

ELIZABETH BOWEN: A STUDY IN ENVIRONMENT

A Thesis

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by

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This thesis is that Elizabeth Bowen, because of her heredity and early environment, has developed a view of life which causes her to place particular emphasis on the background of her novels and short stories.

In her works character is so much a part of setting that it becomes impossible to think of one as existing without the other.

Her particular philosophy is based on the belief that man in his brief and precarious life comforts himself with material possessions which give him the illusion of permanence and solidity. He is able to forget his own mortality in contemplating objects which do not share it.

In times of great civil disorder when wholesale destruction deprives man of these saving objects, he reaches for the lifebelt of his own dreams and memories to preserve his personal identity.

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FOREWORD

Students have sometimes been warned not to choose as the subject of intensive study the works of an author whom they admire. This may seem paradoxical but a surfeit of anything, however good, may well have the effect of causing it to lose its savour. That I have not found this to be so in my preoccupation with the writings of Elizabeth Bowen seems to me to be the clearest proof of their greatness. Many times, turning to a page to verify a quotation, I have found myself reading on - five, perhaps ten pages - unable to escape the spell of her lucid, vital prose, and have had to pull myself up short with the reminder that I am supposed to be working, not just enjoying myself. To me 'age cannot wither nor custom stale' the 'infinite variety' of her work. But what is this charm? Is it universal? Or is it merely one which appeals strongly to a certain group of people of which I am one?

Various critics have attempted to define her charm. Some attribute it to her view of life, which is that of an artist, her 'landscapes with figures' and the close communion between her characters and their environment. Others speak of her

'shimmering page' and the changing effect of light on every object and creature as if light, to her, were an integral part of imagination, in its shaping force. There is truth in both these theories, but it seems to me that neither goes far enough. Light is important, and there is certainly a two-way traffic between her characters and their surroundings; but the objects themselves, the houses, the land on which they stand and the roots which people put down into the soil seem to spell for her the difference between law and anarchy, peace and war.

This very conservatism will probably prevent her works from ever having that universal appeal that is the mark of the truly great. Readers of more bohemian tastes, with no regard for material possessions, with a touch of the tinker in their blood, will always be conscious of a hint of snobbery in her attitude to life and may be irritated by it to the point where they are blind to her own particular genius - for genius she does possess in no small degree. Perhaps her detractors are too close to her in time to be able to overlook what seems to them an overriding flaw. At least they are not indifferent to her - no one who has read even one of her short

stories can dismiss her work as negligible. And once having read, the taking of sides seems to be inevitable: her admirers are extravagant in their praise and her detractors bitter in their denunciation of her attitude to life.

Fashions in books change as do fashions in clothes, and it would be presumptuous to conjecture now whether Elizabeth Bowen's works will continue to be read for a hundred years. This is an attempt not to show that her books ought to survive for generations but rather to investigate the background which shaped and moulded her philosophy. With Graham Greene she might say 'England made me'; and also 'Ireland - generations of landed Anglo-Irish and two world wars have made me; and from this I cannot escape!'

I have been told, by those who know her, that Elizabeth Bowen considers herself to be, 'the last of the Anglo-Irish writers'. What does she mean by this? An Anglo-Irish (as distinguished from an Irish-Irish) writer is one who has been born in Ireland of English stock and who writes in English only. Before the sixteenth century all writing in Ireland was either in Latin or in Irish; no works in English were produced until after the great influx of English settlers in the wake of

Cromwell. Since then, the great bulk of writing done in Ireland has been done in the English tongue and has been the work of those immigrants or their descendants - one more instance of the truth that history is written by the conquerors. They came to consider themselves Irish, often more Irish than the Irish, but their intellectual ties have always been with England. The Anglo-Irish gentry have sent their eldest sons to English schools and universities, and through the years the gates of literary fame have opened to them in London.

When Elizabeth Bowen says that she is the last of the Anglo-Irish writers she is not placing herself at the end of a literary tradition but at the end of a way of life. With the winning of Irish independence the Anglo-Irish as a class ceased to exist politically. Anglo-Irish writers who have outlived the political change are being replaced by a younger generation who are frankly, even militantly national. To call Elizabeth Bowen 'the last of the Anglo-Irish writers' is, then, to recognize these facts: her family are not Irish, though they have lived in Ireland for three hundred years; she was born to an Ireland which was struggling to shake off the rule of England. Tied emotionally to Ireland but intellectually

to England she is one of the survivors of a vanished class, many of whom have been articulate but, whose music has 'a dying fall'.

At first glance the fact that she is Anglo-Irish may seem irrelevant to a discussion of the strong influence of environment on her works. It will be seen, however, that it is of the greatest importance, that it is one of the main factors in shaping her consciousness of background, both physical and social, and her belief in its saving force.

CHAPTER I

HER OWN BACKGROUND AND ITS REFLECTION IN HER WRITINGS

1. Physical Background

The modern climate of life since 1914 has worked against a rooted existence with its sense of tradition, continuity and security. Those who have been able to retain these possessions are fortunate beyond their knowing. Elizabeth Bowen, in everything she writes, reveals her own background with passionate exactness.

Born in Dublin, the daughter of a family who had lived in Ireland since the middle of the seventeenth century, she spent much of her youth at Bowen's Court, which her father had inherited twelve years before her birth. This house, still in her possession, is the prototype of County Cork houses and appears in many of her stories. Not only this house but an ever-widening circle round it - the garden, the fields, the woods, the neighbouring houses, the distant hills bathed in western light - is her spiritual home.

The south coast of England, particularly Hythe and Folkstone, are well known to her because she and her mother spent several years there. In a sense these were years of exile, for they had left her father in Ireland to begin a long, lonely, but ultimately successful fight against a nervous illness which had resulted from too fine a conscience and too many

demands on his time and strength. With the resilience of youth, the young Elizabeth shook off the past and turned eagerly to absorb through all her senses the new and colourful scene before her.

As a young adult she fell under the spell of London, but in a very selective way, as can be seen from her works. She is no lover of the whole sprawling metropolis, nor has she trespassed on those sections already staked out by other writers. She has confined herself to Regent's Park and the airy uplands to the west. Of all London this section probably resembles most closely her home in Ireland - the gentleman's houses, the gardens, the water and, to the west, not the mountains of Ballyhouras but the slight rise to Saint John's Wood and Hampstead Heath.

Elizabeth Bowen's love of travel made her well-acquainted with France and Italy, and, although she does not use these countries so often as settings for her characters, when she does, it is with a familiarity, insight and sureness of touch that is typical of all her backgrounds.

A study of the three settings which occur most frequently in the works of Miss Bowen leads the careful reader to the realization that Regent's Park and the South coast of

England have gradually lost their reality for her and only Bowen's Court and the Irish landscape has retained its original meaning.

To understand why Regent's Park appealed to Elizabeth Bowen one must be familiar with the park itself and with its origin. Nash, its architect, himself describes how he built up his design for the park on what might be described as the natural aspirations of Regency clients. 'The attraction of open space, free air and the scenery of nature, with the means and invitation of exercise on foot, and in carriages' should, he decided be 'preserved or created in Mary-le-bone Park as allurements and motives for the wealthy part of the public to establish themselves there'.¹ Above all the accent on exclusiveness, the idea that the housing estate should be an enclosure protecting a privileged clientele persists in Nash's plan. Like all Regency architects, he made it his first concern to provide a tolerable environment for the individual; such an environment was only offered to the people who could pay handsomely for it. The gentleman's town house must look over a landscape and also form a part of it in the same way that his country house did. This is a point of view

that was inherited by Elizabeth Bowen and which she could readily understand. Many of her characters live in these terraces and exercise on the walks. She speaks of it in The Heat of the Day as 'the one gentleman's park left'.

It was built for her kind of people by a man who understood their tastes - those tastes which remained unchanged for a hundred years and may still remain though the means to gratify them is lost.

Another reason why she was drawn to the Park lies in its dramatic quality. Pilcher in his book The Regency Style describes it, as a 'scene-painter's promenade' and says, 'the idea behind terraces of houses was an essentially theatrical one'.² The houses turn an agreeable face to the park, but there was no attempt to give their backs even the semblance of architectural regularity. From an architect's standpoint it is a splendid stage set and nothing more. From the very first Elizabeth Bowen was aware of this theatricality, and delighted in it. As early as 1935, writing in The House in Paris she says, 'Between thunder and sun, the Nash terraces round the Regent's Park took on their most theatrical air'.³ This is a perfect background not only for the smart brittle characters of narrow horizons and carefully controlled emotions

who people the drawing room comedies of her earlier novels and short stories, but also for the more sombre personalities of her later works when time and circumstance had revealed to the eye and the mind the hollowness of its theatrical air.

In a short story written in the nineteen-thirties we find 'The white walls of Aunt Louella's house (in Regent's Park) twinkled behind the screen of a drooping branch'.⁴

At this period the houses were always sparkling with light, and their windows looked with disdain at strangers walking in the park. In another short story written before the war, 'Tears, Idle Tears', the houses look superciliously at the drama between a small boy and his mother. Frederick (the boy) was too big a boy to cry in public, nevertheless he burst into tears in the middle of Regent's Park. His mother who was 'not the sort of woman you ought to see in a park with a great blubbering boy belonging to her began to walk on quickly, along the edge of the lake, parallel with the park's girdle of trees and the dark haughty windows of Cornwall Terrace'. As for poor Frederick he felt that 'the plate glass windows of the lordly houses looked at him through the may trees with judge's eyes'.⁵

In these instances Elizabeth Bowen has put the houses

to that dramatic use which she feels is essential to the novel. However, by 1939, in The Death of the Heart, which John Strachey has termed 'a description of the banality and despair of the English middle class',⁶ the park has begun to recede from reality

'the pallid withdrawn Regency terraces had an 7
unnatural burnish as though cold were light'

'At the far side of the road dusk set the Regency buildings back at a false distance; against the sky they were colourless, insipidly ornate, brittle and cold. The blackness of windows not yet lit or 8
curtained made the houses look hollow inside'.

Now, almost on the eve of the war which will transform the park and the lives of its inhabitants, the houses have already begun to look 'pallid' and 'unnatural'. They are 'colourless', 'insipidly ornate' and the windows no longer look down with 'judges eyes' but seem 'hollow inside'. In the park itself one begins to notice a translucent dreamlike quality

'swans folded dark-white cyphers on the white water, in an immortal dream..... the Cythorean twisting reaches at the ends of the lake... pigeons clattering the transparent trees... crocuses staining the dusk 9
purple or yellow, flames with no power'

The props which supported this facade were the first to go with the bombing. In the vignette 'Oh Madam' the faithful

housemaid shows her mistress the damage with these words

'That's right, madam, go on the balcony. You wouldn't see much different from there. To look at the park you wouldn't hardly believe... When I looked out at the back this morning at some of those little houses where the mews used to be - (no, don't you look out that way, madam; you can't do anything; better look at the park), - I thought "Well they're paper aren't they".'

Then came the turn of the imposing houses themselves till we see them for the last time in The Heat of the Day

'Ahead one had still an illusion of wooded distance out of whose blue and bronzy ethereality rose the tops of Regency terraces - these in their semi-ruin 10 just less pale than the sky. They were shells'.

Not only the houses but the very trees and grass of the park have lost their pre-war verdancy. In the opening pages of The Heat of the Day we see a Sunday audience listening to an outdoor concert. As they listen the

'afternoon began to gain in transparency as it lost its colour; from above the trees round the theatre there stole away not only colour but time. Music - the waltzes, the marches, the gay overtures - now began to command this hourless place... First note by note, drop by drop, then steadily, the music entered senses, nerves and fancies that had been parched. What first was a mirage strengthened into a universe, for the shabby Londoners and the exiled foreigners sitting in this worn glade in the middle of Regent's Park. This Sunday on which the sun set was the first Sunday of September, 1942'. 11

Colour is lost in transparency; a sense of time is lost in eternity as the park and the hour dissolve in music.

The listeners are unconscious of their shabbiness and of the 'worn glade' in which they sit; they forget for a few minutes what they have endured and must still endure; they enter a universe of music and happier memories of the now distant past before the war.

Let us now look at that part of England which was the author's home for several years when she was a child.

The South Coast of England provides a different setting from Regent's Park. Here the production is opera bouffe or pantomime with an almost fairytale background. The first impression the young Elizabeth had of this scene was 'bustling newness' and an 'air of success'. Folkstone, in that summer of 1907 was 'dazzling with new paint and awnings', parasols in gay colours carried by ladies in romantic Edwardian dresses, villas with white balconies, masses of roses and from the heights of Shornclyff came, through the blue sun-splashed air, the sound of military bugles.

Speaking of Folkstone at this period she admits 'I do not remember thinking of Bowen's Court!'¹² She let the rightness and tightness of Folkstone enclose her and with a child's sternness she thrust her memories of Ireland from her. Her own feelings about the town are mirrored in those of a fictional

character - a boy - who sees it through her eyes in one of her finest short stories 'Ivy Gripped the Steps'.

Like the author, Gavin is an outsider who comes upon the brilliance of the scene from a home where gaiety and light are stifled by the pressure of care and reality. 'Gavin beheld Southstone (Folkstone) with all the ardour of an outsider'.¹³ His parents were landowners who were forever sacrificing themselves to keep the place going. The shadow of bank over-draughts continually darkened their lives; any profits had to be turned back into repairs and renewals. Elizabeth Bowen knew what she was talking about when she described the endless and unproductive struggle of Gavin's parents. Her own great grandfather had been similarly tied to the land, and her father had rented out the lands attached to Bowen's Court, turning to the law rather than harness himself to the unequal struggle.

When we read Gavin's impressions of Southstone we are actually reading the nostalgic memories of Elizabeth Bowen's childhood. 'Southstone was, for the poor landowner's son, the first glimpse of the enchanted existence of the rentier. Everything was effortless. - People here commanded everything they desired'. They lived in 'lofty, smooth-running houses'....

'A word to the livery stable brought an imposing carriage to the door... In the Promenade's glare, at the end of the shaded avenue, parasols passed and repassed in a rythm of leisure. Just inland were the attentive shops. There were meetings for good causes in cool drawing rooms, afternoon concerts in the hotel ballrooms, and there was always the theatre. Best of all, there were no poor to be seen.' 14

It was this separation from reality that was the secret of its fascination for the young boy (and for the author as a child). Even its architecture was 'ostentatious fiddling, bulky and mixed'... This 'exhibition of gimcrack size' elated him, and 'bows, bays, balustrades, glazed-in balconies and French-type mansardes not slowly took up their parts in the fairy tale.' Lavishness was everywhere, in the public gardens, the perspectives and lawns. 'There was a climate here that changed from season to season, the roughest Channel gale blowing, could not disturb. This town without function fascinated him.'

Even in September this ageless beauty prevailed in all its theatricality.

'All day long parasols, boater hats and light dresses flickered against the dense blue-gauze backdrop that seldom let France be seen. In the evenings the head of the pier was a lighted musical box above the not yet cooling sea... Down the avenues the dark green trees hardened but did not change: if a leaf did fall it was brushed away before anyone woke.' 15

But once again time and circumstance change the scene. A grayer picture of the south coast is given in 'The Girl with the Stoop'. Tibbie, the girl, is living in a state of suspended animation; she is simply killing time while she waits for her young man to return from India to marry her. It is November and it is raining. 'A small summer town, seaside, in the late rainy autumn has a left-behind air. Simply to live here is not fully to live'.¹⁶

She goes out for a walk down to the sea

'Behind their neat white gates the villas were in a torpor: all the people in them might have died in their sleep... This morning the sea front was void and dejected-looking. The tide was out leaving stretches of dead sand. The empty bandstand dripped; drops slipped through the slats of seats. Tibbie's equable little heart sank. But one reach of the promenade she always walked down with pleasure - she looked forward to passing the Palace Hotel. This great deluxe hotel... was the chief glory of the quiet resort... Even to dawdle past the Palace Hotel was to feel oneself lapped by its sumptuous mystery'.¹⁷

Obviously the climate of the town has changed since Gavin's visit. Then, change of season and Channel gales failed to alter the equable life of the town. But now, the town has died a little; it is dejected-looking and the villas seem to sleep behind their white gates. Summer has gone, taking with it the holiday-makers and their bustle. The town has become vulnerable; real life has forced its way into the comic opera

world. Not only the season of the year is to blame, but the year of the century. It is twenty years since Gavin's visit. In that Edwardian twilight before 1914 the town still preserved its air of untouchableness. But now the Palace Hotel is symptomatic of the change. It is true that the villas remain, but the hotel overshadows them with its splendour. The air of restrained and leisurely elegance has given place to the garish splendour of the luxury hotel. The town has become commercialized and cold; society has grown to unmanageable size - in fact there is no society, only tourists. Formerly 'the society gained by its smallness; it could be comprehended'; ¹⁸ now it is a shapeless mass of strangers and when they leave, it ceases to exist.

This change alienates Elizabeth Bowen from the south-coast; she can no longer comprehend it. As far as she is concerned its slow death has begun. We can see this in The House in Paris. Karen Michaelis and Max meet in Hythe near Folkstone. Both are engaged to other people when they realize that they love each other and arrange the meeting. Tragedy hangs over their love and nature itself seems to prophesy that this meeting will be their last. There is a dying air about the place which foretells the death of Max. The details build up into a wet and chilling picture.

'Rain drifted over the Channel and west over Romney marsh; there was no horizon, the edgeless clouds hung so low.'

The sea-front houses are grey and 'barracky', isolated from the rest of the town. The canal is 'dark with weeds that catch at the oars,' and along the curve of the coast the only visible objects are 'martello towers in different stages of ruin.' Behind the town the country is 'creased with woody valleys, Kentish, mysterious.' The only sounds, beside the drip of the rain, are an occasional rattle of musketry from the army camp, 'bells from Cheriton, or distant blowy bugles... muffled by clouds.'

To Karen there is an unreality about the place.

'Not having been here before and now coming with Max made an island of the town. It stayed like nowhere, near nowhere, cut off from everywhere else.'

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And always there was the rain which penetrated even into their bedroom and struck chill on her flesh. 'The mats on the dressing table were wet. The handkerchief she had left lying the night before was wet too; she wiped her pearls but when she clasped them on again they were cold round her neck.' They walked out in 'the rain that did not stop but veiled darkening houses and trees.' And now another sound made itself heard; the sea crept on the shingle with a 'half-living rustle', becoming one more threat to their happiness in the 'unfrequented night'.

In The Death of the Heart both Hythe and Folkstone appear again under the aliases of Seale and Southstone. Gone

are the gay parasols, the affluent leisurely society of the earlier pre-war days. Farther and farther recedes that world which so enchanted the girl of seven with its theatrical air of ease and gaiety. No mention is now made of gracious living in high-ceilinged houses staffed by well-trained servants, the whole resting on a solid foundation of ample means invested in Consols. This world of humbler villas dominated by glittering hotels has assumed an unreality of its own - the unreality of a painful fact deliberately thrust into the background of consciousness. Miss Bowen is all too conscious of the vulgarity of seaside society as she saw it in the 1930's. The landscape is the same, but it has suffered a sea change which is obvious in these passages.

'The taxi crawled along the back of the dyke; - From here the chipped stucco backs of the terraces looked higher than anything seen in London. The unkempt lawns and tamarisks at their foot, the lonely whoosh of the sea behind them made them more 21(a) mysterious and forbidding'.

And again 'an imposing bluff is crowned by the most major of Southstone's major hotels. That gilt dome, the flying flags, receive at about sunset their full glory, and distantly glitter, a plutocratic heaven, 21 (b) for humbler trippers on the Seale esplanade'.

Seen from Seale the coast presents a 'dead flat line' broken by the martello towers and a silence 'broken only by musketry practice on the ranges'. It is the same place, with the same

sounds as twenty years before, but with a difference. Now you see 'the world void, the world suspended, forgotten like a past phase of thought'. It is 'like the outpost of a region of fantasy'.

Having relegated Seale (Hythe) to the realm of fantasy the coup de grace remains to be administered to Southstone. This is done in the wartime picture of the town in 'Ivy Grips the Steps'.

'This was, or had been, one of the best residential avenues in Southstone, into which private hotels intruded only with the most breathless, costly discretion: if it was not that now it was nothing else, for there was nothing else for it to be'.

The picture continues to list detail after detail of the ruin, the plundered railings, the tangled barbed wire and the chestnuts dropping their leaves where long ago each dropped leaf had been quickly removed before even an early walker might see and be appalled at the passing of the summer. As for the houses, most of which were empty,

'portions of porches or balustrades had fallen into front gardens, crushing their overgrowth; but there were no complete ruins; no bomb or shell had arrived here, only desuetude and decay. It was now the September of 1944; and, for some reason, the turn of the tide of war, the accumulation of the Invasion victories, gave Southstone its final air of defeat'. 22

From what has been said of her progressively developing attitudes to, and use of her background at Regent's

Park and Folkstone, it becomes evident that we must look farther into the past for the real Elizabeth Bowen. Her essential self springs from roots put down generations ago in the soil of County Cork; her love of light and distance, her artist's eye were nourished by the airy emptiness of Southern Ireland; her intensity of feeling and her consciousness of the past grew out of her earliest years at Bowen's Court. Although the experience of these early years was 'little or less than conscious' it was the strongest shaping force on Elizabeth Bowen as a writer. She herself reminds us of Proust's belief 'that those very periods of existence which are lived through by the writer or writer-to-be, superficially, unwillingly, or in boredom do most often fructify in the later art'. ²³

If we look now, through the eyes of this Anglo-Irishwoman, at the Irish landscape we may see why background and environment is a greater factor for her than for others of different heredity and milieu. These are the conceptions which we must look for in the works of Elizabeth Bowen: an appreciation of light and distance, a great intensity of feeling, a love of ~~ones~~ birthplace with a consciousness of the past with its ever-present reminders of death and decay,

and finally a firm belief in the triumph of the eternal over the temporal.

We remember how London and the Southcoast of England gradually lost their hold over her. No such air of unreality pervades her Irish scenes. This is the microcosm that reflects for her the world, past, present and future. Here is no theatricality; here is life itself, with death never far removed from the consciousness. Her feeling for Ireland is not simply a love of her birthplace but an extremely complex mixture of environment and heredity.

