, Irene, and summarily notes, “He had got knit up with Irene in a sort of dream wood, but the last thing he wanted was to stay in that wood forever” (19). Nevertheless, unable to return to the home dominated by his first wife, the eldest Mr. Quayne is forced back to his “dream wood” which, under these circumstances, is no longer dreamlike. If Portia is herself inhabiting a ‘dream wood’ with Eddie, the dream is impermanent but an escape from her ‘cage’ all the same.

Halfway through the novel, Portia is sent away to the seaside while Thomas and Anna vacation in Capri and her relocation to Mrs. Heccombe’s home at Seale-on-Sea marks a profound shift in the novel. The colourless, cold silhouette of Windsor Terrace sits in stark contrast to the openness of Waikiki where “numbers of windows at different levels looked out of the picturesque red roof” (170). Where there used to be “high barred window[s]”, at Waikiki, “one window had blown open; a faded curtain was wildly blowing out” (170). The “house had an almost transparent front” and the evening of her arrival, “Though dusk already fell on the esplanade, the room held a light reflection from

the sea. She [Portia] located the smell of spring with a trough of blue hyacinths, just come into flower” (170, 171). In Portia’s bedroom at Waikiki, “the electric light, from its porcelain shade, poured down with a frankness unknown at Windsor Terrace” (173). There appears to be an honesty and freedom in this place and perhaps as a result, the senses which are distorted at Windsor Terrace including sight and smell, are appropriately realigned here.

The transparency built into Waikiki through its open windows and glass facade figure into Bowen’s particular attention to the architectural structure of windows throughout her novel. As elements which serve as portals, bridges between the external world and internal domestic environs, windows are perceived of within *The Death of the Heart* as simultaneously liberating, as is the case at Waikiki, and threatening. At Windsor Terrace, Anna, ever conscious of impression rather than intention,

Having been seen at the window, having been waved to, made Anna step back instinctively. She knew how foolish a person looking out of a window appears from the outside of a house - as though waiting for something that does not happen, as though wanting something from the outside world. A face at a window for no reason is a face that should have a thumb in its mouth: there is something only-childish about it. Or, the face is not foolish it is threatening - blotted white by the darkness inside the room it suggests a malignant indoor power (321).

Once again Bowen writes that in this home, “through the big windows, darkness and silence had naturally stolen in on and begun to inhabit” (23). One morning Portia awakes at Windsor Terrace to find not silence but rather the first fog of the season which has also

crept indoors to inhabit the space. She describes the startling infiltration: “my window was like a brown stone, and I could hardly see the rest of the room. The whole house was just like that, it was not like night but like air being ill” (144). Oftentimes entering the house prior to Anna and Thomas or experiencing its grandeur alone, Portia is reminded of the profound absence here and Bowen chooses to emphasize this absence as something substantial and *felt* by filling it with darkness, silence, shadows and fog. Once these things enter, they appear to be trapped for as Eddie notes, “that house is a perfect web” (123).

But in this new setting by the sea, the static unreality and hidden nature of life at Windsor Terrace is juxtaposed by the transparent mobility of Waikiki. Bowen achieves this impression in her depictions of the house in its proximity to the ocean, as a sort of inhabited sea vessel. Her early descriptions of the home instill an air of expectancy upon Portia’s arrival. She writes, “A draught creeping through the sun porch rattled the curtain rings: Waikiki gave one of its shiplike creaks, and waves began to thump with greater force on the beach” (205). As if docked at the shore, awaiting to disembark, Waikiki, the home, parallels the imminent freedom Portia is launched into during her stay in this place.

While Anna entertains a select few at Windsor Terrace, the Heccombe children, Daphne and Dickie open Waikiki to dozens while throwing frequent parties. The evening of Portia’s first such event, “A black night wind was up, and Waikiki breasted it steadily, straining like a liner: every fixture rattled” (209). Now set out upon the seas the ‘home vessel’ absorbs the strength of the wind and continues onward. Likewise, Portia takes on

the night ahead of her as she “wormed her way into her black [like the night] velvet, which, from hanging only behind a curtain, had taken on a briny dampness inside” (209). Despite the potentially threatening dampness, Portia is protected by the warmth below as she strikes out and “was first downstairs...squatting on the tile kerb in front of the fire” (209). Here she “heard the chimney roar” and Bowen underscores the fact that this is no “pallid flare” of Windsor Terrace (209, 333).

It “was to be her first party”, Bowen writes and as if in honor of Portia, Tonight the ceiling rose higher, the lounge extended tense and mysterious. Columns of translucent tawny shadow stood between the orange shades of the lamps...Out there at sea they might take this house for another lighted ship - and soon this magnetic room would be drawing people down the dark esplanade (209).

Waikiki appears to mimic and respond accordingly to Portia’s anticipation of the evening. Not only does the living area make room for her, Portia “got the feeling there was room for everyone” (172). Here she is sheltered yet free. The physical space of Waikiki adapts itself to facilitate the socialization of its inhabitants and the brightness of the home attracts friends and newcomers.

Such a description echoes Bachelard’s notion that, “All the spaces of intimacy are designated by an attraction. Their being is well-being” (12). While the structure of Waikiki the building exemplifies this concept, the event of the party at Waikiki also strikes an opposition to the establishment of Windsor Terrace, site of “The Quaynes’ home life [which] was as much their private life as though their marriage had been

illicit” (109). Unlike the resistance of Windsor Terrace, forbidden and unwelcome to those who have not been previously entrenched within the home: “well did she [the Quaynes’ maid, Phyllis] know the look of someone who knew the house...nobody ever came who did not”, Waikiki instead draws individuals towards and into its being (109). All of this contributes to the spontaneity experienced by Portia in this place, thus lending itself to “the uneditedness of life here” (221).

Soon after she arrives at Waikiki, Portia has cause to reflect on her home with Thomas and Anna. She thinks about how,

He, she, Portia, three Quaynes, had lived, packed close in one house through the winter cold, accepting, not merely choosing each other. They had all three worked at their parts of the same necessary pattern. They had passed on the same stairs, grasped the same door handles, listened to the strokes of the same clocks. Behind the doors at Windsor Terrace, they had heard each other’s voices, like the continuous murmur inside the whorls of a shell (192).