Her artist's eye for light and her Irishness are the product of her formative years spent in County Cork.

'Up in the North-east corner of County Cork is a stretch of limestone country open, airy, not quite flat; it is just perceptibly tilted from north to south and the fields undulate in a smooth, flowing way. Dark knolls and screens of trees, the network of hedges, abrupt stony ridges, slate glints from roofs give the landscape a featured look - but the prevailing impression is emptiness. This is a part of Ireland with no lakes but the sky's movement of clouds reflects itself everywhere as it might on water, rounding the trees with bloom and giving the grass a sheen'. 24

L. A. G. Strong, writing on Elizabeth Bowen's consciousness of light says:

'The Western landscape whether in Ireland or in the West Highlands derives its quality from the effects of light... And this phenomenon, this emanation from their inconstant skies, this elusive visitant that gives their scene its colour and its spirit, haunts from their earliest years the consciousness of Irish writers. For Elizabeth Bowen it is a part of life itself... 25 it merges in the characters'.

Three of her novels and many short stories are set in Ireland, and all of them are evidence of this preoccupation with the light and the open distances of the Irish scene. From 'The Last September', an early novel, comes this passage:

'Like splintered darkness, branches pierced the faltering dusk of leaves. Evening drenched the trees; the beeches were soundless cataracts. Behind the trees, pressing in from the open and empty country like an invasion, the orange bright sky crept and smouldered. Firs bearing up to pierce, melted against the brightness. Somewhere there was 26 a sunset in which the mountains lay like glass'.

It is the breathing vitality of this description which is almost peculiar to Elizabeth Bowen among modern writers and has caused Sean O'Faolain to say of her writing that 'it becomes the language of poetry magnificently taken over by prose'. 27 In the passage just quoted the light is a palpable thing drenching the trees and transforming them into cataracts. It presses forward like a fire and consumes

the opposing fir trees. In the last sentence the 'glass' has the typical effect of mirroring and intensifying the brilliant light of the landscape.

The same effect is achieved in this excerpt from The Heat of the Day, which describes Mount Morris, a house in County Cork, and its surroundings.

'On the far side (of the river) unequal cliffs of limestone dropped their whitish reflections into the water, trees topped and in some places steeply clad the cliffs. The river traced the boundary of the lands... This valley cleavage into a distance seemed like an offering to the front windows: in return the house devoted the whole muted fervour of its being to a long gaze... By anyone standing down by the river looking up, sky was to be seen reflected in row upon row of vast glass panes. The facade, dun stucco, seemed to vary in tone, but never altered in contour except at sunset - which, striking down the valley, gave the stucco an oriental²⁸ pink and enflamed the windows'.

In another novel 'A World of Love', written years after the two already mentioned, the characters are different, the time is later, but the scene is always the same. Here is still the warm light:

'There was no haze but a sort of coppery burnish out of the air lit on flowing fields, rocks, the face of the one house, and the cliff of limestone overhanging²⁹ the river'.

and the emptiness and space

'At all times open and great with distance, the land this morning seemed to enlarge again, throwing the mountains back almost out of view in the south of Ireland's amazement at being cloudless.' 30

As one English artist has said

'I think the quality of hers that most delights me is her power of conveying atmosphere and light. She has a painter's eye - a sort of quintessence of Constable, Turner, Monet, Manet and Renoir. One sees the long evening shadows, the glitter of the sun and water, the rich colours of materials, the reflected light on faces and bodies, the shimmering dust in summer London and the wet greens of Ireland. She never seems actually to describe them, yet one cannot, it seems to me, think of any of her characters divorced from their surroundings.' 31

Nor can one think of Elizabeth Bowen as a figure divorced from the Irish landscape which is, for her, inextricably bound up with her love of Bowen's Court, the country being only an extension of that demesne or park in which the house stands. No traveller could hope to feel that same affinity for Southern Ireland which is felt by one who was born there. The light and the airiness flow indoors through the large windows, and the scents of outdoors mingle with the smell of leather and cloth and polished wood.

In Bowen's Court we read

'Inside and about the house and in the demesne woods you feel transfixed by the surrounding emptiness; it

gives depth to the silence, quality to the light'. 32

The Irish weather takes its toll of interiors where there is often little money to spare for upkeep. There is a continual struggle to preserve old things and a consequently greater value placed upon them. Being haunted by possessions acquired by previous generations, and valued once for a sentiment now meaningless, being conscious always of living with the dead and knowing that immortality of a sort is all around one, gives the inhabitants of these houses a melancholy sense of security and immutability:

'Indoors the alterations of sun and damp makes stuffs fade quickly, fluctuations in temperature, where there is no heating make polish mist over and plaster sweat; 33 there are few new things and nothing stays like new.'

It is interesting to see how this idea from the autobiographical Bowen's Court has been used in the novel The Last September. The house in the novel, Danielstown, is, of course, Bowen's Court as she admits in the preface 'I spent my early girlhood in the house which is the Danielstown of the story'.

'The white sills - the shutters folded back in their frames - were blistered as though the house had spent a day in the tropics. Exhausted by sunshine the backs of crimson chairs were a thin, light orange; a smell

of camphor and animals drawn from the skins on the floor in the glare of the morning, still hung like dust on the evening chill... Pale regimental groups, reunions a generation ago of the family or neighbor-³⁴ hood gave out from the walls a vague depression.'

This powerful attachment of the Anglo-Irish to their own property and houses, it seems to me, is bound up with their history. There has always been an Irish Question since the reign of the first Elizabeth and, although the Anglo-Irish may have been lulled at times into a false sense of security, subconsciously they have always known that matters were not really settled, that they were always resented by the Irish, and that trouble might break out at any time. Their situation may be compared to that of the Roman conquerors in Britain in the early centuries of this era: like the Romans they were never accepted by the native population. As the Romans looked to a stable government in Rome for their safety, so the Anglo-Irish depended for theirs on England's powerful grip on Ireland; and when that distant grip relaxed, the conquering minorities were at the mercy of the oppressed, both in Britain and in modern Ireland.

This feeling of always being resented by the native Irish, this uneasy truce between the conquerors and the conquered, caused the Anglo-Irish to turn into themselves. As the rumblings

of Irish discontent became louder the Anglo-Irish lived a more withdrawn existence, each family in its own house, in its demesne walled off by screens of trees, the members of the family preoccupied with family problems conscious of the family past and living each uncertain day with a distilled ardour.

Elizabeth Bowen is sensitive to the peculiar quality of life in Anglo-Irish country houses and clear-sighted enough to appreciate the cause of it. Indeed she admits frankly 'The structure of its great Anglo-Irish society was raised over a country in martyrdom.' She is too honest to close her eyes to the fact that even Bowen's Court was 'imposed on seized land.' She knows that this is the root of the uneasiness of Anglo-Irish life.

'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. Their existences, like those of only 35 children, are singular, independent and secretive.'

Again and again she draws attention to this isolation of the family within its own house - this forced insularity which, in times of trouble, can take on the likeness of a beleaguered garrison.

'Each of these family homes with its stables and farm and gardens deep in trees at the end of long avenues, is an island' ³⁶ and 'Each member of each of these isolated houses is bound up not only in the sensation and business of living but in the exact sensation of living here.' ³⁷

The preoccupation with the family past ('I know of no house in which the past is not pervadingly felt') coupled with the forced isolation has bred an intensity of living which is bound up with the luminous landscape in which the life is lived. Now, these two qualities, an appreciation of light and an emotional tension, both products of her environment, are qualities pre-eminently possessed by Elizabeth Bowen and are an integral part of her genius. In his Landscape into Art, Sir Kenneth Clark defines 'an emotional response to light' as 'the landscape painter's greatest gift' and he refers to Ruskin's statement that painters and writers who have this gift of perception, belong to the highest order. Sir Kenneth also mentions 'that tension of spirit which goes to the creation of any great work of art'. ³⁸ According to Elizabeth Bowen the very intensity of life in an Anglo-Irish country house gives rise to an intensity of the heart. 'The not long past of these houses has been very intense: - Lives in these houses for generations, have been

lived at high pitch, only muted down by the weather, in psychological closeness to one another and under the strong rule of the family myth.' 39

And in this passage the insularity of life, the intensity of living, and the effect of light are all combined to give a theatrical picture of one of these houses.

'Life in these house islands has a frame of its own. 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. This may be a matter of mood or light. Come on round the last turn of its avenue, or unexpectedly seen down a stretch of lawn, any one of these houses - with its rows of windows set in the light facade against dark trees - has the startling meaning and abstract clearness of a house in a print, a house in which something important occurred once, and seems, from all evidence, to be 40 occurring still.'

The last sentence is the important one for our purpose. We have seen how unreality flooded her London and South coast scenes. But in any view of Ireland 'something important' has occurred, is still occurring and will occur again. This is her reality. The framework in which life is lived endures from one generation to the next, giving a continuity to the human condition. Man is mortal but houses and landscapes are less vulnerable to time. It is these things which help man to face death and to build for those who come after him.

She herself sums up her feelings about Ireland and their shaping effect:

'Though one can be callous in Ireland one cannot be wholly opaque or material. An unearthly disturbance works in the spirit; reason can never reconcile one to life; nothing allays the wants one cannot explain. In whatever direction, the spirit is always steadily moving, or rather steadily being carried as though the country were a ship. The light, the light consumed distances, the air of intense existence about the empty country, the quick flux to decay in houses, cities and people, the great part played in society by the dead and by the idea of death, and, above all, the recurring futilities of hope all work for eternal against 41 temporal things.'

2. Social Background

Environment is not just a matter of landscape. Material possessions, or the lack of them, are equally potent factors in shaping an individual's outlook on life. The ownership of Bowen's Court over a period of three centuries and an established position in Anglo-Irish society have produced in Elizabeth Bowen attitudes which may be best seen in a study of The Last September, an early novel. These attitudes are: a passionate love of the family house, an admiration for a 'style' of life maintained there and in similar households,

a feeling of being different from the English landowning class and, lastly, a deep mistrust of the landless middle class. In the preface to the novel Elizabeth Bowen says: 'This, of all my work, is nearest to my heart. It brims up with, and is rendered to a degree poetic, by experience I had had in my early youth, experience little or less than conscious, little or never registered by the mind, and therefore remaining immune and pure.'

The story itself recounts one month in the life of a girl, of a family and of a house. The house is Danielstown (Bowen's Court) and the family consists of Sir Richard and Lady Naylor and their two wards, a nephew and a niece who are cousins. The girl of the story is Lois, the niece, who has just recently finished school in England and is wondering what next to do with her life. She desperately longs for a goal; whether it be marriage or a career she does not care. Her cousin Lawrence is a much more matter-of-fact person; he looks no further ahead than his next term at Oxford and he moans his fate at being forced by poverty to spend his summer at Danielstown instead of travelling on the continent. This period of unrest in Lois's life corresponds with an ominous

quiet throughout the land. It is the last summer before Ireland's break with England and change is in the air. The month of September brings to a climax the fate of the country, the house and the girl.

Diversion for the family at Danielstown is provided by the arrival of guests who introduce new tensions into the lives of Lois and Lawrence. First to arrive are the Hugo Montmorencys, life-long friends of Sir Richard and Lady Naylor. Later comes Marda Norton, whose worldliness and poise open new horizons to Lois and whose beauty enslaves young Lawrence and the too-susceptible Hugo Montmorency. The drama of these lives is played out against a background of political unrest and only half-acknowledged danger. One has the feeling that all of the occupants of the house (except Lawrence) are deliberately closing their eyes to the approaching catastrophe.

Lois, in particular, is living in a dream world. Her love affair with an English officer stationed in the nearby garrison town takes shape almost without her own volition, and she welcomes it because it fills the void which exists in her life. When Lady Naylor interferes, Lois discovers that her love for Gerald is not strong enough to support the necessary

sacrifice which the marriage would demand. After this follow the two events which shock Lois into reality: the death of Gerald on patrol and the burning of Danielstown by the Irish insurgents. The storm which has been brewing all summer breaks and the tension is released. Lois's tragedy has an air of inevitability which is shared by the greater tragedy of Danielstown. Her tragedy was not that Gerald should die but that he should die knowing she did not love him.

As Gerald's death was probable in those unsettled times, so was the destruction of the house. Both Lois and Lawrence prophetically mention the possible loss of Danielstown focusing their resentment against life upon the house, each in a characteristic way. Lawrence, who is less under the spell of the Irish summer, says to Hugo Montmorency:

'I should like something else to happen, some crude intrusion of the actual... I should like to be here when this house burns'. Hugo says, 'Nonsense' and looks warningly at the house, but Lawrence persists. 'Of course, it will though. And we shall all be so careful not to notice'. 42

Lois's wish is not voiced and springs from a different cause. Marda Norton is packing to leave and Lois contemplates

the barrenness of life after she goes. Her jealousy of that other life which summons Marda away becomes centred on a tangible object. In her mind she contrasts the faded carpet of Marda's bedroom at Danielstown with the one she feels sure is waiting for her in London.

'Lois thought how in Marda's bedroom when she was married there might be a dark blue carpet with a bloom on it like a grape, and how this room, this hour would be forgotten. Already the room seemed full of the dusk of oblivion. And she hoped that instead of bleaching to dust in summers of empty sunshine, the carpet would burn with the house in a scarlet night to make one flaming call upon Marda's 43 memory.'

The house is symbolic of a way of life, and therefore its destruction strikes a grander and more dramatic note than does the death of Gerald. His death takes place off stage in the classic manner, but the death of the house is the closing scene of the book.

'At Danielstown, half way up the avenue under the beeches, the thin iron gate twanged (missed its latch remained swinging aghast) as the last unlit car slid out with the executioners bland from accomplished duty. The sound of the last car widened, gave itself to the open and empty country and was demolished. Then the first wave of a silence that was to be ultimate flowed back confidently to the steps. The door stood open 44 hospitably upon a furnace.'

We have seen how her great love of the house dominates this novel of Elizabeth Bowen and how the destruction of the house symbolizes the end of a way of life. She feels that people of her class have lived in a manner, with a 'style' which gave life meaning. As one of them says 'With nothing left but our brute courage we shall be nothing but brutes.'⁴⁵ The Last September provides a portrait in the round of this life which we must examine if we are to understand Elizabeth Bowen's philosophy.

Sir Richard Naylor is the prototype of a vanishing class - the Anglo-Irish landowner. He does not play a large part in the story, but his presence is constantly felt and his personality revealed more by his inarticulate exits than by what he says. Not a large landowner who delegates the management of his property to a steward, he farms part of the land himself and lets out the rest to tenants. We see him starting out on his usual morning rounds, hear him complaining about lack of rain and explaining to visitors the damage done to trees in a winter storm. He has a highly developed sense of noblesse oblige to his tenants, who, in return, humour him by a bland show of loyalty and respect. Beneath this urbane

surface the foundations of Sir Richard's world are showing ever-widening cracks, which he prefers not to see. Distrustful of change, clinging to the concrete and the matter-of-fact wherein he feels his safety dwells, 'adventure suggested an inconvenience,' ⁴⁶ and 'introspection, or headaches or the observation of nature' ⁴⁷ rouse his impatience. Any small change in routine any miscarriage of plans upsets him and starts up fear in his mind of greater changes to follow. His defence is to change the subject or retreat, usually into the safety of the library. When one of Marda Norton's suitcases fails to arrive 'there was something agonizing to Sir Richard in the thought of that suitcase.' ⁴⁸ When Marda leaves it continues to worry him.

'Sir Richard looked up Marda's train in a May time-table and was worried because he could not find it... Also what was he to do about her suitcase if it turned up. He sighed and went ⁴⁹ back to the library.'

The whole incident of Lois's affair with Gerald is charged with incalculable risks in the mind of Sir Richard. He has hoped that the hot-headed young Irish of the district will eventually see reason and the trouble will blow over,

but Gerald's presence not only reminds him of that which he wants to forget but also brings the storm centre closer to Danielstown.

'Sir Richard to whom the idea about Lois and Gerald percolated in time through the family conversation, declared the idea was preposterous. What chiefly worried him was, might she not have mentioned to Gerald those guns in the lower plantation?' 50

Later these fears are justified, Gerald is speaking:

"We were after a fellow called Peter Connor: we got him."

"I'm sorry to hear that," said Sir Richard flushing severely. "His mother is dying. However, I suppose you must do your duty. We must remember to send up now and inquire for Mrs. Michael O'Connor. We'll send some grapes. The poor woman - it seems too bad." He went off sighing into the library.' 51

At this point his sympathies are clearly with the Irish. He feels the English are simply stirring up trouble. One of the garrison wives, in an effort to force herself on his attention blurts out the news that the army is about to launch an offensive. His only reply to this is: 'I don't suppose it will come to anything. Besides, now the days are drawing in - ' 52 His self-delusion has reached its limit. As he utters these words he must realize that the

longer nights provides the very opportunity the Irish are waiting for. When Gerald is killed on patrol we can sense in Sir Richard the helplessness of the Anglo-Irish who find themselves caught between the opposing forces.

'Sir Richard had slipped away quietly; he was an old man, really, outside all this, and did not know what to do. He was wondering also about the Connors. Peter Connor's friends: they knew everything, they were persistent: it did not do to 53 imagine...'

Sir Richard's tragedy is inherent in his birth which bars him from the confidence of both the Irish and the English. Because he is a figure of such integrity there is a pathos about him which is entirely lacking in Lady Naylor. She is the reverse side of the coin. As a person, we cannot like her, but it is impossible not to feel a certain grudging admiration for the juggernaut way she sweeps through life. Her daily round is worth examining because it is typical of that lived by women in Irish country houses. Her mornings are devoted to managing the house which she does most efficiently. The house is well-staffed with servants but there are certain duties performed by the mistress. One of Lady Naylor's tasks is tending the lamps, for there is

no electricity at Danielstown.

'In big yellow gloves she accurately trimmed the wicks, between the morning's headlines and a thorough talk with cook... who resembled her mistress so closely in personality that their relationship was an affair of balance.' 54

Cutting and arranging flowers is another task not to be taken lightly nor to be entrusted to servants.

'To go to the garden, talk to the gardener, cruise round the paths slowly, select flowers, pick them, carry them back, arrange them in many vases fills a Bowen's Court (Danielstown) lady's morning or afternoon.' 55

Lady Naylor and her neighbors visit each other frequently exchanging news of relatives and friends and admiring each other's gardens. Occasionally there are larger parties, such as the tennis party at Danielstown when the chief business is the lavish tea eaten at the gleaming dining-room table. Longer visits are common; in fact house guests are expected to stay a long time. Hugo Montmorency spent months of his childhood with the Naylor and knows their house as well as his own. When he and his wife arrive they come with trunks of clothes prepared to stay the summer. This is natural and expected behaviour; unnatural is Marda Norton's departure after two weeks, and

everyone seeks for a reason. Lawrence says 'Nobody's ever gone so soon... I think you make a mistake going.' ⁵⁶

On the day of her departure 'they were all distressed and sympathetic, could not settle down to anything, walked about the house.' ⁵⁷ A friend says to Lois 'It seems odd she should be going away; she seems to have only just come. I generally get so accustomed to your visitors.' ⁵⁸ Even the master of the house who notices so little is conscious of something wrong. 'Sir Richard deplored departures. Visitors took form gradually in his household, coming out of a haze of rumour, and seemed but lightly, pleasantly, superimposed on the vital pattern till a departure tore great shreds from the season's texture.' ⁵⁹ This life, so well-ordered, so filled with little busyness, casts a nostalgic charm over the reader - all the more powerful because of the sense of impending disaster 'tragedy coming to a climax in the calm, opulent sunlight of an Irish autumn.' ⁶⁰

But Lady Naylor is completely blind to the approaching storm; managing her family, patronizing her inferiors, airing her views confidently on every subject, she radiates self-satisfaction. Like Lady Catherine de Bourgh she is a magnificent comic character, but shelled in her

absurdity there is always a pearl of truth. Horrified we may be at her high-handed intervention in the love-affair of Lois and Gerald, but in the end we are forced to admit she was right - Lois did not love Gerald enough. Two other beliefs of Lady Naylor are worth examining because they represent the tenets of her class and race - and consequently are shared, to some extent by Elizabeth Bowen.

Firstly Lady Naylor mistrusts the middle class - not because she fears the middle class as a threat to her way of life, but because of a complete divergence of values. This brings us back, in effect to the question of 'style'. To Lady Naylor (and to Elizabeth Bowen) the garrison officers and their wives are unspeakably vulgar. In the preface to The Last September the author says:

'If it seems that Sir Richard and Lady Naylor are snobs with regard to their niece's soldier friends it must be recalled that the Naylor's ideas date back to the well-ordered years before 1914... 61
Lois's 1920 gallants came of less-favoured stock.'

With the adjective 'less-favoured' Elizabeth Bowen places herself firmly on the side of the Naylor's.

Lady Naylor is speaking for herself when she says:
'Of course I don't say Gerald Lesworth's people are in trade -

I should never say a thing like that without foundation,' ⁶²
and again when quizzing Gerald about his people who live
in Surrey:

"Indeed? All in Surrey?"

"Scattered about."

"That sounds to me, of course," remarked Lady
Naylor pulling her gloves off brightly, "ex- ⁶³
ceedingly restless..."

Elizabeth Bowen makes Gerald come off best in this
interview with his 'invincible niceness' but she speaks for
herself alone in the caricature of Betty Vermont, the wife
of one of the officers. 'Betty Vermont had never before
been to so many large houses with so small sense of her
smallness. Of course they were all very shabby and not
artistic at all'. ⁶⁴ She describes Ireland as 'so picturesque
with those darling mountains and the hens running in and out
of the cottages.' ⁶⁵ She tells how her mother 'brought us all
up as kiddies to be so keen on the Irish and Irish songs. I
still have a little bog oak pig she brought me back from an
exhibition.' ⁶⁶ She talks baby-talk, goes to pay a morning
call in 'a swirl of furs and red crêpe de Chine,' her hands
'curled like loose chrysanthemums over her kid pochette,' ⁶⁷
tries to force herself into houses where she hasn't been
invited and, in short, violates every canon of good taste.

By contrast the Anglo-Irish are shown as imperturbably good-mannered in the face of her rudeness, politely resourceful in beating off her attacks.