The image and connotations associated with the object of the shell constitute an entire chapter of Bachelard’s *Poetics*. Though the ‘whorls of the shell’ in the above passage are invoked to describe the sounds of muffled yet distinguishable voices within Windsor Terrace, the metaphor is well extended to the rest of house and the patterns found within: stairwell routes, cyclical days, as well as the human body itself. Bachelard writes that “ancient symbolics used the shell as a symbol for the human body, which encloses the soul in an outside envelope, while the soul quickens the entire being” (116). Adopting and appropriating this concept, Portia herself mirrors the shell in its construction as she

experiences her own “mystery of slow continuous formation” throughout the novel (Bachelard 31). St. Quentin sardonically admires this adolescent state of development, telling Anna, “I’m afraid we can’t do much about your character now. It must have set - I know mine has. Portia’s so lucky; her’s is still being formed” (106). Portia perhaps captures what Bachelard refers to as the “original vortex”, the point at which the subsequent coils of the shell begin to either rotate left or right or in Portia’s case, the point at which she begins to love, to distrust, to roam outwards once more (106).

Anna makes the claim that “Possibly Portia really hasn’t got much talent for home life” (396). Her conclusion is unfounded though, as Portia adapts to the life at Waikiki once released from the cage that is Windsor Terrace. It is not Portia’s “talent” or lack thereof in living domestically that inhibits her at Windsor Terrace. Surrounded on all sides by metaphorical bars of silence, shadow, fog in this place, Portia is treated by the Quaynes as if a piece of their collection of inherited furniture. Her past is ignored out of shame and without this history, Portia is barred from finding a comfortable place here. In a passage which captures well Portia’s captivity here, Bowen writes,

The pointed attention of St. Quentin and Anna reached her like a quick tide, or an attack: the ordeal of getting out of the drawingroom tightened her [Portia’s] mouth up and made her fingers curl...She got to the door...then turned with one hand on it, proudly ready to show she could speak again. But at once, Anna poured out another cup of cold tea...She heard their silence (32-33).

As if on display, Portia becomes an object of amusement and is paraded about through the dissemination of her personal writings. I disagree with what Harry Strickhausen

writes in his review entitled “Elizabeth Bowen and Reality”, that Bowen’s “world is...one in which characters move passively, subjected to forces that they cannot control” (165). While indeed Portia is subjected to much upon her arrival at Windsor Terrace, Portia is not passive in this environment, finding outlets of escape in her affinity to the objects around her (which like her bear a story and past), in the primitive future home which becomes real in imagination and dreaming and finally, in a place which trades the captivity of Windsor Terrace for transparent freedom. As she leaves Mrs. Heccombe’s one afternoon, “Portia glanced back at the Waikiki windows. But no one watched her; no one seemed to object” and off she goes (189). “The tiger liked being outside the zoo. He looked around at the streets and houses and trees, and was pleased with everything”.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Paying a Visit

The day the tiger leaves the zoo and roams with and without his new friends, he visits other people's homes. And although he ultimately envisions Sarah asking him to her home again, the tiger does not always find that which he anticipates in these places. Instead, he discovers that some individuals are expecting him, some are not. Some push him out while others fix him cake and still others climb on the table out of fear. The experience and the reactions which the tiger encounters when he leaves his home for another's are quite varied. The same could be said to be true of the characters and their domestic experiences in Elizabeth Bowen's novel, *The Heat of the Day*. Bowen trades her protagonist's adolescence in *The Death of the Heart* for adulthood in this work, published in 1948, yet maintains London as the setting for the novel. Following the blitz bombings of World War Two, Bowen explores how men and women adapt or fail to adapt to the domestic spaces in which they regularly function and those which they visit in the face of strategic and unrelenting violence, in the process beautifully illustrating the affair between love and deceit in a time of war. Encroaching on the sanctity of home and the security of love, Bowen highlights the war without by detailing the climate, blueprints (both physical and psychic) and fantastic revelations of wartime homes within.

As Richard Gill notes in his essay "The Country House in a Time of Troubles", Bowen writes in an Afterword to *Heat of the Day*, "I have taken the attachment of people to places as being generic to human life, at a time when the attachment is to be dreaded as a possible source of too much pain" (57). Outlining three characters and their respective

homes, the novel and this chapter discuss how these spaces in their various forms - London flat, English country home and Irish big house, provide shape to political and personal realities. As Diana Fuss writes, “the architectural dwelling is not merely something we inhabit, but something that inhabits us” (5). Or in the words of Alain de Botton, the structure which the home provides to an individual’s constitution suggests that the home serves as “guardian of identity” (11). The homes which Bowen creates prove to be the birthplace of treachery but also promising symbols of a future following the war. In *The Heat of the Day*, Bowen does not posit the home as the answer to uncertainty, rather it is a place in which the individual engages with their personal narrative and those of others through wartime visits.

The immediacy of wartime destruction finds voice not only in Bowen’s fiction, but in her letters and non-fiction writings of the time. As Kristine Miller outlines in her essay, “Even a Shelter’s Not Safe: The Blitz on Homes in Elizabeth Bowen’s Wartime Writing”, “London was bombed every night from September 7 to November 2, 1940” and “In total, the blitz damaged or destroyed over 3 1/2 million homes” (138). Among the home casualties of the war was Virginia Woolf’s own (138). In a letter from Bowen to her friend, dated July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1935, Bowen addresses the the loss of Woolf’s flat. She writes, “When your flat went, did that mean all the things in it too? All my life I have said, ‘Whatever happens, there will always be tables and chairs’ –and what a mistake” (Mulberry Tree 216-217). It is as if Bowen initially saw a rootedness in those things which stand on four legs as opposed to two, only to have her belief proved a faulty hypothesis as she closely observed three wars at the national and international levels

during the span in which she wrote. Bowen's letters and friendship with Woolf prove that she related to the world not only through the foundational lens provided by Bowen's Court, but also through those people and homes she visited outside of her own.

To be invited into the home is to be invited into a story. With Bowen's introductory passages on the London flat in Weymouth Street which her protagonist Stella Rodney inhabits, the reader is immediately struck by Stella's ability to establish permanence in a place otherwise marked by transitoriness. The nature of Stella's relationship to the apartment, having "taken the flat furnished, having given up the last of her own houses and stored her furniture when the war began" and existing in a place in which she must continually recognize, "Nothing is mine...Nothing in this flat is" would suggest a perpetual disconnect between home and inhabitant (22, 27). Nevertheless this proves not altogether accurate in the case of Stella, for here her moods are replicated in the way the blinds fall, and her being infuses the space with, as her son Roderick observes, "the particular climate in which his mother dwelled" (51). This climate is described as not only that which Stella exists in, but that which she brings about for, "To re-enter this climate, to be affected by it, could have been enervating if one had not loved her" (51). Though the flat is borrowed, Stella successfully imbues the place with manifestations of her presence.