Coupled with this mistrust of the middle-class is a mistrust of the English. As usual with Lady Naylor, the comic element predominates. Marda Norton is leaving for England to join her fiancé. 'Lady Naylor was more than busy, but could not resist this last opportunity to discover, before the veil of an international marriage descended, what Marda really thought of the English.' ⁶⁸

If Marda had been a missionary about to set off for some remote tribe Lady Naylor could not have offered more condolence nor more advice on how to treat the natives.

'You are very adaptable... I daresay you'll be very happy indeed... I always found the great thing in England is to have plenty to say, and mercifully they are determined to find one amusing. But if one stops talking, they tell one the most ordinary things, about their husbands, their money affairs, their insides.' ⁶⁹

Lady Naylor's impressions of England and the English had been gained during brief visits, the last of which to an old school friend named Anna Partridge in Bedfordshire must have left that unhappy county in a shattered condition.

'She (Lady Naylor) thought of the south of England as a kind of extension of Eastbourne, the north - serrated by factory chimney, the middle - a blank space occupied by Anna Partridge.' ⁷⁰

Others in the novel share this attitude towards the English, but for soberer reasons. Both Lois and Lawrence express the irritation felt by the Anglo-Irish with the complacency of the English. Lois says:

'England is so moral, so dreadfully keen on not losing her temper, or being for half a moment not a great deal more noble than anyone else.' 71

It is Lawrence, however, in a conversation with Gerald Lesworth who states what is undoubtedly the author's own opinion on the subject. Gerald admits that the situation in Ireland is rotten but insists that right is right from the point of view of civilization, that is, the English point of view. Lawrence's only comment on this is to remark that he, 'Thank God,' is not English. This ends the discussion, and Gerald is left wondering just what has gone wrong with his own argument and searching vaguely in his memory for a copybook quotation.

'Lawrence had not hoped to explain but had wished that Gerald could infer that there was a contrariety they each had of this thing called civilization. Lawrence saw it, an exact and delicate interrelation of stresses between being and being, like crossing arches: an unmentioned kindness, withering to assertion selfish or racial; ~~S~~ilence cold with a comprehension in which the explaining clamour died away. He foresaw it the end of art, of desire, as it would be the end of battle, but it was to this end, this faceless

but beautiful negation that he had lifted a glass 72
inwardly while he had said, "Thank God".'

THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN CHARACTER AND ENVIRONMENT

Jocelyn Brooke refers to Elizabeth Bowen's 'preoccupation with the relationship between the individual and his environment'. He compares her work to a 'landscape with figures' and says 'if one extends the word landscape to include the whole social scene, together with its deeper implications, I think the term will stand'.¹ The key word in this passage is 'preoccupation.' Elizabeth Bowen takes the commonplace literary convention of relating characters and landscapes and uses it in a unique way. First of all she uses it far more than almost any other writer: it is the main thing in her work even if one does nothing more than count lines. The second difference is that for her the convention is not a pathetic fallacy; it is a literal truth. Other writers in describing a character or realizing a mood use landscape to make the character or mood tangible and solid. She does this too, but mainly she is saying that the character is produced by the world around it.

Let us compare three of her backgrounds with similar backgrounds in the works of three writers whom she admires



and who can be said to have influenced her. This is no attempt to prove that in her use of background Elizabeth Bowen is a greater writer than the other three, but rather to demonstrate the difference in her emphasis.

This is a description of a house taken from Jane Austen's Sense and Sensibility:

'As a house Barton Cottage, though small, was comfortable and compact; but as a cottage it was defective, for the building was regular, the roof was tiled, the window shutters were not painted green, nor were the walls covered with honeysuckles. A narrow passage led directly through the house into the garden behind. On each side of the entrance was a sitting room about sixteen feet square; and beyond them were the offices and the stairs. Four bedrooms and two garrets formed the rest of the house. It had not been built many years and was in good repair. In comparison of Norland it was poor and small indeed! but the tears which recollection called forth as they entered the house were soon 2 dried away.'

Compare this with Mrs. Fogarty's house in The Last September.

'Mrs. Fogarty had one of the narrow houses looking out on the Square; her windows were screened from outside observation by cubes of evergreen; between the panes and the evergreens rain fell darkly. Mrs. Fogarty's drawing room was thronged with photographs; all the dear boys who for many years past had been garrisoned at Clonmore, many of whom, alas, had been killed in that dreadful war. You could not stoop to put down a cup on one of the little tables without a twinge of regret and embarrassment, meeting the candid 3 eyes of some dead young man.'

In both passages there is humour. Jane Austen quietly pokes fun at the current rage for the 'cottage orné' in her first sentence and for the 'sentimental' in the tears shed and soon dried away. The humour is less subtle in Elizabeth Bowen's description of Mrs. Fogarty's house, but it is the means of evoking the personality of the owner even before we meet her. There is sentiment in the words 'the dear boys' and 'that dreadful war' but the fact that the room 'thronged with photographs' shows the lugubrious pleasure taken by the lady in her collection.

Having read Jane Austen's description it would not be difficult to draw a plan of the house, even to the measurements. But, except for the narrowness of Mrs. Fogarty's house we can only guess at its size. On the other hand it is impossible to avoid the suspicion that Mrs. Fogarty is a busybody. One can imagine her keeping an eye on the life of the town through those 'cubes of evergreens' herself 'screened from outside observation.'

The second author to be compared with Elizabeth Bowen is Colette in this description of a garden from La Vagabonde.

'Sous ma fenêtre, dans le jardin, un parterre oblong de violettes, que le soleil n'avait pas encore touchées, bleuissait dans la rosée, sous des mimosas d'un jaune de poussin. Il y avait aussi, contre le mur, des roses grimpantes qu'à leur couleur je devinais sans parfum, un peu soufrées, un peu vertes, de la même nuance indécise que le ciel pas encore bleu. Les mêmes roses, les mêmes violettes que l'an passe... Mais pourquoi n'ai-je pu, hier, les saluer de ce sourire involontaire... où s'exhale le silencieux bonheur des solitaires?' 4

This is Elizabeth Bowen's completely different treatment, one might better say use, of a garden in one of her short stories:

' Lou put her hand on the gate, and, with a touch of bravado the two filed up the paved path to the door. Each side of the path hundreds of standard roses bloomed, overcharged with colour, as though this were there one hour. Crimson, coral, blue-pink, lemon and cold white, they disturbed with fragrance the dead air. In this spell-bound afternoon, with no shadows, the roses glared at the strangers, frighteningly bright. The face of the house was plastered with tea-roses: waxy cream when they opened but with vermillion buds.' 5

Colette is concerned with a description, such as only she can give, of the flowers themselves, ardent with colour, wet with dew against a pale early-morning sky. The speaker's life has changed since seeing the garden a year ago; she can no longer greet it with the same spontaneous joy because her own feelings are otherwise involved; she is now in love. But there is no suggestion that this change

in her feeling is reflected in the garden; it is still the same.

The backgrounds of Elizabeth Bowen can never remain aloof from the characters. The two people walking up the path are tired, overwrought and apprehensive. Their fear is augmented by the roses which seem to crowd in on them with malignant intent. The roses are too profuse, too bright and too fragrant. The tea-roses have a funereal waxiness in contrast to their sanguine buds. The flowers are not passive background but active participants as they glare frighteningly at the intruders. An evil spell seems to have been cast over the garden with its air of decadence, decay and death.

The third example which, I think, proves the validity of the statement that Elizabeth Bowen sees a different relationship between characters and their environment than does any other writer is a comparison of her work with that of Virginia Woolf. Both authors are describing an empty house. The following is from To the Lighthouse by Virginia Woolf:

'So with the house empty and the doors locked and the mattresses rolled round, those stray airs, advance guards of great armies, blustered in, brushed bare boards, nibbled and fanned, met nothing in bedroom or drawing-room that wholly resisted them but only hangings that flapped, wood that creaked, the bare legs of tables, saucepans and china already furred, tarnished, cracked. What people had shed and left - a pair of shoes, a shooting cap, some faded skirts and coats in wardrobes - those alone kept the human shape and in the emptiness indicated how once they were filled and animated; how once hands were busy with hooks and buttons; how once the looking-glass had held a face; had held a world hollowed out in which a figure turned, a hand flashed, the door opened, in came children rushing and tumbling; and went out 6 again.'

This next is from The Death of the Heart by

Elizabeth Bowen. Portia and Eddie are exploring an empty seaside lodging house:

'The front top bedrooms were like convent cells with outside shutters hooked back. Their walls were mouldy blue like a dead sky... A stale charred smell came from the grates - Waikiki seemed miles away. These rooms, many flights up, were a dead end: the emptiness, the feeling of dissolution came upstairs behind one, blocking the way down. Portia felt she had climbed to the very top of a tree pursued by something that could follow. She remembered the threatening height of the house... But it was not 7 only here that she dreaded to be with Eddie.'

Elizabeth Bowen has often been compared with Virginia Woolf: 'In same acute awareness of outside things, the same almost pictorial intensity of vision.' 8

This description by Virginia Woolf comes closer to Elizabeth Bowen than either Jane Austen or Colette but with this difference: the Ramsay's empty house is still peopled by its former tenants - they continue to dominate. Virginia Woolf's landscapes do not make her characters: the characters create the landscapes.

The scene from The Death of the Heart is vitally bound up with the relationship between Portia and Eddie. Portia is the innocent who has given her heart to the worthless Eddie. He has betrayed her trust in him, and she is about to charge him with his faithlessness. Each detail in the description of the house paves the way for the scene which is about to follow. Unconsciously she knows that this is the end of the affair, and we view the house through her eyes. The emptiness and dissolution around her are also in her heart. These rooms, like her life, have reached a dead end. If this is the end what course is open to her? Death? A convent? After all, she is only sixteen and has not learnt that life is full of compromises. The bedrooms seemed to her like convent cells; the top of the house like the top of a

high tree where her retreat is cut off and to jump means death. Even the smell from the grates has significance for her - immediately she is reminded of Waikiki, the villa where they have just left Daphne, whom she considers her rival. The bloom is off her love; it has become stale and charred. None of this has to be said because the implication is all there: this is the language of undertones of which Elizabeth Bowen is a master.

Further evidence of this quality on a broader canvas is available in three novels: The Hotel, To the North and The House in Paris.

The Hotel is in southern Italy and is occupied during the winter months by an assortment of English guests, among whom is a beautiful and sophisticated but utterly ruthless widow named Mrs. Kerr. She takes pleasure in exploiting her charm, finds it amusing to have someone dancing attendance on her, and has no compunction in discarding her followers when they cease to interest her. Her willing victim this winter has been a young girl named Sydney Warren whose time she has completely monopolized. With the arrival of Mrs. Kerr's son from a German university Sydney is stunned to

find that Mrs. Kerr has no further use for her. In addition Mrs. Kerr takes positive action: she deliberately turns the two young people against each other, building up in the mind of each false conceptions about the other so that before they meet their attitude to one another is hostile.

For all her profession of being a 'modern' young woman with a realistic, rational approach to life Sydney is basically an idealist. Her treatment at the hands of her idol is so shocking that it forces her for the first time to take a long hard look at reality. Ronald also is a product of the post-war world and in his belief in reason and intellectual freedom feels emancipated from the past. His mother has always represented for him the finest example of the emancipated woman who yet retained her good breeding and femininity. When he is brought face to face with the unsuspected flaws in her character he is shattered emotionally. Elizabeth Bowen depicts the moment of insight for both these characters in terms of surroundings which participate in the clarification of their thoughts.

Sydney's enlightenment takes place in an Italian cemetery where she has gone walking with a little girl named

Cordelia:

'The cemetery seemed quite deserted. Gashes of overcharged daylight pressed in through the cypresses on to the graves: a hard light bestowing no grace and exacting each detail. In the shade of the pillared vaults round the walls what already seemed the dusk of evening had begun to thicken, but the rank and file of small crosses staggered arms wide in the arraignment of sunshine. In spite of the brooding repose of the trees a hundred little shrill draughts came between them, and spurting across the graves made the decorations beloved of Cordelia creak and glitter. A wreath of black tin pansies swung from the arm of a cross with a clatter of petals, trailing colourless ribbons; a beaded garland had slipped down slantwise across the foot of a grave. Candles for the peculiar glory of the lately dead had been stuck in the unhealed earth: here and there a flame in a glass shade writhed opaque in the sunshine. Above all this uneasy rustle of remembrance, white angels poised forward to admonish. The superlatives crowding each epitaph hissed out their 'issimi' and 'issime' from under the millinery of death. Everywhere, in ribbons, marbles, porcelains was a suggestion of the salon and nowhere could the significance of death have been brought forward more startlingly.'

9

Sydney's mood is emphasized by such wounding phrases as: 'gashes of overcharged daylight' and 'the unhealed earth'; inanimate things seem to be suffering with her, 'crosses staggered arms wide in the arraignment of sunshine' and 'flames writhed'; everywhere is an 'uneasy rustle' that plays upon her nerves made up of the 'shrill draughts' through the brooding cypresses, the 'clatter of petals from a 'wreath of black tin

pansies' and the 'hissed out superlatives' of the inscriptions. She herself seems to be called upon to answer some charge as the 'angels poised forward to admonish.' She suddenly realizes that she is in danger of wasting the present in her worry over the future. 'Once among the graves she stood... looking round again. She was oppressed by the thought less of death than of the treachery of a future that must give one to this ultimately. She was not accustomed to consider death as other than as a spontaneous gesture. Now it hinted itself as something to be imposed on one, the last and most humiliating of those deprivations she had begun to experience.'¹⁰ The use of the word humiliating shows that it is not just Sydney's heart that is wounded but also her pride. The greatest good resulting from the whole experience will be for her a growing awareness of the human condition and man's mortality.

Ronald comes to a painful realization of his mother's character in a different setting. He is an unwilling but unprotesting member of a sightseeing party to visit the grounds of a deserted villa. The villa had belonged before the war to Russian aristocrats and the thought of these former owners stirs

up romantic sentiments in the breasts of some of the visitors and a certain nostalgia for the ancien régime. Ronald, with his vision of a brave new world and his typical undergraduate yearnings towards liberalism or socialism feels no sympathy for the sentiments of the others; he was interested for another reason ' Perished civilizations interested Ronald who had come too late to share a mild distress at their demise. Soon he was thinking fruitfully about Russia.' ¹¹ He wanders through the garden and finally discovers a square tank hidden among the bushes close to an overhanging cliff. He sits on the brink, letting his feet dangle over the edge and staring at his image in the unclouded depths of green water. Another member of the party, a clergyman, comes to sit on the opposite side, and they converse, not looking at each other, but at the image of each other in the water. The clergyman, who resents the young man's impervious good manners and wishes to make him lose his temper, suggests that hotels are great places for rather unhealthy friendships - in fact they appeal to certain people for that reason. Ronald's mind leaps to his mother:

"But are there really people who would do that?" asked Ronald sharply, in a tone of revulsion, as though he had brought himself up more squarely than he had anticipated to the edge of some kind of abyss. "You mean women?"

"Yes, I suppose so," said Milton.

"There is nothing now to prevent women being different," said Ronald despondently, "and yet they seem to go on being just the same. What is the good of a new world if nobody can be got to come and live in it?" Sitting above his passive and pale reflection, crumpled forward on his folded arms, he remained immobile while the echoes of his last exclamation still seemed palpably to hang about under the slant of rock that roofed him into a cave. The decay of the garden must have seemed to him for a dark instant to have profited nothing.¹²

The remarkable thing about this scene is the active part played by the background in magnifying the importance of sound and in diminishing the value of sight. The tank itself increases the volume of sounds. 'What on earth - it's like talking to ten people!' ¹³ on the other hand, because the two men insist on gazing at each other's reflections

in the water rather than meet each other's direct gaze across it, those softening shades of facial expression, which can take the sting from bitter words, are lost.

'He gazed across thoughtfully, not at Milton but at Milton's reflection which he was able to watch without raising his eyes.' 14

Further on Milton spoke 'with a smile that must have been lost on Ronald since his faint image did not reproduce it.' 15

A further example of this emphasis on sound over sight comes after Ronald's outburst when his words seemed 'palpably' to hang about under the slant of rock while his reflection in the water was impassive and pale.

Finally, the garden itself, is important. Its neglect and decay is the end result of a social revolution which destroyed the Russian aristocracy and, in Ronald's opinion, ushered in a better world. But when he cries despairingly, 'What is the good of a new world if nobody can be got to live in it?' the garden seems to have been sacrificed in vain. 'The decay of the garden must have seemed to him for a dark instant to have profited nothing.' Milton rejoices

in that 'dark instant,' and in the 'profound despair' of the young man because he had been hoping to penetrate his defences. Milton, who is older, regrets the passing of the old order and its symbol, the decaying garden.

'Milton justified his own silence, his unwillingness to go to the rescue of Ronald, by a feeling that this collapse had its austere fitness and that the garden had been, after all, fully entitled to revenge itself.'

16

In the next novel to be considered, To the North, the scenes are more urban and the characters more sophisticated. Caught as these people are in the stream of London life they lack the unreal, holiday aura of their compatriots in The Hotel. I will have more to say about this work in the next chapter when dealing with the importance of a rooted existence in Miss Bowen's works, but here we are only concerned with the close relationship between characters and their environment.

The plot is a simple one. Emmeline the heroine is too honest to make the compromises which alone can make life bearable. In her innocence and wholeheartedness she is related to Portia of The Death of the Heart and, to a lesser degree, to the heroines of The Last September, The Hotel and The House in Paris. Emmeline falls in love with Markie

an ambitious barrister and an opportunist. He is incapable of rising to her level of devotion and is frightened by her unworldliness. He breaks loose from her with a calculated brutality which is typical of his nature. The effect on Emmeline is devastating: her mind cracks under the strain as she drives Markie through the night in her little car, and there is a fatal crash.

Emmeline shares a house in St. John's Wood with Cecilia, the widow of Emmeline's brother. Cecilia's love affair with Julian Tower is a sub-plot which, by its very conventionality, makes Emmeline's clandestine affair with Markie stand out in sharp and glaring relief. Cecilia is a worldling who is immediately able to see Markie for what he is but cannot warn Emmeline. Nor is she able to gauge the depth of Emmeline's passion for Markie because it is something beyond her comprehension. No one could have saved Emmeline - near the end she voices this herself, 'One does oneself in.' This has been called 'an unlikely, but irresistible love affair'; however the merits of the plot do not concern us except in one respect: the background.

St. John's Wood and the house of Emmeline and

Cecilia in Oudenarde Road take shape early in the novel.

'They had gone to live in St. John's Wood, that airy uphill neighborhood where the white and buff-coloured houses, pilastered or gothic, seem to have been built in a grove. A fragrant, faint impropriety, orris dust of a century still hangs over parts of this neighborhood; glass passages lead in from high green gates, garden walls are mysterious, laburnums falling between the windows and the walls have their own secrets. Acacias whisper at nights round airy, ornate little houses in which pretty women lived singly but were not alone. In the unreal late moonlight you might hear a ghostly hansom click up the empty road or see on a pale wall the shadow of an opera cloak.' 17

The suitability of placing Emmeline and Cecilia in this particular part of London is undeniable. There, two lovely young women are not likely to be alone for long. There is no impropriety about Cecilia-she is too aware of the world's opinion - but we are prepared in this passage for the impropriety of Emmeline. Also we have here that intermingling of things and people which makes each thing an adjunct of humanity: the glass passages built to protect the occupants and their opera-cloaked visitors from the eyes of the world, the walls which contain mysteries, the trees which share the secrets of the houses, and the imaginary sound of a hansom cab.

Inside the house, also near the beginning of the

book, there is a description of the bibelots on the mantelpiece in their drawing room which is a masterly revelation of the characters of the two young women:

'If elsewhere the room in its studied restraint might seem cold or formal - the mantelpiece broke out into a gala of femininity. Clear as a still life in the limpid afternoon light the ornaments smiled at each other and might be supposed after midnight to dance and tinkle: candlesticks dropping with lustres, tapering coloured candles, fans tilted aslant, shell tea-caddies, painted patch boxes, couples of china cats spotted with flowers, romping dark ivory Chinese dogs, one widowed shepherdess with only the clock to smile at, a tall rosy clock from Dresden (a heart on its pendulum silent under a shade), a small gold clock ticking. There were curling up photographs of Benito the kitten and drawings of a steel cathedral cut out by Emmeline but not framed. And, drooping out of a claret glass three white roses; roses a girl had worn at a party, a little brown at the tips.' 18

The first part of this description is all Cecilia: Cecilia, the widowed shepherdess, collector of elegant and amusing ornaments, stares at the heart-shaped pendulum of the Dresden clock which has stopped. That part of her life was over; the shock of her husband's death was a sombre memory, an injury, whose extent could never be assessed. 'The frightened heart repairs itself in small ways; one has to live how one can.' 19 Hence the small gold clock ticking and the patch boxes; Cecilia bewildered by her husband's death

still manages to preserve her facade: 'It could not always be Henry.' 20

Emmeline, though elegant in her person, has none of this faculty for providing herself with an attractive frame. Things in themselves are of little importance to her. A deeper nature makes her feelings more vulnerable. She is attracted by living things like Benito the kitten and the roses which she cannot force herself to discard. Also she is less concerned with appearances than Cecilia. Each object placed on the mantelpiece by Cecilia was beautiful; she would never have left a curled-up photograph, a picture cut-out and a faded corsage of flowers to mar the perfection of her drawing-room. Nor would she have been able to forget the world so entirely as to indulge in such a déclassé love affair as Emmeline's.

People, and their opinion, meant a great deal to Cecilia. She was always on the telephone or writing or receiving letters, going out or entertaining, buying pretty clothes, sharing confidences. She hated to be alone with time to think. We are given an interesting impression of the house received through the nerves and senses of Cecilia one afternoon. She has been having a luncheon party and the

guests have gone. Then she hears the servants go and realizes that she is alone. She looks about her at the drawing room:

'the bright emptiness of this room with its smile fading became, brought up to the microscope of her nerves, a living tissue of shadows and little insistent sounds: the clock and the trees outside, a blind cord tapping, her own dress rubbing against the sofa back as she turned to listen.' ²¹

The focus narrows from the trees, to the blind cord, to her dress.