It is this presence that Harrison craves when he visits and enters into Stella's flat and consequently into her life and story. Here he disrupts the balance struck by Stella in his accusations that Stella's lover, Robert Kelway is in fact a traitor to Britain. What brings Harrison to this place is his desire to replace Robert in Stella's story proposing

blackmail, Stella's love for the safekeeping of Robert's secret. Although Stella is initially resistant, the tone of the apartment lends itself to this possibility. Bowen highlights the fact that interior spaces assume a heightened intimacy in the face of World War II blackout policies. The scene is set for acts of an illicit nature as Bowen notes, "It was a time of opening street doors conspiratorially: light must not escape on to steps" (47).

Prior to Harrison's first arrival at Stella's flat, she is in the act of covering her windows;

The harsh black-out blind, its roller hidden under the pretty pelmet, was pulled some way down, throwing a nightlike shadow across this end of the ceiling; the blind of the other window was, on the other hand, right up. She did not correct the irregularity, perhaps because the effect of it, *méchant*, slipshod, was in some way part of her mood (20).

The irregularity of the attention to her windows though foreshadows future indecision of Stella's as to her relationship with Harrison. She closes one window but figuratively leaves the other open and exposed enough for him to 'enter' the flat, giving him just enough access to insert himself into her home and story, thereafter changing it.

Harrison's wishing to insert himself into Stella's life, is accomplished as soon as he crosses the threshold of her flat. Interestingly, there is an inevitability surrounding Harrison's entrance as Stella is not only expecting and waiting for him to make his entry, she helps to facilitate it having "left the street door unlatched and the door of her flat, at the top of the stairs, ajar" (21). Though Stella directly aids in Harrison's entrance, she registers his arrival indirectly; "Over the photographs hung a mirror - into which, on hearing Harrison's footstep actually upon the stairs, she looked; not at herself but with the

idea of studying, at just one more remove from reality, the door of this room opening behind her, as it must" (23). This is an image which will be repeated later in the novel. Perhaps unsure of whether he belongs in this place, Stella feigns indifference and yet the theatrical distances she places between herself and Harrison indicate her startling awareness that Harrison represents another reality that she does not yet know how to view, thus she does so through the glass of the mirror.

If Stella possesses any incredulity regarding Harrison, she surrenders or stifles this in the uncanny and swift observation she makes to him. "I don't quite see how you are to check up - on me, that is - without bringing the roof down", she says (43). Aware of how completely Harrison's accusations will affect her, Stella shows this in her domestic idiom which suggests that Harrison is threatening the very foundation and structure of her life, her home. Her remark constitutes a foreshadowing of Robert's ultimate and literal downfall from the very roof to which Stella figuratively alludes.

Aware that his offer is strange, Harrison approaches Stella and her flat with careful strategy. "Having settled with the door," he "looked at the carpet, at the distances of carpet between them, as though thinking out a succession of moves in chess" (25). Harrison seems to personally forgive his act of trespassing though in the name of desire for Stella. Watching her move about her flat, he imagines himself as a more permanent part of this scene; "So that's what it can be like!" he thinks, "Meanwhile, feet planted apart in the lamplit drawing room, he looked about him like a German in Paris" (46). Although Harrison leaves the flat that evening, there is the sense that the apartment is no longer completely Stella's for the ease of renting, of using borrowed furniture, now the

whole of Stella's lifestyle is complicated. Harrison had "brought to life one of those passes when nothing is simple, not even opening a door" (47).

Although Stella's belief in Harrison's revelations is strengthened throughout the course of the novel, Harrison's presence in Stella's home is never one of natural ease. Despite this fact, he continues to vicariously situate himself in this space through repeated visits. He even goes as far as revealing to Stella, "I so often think of this place that, if you won't mind me saying so, now I feel quite at home" (141). The furniture begs to differ though as his interactions with it reveal Harrison's inability to be naturally incorporated into this space. Harrison progresses from standing "like a German in Paris" to the more comfortable act of being seated, yet "He sat planted well forward in his armchair - which, like so many third armchairs in a room which normally only two intimate people sit, was a stranded outpost some way away" (142). Bowen repeats the term "planted" in each act of Harrison's ("feet planted apart", "he sat planted"), highlighting his desire to become an organic part of Stella's environment. Yet his efforts prove fruitless and Stella "looked from the armchair proper to Robert to the armchair *commandeered* by Harrison [emphasis mine]" and "stepping between or over the smaller furniture, he made her think of that first day at the funeral when she had turned to see him so far behind her stepping over the graves" (146, 148). Harrison imagines and feels himself enlivened in a place that becomes dead for Stella with his entrance.

What Stella's son, Roderick has already highlighted about this home, the fact that one was less likely to enter and remain in it without the precondition of loving Stella, proves apt in regards to the three men in the novel. Roderick as Stella's son, Robert as

her lover, and Harrison as her vigilant admirer, all enter and exist within the flat throughout the novel. Roderick is the second male to inhabit Stella's flat when he visits on his day off from the Army. As it turns out, Harrison is not the only one who experiences difficulty incorporating himself into this setting. Roderick thinks upon his arrival, "This did not look like home; but it looked like something - possibly a story" (48). Finding himself thrown off by the unfamiliarity of the rented furnishings, Roderick's inability to read his surroundings causes him to use the flat instead as a catalyst for his own imaginative creativity. For Roderick,

The house...became the hub of his imaginary life, of fancies, fantasies only so to be called because circumstance outlawed them from reality. Submerged, soporific and powerful, these fancies made for his acquiescence to the immediate day (52).

With his recently revealed acquisition of Mount Morris, an Irish estate bequeathed by the late Cousin Francis, Roderick is endowed with a *new* story towards which all of his thoughts move.

Bowen writes that,

Possessorship of Mount Morris affected Roderick strongly. It established for him, and was adding to day by day, what might be called an historic future. The house came out to meet his growing capacity for attachment; all the more, perhaps, in that by geographically standing outside war it appeared also to be standing outside the present (52).

In his mind he writes his future in this place. Unable to situate himself in Stella's flat, "The absence of every inanimate thing they [mother and son] had had in common set up

an undue strain”, forcing Roderick out of his immediate surroundings and into his fantasies (57-58). Roderick mimics Mount Morris and its capacity to operate outside of the present London moment (the home is situated in neutral Ireland) in the act of imagining. For example, Roderick has not been reclining long on Stella’s couch before she joins him there and he remarks to her, “don’t go away again...Now we’re in the same boat” (55). “What? -how?”, she asks him and in reply he tells her, “This is like being opposite one another in a boat on a river” (55). Roderick has been thinking of Mount Morris the entire time revealed as he asks if his mother, when she arrives at Mount Morris to take appraisal of the home, will inquire whether there is a boat on the estate.