'She ran down like a clock whose hands falter and point for too long at one hour and minute: the clock stops dead.' ²²

Cecilia is concerned more with passing the time than with living. She needs excitement, people, entertainment and travel to help her do it. When these outside stimuli are absent she runs down and verges on panic.

'She thought "I will not telephone; I will not look to see if the past has come." Her life became visible in the hour like water poured into a glass.' ²³

Lady Waters, who is related to both Emmeline and Cecilia, having married the uncle of one and the second cousin of the other, has a drawing room which she has arranged as a useful background for the pursuit of her interests. She

loves to interfere in the lives of other people and uses the warm, comforting atmosphere of her drawing room and the bribery of good food and drink to weaken the defences of her victims. The drawing room had had, when she married Sir Robert, crimson brocaded paper, gilt-slung pelmets, chandeliers, mirrors, Sèvres vases and an ormolu clock.

'She had installed more sympathetic lighting, and approached the armchairs suggestively into tête-à-têtes. She had been right: the room remained an imposing second to her personality and guests were as much alarmed as magnetised into indiscretion.'

24

In this novel, almost more than in any other, the two-way pull between Elizabeth Bowen's characters and their environment is emphasized. When Emmeline is happy in the early stages of her love affair with Markie, her senses sharpened by love, her mood is reflected even in the streets through which she moves. Driving home one evening

'the houses brightened along roads silent and polished, the air freshened: this was a garden. The glades of St. John's Wood were still at their brief summer: walls gleamed through thickets, red may was clotted and crimson, laburnums showered the pavements, smoke had not yet tarnished a leaf. The heights this evening had an air of superurbanity: one heard a ping of tennis balls, a man wheeled a barrow of pink geraniums, someone was practising

the violin, sounds and late sunshine sifted through the fresh trees. Someone was giving a grand party: more gold chairs arrived; when they flicked the lights up a moment in the conservatory you saw tall frondy shadows against the glass. Emmeline wished them joy.' 25

The whole picture is one of light and freshness with its polished roads, gleaming walls, untarnished leaves and fresh trees. There are sounds of pleasure - the tennis balls, music and the sight of anticipated pleasure - the gold chairs. Everything is seen through rose-coloured glasses - red may, clotted and crimson, and a harrow of pink geraniums. But after the break with Markie the district seems to have changed almost beyond belief.

'On evenings when Cecilia went out with Julian Emmeline walked the roads of St. John's Wood or up to Hampstead, quickly, her hands in her pockets. Wet or fine, when rain drew the lamplight out into long reflections or moths from the sycamore whirled in brown air round the lamps, she walked late; pulling up vaguely at corners or stopping to stare over garden walls. The neighborhood appeared strange to her. Trees were dull with July; dust and lamplight made the pale houses monotone; she heard voices sharp with late summer fatigue.' 26

Now Emmeline's senses are dulled and she wanders aimlessly. The freshness has given way to dust and the rosy colours to brown and monotone paleness. The sounds of music and pleasure

have been replaced by 'voices sharp with fatigue.'

People are sensitive to the forces of nature, and perhaps the change of season had its effect on the relationship between Emmeline and Markie. It is difficult to know in which direction more force is exerted. Perhaps, under the influence of summer's heat the freshness was already fading in their relationship at the moment when it seemed to be at its climax: the weekend in Paris. Certainly Emmeline is influenced by the heat and by the strangeness of her surroundings:

'The streets had been watered, the trees were already rusty and stale with summer... Oppressed by plunging once more in this shadowy network when she had been seeing lately so clear a plan, perplexed by some new view of life that, not quite her own, lent double strangeness to everything, Emmeline sat silently in the taxi beside Markie.'

27

Much of the story is seen through the eyes of Emmeline who was very short-sighted. She seldom wore her spectacles 'from an independence that would rather blunder than be directed.'

²⁸ As a result many of the scenes have a misty, bemused quality like an underwater picture. A few examples will illustrate this: Emmeline is lunching with Markie in the early days of their affair. 'In a sort of ecstatic

distraction she took off her spectacles, glanced once more round the room that swam with reflections of her own happiness.' ²⁹ Sitting on a park bench in Paris are 'Emmeline in her white dress watery with green shadow... Markie looking her way in an instant of angry extinction as though he would drown.' ³⁰ In a taxi 'She looked out of the window at Paris, blurred tourist's Paris in which a few branches and figures were cut out distinctly on the pink-violet evening.' ³¹

Her short-sightedness was not simply a physical handicap

'she was short-sighted in every sense. Watching slip past her a blurred repetitive pattern she took to be life, she adored fact... and had taught herself to respect feeling... She saw men as trees walking.' ³²

This inner preoccupation dulled her relations with other people, notably with Markie. At first her unnatural serenity was part of her charm for him; later he learned to fear it. Always she had the faculty of withdrawing.

'Misty with short sight, her eyes dwelt anxiously on his face as though there were someone here she did not recognize.' ³³

'Standing up to see him more clearly - for his face had appeared from the table an angry blur - she

once more looked at him fixedly. Distracted by her short sight... she made a bewildered movement like a deserted woman.' ³⁴

All this must have been distinctly unnerving for Markie who was not a sensitive man. Emmeline had taught herself to respect feeling but unfortunately she was often unaware of what other people felt. She never knew Markie because she never saw him clearly. Inwardly she built up an image of him, and when he failed to live up to it she was destroyed.

Paris provides the opening and closing scenes of another novel, The House in Paris. Of this Elizabeth Bowen said in 1949, 'Of my previous novels The House in Paris gives me most pleasure.' ³⁵ The house belongs to Mme. Fisher, the French widow of an English army officer. For years Mme. Fisher had taken into her home young English and American girls of good family who wished to live with a French family while studying in Paris. Now she is old and bedridden, but her presence still dominates the house and the life of her patient daughter Naomi. The first and last parts of the book follow the events of one day in this house where Mme Fisher sits like a malign spider in the centre of her web.

On that day two children are drawn to the house, each going in a different direction, their journeys crossing at this point. The girl, Henrietta, is on her way from England to the south of France to join her grandmother, a friend of Naomi. The child has been foisted on Naomi between trains. To Henrietta the day in Paris is of little importance; it is merely an interlude in a journey from one familiar, secure place to another. The other guest is Leopold, an illegitimate child who has come to Paris to meet his mother, who has not seen him since he was an infant, when he was handed over to foster parents. To the boy this day is the culmination of all the wishes of his short life. Impatient of his foster parents, unused to the society of other children, this child of an English mother and a Jewish father is staking his life on the outcome of the day. The mother fails to appear, but her husband, Ray Forrestier, does and literally kidnaps Leopold, whose faith is thus partially justified.

The middle section of the book is devoted to the love affair between Leopold's parents, Karen Michaelis and Max Ebhardt. Max had been a protégé of Mme. Fisher when

Karen was en pension at Mme. Fisher's. He was the first man Karen had ever noticed.

Four years later Karen is engaged to a suitable Englishman of her own class when she pays a brief visit to an aunt in Ireland. Already in doubt about her feelings for Ray she is further unsettled by remarks of her aunt which seem to incite her to rebel against her safe way of life. At this point, with her fiancé out of England on a diplomatic mission she returns home to find Naomi and Max in London. They have recently become engaged contrary to the wishes of Mme. Fisher and are in England to collect a legacy which will enable them to marry. Karen and Max meet again with tragic consequences. They have a brief, almost wordless love affair which consists of two secret meetings, one at Boulogne and one at Hythe and Max returns to Paris to tell Naomi that he cannot marry her. Naomi's love for Max and Karen is greater than her own desire for happiness, but she is not allowed to have the final word. All three have reckoned without Mme. Fisher. She discovers the whole story and rallying all her old influence over Max she taunts him with his love of Karen and his treatment of Naomi and drives him to suicide. Later, when Naomi comes to London to see

Karen, she admits that her mother was jealous of anyone who came between her and Max. She says, 'I saw then that evil dominated our house.' ³⁶ And Karen, seeing Mme.

Fisher more objectively than her daughter sums up:

'I told Max once that she loved him; her age can only have made that more terrible for her, and made her more relentless. She saw him love you, then me: she only had her own power - No, I am wrong, though: it was her power she loved. That time it overreached ³⁷ itself; that was all.'

Each time that Karen and Max meet it is in surroundings foreign to both of them. Their meetings seem to take place in a vacuum which imparts an air of unreality and makes them all the more conscious of each other. Karen particularly is removed from all the surroundings which have anchored her to the world of common sense: her home, her family and her friends.

The first meeting takes place in the garden of the house at Twickenham which Naomi has inherited. Karen and Max are alone in the garden, and after a period of four years, she feels the attraction which he had exerted in Paris. They argue and she bursts out, blaming their disagreement on the place.

'"If I exaggerated just now, it was because today is hardly a day, is it? Here we are in a place that's hardly a place at all, in a house

belonging to someone dead. I'd never been to Twickenham till today, and I suppose I may never come again. If I did come, I might never find this house. I don't know the address; I suppose it has one."

"Yes", said Max. "You are certainly off your beat." 38

This feeling of being on unknown territory affects both of them. 'a church clock struck six somewhere behind the garden, they ought to start back soon. The poplars, the crimson-showering cherry, the lawn, the window belonged to the past already. An indoor chill as in some room where nothing goes on, began to settle on Karen.' 39 The feeling of tenseness, of suspended action makes this moment of the present almost unbearable. The garden is the past, and the unseen clock strikes the hour which neither of them want to end with the tension unresolved. The chill of this instant holds them motionless; something must happen to break the spell. It is at this moment that Max, acting almost without volition, makes that irrevocable gesture which Karen has unthinkingly been waiting for. 'Max put his hand on Karen's, pressing it into the grass. Their unexploring, consenting touch lasted; they did not look at each other or at their hands.' 40

Four weeks later they meet in Boulogne where they

know no one. The feeling that they have cut themselves off from humanity, the unreality of their sudden discovery of each other and the hopelessness of their future are all reflected in their physical surroundings: by the closed shutters and the stricken look of the grey cathedral.

'The utter silence of the glaring shuttered streets oppressed them. Everyone in here must be asleep if not dead of plague. Karen's feet began to ache from the cobbles; an afternoon unreality fell on her. The cathedral had the same stricken look: its facade was caked with autumn greyness, as though mists left a sediment. People in love, in whom every sense is open, cannot beat off the influence of a place. Max and Karen looked about them vaguely, not knowing why, they were not sight-seeing ⁴¹ lost to each other in fatigue and vacancy.'

David Daiches, writing in the English Journal on the novels of Elizabeth Bowen says:

'The moments of quiet insight are her greatest triumphs. But the great moment, the instant of crisis never stands out: it merges imperceptibly into the shimmering flux of sensibility.'

One thinks again of Virginia Woolf, whose work has a similar quality; but Virginia Woolf put across the sense of significance she wished to communicate by presenting to us the reveries of her characters. Miss Bowen does not let her

characters indulge in long reveries; she gives us a single thought or impression of the character she is concentrating on, then proceeds immediately to give it its proper significance by picking out appropriate elements in the character's environment and describing them in such a way as to build up the required atmosphere. Consider for example, this picture of the heroine and her lover meeting clandestinely in Boulogne:

"The leaves behind their heads and the leaves under them kept sifting in the uncertain air that drew out the flags. An incoming tide of apartness began to creep between Max and Karen, till, moving like someone under the influence of a pursuing dream, he drew the cigarette from between her fingers and threw it over on to the boulevard. Moving up the parapet, he kissed her, and with his fingers began to explore her hand. Their movements, cautious because of the drop below, were underlined by long pauses. They were hypnotized by each other, the height, the leaves... Later, they began hearing voices on the steps; as the sun went down a little, other people came up to walk on the ramparts. Interruptions making them draw apart, did not alter their sad and desperate calm. Karen could only tell how the time passed by the changing shadows on the roofs below. They got up once and walked right round the citadel, coming back again to where they had been. The apse of the cathedral, the sad windows of houses had looked at them through the boughs.

Before they left a bar of glittering light struck across the path exactly where they

stood making their figures blaze. They stood and looked at each other. The town below began humming with early evening life. Karen saw his face, drowned in the light, full of tiredness and agony."

'Miss Bowen is not afraid of fairly abstract descriptions such as "their movements were underlined by long pauses," nor does she avoid metaphorical descriptions such as "an increasing tide of apartness began to creep between Max and Karen." These are however given specific quality and a precise emotional meaning through the apt account of the environment with which they are surrounded "the sad windows of the houses", "the changing shadows on the roofs". But the music is always muted, the atmosphere trancelike.'

42

It has been shown previously how the South coast of England gradually became unreal to Elizabeth Bowen. It is fitting then, that the last meeting of Karen and Max should take place on this rainy, windswept shore. The climax of their love affair^{is} in a dreamlike atmosphere so laden with overtones of sadness that one feels that even if the sleepers wake there can be no happiness for them.

'Rain in summer seems a kind of disaster. The idea of the rain being disaster though they knew it not hung over Max and Karen meeting on Folkstone pier on Saturday afternoon.'

43

Driving to Hythe Karen,

'saw what made them completely alone for the first time: there being no sun. Always before at

Twickenham or Boulogne, the sun by happening to shine had been a felt presence, adding itself the whole time. It had been insistent on the flowery pink tree, the salt gray stones. Till today they had not, when alone, ever been two; always either three or one. Now, what they did was cut off from any other thing, 44 their silence related to them only.'

The following morning, going for a walk, the situation of the town intensifies this feeling.

'The stretch of forlorn marsh and sad sea-line made the snug town an island, a ship content to go nowhere... Karen, walking by Max, felt more isolated with him, more cut off from her own country than if they had been in Peru. You feel most foreign when you no longer belong 45 where you did.'

By meeting Max, Karen has cut herself loose from her former life. Her mother, she discovers, is aware of her deception but does not speak, nor does she intend to. The house and everything and person in it seem leagued in an opposing army of silence led by Mrs. Michaelis. The importance given to material things in this conspiracy is typically and uniquely the art of Elizabeth Bowen.

'This was like being a dog in a house in which they are packing up quietly, or a sick man from whom it is kept that he is going to die. If a silence rears its head it is struck down like a snake, but with a light smile, as though you had struck the head off a grass. Life went on very fast, like a play

with no intervals; actors, flagging overact, the trying lights are not lowered. Karen was no longer compelling the house with her eye: the house with its fixed eye was compelling Karen. She performed on in dreamlike unreal distress. Even Braithwaite's (the butler's) tortoise face looked violently guarded. Karen saw what was ruthless inside her mother. Unconscious things - the doors, the curtains, guests, Mr. Michaelis - lent themselves to this savage battle for peace. Sun on the hall floor, steps upstairs in the house, had this same deadly intention not to know. To the studio, in the streets, this careful horror pursued her; she could not see traffic without seeing with what overruling coldness things guided themselves.' 46

On a February morning ten years later Henrietta arrives in Paris to spend the day at the Fisher's house en route to Mentone to visit her grandmother. Henrietta is the disinterested observer through whose senses we see and feel the house. It has no significance for her - she, unlike Leopold, is not hoping for anything here which will alter the course of her life - nor is she imaginative. Yet the atmosphere of strangeness, of brooding evil, communicates itself to her from the very fabric of the house even before she meets its evil spirit. Sitting in the taxi beside Naomi she feels there is something emotional about the woman's tense way of sitting. The Fisher's house, in fact the very street in which it stands, shares this tenseness and air of unreality.

'The Fishers' house, opposite which the taxi stopped, looked miniature, like a doll's house: it stood clapped to the side of a six-storied building with balconies. On its other side was a wall... Up and down the narrow uphill street the houses were all heights: none so small as the Fishers'. At each end the street bent out of sight: it was exceedingly quiet and seemed, though charged with meaning, to lead nowhere. Henrietta's exact snobbishness could not "place" this street - was it mean or grand?... It was exceedingly silent... it would not have surprised Henrietta if no one ever walked down that street again.

The Fishers' house looked small because of its narrowness. It was three stories high, and also, stepping back, Henrietta saw another couple of windows, mansard windows, peering down from above... Henrietta thought: Perhaps it is not really so small inside? Or perhaps it stretches back... The house with its clean tight blinds across inside darkness managed to look as proud as any in the street; there^{q7} was nothing "bijou" about it; it looked stern.'

This description (cut considerably from the original) is not meant to stand on its own: it serves two purposes. It reveals something about Henrietta and it begins the careful preparation for the story of Karen and Max which forms the central part of the book. By emphasizing Henrietta's materialism the author prepares the reader for the little girl's subsequent fears which might be discounted in an imaginative child. Repetition of the salient features of the street and house build up a fearful curiosity about events which have taken place there: the silence and desertion of the street, the narrowness and sternness of the house.

Miss Fisher had told Henrietta about her invalid Mother and had also done what she could to prepare her for meeting Leopold. Taking Henrietta upstairs to wash

'they crept up like thieves. You saw no windows, the hall and stairs were draughty lit by electric light. The inside of the house - with its shallow door panels, lozenge door-knobs, polished brass ball on the end of the banisters, stuffy red wall-paper with stripes so artfully shadowed as to appear bars - was more than simply novel to Henrietta, it was antagonistic, as though it had been invented to put her out. She felt the house was acting, nothing seemed to be natural; objects did not wait to be seen but came crowding in on her, each with what amounted to its aggressive cry. Bumped all over the senses by these impressions, Henrietta thought: If this is being 48 abroad...'

The prison-like aspect of the house is emphasized by the windowless hall, the barred wall-paper. Henrietta does not feel just strange - she feels threatened by the antagonistic attitude of the house with its aggressive, crowding objects.

In the salon where Naomi has provided coffee and croissants for the visitor the atmosphere, though lighter, is stiff and repelling. On another occasion it is compared to a convent

parlor. It looked on to a courtyard with high walls in which grew one tree that showed in outline through the blind. It was not a room in which to relax; all the furniture looked stiff and uncomfortable;

'The tight scrolled crimson sofa backed on the wall opposite the window, having its head to the door. The room had a satiny paper, striped yellow and gray, and a scrolled grey marble mantelpiece with an iron shutter pulled down inside: any heat in here came from hot-water pipes. Against the wall opposite the mantelpiece stood a chiffonier with gilt beadings and marble ornaments; next to the window, facing the sofa, a console table with no mirror behind. There were four green velvet armchairs, like doll's-house furniture magnified, and the round centre table on which the tray stood. Any space round the walls was filled up with upright chairs. The curtains draped stiffly round the muslin-masked window clearly did not draw. The parquet was bare and waxed: the room smelled of this.' 49

Not one detail of this description is superfluous; each adds one important brush-stroke to the picture and the feel of the room: the grey of wall-paper and mantelpiece, the cold marble of the mantelpiece and the chiffonier, the iron shutter pulled down over the cold grate, the armchairs which seemed meant to be looked at not sat in, the stiff

chairs, the bare floor, the antiseptic smell. No wonder that when breakfast is over and Henrietta has humoured Naomi by agreeing to rest on the sofa 'she lay stretched straight out, as though on an operating table.' 50

Later Henrietta is summoned to Mme. Fisher's bedroom where the invalid uses her as an audience before whom to humiliate the patient Naomi. From the moment of entering the room Henrietta is afraid.

'Round the curtained bedhead, Pompeian red walls drank objects into their shadow: picture frames, armies of bottles, boxes, an ornate clock showed without glinting, as though not quite pointed out by some dark transparent wash. Henrietta had never been in a room so full and so still. She stood by the door Miss Fisher had shut behind her, with her heart in her mouth. Her eyes turned despairingly to a bracket on which stood white spiked shells with cameos on their lips. The airlessness had a strange dry pure physical smell.' 51

Phrases and words like 'drank objects into their shadow', 'with her heart in her mouth', 'despairingly', 'white spiked shells', emphasize the oppressive, almost cannibalistic atmosphere which Henrietta had been dreading since Naomi had suggested earlier that Mme. Fisher wanted to see her. Then she had felt 'like a meal being fattened up for a lion.' 52

When she is allowed to leave the whole aspect of the room changes.

'The incense cone had burnt out, its fumes were gone: the red wall opposite the window brightened; the winter sun was trying to come through.' 53

At the end of the day Karen's husband takes Leopold and Henrietta away in a taxi and the small enclosed space is so full of emotions that the taxi gets too tight.

'Sense of space is emotional: this taxi, bursting seemed to groan on its springs.' 54

Having delivered Henrietta safely to the woman who will take her to Mentone, Ray and Leopold are alone and the last scene, in the station follows Leopold's query 'Where are we going now?'

'Where are we going now? The station is sounding, resounding, full of steam caught on light and arches of dark air: a temple to the intention to go somewhere. Sustained sound in the shell of stone and steel, racket and running, impatience and purpose, make the soul stand like a refugee, clutching all it has got, asking: "I am where."' 55

The senses are evoked: a magnificent spectacle of son et lumière which is a startling contrast to the atmosphere of the house which they have just left. In the house is death and silence: the past. Here is life, light, noise and movement: the future. No one can stand still, and

Leopold's question sums it up, 'Where are we going now?'

THE IMPORTANCE OF ROOTS

I believe that the reason Elizabeth Bowen feels so strongly about a rooted existence is her certainty that in that alone can man attain peace and happiness. She has known what it means to be uprooted and to live in strange surroundings, and although she enjoyed the novelty of this as a child, she is sure, as a mature woman, that this does not produce contentment.

Her emphasis on the value of stability can be seen in a novel already discussed in a previous chapter: To the North. Emmeline's tragedy is not simply an inability to come to terms with life but also the gradual loss of her roots, her home and her calmness: she is forced out. Cecilia, who by her very nature is less able to soar, moves in the opposite direction: her restlessness gradually disappears as she moves closer to an understanding with Julian. Emmeline moves from the sphere of Sir Robert and Lady Waters with its conventional stability into that of Markie and his sister, whose domestic arrangements lack permanence and grace. Markie

himself is restless, ambitious and governed entirely by self-interest.

Emmeline when we first meet her is more satisfied with life than Cecilia. Cecilia is the one who is driven to seek novelty, company and change of scene; Emmeline is happy with their house, her own work and a mild social round. Markie wakens her from this ordered contentment. In the early days of their affair Emmeline retains her serene poise, but during the Paris weekend she suddenly realizes that her peace has been shattered. Walking with Markie on Sunday afternoon

'she now stood still with her hand on the bark of a tree in St. Cloud... She longed suddenly to be fixed, to enjoy an apparent stillness, to watch even an hour complete round one object its little changes of light, to see out the little and great cycles of day and season in one place, beloved, familiar, to watch shadows move round a garden, to know the same trees in spring and autumn and in their winter forms.'

"This (the Sunday crowds) is frightful," said Markie, "let's go somewhere else."... missing repose vaguely he made it impossible. 'But Emmeline, very pale, leaning against the chestnut, said: "I don't mind where we are so

long as we stay where we are." 1

Markie had made it clear in Paris that he would not marry and Emmeline had accepted that. But she was not made of tough enough fibre to withstand for long the nervous strain of a secret liaison with its hurried meetings and shattering partings. Julian is one of the first to notice the change in her: he was 'haunted by some quality she had lost: perhaps simply composure.' Guessing the reason he felt, 'a profound and disturbing anger against Markie.' Coming home early one day after the Paris visit Emmeline finds Julian alone in the drawing room and they talk. Emmeline reveals her unsettled state of mind and half discloses her unhappiness about Markie. She says:

'This house is Cecilia: when I come in I see her, simply, whether she's in or out. Nothing feels part of me, yet I live here too. I feel I leave nothing but steam in the bath'... 'I should like to live somewhere; it would feel more natural'... 'If I died it wouldn't - though I expect you would all be sorry - be very noticeable. But if Cecilia were dead, every time I looked at those ornaments I should think: "How terrible."' 2

This is borne out a few minutes later by Cecilia's arrival.

'She stripped off the white gloves, dropping the handbag into a chair: the room sat up visibly.' 3

Later in the summer Emmeline and Markie go for a weekend to a borrowed country cottage. Emmeline looks forward to playing at housekeeping, but almost as soon as they arrive Markie suggests dinner in the nearby town and will not be overruled.

'Emmeline said no more; she blinked at the fire; the kettle now humming, put out a comforting thread of steam. The cottage, the late lovely sense of arrival tugged at her heart. "Here we are," she had thought coming in: but she had been wrong, they were not. For ever coming and going, no peace, no peace.' 4

When they return from dinner there is an urgent telegram from Cecilia asking Emmeline to return on Sunday. Emmeline feels certain that Cecilia has promised to marry Julian and

'something slid down in her like a dead weight. Timber by timber Oudenarde Road fell to bits, as small houses are broken up daily to widen the roar of London. She saw the door open on emptiness: blanched walls as though after a fire. Houses shared with women are built on sand. She thought: "My home, my home." 5

The following morning Markie is first incredulous,

then angry, then coldly sarcastic at her decision to return home. Having deceived Cecilia into thinking she is with a woman friend, Emmeline feels it would be cruel to tell her the truth now at her moment of happiness. Here, then, is where she makes her choice: she puts Cecilia's happiness before Markie's, she pays tribute to the sacred rather than the profane love, she shows her preference for the permanent over the ephemeral. She tries to explain her stand to Markie:

'Interruptions like this, don't you see, are a tax on our sort of love. People in love like Cecilia and Julian, people married, have passports everywhere. They don't get telegrams, nobody sends for them: everyone understands. But you and I - wherever we go there is something to keep us separate.'

Markie naturally fails to see the reason of this and they drive back to London in bitter silence.

For Emmeline, her whole world seems to be breaking up - first her home, then Markie, and finally her work.

'Emmeline, upon whom inefficacy was growing, found she had no longer the power to fill her own desk. She sat staring at bottles of coloured ink in the pigeon-holes or turned over dully the letters put out for her to sign: once she signed something she had not read. This broken spring in her enterprise, this betrayal

of everything could no longer appal her.
Wrestling for life with something she
found she had no hands.' 7

The fact that she is no longer appalled by her defeat is preparation for what is to come. The spring of her enterprise has broken, but the coiled spring of her reason is still tense and will not break until that fatal drive to the north when she will repel Markie's entreaty to take him back with the words: 'I only want to be quiet.' Just before the end she receives an intimation of what will release her in the night landscape:

'This breathless outline of earth, these little mysterious woods each aloof from the other and moulded like clouds in the air brought to her desolation a healing stillness that had eluded her happy and living, so that she touched for a moment the chilly hand of peace.' 8

Emmeline, in her love affair with Markie, was disturbed not only by her betrayal of her social mores but by her feeling of being cast adrift. If she had had a place where she belonged, containing things that she had loved, she might have survived - but even these were taken from her.

Because Elizabeth Bowen has shown so clearly her

faith in the beneficent properties of a place of one's own she has been the target for some criticism that, in my opinion, is unthinking and unjust. Because she has levelled most of her satire at that section of society whose values are different from her own she has been accused of snobbery and false values. Writing in the Partisan Review, Elizabeth Hardwicke, herself a novelist, makes a scathing attack on the class consciousness of Miss Bowen - an attack which because of the stature of the critic, cannot be ignored. She calls Elizabeth Bowen 'a sensitive, careful writer whose fineness of feeling is neatly ruffled with wit and laced with snobbery,' - 'a well-bred woman of sensibility, moderately elegant, sensitive to differences in class, moralistic about taste, courtesy and fidelity.' She describes Miss Bowen's style as so 'extraordinarily fluid and diverting that one hardly notices under its spell the bias of the content, the oppressive tidiness of the values.' Of Miss Bowen's plots she says, 'the conflicts are somehow a part of the class struggle and the author appears to be a conservative of nostalgic temperament.'⁹ There is not one word of unqualified praise in this judgement: Miss Bowen is

sensitive - to class differences; has breeding and sensibility, but (we are led to infer) little sense; she is elegant, but only moderately so; moralistic, but only about secondary virtues; her style is fluid and diverting, but not quite diverting enough to conceal the snobbery beneath. This is a sweeping and bitter indictment by one who professes to disapprove of bias. But there is more, and worse, to come.

'The opinion or sentiment that occurs again and again in Elizabeth Bowen's fiction... is that to know who you are, to be close to your past, to feel the pride and obligations of family, and place, are, if not the most exquisite and difficult attainments, a great source of personal and national pride. These warm sustaining emotions are found most frequently in the gentry and upper classes; the disloyal, the insincere and unreliable are the homeless, the shapeless nobodys, the complacent, vapid middle class, the mysterious foreigner, the restless self-loving arriviste.'

'As a sort of sub-head to hereditary class, there occurs the abstract notion of Home, representing familiarities, allegiances, duties and affections; under Home there is a particularity, the actual house in which the character lives. From the Home or lack of it, one's house, enriching or blighting the senses and manners, Elizabeth Bowen creates a fantastic environmental psychology, as implacable, materialistic and mortifying as the verdict of a property assessor.'

'Frequently the environmental ethic slips' down a peg or two to include not only the family and the house but the furnishings. By a complicated theology of objects the noble and the lost soul are defined. This is the moral intransigence of the interior decorator, the wrath of the goddess of the drapery and the table setting. Peace is a well-lit drawing room, purity is light, airy, spacious and in its presence the glasses shine and the flowers are forever fresh. The guilty lead an uneasy existence among the thick, dark impersonal objects in a furnished room (Eddie in *Death of the Heart*) or communicate rudely with family members by means of a speaking tube (Markie in *To the North*); or bear upon their souls the terrible scar of one of those boys' dens in which snapshots of youth are kept intact by a vulgar family. (Robert in *Heat of the Day*). In the *Heat of the Day* look for the reason for Robert's treachery "back home nestling behind the shrubbery and bird baths." Look for Robert Kelway, the traitor, in the fact that his humptious middle class family thinks of its home only as a poor investment, a galling swindle to which they are doomed because it would be a slight not to sell for more than they gave. Stella Rodney, the heroine, meeting her lover's family for the first time and hearing their conversation about selling the house thinks "How can they live, anyone live, in a place that has for years been asking to be brought to an end?" Stella is gentry by extraction and, though uprooted by the war and private circumstance, has retained her identity and pride. "A handsome derelict gateway opening on to grass and repeated memorials round the walls of a church still gave some sort of locale, however distant, to what had been her unmarried name." She is appalled by the Kelways... The author seems to feel that for all its overweening middle-class vanity this family (and the middle-class too?) is socially and humanly

menacing; it is a dangerous weight suspended in the middle of nothing.' 10

Let us look at the statement that 'these warm sustaining emotions are found most frequently in the gentry and upper classes.' The emotions referred to are those rising from knowing who you are, being close to your past, and feeling the pride and obligations of family. To deny that these emotions are warm and sustaining would be to deny humanity itself; but, where it is possible to quarrel with Miss Hardwick is in her assertion that these emotions are 'found most frequently in the gentry' in the works of Elizabeth Bowen. This is not telling the whole truth. Certainly these emotions are found most frequently in the gentry and upper classes in Miss Bowen's works because most of her characters are drawn from that class. But she makes it abundantly clear that she feels these emotions are instinctive in all men and are the only basis for true happiness. The upper classes, fortunately for them, have been able to gratify these longings of all humanity to a greater extent than those less happily placed, and have developed a code of noblesse oblige towards their servants, tenants and employees

which has resulted in their participation in the fruits of a rooted existence. These two classes, the highest and the lowest, have been able, in the past, to put down roots; it has been their luck not their virtue.

Elizabeth Bowen has made no claim to virtue as the prerogative of the upper class. It has its 'bounders' like any others. In one book of short stories, The Cat Jumps, there are three examples. In 'The Last Night in the Old Home,' a family is being uprooted, and all its belongings are being auctioned to pay the debts of the youngest son.

'Hard-hit, John felt really innocent. Not once had he been deliberate; if mess-bills ran up, horses he backed turned out rotten, cards he held worthless and women he loved exacting was John to blame? He told himself he had had no real fun. It had always helped him to think of his old home; after a thick night it made him feel good and squashy.' ¹¹

A second bounder is Arthur the oldest son in the story 'The Needlecase'. Into the house - 'far too big but kept on for Arthur, who was almost always away but liked to think of it there,' ¹² comes a dressmaker, Miss Fox, to smarten up Arthur's sisters with made-over dresses, and the

drawing room with bright chintz against the arrival of Arthur's newest girl. 'Everyone knew, Arthur knew, that Arthur must marry money.' ¹³ Miss Fox has a beautiful needle case which contains among the coloured spools the portrait of her child. The air of mystery surrounding her attracts Arthur's sisters and younger brother, who contrive to see the picture. To their horror they realize that Miss Fox's little boy is their brother's son. They

'saw its curls and collar. Like Arthur's collar and curls in old photographs downstairs. And between the collar and curls, Arthur's face stared back again at the uncle and aunts.' ¹⁴

The third and best example is Oliver, the young man engaged to catalogue the country house library in 'The Disinherited.'

'He was like Davina an enemy of society, having been led to expect what he did not get. His father had sold himself up and Oliver had had from him little but bad advice. Oliver despised the rich and disliked the poor and drank to the bloody extinction of the middle classes. He wished to call no man brother and disbelieved with ferocity in himself. The old order left him stranded, the new offered him no place. He lived as he could and thought well of Davina for settling herself on her aunt. His own relations had, under the suavity of their aspect, a mean kind of canniness, and were not to be imposed upon: they

did what they could by imposing him on their friends. Perverse bad manners and clumsiness disqualified Oliver for the profession of being a guest, by which otherwise he might have victualled and housed himself. He had once or twice, on his uncle's recommendation, catalogued country house libraries; his work was impatient, showy and incorrect, but no one had said so so far for fear of offending his uncle. He was an ungracious beggar, and, handicapped by a stammer, uncertain health and excitable sensibility an embarrassment to himself. With his height and fairness he was, in an overcast kind of way, magnificent looking: a broken spirited Viking. He was capable of fantastically disinterested affections. Not having been born for nothing into a privileged class, he was like Davina, entirely unscrupulous.¹⁵

It is not then, only the middle class or the homeless nobodies who are 'disloyal, insincere and unreliable' in the works of Elizabeth Bowen. In fact if we examine her writing with this charge in mind we will see that it is not the middle class as a whole but the consciously genteel part of it which arouses Miss Bowen's distrust. As for the homeless wanderers and the mysterious foreigners, we will discover that she feels for them a great pity. Miss Hardwicke's charge - that Robert Kelway's treachery is made to seem a result of his middle class background - will be

dealt with later in discussing The Heat of the Day. Here we are concerned with the biting picture of middle class life contained in The Death of the Heart: not middle class life as a whole but merely that part of it which is most pretentious and completely bogus.

The Death of the Heart is an excellent environmental study because in it the upper and lower classes (the Quaynes and Matchett) in the elegant Regency house are contrasted with the restless type of middle class (the Heccombs) in their seaside villa; hovering on the fringe of society are the homeless wanderers. Before examining this tri-partite society and its various backgrounds let us look briefly at the story.

The central character is Portia Quayne, a girl of sixteen, a fearless innocent who has always lived the life of a wanderer in cheap continental hotels before coming to live with her step-brother Thomas Quayne and his wife Anna. In a way, Portia is an embarrassment to the Quaynes. She is the child of Thomas's father and Irene 'a scrap of a widow, ever so plucky, just back from China.'¹⁶ When Thomas's father began his little affair with Irene he had no idea

that he would be forced by his wife to do the right thing and marry her to make the child legitimate; in fact he had no idea that a child might result. He certainly never contemplated giving up his home and his garden and ending his life in foreign hotels. But so he did, and later Irene died too and Portia came to Thomas's house in Regent's Park.

The novel is concerned with the effect Portia has on the residents of the house, their servants, and friends; and when she visits in a south-coast town, her influence on that other house and its inhabitants. The difficulty with Portia in this very cynical world is her innocence. Innocents

'exist alone; when they try to enter into relations they compromise falsifyingly - through anxiety, through desire to impart and to feel warmth. The system of our affections is too corrupt for them. They are bound to blunder, then to be told they cheat... Their singleness, their ruthlessness, their one continuous wish makes them bound to be cruel, and to suffer cruelty.' 17

Portia falls in love with Eddie, a clever, handsome young - arriviste and protégé of Anna. This attachment is seen with varying degrees of distrust by Thomas, by Matchett the old family servant (who had been devoted to Portia's father)

and by Major Brutt (one of the homeless ones who is drawn to the house in Windsor Terrace as to a refuge). Portia 'saw with pity, but without reproaching herself, all the sacrificed people - Major Brutt, Lillian, Matchett, even Anna - that she had stepped over to meet Eddie. And she knew that there would be more of this, for sacrifice is not a single act.' 18

When Thomas and Anna go to the Mediterranean in the spring Portia is sent to visit an old governess of Anna's, now widowed and living in a Southcoast town. This woman, Mrs. Heccomb, lives in a villa called Waikiki with her two grown-up children, Daphne and Dickie. Portia invites Eddie for the weekend, and her possessiveness and his shallowness produce a crisis from which he takes flight to London and she is left trying to convince herself that the affair is not over.

Back in London Portia finds out that Anna has been reading her diary and worse still, that Anna and Eddie have been discussing it and laughing at it. Shocked by this greatest betrayal she goes for comfort to the one person

she feels she can trust - Major Brutt. She takes him by surprise in his second-rate Kensington Hotel and throws herself on his mercy. In her despair she robs him of his self-respect by telling him that he too is a victim of Anna's laughter. When he phones to Windsor Terrace, Anna, Thomas and St. Quentin, a novelist friend who has had his rôle in the drama, are faced with the truth about themselves. As St. Quentin says

'This evening the pure in heart have simply
got us on toast.'

19

The solution is finally to send Matchett to fetch her home. St. Quentin's remark about 'the pure in heart' is the crux of the novel. Portia's singleness of purpose, her reckless innocence, forces the others to look into their own hearts and contemplate the corruption there. As George Dangerfield says: 'Elizabeth Bowen does not celebrate a dying individual but a dying era.' 20

Number 2 Windsor Terrace is that 'ideal mould for living' which the Quaynes fail to live up to. For all its elegance it reflects the inner conflicts of its owners to an alarming degree. Briefly, both Thomas and Anna lack

courage. In their past lives there are failures they dare not think about because they are failures which have taught them nothing. Neither has ever learned the secret of bridging the gap between two individuals; a secret which results in complete understanding and trust. Anna cannot forget a former lover and Thomas cannot free himself from a feeling of guilt for his passive role in his father's exile. When Portia arrives, her candid gaze turned on her brother and his wife seems to lay bare their weaknesses and widens the gulf between them. She senses the lack of warmth in the house and unconsciously makes it more apparent.

'...one cannot live alone. Not only is there no question of solitude but in the long run we may not choose our company. The attempt at Windsor Terrace to combat this may have been what made that house so queasy and cold. That mistaken approach to life - of which at intervals they were all conscious from Thomas Quayne down to the cook, produced the tensions and hitches of an unpromising love affair. Each person at Windsor Terrace lived impaled upon a private obsession, however slight. The telephone, the doorbell, the postman's knock were threatening intimations, though still far off. Crossing that springy doormat, the outside person suffered a sea change. In fact something edited life in the Quaynes' house... At the same time no one seemed clear what was

being discarded or whether anything was being let slip up. If Matchett were feared, if she seemed to threaten the house it was because she seemed most likely to put her finger on the thing.' ²¹

Matchett, the housemaid, who had been with Thomas's parents and had come to London with the furniture, is the most solid person in the house: she is like a house herself. She is the perfect example of the family retainer; devoted, not to Thomas and Anna, but to the furniture and to the memory of old Mr. Quayne. She transfers some of her affection to the old man's daughter and talks to her about him at length. Her sensitivity to tangible things amounts almost to a fetish. Telling Portia about the Quayne home in the country before the break up she says:

'Well I liked the work in that house, I liked that work from the first; what she (Mrs. Quayne) couldn't forgive me was that I liked the work for its own sake. When I had been the morning polishing in my drawing room, or getting my marbles nice with a brush and soft soap she would come in to me and she'd say "Oh, it does all look nice! I am so pleased, I am really." Oh, she meant well in her own way. But with work its not what you show, its what you put into it.' ²²

When Portia asks her 'But what made you come here?' she replies:

'It seemed to me proper. I hadn't the heart, either, to let that furniture go: I wouldn't have known myself. It was that that kept me at Mrs. Quaynes. I was sorry to leave those marbles I'd got so nice, but those had to stop and I put them out of my mind.'²³

She boasts 'You can see ten foot into my polish'²⁴ and claims 'Furniture's knowing all right ... Good furniture knows what's what. It knows it's made for a purpose and it respects itself.'²⁵ Here is where Matchett shows that she is capable of putting her finger on what was wrong at 2 Windsor Terrace: no one there felt that they were satisfactorily fulfilling their purpose. Matchett goes on

'Oh, furniture like we've got is too much for some people that would rather not have a past. If I just had to look at it and have it looking at me, I'd go jumpy, I daresay. But when it's your work it can't do anything to you.'²⁶

Matchett knows the value of the past. She says

'No there's no past in this house... No wonder they don't rightly know what they're doing. Those without memories don't know what is what.'²⁷

She is horrified that Anna has bought Portia a wardrobe in bright colours, when she ought to be in mourning for her mother; horrified also that Portia is to dine each night with her elders.

'Matchett's ideas must date from the family house, where the young ladies, with bows on flowing horsetails of hair, supped upstairs with their governess, making toast, telling stories, telling each other's fortunes with apple peel. In the home of today there is no place for the miss: she has got to sink or swim. But Matchett, upstairs and down with her solid impassive tread, did not recognize that some tracts no longer exist. She seemed instead, to detect some lack of life in the house, some organic failure in its propriety. Lack in the Quaynes' life of family custom seemed not only to disorientate Matchett but to rouse her contempt - family custom, partly kind, partly cruel, that has long been rationalised away. In this airy vivacious house, all mirrors and polish, there was no place where shadows lodged, no point where feelings could thicken. The rooms were set for strangers' intimacy, or else for exhausted, solitary retreat.' 28

All those qualities which make a house for Elizabeth Bowen are absent: As Matchett has put it Thomas and Anna would rather not have a past; by being too self-contained the present eludes them; their lives are a compound of banality and despair with no hope for the future.

Matchett does her work with the dedication of a priestess. See her late in the evening

'About now she served the idea of sleep with a series of little ceremonials - laying out night clothes, levelling fallen pillows, hospitably opening up the beds. Kneeling to turn on bedroom fires, stooping to slip bottles between sheets, she seemed to abase herself to the overcoming night. The impassive solemnity of her preparations made a sort of altar of each bed; in big houses in which things are done properly, there is always the religious element. The diurnal cycle is observed with more feeling when there are servants to do the work.' 29

The spring cleaning could almost be compared to a spring ritual when Matchett is left with her helpers to cleanse the shrine.

'She had had her way like a fury... In her helmet of stern hair a few new white threads shone - but beyond the opaqueness of her features control permitted no sag of tiredness. There was more than control there: she wore the look of someone who had augustly fulfilled herself. Floor by floor over the basement towered her speckless house, and a reckoning consciousness of it showed like eyes through the lids she lowered over her knitting.' 30

At the end of the story when the three adults are faced with the problem of what to do about Portia it is

Matchett who is called upon to step into the breach. Only Matchett can be trusted to do what has to be done without fuss. Our last sight of her is entering the 'sad gimrack cliff of the hotel' with her implacable dignity unruffled, the words that she will speak to Portia already taking form in her mind.

'Ignoring the bell, because this place was public she pushed on the brass knob with an air of authority.' 31

Matchett represents the settled life of the upper class and their households while the Heccomb's are an inspired picture of that type of middle class life, without foundation, tradition and grace which draws Miss Bowen's fire, not because of snobbishness but because its very gracelessness is a symptom of the minds and lives of its exponents. Portia going shopping with Mrs. Heccomb is conscious of it.

'It made her sad to think how Matchett would despise Mrs. Heccomb's diving and ducking ways like a nesting waterfowl's. Matchett would ask why all this had not been seen to before. But Irene would have been happy with Mrs. Heccomb and would have entered into her hopes and fears.' 32

Portia, though she has been with her brother only a few months, has become used to the quiet, well-ordered house

at Windsor Terrace and is fearfully conscious of the noise and turmoil at Mrs. Heccomb's villa, fancifully named Waikiki. The name Waikiki, suggestive of Hollywood, cheap jazz and passing pleasures, prepares us for the house itself. It is built on the esplanade facing the channel, and in winter, storms fling shingles onto the lawn, and if windows are left open, onto the carpets.