Eventually Roderick does return to the immediacy of the flat, but his findings are increasingly disorienting. Whereas the room ‘speaks’ to and for Stella, for Roderick, “in this room in which they sat nothing spoke...a mysterious flutter, like that of a fire burning, which used to emanate from the minute seemed to be at a stop” (58). While Mount Morris stands as an institution of the future, the Weymouth flat stands for the present, but without anything further to promise. For Roderick, it is outside of time itself. Bowen writes,

The room lacked one more thing: apprehension of time. Inside it the senses were cut off from hour and season; nothing spoke but the clock. The day had gone from the moment Stella had drawn down the fitted blinds and drawn across them the deadening curtains: now nothing took its place. Every crack was stopped; not a mote of darkness could enter - the room, sealed up in its artificial light, remained exaggerated and cerebral (59).

Appraising the space as such, there is no story here for Roderick. He cannot read the space and therefore does not try to write himself into it. The homes of his past childhood have been relinquished and the home of his future lies outside of London and England in neutral territory. This space provides him with little in regard to his own personal narrative and he therefore feels nothing here.

The notion of 'home' stands as a convention of trust, of decency and as evidenced by Roderick, of future. It is a belief in this tradition that prompts a desire in Stella to further explore the childhood home of Robert, perhaps seeking to find here the root of what she loves in him after Harrison's accusations. The couple embarks on a day trip to the country to visit Holme Dene and instead of finding reassurance here, Stella discovers the roots or blueprints of Robert's betrayal. Here she is introduced to the home as well as the mother, sister and young niece and nephew who inhabit it. Though Holme Dene sits a train trip outside of London and thus would be thought of as a safer place than say, Stella's flat, Bowen's description of the couple's time is fraught with tense, militaristic language. With this space, Bowen illuminates the possibility that a 'war' on the home front preceded the World War.

Control of Holme Dene sits with Robert's mother and yet prior to meeting Mrs. Kelway, Stella's first introduction to the interior of the home is her exposure to the 'refugees of war' manifest in the form of the family furniture which decorates the living area. Here she observes, "Some mahogany pieces, such as a dining-table, a dumb waiter and an upright piano" which "could be marked as evacuees out of other rooms" (117). These interior articles hint at a lack of rootedness in this space and a subsequent desire to

flee; a desire replicated in Robert. Even the rented furniture which Roderick has difficulty placing within the context of Stella's apartment and life is spoken of with more intimacy than those family pieces at Holme Dene. Bowen goes on to describe Stella's immediate inability to navigate Holme Dene noting that perhaps this is the desired effect on a visitor to this place. She writes that,

Stella, keyed up to meet Robert's mother, did not know in which direction to look first: a small bowl of orange dahlias drew her attention, like an arranged decoy.

A silence, more than a sound, made her turn round quickly - Mrs. Kelway, in one hand holding her knitting, had already risen out of her chair (118).

The home appears to be in collusion with Mrs. Kelway, allowing for her stealthy appearance.

She had risen from the "armchair Stella should not have failed to see, for it was posted midway across the floor. Was this position strategic? -from it she commanded all three windows" (120). Stella's anticipation, her 'keyed up' feeling is hardly lessened once she has met this figure. Rather, Mrs. Kelway's vigilant surveillance never allows a moment lacking scrutiny. As Stella and Robert take a walk outside the home following their brief tour of the interior, Stella is disconcerted in their inability to be alone (a sense which is exaggerated by Harrison's equally vigilant surveillance). At a distance from the house, they "were out of sight, or all but psychic sight, of the windows" (120). The home and its surrounding land operates as an extension of Mrs. Kelway, extending her power of sight to those places she cannot physically go. In this capacity, she mimics Harrison, yet

in her synchronicity with the rooms in which she abides, Robert's mother echoes Stella, for she also defines the climate of her surroundings:

The lounge became what it was from being the repository of her nature; it was the indoors she selected, she consecrated...she projected Holme Dene: this was a bewitched wood. If her power came to an end at the white gate, so did the world (120).

Whereas the question of inherent animation and life in the domestic environment is one of great importance in novels such as *Death of the Heart* for example, this dispute is somewhat irrelevant in regards to Holme Dene as any life and/or being possessed in this home is clearly born in and through the mistress of the estate.

Overwhelmed by her surroundings and the change which the home brings over Robert, Stella must force herself to feel real in this place. Seated at the mahogany tea table at which "each one of the family had his or her own ration placed before his or her own plate in a differently coloured china shell", Stella,

...pressed her thumb against the edge of the table to assure herself this was a moment *she* was living through - as in the moment before a faint she seemed to be looking at everything down a darkening telescope (124-125).

The surreal nature of this moment continues as Stella,

...dared look again at Robert, seated across the table, opposite her, between his nephew and niece. Late afternoon striking into the blue of his eyes made him look like a young man in Technicolour (125).

She acknowledges to herself “that the current between him and her should be cut off, she had expected; dullness, numbness, even grotesquery she had foreseen” (125). While she is musing on the propriety of the couple’s having come to Holme Dene, Stella’s thought is equally appropriate in regards to the propriety of the couple’s relationship in the face of Harrison’s accusations.

In this moment Stella cannot connect with her lover even though what literally separates them is “Nothing more psychic than Mrs. Kelway’s tea table, with its china and eatables...the tea table, however, was in itself enough” (125). Bowen’s comment speaks to the severity of the potential divide between Stella and Robert, a divide which is legitimate and beginning to be palpable yet delicate enough to be further exasperated by a standard household object while partaking in a standard domestic activity. While this is suggested by the tea table in question, in keeping with Bowen’s tendency for enlivening inanimate objects with both physicality and psyche alike, it is also tenable that the tea table of which she writes *does* indeed penetrate the scene, broadening the divide between the lovers with not only its tangible mass, but also with its keen perception. Although her suspicions are planted by Harrison, Holme Dene writes a new awareness into Stella through the awareness inherent in those objects and spaces around her in this home. She believes the trip to Holme Dene will strengthen her relationship with Robert while escaping the scrutiny of Harrison, and yet the trip solidifies Stella’s fresh misgivings in regard to her lover and she realizes she must scrutinize back.

Just as Stella’s flat comes to stand for her story, Stella in turn, is able to read into Robert’s own tale as she continues to discover more about his childhood home,

specifically through an investigation of his former bedroom. Situated at the top of the house, Bowen writes, “Robert’s room decidedly gained by being an attic: its windows occupied ample gables; the slants of the ceiling reared round one’s head romantic tentlike half-lights” (127). The room is framed to appeal. Yet as the reader discovers along with Stella, the space is characterized by an incongruity behind its romantic loftiness. Bowen continues outlining the attic room, detailing that,

Against such walls as offered vertical space, imposing mahogany furniture had been planted; the unblemished veneer of all these pieces showed them to be testimonials to his maturity. His reluctance to move downstairs from his boyhood’s den had evidently been seen indulgently: first-floor manly comforts had moved upstairs to him. They interspersed fictions of boyishness (127).

Stella’s introduction to Robert’s old room and home fold her more deeply into a story which proves to be partially composed of myths and “fictions of boyishness.” If such furniture is to be taken as a symbol or extension of Robert, the ‘unblemished veneers’ of such pieces provide a striking contrast to Robert’s own exteriority, commanding and handsome yet blemished by his visible wound from Dunkirk. Perhaps because of the inherent contradictions of this space, attic loftiness with imposingly “planted” furniture, “testimonials of maturity” with “interspersed fictions of boyishness” in a “boyhood den”, Stella cannot grasp at the space and ultimately concludes, “this room feels empty!” (128-129).

This notion of emptiness introduced by Stella speaks to Robert’s philosophy of war and loyalty which find root in Holme Dene and his attitude towards the house which

is on the market. "It's for sale, you know", he tells Stella, "It practically always has been" (132). "We never speak of the matter even among ourselves because we feel so sore", he notes (132). Taken out of context, Robert's entire dialogue on the subject may be appropriated to address his own 'market' he has created for the selling of British secrets. Stella feels and imagines a natural fidelity to home (and consequently, country) while Robert feels no such allegiance. "How can *they* live, anyone live...in a place that has for years been asking to be brought to an end?", Stella asks to which Robert replies, Oh, but there will always be somewhere else...Everything can be shifted, lock, stock and barrel. After all, everything was brought here from someone else, with the intention of being moved again - like touring scenery from theatre to theatre. Reassemble it anywhere: you get the same illusion (133).

Robert's philosophy contends with Bachelard's notion of the home. "All the spaces of intimacy are designated by an attraction", he writes, "Their being is well-being" (12). According to Bachelard, such an attraction would magnetically draw and hold inhabitants and furniture alike within the intimacy of home and yet this there is no such intimacy operating within Holme Dene, at least not that Robert is capable of experiencing.

Robert shares with his father his tendency to put things up for sale, for it was Mr. Kelway's decision, "so soon after the move here to put Holme Dene down as for sale again" (289). With no loyalties to this place, Robert likewise advises Mrs. Kelway and Ernestine to accept an offer on the home. Where father and son differ though is that while "What unformulated anarchical dreams he [Mr. Kelway] had entertained one would never know", Robert's anarchical dreams are exposed in the first chapter and expounded

upon in the final chapters of Bowen's novel. When ultimately questioned by Stella, Robert informs her of his position; "Country? - there are no more countries left; nothing but names. What country have you and I outside this room?" (301). Country is therefore an indeterminate and shifting term as Robert has already outlined his belief in the impermanence of interiors as places where, "everything can be shifted" (133).

Despite his nonchalance regarding the permanence of home, the power of the home is indeed felt by Robert and reiterated by Bowen when the climax of Robert's story (and Stella's by association) comes the same evening that an offer is placed on Holme Dene and Robert understands that his secret is out. For a family who has barricaded themselves against the outside world by creating a domestic territory throughout which their psychic rule permeates, a potential buyer has become an enemy and such an offer places Mrs. Kelway and Ernestine on the defense. As Bachelard notes and Bowen illustrates, "A house constitutes a body of images that give mankind proofs or illusions of stability" (17). The family's stability is threatened the night an offer is placed on Holme Dene and Robert's stability is simultaneously thrown as he realizes he may have held "illusions" (on the home and on war) which have consequences to which he must now answer.

Robert's final trip to Holme Dene after he is called by Ernestine and Mrs. Kelway for his response to the offer on the house substantiates Stella's earlier impressions of the confounding home. As if the home is occupied, Robert walks to the stairwell and looks up as if his enemies are hiding there, waiting to take him. But,

Above-stairs Holme Dene was silent...Upstairs, as elsewhere, it had been planned with a sort of playful circumlocution - corridors, archways, recesses, half-landing, ledges, niches and balustrades combined to fuddle any sense of direction and check, so far as possible, progress from room to room (287).

While Robert cannot seem to express the nature of this place on Stella's visit, now the home is truly opened to expose these complications. Just as the wall of Robert's childhood bedroom is meticulously clouded with photographs, so too is the upstairs cluttered; "These two upper floors...were in fact, not hollow, being packed with matter - repressions, doubts, fears, subterfuges and fibs" (287). Through discussing what occurs inside of the house, Bowen in her subtle yet powerful way hints at the possibility of primogeniture as "Robert's hand reposed where he remembered seeing seeing his father's" and yet she quickly denies this possibility with the conclusion of this statement for Robert's hand lay "on the polished knob *terminating* the banisters [emphasis mine]" (298). The interior of Holme Dene is discussed as though the scene of a battle already fought and lost and now littered with tangible "repressions, doubts" and so on. Robert it seems was never offered the ability to write or begin his own story here and even now he cannot create a personal narrative in this place as his father's "fiction of dominance" prevailed, "preserved by his widow and his daughters" (289). As Bowen puts it, "Holme Dene was a man-eating house" (288).

Even after Stella has taken into account her own impression of Holme Dene, impressions which as indicated prove to be accurate, she still has difficulty accepting what Harrison says. Perhaps the reason is rather simple. Aside from not wanting to

discount an amorous attachment which she has invested in during a tumultuous and uncertain historical moment, Stella cannot trust Harrison because as she tells him, “I still don’t know where you live” (158). “But for instance, where do you keep your razor?” she asks Harrison on one of his stormy night calls (155). Stella wants to root Harrison down, to give him his own home and thusly his own story by which she can judge him. Bowen writes, “By the rules of fiction, with which life must comply, he was as a character “impossible” - each time they met, for instance, he showed no shred or trace of having been continuous since they last met” (155). And yet, even lacking this continuity, which Stella feels would be fixed with a home, the juxtaposition of Harrison and Robert stands as something of a contradiction to that which Bachelard observes on man without home. He writes, “the house thrusts aside contingencies, its councils of continuity are unceasing” and observes that, “Without it, man would be a dispersed being” (7). According to this assumption, Harrison would obviously signify said dispersed being. And yet, Harrison proves true and it is Robert, the man of Holme Dene, “a man-eating house” whose being finds no foundation a home and thus becomes dispersed in the act of treason.