'Constructed largely of glass and blistered white paint, Waikiki faced the sea boldly as though daring the elements to dash it to bits.' 33

Occasionally Mrs. Heccomb had tried taking paying guests to eke out her income but

'the house's exposed position in bad weather, the roar of the sea on the shingle and the ruthless manners of the two Heccomb children almost always drove these guests away after a short time.' 34

Although the Heccomb children are now grown up their manners remain unchanged. Portia feels that Waikiki is

'the fount of spontaneous living. Life there seemed to be at its highest voltage and Portia stood to marvel at Daphne and Dickie as she might have marvelled at dynamos.' 35

Not only the high voltage but the enforced intimacy of life there is a surprise to her.

'At Windsor Terrace with its many floors and extended plumbing the intimate life of Thomas was not noticeable. But here Dickie made himself felt as a powerful organism.' ³⁶

By using the words 'dynamos' and 'organism' to describe Daphne and Dickie the author conveys her aversion to them, almost her horror of them as human beings. She rejects them as human beings not because they are noisy, ruthless and graceless but because they are pretentious. When they left school, education ceased for them, and armed with a set of values culled from copy-books, cheap glossy magazines and the cinema, they view the world smugly content with their own superiority and frankly scornful of anyone who is different.

The house itself has more humanity than these two overpowering young animals. Ships have personalities and the more we read of Waikiki the more like a ship it seems.

'A draught creeping through the sun porch rattled the curtain rings. Waikiki gave one of its ship-like creaks, and waves began to thump with greater force on the beach.' ³⁷

The house seems almost to have come unmoored in this passage.

'A black night wind was up, and Waikiki breasted it steadily straining like a liner: every fixture rattled... Out there at sea they might take this house for another lighted ship.' ³⁸

Outside and in it has a dissheveled air. The front doorbell was out of order: 'It hung out of its socket on a long twisted umbilical wire.' ³⁹ The living room, called the 'lounge' by Daphne, contained a glass fronted bookcase with 'a remarkably locked look', a very glossy wireless set, a scarlet portable gramophone, a tray with a painting outfit, a half-painted lampshade and a mountain of magazines in addition to two armchairs and a settee with crumpled bottoms. Mrs. Heccomb considered her house 'comfy'.

What gave the house its air of impermanence? Certainly not just its exposed position and jerry-built construction. Nor can we attribute it to the fact that every summer Mrs. Heccomb rented it at the height of the season. The reason seems to rest with the occupants. The late Dr. Heccomb had built it as an investment with the avowed purpose of renting it. Mrs. Heccomb had lived in other people's houses so long that impermanence seemed natural to her. Dickie and Daphne live their real life

'with the rest of their gay set at rinks, in cafés, cinemas and dance halls.' ⁴⁰ No one feels anything about this house except impatience with the broken bell or the plumbing. Portia, looking round her on her first evening at Waikiki, wonders if she will ever feel at home here.

'Wondering if this could ever make her suffer, she thought of Windsor Terrace. I am not there. She began to go round in little circles, things that at least her senses had loved - her bed with the lamp turned on winter mornings, the rug in Thomas's study, the chest carved with angels out there on the landing, the waxen oilcloth down there in Matchett's room.' ⁴¹

Portia feels comforted to think of Windsor Terrace and to know that it is still there with Matchett waiting for her to come back. With a house like Waikiki one would never feel sure. Indeed its occupants would probably not have cared if it had been destroyed provided it were well insured. Portia's search for a home and her failure to find it in the loveless home at 2 Windsor Terrace drives her to seek happiness with Eddie, who is also homeless. His homelessness is the result of his nature 'in which underground passion was, at a crisis, stronger than policy.' ⁴² The brilliant child of

an obscure home he has successively failed at one thing after another: he has been sent down from Oxford, has lost a job as a journalist, has almost got himself adopted by a wealthy middle-aged couple and, at the time Portia meets him, is being given a trial in Thomas Quayne's advertising agency. All his failures are the result of a farouche recklessness; he is unable to see this and feels disillusioned, wounded, betrayed and insulted by what he considers the cruel behaviour of other people.

'He had gone wrong through dealing with other people in terms that he found later were not their own. However kind seemed the bosom he chose to lean his head on, he had found himself subject to preposterous rulings even there.'⁴³

Eddie's innocence is warped but it is this very naïveté which responds to Portia. Here at last is someone who makes no demands on him; with her he need not play up.

As he says to her at their last meeting in his unspeakably ugly room,

'If I weren't innocent to the point of deformity would you get me worked up into such a state? ... You know I'm not a cad and I know you're not batty. But, my God, we've got to live in the world.'⁴⁴

The description of his room is one of the finest things in the book and it is pure Bowen. Too long to quote in full, parts of it will show how much the room was a reflection of Eddie. 'To be received by Eddie in such frowsty surroundings could be taken as either confiding or insolent. If he had stuffed a bunch of flowers (never very nice flowers) into his one art vase the concession always seemed touching... In the hideous hired furniture and the stuffiness he (with a kind of arrogance) acquiesced. Thus he kept the right, which he used, to look round his friends' rooms - at the taste, the freshness, the ingenuity - with a cold, marvelling, alien ironic eye. Had he had a good deal of money his interior probably would have had the classy red Gallic darkness of a man-about-town's in a Bourget novel... Like the taste of many people whose extraction is humble, what taste he had lagged some decades back in time and had an exciting antimoral colour... Happily he had to keep what taste he had to himself. For as things were this room of his became a tour de force - not simply living here but the getting away with it. He was able to make this room a special factor,

even the key factor, in his relations with fastidious people.' ⁴⁵

The room really gives nothing away which is exactly what Eddie wants because 'no one so far knew how he felt about himself' and he is determined that they shall not. No one but Portia is privileged to see behind the shutters which cover his eyes. It is impossible to deny that Eddie behaves very badly and yet, clearly as we can see the vacuum inside him, we must feel pity.

The other homeless ones whom Elizabeth Bowen treats with such sympathy in the Death of the Heart are the exiled father of Thomas, his second wife Irene, Portia herself, and that simple soldier Major Brutt.

Anna is the first to recount the ignominious end of old Mr. Quayne. She tells her novelist friend, St. Quentin that when Mr. Quayne confessed his alliance with Irene to his wife,

'She told him that he would have to marry Irene. When he took that in and realized that it meant the sack, he burst into tears... He did not like that at all... He loved his home like a child.' ⁴⁶

Anna is unsympathetic to Thomas's father and her words are brittle and unfeeling like herself. But Matchett, telling Portia about the past (uses the same phrase when she) says, 'Worse than dying? For your father, going away was like that. He loved his home like a child: Go! He was sent. He liked his place in the world; he liked using his hands. That stream wasn't the only thing he'd made. For a gentleman like him, abroad was no proper place... He was sent away as a cook or I might have been - but oh no, we suited her too well. She stood by while Mr. Thomas put him into the car and drove him off as if he had been a child. What a thing to make Mr. Thomas do to his own father! And then look at the way your father and mother lived, with no place in the world and nobody to respect them. He had been respected wherever he was. - Who put him down to that?' ⁴⁷ Anna's cold account of the past continues,

'He and Irene and Portia all more and more piano ,
trailed up and down the cold parts of the Riviera.' ⁴⁸

...'they always had the back rooms in hotels or
dark flats in villas with no view.' ⁴⁹

Of course Thomas went to see his father now and then and

Anna with him.

'When we met', continues Anna 'he did not behave at all like Thomas's father but like an off-the-map seedy old family friend who doubts if he has done right in showing up. To punish himself by not seeing us became second nature with him: I don't think he wanted to meet us, by the end. We came to think, in his own way he must be happy. We had no idea till we got that letter of his, that he'd been breaking his heart, all those years abroad, about what Portia was missing. He had felt he said in the letter, that, because of being his daughter (and from becoming his daughter in the way that she had) Portia had grown up exiled not only from her own country but from normal, cheerful family life.' 50

Anna is well aware of the irony of describing family life at 2 Windsor Terrace as normal and cheerful.

Thomas had loved his father and found these visits to him and Irene embarrassing. 'In those sunless hotel rooms, those chilly flats, his father's disintegration, his laugh so anxious or sheepish, his uneasiness with Irene in Thomas's presence had filled Thomas with an obscure shame, on behalf of his father, himself and society. From the grotesqueries of that marriage he had felt a revulsion. Portia with her suggestion - during these visits - of scared lurking, had stared at him like a kitten that expects to be drowned.' 51

Of Thomas, Matchett says 'He's like his father; he doesn't like to be left.' 52

Once when Portia and Thomas are having one of their brief, uneasy conversations walking in Regent's Park Portia says,

"These are the tulips Father told me about."
 "Tulips - what do you mean? When did he see them?"

"The day he walked past your house."
 "Did he walk past our house? When?"
 "One day once. He said it had been painted; it looked like marble, he said. He was very glad you lived there."

'Thomas's face went slowly set and heavy, as though he felt the weight of his father's solitary years as well as his own.' 53

Portia tells Matchett how her father felt about Thomas,

'He used to tell me, and to tell people we met, how well Thomas got on in business, and how pretty Anna was - stylish, he used to call her - and how much they entertained, and what gay parties they had... Yes, he was ever so proud of Thomas and her. It always made him happy to talk about them.' 54

Portia carried this burden of her father's homelessness with her. At the end of the story she says to Major Brutt,

'I see now that my father wanted me to belong somewhere because he did not: that was why they had to have me in London... My father often used to explain to me that people did not live the way we did: he said ours was not the right way.' 55

After the death of Mr. Quayne Irene continued to wander from one out-of-season resort to another, not too unhappily; Portia who was clear-sighted and her father's child felt the ignominy of their life. Later, standing at the entrance to the study room in Miss Paullie's school for young ladies in London, the contrast between her wandering life and this sweeps over her.

'Irene herself knowing that nine out of ten things you do direct from the heart are the wrong thing - would not have dared to cross the threshold of this room. For a moment, Portia felt herself stand with her mother at the doorway, looking at all this in here with a wild askance shrinking eye. The gilt scrolled paper, the dome, the bishop's chair, the girls' smooth heads must have been fixed here always, where they safely belonged - while she and Irene, shady, had been skidding about in an out-of-season nowhere of railway stations and rocks, filing off wet third-class decks of lake steamers, choking over the bones of loupes de mer, giggling into eiderdowns that smelled of the person before last. Untaught, they had walked arm-in-arm along city pavements, and at nights had pulled their beds close together or slept in the same bed, overcoming as far as might be, the separation of birth. Seldom had they faced up to society - when they did, Irene did the wrong thing, then cried. How sweet, how sweetly exalted by her wrong act was Irene, when, stopping crying, she 56
blew her nose and asked for a cup of tea.'

Deprived of a home Portia learns to develop a

'solicitude for things. One's relation to them, the daily seeing or touching them, begins to become love, and to lay one open to pain. Looking back at a repetition of empty days, one sees that moments have sprung up. Habit is not mere subjugation, it is a tender tie: when one remembers habit it seems to have been happiness. So she and Irene had almost always felt sad when they looked round a hotel room before going away from it for always. They could not but feel that they had betrayed something. In unfamiliar places they unconsciously looked for familiarity. It is not our exalted feelings, it is our sentiments that build the necessary home. The need to attach themselves makes wandering people strike roots in a day: 57 wherever we unconsciously feel, we live.'

This faculty for finding comfort in things helps her to preserve her balance at Waikiki when her image of Eddie crumbles and she sees him linked in coarseness with Daphne. In her bedroom she gazes stricken at a picture of Anna as a child which Mrs. Heccomb has placed there to make her feel at home.

'What help she did not find in the picture she found in its oak frame and the mantelpiece underneath. After inside upheavals it is important to fix on imperturbable things. Their imperturbableness, their air that nothing has happened, renews our guarantee. Pictures would not be hung plumb over the centre of fireplaces or wallpapers pasted with such precision that their seams make no break in the pattern if life were really not possible to adjudicate for. These

things are what we mean when we speak of civilization: they remind us how exceedingly seldom the unseemly or unforeseeable rears its head. In this sense the destruction of buildings and furniture is more palpably dreadful to the spirit than the destruction of human life... Had the gas stove blown up when Portia lit it, blowing this nice room into smithereens, it would have been worse than Portia's being called spying common. Though what she had said had apparently been dreadful, it had done less harm than a bombardment from the sea. Only outside disaster is irreparable. At least there would be dinner at any minute; at least she could wash her hands in Vinolia soap.' 58

Hotel life had left its mark on Portia. 'Portia instinctively spoke low after dark: she was accustomed to thin walls.' 59 Miss Paullie reproves her and makes her feel small by saying, 'To carry your bag about with you indoors is a hotel habit, you know.' 60 Trying to make conversation with Thomas she says, 'A house is quiet after a hotel. In a way I am not used to it yet.' 61 'If you always live in hotels you get used to people always coming and going.' 62

'Having lived in hotels where one's bills wait weekly at the foot of the stairs, and no 'extra' is ever overlooked, she had had it borne in on her that wherever anyone is they are costing somebody something, and that the cost must be met. She understood that by living at Windsor Terrace, eating what she ate, sleeping between

sheets that had to be washed, by even so much as breathing the warmed air, she became a charge on Thomas and Anna. Their keeping on paying up, whatever they felt, had to be glossed over by family feeling - and she had learned to have, with regard to them, that callousness one has towards relatives.' ⁶³

But in spite of this callousness she wants terribly to belong somewhere, to feel welcome, to have friends and letters in the post. When Anna suggests she go down to Thomas in the study before dinner 'Portia lit up. "Did he say for me to?"' ⁶⁴ Seeing the parcels for Anna in the hall she says,

'I wish someone liked me so much that they would come to the door when I was out and leave surprises for me on the hall table to find when I came in.' ⁶⁵

And then when Major Brutt actually does send her a present

'Oh, it is just like an answer to a prayer. Major Brutt has sent me a jig-saw puzzle. I found it on the table when I came in.' ⁶⁶

She relishes the first meeting with Major Brutt at the theatre with Thomas and Anna.

'Oh, the charm of this accident, this meeting in a sumptuous place - this was one of those polished encounters she and Irene had spied on when they had peeped into a Palace Hotel.' ⁶⁷

But Windsor Terrace is spoiled for her when she discovers that Anna has been reading her diary. In fact, when she first hears that Anna sometimes entered the charming room she has furnished for Portia, the room loses much of its charm. To Matchett Portia wails

'But what was she doing in my room?... she always says its my room. Birds know if you have been at their eggs: they desert.' 68

And she does finally desert and make her way to Major Brutt 'I've got nowhere to be.' 69

'Unhappy on his bed, in this temporary little stale room, Portia seemed to belong nowhere, not even here... Stripped of that pleasant home that had seemed part of her figure, stripped of his own wishes and hopes, she looked (to Maj. Brutt) at once harsh and beaten, a refugee - frightening, rebuffing all pity that has fear at the root.' 70

Portia has brought down Major Brutt into her own pit of despair. Reckless in her unhappiness she has deprived him also of that warmly lit refuge at 2 Windsor Terrace. Major Brutt had known Anna years ago when she was Pidgeon's 'girl' - Pidgeon that versatile, gay companion who had been the one man ever to stir Anna. Now meeting in London after a theatre both of them are conscious

of Pidgeon's unseen presence between them.

'The picture of that great evening together, Anna, himself, Pidgeon - was framed in his mind, and could not be taken down - it was the dear possession of someone with few possessions, carried from place to place... By being married to Thomas ... Anna annihilated a great part of Major Brutt.' 71

But, casually, Anna had invited him back to their house, and gradually he began to fasten his dreams there, his dream of security and family life.

'Major Brutt, brought that first night to Windsor Terrace at the height of his anguish on Pidgeon's account, already began to attach himself to that warm room.' 72

'He was the man back from somewhere, out of touch with London, dying to go on somewhere after a show. He would be glad to go on almost anywhere.' 73

In London he is staying at the Karachi Hotel.

Elizabeth Bowen's description of this bleak hostelry is so telling that one can almost feel the draughts and hear the creak of steps on the stairs.

'The Karachi Hotel consists of two Kensington houses of great height, of a style at once portentous and brittle, knocked into one - or rather not knocked, the structure might hardly stand it, but connected by arches at key points... If these houses give little by becoming hotels, they lose little; even when they were homes, no intimate life can have flowered inside these walls or become endeared to them. They were homes of a class

doomed from the start, without natural privilege, without grace. Their fog, which having seeped in never quite goes away. Dyspepsia, uneasy wishes, ostentation and chilblains can only have governed the lives of families here.' 74

Major Brutt had made a few acquaintances among the guests but as usual in his experience 'The one or two families he had found congenial had moved away.' 75 His thoughts turned more and more to the Quaynes house.

'Almost unremitting solitude in his hotel had, since his last visit, made 2 Windsor Terrace the clearing house for his dreams.' 76

Major Brutt's troubles are not confined to loneliness - he is definitely 'hard up'. He is looking for congenial work and is very grateful to Anna for attempting to arrange a job as estate agent for him. This attempt fails to come off partly because of Major Brutt's own ineptitude and partly because Anna is tense and upset as the drama over Portia's diary nears its climax. But in spite of this setback Major Brutt still looks on the Quaynes as his one anchor until that night when Portia seeks him out at the Karachi and disillusion him.

In an effort to prevent Portia from making a scene in the lounge of the Karachi he takes her to his room. The

details of this room emphasize his loneliness and his almost desperate financial situation. 'Most privacy, though least air, is to be had in the attics which were too small to be divided up. One of these attics Major Brutt occupied.' ⁷⁷ This last scene makes Portia seem almost a monster in her treatment of this simple, honest rather dull man. Determined not to return home she even suggests that he marry her. Glancing around at the pathetically few personal belongings she suggests that she could look after him and cook for him and each word is like a blow.

'Had nothing in Major Brutt responded to it (her suggestion) he would have gone on being gentle, purely sorry for her. - As it was, he got up briskly, and not only got up but put back his chair where it came from... And the effect this cost him, the final end of something, made his firm action seem more callous than sad.' ⁷⁸

Portia may go back but he knows he may not.

Each person in this book is a study in solitude and each one (except Matchett) is frustrated in the wish to be important to someone else, to have an assured 'place.' Neither Thomas nor Anna have nice characters, but in a sense their situation is most pitiful of all because it results

from a flaw within themselves. Portia with too great a capacity for love, is bound to suffer, but youth is on her side. No one reading The Death of the Heart can fail to feel Elizabeth Bowen's sympathy with the homeless. Only Matchett is truly the captain of her soul, serene in the confidence of work well done and able to look herself in the eye in the gleaming surface of 'her' cherished furniture.

RESORT TO THE WORLD OF THE MIND

We have seen the strength of Elizabeth Bowen's belief in a settled existence as a basis for happiness. War means an upheaval; people are separated from their homes and their routine. The things they are used to, which give them a feeling of security, are lost suddenly, and in bewilderment they turn to books, to memories of the past, to anything that contains a scrap of themselves. Miss Bowen does not fail to recognize the abnormality of wartime life, but recognizing that it is abnormal she shows how people, having lost one anchor, will reach out for another to save themselves in the storm. The Heat of the Day, a novel of wartime London, and a volume of short stories The Demon Lover show how people preserve their sanity in abnormal times.

The Heat of the Day takes place during that period known as the 'blitz' when the people of Britain, particularly London, were called upon to endure, 'the burden and the heat of the day'¹ as few other nations have ever been called upon to do. Although very little is said about the actual events

of the war, the whole atmosphere of the book is one of urgency. London is a city besieged, separated by the channel from a prostrate continent. The times are destructive of the individual and his life.

Jacques Vallette, reviewing the novel in the Mercure de France says, 'without being a war novel it gives one of the best pictures of London during the war... the quality of this picture is not due to its scrupulous exactness but to the impression which emerges from it; to what, for lack of a better expression, might be described as its poetic dimension; it is produced particularly by interchanges of every kind between people and places.' ²

Briefly, the story is as follows: Stella Rodney, a widow with a twenty-year-old son in the army embarks on a love affair with Robert Kelway, a veteran of Dunkirk who is now in the War Office. To her comes one day the man Harrison, a counter-spy, with the nearly incredible suggestion that Robert is in the pay of the enemy, and with the equally incredible proposition that he will not give Robert away if Stella will get rid of Robert and accept

Harrison in his place. Stella dares not ask Robert if he knows Harrison, nor does she dare check Harrison's credentials for fear of what will happen to Robert.

Stella's only previous meeting with Harrison has been at the funeral of an elderly Irish uncle, whom Harrison claimed to know well. On a visit to Mount Morris, the Irish estate which the uncle has bequeathed to Stella's son Roderick, she discovers that Harrison's tale of visiting there and of the uncle's help in counter-espionage is probably true. On her return to London she charges Robert with her suspicions. He denies them and asks her to marry him as evidence of her trust in him. This she cannot do.

At her next meeting with Harrison, in a Soho restaurant, he finally proves to her that his assertions are true. In a desperate effort to save Robert she offers herself to Harrison with such insulting scorn that even he rejects the bargain. When Robert feels the net tightening round him he goes to spend one last night with Stella. Now there are no secrets between them; horrified at Robert's

treachery, Stella is still more appalled at herself when she realizes she still loves him. To avoid arrest Robert commits suicide by leaping from the roof.

One other interesting person in the book is Louie Lewis. Her story runs parallel to the main action, touching it at intervals but never influencing its course. Her father, mother and home have all disappeared in a bombing raid in a southcoast town, and her husband, Tom, has been sent to fight in India. Simple, inarticulate and alone, Louie wanders around London in her hours off from the factory, seeking companionship. A chance meeting with Stella gives her someone to look up to but when the scandal about Robert reaches the headlines Louie is disillusioned and proceeds to be unfaithful to her husband. Her child is born just after she receives news of Tom's death.