While Harrison provides a foil to Robert, Mount Morris serves as such for Holme Dene. “The house is one of the greatest powers of integration for the thoughts, memories and dreams of mankind”, Bachelard notes (6). Mount Morris encompasses all of the above for Stella and Roderick and because of this is perceived as a threat by Robert. Prior to Stella’s trip to take inventory of the home her son has inherited, Robert tells her, “It’s not how long you are going to be away, it’s how much away you are going to be -

*there, you will be away completely*” (177). Kristine Miller describes the abstract “place” or “habitat” “that Robert and Stella have created in their relationship” (90). Like Bowen’s own parents who “made by their marriage, and lived in, a world of their own”, the couple has built their own particular environment in which they exist (SW 469).

Robert prefers to inhabit Stella’s flat of which they can claim,

...possession of the whole empty house below them, from nightfall on: after dark the stairs went up, flight by flight, past door after door of consulting-rooms in which there was now no one to stir or listen - silence, when she and Robert came back together, stood stories deep (108).

Bowen plays on ‘stories’ and reiterates the connection between domestic spaces and the creation of personal narratives. For Robert, the emptiness below Stella’s flat means nothing to which he must commit himself, a blank slate for rewriting his story. The possibility inherent in this place though becomes much more intangible in the face of Mount Morris with its established history.

Mount Morris, unlike the space below Stella’s flat, is not defined by emptiness but rather, a timelessness provided by its situation outside of the war, nestled in Ireland’s neutrality. Upon her arrival, Stella is struck by the immediate signs of such neutrality as seen (literally) in the visible lights throughout the country. “Fearless lights” impress themselves upon Stella “as her ship drew in [to Ireland]...the windows had not only showed and shone but blaze, seemed to blaze out phenomenally” (186). Rather than in scenes of destruction, the fires of Ireland now burn in the brilliant reflections of sunset which, “striking down the valley, gave the stucco an oriental pink and enflamed the

windows” at Mount Morris (180). While the description hearkens back to the burning homes of *The Last September*, such light now speaks to Ireland’s prodigality and freedom with light. Bowen strikes “a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and [recent] antiquity” (Eliot 167).

Bowen continues such referential imagery within and around Mount Morris. Now a natural, innocuous “smoulder of yellow from the woods entered the house” and in this place the dampening dullness of blackout blinds is traded for the reflection of its inhabitants: “the two globes, the Donovans, Stella” appear in the window’s “jet black panes” (180, 182). Mount Morris’s ability to display what lies on either side of its windows appears in stark contrast to the clandestine “window embrasure” of Stella’s flat which was “deep” and while Harrison stands within, “nothing showed there was a person in there at all” (153). In London, where the gaze is cut off by guarded, cloaked windows, where Stella sees only “blankness out of the open window”, a blankness strong enough to “enter her through the eyes”, Mount Morris alternately enjoys mutual communion with its surrounding environs and its windows are uncovered, to reveal that which is both inside and out (153).

The communion existing between Mount Morris and its surrounding lands is nonexistent at Holme Dene. During the day the glass panes of the Irish house open onto the “valley cleavage” outside which “seemed like an offering to the front windows: in return, the house devoted the whole muted fervour of its being to a long gaze” (180). At Holme Dene, Bowen writes, “to come on looking out of a window had been to be asked to specify what one was looking *at*” (288). The world beyond the perimeter of the house

is not considered a gift of sorts but rather something to challenge, classify and meticulously account for, consequently removing all of its natural charm.

Though Stella visits Mount Morris alone, her stay is marked by a lack of loneliness. There are the Donovans, the small party's reflection in windows that are not blacked out, the spirit of Cousin Francis and the presence of "Virtue with nothing more to spend, honour saying nothing, but both present" (193). In a place where her solitariness should have been overwhelming, Stella finds that she is consistently not alone. The opposite is true at Holme Dene. In a space occupied by family and even another younger generation of this family, this house is typified by avoidance tactics. Bowen writes, "some other member of the family, slightly hastening his step as they heard one's own, had always just got round the next corner just in time" (287). Stella's visit to Mount Morris allows her to more clearly see herself while Robert's final trip to Holme Dene reveals the degree to which his own perception has been formed and thus skewed by illusion, avoidance, and an inability to connect, reinforced and partially stemming from the labyrinthine layout of the house.

Whereas the former tenants of Stella's apartment are unknown and the businesses below her flat are often deserted, Mount Morris still speaks of its previous owner. Without Cousin Francis, Bowen describes "the arrested energy" of the rooms as a poetry of sorts. There is an implied beauty in such poetry and the 'hauntedness' experienced in this place starkly contrasts that experienced in Stella's own flat in London. While Stella closes herself off by the window of her apartment one evening, "letting go the curtains, glad to be walled away by them from that haunted room" (153), she feels little dismay at

Mount Morris. Musing over the room where “Cousin Francis had had his being”, Stella reads the detailed notes left by her relative, a thorough outlining of the actions to be taken in regard to the house, “in case of” a plethora of scenarios (182). Francis’s personal direction manifest in these domestic directions causes Stella to recognize the lack thereof in her own life. When she therefore thinks, “Oh to stay here forever, playing this ghostly part!” the reader understands that she is not talking about the meticulous spirit of Cousin Francis as felt in this room, but rather about herself (182). As Holme Dene facilitates discoveries on Robert and his being, Mount Morris does likewise for Stella.

Whereas Roderick cannot place the things in his mother’s flat, Mount Morris is strangely familiar to Stella. Bowen writes, “Indeed the familiarity of the house was startling; as a whole it rose to the surface in her, as though something weighting it to the bottom had let go” (184). With the buoying of Mount Morris within her,

Now she seemed to see to perceive on all sides round her, and with phantasmagoric clearness, everything that for the eye the darkness hid. The declivities in the treads of the staircase, the rounded glimmer of its venetian window...the creak of the lobby floor under her foot, and the sited near-and-farness of smells of plaster, pelts, wax, smoke, weathered woodwork, oiled locks and outdoor trees preceded themselves (184).

Just as Bowen does in the act of writing *Bowen’s Court*, Stella here exhibits what historian Roy Foster recognizes as “the old Irish tradition of memorializing and celebrating a place”, through enumerating its interior aesthetic components, reinforcing their familiarity (Prints 150).

While the use of descriptors such as ‘spell,’ ‘mystery’ and ‘phantasmagoric’, might seem to distance Stella from her immediate surroundings by introducing an esoteric, mystical layer of experience, a new reality lies in the opening of her perception “on all sides round her” brought about in and by this home. This illumination of the senses is lyrically supported by the above-mentioned lights of Ireland as Bowen remarks, “it was with energy of lightness that she [Stella] embarked on the business of Mount Morris” (187). And yet with this newly heightened acuity, Stella subsequently loses some sense of herself (or what she had perceived of as her self). Probing other rooms in the house,

...it was most of all with the sense of some sense in herself missing that she looked, from mirror to mirror; into misted extensions of the room. She was proof against it. Constrained to touch things, to make certain that they were not their own reflections, she explored veneers and mouldings, corded edges, taut fluted silk, with the nerve of her fingers (192).

Foucault writes of the mirror in his essay, “Of Other Spaces” in which he outlines his notion of the ‘heterotopia’ or that,

...in which all the real arrangements, all the other real arrangements that can be found within society, are at one and the same time represented, challenged and overturned: a sort of place that lies outside all places and yet is actually localizable. (352)

Residing “outside all places [of war]” Mount Morris serves as a sort of heterotopia for Stella. This is a site in which Stella can evaluate the “arrangements” of the home and her

son's future here, while also evaluating the "arrangements" within her story in London. Here she is enabled to see how she is represented and confront the challenges posed by her connection with Robert, challenges which could overturn her own story. Foucault writes that,

...between utopias and these quite other sites, these heterotopias, [where] there might be a sort of mixed, joint experience, which would be the mirror. In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface (352).

To see herself in the mirror 'where she is not' allows Stella to see the truths "behind the surface". She recognizes what her experience at Mount Morris signifies; "That her own life should be a chapter missing from this book [the history of the home] need not mean that the story was at an end - at a pause it was, but perhaps a pause for a turning-point?" (194). Mount Morris is not her home and therefore, "It was not her story" (216). Her son on the other hand has been written into a narrative and "she would never agree that Roderick had been victimised: he had been fitted into a destiny" (194).

After looking in the mirror, Foucault writes, "I come back toward myself; I begin again to direct my eyes toward myself and to reconstitute myself there where I am" (352). Stella returns to London and confronts Robert. In a beautiful image and final gesture towards Stella and Robert's fading relationship, Bowen remarks that in Stella's flat that night, as the lovers talk for the last time, "it was in this room that an eyelid came down over the world" (313). Robert's treason has brought war into Stella's flat, supporting her early belief that,

“outside” meant the harmless world: the mischief was in her own and in other rooms. The grind and scream of battles, mechanised advances excoriating flesh and country, tearing through nerves and tearing up trees, were indoor-plotted; this was a war of dry cerebration inside windowless walls (157).

Robert cannot seem to discuss his actions in a room as familiar as Stella’s. He therefore ‘blacks it out’ and “turned off the fire – the glow from the units died out slowly” and “the room, absolutely unseeable at last, might now have been any room of any size” (300).

Perhaps his doing this is a sign of shame, an inability to contextualize his treason or perhaps Robert tries to remove himself from the understanding that he has in some sense violated Stella’s home. While the act of covering windows and sealing the spaces within is normally reserved to keep the dangers of the outside world at bay, Robert has already brought these dangers inside. Walter Benjamin would call this scene a moment of profound modernity. As summarized by Diana Fuss in the Introduction to *The Sense of an Interior: Four Writers and the Rooms that Shaped Them*, for Benjamin, “Modernity is simply another name for the reign of interiority, that moment in history where exteriority is driven indoors” (12).

The anonymity attributed to Stella’s room during this conversation becomes heightened to the point at which,

In something more powerful than the darkness of the room the speaker [Robert] had become blotted out: there occurred in the listener one of those arrestations of memory which made it impossible to conceive not only what the look on the face might now be but what the face had been, *as a face*, ever (303).

Interestingly, once Robert is blotted out and becomes referred by the impersonal title of “speaker”, Stella is mutually obscured. She has now become the “listener.” Familiarity continues to slip away in this scene. Not only is Robert’s face unidentifiable in this room become void, his voice is likewise made strange. Bowen writes,

...the voice itself [of the speaker] was familiar only in more and more intermittent notes: it was as though some undercurrent in it, hitherto barely to be detected, all the time forbidden and inadvertent, had come to the top (303).

It is as if Stella is being erased from the present and the process commences with the disappearance of Robert’s face, the foreign notes of his voice and her corresponding descent into anonymity with him. What allows all of this though is the darkening of the room, erasing a familiar setting and replacing it with a blank black stage. The role of the domestic is to situate one in the familiar and as Stella loses her grasp on this, her story is rendered null in the face of Robert’s.

The tone of the conversation is quickened by knowledge of Robert’s impending arrest. Bowen communicates the severity of the moment by once more highlighting the increasingly tenuous barrier between interior and exterior; “Now they had dropped into talking in lowered hurried voices as though already something were at the door” (306). While they have sought refuge in their relationship throughout the novel, blocking those outside with figurative ‘shades,’ in this moment the couple cannot ignore the external. They begin to lose sight of one another and they repeat, “there might be someone outside. We must think of that” with vehemence (322). Now that she is fully informed of Robert’s treason, Stella’s ignorance of his actions can no longer protect her and the external has

fully breached the private world (a process begun with Harrison's entrance into the flat at the beginning of the novel). Stella's door is now literally the only thing which separates the lovers from their future and when she opens it "public politics and private emotion" converge (Miller 138).

It is therefore not by the door that Robert leaves. Instead, he chooses the only escape he believes is not guarded - the roof, and his choice proves fatal. For Stella, this last night she spends with Robert brings about the deconstruction followed by destruction of home and self. The next day Stella rides the train outside of London to meet Roderick and tell him of Robert's death. On her journey, Stella begins to be reawakened. The home and self which were muted and blotted out the previous evening begin to be replaced in the homes which she "was fortunate in being able to see through railings or over fences", observing "not only yards and gardens but right into back windows of homes" (330). Within she finds,

Prominent sculleries, with bent-forward heads of women back at the sink again after Sunday dinner, and recessive living-rooms in which the breadwinner armchair-slumbered, legs out, hand across the eyes, displayed themselves; upstairs, at looking-glasses at windows, girls got themselves ready to go out with boys (330).

As Bachelard remarks in *Poetics of Space*, "An excellent exercise for the function of inhabiting the dream house consists in taking a train trip. Such a voyage unreels a film of houses that are dreamed, accepted and refused, without our ever having been tempted to stop, as we are when motoring. We are sunk deep in day-dreaming with all verification

healthily forbidden” (62). In the face of destruction, the home is among that which may be materially lost. And yet Bowen suggests that there is a system of homes outside of our own to which we might look for signs of stability, for knowledge of ourselves and others and for pictures of continuity in moments of loss.