In the bomb-shattered city 'the night behind and the night to come met across each noon in an arch of strain.' ³ People reacted to strain in different ways, but each one clung desperately to any possession or shred of memory which might bolster up his individuality. If houses were damaged

their owners lived on in the undamaged parts; if one lost one's home completely the impulse was to find solace elsewhere - sometimes in other people. If the 'house' is taken as the symbol of normality in this novel, the distance each character travelled from it is the measure of his individual dislocation.

Stella has known a 'house' in her youth. The people who shared it with her are gone, her parents dead, her brothers killed in Flanders. Her early marriage has ended in divorce, a divorce made unnecessary by her husband's death soon after. She never saw her husband's people, who blamed her, wrongly, for the divorce and considered her slightly déclassée. When Roderick, her son, enters the army it seems as if she may lose her last link with humanity: 'what nagged at her, what flickered into her look each time she confronted the soldier in battle dress, was the fear that the Army was out to obliterate Roderick.' ⁴ Also, when Roderick entered the army she gave up the struggle to have a home and, having stored her furniture, took a flat in London full of other people's furniture. In this rented apartment, to which Roderick comes on leave, 'the absence of

every inanimate thing that they had had in common set up an undue strain.' ⁵

Into this vacuum which her life has become Robert enters and in place of all she has lost, Robert 'became her habitat'. This is a step down for her, for when their love finally reaches its testing time, Robert fails her. She, like him, has come loose from her moorings, and she realizes that 'Life had supplied to her so far nothing so positive as the abandoned past.' ⁶ When Harrison enters the scene she moves still farther from the foundations of her life and sees clearsightedly her 'helpless progress towards disaster.' Bereft of all but her memories, sharing an unreal partnership with Robert, she is forced by fear - literally blackmailed - into meeting and talking with Harrison, whom she loathes. It is Harrison's inhumanity that seems to Stella so terrifying and so horrible. In his presence she feels herself debased. She says to him,

'We both have natures; but what I can't bear is what you do to mine. If it only were that you loved me, I could do no worse than not love you back; but there has been something worse - somehow you've distorted love.' ⁷

From their first meeting, Stella, who is seldom rude, finds herself being rude to Harrison. She says: 'I simply do not care what I say to you... Between you and me everything has been impossible from the first - But when I talk as I sometimes do to you... you should not feel flattered.' ⁸ To the very end she is wrong in her estimate of Harrison; she fails to plumb the depths of his inhumanity. He does not want her as his mistress in the ordinary sense; he admires her as a beautiful machine of workmanship superior to any he has yet seen, a machine whose movements are easy and effortless and whose setting he wishes to share on equal footing. It is her refusal to accept him as an equal that goads him into springing the trap on Robert.

Far as Stella has travelled from the 'house' there are rare moments when that part of the past which remains inside her rises to the surface. At Mount Morris, gazing at herself in the drawing room mirror in this house that is heavy with memories,

'Momentarily she was the lady of the house, with a smile moulded against the drapery of darkness. She wore the look of everything she had lost the secret of being.' ⁹

This quality of Stella's of seeming to be wandering in a desert communicates itself to people who hardly know her. Louie Lewis thinks of her as 'a soul astray', and strangers, seeing her in a railway carriage after Robert's death see her as 'someone for the first time finding herself alone among humanity.' ¹⁰

Robert has no 'house', his home is simply the expression of his mother's personality. Mrs. Kelway reminds one of Mme. Fisher in The House in Paris; there is the same brooding wickedness, the same crushing effect on the other members of the household. She strikes Stella as wicked the first time they meet. 'But you might not see that', she says to Robert, who replies 'Oh, I see it constantly.' ¹¹ Her appearance repells Stella instantly:

'the daunting beauty of that face... the diamond cut of her features... the lips relentlessly delicate, the regard which showed the mute presence of an obsession... the self-contained mystery of herself. Her lack of wish for communication showed in her contemptuous use of words. The lounge

became what it was from being the repository of her nature: it was the indoors she selected, she consecrated... this was a bewitched wood.' ¹²

Completely selfish and determined to get her own way always, she makes capital of her position as 'mother' and of the more conventional feeling of her family to put everyone else in the wrong, at the same time gaining the maximum advantage for herself. Loudly professing that she never interferes with her family, she nevertheless tyrannizes over them and humiliates them in a way that makes Lady Macbeth's crimes seem like good, clean sport. Under her rule the house gradually fulfills its role: 'Holme Dene had been a man-eating house;' ¹³ 'The two upper floors were flock-packed with repressions, doubts, fears, subterfuges and fibs.' ¹⁴ On his last night in the house, Robert, who knows that his time is running out, gazes up the dark staircase, and with his mind's eye he sees the labyrinthine fastnesses of the house and ruefully remembers how Mrs. Kelway has used it to warp the natures of her children and husband.

'The many twists of the passages had always made it impossible to see down them; some other member of the family, slightly hastening

his step as they heard one's own, had always got round the next corner just in time. A pause just inside to make sure that the coast was clear, had preceded the opening of any door, the emergence of anyone from a room. The unwillingness of the Kelways to embarrass themselves or each other by inadvertent meetings had always been marked. Their private hours, it could be taken, were spent in nerving themselves for inevitable family confrontations such as meal-times, and in working on to their faces the required expression of having nothing to hide.' ¹⁵

This atmosphere of mutual distrust was the creation of the mother whose motto seems to have been 'Divide and rule.' Her chief victim was her husband: Mrs. Kelway's way of saying "your father" still, years after that guilty creature's death, vibrated with injury; the implication was that he had become a father at her expense.' ¹⁶ The humiliation of the father was burned into the mind of the son. He tells Stella,

'In my father it was impossible not to see the broken spring; or at least impossible for me not to.' ¹⁷

It was because Stella had within her the qualities of the 'house' even though she had lost the house itself, that she appealed so strongly to Robert. In her he sought and found what he had never known. Speaking once more of

his father he says:

'If you, anybody like you had loved him - but no, I cannot imagine anytime when that could have been in time; at any time I remember it would have been too late - and I can't imagine a more exposing thing to have happened: that would have been the payoff. In all but one sense he was impotent; that was what came out in his relationship to me. What I think must have happened to him I cannot, while we're in this house, say.' 18

Robert is fully aware that he himself is the direct heir to this abnormality. Speaking of a girl to whom he had once been engaged, he explains why she threw him over with 'Decima came up against what was wrong with me,' 19 and at the moment of truth, the last evening with Stella, he admits, 'I was born wounded, my father's son.' 20 This then is the explanation of his treachery. Stella helplessly professes herself incapable of understanding why he has betrayed his country and why he has been so careless of his personal safety:

'Were you never frightened... of what you'd been doing?'

'I? - No, the opposite: it utterly undid fear. It bred my father out of me, gave me a new heredity.' 21

This would seem to refute Elizabeth Hardwicke's explanation of Robert's treachery. She says, 'Look for the reason for Robert's treachery back home... look for Robert Kelway the traitor, in the fact that his bumptious middle-class family thinks of its home only as a poor investment.' The answer is far more sinister than simple snobbery. 'You could not account for this family by saying it was middle-class.' ²² No, the answer, lies rather in this vacuum of ordinary feelings in which Robert grew up. Into this nothingness swept the misconceptions, the false certainties, which made up his treason. There was nothing to replace, only a space to be filled. For him there was no treachery for treachery means betrayal of beliefs and loyalties. These he did not possess.

Harrison is a monster thrown up to the surface of the ooze by the upheaval of war. Wartime for him is a good time:

'for me the principal thing is that it's a time when I'm not a crook. For me there've been not so good times when I did seem to be a bit out in my calculations, so you must see how where I'm concerned things have taken a better turn:' ²³

Throughout the book we see him through the eyes of two women - Stella and Louie Lewis. Although his appearance is described in detail he never takes shape as a recognizable human figure but remains flat, colourless but faintly sinister. There was something odd about his looks, but neither of them could quite put her finger on it: was it a limp, or a squint? No, he did not actually limp or squint, and yet the impression of some imperfection remained.

Louie noticed him first at the open-air concert.

'This was a face with a gate behind it - a face that, in this photographic half-light looked indoor and weathered at the same time; a face, if not without meaning, totally and forbiddingly without mood.' ²⁴

Thinking back, much later, to this first meeting, she remembers how he moved - with a sort of inhuman, mechanical purpose:

'Every joint flexed with an uninteresting smoothness: the side slip or jerk or jamming was in his manner - which was, she saw, chronic... She could not forget the calculated padding uneager evenness of his walk... It was that bodily monotony of him which, coupled with his recalcitrance, could not but get on any woman's nerves.' ²⁵

Harrison is brutally rude to her on both occasions when they meet. The second time, in the Soho restaurant she turns to Stella and says;

'Oh, I wonder you go with him! I don't wonder you don't care to stay alone just with him if you can help it. People to be friendly, that's what the war's for, isn't it... How was I to know he would flash out so wicked?' ²⁶

Home in bed, she thinks over the strange meeting with Harrison and Stella: 'This evening for Louie had rung the knell of Harrison, man of mystery, as a subject: she found with a shock, that what she now most wanted was never to speak of him again. A fog of abhorrence was already settling over his features - Louie simultaneously felt he could never suffer and wished he might.' ²⁷ Louie's reaction to Harrison is more the result of instinct than of observation and reasoning. As a dog might do, she senses that he is different and mysterious and finally that he lacks the ordinary human feelings.

Stella, unwillingly, talks with him many times, and in the end, her conclusions are the same as Louie's. Harrison's world is the abyss into which they both fear to

look - he lacks everything: 'house', memories, personality and humanity. Stella and Louie have both known the 'house', they still have their memories, and they have the capacity to love. Robert, without the 'house', yet appreciates it in Stella and loves her for it: also he has, himself, sufficient humanity and personality to win her love. But Harrison is like a robot, a machine.

From their first encounter, she was struck by his strangeness. 'Her incontrovertible sense of Harrison's queerness dated, she saw ever afterwards from that day of the funeral. His stops in talking, apparently due to some inner cramp; the exaggerated quietness of his movements, as though their importance must be at all costs hidden; his unified way of regarding you simultaneously out of each eye - these, in the months that followed, were to keep on alimentering her first idea. He had followed the funeral like a shark a ship. "Originally", she was to tell him from time to time, "I took it for granted you were a lunatic and I am still not so certain that I was wrong."' 28

Harrison had never loved nor been loved; he does not suggest love to Stella, only he says that he would like to get to know her. He wants to share her life because it suggested to him 'the first idea he had had of poetry.' Her personality invests for him the objects in the furnished flat:

"Pretty", he said softly. "All your things are so pretty... even this ashtray." "It's not mine", she flickered. "Nothing in this flat is." 29

He and Stella have nothing in common, though he evidently wants there to be something, even if it was only the air they breathed.

'Feet planted apart in the lamplit drawing room, he looked about him like a German in Paris.' 30

When she asks him point-blank what he wants, he replies, 'You to give me a break. Me to come here, be here, in and out of here, on and off at the same time always: To be in your life, as they call it - your life just as it is.' 31

He seemed to have no place in the ordinary business of living. Once she says to him,

"Where exactly do you live? I have no idea."
"There are always two or three places where I can turn in."

"But for instance where do you keep your razor?"

"I have two or three razors", he said in an absent tone.

That of course was the core of their absolute inhumanity together. His concentration on her was made more oppressive by his failure to have any possible place in the human scene. By the rules of fiction, with which life to be credible 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. His civilian clothes seemed to vary less than Robert's uniform; the uninterestingly right state of what he wore seemed less to argue care - brushing, pressing, changes of linen - than a physical going into abeyance just as he was, with everything he had on him, between appearances. "Appearance", in the sense used for a ghost or actor, had, indeed been each of these times the word.' ³²

Not once does Harrison perform any human action with another human. To be sure he walks, talks, eats, and smokes, but all this seems like the performance of a highly perfected doll. He never touches another human being; he performs no overt act. We are led to believe that it is because of him that Robert is cornered, but this may be conjectural. He does not enter the flat and arrest Robert nor even show himself. When brought face to face with Stella's compliance, he refuses her not once but twice; the first time in the Soho restaurant and the second time some months

after Robert's death. Stella, now in another flat, is startled by the sudden appearance of Harrison, whom she has not seen for several months. On the second occasion she charges him with his former refusal and he says:

"Yes, that was not what I wanted."

"What did you want, then, when it came to the point?"

He did not answer.

"You did not know; you did not know what to do."

"What, didn't I?" he said in a driven way.' 33

Determined to bring this ridiculous relationship to an end she offers to let him stay the night and he parries this with "As I told you I never have been loved. - No, my forte has I suppose always rather more been plans.' 34 Obviously he is more an electronic computer than a man. Finally, when Stella tells him that she is to be married, he asks,

"Indeed, is that so?" He paused, needing all he had to keep in command his features during their change, their change into the expression of a violent, fundamental relief.' 35

Louie Lewis, alone in London after the departure of Tom, her husband, has only the memory of her brief married life and of her childhood home to cling to. But, this memory

of the house stands her in good stead in the end. When her child is born (not Tom's) she names him Tom and takes him off to lodgings in her home town on the south coast, 'an orderly mother.' Proud of the baby she sees him look more like her Tom with every passing day. One of the first places she must take him is the bombed emptiness where once stood her parents' (his grandparents') house. In the child, Louie preserves her own personality, the hope for his future makes life seem good to her.

Roderick Rodney, Stella's son, longs for a 'house'. He is all in favour of the 'authoritarianism of home life'; the last thing he wants is Liberty Hall, particularly since he has been in the Army. 'He would have esteemed... organic family life', and Stella reproaches herself for having 'not only lost his father for him but estranged herself (and him with her) from all his father's relations.'³⁶ He dislikes the furnished flat in London because it lacks the custom and tradition of family living. The fact that the rooms have no names bothers him; as there

are only two rooms the one you are not in automatically becomes 'the other room' instead of having a proper name like 'drawing room' or 'dining-room'. Not knowing exactly where he is worries him.

When Uncle Francis dies and leaves him Mount Morris, the inheritance becomes for Roderick the fantasy which makes bearable the monotonous army routine.

'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. The house nonhuman 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... They did not amount to desires, being without object; nor to hallucinations, for they neither deceived him nor set up tension.' 37

Ownership of Mount Morris gives him a new stature and sense of responsibility. Out of a feeling of family duty 'after all I am the head of the family', he visits Cousin Francis's widow in the nursing home to which she retreated years ago. He also goes to stand bareheaded by Cousin Francis's grave. He glories in the feeling that

at last he had his appointed place in a tradition. This feeling reaches its climax when at last he is able to go on leave to Ireland and see for himself the house and land. At night in the master bedroom his head on the old man's pillow 'He heard the pulse in his temple... he was followed by the sound of his own footsteps over his own land. The consummation woke in him, for the first time, the concept and fearful idea of death, his... He had not till tonight envisaged not coming back from war.'

38

Life seems sweeter to him than ever before, and his own life takes on an importance never before felt - an importance not just to him but to the dead and to the unborn. He sees himself as the one link at Mount Morris between the past and the future. He feels he is the only heir of three dead men: his own father, the defeated Victor, Cousin Francis, and his unadmitted stepfather, Robert Kelway. He sees that it is a matter of continuing, and if he does not survive all three will have lived in vain.

Roderick's thoughts embody once more Elizabeth Bowen's belief in the importance of the 'house' to man's

equilibrium. Roderick is the hope of the future and,
if there can be any hope for Stella, it lies in him.

The attitude of people towards their possessions changed perforce during wartime. This change is shown best in a volume of short stories, The Demon Lover. The edition of these stories which appeared in 1952 contained a postscript by the author which gives her own estimate of the stories with the perspective gained by six years of peace.

She states that these stories are 'saturated with the general subconsciousness', that they are 'studies of the war-climate.' She admits that she is no portrayer of the impersonal, active, historic side of war or of the 'dark mass-movements of people'; she is rather the painter of the particular. She concludes, 'through the particular in war-time, I felt the high - voltage current of the general pass.'

The importance of these studies to a study of environment in the works of Elizabeth Bowen is the temporary shift in emphasis from things to thoughts, as possessions of value to man. She points out that the destruction of

solid things and the 'explosion of the illusion that prestige, power and permanence attach to bulk and weight - left everyone feeling heady and disembodied.' War threatened to annihilate personal life, and as a result everyone read more, 'seeking the communicating touch of human life.' It became essential, in those days in Britain, to survive not only physically but spiritually. People who had lost their homes in air-raids searched among the wreckage for some scraps of their belongings. In like fashion they tried to resist losing themselves.by assembling bits of themselves in stories, poems, personal memories and conversations. Outwardly the identity of the individual came to count for less and less; inwardly it became almost an obsession. There came into being a 'passionate attachment of men and women to every object or image or place or love or fragment of memory with which his or her destiny seemed to be identified, and by which the destiny seemed to be assured.'

She explains that 'the search for indestructible

landmarks in a destructible world led many down strange paths.' Life, torn, mechanized and impoverished had to complete itself some way. People consoled themselves with compensating dreams by night and fantasies by day. In fact the collection of stories is a rising tide of hallucination from the first story. 'In the Square' in which a London house is organically dislocated as well as its occupants, to the last story, 'Mysterious Kôr' in which a young girl with no home to take her soldier lover to conjures up out of her imagination a timeless abstract city.

The clue to all these stories is in this sentence: 'It is the "I" that is sought and retrieved at the cost of no little pain.'

This effort to seek and retrieve the "I" takes at least four paths.

The first is an effort to cling to the conventional pattern of life. It appears in 'In the Square', 'Careless Talk' and 'Sunday Afternoon'.

'In the Square' concerns a 'hostess who has not learnt with grace to open her own front door.'³⁹ The

house is occupied by: the owner's wife Magdela; a couple in the basement who are supposed to be caretakers but who lead independent lives (their son, a policeman stays the night frequently); the former secretary of the owner, who occupies part of the first floor; and at the moment of the story a nephew who is passing through London on his way to school. A visitor arrives, and the hostess's vacant politeness and fumbling efforts to seem normal merely emphasize the general dislocation of life.

'It would have been remarkable if she had yet arrived at the manner in which to open her own door - which would have to be something quite different from the impulsive informality of peacetime. The tray of glasses she had been heard moving now stood on a pedestal table beside a sofa. She said "These days there is no one..." Indeed the expanse of parquet, though unmarked, no longer showed watery glass and depth. Though it only may have been by the dusk that the many white lampshades were discoloured, he (the guest) saw under one, as he sat down beside her, a film of dust over the bulb. Though they were still many, the lamps were fewer; some had been put away with the bric-à-brac that used to be on the tables and in the alcoves - and these occasional blanks were the least discomfoting thing in the dead room.'

40

What was most discomfoting was the manner of the hostess. 'Who would think this was the same world? One has changed so much,' ⁴¹ she said; and again, 'Now the house seems to belong to everyone. One has nothing except one's feelings. Sometimes I think I hardly know myself.' ⁴² The visitor asks for news of acquaintances, and she says;

"Whom do you mean exactly?... Oh, in different places, different places, you know. I think I have their addresses, if there's anyone special..."

"You hear news of them?"

"Oh yes; oh yes, I'm sure I do. What can I tell you that would be interesting? I'm sorry," she said suddently, shutting her eyes, "but so much has happened." ⁴³

Such phrases as 'I think I have their addresses' and 'I'm sure I do' merely underline her lack of sureness and her confusion at the turn events have taken in her life.

At the end she makes a gallant but pathetic effort to rally her social resources,

'But do talk to one - perhaps you have no plans either? I have been so selfish, talking about myself. But to meet you after so much has happened - in one way there seemed nothing to

talk about. Do tell me how things strike you, what you have thought of things - coming back to everything like you have. Do you think we shall all see a great change?' 44

'Careless Talk' gives a different way of preserving the 'ghostly pattern of London life.' Four people are having lunch in a London restaurant. Two men and a woman have been in London all along but the second woman, Joanna has just come up from the country for the day. The three who have remained in town are very much 'in the know' and have no real interest in hearing Joanna's replies to their questions about her own life. Mary Dash is particularly full of herself and inclines to be patronizing to anyone who has fled the town. Their conversation consists of a self-conscious smartness, a brittle carrying-on. They boast that they do not live in houses any more and are so sure that their life must be interesting to one who has come from the dull country. The two men make a great play of knowing official secrets, and it is obvious to Joanna that all three are loving this opportunity to show off in front of her. Their

pre-occupation with the menu, their wails at the shrinking wine-list, their constant boasts of how busy they are, are a pathetic effort to preserve a way of life which none of them can fail to see is slipping from them. This is the 'heady, disembodied war-climate' that Elizabeth Bowen mentions in her post-script, and this was the method of a certain type of person of combatting it and endeavouring to preserve his individuality.

'Sunday Afternoon' contains a threefold vision of this struggle to retain individuality by clinging to conventions. In this story there are three generations. Henry Russel has returned to Dublin for a holiday from London. It is May and the year is 1942. He has lost his flat and all his valuables in the bombing and is grateful to still exist. He spends Sunday afternoon with friends of his mother in a beautiful house just outside of Dublin.

'An air of fastidious, stylized melancholy, an air of being secluded behind glass, characterized for Henry these old friends in whose shadow he had grown up. To their

pleasure at having him back among them
 was added, he felt, a taboo or warning -
 he was to tell a little, but not too much.' 45

These people are the onlookers, and yet Henry realizes
 that they probably have a saner outlook than he who has
 been sucked up into the whirlpool of war. One of them
 says

'...this outrage is not important. There
 is no place for it in human experience;
 it apparently cannot make a place of its
 own. It will have no literature.' 46

Henry realizes that these people have mastered the
 'aesthetic of living' and how embarrassed they were
 at finding themselves on the perimeter of such savagery.

'He adored the stoicism of the group...
 with their little fears and their great
 doubts - the grace of the thing done
 over again. He thought, with nothing
 left but our brute courage, we shall be
 nothing but brutes.' 47

He felt himself an outcast between two generations,
 that of Mrs. Vesey and that of Maria, the niece of Mrs.
 Vesey. Maria is determined to go to London, and Henry
 is shocked at the ruthlessness of her disregard for her
 home and her place in this civilized world. He feels as
 he leaves this lovely house an inner protest at returning

to the zone of death. He tries to dissuade Maria in these words:

'You know, when you come away from here, no one will care any more that you are Maria. You will no longer be Maria, as a matter of fact. Those looks, those things that are said to you - they make you, you silly little girl. You are only you inside their spell. You may think action is better - but who will care for you when you only act? You will have an identity number, but no identity. Your whole existence has been in contradistinction. You may think you want an ordinary fate - but there is no ordinary fate. And that extraordinariness in the fate of each of us is only recognized by your aunt. I admit that her view of life is too much for me - that is why I was so stiff and touchy today. But where shall we be when nobody has a view of life?' 48

The second path, pursued by some in an effort to preserve identity, is that of memory. Three stories embody this: 'The Inherited Clock', 'Songs My Father Sang Me', and 'Ivy Gripped the Steps'.

The Inherited Clock is about two cousins Clara and Paul who are co-heirs to a wealthy cousin of both their parents. From their earliest years Cousin Rosanna had been frank about the terms of her will, which divided her property equally between them, and had used this hold

over them to provoke quarrels and ill-feeling between the cousins. The story opens during the war. As the aunt approaches death and the inheritance ceases to be a remote possibility Clara, whose nerves are raw from the war (she was tied to exacting work) and an unfortunate and apparently futureless love-affair with a married man, realizes that there are periods in her life which have dropped out of her memory. These periods are all associated with a clock which is to be hers on her aunt's death. 'With regard to no place other than Sandyhill (Cousin Rosanna's house) could this opening and splitting of a crevasse in her memory have alarmed her more. At its deepness, she dared not attempt to guess; its extent, if it ever did stop, must simply wait to be seen.'

49

When Cousin Rosanna dies the clock is carefully brought by an elderly relative to Clara's London flat where its ticking begins to threaten her reason. Paul, who had always coveted the clock, saves her sanity by forcing her to re-enact the scene of their childhood which had caused the hiatus in her memory. Clara finds herself transported back twenty-four years to when, as a child of six, Paul

had forced her to put her finger into the clock and stop the works. Cousin Rosanna valued the clock highly because it had not stopped for one hundred years. Both of them realized that this was an unpardonable crime, and although they were never found out, Clara, the sensitive one of the two has re-acted by blotting out all memory of the clock from her conscious memory. By finding the key to her neurosis Clara has bolstered up her identity; by reclaiming a memory she has reclaimed part of her own individuality which was threatened by the routine of war.

'Songs My Father Sang Me' is 'an inebriate night club conversation'. A girl talks about her father to her escort, who is obviously a chance acquaintance. Here is another example in which 'the past discharges its load of feeling into the anaesthetized present.'⁵⁰ The speaker chooses to remember her father as a man of twenty-six and refuses to admit that he must now be over fifty. He was twenty-six when he walked out on her and her mother in the twenties, and as far as she is concerned, twenty-six he will remain. Married during the first world war they

were a dashing couple, he an officer and she a flapper. After the war nothing turned out well, and he evidently decided that his wife could manage very well without him, which she did. The speaker evidently talks often about her father: 'Didn't I ever tell you about my father? I always thought he made me rather a bore. Wasn't it you I was telling about my father?' ⁵¹ To her this young father is still the finest person she has ever known: his love of England, his bewilderment at peace, his fine hands, his gaiety are her sentimental possessions. When her escort suggests that her father might turn up anytime, might in fact be present in this night-club "Here?" she repeated, "my father? - I hope not." ⁵² This is the memory that she clings to and which makes her different from other people.

In 'Ivy Gripp'd the Steps' Gavin Doddington revisits the scene where as a young boy his ability to love had become permanently paralysed. In subjecting himself to the sights which recall his infatuation for

Mrs. Nicholson he suffers again and by suffering gains an insight into his life's tragedy. He was eight when he met her and ten when she died, and he still bears the stigmata of the encounter. He has not been back to Southstone since his last visit with her. First it was a personal inhibition, then a wartime ban, and finally when the ban on the area is removed he feels a lessening of the inhibition and returns. Standing in front of the neglected, ivy-covered house he relives mentally his visits with his mother's beautiful widowed friend. He lets himself feel once again as he felt as a child; a thing he has trained himself not to do in order to shield himself against that pain which he cannot bear to suffer again. He has trained himself to think, lest he should feel. In the years between he has become an amorist, but never a lover. He remembers how she fascinated him with her pretty ways and flattered him by using him to play off a retired admiral who was in love with her. He hears their words, words that he was never meant to hear on his last evening in her house. The admiral was speaking.

"I see now, where you are in your element. You know as well as I do what your element is; which is why there's nothing more to be said. Flirtation's always been off my beat - so far off my beat, as a matter of fact, that I didn't know what it was when I first saw it... It would have been enough, where I am concerned, to watch you making a minnie out of that unfortunate boy."

"Who, poor little Gavin?" said Mrs. Nicholson. "Must I have nothing? - I have no little dog. You would not like it, even, if I had a real little dog. And you expect me to think that you do not care...." 53

Remembering this with intensity he is tempted to take the first train back to London but decides that a descrescendo is necessary. He will walk further around Southstone and look for other places which remind him of her. 'From his tour of annihilation, nothing out of the story was to be missed.' 54 He looks for the florist shop where Mrs. Nicholson bought red carnations to humiliate the admiral's wife - it had been destroyed by a bomb. He finds the house where the admiral and his wife lived and where Mrs. Nicholson committed the outrageous insult to her hostess of bringing Gavin along as her dinner partner. Now it is an A. T. S. office, and Gavin pauses to watch a girl in khaki through the front window. When

she comes out he speaks to her, and she rebuffs him calmly and with experience. In the flame of a lighter as he cups it to a cigarette she studies his face and is puzzled by it.

'She had seen the face of somebody dead who was still there - "old" because of the presence, under an icy screen, of a whole stopped mechanism for feeling. Those features had been framed, long ago, for hope. The dents above the nostrils, the lines extending the eyes, the lips grimacing grip on the cigarette - completed the picture of someone wolfish. A preyer. But who had said, preyers are preyed upon.'

55

In a sense the two remaining ways, by which people in wartime sought to retain their individuality are the same; whether ghosts or just dreams or fantasies they are saving illusory worlds. 'These impulsive movements of fantasy are by-products of the non-impulsive major routine of war.'

56

Whatever they are called they are worlds-within-worlds; 'they fill the vacuum for the uncertain "I".'

57

Four stories contain ghosts: 'The Cheery Soul',

'The Demon Lover', 'Pink May' and 'Green Holly'. In the postscript the author says 'the ghosts are the certainties - hostile or not.'

'The Cheery Soul' reflects the chanciness about life in those times, even the simple act of going to stay with friends for Christmas. The narrator, working at a war-job in a Midland town arrives to spend Christmas with the Rangerton-Karneys, local people famous for good works and the austerity of their life in the national cause. The invitation had been surprising and flattering and feverishly anticipated. Equally surprising is her welcome at the hands of an elderly aunt. There is no sign of her hosts nor of any servants. Gradually another presence makes itself felt, the ghost of a cook who left a year ago in search of 'an English Christmas' and was drowned in the canal after becoming thoroughly intoxicated. We are not surprised to learn that the Rangerton-Karneys are traitors and that the invitation to stay had been issued merely as a blind to cover their escape. There is no attempt to

explain this ghost as the imagined creature of a war-exhausted mind. The cook's ghost is as real as the aunt. She is a saner person than her employers, and her message scrawled on the bedroom mirror with soap is strangely comforting: 'Dearie, don't mind me.'

The scene of 'The Demon Lover' is a shut-up London house to which the mistress returns to get some belongings. Mrs. Drover notices an unfamiliar queerness in her once familiar street, and the door is warped and difficult to unlock. Entering the house, 'the prosaic woman, looking about her, was more perplexed than she knew by everything she saw, by traces of her long former habit of life.'⁵⁸ Strangest of all she finds on the hall table, a letter from a former lover who died in the first world war twenty-five years ago, reminding her of a rendezvous for that very day 'at the hour arranged.' She closes her eyes and wills herself to be sensible, but when she opens them again the letter is still there. She tries to remember the dead man's face but cannot. In rising panic she flees from the house and scrambles into

the only taxi in the rank at the end of the street. Immediately it moves off and when she tries to tell the driver where to take her he

'braked, turned around and slid the glass panel back... driver and passenger remained for an eternity eye to eye. Mrs. Drover's mouth hung open for some seconds before she could issue her first scream.' 59

Whether this is hallucination or not Mrs. Drover has felt the chill of that unnatural promise for a quarter of a century 'I shall be with you', he said, 'sooner or later.' It was a sinister troth, and when he was reported missing she felt, in addition to grief 'a complete dislocation from everything! She has never been completely normal, and wartime stress has forced this dread into the open.

'The worthless little speaker in "Pink May" found the war made a moratorium for her married conscience.' 60 Here also the ghost may be subjective. A woman engaged in war work is living in a rented house with her husband. During the month when the may trees are in bloom she is

carrying on a violent affair with another man which is made possible by her husband's being kept late at his job night after night. She admits to having been rather 'nervy' but insists that it was a happy month 'madly happy'. About the house she says 'But you know how it is about other people's belongings - you can't ever quite use them, and they seem to watch you the whole time.' ⁶¹ But there was more than this to ruin her pleasure; she gradually became aware of a ghost, a 'puritan other presence' who disapproved of the way she lived and even of the way she dressed. She then felt the disapproval change to pity and this robbed her of her self-confidence, which in turn lost her her lover and then her husband. At the end she admits she never actually saw nor heard the ghost but continues to blame it for everything: She says to her listener

'If you don't understand - I'm sorry I ever told you the story! Not a ghost - when it ruined my whole life! Don't you see, can't you see there must have been something? Left to oneself, one doesn't ruin one's life! ' ⁶²

Once more the ghost has filled the void.

'Green Holly' is a wittily funny ghost story. There are actually two ghosts seen by two different people. The real characters are two men and a woman, experts, doing some very hush-hush war job, cooped up together in an unlovely Victorian country house. They have been confined together since 1940, and it is now the Christmas of 1941.

None of them is to be given leave; they are overtired, bored with each other and 'in the matter of intimacy they had by now completed the full circle',⁶³ even to the point of again addressing each other as Mr. and Miss. They are caught up in the machinery of war, which outwardly they accept but inwardly resist.

One of the men, Winterslow, who has been drinking too much, sees the female ghost. '"She was marvelous" he said, "what I could see of her".'⁶⁴

That evening the ghost 'a bodiless foolish wanton' waits for him on the stairs. At the bottom of the stairs lies the other ghost - the body of a man with the side of his head blown out. Winterslow is unaware of the man's body and mounts the stairs towards his ghost.

He is later found kneeling, half way up the stairs when his fellow workers emerge from the drawing room into the hall.

Of the others only one, Miss Bates, sees the man ghost lying dead on the floor, although she cannot see Winterslow's charmer. This is what she says of her experience and it is an example of Elizabeth Bowen's wit at its best:

"When I opened the door, just now,... what do you think I first saw there in the hall?"

"Me", replied Mr. Winterslow, with returning reassurance.

"O-oh no; oh indeed no", said Miss Bates. "You - why should I think twice of that if you were striking attitudes on the stairs? You? - no, I saw your enchanting inverse. Extended, and it is true stone dead, I saw the man of my dreams. From his attitude it was clear he had died for love. There were three pearl studs in his boiled shirt, and his white tie must have been tied in heaven. And the hand that had dropped the pistol had dropped a white rose; it lay beside him brown and crushed from having been often kissed. The ideality of those kisses, for the last of which I arrived too late" - here Miss Bates beat her fist against the bow of her snook - "will haunt, and by haunting satisfy me. The destruction of his features before I saw them, made their former perfection certain, where I am concerned. - And here I am, left, left, left, to watch dust gather on Mr. Ranstock and you; to

watch - yes, I who saw in a flash the ink-black perfection of his tailoring - mildew form on those clothes you never change; to remember how both of you had in common that way of blowing your noses before you kissed me. He had been deceived - hence the shot, hence the fall. But who was she, your feathered friend to deceive him? Who could have deceived him more superbly than I? - "I could be fatal", moaned Miss Bates, pacing the drawing room, "I could be fatal - only give me a break!" " 65

In Miss Bate's bravado there is more than a hint of that universal pathos that characterises everyone in this series of wartime stories. She has been forced into a machine, her life has been impoverished, egotism in small ways has stopped such as dining out; buying a new frock; life had to complete itself some way.

The other two stories are pure fantasy of a rather frightening sort. In the postscript the author says, 'If these resistance - fantasies seem frightening it is to counter fear with fear, stress with stress?

In 'The Happy Autumn Fields' a woman is projected (in a dream) from bombed London, into the key

emotional crisis of a Victorian girlhood. This is one of the author's own favourite stories, and the atmosphere of the past is built up with so dream-like a quality, that the reader is reluctant to return to the dangerous present, and in the second dream slips gratefully back into the past with the dreamer.

Mary, lying on a bare mattress in the bombed ruin of her London house, dreams she is Sarah. Until this afternoon she has never heard of Sarah, but in a box full of old family papers, letters and photographs she has read of the family and of the twin sisters Henrietta and Sarah. She, Mary, sees the drama of the family unfold through the eyes of Sarah, feels the cross-currents of emotion through all the senses of Sarah - in fact she is Sarah. Another bomb, an explosion and more falling plaster recalls Mary to the present just as her husband comes to take her away from the house. He sees that she has been crying, and she replies,

'Yes. How are we to live without natures?
We only know inconvenience now, not sorrow.
Everything pulverizes so easily because it is

rot-dry; one can only wonder that it makes so much noise. The source, the sap must have dried up, or the pulse must have stopped, before you or I were conceived. So much flowed through people; so little flows through us. All we can do is imitate love or sorrow... What has happened is cruel; I am left with a fragment torn out of a day, a day I don't even know where or when; and now how am I to help laying that like a pattern against the poor stuff of everything else? Alternatively, I am a person drained by a dream. I cannot forget the climate of those hours. Or life at that pitch, eventful - not happy, no, but strung like a harp.' 66

This is the most perfect example of how 'the past... discharges its load of feeling into the anaesthetized and bewildered present.' 67

'Mysterious Kôr' is a fantasy in the mind of a girl which has taken shape under the spell of these lines:

'Mysterious Kôr thy walls forsaken stand,
Thy lonely towers beneath a lonely moon
Not in the waste beyond the swamps and sand,
The fever-haunted forest and lagoon,
Mysterious Kôr thy walls - '

The tragedy of Pepita and Arthur, her soldier lover, is that they have nowhere to go where they can be alone. They have tried the crowded noisy cafés where they have been alone in the crowd, they have walked in the park,

and now, there is no place for them to go but the small flat Pepita shares with another girl. Unfortunately for them, the other girl, coming from a more conventional background than Pepita, takes her duties as a duenna seriously and refuses to leave the flat to the lovers. As the two walk through the moonlight darkness to the flat Pepita tells him of the imaginary city to which she goes in her dreams.

"I think of it all the time - a completely forsaken city, as high as cliffs and as white as bones, with no history... Kôr's very strong; there is not a crack in it anywhere for a weed to grow in; the corners of stones and monuments might have been cut yesterday, and the stairs and arches are built to support themselves."

Arthur, surprised says "I thought girls thought about people."

"What, these days?" she said. "Think about people? How can anyone think about people if they've got any heart? I don't know how other girls manage: I always think about Kôr." 68

When they arrive they find the other girl waiting up for them, anxious that Arthur should be comfortable and feel welcome. Her native gentleness and good manners are a sharp contrast to Pepita's rudeness - Pepita who cannot forgive her for staying.

Once asleep however, Pepita returns once more to Mysterious Kôr and this time Arthur is with her. 'She still lay, as she had lain, in an avid dream, of which Arthur had been the source, of which Arthur had not been the end. With him she looked this way, that way down the wide, void, pure streets, between statues, pillars and shadows, through archways and colonnades. With him she went up the stairs down which nothing but moonlight came; with him trod the ermine dust of the endless halls, stood on terraces, mounted the extreme tower, looked down on the statued squares, the wide, pure void streets. He was the password but not the answer: it was to Kôr's finality that she turned.'

69

All these dreams and fantasies are the resort of the soul under abnormal conditions. Elizabeth Bowen

does not otherwise recommend them, for she mistrusts fantasies. Writing in Bowen's Court after years of war she sees her own family as a representative microcosm. Their two great faults, fantasy and an infatuation with the idea of power, have bred private cruelty - and, in the larger field war. Fantasy is toxic; it originates in the heated brain. The dangerous power idea remains quiescent so long as property lasts. The power-loving temperament, once dispossessed, becomes dangerous and turns to operate in the world of ideas, harnessing men's minds.

Summing up at the end of Bowen's Court she says:

'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.' 70

She feels that in writing about the past generations of Bowens during a time when the world is at war she has been writing about self-centred people in a world where the destiny of the individual counts for nothing. In spite of this disparity between time and subject, the

subject itself has become more rather than less important to her - has, in fact, become a means to approach a truth about life.

This truth, as she sees it, may be summed up thus:

Property is important because it gives man the means to exercise power in a direct, concrete and therefore limited way; because it provides a link with the past and only through a realization and knowledge of the past can the present acquire meaning; because it provides that continuity between the present and the future which enables man to build an edifice which will outlast his own brief span.

In her own words,

'the values which I set out - my own values - have at least to my own feeling been constant: they have been accentuated rather than changed by war. The urgency of the present, its relentless daily challenge, seems to communicate itself to one's view of the past until, to the most private act or decision, there attaches one's sense of its part in some campaign. These days, either everything matters or nothing matters. The past - private just as much as historic - seems to me now to matter more than ever; it acquires meaning; it loses false mystery.'

71

Studying the past of her family she has seen how the natures of her ancestors changed when property could no longer be guaranteed.

'I submit,' she says, 'that the power-loving temperament is more dangerous when it either prefers or is forced to operate in a void. We have everything to dread from the dispossessed. In the area of ideas we already see more menacing dominations than the landlord exercised over land. The outsize will is not necessarily evil: it is a phenomenon. It must have its outsize outlet, its big task. If the right scope is not offered it, it must seize the wrong. We should be able to harness this driving force:... Not the will itself but its wastedness is the dangerous thing.' ⁷²

Property, possessions, a home, bolster up the individual, give him a link with the past and a stake in the future. If this feeling of personal identity, resulting from an attachment to possessions and a way of life, is lost our civilization might perish. This is not a mystical philosophy, but despite its realism Elizabeth Bowen is not irreligious. Brought up in the Church of England faith, religion to her, as a member of the land-owning squirearchy, is part of her way of life. It is not something to be questioned but to be accepted without

fuss. It is part of a style of living which demanded that they live as though living gave them no trouble. This has always required courage and much of the courage has come from the calm acceptance of their faith.

Elizabeth Bowen, even in war-time is optimistic about the future. She has seen how, when material possessions are lost, the ideas and memories the dreams and fantasies that rush into the void are not necessarily harmful. But she feels they are only a substitute for real possessions, the embodiment of memories.

Looking ahead to peace she says that in war-time everyone carries in his heart one private image, one peaceful scene which to him is the absolute of peace. To her, in London, Bowen's Court meant peace. She cautions against losing this image when peace comes again. She realizes that in war-time Britain much has been germinating that will bring gradual but great changes. What these changes will be she does not attempt to guess, but she

has felt change in the air. Even in the peace of Bowen's Court the apprehensions common to all mankind have been present. Nevertheless she feels that the truths by which she has lived will remain the same. They are the truths by which she will survive, and she has confidence in the toughness of her class and race.

In estimating the work of Elizabeth Bowen it is difficult not to think in terms of painting. Sir Kenneth Clarke's remarks about the impressionists are, in part, equally applicable to her writings.

'Impressionism gave us something which has always been one of the great attainments of art: it enlarged our vision... The impressionists taught us to see the colour in shadows. Everyday we pause with joy before some effect of light which we should otherwise have passed without notice... their painting is full of a complete confidence in nature and in human nature.' 73

Up to this point Miss Bowen is an impressionist; no one could read her descriptions of landscapes and seasons, places and people, without gaining a clearer insight into and a greater appreciation of the world around him. But with maturity and under wartime stress she has advanced beyond this predominantly materialistic

and pagan outlook, and has come to see the value of abstract possessions to the happiness of the individual. She has come to share the views of this famous critic and art lover when he says

'Art is concerned with our whole being - our knowledge, our memories, our associations.' ⁷⁴

NOTES

Key to abbreviations

A.W.L.	:	A World of Love
B.C.	:	Bowen's Court
C.J.	:	The Cat Jumps
D.H.	:	The Death of the Heart
D.L.	:	The Demon Lover
H.D.	:	The Heat of the Day
H.P.	:	The House in Paris
H.	:	The Hotel
J.C.	:	Joining Charles
L.S.	:	The Last September
L.A.T.R.	:	Look At All Those Roses
T.N.	:	To the North

CHAPTER I

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4	2	Ibid., p. 97.
4	3	H. P., p. 115.
5	4	C. J., p. 157.
5	5	L. A. T. R., p. 147
6	6	George Dangerfield, 'Narrowing Horizons,' <u>The Saturday Review of English Literature</u> , Jan. 21, 1939, p. 6.
6	7	D. H., p. 1.
6	8	Ibid., p. 9.
6	9	Ibid., p. 130.
7	10	H. D., p. 19.
7	11	Ibid., p. 4.
8	12	B. C., p. 418.
9	13	D. L., p. 139.
10	14	Ibid., p. 137.
10	15	Ibid., p. 157.
11	16	L. A. T. R., p. 137.
11	17	Ibid., p. 231.
12	18	D. L., p. 137.
13	19	H. P., p. 147

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18	25	L. A. G. Strong, 'Elizabeth Bowen', <u>Living Writers</u> edited by Gilbert Phelps p. 157.
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23	35	B. C., p. 20.
24	36	Ibid., p. 19.
24	37	Ibid., p. 19.
24	38	Kenneth Clark, <u>Landscape into Art</u> pp. 38 and 47.
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30	43	Ibid., p. 141.
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31	45	D. L., p. 29.
32	46	L. S., p. 43.
32	47	Ibid., p. 38.
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39	70	Ibid., p. 284.
40	71	Ibid., p. 66.
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43	2	Jane Austen, <u>Sense and Sensibility</u> , p. 16.
43	3	L. S., p. 101.
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