## CONCLUSION

*The Good Tiger* has a happy ending. But then again it is a children's book. Sadly, the endings to Bowen's novels do not also bring about "the best tea party anyone had ever had". Instead, they bring destruction to an era and lifestyle for the Anglo-Irish in *The Last September*, temporary freedom to Portia who may or may not be taken back to Windsor Terrace in *The Death of the Heart* and the violent death of a treacherous lover in *The Heat of the Day*. Dispossession, dislocation and distrust are elucidated not solved by Bowen in her novels. She accomplishes the task of "controlling, or ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history" through the incorporation of her "home myth" (Eliot 167). Her methodology provides the very "shape" to which she refers in her letter to V.S. Pritchett outlined in the Introduction. "The possibility of shape" she says to him, "is...magnetic" and it is this magnetism of the domestic which holds her novels together (Pritchett 4). Even in the face of modernity's capacity for destruction, for loneliness and for disorientation, Bowen's method survives.

Elizabeth Bowen successfully strikes "a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity" by allowing homes to represent, speak of and hold their past histories. Alain De Botton identifies these homes as "dignified and seasoned creatures" (10). Bowen's own domestic experiences and the real places she inhabits serve to bolster and support those which she creates in her fiction which do *not* merely replicate Bowen's past but serve to illustrate the universal nature of home. Bowen sees and shows how homes factor into childhood, adolescence and adulthood and how the

human desire to protect oneself, to roam outside of stifling boundaries, and to find clues to who we are find root in this place.

Bowen's phenomenological practices align with that which she considers to be the role of the "imaginative writer." This individual she says in "Book Talk - New and Recent Fiction", "expects, as a rule, to go one better than life. He has seen it as his business to supply the element of strangeness, of fantasy, lacking in the humdrum daily routine" (Listening In 79). And yet her stories remain utterly relevant and as she hopes they should do in her opinion, they do indeed "contain some idea that may help explain life" (79). The phenomenology, sympathy and personal knowledge which Bowen brings to the homes of her writings are indicative of an imagination which "extends beyond" the objects of the home "to encompass the cataclysms of her time" (Ellmann 5). Elizabeth Bowen tells stories and builds houses while building stories and telling of houses. Her endeavors highlight just as Gaston Bachelard acknowledges, "The house is one of the greatest powers of integration for the thoughts, memories and dreams of mankind" (6). Bowen would agree and therefore for her, the home is the stuff myths are made of.

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**BETHANY CARLENE CHAFIN**

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**EDUCATION**

*Wake Forest University*, Winston-Salem, NC

**Master of Arts in English Literature**, May 2011

Cumulative GPA: 3.8

Recipient of English Department Fellowship, full-funding awarded to one member of incoming class at outset of program

Recipient of Richter Grant for the Summer of 2010 to study Elizabeth Bowen in Dublin, Ireland and Oxford, England

**Bachelor of Arts in English with Honors / Minors in Political Science and Studio Art**, May 2008

Cumulative GPA: 3.66, Major GPA: 3.7

Member of Golden Key International Honour Society

Member of Sigma Tau Delta, English Honor Society

Recipient of the Emily Crandall Shaw Scholarship in Liberal Arts, Spring 2007

Completed Senior Honors thesis entitled, "Refining Self-Indulgence: Jane Austen's *Sanditon*, *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*"

**FOREIGN STUDY**

**The Worrell House of Wake Forest University, London, England**, Fall 2006

Enrolled in five courses including Comparative Politics (with a focus on the English Political system), Urban Politics, the History of London, British Painting (Hogarth to the Pre-Raphaelites), and British Theatre, a volunteer during this time period with the Muswell Hill Toy Library

**PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE**

*Resumé Reviewer, Office of Career Services*, Wake Forest University, Fall 2010 - Present

- Consult with Undergraduate and Graduate students three times a week to edit, advise and discuss the foundational elements of strong resumé writing
- Perform similar tasks for students in the process of creating cover letters, helping individuals to present their interest, ideas, and skill-sets in clear, concise and appropriate manner
- Follow-up with students regarding subsequent drafts of resúmes and cover letters, ensuring

*Research Assistant, Dr. Paul Bogard*, Wake Forest University, Fall 2010 - Present

- Gather, synthesize and compile relevant background information on topics ranging from light pollution, historic, cultural and theological conceptions of night and darkness to visual representations of night
- Meet weekly with Dr. Bogard to present and discuss how findings relate to his forthcoming book, *The Geography of Night: Discovering the Value of Darkness in an Age of Artificial Light* (Little, Brown, and Co., 2012)

*Intern for National Public Radio, Talk of the Nation*, Washington D.C., Fall 2008

- A full-time position for length of internship, involved in brainstorming daily show topics, booking guests, writing scripts, and coordinating with studios across the country for two-hour daily, live call-in news show
- Selected for assistance in Election Night coverage and in early September, served as director for host Farai Chideya of News and Notes during her time in D.C.
- Initiated and helped to plan the inaugural project, "Talk of the World", a broadcasted Global Conversation with world figures including Desmond Tutu, Vicente Fox and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf

*Docent at the Jacksonville Museum of Modern Art*, Jacksonville, FL, Spring 2004 – Spring 2006

- A three month training program on the permanent and rotating collections at JMOMA, regular tours and continuing education for school groups

### **LEADERSHIP AND VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES**

*Tutor for the Adult Learning Center at the Jacksonville Public Library, Jacksonville, FL, January – July 2009*

- Tutor to adult members of the community studying to sharpen reading/math skills and working towards successful completion of the GED among other standardized tests

*Tour Guide, Harbinger Corps, Wake Forest University, Spring 2005 - Spring 2008*

- Administered weekly tours of the Wake Forest campus to prospective students and their families, in cooperation with the office of Admissions

*Editor, The Philomathesian Journal, Wake Forest University, Spring 2007 - Spring 2008*

- Solicit campus-wide submissions
- Wake's sole academic journal committed to publishing essays by Wake Forest students and faculty in the arts and sciences; aims to serve as a forum for intellectual dialogue within the University community

*Artist and Planner, START Student Art Auction, Winston-Salem, NC, Spring 2008*

- Donated artwork and assisted in planning annual silent art auction benefiting SWAP – Students Working Against Poverty, all proceeds from event went to crisis control ministries

### **LANGUAGE AND COMPUTER SKILLS**

**Foreign Language:** Proficient in French (Written and Spoken)

**Computer:** Proficient in Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Apple iWork, familiar with Adobe Photoshop